

# Summary record of the joint meeting between the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments (London, 3 July 1956)


**Caption:** On 26 June 1956, a joint meeting is held between the Council of Western European Union (WEU) and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments. The first point raised concerns the differences of opinion as to the powers of the Assembly, and even those of the Council. A British member of the committee, Sir James Hutchison, refers to the legal basis that justifies the fact that the Assembly needs sufficient information to carry out its role in keeping the public informed. He also emphasises that Western defence is indivisible and that it is therefore reasonable to ask for information from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). British Assembly member Wynn Hugh-Jones agrees with James Hutchison and notes that if difficulties arise because of objections from non-WEU members of NATO, the whole system should be reassessed or the Assembly should even be disbanded. Sir Harold Caccia finally replies that it is not a question of good or bad will on the part of the Council; it is merely a question of identifying WEU's proper function. The second part of the session focuses on replies to the committee's questions.

**Source:** Council of the Western European Union. Summary record of joint meeting Council/Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments, 26 June 1956. London: 03.07.1956. C (56) 133. Copy No 22. 8 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1956, 01/01/1956-30/12/1956. File 202.414.01. Volume 1/1.

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# WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

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3rd July, 1956

Summary record of Joint Meeting Council/Assembly  
Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments  
26th June, 1956

*Mr. Eden*

The CHAIRMAN opened the proceedings by stating how much he appreciated the presence of representatives of the Council at this Joint Meeting which, he felt sure, would produce valuable results.

Mr. STIKKER replied that the Representatives of the Council also welcomed this opportunity of meeting the members of the Committee for joint discussions.

## I. QUESTIONS OF PRINCIPLE

Sir James HUTCHISON opened the discussion by thanking the Council for meeting, in many cases in their written answers, the requests of the Committee for information but stressing that such written exchanges as had taken place could never be as satisfactory as oral discussion.

There was however a divergence of opinion between the Council and the Assembly as to how far the sphere of action of the Assembly, and indeed that of the Council, should extend. He suggested looking first at the general purpose that it had been intended to serve in creating the Assembly, and its rôle in defence questions. He quoted the opinion given by the Council that "it is of the greatest importance that public opinion be kept informed on the activities of W.E.U. and the Council does not underestimate the valuable part played by the Assembly in this connection." To carry out this rôle the Assembly must have the information necessary to enable it to play its part effectively. The Council had however stated that they did not consider they could reply to certain questions. To reconcile this conflict it was essential to clarify the extent of the responsibility of the Council, the Assembly, and this Committee.

Under Article III of Protocol I the "High Contracting Parties and any organs established by Them under the Treaty shall work in close cooperation with NATO." The Treaty further set forth as its main aim the defence of the West. This defence was indivisible, and it was impossible to say that NATO was responsible for one part, and W.E.U. for another. (If this were so, how was it that W.E.U. had set up a Standardisation Committee when NATO already had one.) The responsibility of the Council,

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C (56) 133

the Assembly and the Committee therefore spread itself over the whole sphere of defence; in seeking knowledge about defence, information was available through NATO. It did not seem therefore that the Assembly had been asking questions on matters of collective self-defence which lay outside its sphere of activity.

Sir James HUTCHISON enquired how far the Council in London were left a free hand to negotiate by the Ministers. He hoped very much that the Council would show all possible flexibility in meeting the point of view of the Committee.

He stressed finally that the Committee only sought to enable the Assembly to carry out the task for which it had been created.

Mr. STIKKER made it clear that the members of the Council worked on instructions from their Governments, of which they were the portes-parole. The answers to the Committee's questions had thus been a compromise between the views of the different Governments.

Mr. STIKKER then recalled the history of the Brussels Treaty Organisation set up in 1948 and the subsequent creation of NATO. In 1950, a Consultative Council Resolution, which he read to the meeting, recognised that the continued existence of the Western Union Defence Organisation in its then form was therefore no longer necessary. This Resolution, which had not been affected by the modification of the Brussels Treaty, was an act of policy and formed the basis of the competence in defence questions of the present Council. W.E.U. had no military organisation. The Council never discussed problems of defence - these were dealt with in NATO, to avoid duplication.

