



Assembly of Western European Union

DOCUMENT 1665

9 November 1999

FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

European Commission Delegation
1000
1700 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

FEB 13 1999

The public perception of European security and defence after Cologne

REPORT

submitted on behalf of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations
by Mr McNamara, Rapporteur

ASSEMBLY OF WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION
43, avenue du Président-Wilson, 75775 Paris Cedex 16
Tel. 01.53.67.22.00 – Fax: 01.53.67.22.01
E-mail: assembly@weu.int
Internet: <http://www.weu.int/assembly/welcome.html>

The public perception of European security and defence after Cologne

REPORT¹

*submitted on behalf of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations²
by Mr McNamara, Rapporteur*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

on the public perception of European security and defence after Cologne

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

submitted by Mr McNamara, Rapporteur

- I. Public opinion of the different stages of European integration
Rekindling support for the integration process
- II. The Cologne Summit: a source of misguided interpretation in the media
 - (a) The choice of High Representative for the CFSP
 - (b) The shift away from the objectives of Amsterdam
- III. Cologne and the “Kosovo” effect
- IV. The announced demise of WEU and its effect on public opinion
The result of the absence of a WEU communication policy aimed at public opinion
- V. The need for a comprehensive public information policy
- VI. Conclusions

APPENDIX

on the development of public opinion in central European countries: the case of Romania
submitted by Mr Mesca, Romania, co-Rapporteur

1. History
2. Romania – what kind of security?
3. The Kosovo war and the change in the public’s perception of NATO
4. Romanian official and public perception of European security and defence after Cologne – interests and perceptions of central European states
5. Communication, information and education – the need to involve and take account of public opinion in order to build a new security and defence system in Europe

¹ Adopted in Committee by 11 votes to 0 with 1 abstention.

² *Members of the Committee:* Mrs Squarcialupi (Chairman); Lord Russell-Johnston, Mr Eversdijk (Vice-Chairmen); MM Aleffi, Amoruso, de Assis, Debarge, Evin, Gehrcke, Graas, Mrs Guirado (Alternate: *Arнау Navarro*), Ms Hoffmann, Ms Jäger, Ms Jones (Alternate: *McNamara*), Mrs Katseli, Mrs Kestelijn-Sierens, MM Legendre, Mignon, Moreels, Niza, Onaindia, Pottakis, Mrs Pulgar, Mr Rodeghiero (Alternate: *Robotl*), Ms Sussmuth, MM Taylor, Timmermans, Vis.

Associate members: Mrs Kaland, Mr Matuska.

N.B. *The names of those taking part in the vote are printed in italics.*

Draft Recommendation
on the public perception of security and defence after Cologne

The Assembly,

- (i) Considering that the war in Kosovo has helped to further increase European public awareness of the difficulties experienced by Europe in trying to deal with its own security problems;
- (ii) Noting that several official declarations on the proposed reform of the European institutions have been issued recently, without any explanation being given of the logical sequence of events;
- (iii) Convinced of the need to inform citizens in a simple but comprehensive fashion about the different stages of European integration, in particular in the field of security and defence, so that any reforms are supported by public opinion;
- (iv) Aware of the responsibility it bears for conveying, through its role of parliamentary scrutiny, the wishes of the national electorates to the governments gathered together in the Council;
- (v) Convinced nevertheless that the Council, member governments and WEU Secretary-General must assume their responsibilities in full for explaining to public opinion WEU's unique purpose and the problems which must be resolved in order to complete the building of a security and defence dimension at a time which is particularly propitious for making this project a reality,

RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL

1. Apprise the Assembly of how it is informing public opinion about the difficulties encountered in building a security and defence Europe and about WEU's specific role in this area;
2. Explain, in particular, the different stages of the process of reflection that is under way on institutional reform so that the public can understand what the plans announced for the end of the year 2000 entail;
3. Emphasise to the member governments the international democratic deficit in the institutional proposals, provide for the maintenance of a representative assembly and consider possible additional measures to overcome the lack of international democratic scrutiny;
4. Urge member governments to give all the proper priority to the dissemination of information on available assets and the commitments of WEU and each of its member countries to European security and defence;
5. Encourage the Presidency and the Secretary-General to strengthen their relations with the press and to continue publishing updated information documents such as the one entitled *WEU today*, ensuring that they are widely disseminated in all the languages of the member countries, and also following up Recommendation 638 on "WEU's communication policy" adopted by the Assembly on 2 December 1998.

