

# Letter from Anthony Eden to Gladwyn Jebb on the future role of WEU (London, 16 February 1955)


**Caption:** On 16 February 1955, Sir Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom, writes to Sir Gladwyn Jebb, British Ambassador to Paris, outlining the British position on the future role of Western European Union (WEU). The letter identifies the main tasks of the organisation and emphasises that, for its successful development, WEU should remain an intergovernmental organisation and should not attempt to become a supranational community on the model of the European Defence Community (EDC). WEU should not attempt to take action which duplicates or cuts across the work of existing organisations. For instance, in the military sphere, it should rely on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's military authorities for information and advice. Additionally, the British emphasise their close relationship with the United States, insisting that in the development of WEU a proper balance must be maintained between the needs of the organisation itself and those of the wider Atlantic community.

**Source:** The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966. WESTERN ORGANISATIONS (WU). Western European Union (WEU): Liaison with NATO. 01/01/1955-31/12/1955, FO 371/118579 (Former Reference Dep: File 10784).

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1955

WU

WESTERN ORGANISATIONS DEPT.

NORTH ATLANTIC

TREATY ORGANISATION

WU 10784/5

From  
Foreign Office  
Hills, Leek Road

Relationship between NATO and W.E.U.

Brief for Ministerial meeting May 9-11

- NATO and
- 1) W.E.U. Council
  - 2) the Armaments Control Agency
  - 3) the Standing Armaments Committee.

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Contains Chart showing relationship between W.E.U. & NATO & C.A.E.

References to former relevant papers

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WESTERN (GENERAL)

February 16, 1955

Section 1

WU 10785/15

## THE FUTURE RÔLE OF WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

*Sir Anthony Eden to Sir Gladwyn Jebb (Paris)*

(No. 99. Confidential) *Foreign Office,*  
Sir, *February 16, 1955.*

I think it will be useful to set out my ideas on the future rôle of Western European Union.

2. Her Majesty's Government were largely responsible for creating W.E.U. and the United Kingdom will continue to bear a major responsibility for its successful development. We have every intention of playing our full part, but if we are to do so effectively it is essential that the other members of W.E.U. should recognise and accept certain basic assumptions. Of these, the most important is that W.E.U. should not attempt to convert itself into a supranational community on the model of the European Defence Community or European Political Community. After the collapse of the E.D.C., it was no doubt inevitable that its more fervent supporters should look on W.E.U. as very much a second best. The only consolation from their point of view was that it appeared to hold out a hope of recreating a federal structure which would include the United Kingdom. We cannot of course encourage any such hope and it would be fatal for the prospects of W.E.U. if it became involved in sterile arguments about the merits and fallacies of federalism.

3. W.E.U. is an inter-governmental organisation and this is the basis on which, in our view, it must develop. Its provisions for majority voting on certain questions can be described as supranational, but it is important to distinguish between constitutional supranationalism, which we dislike, and practical measures for international co-operation and the combining of national resources, which we fully support. Our decision about the maintenance of our forces on the Continent is a good example of the latter, and other examples exist in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and in Germany, where in the British Army

of the Rhine and the 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force we have taken the lead in forging a European army. The problem is not simply to devise statutory provisions, but to translate into concrete and effective action our desire to achieve the greatest possible degree of co-operation. This is no easy process since it requires mutual understanding, the readjustment of national policies and some sacrifice of national interests in the wider general interest.

4. Fortunately there is increasing evidence of support among the other member Governments for this pragmatic approach. Some of them, the Belgians and Italians, for instance, no doubt still regard a federal Europe as the eventual goal and they may well seek opportunities in W.E.U. for making progress towards it. But they now seem to realise that if there is to be any progress it can only be gradual. Their attitude may at times cause difficulty in W.E.U. over specific questions, but we must hope that this issue, which has done more to divide than to unite Europe since the war, will not become dominant in W.E.U.

5. Another necessary assumption is that W.E.U. should not try to constitute itself as a "third force." Discussions in the W.E.U. Interim Commission have already shown that the other members set considerable store by the European character of the organisation. This is understandable and need cause no concern, but there may be a tendency to go further and to argue that the United Kingdom, by joining W.E.U. as a full member, has moved closer to Europe and must for that very reason have moved further from America. Although this argument may not be publicly stated, there are of course people, notably in France, who would welcome a European grouping with United Kingdom participation used as a counterweight to American power and influence. This danger is not yet serious, since attempts to divide us from the United

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States have little chance of success so long as we refuse to lend ourselves to the manoeuvre. It does, however, mean that in the development of W.E.U. we must maintain a proper balance between the needs of the organisation itself and those of the wider Atlantic Community.

