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The armed forces, European defence
and informing the public in WEU member countries

REPORT

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

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and informing the public in WEU member countries*

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The "Bundeswehr 2000" plan

1. Adopted unanimously by the Committee.

2. *Members of the Committee:* Mr Masseret (Chairman); Sir *Russell Johnston*; Baroness Gould of Potternewton (Vice-Chairmen); Mr de Assis, Mrs Beer, MM *Benvenuti*, Birraux, Decagny, Dionisi (Alternate: *Carcarino*), Sir Anthony Durant (Alternate: Lady *Hooper*), Mr Erler, Mrs Err, Mr Eversdijk, Mrs Fernández Sanz, Mr Ghesquière (Alternate: Mrs *Maximus*), Mr Harmegnies (Alternate: *Valkeniers*), Sir *John Hunt*, MM *Korahais*, Lummer, Mattina, *Micheloyiannis*, Mignon, Mrs van Nieuwenhoven, MM *Niza*, Robles Fraga, Sainz García, *Selva*, Mrs Terborg.

Associate members: Mr *Akcali*, Ms *Aytaman*.

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

Draft Recommendation

***on the armed forces, European defence and informing the public
in WEU member countries***

The Assembly,

- (i) Noting the increasing role information plays in the running of modern-day societies;
- (ii) Stressing the importance of providing the public at national and European level with appropriate information on the issues involved in developing an autonomous and credible European defence policy;
- (iii) Concerned that the lack of information about WEU and its Assembly leads to misunderstanding of their role and place in the European security architecture, as evidenced in the discussions preparatory to the IGC and the confusion that reigns over the modified Brussels Treaty in relation to the 1998 time frame;
- (iv) Recognising the increasingly important role played by the mass media as a tool for communicating with the public, use of which carries the risk of manipulation of information and disinformation;
- (v) Drawing attention to the increased use of information technology, and in particular the Internet, in national, regional and worldwide communications;
- (vi) Stressing the need for WEU to adapt to such methods of communication and to master their use;
- (vii) Urging cooperation between the Assembly, the Secretariat-General and all WEU bodies involved in communicating with the general public, for the purpose of securing their presence on the Internet and using it to establish a Europe-wide computerised data network incorporating security and defence matters;
- (viii) Stressing the importance of WEU associate members and observers being closely associated in this process, together with the central European countries that are candidates for accession to the European Union and NATO, and of acting in conjunction with NATO, drawing on the latter's experience in the communications field,

RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL

1. Develop and implement a communications policy directed towards the public at large, taking account of the important role of the mass media and the development of computerised communications systems such as the Internet;
2. Involve the various WEU bodies, the Institute for Security Studies and the Assembly in the development and implementation of such a policy, in such a way as to avoid duplication of resources and a superfluous profusion of information;
3. Cooperate with NATO and the European Union in the communications field so as to take advantage of their experience and better inform the various strands of the public about WEU's dual role as the European pillar of the Alliance and defence component of the European Union;
4. Envisage, in conjunction with the Assembly and NATO, making permanent use of the Internet as a communications tool, by setting up a site on the World Wide Web, managed by the organisation;
5. Keep the public regularly informed about the activities of WEU and its various bodies, with particular emphasis on the organisation's military activities and manoeuvres and its role in European defence structures;
6. Encourage member, associate member, associate partner and observer countries to use their communications policies on defence matters to help inform the public in their respective countries about WEU;
7. Continue and redouble its effort in the context of transatlantic communications policy, paying particular attention to the main radio and television networks and the American press and essentially directing that effort at Congress;
8. Support initiatives taken by the central European countries, associate partners in WEU, towards establishing information centres on WEU, by contributing, under such arrangements as may be defined by the Council, to their development and work;

9. Pay particular attention to ensuring that information is available for the public in countries with an avowed policy of neutrality;
10. Develop communications initiatives directed towards Mediterranean countries that are not members of WEU, as well as Russia and Ukraine.

Explanatory Memorandum

(submitted by Mr Benvenuti, Rapporteur)

1. Introduction

1. Information has become a major factor of political and economic life in the modern world. Technological developments coupled with the process of globalisation of economies have contributed substantially to this state of affairs. However the amount of information available is also a source of disinformation and confusion. We live in societies which are overloaded with information, where increasing volumes of data are being made available to the public at large via the press, radio and television channels and computer networks such as the Internet, making it possible to follow the development of any national or international event of major or lesser importance as it happens. Nevertheless, when it comes to major political issues, the wealth of information available does not always serve the interests of democratic debate and problems tend, for reasons that are essentially financial, to be presented in a reductionist manner.