Explanatory Memorandum

(submitted by Mr McNamara, Rapporteur)

I. Public opinion of the different stages of European integration

1. A broader section of the public than ever before has recently been taking an interest in issues of European security and defence. Firstly, the citizens of member states have become more aware of the reality of Europe as a common edifice, following the introduction of the single currency, which showed that governments can reach agreement on Community issues when common interests are at stake and where there is a political resolve to find institutional solutions.
2. Secondly, there has been an acute public awareness of the many crises that Europe has encountered in the Balkans, so close in terms of culture and ties to many European states. In this case, however, it was difficult to generate the necessary common political will and when it did finally emerge, member states showed themselves incapable of translating it into action on the ground. Both in Bosnia and Kosovo, the United States was the one to show resolve, giving rise in public opinion to the conviction that only when there are major economic interests at stake is it possible to muster the support needed to forge a common policy, because such interests elude the power of governments and probably operate across national borders through the international financial networks. Opinion surveys carried out during the crisis showed a loss of confidence in governments, which are unwilling to tackle the transnational defence challenges. An aggravating factor was the recollection, still fresh in many minds, of the economic sacrifices that had been made to meet the conditions for joining the euro. Indeed, election results in several countries showed dwindling support for the parties in power.

Rekindling support for the integration process

3. There was therefore a need to find ways of rekindling the public's support for the process of European integration which, in the meantime, had taken further steps forward with the Amsterdam Treaty and was reaffirmed at every summit or bilateral meeting.
4. This was no easy task, for the Kosovo war in particular had brought to the notice of all sections of public opinion the fact that Europe was

not sufficiently present in the security and defence field. Confronted with television images of a war being waged by a NATO in which the US was the leading power, the man in the street could not fail to be struck by the contrast between the declarations of the European heads of state and those of the NATO military spokesman. It was soon realised that NATO had won not only the military battle in the field, but also the war in terms of information and images, imposing itself as a key player on the world stage for the third millennium. For the EU and WEU, by contrast, which were struggling to make an impact on public opinion, the meetings held at the end of Germany's EU Presidency provided an opportunity that could not be missed.

II. The Cologne Summit: a source of misguided interpretation in the media

5. The Cologne Summit on 3 and 4 June 1999, which brought together the heads of state and government of the Fifteen, was an opportunity to renew the public's confidence in the efforts of European governments to achieve integration. Held, as it was, at the height of the military action in Kosovo, the Summit tried to prepare the public for a historic decision in the field of the common European security and defence policy. The "European Council Declaration on strengthening the common European policy on security and defence" contains a number of statements, the full implications of which are only really grasped by well-informed specialists. Generally presented as a very ambitious programme for European integration, it masks a much more complex reality. It is therefore not surprising that the reactions of the media gave rise to a whole host of different and sometimes misguided interpretations.
6. In its Cologne Declaration, the European Council announced its determination "that the European Union shall play its full role on the international stage" and "to give the European Union the necessary means and capabilities to assume its responsibilities regarding a common European policy on security and defence". But it goes on immediately to specify that "the Council should have the ability to take decisions on the full range of conflict-prevention and crisis-man-

agement tasks defined in the Treaty on European Union, the ‘Petersberg tasks’ ”.

7. Thus there are two different issues here which the public often confuses, particularly having followed the developments in the Balkans, where the terminology used to define the different types of humanitarian and military intervention has gradually been modified. Although there is not a total consensus, hardly anyone now seriously believes that there is a real danger of another war on the territory of the EU. It is much easier to imagine the EU taking action to settle crises in neighbouring areas, although the opinion polls reveal some scepticism on that score. The only idea which has been fully grasped by the public at large, in fact, is that of Europe’s dependence on decisions by the United States. The newspapers have made the most of this issue, attracting their readers’ attention with such provocative headlines as “Europeans want more Europe”, “The elusive European defence”, “A common defence to do what?” or “Europe: a continent of goodwill and last-ditch compromises”.

8. The common threads running through all such articles are: putting an end to Europe’s subordination to the United States, comparisons of defence spending and Europe’s unsatisfactory performance in general. They demonstrate – figures at hand – that the EU member states spend a not inconsiderable amount on defence with little to show for it. They emphasise the need for a reform of the common institutions in order to adapt them to new requirements, without preparing the public for the financial implications of the ambitious plans announced in Cologne.

9. In this respect, WEU has always been compared unfavourably with NATO, of which it has been presented as a pale and ineffectual imitation. Or else it has been presented as a complementary structure which it would be better to integrate in the European Union. None of these plans met with objections when they were announced, but it seems clear that governments will have great difficulty in putting them into practice.

