

W.F VAN EEKELEN



Dr. Willem F. van Eekelen (1931) studied law at Utrecht and political science at Princeton University. He joined the Netherlands foreign service in 1957 and served in New Delhi, London, Accra, Paris and Brussels NATO.

He was elected to parliament in 1977 and became State Secretary for Defence, State Secretary for European Affairs and Minister of Defence.

In 1989 he became Secretary General of the Western European Union and in 1995 in the Netherlands parliament.

He is chairman of the European Movement in this country.

1. Introduction

From the beginning, I have always felt the necessity of merging the Western European Union (WEU) with the European Union (EU), because I don't think the EU can have a separate foreign policy and a separate security and defence policy. As a matter of fact, defence is a function of foreign policy and has to be closely integrated in it. There should be primacy of politics, in any case, but co-operation between the two pillars - military and civilian - seems to be necessary to me (cf. below).

The functions of the Western European Union have now been taken over by the EU and among the few things left is the Automatic military assistance clause of Article 5, which, to a large extent, has been taken over by NATO, though it is more constraining than the NATO article 5, which has an element of *discretion*: countries take the *necessary* measures to help one another in case attack on them.

But it was never thought that, within the framework of the East-West confrontation, this *wen* article would, in effect, mean **joint defence**, because of the same imminent danger we were all threatened by. In the light of the debate about whether article 5 is still needed, as there is no immediate threat, I think it is.

Other point are **armament co-operation**, within the framework of which the EU will hopefully establish an Armaments Agency taking over the Western European Armaments Group, whereas we will still have the WEU Assembly (cf. below).

On the one hand, an Assembly covering inter-governmental co-operation is very important for consensus-building. It is not exercising control in the traditional sense, because that is done by national parliaments. Over defence budgets and defence policy. Nevertheless, the fact that parliamentarians from different countries meet one another, discuss issues and work together on reports and resolutions is of immense importance for the way in which they act in their national parliaments. On the other hand, one of the gaps in the Constitution being elaborated by the Convention is that we have not dealt yet with the question of how to have some parliamentary participation in the areas of inter-governmental co-operation.

2. Historical outline

The WEU began in Brussels – and probably it will end in Brussels because that is now where the European Council meets.

The **Brussels Treaty** was a unique step after the War, thanks to two people: Spaak and Bevin in London, who realized that Europe had to show to the United States that it was willing to do something together.

There was a very clear incentive, i.e. the Marshall-Plan. Secretary of State Marshall had made clear to Spaak and Bevin that he could not maintain support in the American Congress for the Marshall Plan if Europe was not showing signs of doing things together, as distinct from the pre-war situation in which we were all doing things on our own. And although only France, Britain and the Benelux countries were involved, the Brussels Treaty was of immense importance.

Clearly, the British, from the beginning, were hoping that then the Americans would also chip in and, especially as East-West relations were deteriorating, they exercised considerable pressure on Washington to have some sort of military engagement for Europe.

So, in 1949, **NATO** was formed and this in a way was a tragedy for the Brussels Treaty, but, to a certain extent, also a measure of success. All the functions in the Brussels Treaty, which were very wide and covered economic and social aspects, as well as other areas of harmonizing legislation, were taken over by others (the Council of Europe, the Coal and Steel Community). The lesson of the Monnet method was: "If you have a problem, you have to put it into a different context". As a matter of fact, if you stick to old confrontations, old points of view, you will never find a satisfactory solution. Only if you can transfer the problem into another context, you will have the *chance* to find a solution. In that respect, the Monnet method has been a fantastic success, proven by the EU enlargement that is now taking place and spreading this sense of stability, security and future prosperity to the whole of Europe.

As to the military structure of the WEU, which existed for a couple of years, General Montgomery was one of the senior officers in the Command. Referring to Paul Henri Spaak, some people jokingly talked of the Western Union, as it was called then, as "Spaakistan", Pakistan having just become independent. By the way, at the beginning, at the time NATO was not a military organization either, as the military side of NATO only developed after the Korean War. Before that it was much more political than military.

Western Europe moved to the Council of Europe. We had the European Defence Community idea (the extension of the Schuman method) combined with the Political Union. And as in 1954 that foundered because of the objections in the French parliament - again a paradoxical situation in European history, in which a country that had started an initiative, then finally defeated it. 1954 was a low point in the integration of Europe, as John Foster Dulles talked about the agonizing re-appraisal that the US would need to apply to this Europe that was so divided and not prepared to do much in the field of defence.