2. The Assembly's Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations has invariably accorded importance to such issues in its work. This interest is reflected in a number of reports, and texts have been adopted on many occasions encouraging WEU as a whole to take a lead in informing the public. These initiatives have achieved some practical results although it is difficult to measure their degree of success with any accuracy. The public is now undoubtedly more familiar with the acronym "WEU" but analysis of the way the organisation is presented in the media reveals a degree of confusion about its role and place in European political, security and defence structures which is perhaps due more to the vague and ambiguous nature of some WEU documents than to a lack of information likely to affect media relations.

3. References to WEU as the "European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance", or the "defence component of the European Union" and other such concepts help to contribute to WEU's blurred image with the general public. Occasionally slipping these expressions into official communiqués is not good enough. Explanations should be given, with concrete examples, of what they mean in practice. For example, WEU acts as the European pillar of the Alliance when its member countries' naval forces, working in conjunction with one another and the NATO authorities, organise monitoring of the embargo in the Adriatic Sea. WEU acts as the defence component of the Euro-

pean Union when its member countries' police forces do their best to implement decisions of the Union in relation to the Bosnian town of Mostar. These are specific examples of the organisation's dual role of which the public are not really aware, as they have not been adequately informed.

4. The increasingly important role of radio and television and new methods of generating and circulating information, such as the computerised information network known as the Internet, complicate the way communications on security and defence matters are handled. Paradoxically, media resources such as these, intended in principle to improve access to information, are helping to remove discussion of these issues from the agenda by adopting a reductionist approach to them that places the emphasis solely on the more spectacular aspects of initiatives in this field. The race for profitability and audience ratings, industrial concentration within the sector and the uniform standards this implies in terms of the way information is processed are decisive factors contributing to the public being kept ill-informed about an area essential to the existence and cohesion of European nation states. These developments are not in themselves solely responsible for this state of affairs. The pressures involved are essentially economic, resulting from the competition prevailing in the communications sector at world level.

5. It is up to the relevant institutions to make best use of the possibilities offered by the many and varied modern communications systems. Some, like NATO, grasped the importance of a permanent media presence long ago. NATO has now extended this presence to the Internet, incidentally thereby enabling WEU and its Assembly to have a presence on the net. NATO is also able to draw on American experience of communicating with the public and on the influence of the Anglo-Saxon press, television and radio agencies. The Gulf war and NATO intervention, followed by that of IFOR in Bosnia are well-known examples illustrating the fact. WEU, however, still does not have a public information policy that would give it an effective presence in the European media.

6. This is also due in part to WEU's working methods which are more confidential and based to a greater extent on consensus than those of either the European Union or NATO. Nor are the materials of the three organisations comparable – one major reason for the virtual absence of a WEU

communications policy. The Assembly for its part, in line with orders adopted at the behest of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations, has greatly increased its public information activities in relation to plenary sessions, committee visits and meetings, texts adopted and practical follow-up action, indeed to the work of the organisation as a whole. This is a considerable achievement given the very limited equipment and human resources available to the Assembly's press service for carrying out its task.

7. The member states for their part also have a duty as regards communication in relation to security and defence matters. Each country has information services within its defence ministry which are responsible for press and public relations. Their approach to such questions is naturally a national one but issues such as structural reform of the armed forces in member countries are fostering a multilateral, European and Euro-Atlantic approach. Reductions in defence budgets and the size of the armed forces, the move towards fully professional armed services, the redefining of defence priorities that these changes imply are leading to a less national approach and greater readiness to cooperate with other allied countries which find themselves in similar circumstances. A good communications policy which gives the public a grasp of these developments is the way to win its support for a national and Euro-Atlantic approach to the reforms envisaged by the various countries. WEU has a part to play in this process by helping to inform the public from a European perspective, a task which needs to be done effectively and imaginatively and one that requires an ability to adapt to new forms of communication.

II. Public opinion and defence issues

8. It is necessary for the public to be informed about defence questions in order to enlist its support for policies conducted by governments in this area. During the cold war period, East-West confrontation lent information an ideological and propagandist slant, each opposing camp being convinced of the validity of its own stance. Massive armed forces, sustained defence spending and permanent mutual support among allied countries were regarded as essential. In the West, although intensive intellectual debate and discussion of geopolitical and geostrategic concepts were traditionally in order, they were dominated by consensus on the need to sustain a major defence effort, both at national level and in the Atlantic Alliance. When Europe ceased to be divided into two opposing blocs, consensus all but vanished and longstanding positions on defence matters were assailed by a new and uncertain international reality calling for an urgent revision of priorities.

