

Note by the British representative on equipment to be standardised (Paris, 15 April 1955)

Caption: On 15 April 1955, the Secretary-General of the Interim Commission of Western European Union (WEU) circulates a note from the United Kingdom representative on equipment to be standardised. The British representative starts by emphasising that the note represents his personal conclusions as a member of the committee of experts. The document focuses on the question ‘What is the useful scope for WEU in the field of equipment standardisation?’ The British representative believes that the most useful activity for WEU in this field would be to explore the possibilities of developing standard components on behalf of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a whole.

Source: Western European Union. Interim Commission. Working Party on Production and Standardisation of Armaments. Committee of Experts. Equipment to be standardized. Secretary’s general’s Note . Paris: 15.04.1955. PWG/E/29. 5 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://anlux.lu/>. Western European Union Archives. Armament Bodies. CPA/SAC. Comité permanent des armements. File CPA-034. Volume 1/1.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/note_by_the_british_representative_on_equipment_to_be_standardised_paris_15_april_1955-en-12ac1791-4d09-497b-9784-50b4c217bbe0.html



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WORKING PARTY ON PRODUCTION AND STANDARDISATION OF ARMAMENTS

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COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

EQUIPMENT TO BE STANDARDISED

Secretary-General's Note

At its fifth meeting, on 10th March, 1955 the Committee of Experts decided to invite the delegations and the NATO representative to submit a note, as the French Delegation had done, on point A.5 of its terms of reference. (See Document PWG/ER/5, final version, Section I, last paragraph).

In accordance with that decision, the Secretary-General circulates herewith some notes by the United Kingdom Representative on equipment to be standardised.

These notes will be examined by the Committee of Experts at a forthcoming meeting.

Equipment to be Standardised

The following notes represent my personal conclusions as a member of the Committee of Experts, and in setting these views down on paper, I have not consulted the United Kingdom authorities.

2. I take the question we are trying to answer to be, not simply, "What equipment should be standardised?" but rather, "What is the useful scope for W.E.U. in the field of equipment standardisation?" It seems to me that this is a nuance of great importance, bearing in mind that all the nations who will be members of W.E.U. are or will be members of N.A.T.O.; that N.A.T.O. has, during the last five years accumulated considerable experience, by trial and error, as to what is and is not both useful and practicable in the matter of standardisation; that the work of N.A.T.O. in this field will continue and that the W.E.U. nations will participate in it as members of N.A.T.O.

3. I believe the studies we have undertaken in our Committee point inevitably to the conclusion that the most useful activity for W.E.U. in the matter of standardisation would be to initiate and encourage the standardisation of components and adaptors.

4. Our investigations have shown that the adoption by a group of countries of a complete new "end-item" has nearly always come about as a by-product of either mutual aid programmes or of joint procurement. In other words, an "end-item" already developed by one country is

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adopted by others. Cases in which an end-item has been developed, ab initio, as a joint undertaking by several countries, through all the successive stages, have been extremely rare. Even the apparently simple cases of the infantry rifle and the small arms round turned out to be extremely difficult. It took a matter of years to reach a compromise. This was by no means due solely to the difficulty of reconciling differences in military requirements. There were widely differing financial and even political implications for each country concerned in the adoption of this or that possible rifle or round.

5. Thus, although the possibility should not be excluded that countries may be willing to develop new equipment as a cooperative effort I feel we should be unwise in putting this in the forefront of our objectives. Moreover, I feel convinced that it would be wrong to aim at developing specifically W.E.U. items of equipment. The possible permutations and combinations of countries within N.A.T.O. who could conceivably cooperate in specific research and development projects are many, and are by no means necessarily limited to the W.E.U. members of N.A.T.O. We must not forget that the resources at present available to the European members of N.A.T.O. for military research and development are dwarfed by those available in the U.S.A. It would not be realistic to assume that, in the field of new weapons, the W.E.U. countries could or should set up on their own as a separate entity in research and development. The plain fact is that the

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European member of N.A.T.O. will, on the whole, be dependent for many years on the fruits of the vast and continuous effort in this field in the U.S.A. and to a lesser extent in Canada and in the U.K. This does not exclude the possibility of collaboration between W.E.U. countries in research and development in a few specific cases, probably those which do not involve vast expenditures. Research and development will be a dead end unless it can be followed by a considerable production effort, and, on present showing, the production effort which is possible for the W.E.U. members is but a small fraction of that which is possible for the North American allies.

6. Hence my conclusion that, in the field of standardisation as such W.E.U. should seek, at least to begin with, the more practicable objective of standardising components, and modifications to items of equipment held by more than one member country, and so on. It would be a great mistake to minimise the importance of the work to be done in this perhaps unglamorous but nevertheless practical sphere. In my opinion, one of the most useful services W.E.U. can render to N.A.T.O. in the matter of standardisation is to put a real drive behind the effort to work out standardised components - for example in the electronics field.

7. The end items will, to a large extent take care of themselves in practice. Joint procurement schemes will do a great deal, and for such schemes, it is not necessary, as experience, and our investigations have shown, to begin at the research and development stage.

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8. Thus, I am very much in agreement with my Netherlands colleague. I do not exclude the possibility that cooperation in research and development on specific items of equipment may prove practicable, but I do think we must discount the probability that the scope for this will be extensive on a W.E.U. basis. I do, however, believe that there is a really useful job for W.E.U. to do in exploring the possibilities of developing standard components on behalf of N.A.T.O. as a whole.