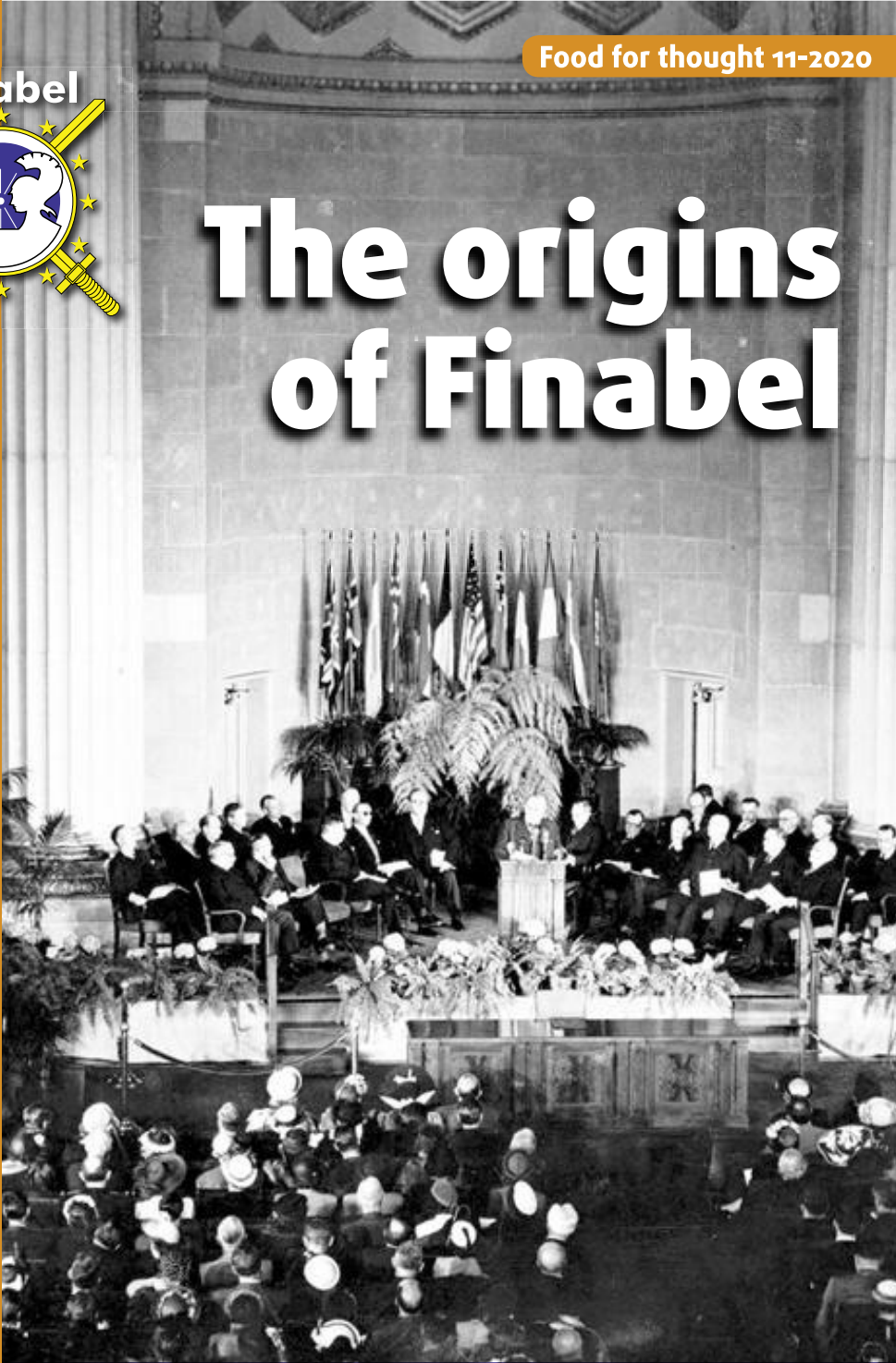




Finabel

The origins of Finabel

AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN
ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953



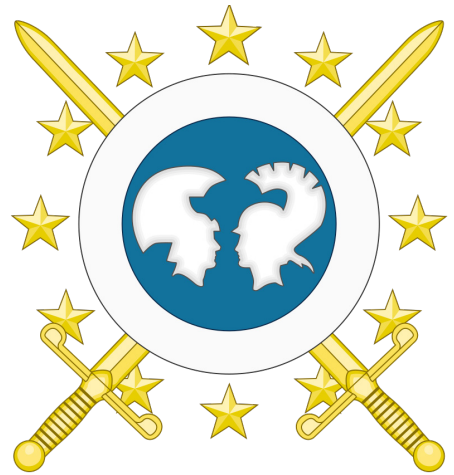
This paper was drawn up by Georges Clementz under the supervision and guidance of Mr Mario Blokken, Director of the Permanent Secretariat.

This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

THE ORIGINS OF FINABEL (1953-1957)

In the wake of the Second World War, Europeans quickly became aware of the dilemma they faced concerning their collective security, namely the balance between autonomy and dependence - fate and freedom of action¹. The debate over European cooperation and subordination of European defence to the Atlantic defence structure is thus old. It dates back to the first years of the Cold War with the creation of NATO in 1949. Even though the idea of a European defence took shape with the Treaty of Brussels (1948), the European Defence Community (1950) and then the Western European Union (1954), European security would remain, throughout the Cold War, under the umbrella of the United States, in a confrontation with Russia based on “mutually assured destruction”. These various defence cooperation initiatives were essential for countering the Soviet threat and are at the very core of the debate previously mentioned. Consequently, an analysis of these initiatives and the context within which they evolved can be valuable for understanding the major issues that European defence decision-makers faced at the beginning of the Cold War.