9. The Gulf war and the outbreak of conflict in former Yugoslavia, first in Slovenia, then subsequently in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, helped elevate information to the status of actor on the international political scene since it led at times to diplomatic and military action. The public was sensitised to certain events, eventually becoming a lever for exerting pressure on governments. Thus the interests of governments and the general public virtually coincided over events in Iraqi Kurdistan, Somalia, Rwanda and Haiti, each taking a similar view of where its best advantage lay. The reason why emphasis is being placed on so-called humanitarian missions, why peace-keeping operations are now being mounted by the United Nations - although the organisation's resources are not keeping pace with this development - and why the true international decision-making centres are still - notwithstanding the facade of unity in the Security Council - Washington, Moscow, Paris, London and Beijing, is partly that media pressure has swung public opinion in favour of these types of international intervention. Most governments have attempted to meet this demand, although with varying success, as the example of UNPROFOR goes to show. Lacking a clearly-defined mandate, it found itself embroiled in awkward situations which eroded its credibility among the belligerents.

10. The Gulf war is practically a text-book example of the part played by information - and misinformation - of the public in international relations and defence matters. The United Nations' new role, Iraq's meteoric rise to world power status (despite the indifferent performance of its armed forces in the war with Iran), the marvels of modern technological warfare (surgical strikes which were nonetheless the cause of the deaths of several thousand soldiers and Iraqi civilians, not to mention the material damage involved which was not confined to purely military targets), the media sensation which surrounded the Patriot anti-missile system, although it was of limited effectiveness against Iraqi Scud missiles (the number of successful firings was overstated and only 9% of interceptions were successful according to a US General Accounting Office report)¹: such perversions, to give them their correct title, are but a few examples of the ways in which the modern media can be manipulated. The Iraqi authorities made quite deliberate use of such manipulative techniques during the hostage crisis or when estimating losses during the conflict. The common factor in all the images the public worldwide received of the conflict, and one that illustrates in almost anecdotal fashion the role of modern media, especially television, as an integral aspect of international relations, is the CNN

1. *Defense News*, Vol 7, No. 40, 5-11 October 1992, page 10.

logo which has since become inseparable from the major conflicts and crises of the recent past.

11. The war in Yugoslavia also gave rise to excessive media “hype” at times leading to “off the cuff” reactions from governments during the initial months of the conflict in Croatia, then in Bosnia. Direct coverage of events, not subject to military censorship as in the Gulf conflict, allowed the media to step up pressure, in Europe and on the other side of the Atlantic, as regards the policy to be implemented in relation to former Yugoslavia, without the causes and long-term consequences of the conflict being clearly explained to the wider public. This led to action taken by the European Union and the United Nations being discredited even though both of these organisations cannot pursue their action beyond what their member states decide. Moreover, governments that decided to send troops into the field were not always able to explain clearly to their fellow-citizens the reasons for and constraints upon their involvement. It should be borne in mind that the view of the conflict presented to the public was to a large extent based on television footage, with all that implies in terms of time and profitability constraints.

12. The United States’ engagement in the conflict and the NATO air strikes against Bosnian-Serb forces obviously attracted intense media coverage reminiscent of that of the Gulf war, featuring displays of sophisticated military equipment, use of technology and so-called “surgical strikes”, all presented in highly graphic form suited to television and to other forms of communication such as the Internet. America’s skill in using modern communication methods also proved extremely useful later on when the Dayton Accords were negotiated, given that, despite their ambiguities and lack of precision, they virtually became a model for resolving present-day conflicts, from the Middle East to the Aegean, not to mention Northern Ireland². The deployment of American troops in Bosnia in December 1995 had widespread resonance in the media and on the Internet – to the benefit, incidentally, of American firms such as Lockheed Martin whose C-17 airlift aircraft enjoyed free advertising on television screens all over the world, while the Europeans dithered over the fate of the Future Large Aircraft (FLA).