6. A concrete problem which might give rise to difficulties in this context is the question of membership. If W.E.U. were to take in the other European members of N.A.T.O., the latter would be divided between its European and North American members and the danger of "third force" tendencies would be greatly increased. At least for the time being this makes undesirable any extension of the membership of W.E.U. Initially Norway and Denmark, and particularly Turkey, showed interest in joining, but, partly due to our advice, this interest has for the moment waned. The Scandinavian countries have of course a far better claim than Greece and Turkey to be members of W.E.U., but if they were now admitted the Greeks and Turks would certainly press for admission also and would resent any suggestion that they were not sufficiently "European" to join the club.

7. The Norwegian and Danish Governments recognise the immediate difficulties and are not at present pressing for membership. But they have not given up the idea of membership at some future date, and M. Lange told me on December 18 that if W.E.U. is going to play a real and effective rôle Norway ought to be in it.

8. This problem of membership is a convincing reason, which reinforces those set out later in this despatch, why W.E.U. should not at the outset take on functions in addition to those assigned to it by the Paris Agreements or which it will inherit from the Brussels Treaty Organisation. In a year or two the position may change. If, for instance, the Balkan Alliance becomes an effective organisation and establishes some form of association with N.A.T.O., this would help to satisfy Greek and Turkish ambitions. The development of W.E.U. may also make it more specifically *Western* European and manifestly less suitable for the Balkan countries. It might then be possible to bring in Norway and Denmark without the awkward consequences which would follow from any attempt to do so now.

9. It is within this general framework that we must consider what the rôle of

W.E.U. should be and what specific tasks it should undertake.

10. The Brussels Treaty Organisation, of which W.E.U. will be the successor, has achieved much in the social and cultural fields and has been a useful forum for the intimate and informal exchange of views on political matters. The Consultative Council, consisting of Foreign Ministers, met whenever required, and the Permanent Commission, composed of the heads of mission of the continental members and a Foreign Office representative of ambassadorial rank met regularly in London. Periodically, special meetings of the Permanent Commission were attended by the "Directeurs Politiques" of the continental countries. It was the recognised practice for the Consultative Council and the Permanent Commission to discuss any subject of concern to any member State and there is no doubt that these meetings, which were more intimate and informal than is possible in larger organisations like N.A.T.O. or the United Nations, were much valued by our Brussels Treaty partners. In addition, meetings at official level were held before sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, ECOSOC and the General Conference of UNESCO for the purpose of co-ordinating the views of the Brussels Treaty countries. Her Majesty's Government will endeavour to ensure that after the accession of the Federal German Republic and Italy all these valuable activities are continued within W.E.U., and that the intimate and informal atmosphere is preserved. In view of the close relationship between W.E.U. and N.A.T.O., it might also be useful for the Permanent Representatives of the seven Powers to the two organisations to meet together periodically.

11. The Paris Agreements confer on the Council of W.E.U. a number of tasks. It will have various responsibilities under the Saar Agreement. Under Protocol II to the Brussels Treaty, it will be concerned with the agreed levels of forces placed by member States under N.A.T.O. authority on the mainland of Europe, and with the agreements (which have still to be negotiated) on the strength and armaments of internal defence and police forces. Under Protocols III and IV, it may have to pronounce on the manufacture of prohibited weapons and on the level of stocks of A.B.C. weapons, and it has general responsibility for the operations of the Agency for the Control of Armaments. It has to submit an



annual report on its activities to the W.E.U. Assembly and will have to develop a working relationship with that Assembly. It may acquire further functions as a result of the current discussions on armaments production and standardisation.

12. The nature and the volume of the work which will fall to the Council in fulfilment of these tasks cannot at present be foreseen, but the field of operation is in each case clearly delimited. The Council has been given, however, under the Paris Agreements the further task of "promoting the unity and encouraging the progressive integration of Europe." These are vague objectives, and the protocols give no guidance as to how they are to be interpreted nor in what fields they are to be pursued. If we are to avert the dangerous tendencies mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this despatch, it is desirable to clarify the Council's rôle in these matters.