(a) The choice of High Representative for the CFSP

10. Several seemingly disparate facts were announced to the public in Cologne. The first

was the Fifteen’s designation of NATO’s former Secretary-General Javier Solana as High Representative for the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy). Their choice of a well-known and experienced personality was reassuring to the public at large, without upsetting Europe’s internal situation or its transatlantic relations. Some time later, the idea of combining the post of High Representative for the CFSP with that of WEU Secretary-General began to take shape, given the unanimous support for Mr Solana’s appointment. Several statements of approval were reported in the media. It remains to be seen how this issue will develop, since the institutional debate has only just started. The idea has been warmly welcomed, but the means of putting it into practice have yet to be defined. The media once again are expected to convey encouraging messages about the future of the European Union and, indeed, the public in Europe is becoming accustomed to hearing announcements concerning new appointments of leaders of European institutions without really being told how the decision-making process is organised. This is the weak point in the process of European union, which, given its complexity, needs to be explained more clearly to the public at large.

(b) The shift away from the objectives of Amsterdam

11. In Cologne, the Fifteen above all announced their resolve to gradually frame a common defence policy, but not – and this is a nuance which has escaped public attention – to create a common defence as foreseen by the Amsterdam Treaty. Article 17 of that Treaty outlines a broader policy “which might lead to a common defence”, the progressive framing of which “will be supported, as Member States consider appropriate, by cooperation between them in the field of armaments”. Paragraph 2 states that “questions referred to in this Article shall include humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking”. And finally, paragraph 3 stipulates that “the Union will avail itself of the WEU to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications”. Clearly there are two complementary hypotheses here: a general one, concerning an integrated common defence system, and a more specific one, concerning Petersberg operations. In any event it is stipulated that Western European

Union will “be an integral part of the development of the Union providing the Union with access to an operational capability notably in the context of paragraph 2”. Since the Amsterdam Treaty covered all areas concerning the future of the European Union, the media did not draw the public’s attention specifically to the issue of security and defence, preferring to focus on aspects with a more direct impact on peoples’ daily lives, such as employment, social and economic policy, the environment, reciprocal rights etc. They did, however, devote a lot of attention to the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) which was a new development of some general interest, more easily accessible to the public at large. A merger of WEU with the EU would be taking things a lot further than envisaged in Cologne, where any reference to a common defence was dropped. Indeed that issue is entirely absent from the Cologne Declaration which refers solely to conflict-prevention and crisis-management activities, and it is for such activities only that the Fifteen pledge to provide the Union with the necessary capabilities and instruments. These fine distinctions will not, of course, have escaped the specialist. However, the important message behind the Cologne Declaration is Europe’s desire to free itself of its dependence on the US and to show its resolve to shoulder responsibility for its own security, something which citizens, logically, can only support.

12. There was no question at all in Cologne of creating a European army, and yet this is the idea that has taken root in the public mind, and which was strengthened by the similar messages coming out of the Franco-German Summit in Toulouse several days before. Here, however, the language is less complex, since the decisions on joint military programmes are much more tangible, in that they refer to budgetary issues and to the more rational use of financial resources. This is probably one of the arguments to which taxpayers are the most amenable, for while the institutional aspects of the EU often only interest a small, well-informed section of public opinion, everyone is able to perceive a direct link between the taxes they pay and how the money is spent. Moreover, the public at large will be even more sensitive to decisions affecting the development of national defence industries, given their very practical implications for jobs in member states.

13. The Cologne Declaration refers, on the issue of a cooperation framework for giving the European partners an independent military capability, to the need for sustained efforts to strengthen the defence industrial and technological base, by fostering a restructuring of European defence industries and a harmonisation of military requirements and of armaments planning and procurement.

III. Cologne and the “Kosovo” effect

14. Seven years previously, the war in Bosnia had already highlighted Europe’s weaknesses. A general awareness had emerged during the bloody process of Yugoslavia’s dissolution that Europe, for all its ambition to become a greater world economic power, was totally absent from the picture. The Kosovo conflict, following as it did the collective achievement of the single currency, was a reminder that nothing seemed to have changed in this respect. Europe was still out of the picture and subordinated to its American ally during this conflict on European territory. Opinion surveys carried out at the time revealed the enormous uncertainty of Europeans as they saw their national positions weakened. A public debate soon developed on the need for Europe to play a role, particularly as everyone was following the war on their television screens.