Sir Harold CACCIA stressed that there was a genuine constitutional difficulty. The field of action of the Assembly had intentionally been left open; but that of the Council had been purposely limited by Governments through the handing over of the defence organisation to NATO. This had been done on organisational grounds, and also because, thinking in terms of a defence policy for Europe, an organisation that included the United States and Canada should clearly be responsible. The Council's field of action in military matters was thus limited to standardisation and control of armaments.

Mr. ERLER agreed that a fundamental point was at issue. But the Assembly was responsible to the seven countries for defence questions, and it must have the information necessary for its deliberations if they were to be effective. He agreed that duplication should be avoided and the Assembly had no wish for W.E.U. to take over the job of NATO. But information was essential, and he wished to know whether it was possible to obtain it from NATO through the Council.

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Mr. STIKKER recalled that under Article IX the Council was bound to make an annual report on its activities. This was a limitation which must be respected.

Mr. ERLER enquired whether this could not as well be regarded as the minimum that the Council was bound to, and not a maximum.

Sir James HUTCHISON enquired what was understood by "activities". He considered that the Council might include under these everything that was done for Western Defence, not merely standardisation and control. If the Council considered that its activities, and its knowledge from NATO, were thus limited, the Assembly would have to seek the information it required elsewhere, possibly direct from NATO.

Sir Harold CACCIA pointed out that the Council's activities were limited not only by interpretation of the Treaty etc. but by a decision of the Governments not to concern themselves in W.E.U. with Western Defence. Governments could of course reconsider this decision, but it should be remembered that NATO included countries not represented in W.E.U. A very large political question would be raised if requests for information for a limited number of countries were referred direct to NATO.

Mr. ERLER recalled that under Article VIII the Council was set up to strengthen peace and security; in addition, the automatic assistance clause in the Brussels Treaty was more far-reaching than the corresponding provision of the North Atlantic Treaty. It therefore seemed that the Council's activities under the Treaty must cover more than control and standardisation, and it should develop a common policy on defence matters. Was it, however, the intention of Governments that the Assembly should deal only with standardisation and control and not with the vital issues of policy of Western Defence?

Sir Harold CACCIA stated that there was no intention of thus limiting the Assembly. But on the other hand, no intention had been manifested of creating a NATO Assembly and it seemed that the Committee was tending to undertake what would have been the tasks of a NATO Assembly, if it had been considered desirable to create one.

Mr. ERLER then enquired what were the activities of the Council besides social and cultural activities, and standardisation and control.

Mr. STIKKER confirmed that the Council did not deal with general problems of defence of a political character and that its activities were only those mentioned by the Chairman.

LORD LAYTON did not challenge the fact that the Council acted on instructions from Governments, or that its activities were restricted. But he pointed out that W.E.U. was a much closer alliance than NATO, by reason of the automatic assistance clause which involved far more than the NATO provisions, and possibly action independently of NATO.

NATO, under the aegis of the U.N. carried out a function not carried out by the U.N.; similarly, W.E.U. in relation to NATO, since it was incumbent on the member States to take action under the Brussels Treaty which was not incumbent on them under the North Atlantic Treaty. Its parliamentary Assembly could therefore ask questions of the Council concerning these matters. He felt that this aspect should be represented to Ministers, and felt that otherwise this would in fact be done in the Assembly.

Mr. ERLER considered that if the Assembly was lacking a solid background of information for its discussions on defence matters the debates could do more harm than good. He felt that an appeal should be made to Governments to establish a procedure whereby the Council had the possibility of supplying the necessary information to the Assembly. He fully agreed that W.E.U. should be regarded as a kind of laboratory in the social and cultural fields, handing over its worthwhile achievements to larger bodies. It could do the same in military matters, handing over to NATO its achievements, for example, in the field of standardisation. This question might also be discussed with the Ministers.