Furthermore, both in the past and today, there is a domain pursuing the objectives of-



Wikipedia - "Blason du Finabel"

better interoperability, non-duplication, and better efficiency in defence, balanced between the Atlantic and the European logics and, in fine, of major importance regarding strategic autonomy: armaments standardisation.

The standardisation of armaments enables the production of military equipment with characteristics and performances that have been defined in close collaboration. Common outlooks on arms and their use are thus a prerequisite for standardisation. Whereas the Second World War had demonstrated

1. Howorth Jolyon, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, 2014, Macmillan International Higher Education

how common armaments are useful, the fifties and the Warsaw Pact made them necessary. While not giving up on their military industries, many Western European countries were eager to build cooperation to prevent any attack coming from the Soviet Union². In this context, several committees in charge of harmonising armaments were created, particularly within the organisations as mentioned above (NATO, EDC, WEU). Armaments standardisation has several advantages within a military alliance. First, the distribution of production among the allies allows, in the context of war, for enhancing procurement and reduces the impact of bombings. Second, via joint research and procurement, standardisation allows for savings in both industry and the scientific domain. Finally, standardisation increases interoperability among allies by facilitating material and ammunition exchanges.

While the Committee dedicated to armament standardisation within the Brussels Treaty soon disappeared, another initiative came into being a few years later, in 1953, with the Finbel Committee established by France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The new organisation experienced its first enlargement in 1956 when West Germany joined the five founding members and was renamed as Finabel³. Almost ten years after the end of the Western European Union, more than six decades after its creation, the Finabel Committee is still alive.

In the beginning, Finbel was a French initiative dedicated to land forces of continental Western Europe. Its standardisation approach differed from the Anglo-Saxon one insofar

as it favoured an extensive exchange of data, in contrast with the Anglo-Saxons' refusal to give information regarding nuclear, bacteriological, and chemical weapons. Although independent, the Finbel Committee soon began to collaborate with NATO as well as with the Standing Armaments Committee of the WEU, created in 1955. Analysing the Finbel Committee, its creation, its first years, its evolution and how it dealt with the other Euro-Atlantic defence structures of that period allows us to understand better the ins and outs of the birth of a European Defence in the 1950s, and the challenges it was facing. Some of these challenges, such as the issue of strategic autonomy, are still subject to debate. In other words, the study of Finbel and its work during its first four years, between 1953 and 1957, offers an overview of the European Defence architecture of that time, through the prism of standardisation. Some issues Europe is now facing regarding defence could then be addressed thanks to this historical analysis. This paper, essentially based on the archives of the organisation, will be divided into four parts, in a logical sequence. The first part will focus on the Committee itself and its work. The second part will deal with the relations between Finbel and the other Euro-Atlantic defence structures of that time, such as NATO and the WEU. Then, the paper will particularly focus on the relations between Finbel and the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) of the Western European Union. Finally, the implication of Finbel Committee regarding the possibility of a nuclear war will be discussed.

2. Deloge Pascal and Burigana David, « Pourquoi la standardisation des armements a-t-elle échoué dans les années 1950? Eléments de réponse et pistes de réflexion autour d'un cas : le comité FINABEL » In *Entreprises et histoire* 2008/2 (n° 51), pages 103 to 116

3. In the interest of simplicity, this paper will consistently use the first acronym Finbel

The start of Finbel

On October 12th, 1953 in Brussels, after epistolary exchanges, the Chiefs of the Land Staff of France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg held a meeting for the first time. They decided to create a body in charge of the armaments standardisation, in a framework limited to the continental Western European countries belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty⁴. The initiative proposed by the French General Blanc was, first of all, a response to the French wish to emancipate Europe from American leadership. Previously, in May 1953, the French Chief of Staff had criticised the functioning of the Atlantic structures, especially the fact that France was kept away from several Committees within NATO such as ABC (America, Britain, Canada) Committee⁵. Furthermore, the French military circles deplored the withholding of information by the Anglo-Saxons in sensitive areas such as nuclear weapons, the privileged relations between the United States and the United Kingdom, and the divergence of interests between countries with too many geographic differences⁶.

One month later, on November 4th and 5th, a working group, composed of representatives and experts, set up a procedure and proposed to the Chiefs of Staff the problems that need to be addressed first. The Finbel Committee officially came into being on December

3rd, 1953. Gathered for the second time, the Chiefs of the Land Staff decided to “proceed to greater cooperation between their countries, to reach an advanced stage of standardisation and, eventually, of integrated production”⁷. They also agreed on an examination of “the possibilities to exchange scientific and technical information to reach this purpose” and to “organise material tests following standards collectively defined”. The goal was no longer to compete with NATO but, on the contrary, to “increase the continental countries’ help to the work of NATO bodies and facilitate this latter as far as possible”.