Then, another brilliant idea came up, propagated by Anthony Eden in London. He was a member of the WEU and had not participated in the European Defence Community, but saw the need to pick up the pieces and to show willingness for a British contribution to the defence of our continent.

He had the idea that he could use the WEU to bring in Germany in a way that would be acceptable to the French. Germany would accept certain discriminating aspects of its re-militarization and all the others would also accept controls, although these were more symbolic than real. Nevertheless, there was some equality of treatment and Germany became a full member of NATO on an equal basis. So, that was the first occasion on which the EU played a role, although a secondary role.

The third occasion was represented by the negotiations about British entry into the European Economic Community, as it was then called.

There were difficulties and ultimately President De Gaulle didn't want it to happen. So, it took until 1973 before Britain finally came in. But for a while, the WEU was used as a **bridge (trait d'union)**, because Britain was in the WEU, which had then been enlarged by Germany and Italy. So, the Six of the European Community and the United Kingdom had a common framework in the WEU. We even had an economic day at ministerial meetings, which were then on a quarterly basis, to discuss issues of common concern.

When Britain came in, that function, of course, lapsed. It took until the 1980s before another initiative was launched, the so-called GENSCHER-COLOMBO initiative, based on the conclusion that European political co-operation had reached a certain level beyond which it would not develop very easily and required a new incentive, also vis-à-vis the public. So, they had this notion of beefing up the European Community and including an element of security in our deliberations.

At that time, in Holland and the UK, too, there were considerable doubts about this GENSCHER-COLOMBO initiative, because it could **weaken NATO**. Even today's several of our countries are still afraid that whatever the European Union is doing could weaken NATO (cf. below). So, the solemn declaration of it in Stuttgart was only a political declaration, without any substance.

Nevertheless, it was the time when SPINELLI came to the European Parliament with his blueprint for a European Union. There was a debate about how to deal with that and ultimately we had the Single Act of Luxembourg, where the European political co-operation and the economic side of the European Community were handled in one Single Act.

In 1984, after thirty years of the WEU, the Italians brought in **the Ministers of Defence**, whereas before all these discussions had been handled by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. So, 1984 was a crucial time as we had this joint approach whereby ministerial meetings were attended by both Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Defence. In spite of the advantages offered by it, it also poses a problem, because all Ministers will certainly not be able to speak at the meetings when ultimately 28 states participated (after our associate partners have come in).

As far as the further developments are concerned, several accessions took place. In Maastricht in 1991, in Amsterdam in 1997 and in Nice in 2001, we tried to bring the various strands of European integration together. But the main point is that, in all these deliberations, we were never able to bring the security dimension fully into the framework of the European Union. And even today, in the draft constitutions, we haven't really succeeded in doing that. Defence and security are still a separate area, with different procedures of decision-making (cf. below), with different funding. That is one of the most crucial gaps, as, in the EU, we have a budget of 100 billion euros, with which we can do a lot, but which does not apply to defence and security. About the reasons why, I shall comment later.

3. Our activities

It started in 1987 with the **mine-clearing operation** during the Iran-Iraq War.

It was a very peculiar situation, as mines appeared in the Gulf and nobody did anything about it. So, when we decided to start clearing the mines, it was, in a way, a war without an enemy, as the enemy were the mines and not a particular country.

It was a success and the Americans were always grateful to us, especially to Belgium and the Netherlands for joining – the Belgian mine hunter *Zinia* was an old ship, but was worth its weight in gold because it provided the basis for the operation (medical facilities, logistic possibilities).

When I came to the WEU in 1989, I said this had been a good experience and suggested that some contingency planning be done for something else in the Gulf. The answer was that this was out of the question, because such a situation would never repeat itself. On the contrary, my other initiative of doing more about arms control in the context of the Convention of Forces in Europe Treaty was taken up.

But six months later Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Then we took action in enforcing the UN embargo, which was a resolution of the Security Council against Iraq. The WEU conducted about 75% of all naval operations. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that naval operations are easier than land operations, because every country maintains its own ships and units and the willingness of countries to participate in them was greater.