13. These two conflicts serve to demonstrate that the way defence questions are dealt with, as a rule, is governed essentially by strictly military considerations: need for mobile armies, dependence on advanced technologies, low-detection aircraft and shipping, intensive use of electronic means of warfare and satellite images. The whole corresponds to an American-style model, deriving

2. See, for example the article entitled “Dublin proposes Bosnia-style peace plan”, *The Independent*, 8 February 1996.

in part from the United States’ geostrategic position between the European and Asian continents and the worldwide range of its economic interests, which demands major force projection capability and image-monitoring of sensitive regions, (hence the importance of a sophisticated satellite network). What is true for America does not necessarily hold good for European countries, which have a different geostrategic position and other economic and political interests in the world. The Yugoslav conflicts, instability in Russia and in the Caucasus, the problems of arms proliferation and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the Mediterranean region, tensions between Greece and Turkey and minorities in central Europe are only some of the challenges WEU member countries are called upon to face at this very moment – not from the far side of the Atlantic but on their own doorstep.

14. Not all countries attach the same importance to these problems but a coordinated approach – at both European and national levels – is necessary for dealing with them. In the first instance, the approach will be national since the right of defence is a prerogative jealously guarded by nation states. France’s decision to reorganise its armed forces in a move towards greater professionalism was taken without consulting Germany, even though both countries are closely involved in the European Corps, where career and conscript troops already work alongside one another. Another example of this approach is the resumption of French nuclear testing for military purposes, which gave rise to reservations and protest on the part of some WEU member countries. However such examples are in fact fairly insignificant. In general terms the trend is towards a “Europeanisation” of defence. The European Corps exists in the flesh and is operational, despite government indecision on the purposes for which it is to be used. France and the United Kingdom are cooperating in the aeronautics field and cooperation in WEU on nuclear issues has not been ruled out; lastly, EUROMARFOR³ and EUROFOR are now operational in the Mediterranean region.

15. On the industrial side, cooperation is urgently needed in the face of growing competition from the United States. The Horizon frigate, the Tigre helicopter, the Helios 1 and 2 satellites and the FLA programme are but a few examples of a European approach to defence issues, notwithstanding the many ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the future of these projects. But for the time being the final decision rests in the hands of the nation state, and this also applies to cooperation programmes. Nevertheless every European country today realises that on its own it cannot handle the various conflict situations that either exist or might arise on the continent of

3. *El País*, 24 April 1996.

Europe. The economic situation, priorities in terms of a single currency and the fight against unemployment make it difficult to maintain large armies and a limitless range of equipment (aircraft, tanks, satellites, aircraft carriers, etc.) as France, forced to make drastic choices about some of its equipment programmes, such as the Rafale fighter aircraft programme, has now realised. These quite complicated debates are nonetheless still not open to wide public scrutiny through lack of adequate reporting in the mass media.

16. In this area, the information and public relations services of the armed forces play an important role in relation to certain "target" audiences, such as students or managers in industry, as well as senior civil servants and parliamentarians. Familiarising present and future decision-makers with various national and European defence issues is necessary, not to say essential, so that the problems they raise can be dealt with in full knowledge of the facts and from a developmental perspective. Most of the larger European countries are highly attentive to how the public should be addressed on defence as on other matters, as the German Defence Ministry's communications plan, entitled "Bundeswehr 2000", serves to illustrate. (A summary is attached as an appendix to the present report). Similarly France's decision to reorganise its armed forces so as to move towards a higher degree of professionalism is being accompanied by an information campaign designed to influence public opinion. Such initiatives are desirable and necessary since defence is a sensitive instrument and the decisions taken in the regard have implications for society as a whole. The choice of equipment, for example, is indicative of the existence or otherwise of an industrial policy on armaments and has a substantial impact, economically speaking, on employment, technological innovation and exports. Manpower reductions in the armed forces, which have been apparent in all WEU member countries since the late 1980s, have had a knock-on effect on land-use planning, for example, due to garrison closures and staff redeployment. Reforms at present under way in various countries call for difficult budget decisions, at times leading to perverse outcomes, especially if the emphasis is on the use of the armed forces for humanitarian operations. A strong manpower presence is extremely important in such cases, although manpower is the first area to suffer the effects of cutbacks.