Consequently, “Finbel arose from the need to create, in terms of armaments standardisation, a natural and intermediate platform of coordination between each of the continental Western European countries members of NATO, and [the] NATO [organisation], to counter the shortcomings of the Military Agency for Standardization in London”⁸. During the meeting on 3 December, the last barriers to an “unconditional collaboration between the countries”⁹ came down, the representatives’ and experts’ propositions were approved, and the work programme was clarified. This day marked the genuine beginning of the “Finbel coordination committee” since the experts and technicians could then begin studying concrete problems. Thus, the work regarding material and military doctrine stan-

4. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 8 février 1956 »

5. Deloge Pascal and Burigana David, « Pourquoi la standardisation des armements a-t-elle échoué dans les années 1950 ? Éléments de réponse et pistes de réflexion autour d’un cas : le comité FINABEL » David François In *Entreprises et histoire* 2008/2 (n° 51), pages 103 to 116

6. Burigana David et Deloge Pascal in *Quelle(S) Europe(S)? / Which Europe(S)?* Rucker K/Warlouzet Peter Lang

7. Finbel archives – « Déclaration commune aux Chefs d’État-Major des Armées de Terre de Belgique, de France, d’Italie, du Luxembourg et des Pays-Bas, adoptée le 3 décembre 1953 » - translated by the author

8. CVCE archives – « La BITD: la conception et la production d’armements » <https://www.cvce.eu/collections/unit-content/-/unit/56d70f17-5054-49fc-bb9b-5d90735167d0/71aac87-63fd-4138-86d6-3b4110b/46fa>

9. Finbel archives – « Annexe A au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/96, « Compte-rendu d’activité “Finbel” depuis le 3 décembre 1953 », mars 1954 »

dardisation in the land sector had begun. Additionally, one should note that the agreement on weapons characteristics was to relax the

The functioning of Finbel

The structure of Finbel was very similar to one of the military land staff in terms of hierarchy. The decision-making body was a Committee of Chiefs of the Land Staff, supported by a Committee of deputies (suppléants). The working bodies were Committees of military experts, Committees of technicians as well as a Secretariat. This latter was the single permanent body of the organisation, located in Brussels and directed by the French Colonel Declercq. On February 8 1956, it was decided to replace him by another French official, while Belgium offered to continue hosting the Secretariat¹¹. Finally, on May 30, 1956, Lieutenant-Colonel Jeanpierre succeeded Colonel Declercq¹².

Every obstacle that could impede the achievement of the objectives previously mentioned was removed. The organisation was characterised by its lightness and flexibility, with no permanent body apart from the Secretariat. The Committee of deputies and the Committee of Chiefs of the Land Staff were hosted alternately by each country, which also held the presidency. Without a legal personality, Finbel cannot adopt any treaty; it is an informal organisation purely for military people.

The Committee was based on the competence of its members, “officers who have, at their

culture of military secrecy when it comes to dealings between the founding members”¹⁰.

level in their own country, the responsibility of the questions they deal with”, “their participation in Finbel is a guarantee of efficiency”¹³. Furthermore, Finbel avoided any damage to the sovereignty of its Member States: “there is no supranational authority, but a collegiate structure within which the adopted solutions arise from the goodwill of these members, who strive then to promote them in their own countries”. Despite the Cold War, the Member States of the Committee wanted to preserve this sovereignty from any institutionalisation in the area of defence. In this context, Finbel allowed its members to manage their military policy, including in terms of equipment. Indeed, some projects were aborted due to research or cooperation between some States and the US¹⁴.

Regarding the procedure, Finbel was first compared to the Military Agency for Standardization in London (MAS)¹⁵ even though in this organisation the experts in charge of the existing materials and the ones in charge of future materials were not the same¹⁶, unlike in Finbel. It was decided that Finbel would take the work of the MAS as a starting point, and then complete and develop the normalisation agreements¹⁷ of this body by insisting on their obligatory character and by pressing the standardisation terms¹⁸.

10. Deloge Pascal et Burigana, op.cit.

11. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major Finbel du 8 février 1956 »

12. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major Finbel du 30 mai 1956 »

13. Finbel archives – « Note sur l'organisation Finbel, le 8 février 1955 »

14. Deloge Pascal et Burigana, op.cit.

15. NATO body located in London (see the part on the relations between Finbel and the other Euro-Atlantic defence structures)

16. Archives Finbel – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major Finbel du 12 octobre 1953 »

17. The normalization agreements, also called Stangos for « Standardization agreement » are documents published by NATO, defining the procedures, terms and conditions adopted by the members of the Alliance regarding the military systems and equipment

18. Finbel archives – « Note sur l'organisation Finbel, le 8 février 1955 »



NATO standardization

The hundreds of agreements reached in Finbel, which had the status of recommendations, were not binding on the industries nor on the States, in the absence of a political will. However, when they did adopt a Finbel material, it was agreed that “the countries undertake if they need to build material of this category, to choose a model that has been defined and tried in common”. In addition to these agreements, some bilateral or trilateral cooperation agreements were established, as well as ad hoc agreements between the Member States. Finally, the meetings of the Chiefs of Staff also had the objective of creating between them a genuine “spirit of solidarity and confrontation of ideas”. In that regard, mutual visits by the delegations of Finbel nations

were scheduled to make them discover the production sites and experimentation centres¹⁹.

