



Prime Minister

Contact with this approval?

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PRIME MINISTER

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Western European Union (WEU)

1. I understand that there was discussion in OD on 5 April of the wording of a passage in the Defence White Paper about current moves to strengthen European defence cooperation.

Among other things, these involve the Western European Union (WEU). I thought it might therefore be helpful to let you and colleagues have a note of the background and state of current discussions of the role of WEU.

2. The Modified Brussels Treaty of 1954 on which WEU is based contains a mutual defence commitment stronger than that of the North Atlantic Treaty, and the commitment to keep British forces in the FRG. The Treaty is still of value, but the role of the Organisation itself has diminished in importance since the creation of NATO and the EEC. The seven members are the UK, France, FRG, Italy and the Benelux countries.

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3. Recent renewed interest in WEU reflects concern to strengthen the European contribution to our common defence, among other reasons in order to be seen by our US ally as credible partners; and an increasing desire among our European allies to discuss defence and security issues among themselves. The German-led attempt to have such issues placed on the agenda of Political Cooperation achieved only slight progress owing to Irish, Greek and Danish opposition. The French have taken the lead in arguing that the WEU could play a greater part. Of her WEU partners, the Germans support French ideas for developing the WEU as a place for reflection by Ministers on questions affecting European security. Belgium and Italy also support, the former enthusiastically, The Netherlands is

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more sceptical.

4. The French have proposed developing the WEU Council as a forum for discussion; and giving the work of the parliamentary Assembly a higher profile. They also suggest using WEU for discussion of co-operation in weapons procurement. Underlying their proposals is probably a desire to tie the Germans more securely into a purely European defence organisation at a time when many in France are disturbed by what they see (we believe wrongly) as German neutralist tendencies. They also believe that the WEU Assembly could play a role in increasing public support for defence policies: a view with which it is possible to have some sympathy. The Germans on the other hand, in supporting French ideas, want to exploit an opportunity to tie the French in to multilateral discussions of security questions, taking advantage of Mitterrand's readiness to move closer to his allies over practical defence co-operation. Regrettably, there seems to be no question of France rejoining the NATO integrated military structure or coming into the Eurogroup in the near future - which would be the ideal solution. But the Germans see France's willingness to co-operate in another forum as to be encouraged. I think they are right in this. A precondition for the Germans of strengthening WEU is the removal of the discriminatory controls which apply to them on the production of conventional weapons, and action is in hand to achieve this.

5. Our own interests in all this are:

- (i) to ensure that whatever is done with WEU does not undermine NATO, or the Eurogroup (currently chaired by Michael Heseltine) or the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) of which the French and some non-WEU countries are members too; the IEPG is being taken seriously by the Americans as a forum for concerting European views on equipment matters;

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- (ii) to avoid undermining Political Co-operation in the Ten;
- (iii) to avoid a serious clash with France or the FRG;
- (iv) to exploit any opportunity to bring France into a closer defence relationship with her allies.

There is a balancing act involved in preserving our NATO interests and ensuring that we do not upset the Americans, while showing that we are ready to play a part in a European exercise to which our major partners attach importance.

6. Our soundings of the Americans have so far been fairly reassuring. All the WEU members are determined that nothing should be done which undermines Transatlantic links and that we should keep the Americans fully in the picture. The State Department at a senior level have told us that they welcome the Europeans getting together to discuss what more they could do in their own defence. Provided that any movement to reactivate WEU is presented in a positive way, and they are not faced with inflexible European positions in NATO, they say they will have no objection.

7. At present a Working Group of the WEU is considering how in practice WEU might be "activated" and what subjects a reinforced WEU Council might usefully discuss. There will be a Ministerial meeting in Paris on 24 May, which I shall attend, to decide how far to proceed with this revival. Then in October Ministers of Defence will meet in Rome to mark the 30th anniversary of the organisation. No decision has yet been taken on a German suggestion that Foreign Ministers should attend this meeting as well.

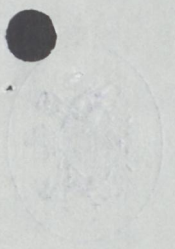


8. I should like to pursue the discussions of the role of the WEU in an open-minded, but cautious way. I believe we need to involve ourselves in them in order to influence the development of WEU in a direction which preserves UK interests, including the strengthening of the Eurogroup and the IEPG. I do not believe we need to be alarmed at the prospect of some discussion of security-related subjects in WEU. If we stand aside we would be perceived as unco-operative and negative in an important area of European activity. I should like therefore to be in a position to agree on 24 May to some measure of revival of the WEU Council if, as is likely, it becomes clear that all my partner Ministers favour this. But we should maintain scepticism about the possibilities for using WEU as a forum for armaments collaboration and defence co-operation. We should continue to promote the legitimate claims of the Eurogroup and IEPG for European collaboration in these areas, and to insist on keeping in step with the Americans.

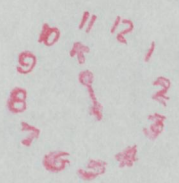
9. Copies of this minute go to Members of the OD Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
16 April 1984



16 APR. 1984





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CC RTA CDA
 LCO HMT
 LPO MOD
 LPS DTI

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 April 1984

Western European Union

The Prime Minister saw the Foreign Secretary's minute of 16 April about the Western European Union before her departure for Portugal. She was content with the approach set out in it.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of the recipients of your Secretary of State's minute.

(David Barclay)

Roger Bone Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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