15. This acted as a spur to decision-making in Cologne, with the Fifteen skipping some of the intermediate stages that would have been necessary for achieving a common defence and setting the end of 2000 – during the French EU Presidency – as a key date in that process. The aim of adopting a timetable was to make the project more tangible for public opinion, as though setting a deadline was a way of guaranteeing that it would come about. France’s commitment to this undertaking was another guarantee, given that it was a driving force at Saint Malo, together with the United Kingdom, and at Toulouse, with Germany.

16. Under the influence of the Kosovo war, virtually the whole political spectrum rallied in support of a European system of defence and the few dissenting voices – mostly on the extreme left and right – were sidelined by the media. One can hardly claim that there was any real discussion with the few opponents who voiced their opinion, particularly since there was a concern to avoid embarrassing the centre-left governments –

which meant the majority of European governments in 1999 – in the run-up either to national or European elections.

17. The press fell in with the movement, and stressed, with reference to similar situations in the past, how the EU and WEU had constantly failed to assert themselves in the region and had always been totally overshadowed by NATO.

18. Thus, once again, the citizens of Europe were strengthened in their scepticism with regard to the functioning of the European institutions, which they perceived as the result of decisions by an intellectual and political elite unable to assure democratic transparency in bodies which, at exactly the same time, were being tainted by their first media scandal following accusations of fraud and corruption.

IV. The announced demise of WEU and its effect on public opinion

19. In parallel to their growing awareness of the lack of a common security and defence policy in Europe, the media began to realise that there was a system which could have been used to deal with the situation, but which for reasons that had never been explained in detail, had not worked. Indeed, WEU's nickname of "Sleeping Beauty" and the accusation of "congenital lethargy" were typical of the rather picturesque criticism accompanying any presentation of the Organisation. Since the Saint Malo Declaration, the public had been led to acknowledge the need for institutional change according to a range of possibilities which had never been properly gone into. What was important was to announce a fresh start on introducing reforms, the details of which remained to be clarified.

20. Those details have not been revealed to this day. Quite the contrary, when one tries to see one's way more clearly, one begins to realise that the road ahead is a lot longer than it initially appeared.

21. However, a new step was taken in Cologne; indeed the EU General Affairs Council was instructed to "prepare the conditions and the measures necessary (...) including the definition of the modalities for the inclusion of those functions of the WEU which will be necessary for the EU to fulfil its new responsibilities in the area of the Petersberg tasks. In this regard our aim is to

take the necessary decisions by the end of the year 2000. In that event, the WEU as an organisation would have completed its purpose". The idea of setting a deadline was probably to provide the public with a precise point of reference and to establish a programme to be followed in the run-up to that date. In fact it is now being presented less as a deadline than as a starting point for the construction of a new system of security and defence on the basis of organisations which remain to be defined. The French Presidency is obliged to present European citizens with a project, not a result.

22. It is a pity that the Declaration, perhaps because it tries too hard, ends with a death sentence for WEU. That, surely, can only strengthen the widespread opinion that this institution is no longer up to the new tasks facing Europe in the third millennium.

The result of the absence of a WEU communication policy aimed at public opinion

23. In spite of the declared efforts and improvements in the area of communication policy, WEU remains largely unknown to the general public. This is not true of the more specialised circles which are more directly concerned, in other words, the other international organisations, the national parliaments, the defence and foreign affairs ministries, specialised research institutes and universities, which already receive sufficient information. The problem is with the man in the street and with those who shape public opinion and awaken the public's interest through the media, in other words, journalists, who are key opinion-formers.

24. The WEU Assembly has tackled this problem by regularly drawing up communication plans which most certainly have helped to publicise its activities among specialised circles. Indeed, all that is needed is to adapt to the increasingly sophisticated technologies that are currently available by using the information channels which are already in place. However, the Organisation at intergovernmental level has been unable to muster the same enthusiasm, and apart from a few ministerial meetings – indistinguishable in the public's mind from the various other European gatherings – it has not been able to make enough of an impact to win a place in the media. In fact, no specific event has been organised for publicity purposes, with the possible exception of

the official celebrations and declarations that marked the 50th anniversary of the Brussels Treaty. And, if anything, those events in fact contributed to misinforming public opinion, since it was not the 1948 Brussels Treaty which instituted WEU and its Assembly, but rather the *modified* Brussels Treaty of 1954, of which the 50th anniversary will be in 2004.