The Finbel Committee could be considered as a “minilateral” organisation in the military land forces of Western Europe. If we see, as proposed by John R. Ruggie, minilateralism as an “institutional form coordinating the relationships between at least three states, based on generalised principles of conduct”, we quickly understand the blockages encountered by the multilateral initiatives in the field of defence. Defence policy is defined by particular interests, such as national security, strategic priorities, states’ particular means and threats, and other nationally specific circumstances.²⁰. Obviously, multilateralism allows management of common problems, economies of scale and reciprocity among members. However, it also has cons, such as difficulties in reaching a consensus, extensive discussions, cost of the institutions. Hence, especially in the field of defence, we can find initiatives with a restricted number of members. Finbel gathered countries which are geographically close, and with similar geo-strategic priorities. Likewise, the strategic cultures were more convergent than in a broader framework. In addition to this, we can add the linguistic proximity as well as the logistic facilities.

Finbel’s activities

In March 1954, an activity report detailed the first work done by the Committee since its creation on 3 December 1953. One of the first projects studied was a medium-range anti-tank weapon, which was subject to meetings with military experts in Brussels on 15

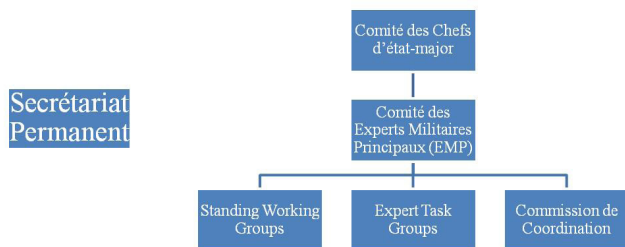
19. Finbel archives « - Lettre de l’État-Major italien au Secrétariat du Comité Finbel de Coordination, le 11 avril 1957 »
20. Pannier Alice, « Le « minilateralisme » : une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense » In Politique étrangère 2015/1 (Printemps), pages 37 to 48

December and 4 March, and with technicians in Paris on 11 January and 22 February²¹. The light machine gun was the most advanced Finbel project at the time since it was the first initiative for adopting a weapon. Simultaneously, devices capable of replacing the anti-aircraft defence tools were analysed, with meetings in December 1953 and March 1954 where different devices were envisaged. A mountain howitzer was also examined at the beginning of 1954. Whereas French and Italian views were originally incompatible, a solution was finally found, consisting of creating a model close to the Italian one but respecting some of the French criteria. Yet, armoured vehicles were studied in January and March 1954 by a Committee of experts which decided, given the diversity of viewpoints, to create two vehicles. Some experts also looked into the electronic material and interchangeable components for vehicles. Concerning logistical standardisation, the deputies decided on 10 February that the “legacy of the High Logistics Committee of the Western Union is collected and well exploited by NATO bodies (Shape, Production and Logistics Office)²², that the procedures are finalised and that the creation of a new body within Finbel framework is not mandatory”. At last, operational standardisation reached concrete results by

focusing only on transmissions.

With time, meetings became rarer. In the activity report of September 1954, it was stated that only seven committees had gathered together since the end of May. However, this slowdown can be explained by the fact that the trial phase had begun for some materials and that it is “more complicated to improvise experimentation than a conference”²³. Indeed, the delivery of the prototypes, the last adjustments and the material organisation of the trials impose lead times.

Nevertheless, the utility of Finbel Committee was recognised in a new activity report, one month later. Colonel Declercq explained that the “Committee had achieved more in one year than the MAS in three years”. Also, it gave greater independence to the Member States: “During the critical period preceding a conflict, when everyone will try to increase its armament when the United States gets equipped before thinking about military aid to friendly nations, it will be the guarantee, for Finbel countries, to have in hand all the elements of decisions, to be able to launch without lead times the production of a modern weapon already tested, to replenish the replacement components thanks to neighbouring countries”²⁴. After that, the



21. Finbel archives – « Annexe A au Procès-verbal n°FIN/SEC/96 « Compte-rendu d'activité Finbel depuis le 3 décembre 1953 » mars 54 »

22. During the Chiefs of Staff meeting of October 1953, General Blanc had noticed that a High Logistics Committee existed within the Western Union, which had proved its efficiency. He proposed the creation of a similar body inside Finbel. But the Belgian delegation had remarked that it would be better to first ask the results NATO obtained.

23. Finbel archives – « Annexe A au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/184 du __ septembre 1954 « Compte-rendu d'activité Finbel » »

24. Finbel archives – « Annexe A au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/_ du 6 octobre 1954 « Compte-rendu d'activité Finbel » »

proximity fuse, the transports coordination in Central Europe, the transport of the 5th French Armoured Division, as well as the replenishment in times of war were studied. The industrial property and patents would also be analysed.

Regarding the classification of these activities, the deputies decided on 10 February 1954, to use the word Finbel only in secret documents. Finbel was, at that time, “a code word affixed to documents dealing with armaments standardisation of the Land Forces at a European level”²⁵. However, things changed quickly. In a letter to the Chiefs of Staff of Finbel on 22 March 1955, Colonel Declercq explained that the “existence of Finbel is now known by all the allied countries, it is mentioned in some of the Western European Union documents and commented at the Palais de Chaillot. If the Finbel documents remain secret, there

is no disadvantage of revealing its existence. Even more, in the face of the attacks to which the organisation is subject, it could be good doing so to remind its vitality”²⁶. Colonel Declercq then proposed to use the word Finbel commonly. Documents labelled as “Finbel Secret” were not to be communicated to people who did not have access to Finbel documents, as well as for the “NATO” documents. The Chiefs of Staff approved the proposal. Furthermore, the classification was specified on 20 December 1956, during the deputies’ meeting, who decided that the original documents should be classified under the label “Finbel” but that extracts can be released for “exploitation, studies or materials machining process”²⁷. These extracts “no longer contain the Finbel stamp and fall into the national domain where they remain classified with the level of secrecy previously assigned by Finbel”.