13. It is the view of Her Majesty's Government that W.E.U. should not attempt to take action which would duplicate or cut across the work of existing organisations. Indeed in the military sphere the Paris Agreements already recognise the undesirability of duplicating N.A.T.O. by expressly providing that W.E.U. shall rely on the N.A.T.O. military authorities for information and advice on military matters, and the W.E.U. Interim Commission has accordingly recommended that no standing W.E.U. military organisation is required. In the economic field, it is at present hard to see what functions W.E.U. could perform without duplicating or cutting across the activities of the O.E.E.C., the E.C.S.C., the G.A.T.T., the Eisenhower Plan for the peaceful uses of atomic energy and other existing organisations for co-operation. Other members of W.E.U. may seek to discuss European economic problems which they may represent as being of special interest to the member States; and this may be difficult to prevent, if "the special interest" is essentially political or if the purpose is simply to exchange views between the Seven as a preliminary to discussion in one of the wider organisations. For matters within the province of E.C.S.C., we shall, however, resist any attempt of this kind, on the very good ground that there is now provision for a Council of Association between Her Majesty's Government and the High Authority of the E.C.S.C. For other matters, we shall argue that action must lie with O.E.E.C. or G.A.T.T., and that it would hardly be in the best interests of

these wider organisations for their W.E.U. members to attempt to set up over-lapping consultative machinery of their own. Up to date no member of W.E.U. has shown any desire to set up any economic machinery as part of W.E.U. or to encroach on the territory of O.E.E.C. or other economic organisations.

14. In the political field, consultation of certain kinds is to be encouraged. Examples are given in paragraph 10 above, and a specific case has already arisen in the shape of the Soviet Note about Chemical and Bacteriological weapons. But it would be a grave mistake for W.E.U. to seek to become the main or exclusive forum for political consultation between its members or for the maintenance of Western unity in face of the East. The North Atlantic Council is the right forum for political consultation on the broad problems of East-West relations and N.A.T.O. must remain the core of Western unity. Political consultation without Canada and the United States could not be very productive on the big issues such as policy towards the U.S.S.R., and its effects might be to hinder rather than help the unity of the Atlantic alliance. It would no doubt be feasible to invite the Canadians and Americans (who will in any case be invited to participate in any W.E.U. discussions about the Saar) to attend meetings of W.E.U. on such topics, but if we were to make a practice of this the exclusion of the other N.A.T.O. Powers, such as Norway and Turkey, would be all the more pointed. In fact, there is every indication that any attempt by W.E.U. to supplant N.A.T.O. as the core of Western unity would be opposed by the Canadians and Americans as strongly as by the other N.A.T.O. countries.

15. It would be equally undesirable to use W.E.U. as the principal medium for promoting European unity. This would produce a clash with the Council of Europe and lead probably to a serious decline in the latter's influence, which would be unwelcome to those members of the Council of Europe who are outside W.E.U. and in particular to the Scandinavians. Moreover, it would encourage pressure within W.E.U. for direct European elections and a European political federation, and precipitate precisely those developments which as stated in the opening paragraphs of this despatch we must be at pains to avoid.

16. In my broadcast on January 17 I said: "Western European Union has also the greatest political importance, for within



it France and Germany will at last be able to work constructively together." This in my view should be the main political function of W.E.U.: to promote Franco-German reconciliation and to develop German association with the West. The Agreements on the Saar, on the level of forces and on armaments control are all facets of this problem, and as time goes on any other points of friction between France and Germany might well be handled in W.E.U. Equally, we may reasonably hope that the cultural and social activities of W.E.U. and its informal political exchanges will all serve to develop the ties between Germany and her Western European neighbours.

17. As I said, in speaking of the future of W.E.U. in Parliament on November 18, unity can only grow, it can never be imposed. It is important that W.E.U. should be successful in those tasks which it does undertake, for only thus can it develop prestige and an *esprit de corps*. The tasks already allotted to W.E.U. are sufficient to

keep it occupied during the early stages of its growth. If, in the pursuit of them, W.E.U. can produce real unity and a common view between its members, particularly France and Germany, it will fully justify its existence. Moreover, the growth of mutual confidence which such an achievement would inspire would in itself lead naturally to co-operation in other fields as well.

18. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Ankara, Athens, Belgrade, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dublin, The Hague, Lisbon, Luxembourg, Oslo, Reykjavik, Rome, Washington, Strasbourg, Stockholm, Berne, Vienna and Madrid, to the Permanent United Kingdom Representative on the North Atlantic Council, the Heads of the United Kingdom Delegations at Luxembourg and Geneva, and the United Kingdom High Commissioners at Bonn and Ottawa.

I am, &c.,

ANTHONY EDEN.