17. Countries are still tackling these reforms in an uncoordinated way and it might be time for WEU to address the specific issues in order to identify broad principles for strengthening Europe's defence, while at the same time slimming down and modernising national armed forces. However this task can genuinely be made to succeed only if the public understands the need for this approach and its underlying justification. The

peace dividend argument still has a great deal of mileage, despite remaining uncertainties on the borders of the European states that belong to WEU or the European Union. Low-intensity conflicts are the most prevalent and take varying forms, ranging from open warfare to terrorism; in some instances they have spread to European countries. The conflict in former Yugoslavia has moved into an uncertain peace phase but resumption of hostilities is still possible; Islamic terrorism in Algeria has been responsible for action on French soil directed at France itself, while Germany has to contend with the presence in its territory of PKK activists who have no hesitation about resorting to acts of terrorism directed against the Turkish community. Even between countries that are supposedly allies, differences are such that their resorting to armed force, albeit on a limited scale, cannot be ruled out. Such differences concern territorial waters (for example the conflict in the Aegean Sea) or exclusive economic zones (fishing grounds in the North Atlantic for example). Greater cooperation between the countries concerned is required to counter such difficulties, together with a common approach which each must explain to its own public. This could help avoid confusion between the policies and interests of governments which may at times be prone, under media pressure, to make decisions or choices that run counter to a common approach.

III. WEU's role in informing the public

18. WEU is regarded as the sole European organisation – in the strict sense of the term – with responsibility for defence matters. Although known to specialists in the field, it goes virtually unnoticed by the media and new forms of mass communications. The acknowledged primacy of NATO and the predominance of the United States within it leave little room for WEU in the public eye – a fact which can easily be verified by perusal of daily newspapers or regular viewing of national and international television news programmes (CNN or Euronews, for example). The Organisation cannot be held solely responsible for this lack of awareness. Governments must also be responsible for ensuring that their period of presidency of WEU and their impact on the Organisation have a sufficiently high profile to attract good media coverage. It is certainly worrying to note that no substantive feature articles appeared in either of the two major British dailies (The Times and The Independent) between 1 December 1995 and 31 January 1996 when the United Kingdom was in the throes of preparing for the presidency (which started on 1 January 1996).

19. For, unlike NATO, WEU does not consider it one of its priorities to inform the public and promote an awareness of the Organisation and its acti-

vities. However Europe's populations do feel concern over security and defence matters, if an opinion poll, taken in January and February 1996 in the 15 European Union member countries and published in time for the opening of the IGC, is to be believed. 71% of those interviewed thought that there should be a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and 81% wanted a common defence policy⁴. WEU has a role to play in relation to both and must learn to present itself to the public at large as offering the best guarantee, alongside NATO, of peace and stability in Europe. But to do so, it must take practical steps to make its mark on European and international media. Its involvement in operations in the Adriatic during the period the naval embargo was in force has helped highlight its role, but the experiment was discontinued since it implied widening coordination at sea to land and air. Instead, NATO benefited from media attention when WEU handed over to it control of naval operations. Conversely, the case of Rwanda, in which WEU did not want to be directly involved, did nothing to enhance the credibility of its image in the eyes of the public.

20. The Assembly for its part is trying to fill the vacuum by intensive activity in this sphere, but the results are still rather modest. Assembly sessions receive relatively limited press coverage and this focuses almost exclusively on speeches given by ministers from the larger member countries or leading international figures, while debates and reports attract little attention from the major daily newspapers and press reviews, not to mention radio and television. These issues have been discussed and reported in the past by the Committee, but to little avail. Besides, can it be said that the public is really interested in issues discussed in WEU and its Assembly? As mentioned earlier, the media can have an important influence in sensitising public opinion to international events and thus constitute a source of pressure on governments. Sometimes, the latter in turn seek to act through the organisations of which they are members, such as, for example, WEU.

21. This is precisely what occurred in the initial months of the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia, when WEU and European Union member governments decided both to monitor the United Nations embargo on the supply of arms to the belligerents and engage in intensive diplomatic activity in an attempt to find a solution to the conflict. In terms of media coverage of these actions, the European Union quickly attracted wide media attention on its diplomatic initiative, while WEU seemed overshadowed. The handover of command of the Adriatic operation to NATO and the arrival of a US maritime air group immediately put the operation in the media spotlight, which focused mainly

on its military aspects – aircraft carrier fire-power, number and capability of aircraft aboard, surveillance by satellite etc. Although US commitment remained minimal – since Europeans were present on land, at sea and in the air and were monitoring airspace and the air bridge for Sarajevo – the US air-sea presence alone attracted daily coverage in the national and international media (with CNN at the forefront). Here again, the Americans showed their ability to make intelligent use of the possibilities modern communications offer.