PART 2 – THE RELATIONS OF FINBEL WITH THE EDC, WITH NATO AND ITS MILITARY AGENCY FOR STANDARDIZATION (MAS) IN LONDON

Standardisation within NATO and the MAS: Compatible with Finbel standardisation

As early as 1949, a “Military Production and Supply Board” was created within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The goal of the board was to identify the military needs of the Alliance members, to evaluate the supplies status and make recommendations to increase them and to promote the standardisation

of finalised components and products²⁸. In 1950, the board was replaced by a “Defence Production Office” in charge of intensifying production and facilitating the mutual use of allied industrial resources.

Starting from 1952, the NATO Secretariat would conceive coordinated production programmes in terms of military equipment. The standardisation went beyond production and also concerned operational, logistical and even administrative procedures. Within the

25. Finbel archives - « Annexe n°3 au Procès-verbal de la réunion des Représentants et Experts les 4 et 5 novembre 1954 »

26. Finbel archives - « Lettre du Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d'Etat-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, à propos du mot Finbel, 22 mars 1955 »

27. Finbel archives - « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 décembre 1956 »

28. CVCE archives - « La BITD: la conception et la production d'armements », op.cit

Alliance, a significant gap existed between the military needs and the production capabilities, which made it necessary to step up the production with new capacities. In this context, a special working group was established to study the production of aircraft and ammunition, where the progress was the most notable, but also radios and pieces of artillery. Models were created, and the production capabilities were multiplied by five in five years²⁹. During this period, the work of the technical experts led to around forty Standardisation Agreements (STANAG) – NATO documents defining the procedures, terms and conditions adopted by the Alliance members regarding military equipment and systems. Each country ratifies a version of the STANAG and implements it within its army. By defining the common operational and administrative procedures, the purpose is to facilitate interactions between the armies of the different nations³⁰.

At the Finbel Chiefs of Staff meeting on 8 February 1956, General Hasselman from the Netherlands reported that the NATO Council had authorised, in December, the creation of a new committee (NATO Weapon Progress Team), composed of American, British, Canadian and French delegates. The General did not know the new body and asked for further information. The French Colonel Leguay responded by telling that it was only a task group aiming at studying how to reinforce the NATO Military Agency for Standardization. Born in 1951 and divided into three distinct groups (air, sea, land), the MAS had the mission of facilitating the “normalisation of operations, procedures and materials” of

the Alliance members to strengthen interoperability and combined operational efficiency among allied forces. To comply with this objective, it analysed armaments standardisation, elaborated STANAGs and collaborated closely with national experts groups and other NATO bodies. The MAS thus aimed to resolve problems created by the plurality of weapons and armaments types used within NATO, such as difficulties in procurement and maintenance. However, countries tended to favour their material models, except when it came to mass-produced components³¹. Much more progress was made in terms of operational standardisation and practices, to remedy problems caused by differences between military structures and doctrines, which complicate teamwork.

If initially, Finbel was born out of a will to detach from Atlantic structures such as NATO, the cooperation between the two bodies soon became self-evident. Finbel was primarily a practical collaboration, allowing continental Western Europeans to resolve concrete problems in the case of an attack. The Committee was able to adopt common positions before the Atlantic agreements³². Finbel started exchanging with NATO as of December 1953, taking into account the standardisation activities of the Alliance. To avoid any risk of duplication with NATO committees, Finbel’s activities soon became subordinated those of the Alliance³³. In the same pragmatic approach, some of the Finbel projects were abandoned to avoid duplications with those of NATO. In December 1954, a NATO Permanent Group outlined the general principles of the Alliance standardisation and insisted on this complementarity: “NATO standardisation and

29. NATO archives, online « April 1952 - April 1957 »

<https://www.nato.int/archives/ismayrep/text.htm#8>

30. Finabel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Experts Militaires et de leurs techniciens les 4 et 5 mars 1954 »

31. Finabel archives « The first five years 1949-1954 - The Military Structure » <https://www.nato.int/archives/1st5years/chapters/7.htm>

32. Burigana David et Deloge Pascal in Quelle(S) Europe(S)? / Which Europe(S)?, op.cit

33. CVCE archives - « La BITD: la conception et la production d'armements », op.cit

standardisation by groups of countries within NATO are two complementary aspects. Trials towards the realisation of standardisation at the NATO level should not prevent standardisation by more restricted groups of NATO nations, standardisation by groups will often be possible where standardisation in the whole NATO will not be.”³⁴. Following the same idea of promotion of sub-regional forms of cooperation within NATO, the latter claimed that “the comparative tests by groups of countries on a regional basis are capable of facilitating the European production programme” and that “the countries organising demonstrations are urged to invite all the NATO members interested to send observers and to present materials”³⁵.