Mr. GOEDHART wished to stress the political and parliamentary aspects of the question. The Assembly had a public responsibility. But it got no replies from the Council - for instance, after its debates at the last session, the Chairman of the Council could only say that he would refer to the Council the questions raised therein. Also, the Assembly got no information from the Council. He understood the constitutional difficulties that led to this, but the Assembly was not asking for secret information and he could not understand the Council's refusal, for instance concerning military service. The Council was aware of the present difficulties in all countries in convincing the general public that military service and expenditure on defence were necessary: the parliamentarians had to carry out this task, and it was in the Governments interest to help them to do so. The Parliamentarians could not do it without information if their work was not to be a pure waste of time and money.

M. ZOPPI stated that the Council fully understood this view, and had no wish to hide information or refuse it. But they could not go outside the limits of their activities as decided by the Treaty and the intentions of Ministers. Military service was discussed during the Annual Review in NATO; the Council had never discussed it and had no information about it. If it were wished to give the Council a wider competence, the North Atlantic Council would undoubtedly have an opinion to express.

Mr. ERLER felt that it was impossible to discuss control and standardisation without having an overall picture of Western Defence. Further, the consequences of NATO decisions should be discussed by the Seven in so far as they affected the special position of the Seven under the automatic assistance clause. He fully understood that the Ministers must be responsible for a decision on this, but he felt the Ministers must be convinced of the necessity for a change.



Mr. JONES pointed out that under Article IV, W.E.U. received information from NATO on matters concerning defence. If the Council really relied on the Assembly, as it said, to help it to keep public opinion informed, why could it not pass the information received from NATO on to the Assembly to enable it to do its job? If difficulties arose because the non-W.E.U. members of NATO might object, there should be a re-assessment of the whole question or else the Assembly should be disbanded, for under present conditions it could not do its work.

Sir Harold CACCIA said that it was true that W.E.U. could get information from NATO, but this information was on questions on which W.E.U. had a subsidiary body, i.e., on control and standardisation. If Governments were to alter their decision that these should be the only two W.E.U. Council activities in the military field, there would have to be, firstly, a change of intention by Governments; secondly, a decision on the scope of the information to be given by NATO, and on the method of passing it on to the Assembly, whether directly, or through the Council; and thirdly, a decision as to whether this could be done under the existing text. This was not a question of good or bad will on the part of the Council; it was purely a question of the proper function of W.E.U.

Sir James HUTCHISON stated that it seemed to him that the intention of the Ministers had narrowed the intention of the Treaty. The Treaty provided that all aspects of defence entered into the purview of W.E.U.: the Ministers only accepted that information should be provided by NATO touching on the subsidiary bodies set up by the Council. Yet under Article VIII the Council could set up such subsidiary bodies as it considered necessary. The Ministers appeared to have narrowed the field in such a way as to affect adversely the work of the Assembly.

Mr. ERLER recalled that the aim of this meeting was not to reach conclusions but only to clarify the positions of the Assembly and the Council. To summarise, the Treaty stated that "the High Contracting Parties and any organs established by Them" would cooperate with NATO; this included the Assembly, and they could not cooperate unless they had the necessary information. From a common sense aspect, the view was surely acceptable that the Council must use the Assembly as a forum for public opinion and must therefore help it.

Mr. ERLER stated that the Committee would report on the questions discussed at the Joint Meeting to the Assembly. He stressed once more the value of close co-operation between the Council and the Assembly, and the usefulness of Joint Meetings between representatives of both.

## II. REPLIES TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

Sir James HUTCHISON suggested that all questions affected by the Council's view of their responsibilities should be left aside, and only questions dealing directly with control and standardisation dealt with.

The Directive and Regulations concerning the Agency were handed to the members of the Committee.