The same applied in 1992, when we had this embargo against Serbia in the Yugoslav crisis. By the way, when Mr. COOLSAET referred to our failed initiative in Croatia and later in Bosnia, it was before our 1992 naval operation. We tried and even had a planning group, where we developed four contingencies (varying from 5 000 men, to 30 000), different levels of intervention, but unfortunately there was no political will. I'm convinced that, if we had succeeded, we would have been able to stop escalation, certainly in Bosnia. That opinion is confirmed by a man we are searching to bring him to The Hague, i.e. Karadzic, who in a BBC programme said that *if* the international community had then had 10 000 men, he would not have been able to do anything. But then we had this fantastic misappreciation of the situation. People were quoting to me

how difficult it had been for Hitler to occupy and control Yugoslavia. But that was a completely different situation. This was a situation where you had to separate different parts from each other so that the conflict could not escalate. So we see again how much old thinking is always influencing political acts.

We had the peculiar situation in Helsinki during the OSCE ministerial meeting of the WEU deciding in the morning to have a flotilla and NATO in the afternoon deciding to do the same thing. Eventually, we worked together and we had good co-operation, again thanks to the Italians, who had commanders in both operations so that they knew each other and managed to come together.

Of course, the Yugoslav situation continued to preoccupy us. In Mostar, at a given moment, we had an administrator of the EU on the civilian side and we provided the police contingent.

That is interesting, because in Maastricht in 1991, we decided that the EU should elaborate and implement decisions with **defence** implications. But, in practice, we did this only in respect of police and customs officers and naval deployments. For example, on the Danube, there were police and customs officers; in Mostar there were police officers. These were essential operations for doing things that otherwise would not have been possible, although only a few hundred people were engaged. So, there was a certain inconsistency there, but not for the first time.

In the meantime, during the German presidency, we had developed the **Petersberg missions**.

In a way that was a sort of revolution, especially for German policy, because for the Germans to propose this was really enormous progress, as it was only in 1995 that the Karlsruhe Court allowed German forces to go outside the NATO area. But already in 1992 they were prepared to list those three missions for the WEU.

Well, next to humanitarian and rescue peacekeeping referred to *traditional peacekeeping*, i.e. when there was agreement between the parties and a cease-fire in place. But the real mission of importance was the role of combat forces in crisis management, including *peacemaking*. And I regret that word, because by “peacemaking” we meant **peace enforcement**, but at that time the terminology was not as clear as it is today.

Then came the time when President Clinton was elected, who came with the slogan of “the economy stupid” – and so, for a while, didn’t focus on foreign affairs. In 1994 he came up with this idea of **combined joint task forces**. It was a good idea that certain functions could be handed over to the Europeans, if there were situations where the Americans would be less inclined to participate, but it never came to anything. Later on, in Berlin, NATO tried to work it out. Not a bad arrangement, but then the Greeks and the Turks quarrelled because Turkey felt that it was not fully involved on the European side. They thought wrongly, because we had brought Turkey in as associate member, able to participate fully in the activities, but nevertheless they were not quite satisfied with the arrangements and that produced a long stalemate,

which has only recently been solved. So, only now it is possible to use NATO assets for European-led operations.

Today, we are facing **four scenarios** when we are talking about defence and security.

1. Collective defence.

It is not so urgent as it was, but nevertheless a latent scenario, clearly for NATO.

2. Peace-support operations.

Here again we have three different scenarios:

- The US are prepared to join the operation. Then again NATO is the best organization to conduct the operation (it has an oiled machinery, all the arrangements, experience, the standing operating procedures, rules of engagement and so on).

Scenarios where the US are not participating. Here, I see two differences again:

- We can use NATO assets. That requires some procedure under which NATO agrees to make them available, which probably will not be easy. But if politically there is agreement, and the Americans share that agreement, then the EU could use NATO assets with the deputy SACEUR commanding the operation. That, in a way, is the most efficient, because then you have the best of both worlds: you have the Europeans -because the deputy SACEUR is a European officer - making full use of the capabilities of both.
- The other situation is where there is an *autonomous* European operation. And as Mr. COOLSAET mentioned, Artemis, in Bunia was the first and so far the only autonomous operation. So, it is possible; we have done it and fairly quickly. The interesting thing is that we did it in anticipation of a UN operation, as the UN needed more time. It will never be able to start a quick operation; we were able to do it and we did it quickly and efficiently, albeit that it was largely a French operation. The main point is that it is possible and that, if you have sufficient preparations, you can do it.