The relations of Finbel with NATO, the United States and the EDC

As early as the first Chiefs of Staff meeting on 12 October 1953, the Belgian General Piron and Italian General Pizzorno joined the Dutch Chief of Staff Hasselman in stating that it is necessary to define the relations between the Finbel Committee and NATO. According to Hasselman, it was crucial to “officially and explicitly announce the existence of the Finbel Committee to NATO bodies”³⁶. Concerning the coordination between the two organisations, the same experts and technicians represented their countries both in the MAS working groups in London and in the Finbel committees³⁷. However, a problem of timetable clashes between Finbel and NATO meetings quickly appeared, particularly for the technicians.

The deputies thus decided in July 1955 that “as soon as the date will be found for a technicians meeting, NATO will be informed, the date will not change except if NATO decides to do a meeting on the same day”³⁸. Regarding the activities of the two institutions, Finbel had the freedom of choice, but its activities had to comply with the directives decided by NATO bodies in charge of standardisation³⁹.



“Cérémonie de signature du traité de Washington (4 avril 1949)” - Archives CVC

The relations of Finbel with NATO, the United States and the EDC

The relationship between Finbel and the United States is defined by a fact, remarked

34. Finbel archives – « Annexe D au Procès-verbal Fin/SEC/515 de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major, les 23 et 24 septembre 1955 »

35. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 25 mai 1954 »

36. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 12 octobre 1953 »

37. Finbel archives – Note sur l’organisation Finbel, le 8 février 1955

38. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 juillet 1955 »

39. Rafflik-Grenouilleau Jenny et Frank Robert, La Quatrième République et l’Alliance atlantique: Influence et dépendance, 1945-1958 (Histoire) d

by German General Speidel during a meeting with Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq: “in practice, standardisation is mostly determined by supplies of arms from the United States”⁴⁰. Indeed, it was often American materials that were chosen for comparative trials. Concerning the medium-range anti-tank weapon, for instance, the Chiefs of Staff decided on 31 March 1954 to retain the American 106mm recoilless gun. To test it, they asked the Chief of Staff of the United States to “use his supreme authority to accelerate the delivery to Finbel countries of some copies of the 106mm recoilless material”⁴¹. Yet, Finbel kept looking for certain independence towards the United States. When a Dutch delegate proposed, during a meeting with representatives in December 1954, to request American financial assistance similar to the Maris one, or technical assistance from bodies like NATO, Colonel Declercq pointed out that such an attitude would include the United States within Finbel Committee, which is not compliant with the Committee’s guidelines⁴².

Concerning the European Defence Community (EDC), the necessity to define the relations between Finbel and this organisation was highlighted during the 12 October 1953 meeting. The Dutch General Hasselman suggested it would be good “to stick to the highest standards of confidentiality since the communication of NATO secret documents to the EDC is not allowed”. At the start of 1954, the Chief of Finbel Secretariat, Lieu-

tenant-Colonel Declercq, spoke with French General Larminat, who told him about the importance he attached to standardisation and the necessity to “maintain a liaison between Finbel Committee and the Interim Committee of the EDC in order not to move towards divergent orientations”⁴³. Declercq explained that the most efficient liaison would be one that can be unofficially established between officers from the different Finbel Committee countries and the officers of the same nationality who deal with standardisation issues within the EDC Interim Committee. The French General approved, and a first liaison with the Interim Committee was settled in Paris on 10 May 1954. Declercq argued that Finbel’s approach was suitable for anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft defence weapons, and insisted on the fact that Finbel, like the MAS, classified these weapons depending on their range. At the same time, the Interim Committee did it depending on their calibre. Colonel De la Grange, from the EDC, promised to review this question⁴⁴. Then, Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq reported to the General Larminat about Finbel’s orientation in this field and the model that would probably be adopted by Finbel countries to avoid the EDC Interim Committee’s study of the question⁴⁵ from taking too different a path⁴⁶. On 9 June 1954, the Chiefs of Staff signed a common letter⁴⁷ to the EDC Military Committee President, urging him to tell the EDC Armament Committee which arm had been chosen by Finbel⁴⁸. The attitude to

40. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, le 2 février 1954 »

41. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Comité Finbel de Coordination adressée au Chef d’État-major de l’Armée de Terre des États-Unis, le 31 mars 1954. »

42. Archives Finbel – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des représentants des Chefs d’État-Major, le 15 décembre 1954 »

43. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, le 2 février 1954 »

44. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, le 17 mai 1954 »

45. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 25 mai 1954 »

46. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Lieutenant-Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, le 1 juin 1954 »

47. Finbel archives – « Lettre des Chefs d’État-Major des Armées de Terre de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg et Pays-Bas adressée au Général d’Armée, Président du Comité Militaire de la Conférence pour l’Organisation d’une Communauté Européenne de Défense, le 9 juin 1954 »

48. Swiss 20mm Hispano-Suiza machine gun.

adopt regarding the STANAGs from NATO was quickly discussed by the Chiefs of Staff. During their meeting in March 1954, French Colonel Mirambeau explained that for the armoured vehicle, “it consists no longer, like for the anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft defence weapons, in approving the Stanag with some Finbel stricter requirements. Now we ask a modification of the Stanag in the sense of an easing because we consider the conditions it imposes as impracticable”⁴⁹.

ed that a difference between NATO definitions and Finbel definitions could not exist, except if the latter are stricter. The deputies then decided to give a “satisfaction-in-principle to the Atlantic Committees” and to accept their solution, as long as it contains the more stringent Finbel definition. This would lead to an “illusory standardisation within NATO framework and a real standardisation within Finbel framework”⁵⁰.