25. What is certainly lacking in WEU's communication policy is a media image that is immediately associated with its name. The image should of course be that of its Secretary-General, as spokesman for and representative of the Organisation as a whole. The imminent appointment of a new Secretary-General will be a last chance to attract the interest of public opinion for the only European organisation with competence for common security and defence and this, at the end of the day, will be decisive for the successful creation of security and defence Europe.

V. The need for a comprehensive public information policy

26. One could have imagined that the tone adopted by the current Finnish EU Presidency might somewhat temper the initial enthusiasm and that a kind of Nordic pragmatism would take the place of sensationalist announcements. Indeed, leaving aside the issue of a common defence – on which apparently no headway is being made – Finland has on several occasions announced its resolve to make progress on the creation of a European capability for Petersberg operations. Emphasis is also being laid on the future participation of non-WEU member countries, and there are assurances on all sides that they will not be excluded from the new institutional framework. WEU's *acquis* in this field have been duly acknowledged, although this does nothing to allay the serious concern felt by the public in those countries, particularly those which are not members of NATO, about the danger of being sidelined. The reader is referred on this issue to Mr Mesca's valuable contribution to this report in which he sets out his views.

27. One question must soon be brought to the public's attention: how is parliamentary scrutiny of decisions in the field of the common security and defence policy to be exercised in the future, given that it is not certain whether the European Parliament will have the necessary powers, and what reforms will be required? Indeed, the pres-

ent structure of the European Parliament is inappropriate for the task of scrutinising intergovernmental decisions on security and defence; the members of the EP are directly elected by universal suffrage and exercise scrutiny over the activities of the European Commission, but have no powers vis-à-vis individual governments. In the plans for institutional reform that are currently being prepared, due attention must be paid to ensuring that there is continuity of democratic scrutiny. This could be exercised by a parliamentary body which, while it may not have a configuration identical to that of the WEU Assembly, could nonetheless be based on it, and would be composed of directly elected members of national parliaments and of the European Parliament, as well as observers from countries sharing a common interest in the security and defence of Europe. The task of informing the citizens of Europe on such issues falls to the members of the national parliaments and of the WEU Assembly. Given the determination reflected in government statements to move ahead fast, it is up to parliaments to constantly reiterate this demand for accountability, which is one of the principles of democracy. It is their responsibility to raise public awareness of this sensitive issue on which there is likely to be a broad consensus.

28. The Assembly of WEU is currently the only European institution which has competence for security and defence and which can exercise democratic scrutiny through its members, who are also members of their national parliaments. This dual mandate provides a link between the electorates of the member countries, national policy and decisions taken at international level. This system offers advantages which must be integrated, in the appropriate form, in the future institutional architecture, for an attempt to rapidly adapt the powers of the European Parliament might destroy this link in the democratic process. This would be particularly disastrous in the light of the dwindling confidence shown by the poor turnout for the European elections, a sign of widespread scepticism with regard to the usefulness of that institution.

29. All these issues need to be explained in more depth to the public at large, although many people, when presented with the details, may well fail to grasp them in full. The time has therefore come to take the situation in hand and to create the conditions for sound information to be sup-

plied through the media, in order to avoid having recourse at the end of 2000 to expedients which are bound to be detrimental to the democratic future of the common security and defence institutions, which in the eyes of the public may always be seen as being governed by a distant elite. All this means that governments will be unable, when the time comes, to rally the support they need to adopt vigorous measures at European summits, thereby dooming EU programmes to failure and making it impossible, once again, for the European Union to play its proper role on the international stage.

VI. Conclusions

30. Events are moving fast and the initial conclusions which one might have drawn have by now become outdated. The Assembly of WEU has set in motion a process of institutional reflection about which it would be useful to inform the outside world – first the parliaments and then the public at large. The coming year should provide a veritable testing-ground for new ideas. Each step must be clearly explained by the media, so that the project put together by the end of

2000 can count on a certain degree of public support. An information effort needs to be made vis-à-vis the national parliaments, which must be supplied with progress reports. It would be useful for that purpose to organise special Assembly colloquies or sessions with members of the foreign affairs and defence committees of the national parliaments, given that the institutional changes to be made within the European Union will one day have to be ratified by each national parliament.

31. A recommendation could be submitted to the Council, inviting it to supply detailed information at each new stage of the process, so that the national parliaments and the public receive explanations going well beyond the formal declarations issued at the close of summit meetings. Preparatory discussions on the new European security and defence architecture should be organised with the national parliaments and the European Parliament. There must also be a constant flow of information towards the Assembly of WEU, which will continue to provide the expertise which has always characterised its analyses and proposals.