

Draft reply from the WEU Council to the preliminary report of the Assembly's Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments (London, 6 June 1956)


Caption: In a note dated 6 June 1956, the Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU) circulates the draft reply from the WEU Council to the preliminary report of the Assembly's Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments. The Council believes that it is important to give a brief summary of how the question of collective defence in Western Europe has developed before replying to the additional questions, so that the Assembly can clearly understand how tasks are divided between WEU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The WEU should be seen only as the depository of the solemn undertaking to afford mutual assistance embodied in Article V of the modified Brussels Treaty and as the guardian of the procedure laid down in Article VIII. Consequently, the Council is not in a position to reply to matters relating to the maintenance and the defence of peace in Western Europe, which are the responsibility of NATO. But the Council is able to reply to any questions relating to its subsidiary bodies, the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) and the Agency for the Control of Armaments (ACA).

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Secretary-General's note. Supplementary Questions of the Assembly. . London: 06.06.1956. C (56)113 (2nd Revision). Copy N°60. 8p. 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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SECRETARY-GENERAL'S NOTE

Supplementary Questions of the Assembly

The Secretary-General circulates herewith a revised reply to the preliminary report of the Assembly's Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments, as discussed at the meeting of the Council held on 6th June, 1956.

Delegations are requested to telephone their agreement to this text as soon as possible.

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2, Eaton Place,
S.W.1.

I. The Council have carefully considered the preliminary report of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments which the President of the Assembly communicated to the Chairman of the Council on 26th April 1956.

Before replying to the supplementary questions in this report, the Council would like to discuss some points of a general nature raised in Chapters I and II of the report which also concern some of the supplementary questions.

II. The first point concerns the relations between the Council and the Committee. The Council welcome the statement, in paragraph 2 of the report, that it is the Committee's purpose to help the Council in achieving the aims of Western European Union. They realise that it is of the greatest importance that public opinion be kept informed on the activities of W.E.U. and they do not underestimate the valuable part played by the Assembly in this connection.

The Committee raised in this respect the question of personal contacts of members of the Council with the Committee. The Council are fully aware of the advantages of such contacts and they therefore welcome the Committee's decision to hold its next meeting in London, which gives opportunity for these personal contacts.

III. From several of the Committee's remarks it would appear that there may be some misunderstanding about the nature and scope of W.E.U. and about the respective rôles of the Council and the Assembly; it might perhaps be useful to consider these problems in some detail.

Articles V and VIII of the revised Brussels Treaty provide that, at the request of any of their number, the High Contracting Parties will consult on any question which may constitute a threat to peace, in whatever area this threat may arise and that if any High Contracting Party should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the other High Contracting Parties will afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power.

It should be noted that this solemn undertaking was not an innovation, since it was included, in exactly the same terms, in Articles IV and VII of the original Brussels Treaty (17th March 1948).

As a direct consequence of this undertaking, the Signatories of the original Brussels Treaty, mindful of their joint responsibilities, took steps to create the machinery necessary to implement a policy of mutual assistance. Therefore, the Council set up by the Treaty at once established (17th April 1948) a Western Union Defence Committee, consisting of the Defence Ministers of the Governments concerned. Under the

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auspices of this Committee, a permanent organisation was set up in September 1948 to work out the joint defence policy which was to be applied by the General Staff in each country.

Shortly afterwards (October 1948), a Committee of Finance Ministers was formed to consider the financial and economic aspects of problems arising from the organisation of joint defence.

During the first year of its existence, the defence organisation of the five Powers studied a plan for their common defence, including an integrated air defence plan, based on the use of radar. It made suggestions for the production of arms and equipment which involved large-scale application of the principle of mutual aid. It set up the nucleus of a joint command organisation, agreed upon measures for training, and organised a number of combined exercises of land, sea and air forces.

This "spade-work" done by the five Powers was of great assistance, not only in creating the atmosphere which made the conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty possible, but also in shaping the character of the organisation set up under that Treaty.

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in April 1949. A few months later, in November-December 1949, on the initiative of the Western Union Defence Committee, the defence machinery of Western Union became the Western European Regional Planning Group, within the framework of N.A.T.O.

After very close collaboration between B.T.O. and N.A.T.O., the latter, from April 1951 onwards, took complete charge of the organisation of common defence and the responsibility for determining defence policy.

