

Replies by the WEU Council to questions put by the Assembly's Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments (London, 21 February 1956)

Caption: The Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU) circulates the Council's replies to questions put by the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments in a note dated 21 February 1956. The Secretary-General points out that the Council can only reply to questions within its remit and cannot reply to those for which the individual Member States are responsible or those that encroach on the powers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the military field. With regard to the activities of the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC), the Council notes that the SAC acts on a case-by-case basis to improve methods of consultation and coordination in the sphere of armaments. On the matter of the armaments currently under review, production problems and the possibility of a division of labour will be considered as soon as all or some Member States approve the joint adoption of such weapons or some of their elements.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Secretary-General's note. Replies to questions put by the Assembly "Committee on defence questions and armaments. London: 21.02.1956. C (56) 45. Copy No 72. 6 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: 1955, 19/12/1955-22/04/1958. File 202.415.20. Volume 1/1.

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URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/replies_by_the_weu_council_to_questions_put_by_the_assembly_s_committee_on_defence_questions_and_armaments_london_21_february_1956-en-9a12ac1f-846d-407b-957a-4f36356e25f4.html



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WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

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21st February, 1956

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S NOTE

REPLIES TO QUESTIONS PUT BY THE ASSEMBLY "COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE QUESTIONS AND ARMAMENTS"

The Secretary-General circulates herewith the final text of the replies given to the questions put by the Assembly "Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments".

Reservations made by certain delegations having been withdrawn, the text was sent to members of the Assembly Committee on 20th February, 1956.

2, Eaton Place,
London S.W.1.

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Sir,

The Council have instructed me to reply to your letter of the 5th January containing the questions put to them by the COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE QUESTIONS AND ARMAMENTS.

The Council are glad to note the Assembly's interest in the measures they have taken for the implementation of the provisions of the amended Brussels Treaty.

The nature of the Council's replies will give the Assembly a clearer picture of the limits within which W.E.U. can take action.

It will be seen that the Council can only reply to questions coming within their competence and cannot reply to those for which the individual member countries are responsible in conformity with the amended Brussels Treaty.

Furthermore, it was recognised at the time of the creation of W.E.U. that the Organisation's activities should not overlap with those of NATO in the military field. There is indeed a specific provision to this effect in Article IV of the amended Brussels Treaty. It follows from this principle that some of the points raised in the questionnaire, which come exclusively within the competence of NATO, cannot be dealt with by the Council of W.E.U.

The Council do not think that it will be possible for them to comply with the Committee's wish that they should be represented at the meeting to be held in Paris on the 27th February. They draw attention to the fact that the annual report of the Council to be submitted to the next session of the Assembly will contain further details which should give the Assembly the information they require.

The Council have done their best to follow the procedure and the timing suggested in your letter. They hope that this procedure will promote that collaboration and mutual trust between the Council and the Assembly which is their chief concern. However, experience alone will show whether this procedure or some variation of it will best achieve the common aims of the Council and the Assembly.

The replies prepared by the Council are attached to this letter.

I have the honour to be

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) L. Goffin
Secretary-General

To: The Right Hon. J.S. Maclay, C.M.G., M.P.,
President of the Assembly of W.E.U.,
House of Commons,
London.

I. STANDING ARMAMENTS COMMITTEE

Answer to Question No. 1

As is clearly stated in the decision of 7th May, 1955 setting up the Standing Armaments Committee, the Council recognised the desirability "of seeking the best method of using the resources available to these countries for equipping and supplying their forces and of sharing tasks in the best interests of all". The budgetary implications of such co-operation depend on a number of factors which do not come within the competence of W.E.U.

Answer to Question No. 2

In setting up the Standing Armaments Committee the Council specified that the Committee would act on a case by case basis to improve methods of consultation and co-operation in the sphere of armaments, with a view to finding joint solutions which would assist the governments in meeting their equipment requirements. This means that the Committee will normally obtain the best results by studying concrete cases submitted by one or more of its members. On this basis a general enquiry extending to all armaments industries which could take part in common production would not be suitable. One of the reasons which decided the Council's choice of methods was that each case is entirely different from all others. For example, the extent to which industries are linked or integrated with others not engaged in defence production varies widely from industry to industry.

Furthermore, no type of equipment should automatically be regarded as unsuitable for consultations by the Standing Armaments Committee in accordance with its terms of reference.

Answer to Question No. 3.

