


Arms design and production in WEU

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In WEU it was not until 1955 that the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) was set up to act in the field of arms production.

The SAC was the result of a protocol to the Modified Brussels Treaty of October 1954, the ‘protocol on the production and standardisation of armaments’, signed on 21 October. ‘Anxious to increase the effectiveness of their common defence forces to the maximum,’ and ‘[d]esirous of ensuring the best possible use of their available armament credits by means of the rational organisation of production,’ the signatories ‘1. Recall the decision taken at the London Conference to set up a Working Party to study the draft directives submitted by the French Government on October 1, 1954, and such other documents as might subsequently be submitted on the problem of the production and standardisation of armaments; 2. Agree to convene a Working Group in Paris on January 17, 1955, of the Representatives of Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, to study the draft directives and other documents referred to in the foregoing paragraph, with a view to submitting proposals to the Council of Western European Union [...]’. On 7 May 1955, in accordance with these provisions, the Council established the Standing Armaments Committee, to be responsible, ‘working closely with NATO, for improving the standard of consultations and cooperation in the field of armaments, with a view to finding common solutions which would make it easier for Member States’ governments to meet their needs for materiel. [...] To this end, it will, whenever the opportunity arises, do its best to promote agreements or arrangements which may relate to problems such as studies, standardisation, production and supply of armaments’.^[1]

The positions of France and the United Kingdom

As with FINBEL, the initiative came from France. France was anxious to revive its arms industry and to promote cooperation in this field. Initially, everything was done to ensure that the SAC would work in close collaboration with NATO. Its headquarters were established in Paris in 1955, close to the seat of the North Atlantic Council. The permanent delegates of its constituent Member States could at the same time be members of the delegations to NATO. Other members of the Alliance could sign up to agreements or arrangements adopted by WEU. In the early stages, France was keen to give the Atlantic framework preference over the European framework when it came to discussions about armaments. The French hoped for United States aid and cooperation. However, they did not by any means want, as the Americans and British very soon suggested, to see arms production being divided among the Member States. The risk was that the industries in the English-speaking world, far removed from the possible future battlefield, might be given the task of designing and manufacturing the main armaments, while the arms industry in mainland Europe would be relegated to manufacturing ammunition and spare parts; in other words, the products with the smallest added value and involving the least scientific development. France therefore very soon realised that it would be more advantageous to develop cooperation in the arms field at the European, not the Atlantic, level.

The British were much more hesitant. Throughout the SAC’s existence, the United Kingdom tried to thwart every French move to develop the SAC, to the point of attempting to get rid of it altogether in the 1970s.

The role of WEU

The SAC’s dependence on NATO circumscribed its operations and accounted for the disappointing results it achieved. ‘At no time during the 35 years it was in being was any military materiel produced or even developed under WEU auspices! Every example of European cooperation was under a bilateral or multilateral arrangement between national governments and between industries, or

emerged from programmes devised within NATO. The SAC was, above all, one of several liaison bodies for military representatives who, in the end, always gave the preference to NATO when it came to carrying out their plans in cooperation.'^[2]

The SAC tried to set up common 'shopping lists' for the WEU Member States, but they were sent to NATO for the practical follow-up. It also worked on defining features common to certain types of equipment on the lists of Member States' needs, but these features were submitted to NATO for approval. Where the SAC was most useful was in carrying out studies, particularly in the field of operational research. Its Working Group No 8 was devoted to this topic. It drew up a five-language glossary of terms used in inter-army operational research, organised visits to research centres and held seminars on the subject.

In 1976, cooperation in the field of arms production was revived with the establishment of the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG). The SAC's only task thereafter was to carry out a study on the armaments sector of industry in the Member States. This — confidential — study was delivered in 1980 and revised in 1984 and 1985. Declassified versions of it were forwarded to the Assembly under the title *The armaments sector of industry in the member countries* in 1982, 1984 and 1985.

It was the IEPG which became the — albeit informal — framework for European cooperation in the field of military equipment, without any institutional tie to NATO and with a bias towards European concerns. The IEPG was set up in Rome on 2 February 1976 at a joint meeting of the Eurogroup members and France. It was in response to a request from the United States to the European members of NATO. The Americans wanted there to be more coordination in arms programmes within the common defence organisation, and proposed that a major transatlantic common market in defence materiel should be set up. On the European side, there was also a need not to exclude France, and particularly its industrial defence base (IDB), from any system for organising armaments cooperation at the European level, and therefore to go beyond the Atlantic framework. When it was set up, France took care to prevent there being any institutional links to NATO.

The objectives the IEPG was assigned in 1976 (in the resolution establishing it, adopted in Rome on 2 February 1976) were as follows: to encourage more efficient use of the resources devoted to the research, development and acquisition of military equipment by the Member States; to promote and develop the interoperability and, if possible, standardisation of the equipment in use in their armies; to guarantee the maintenance of a solid European industrial base in the defence field; to give Europe greater weight in its relations with the United States and Canada. Between 1976 and 1984, the IEPG chiefly sought to harmonise national timetables and replacement plans for the Member States' defence equipment, in order to encourage the establishment of collaborative programmes.^[3]

Despite that, the main European cooperation schemes during that period took place outside the WEU framework, for example, cooperation on Jaguar fighter planes between France and Britain, the Tornado programme between Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom, or the Alpha-Jet scheme between France and Germany. WEU was kept informed, but it did not regulate these initiatives.

^[1] Decision of the Council, 7 May 1955.

^[2] DELHAUTEUR, Dominique. *Les activités du Conseil de l'UEO en matière de coopération dans le domaine des armements*, Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité, Dossier 'Notes et documents', August 1991, p. 8.

^[3] DELHAUTEUR, Dominique. *La coopération européenne dans le domaine des équipements militaires: la relance du GEIP*, Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité, Notes

et Documents, 1991, 42 p.