It was necessary to recall briefly how the problem of collective defence has developed in Western Europe in order to give a clear definition of the responsibility of the Council set up by the revised Brussels Treaty as far as questions of defence are concerned. It is clear that, while the implementation of the 1948 Brussels Treaty demanded the preparation of a common defence policy and the establishment of a joint military organisation, this responsibility has now been taken over in its entirety by N.A.T.O. In assuming the responsibilities of the B.T.O., W.E.U. could not take over greater obligations for defence than those which remained under the Brussels Treaty.

IV. At present, Western European Union should be regarded only as the depository of the solemn undertaking to afford mutual assistance embodied in Article V of the revised Brussels Treaty and the guardian of the procedure laid down in Article VIII. It is doubtless in order to confirm this position that

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Article IV provides that, in the execution of the Treaty, the High Contracting Parties and the two organs established by them under the Treaty shall work in close co-operation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Therefore, all questions relating to the maintenance and the defence of peace in Western Europe are, and in the present circumstances should remain, the responsibility of N.A.T.O.

The Committee stated in this respect that there could be "no overlapping between the Assembly and N.A.T.O., because there is no N.A.T.O. Assembly." The Council, however, consider the Assembly as a part - though an independent part - of W.E.U. as a whole and its very useful function of debating W.E.U. activities could, in the opinion of the Council, only be weakened if the Assembly were to take up problems which are not dealt with by the Council and which therefore could not be the subject of exchanges of views between the Assembly and the Council.

This applies notably to the activities of the Member States within N.A.T.O. Giving information on these activities would mean that the Council would have to discuss them first which, as explained above, they are not in a position to do. The Governments of Member States within N.A.T.O. act not as W.E.U. members but as individual governments which are responsible only to their national parliaments.

This does not mean that the Council can only discuss with the Assembly problems relating to the activities dealt with in their Report to the Assembly: if the latter feels that W.E.U. should, within the scope of the Treaty, start other activities the Council is willing to examine with it any suggestions which may be brought forward which are in accordance with the position outlined in this paper.

V. The same remark about information relating to the activities of Member States within N.A.T.O. applies to the problem of information on national activities and policies. Governments provide their national parliaments, to which they are responsible, with this information and representatives of the Assembly are thus informed about their own Governments' policies. The compilation by the Council of this national information into one document could not be regarded as a statement of the Council's policy and would in fact add nothing to the information available to the members of the Assembly.

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VI. Finally, the Council wish to add a general remark concerning the rôle of the Standing Armaments Committee. The Council's Resolution creating this Committee was based on the conclusion reached during the preparatory work that the decision to undertake a specific investigation, and the degree of priority to be accorded to any such investigation, would be matters for the competent national authorities. Consequently, neither the Standing Armaments Committee, nor its Secretariat, have a right of initiative independent of that of the Governmental representatives who constitute the Committee.

The Council have noted with interest the importance the Committee attaches to the "case by case" method pursued by the Standing Armaments Committee. They consider that a rigid rule, providing for preliminary consultation before any purchase of major equipment is made by one or more of the member Governments, would not be in accordance with the line of thinking that led the Council to the adoption of this "case by case" method. Indeed, any such rigid rule would not be conducive to easy cooperation between Governments.

VII. The Council have, within the limits indicated in the previous paragraphs, tried to reply as fully as possible to the supplementary questions put in the report. Their answers are given below with an indication of the paragraphs of the Assembly's report to which they refer.

(A) STANDING ARMAMENTS COMMITTEE

8. The Committee is requested to refer to paragraph VI. above.

9. Examples of equipment supplied under Mutual Aid Programmes to member States include AOF-84-F fighter bombers, RF-84-F tactical reconnaissance aircraft, F-86-K all-weather fighters, Centurion and M 47 Patton tanks, various calibre guns and ammunition (from 40 mm. up to 155 mm.), radar and communications equipment.

10. The United Kingdom Government have made arrangements for members of the Committee to visit factories producing the Hawker Hunter.

As far as troop trials are concerned, the Council wish to draw the Committee's attention to the necessity of limiting attendance at such trials to a minimum number of experts if these trials are to be effective. However, as soon as such trials have been held, the Council will bear in mind the Committee's request for an opportunity of observing demonstrations of standardised equipment.