The Council are unable to circulate documents dealing with the extent to which equipment is at present standardised. At the same time it can be noted that there is already a considerable measure of standardisation in practice due to the delivery of a number of types of weapons to all member countries under the Mutual Aid Programme. Several standardisation agreements have also been concluded between the various countries, as a result of action taken under the Brussels Treaty over a period of almost eight years and continues in NATO. The replacement of existing weapons and the purchase of components will offer fresh possibilities for useful work in this direction.

Answer to Question No. 4 a) and b)

In the case of armaments at present under review by the Standing Armaments Committee, production problems and the possibility of a division of labour will be considered as soon as all or some member countries approve the joint adoption of such weapons or certain of their elements.

However, in the case of certain items there is already some specialisation and division of labour between the Member countries of W.E.U. Examples are the "Gloster Meteor" and "Hawker Hunter" aircraft, production of which is divided between factories in the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands.

c) and d)

The Council is not yet in a position to answer questions 4 c) and d) (see replies to questions 4 a) and b)).

Answer to Question No. 5

The development of military tactics has not yet reached the stage at which any member country has found it necessary to submit the problems of renewal or supply of such types of equipment to the Committee for consideration. On the other hand, the Standing Armaments Committee is investigating a number of ground-to-ground radio-guided missiles in connection with a study of anti-tank weapons.

Answer to Question No. 6

Yes.

Answer to Question No. 7

These problems are outside the competence of W.E.U.

Answer to Question No. 8

There can be no doubt regarding the value of regular consultation with a view to co-operation between countries in the purchase of military equipment. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that circumstances vary greatly from country to country. In this connection the importance may be stressed of the United States and Canadian Aid Programmes.

Answer to Question No. 9

The Council is not aware that the Governments have shown reluctance for the reason stated.

Answer to Question No. 10

Armaments study and research are matters for the Standing Armaments Committee. The possibility of joint action will be considered in each specific case.

Answer to Question No. 11

Experts are already exchanged under agreements concerning the sale and use of licences for military equipment. Technical information and practical experiences are also exchanged.

Answer to Question No. 12

The staff is sufficient to handle the present work of the Committee.

Answer to Question No. 13 a)

The Budget of the S.A.C. for the period 1st June to 31st December was £17,470.

b)

Yes.

Answer to Question No. 14

The Council cannot deal with this point which relates to matters coming within the competence of the national Governments.

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Answer to Question No. 15

In accordance with the decision setting up the S.A.C., liaison with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is maintained by the attendance of a NATO Observer at all meetings of the Committee and its sub-committees or working parties. The Secretariats of the two Organisations are also in permanent contact and these arrangements are fully satisfactory.

Answer to Question No. 16

Yes.

II. THE ARMAMENTS CONTROL AGENCY

Answer to Question No. 1.

No control measures were taken by the Agency between 21st June and 31st December, 1955. Meeting in Paris on 14th December, 1955, the Council of Ministers of W.E.U. decided that effective control of armaments should begin on 1st January, 1956.

The period 21st June to 31st December, 1955 was a preparatory stage during which the Agency devoted itself to organisation and considered the various points raised by the Paris Agreements which had to be settled before the Agency could start full scale operations.

Answer to Question No. 2

The Agency has compiled a questionnaire for circulation to the governments of member countries in order to obtain information on the armaments of land, sea and air forces as provided in Article 13 of Protocol IV. This questionnaire was sent to the governments on 10th January, 1956 and replies are due in April, 1956.

The Agency will start the verification of documents on the basis of these replies.

The Council and the Agency are anxious to settle the problems raised by Agency controls on the spot.

Answer to Question No. 3

None.

Answer to Question No. 4

During the preparatory period the governments have shown that they intend to co-operate effectively with the Agency in the spirit of Article 12 of Protocol IV.

Answer to Question No. 5

The Council see no reason to doubt that member countries will comply with their obligations under Protocol III and its Annexes.

Answer to Question No. 6

Replies to questions put in accordance with Article 21 of Protocol IV will be obtained during the control year 1956:

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- in April, together with other replies to the questionnaire, in the case of depots containing armaments subject to control on 1st January, 1956.
- at a date to be fixed in the case of plants manufacturing armaments in 1956.

Answer to Question No. 7 a)

Exports are covered by the questionnaire referred to in the reply to Question No. 2, in a section dealing with anticipated exports under programmes for 1956.

b)

The Council are unable to answer this question.

Answer to Question No. 8

The Council is studying the question raised by Article 5 of Protocol II.

III. GENERAL QUESTIONS

Answer to Question No. 1

The Council have no relations with FINEBEL.

Answer to Question No. 2

The Council are unable to answer this question.