

Europe's national parliamentarians working for security and defence



The Assembly of Western European Union The Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly

is where Members of your national parliament are working in the important areas of European security and defence, promoting peace in Europe and beyond.

What is the Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly and why do we need it?

The Assembly of WEU, to which European national parliaments send delegations, is the only European interparliamentary assembly for security and defence issues. It was founded in 1954 by the modified Brussels Treaty, a treaty on cooperation in security and defence in Europe with a mutual defence commitment.

Assembly President Armand De Decker
(who is also President of the Belgian Senate)



Governments are under a treaty-based obligation to provide national parliamentarians represented in the Assembly with a written report on their security and defence activities (Article IX of the modified Brussels Treaty), which the parliamentarians then discuss before formulating recommendations to the governments.



The fundamental idea is that cooperation between governments should be mirrored by cooperation between national parliamentarians, meaning that governments must together provide parliamentarians as a group with information on their activities. It is only when interparliamentary scrutiny accompanies intergovernmental policy that real transparency and democratic accountability are evident.

<http://assembly.weu.int>

The Assembly, located in Paris, provides a forum for debate on all aspects of security and defence. Today, its main focus is the European Union's Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the development of the EU's international civil and military crisis management activities.

Cooperation between governments should be mirrored by cooperation between national parliamentarians!

Intergovernmental and interparliamentary cooperation on security and defence in WEU and the EU

While WEU places a treaty-based obligation on the Council to inform national parliamentarians, this does not exist in the EU for ESDP. In legal terms, the WEU obligation concerns only its 10 full members, although the governments of the other WEU countries (associate members, observers and associate partners, see map below) are involved in the reporting procedure and the subsequent European-wide interparliamentary dialogue.



The WEU countries (Cyprus and Malta send Observers to plenary sessions)

Over the years a European security and defence culture has developed among the WEU countries, all of which are members of the EU and/or NATO. However, debates on foreign policy and defence in national parliaments and among governments continue to be strongly influenced by national considerations that do not take sufficient account of the European context. In order to remedy this state of affairs, governments and national parliaments need more intensive exchanges of views on issues of common European interest.

That is why the members of the Assembly have proposed the creation of a broad-based interparliamentary forum in the EU where national parliamentarians can debate security and defence issues with

the EU Council. ESDP will lack **transparency** if governments are not collectively under an obligation to inform national parliamentarians as a group about their policy on Europe's security and defence.

"Double-hatting" and government-to-parliament dialogue

WEU's Secretary-General is **Javier Solana**. His office is in Brussels. He is also the High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy including ESDP. The Ambassadors representing member states in the ESDP's main political steering body, the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC), also make up the WEU Permanent Council. Through this "double-hatting", which also applies to EU and WEU Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers, EU representatives are already engaged in a structured dialogue on ESDP issues with the national parliamentarians represented in the Assembly.



Javier Solana addressing the Assembly

The interparliamentary nature of the Assembly combined with its experience and composition make it a model for the future structure of collective participation by national parliaments in the EU.

Who are the members of the Assembly?

European national parliaments send delegations to the Assembly, which currently has 370 members. Many are members of the defence, foreign or European affairs committees in their own parliaments. The number of delegates depends on the size of the country. In addition, a number of other European countries choose to send parliamentary delegations to take part in the Assembly's activities on an "ad hoc" basis. Russia and Ukraine send parliamentary delegations in accordance with their status as permanent guests.

The Assembly's consultative rights are rooted in the modified Brussels Treaty of 1954, signed by 10 countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom). 18 other European countries are formally associated with WEU either as associate members (Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Turkey), observers (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) or associate partners (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). The status of individual countries and their parliamentary delegations should be reviewed in light of the enlargement of the EU and NATO.

What are the Assembly's structures?

The main work is done by four committees. The Defence Committee is concerned with European security and defence issues from an operational and military standpoint. The Political Committee addresses the political aspects of European security and defence. The Technological and Aerospace Committee is concerned with matters pertaining to defence and dual technologies and to cooperation in the field of armaments.

Assembly members voting a recommendation to governments

The Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations,

is responsible for cooperation with national parliaments and monitors and analyses security and defence debates in national parliaments as well as parliamentary questions put to national governments. It also makes comparative studies and tries to develop benchmarks for government accountability in the field of security and defence.



How do national parliamentarians work in the Assembly?

The members of the Assembly meet at least twice a year for plenary sessions and throughout the year in committee meetings, conferences and colloquies. Extraordinary sessions can be held if the situation so requires, for instance in times of conflict and crisis. Each committee appoints **Rapporteurs** from among its members, who present draft reports and recommendations on current security and defence issues to the competent committee. After several debates during which the draft recommendations are often considerably modified, committee members vote the final texts which are then submitted to the plenary session for amendment and adoption by the Assembly.

Assembly Recommendations are sent to the Council which is obliged to give written replies to them. No such requirement exists in the EU.

French Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie speaking at the plenary session of the Assembly



Assembly plenary sessions are politically important events bringing together the national delegations, government and military representatives, Members of the European Parliament and other interested parliamentarians, security experts and journalists.

Committee reports are public documents and may be downloaded from the Assembly's website. Other documents available on the website are the Proceedings of the Assembly's plenary sessions, conferences and colloquies, speeches and press releases. (www.assembly.weu.int)

Parliamentarians also have the right to put questions to governments. Questions and answers are published on the Assembly's website.

What are the Assembly's objectives?

- Act as an interparliamentary forum for general strategic reflection and give impetus to the intergovernmental and public debate on security and defence.
- Discuss and coordinate at the European level national parliamentarians' constitutional role at home, where they vote national defence budgets, decide on troop deployments, agree to the activation of mutual defence clauses, decide on the use of airspace and territory by foreign forces, and make crucial choices on the purchase of weapons by the State.
- Improve transparency in intergovernmental cooperation on European security and defence.
- Support intergovernmental initiatives and increase public awareness of European security and defence issues, including the need for a sound European armaments industry.
- Encourage national parliamentarians to exchange views with their European colleagues on topical security and defence questions.

<http://assembly.weu.int>

What are the Assembly's achievements?

Governments appreciate the Assembly's strategic reflection on all questions relating to security and stability on the European continent. The Assembly's reports are recognised as reference documents for the international debate on defence and security issues. Progress in European security and defence integration has often been initiated by the Assembly's recommendations:



● the "Petersberg tasks", agreed by WEU Ministers in 1992, today define the scope of ESDP's crisis-management activities, ● the former WEU **Satellite Centre** now provides the EU with a degree of autonomy in analysing satellite imagery for intelligence, ● the **WEU Institute for Security Studies** has been transferred to the EU, ● **Defence Ministers** participate in the Council's activities, ● increasing **Europeanisation of NATO**, ● recognition of the need for a European chain of command, ● the handbook on military standards and procedures given as a reference to the EU Military Staff, ● Europe-wide **armaments cooperation** – all these are results of WEU's past experience and of the political input and impetus generated by national parliamentarians, working together in the Assembly.

The Assembly and the European Parliament

The European Parliament will have an increasing role in European security and defence questions as more decision-making is done at European level. It already has information and consultation rights. However, it is not a body of representatives elected to the parliaments of the Member States and it cannot take their place at national level.

The Assembly cooperates as closely as possible with the European Parliament on ESDP in order to make the most of the complementary competences of European and national parliamentarians.

It is national parliamentarians who decide in their parliaments at home on defence spending including weapons procurement, the deployment of troops, the use of airspace and territory by foreign forces or the activation of mutual defence clauses.

What is WEU today?



WEU is a European security and defence organisation based on the Brussels Treaty of 1948 (which was modified in 1954) providing a collective and mutual defence commitment among its member states that is analogous to Article 5 of NATO but in the context of an armed attack in Europe.

In political terms, WEU's Article V expresses solidarity among its members, stating that if any Member State is attacked, the allied countries will, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, afford it "all the military and other aid and assistance in their power".

Because all WEU members are also NATO members, WEU members coordinate their collective defence commitment through NATO. Article IV of the modified Brussels Treaty provides the formal link to NATO and to transatlantic cooperation.

WEU also stands for successful **cooperation in the field of weapons procurement and armaments research and development**, which are funded and carried out by the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG) and the Western European Armaments Organisation (WEAO).



Since 1991 the two organisations, operating under the aegis of WEU, have conducted a cooperative defence research programme worth 650 million euros. Its purpose is to support European industry and strengthen European defence capabilities.

Armand De Decker meeting Javier Solana, WEU Secretary General and EU High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy

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The European Union has now embarked on a further stage of integration: following the work of the European Convention, the Intergovernmental Conference is currently discussing a draft Constitutional Treaty for the Union. The draft text contains important procedural innovations aimed at rendering ESDP decision-making more efficient. It also includes a solidarity clause giving member states the possibility to request aid and assistance from the other EU countries in the event of a terrorist attack. The draft Constitutional Treaty also proposes a mutual defence clause for the EU, which is largely inspired by the modified Brussels Treaty. Thus, WEU's collective defence commitment has the potential to promote further European integration. Membership remains open to the countries joining both the EU and NATO. A protocol attached to the draft Constitutional Treaty opens up further possibilities for interparliamentary dialogue on ESDP. The Assembly will avail itself of every opportunity to make sure that European national parliamentarians are given proper parliamentary instruments to scrutinise intergovernmental cooperation under ESDP.

WEU and its Assembly have helped to rationalise and reinforce security and defence policy over half a century, thus guaranteeing peace and security in Europe. In today's context this is more relevant than ever before.



Assembly of Western European Union
The Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly

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