The need for regular communication with NATO quickly started to seem indispensable. In December 1954, Colonel Declercq enumerated the risks of a lack of liaison. He explained that divergences had appeared between proposals made by the Finbel delegates and the ones made by the delegates of the same nation inside NATO committees. For instance, concerning interchangeable vehicle parts, which witnessed two parallel efforts at standardisation, the Colonel requested Finbel’s proposals to be made known to NATO delegates⁵¹. During their



The communication with NATO and the MAS

Then, during a meeting of Finbel deputies in July 1955, the Dutch General Van Loo reminded that one of Finbel’s goals was to adopt a common viewpoint among the five countries regarding the issues dealt within NATO, and argued that this viewpoint thus needed to be defended. Moreover, he assert-

meeting in September 1955, the Chiefs of Staff highlighted that Finbel agreements were regional agreements similar to ABV agreements released to NATO countries. It was unanimously decided that Finbel agreements would, similarly, be released and that it would be possible for other NATO countries to join

49. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 31 mars 1954 »

50. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 juillet 1955 »

51. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, « Liaison entre les délégués Finbel et les délégués à l’OTAN » le 31 décembre 1954 »

these agreements⁵². In the wake of the meeting, the Chiefs of Staff authorised the Finbel Industrial Property Committee to share its works with the legal working group of the Armament Production Committee within NATO.

With the MAS in London, the Chief of Finbel Secretariat Declercq established contact with some representatives in June 1954, particularly ones of the Committee in charge of material classification and selection for the Land forces. These representatives then invited him to their meeting⁵³. Finbel started communicating its works to the MAS and, one year later, in July 1955, the deputies decided that the MAS would be “notified regarding what must be done with Finbel agreements released, either record them purely and simply or ask other countries if they want to subscribe to them”⁵⁴. For instance, the proposals of a Finbel technicians committee in charge of the study of interchangeable electronic components were given to the MAS in February 1957. These agreements could be released to NATO countries to get their potential adhesion⁵⁵. In August 1957, Declercq informed the President of the MAS Land Office that in the future, he would send all the Finbel agreements in 35 French copies⁵⁶. Conversely, Colonel Declercq explained to the MAS Principal Secretary in April 1956 that “a copy, in each language, of every Stanag of the Land force, would be welcome in Finbel Secretariat”⁵⁷. Moreover, in November 1956, Declercq’s successor, Colonel Jeanpierre, requested the

MAS Land Office President for the transcript of the expert meeting on protection material against radioactivity⁵⁸.

At the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff in October 1954, the question of re-examining the studies abandoned by the United States arose. It appeared that some of the STANAGs could be approved without any modification⁵⁹. In contrast, others were interesting for ongoing studies, like the ones on the armoured vehicle and the anti-tank weapon. The re-examination of abandoned STANAGs continued during the subsequent years, as we can see with the case of the medium-size tank or the armoured personnel carrier.

A few months after the creation of Finbel Committee, the project of a European Defence Community collapsed, and an alternative thus needed to be found. In the end, the process led to the creation of the Western European Union. As we will see, Finbel was affected by these changes and particularly by the creation, within the WEU, of a body able to make the Committee disappear.

Towards the disappearance of Finbel?

On 31 May 1955, soon after the establishment of a Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) by a decision of the WEU Council on May 7th, the Finbel Chiefs of Staff came together. In a declaration made through General Hasselman, the Netherlands suggested abolishing Finbel’s activities. The Netherlands first recalled the objectives of the WEU Standing Armaments Committee, which

52. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 23 et 24 septembre 1955 »

53. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, aux Chefs d’État-Major Généraux des Forces Terrestres de Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, le 16 juin 1954 »

54. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 juillet 1955 »

55. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Président du Bureau Terre du Bureau Militaire de Standardisation de Londres, « Etudes relatives aux matériels de protection contre les effets de l’arme atomique » le 8 février 1957 »

56. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre au Président du Bureau Terre du Bureau Militaire de Standardisation de Londres, « Diffusion des accords Finbel au BMS de l’OTAN », le 30 août 1957 »

57. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Declercq, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Secrétaire Principal du BMS, « Distribution des documents diffusés par le BMS », le 9 avril 1956 »

58. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Président du Bureau Terre du Bureau Militaire de Standardisation de Londres, « Etudes relatives aux matériels de protection contre les effets de l’arme atomique » le 14 novembre 1956 »

59. Armoured vehicles, special tanks, anti-gas material, classical artillery

aimed to achieve improvement and closer cooperation regarding armaments, and to “find a common solution to the concrete problems in front of which the governments are concerning the equipment procurement of the armed forces”⁶⁰. The declaration specified the functioning of the Committee that would have to make, on a case-by-case basis, bilateral or multilateral cooperation arrangements regarding development, standardisation, production or acquisition of armaments, with the help of sub-committees and working groups if necessary.