11. The Committee is requested to refer to paragraph VI above.

14. The reference to the United States and Canadian Aid Programmes was made by the Council to indicate that an important part of major military equipment at present in use in member countries has been, and still is, delivered under these programmes, thus ensuring a large degree of de facto standardisation. Similarly, it will, if only in the interests of standardisation, be highly desirable for consultations concerning replacement of, or additional equipment for, these types of armament to be **conducted in most cases** with the participation of the North American partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

17. Exchanges of experts take place in the course of normal commercial procedure on a bilateral basis. Technical information is exchanged in groups of experts of the N.A.T.O. Defence Production Committee and the Working Groups set up by the Standing Armaments Committee.

18. The Council assure the Committee that the staff requirements of the Secretariat of the Standing Armaments Committee are kept regularly under review and that personnel strength will at all times be kept in relation to the actual requirements for efficient execution of the tasks given to the Secretariat. When the Standing Armaments Committee was set up in May 1955, the Council explicitly directed that the Secretariat should, in principle, "consist of a small number of officials, chosen in accordance with their qualifications".

As far as the question on the right of initiative of the Secretariat is concerned, the Committee is requested to refer to paragraph VI above.

20. The Committee is requested to refer to paragraph V. above.

22. The substance of the report of the Standing Armaments Committee has been included in the Supplement to the first Report of the Council to the Assembly.

(B) AGENCY FOR THE CONTROL OF ARMAMENTS

24. As on 1st January, 1956, the total number of personnel available amounted to thirty. In order to carry out the functions resulting from the Council's directive to the Director of the Armaments Control Agency mentioned in the next paragraph, the Agency has since been authorised to increase this number to forty-four.

25. This Report has been submitted to the Council. The Council, assisted by a working party established for this purpose, have studied the various questions raised in the Report.

As the Council have come to the conclusion that the final solution of a number of problems related to the protection of private interests may require some time, a directive has been issued to the Director of the Agency which will enable him to start test checks and inspections on a preliminary basis. This directive will be communicated to members of the Committee at the forthcoming Joint Meeting.

26. Six of the seven replies to the questionnaire have been received by the Agency. The remaining reply is expected shortly.

The Agency is now analysing the replies; in the course of this study it has not so far come upon any special points which need to be brought to the attention of the Council. Under the above-mentioned directive, the Director of the Agency has been instructed to supply to the Council certain information concerning these replies and, as soon as this has been received, the Council will consider how to respond to the Committee's request for some information concerning the replies.

29. The rules concerning the nature of weapons contained in Annexe IV of Protocol III have not been modified. If, at any time, modifications should be decided upon, the Council will not fail to communicate them to the Assembly.

30. Governments will send in their replies to the questionnaire concerning armament manufacturing plants as soon as possible. Two replies have already been received.

31. The control of armaments in Western European Union is in principle concerned with stocks held by member countries. Accordingly, the control of exports by the Agency is not an end in itself, but is carried out only to establish whether a possible surplus of the total quantities of certain armaments available, or planned, over the recognised requirements of the forces of the country concerned is justified.

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It follows from the above that the Council will consider and discuss exports only insofar as this may be necessary to enable them to form an opinion on the level of stocks of armaments held at any time by each Member of W.E.U. on the mainland of Europe.

Information on armaments already exported is therefore for the time being not considered necessary; information on armaments which are to be exported will be received in reply to the questionnaire referred to in the Council's original reply to question no. 7. It should be noted that for the purpose of the control of armaments, as explained above, the country of destination is irrelevant.

32. The Council have established a working party to assist them in the preparation of the Agreements concerned. This working party sent out a questionnaire in which governments were requested to submit information on all national military and police forces on the mainland of Europe, with the exception of forces already assigned to or earmarked for NATO. The replies to this questionnaire have been received and are being analysed.

In consultation with NATO, a procedure has been established through which, in accordance with Article IV of the revised Brussels Treaty, information and advice on military matters will be obtained from the military authorities of NATO. Copies of the replies to the questionnaire have been sent to these authorities.

As soon as the Agreements have been concluded, their contents will be made known to the Assembly. It cannot yet be foreseen when this will be done.

(C) GENERAL QUESTIONS

34. Reference is made to paragraphs III and IV of this note. In this case in particular the Council felt that it was not their task to discuss this matter, as the whole question of the implication of nuclear explosions in the U.S.S.R. is being dealt with by N.A.T.O.