22. It will not do to publish a communiqué at the close of Assembly sessions or ministerial meetings, drawing attention to some decision or other, for the purpose of keeping the public informed and encouraging it to feel involved. It is necessary to see to it that the media are invited to report on the practical outcome of decisions taken in the field. This effort is one that must be sustained and requires development of an information and public relations policy directed primarily at radio and television and new communication systems like the Internet. Information on WEU, whether it emanates from the Council, the Assembly or the Institute for Security Studies, already enjoys fairly wide circulation in specialist circles; it is essential that it should now reach the national and European public, which is already familiar with the European Union and NATO. Like political Europe, defence Europe with all that it implies for preserving the sovereignty and integrity of nation states, cannot be built without the agreement of peoples, at national and European level. Membership of WEU imposes binding obligations in terms of a common defence, and these are often entered into rather flippantly, even though they engage member states directly in actions that cannot be undertaken without popular support.

23. In fact things tend to carry on as though the cold war had never ended and world stability were still based on nuclear weapons, despite the fact that the international situation is much more unpredictable today than in the past. In the case of states owning territories on other continents, aggression against a WEU member state's territory could occur outside the framework of Europe. Would the public in the Netherlands or Portugal stand for national troops being dispatched to the Maghreb, in the (hypothetical) event of one of the countries of the region attacking the Spanish enclaves and Spain calling upon its WEU allies? Article V of the modified Brussels Treaty is entirely unambiguous on this point and the Treaty, moreover, does not specify geographic limitations. These are issues that for many analysts belong to the world of political make-believe, as though the fact were established that the geopolitical and geostrategic landscape of Europe, and especially the Mediterranean region, will remain frozen in its present mould for decades to come. The uncertainty surrounding

4. *Bulletin Europe*, No. 6697, page 5, 28 March 1996

developments in international relations was already there in the cold war period. No-one could have predicted in the early 1980s that the continent of Europe would, by the end of the decade, have experienced an upheaval comparable to that which followed the second world war. The dominant tenor of media-reporting is essentially intended to reassure the public in WEU and European Union member countries and focuses on economic and ecological issues, although the causes of the conflicts that have arisen in Europe since the start of the century, which are essentially political in nature – for example problems over minorities, aggressive forms of nationalism and territorial disputes – are still very much with us today.

24. It is here that gaps in the information that reaches the public are apparent, making the adoption of credible policies and the reform of national and European institutions, whose job it is to tackle the problems referred to, more difficult. How then can a European security and defence identity be built up if the public cannot perceive this as being in its interest? The same observation can be made regarding the European Union. How would the creation of a “ Mr CFSP ” alter the reality of the present situation when foreign policy remains the province of the nation state and consequently serves national interests, which may on occasions happen to coincide with those of other European Union and WEU partners? Although some governments consider a concerted European approach towards foreign and defence policy issues a matter of priority in the framework of the IGC negotiations, public opinion is still far from being aware of it, through lack of the right kind of information. This state of affairs has important consequences at national level, when decisions taken at European level must be presented and adopted either in parliaments or by means of a referendum. The examples of the Danish and French referendums on Maastricht serve to reveal the gap between government decisions and public opinion.

25. In defence matters only WEU and NATO are in a position to carry out an information campaign of the kind required. However NATO priorities are directed increasingly at enlargement towards the central European countries, which are becoming the main target of its communications policy, as the validity and usefulness of the Alliance in principle no longer needs to be justified to the public in the allied countries. That leaves WEU, which has to make an effort to arouse interest in a European defence in the countries associated with it in various ways. More regular radio and television exposure and a presence on the Internet – currently provided courtesy of NATO – can help familiarise the public with the Organisation, often regarded as a European Union body. The transatlantic approach to communicating information should also be used in

Europe. While it is important to sensitise leading figures in America to WEU's existence, one cannot fail to notice the absence of a communications policy that could influence the major American media companies. A single report on WEU, broadcast on CNN or one of the other main American television channels, would do far more to publicise the Organisation in the United States than any number of conferences and colloquies directed towards local experts in transatlantic and European defence who already know about the Organisation.

26. This presupposes the development of a coherent and structured communications policy, encompassing the various WEU bodies and the Assembly and directed towards a European public. This is important, both in order to publicise achievements in the framework of cooperation in European defence matters, and also – and herein lies the crux of the matter – to show the peoples of Europe that there is a need for this kind of organisation. Public opinion on WEU's image is still somewhat confused compared with that of NATO or even the European Union and this “ information shortfall ” also affects member governments, of all statuses. As proof of this, one need only refer to the discussions preparatory to the IGC and the references to the 1998 time-frame. In these discussions, in which it is clear that the Council of Ministers has the last word, there is real cause for concern on the part of the Assembly as regards its role and place in European security and defence structures; nowhere are these analysed in detail in setting out the various options for WEU's future – from maintaining the status quo to merger with the European Union – not even in the documents produced by the national parliaments. It is important that European defence too should have a responsible instrument of parliamentary supervision, providing a link with national parliaments and through them with public opinion in the various countries.