Mr. STIKKER pointed out that these documents were still confidential. Publication could not take place until the protection for industry of which mention was made therein had been agreed and until it had been decided which of the Regulations would have legal force. The Committee would of course be informed as soon as publication could take place.

At his request, Mr. HUYDECOPER summarised for the meeting the main points of the two documents.

Mr. ERLER, thanking the representatives of the Council for communicating this document, proposed that the Committee should study it before proceeding further.

The Assembly representatives requested that the information concerning the replies to the Agency's questionnaire should be supplied to them in time for the autumn session of the Assembly. The representatives of the Council undertook to look into this matter.

Mr. ERLER enquired whether the Governments maintained their position as regards the question of initiative in the S.A.C. He felt that the staff of the Committee should be able to make suggestions for investigations, particularly since the present method seemed only to have given meagre results so far. The member States of W.E.U. were so much more closely connected than those of NATO that it should be possible to do more in the field of standardisation in W.E.U. This opportunity should not be missed.

Mr. STIKKER stated that these problems of standardisation had been under study for many years, first under the Brussels Treaty Organisation, and then in NATO. The former had some useful achievements to its credit. In NATO standardisation was carried out by the Army, Navy and Air Boards of M.A.S. and they had already reached a number of "Stanags" (Standardisation Agreements), the Navy Board 47 final and 9 draft agreements, the Army Board 72 final and 50 draft agreements and the Air Board 71 final and 139 draft agreements. But these agreements did not aim at the production stage, as did the work done by W.E.U. of which he gave a brief summary. Standardisation problems were also dealt with by FINABEL. He considered that W.E.U. could do more than was being done in NATO and stressed that the Council attached great importance to the work of S.A.C. But standardisation was a long and difficult process, requiring a great deal of consultation on the expert level, and necessarily took a good deal of time to reach results.

Mr. ERLER thanked Mr. Stikker for giving this interesting information. NATO thus appeared to have reached some very useful results. He wondered as to the method used by NATO and rather thought that the NATO Boards had a right of initiative. He felt it would be useful if the information supplied by Mr. Stikker were included in a report to the Assembly in some appropriate form.

Mr. STIKKER undertook to see whether this could be done.

Mr. ERLER then enquired how the sub-groups mentioned in the Supplementary Report to the Assembly worked.

Mr. STIKKER explained that a Government made a suggestion; S.A.C. then set up a working group; if any Government was not interested in this particular investigation it did not take part though all Governments were of course free to do so. Participation was therefore on an entirely voluntary basis.

Mr. ERLER then enquired whether the deliveries under the Mutual Aid Programmes had a favourable influence on standardisation: did the countries receive these weapons in such quantities, and did a sufficient number of countries receive them, as to result in practice in standardisation?

Mr. STIKKER stated that he had no details available, but could say that large numbers of weapons were involved. The Council would see whether further information on this question could be supplied.

### III. CONCLUSION

On Mr. ERLER enquiring whether the Council wished to ask any questions of the Committee, Sir Harold CACCIA expressed the value attached by the Council to these opportunities for personal contact. He stressed that the Council considered that one of the most effective ways of propagating knowledge about W.E.U. was through the Assembly, particularly since the newspapers were not greatly interested in W.E.U. He recognised that the Council was asking the Assembly to help them, but at the same time was not able to give the Assembly the tools it wanted to do so.

Mr. ERLER stated that he was very glad that this meeting had taken place in London, so as to give an opportunity for personal contacts, and frank discussions, stressing once more the value of these contacts and their superiority over written exchanges.

The Committee was now clear as to the position of the Council, and, in the light of the discussions, would make its report to the Assembly. The Assembly would then be able to make any recommendation it saw fit to the Council of Ministers.

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(This document has been prepared by the Secretariat-General, but has not been agreed by the representatives of the Assembly)

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIALC (56) 133REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COUNCIL OF W.E.U.

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H.E. M. V. Zoppi  
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