Now we are all in a quandary, insofar as the “what for” question is concerned. You surely remember NATO Secretary-general Lord Robertson saying “Capabilities, capabilities, capabilities”. But halfway through his term, the situation changed and he asked for different capabilities (in Afghanistan, unmanned aerial vehicles – drones - special forces, which were not on this list before). So, much more stress has to be placed on “What for?": “What are we able to do with what we have? What do we want to do in the future?”, because then you can organize your planning accordingly.

In addition, we have to get our political act together. In my time, I tried to get a European contribution in Somalia. As a matter of fact, there were at a given moment five members of the EU with forces in Somalia, but nobody thought of doing something together. No. It had all to be done separately with the UN. That does not make sense. We have also to co-ordinate our political activities and not act in compartments (one NATO compartment, one EU compartment, one UN compartment, maybe others for the OSCE). I think that doesn't make sense as the same institutional arrangements should apply to the same forces.

We have today a kind of competition between NATO with the NATO response force, which came after the Helsinki Headline Goals. We are competing with each other. Today, NATO is ahead. We started with 50.000-60.000 men available for a year within 62 days; NATO – rightly – emphasized that 60 days is too long a time. So, they came up with 20.000 men able to fight, an insertion force to stop escalation, but then you have to act quickly. In Dutch they say: “De eerste klap is een daalder waard” (The first step is worth a euro). So, we, Europeans, should be much clearer in our scenario planning: What for? What situations do we think we could face? Who is prepared to participate? What is needed? How do we organize force packages? If you know who in each force package is able and willing to participate, you can organize the command, transport, the communication and logistics.

4. Conclusion

So, it is quite simple. The “**What for?**” question is crucial. If you are only thinking, in the same way as NATO, of bombing Kosovo or Iraq, we cannot do it to the same extent as the Americans – although we have plenty of fighter bombers, but they are not organized.

It is really a question of determining what we need to do together as Europeans for the most likely scenarios. Can we assign forces to *both* the NATO response force and the Helsinki Headline Goals? It used to be possible to say that. Now, I don't think it is. If the first elements of the NATO response force have to be available within ten days, you cannot assign those forces also to another operation. So, we have to think of other means, such as **rotation**. For example, Belgium would say that next year it would participate in the Headline Goals and two or three years from now it would participate in the NATO response force. It is not necessary for all 25 in the EU or all 26 in NATO to participate in one operation.

Finally, there have been plenty of disappointments.

The first disappointment is that we were not able to act more decisively in **Europe**: the Germans couldn't do it; the British didn't want to do it. For example, in 1992, the British contribution was *two* people for mapping services. Of course, European defence cannot do without the British, but then the will has to be there and we have to ascertain where the will is for doing things together?

In **Rwanda**, in 1994, it was not possible to act. The French “Operation Turquoise” was criticized, but at least they were prepared to do something. I remember talking to the German Minister of Defence Volker Rühle when he said: “The Euro Corps is no Afrika Corps”. It reminded me also of what he said about Bosnia: “We should not go to places where Hitler went”. But we are dealing with a new Germany, which is playing its role very well (e.g., in Kosovo, where they are motivated and know exactly the constraints of military operations).

Then, there have also been missed opportunities, such as in Albania, when the pyramid scandal broke and there was complete chaos in the country. We were simply not prepared to do something about it.

So, the record is very mixed, because we also did *some* useful things. The scale was very limited, not because of a lack of military capability but of a lack of political will.

As far as the relationship between the EU and the budget is concerned, we have now, in the Constitution, the notion that the functions of SOLANA and PATTEN will be merged into a Minister of Foreign Affairs. That may overcome this issue of access to the European budget, but, to a certain extent, it could be a cuckoo’s egg in the nest of the Commission, because then the intergovernmental aspects would erode the communitarian workings of the EU. But anyway, let’s try it.

In respect of the WEU Assembly, we have to think of a way to have a parliamentary dimension that can permit consensus-building among parliamentarians in the field of inter-governmental co-operation.

Today, the WEU Assembly is in limbo. Its tasks have not been taken over by anybody else (the European Parliament is not able to do that, largely because France and the UK don’t want there to be a *role* for the European Parliament and the Commission in security issues). So, we have to find a solution and to maintain that function, whether we call it a WEU Assembly or something else. There has to be some parliamentary involvement.

So, the record is mixed, but the lesson I draw is that if we *want* to do things we *can* do them.