27. This aspect is paramount if the hope is that WEU should one day become the true European pillar of the Alliance, capable – in coordination with NATO, in the context of the CJTF (combined joint task forces) programme⁵ – of mounting peace-keeping or humanitarian operations requiring mobilisation of military assets. It will not do simply to state an intention to strengthen WEU's operational capabilities or draw up a list of forces answerable to the Organisation (FAWEU). It is necessary to convince the European public and taxpayers and the parliaments that vote defence budgets of the need for and usefulness of such endeavours. WEU's communications policy

5. This programme involves NATO making its material assets and logistical support capability available to the European allies in the event of the latter engaging in military operations in which the United States is not involved.

should seek to highlight the Organisation's determination to carry out the role for which it was created and its ability to adapt to the prevailing new international geopolitical and geostrategic conditions. It must also seek to influence public opinion in all the countries associated in various ways with WEU, and also on the other side of the Atlantic. This would strengthen the arguments of all those in the United States who believe that consolidation of the Alliance is to be achieved by the European allies gradually assuming more responsibility, as opposed to those who feel that the American taxpayer is paying over the odds to defend a Europe which is, to boot, an economic adversary. In promoting development of the transatlantic dialogue, one must not lose sight of the fact that public opinion is responsible for the election of US representatives and senators, who, unlike many of their European counterparts, have real powers of control – and decision – in US foreign policy and defence matters.

28. In this connection the presence of WEU and its Assembly on the Internet⁶ takes on special interest at a time when that particular communications tool is attaining a worldwide dimension and developing, in the United States as in other industrialised countries, into one of the information sources most widely used by the general public and experts, on a par with television. The Internet offers considerable advantages in terms of cost and impact of information distribution, as compared with other communications media, without the financial constraints of the latter. It could thus be used by WEU to keep the public informed about its work and the way it operates. For example, pictures and commentary are available, via NATO's information site, on the WEU police force in Mostar, Bosnia, even though it rarely receives a mention in newspapers or on television. The force undoubtedly has scant resources with which to carry out the tasks entrusted to it – this became obvious from the incidents on 7 February 1996 occasioned by hostility shown by a section of the Croatian population towards the European Union administrator for Mostar, Mr Hans Koschnik; however it is up to governments meeting in the Council of Ministers to shoulder their responsibilities and explain to the public what the limits of the mandate given to the European police force are. In the absence of such information, all that will remain is an impression of the powerlessness of WEU and the European Union, helping to cast doubt on WEU's real capabilities and the political will that must govern its actions.

29. To avoid duplication it might be a good idea for the Secretariat-General and the Assembly

6. This topic is dealt with in detail in another report which Sir Russell Johnston is submitting on behalf of the Committee entitled "Interparliamentary communication and computer networks in WEU member countries".

to coordinate all initiatives directed towards establishing a WEU presence on the Internet. NATO and the North Atlantic Assembly cooperate in this way, although legally speaking, there are no official ties between them. Another advantage of this type of coordination would be to give WEU a presence on international communications information networks for only a very small outlay in terms of human and material resources. In the coming years, such networks will have an increasingly important role as an information source in many quarters including governments. Some, such as the United States Government, are very active on the Internet. This must not be seen as a passing fashion but as an opportunity to be involved in a technological development which has already had a substantial impact in forming public opinion, especially in industrialised countries. Any communications policy WEU adopts, must, in order to be credible, pay special heed to this development if the Organisation wishes to be able to convey the information necessary to publicise its role within the European security and defence architecture to as many people as possible and to present that role clearly.

30. Public opinion is not homogenous. It represents differing interests and priorities which complement and contradict one another. Too much or too little information leads to manipulation, at times at the hands of pressure groups whose aims, be they political or economic, are not those of the nation state and its institutions. In the defence field, the stake future generations have in policies decided today is too important, in general terms and more specifically for the purpose of preserving national identities, for responsibility for informing the public to be left solely in the hands of media professionals. There is a need for some form of education in this area and it can only come from governments or institutions mandated by them to represent their collective interests, such as WEU or NATO. This implies that there should be a policy of communicating with the ordinary man or woman, not merely with experts, and that any such policy should be seen to be capable of adapting to media constraints and new technologies. Increased cooperation with NATO in this area – as is already happening over use of the Internet – is desirable and necessary, as communications budgets have a tendency to shrink in the face of other priorities such as NATO enlargement or the development of WEU's operational capabilities. WEU would benefit from more experience and resources in order to affirm its role as the European pillar of the Alliance in the eyes of the public in European countries and on the other side of the Atlantic, thereby contributing to the development of a true European defence identity regarded as credible by the governments and peoples of Europe.

APPENDIX

The "Bundeswehr 2000" plan

1. The Bundeswehr's communications policy takes on its full significance when placed in the context of the political events Germany has experienced in recent years, namely, the establishment of a new sovereign nation and foundation of a new national community. This policy is likewise of major importance when directed towards other states, for Germany, as a result of its borders having moved towards the east of the continent, needed to reaffirm that its roots lay in the West and still finds it necessary to do so to an extent. This explains the ever-present concern of government and army alike to act within the framework of security alliances (such as NATO, WEU and the OSCE) and to abide by their rules.

2. In terms of these developments, the direction taken by the German army's communications policy is a highly constructive one: the conventional cold war philosophy has been replaced by an ethos of support for peace with multinationality, flexibility and mobility as its corollaries. The German army fully recognised the importance of the media today, which has enabled it to establish a relationship of trust with the German people and promote understanding of the foundation and goals of German security and defence policy. Above all, the media has made it possible to achieve consensus on the new role of the army, especially in Europe. This requires making accessible information which, by its very nature, the population at large does not normally possess; at the same time, the latter is becoming increasingly critically-minded and eager to have such information. The relationship the German army has established with all sections of the media is practical and outgoing; it is based on trust and credibility and aims to be convincing and to reach as wide an audience as possible. The army press officers carry out in-depth research and provide the media with background information.

3. The German army's support for and participation in the multinational peacekeeping forces in former Yugoslavia have been the major challenge faced by the Bundeswehr since its creation. Information work contributed to the gaining of acceptance for the army's new tasks and the reform of the Basic Law, and also made it possible for a general consensus to emerge on actions undertaken in former Yugoslavia. There is now a better perception of the challenges and significance of security policy, as the results of an opinion poll carried out in 1995 have shown. 80% of those polled regarded the army and NATO as guarantors of Germany's external security. The information department of the ministry of defence places great

emphasis on new computer-based communication systems: a computerised CD-ROM (compact disk-read only memory) on the armed forces and German defence policy has been available since the beginning of the year, an electronic mail system (accessible via the Internet) has been installed and a Bundeswehr site was brought up on the Internet in January 1996.

4. Frequent approaches are also made to other media in a massive drive to inform both the German people and the wider world, a task in which the German army has been involved since 1989. No other European country has needed to undertake communications work on this scale, with the possible exception of France which this year is to open a debate on the reforms of its system of national service. The goal is a new definition of the Bundeswehr's identity. The "Army Information 2000" project is a means of coordinating all the areas of expertise covered by information. The army is a full member of the information society and is thus in competition with firms and organisations of all types for the attention of the public. Public scrutiny is moreover far from uncritical for the army is still, primarily, an instrument of power in the hands of the State. To present the army's new tasks – as defined in the 1994 White Paper – and inform younger generations in a country with large numbers of conscientious objectors, television slots were booked and advertising material was broadcast on the national channels and published in the press, including the "house magazines" of the different army corps, up until mid-October 1995. The various aspects of the project from humanitarian intervention to manpower training, and including NATO membership and the use of new detection systems such as AWACS aircraft and satellites, received high profile coverage to the accompaniment of the army's advertising slogan: "Wir sind da" ("We're right there").

5. Such wide circulation is essential to produce the desired effect, namely, renewed enthusiasm. All army publications are to be updated in 1996 and new publications will appear. There is also a national telephone number for information on the Bundeswehr, giving direct access to various kinds of information. In 1996 the emphasis will be on international public relations and delegations from Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine will visit throughout the year. Similarly, German delegations are to visit Albania, Chechnya, Lithuania and Slovenia. This programme coincides exactly with the main themes identified for the year, which, together with dis-

cussion forums on external intervention, peace-keeping and developments within NATO, project a strong European emphasis. The development of the European Union, industrial cooperation on

armaments and joint work within the European Corps, not to mention strengthening WEU's operational capabilities, are to be themes for a major information drive in 1996.

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