According to the Dutch Chief of Staff, there was no doubt that Finbel’s studies no longer had a reason to exist. The declaration stated that “a part of the task attributed to WEU sub-committees and working groups will be similar to the work of the different experts and technicians committees of Finbel, more particularly for the groups in charge of the development and standardisation. To avoid any duplication between the WEU and Finbel working groups, it seems necessary to delegate the works attributed to Finbel experts and technicians committees to the APC sub-committees and sub-groups”. The request to transfer works from Finbel to the WEU was repeated at the end of the Dutch declaration: “The work of the technicians and experts must be done in the framework of the WEU, the experts and technicians meetings in the framework of Finbel deleted, and the works pursued within the WEU”.

The declaration justified this transfer by the very essence of Finbel project, destined to be temporary: “Even though Finbel has been fruitful, the initial Finbel project was a transitional body, before the European Defence Community, it seems important to put these proposals into practice”. Nevertheless, the Dutch Chief of Staff, taking into account “the useful contact that has been established between the Finbel Chiefs of Staff until now”, said that he was eager to maintain this contact. Indeed, reminding that there was no position planned for a military body within the WEU, General Hasselman considered that “when it comes to subjects such as standardisation and development, the national representatives will need to be military experts. Since they will receive their directives from their national authority, it seems advisable to continue the unofficial discussions between the Chiefs of Staff. This contact could take the ancient form of Finbel”. Then, it would be interesting to enlarge this unofficial cooperation to Germany and the United Kingdom.

In brief, starting from 1955, Finbel suffered from competition with the creation of the Standing Armaments Committee within the WEU, and the Dutch delegation raised questions about Finbel’s continuation. Nevertheless, as we will see, Finbel would carry on its activities and define its relations with the WEU Committee to avoid the “duplication” feared by the Netherlands.

60. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 31 mai 1955 »

PART 3 – RELATIONS BETWEEN FINBEL AND THE STANDING ARMAMENTS COMMITTEE (SAC) OF THE WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

The conservation of Finbel, compatible with the WEU Standing Armaments Committee (SAC)

During the May 1955 meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, the Dutch proposal was far from reaching unanimous support. The French General Blanc pointed out that Finbel had been created because the “NATO bodies did not obtain results”. At the same time, the Italian General Liuzzi defended maintaining an organisation that “functions efficiently”. Furthermore, General Liuzzi held that the proposal did not consider how WEU might develop in the future, or “when the Standing Armaments Committee will be able to function efficiently, it’s thus useless to wait for uncertainty”⁶¹. The French and Italian Chiefs of Staff went further in their argumentation, with each one writing a declaration responding to the Dutch proposal, before their meeting in September 1955.

The French declaration first remarked the compatibility of Finbel with NATO and the WEU. Then, it highlighted that the WEU was a creation arising from treaties signed by Finbel countries but that the process of setting it up was not yet finished. Finbel “is not based on a similar basis” and “there can be no question of opposing it to the WEU”⁶². Finbel, the argument went on, had the virtue of existing to the entire satisfaction of Finbel countries, and it would be “certainly unwise to remove a body that has already proven its worth by another one which starts and that may not fully

replace it”. Indeed, it did not seem that in the framework of the WEU it had been envisaged to study standardisation problems as a whole, starting from the doctrinal basis, nor directing common trials, nor preparing nations’ choices between several materials. It was difficult to prejudge the WEU tasks and, as long as this organisation does not effectively take charge of these matters, France founds that Finbel would remain useful and perhaps become an essential structure, complementary to the WEU in the future.

Meanwhile, the Italian declaration first observed that the SAC of the WEU represented a “body of a political and economic nature”, that “cannot define the characteristics of the weapons and materials necessary for the armed forces”⁶³. However, this body was qualified for the “study of the coordinated and integrated weapons and materials already standardised, which respond to the military requirements”. By acting outside the political and economic areas, Finbel was qualified for standardisation, which belongs to a field different from production. Whereas standardisation refers to the military area and thereby represents a problem under the competence of the Chiefs of Staff, production deals with the economic and political sphere. Consequently, the Italian Chief of Staff recommended, in his declaration, to have Finbel in charge of the standardisation at a regional level (while the MAS would act in the framework of NATO), and the SAC in charge of coordinated and integrated production. Then, there would be the “opportunity,

61. Finabel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 31 mai 1955 »

62. Finabel archives – « Annexe au Procès-verbal Fin/SEC/515 de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major, les 23 et 24 septembre 1955 – Déclaration du Chef de l’État-Major de l’Armée Française »

63. Finabel archives – « Annexe au Procès-verbal Fin/SEC/515 de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major, les 23 et 24 septembre 1955 – Déclaration du Chef de l’État-Major de l’Armée Italienne »

much more than the convenience, to have Finbel reinforced as a structure and perfected in its attributions". Therefore, Finbel's competence concerning standardisation should be exclusive, but the organisation would have no competences concerning production.

During the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 23 and 24 September, both the French and the Italian declarations were studied. General Hasselman was perplexed concerning an entirely political and economic nature of the Standing Armaments Committee since standardisation was mentioned in its statutes⁶⁴. General Liuzzi responded that SAC's work would only consist in encouraging standardisation. The Luxembourgish Colonel Albrecht and Belgian Colonel Van Vreckom agreed that one should avoid dislocating Finbel by removing the expert and technicians' committees preparing the Chiefs of Staff meetings. The French solution, "maintaining Finbel for now and re-examining the problem of its coexistence with the WEU when this one will fully work", was unanimously adopted.

The distribution of competences between the two bodies

Reunited in Rome on 8 February 1956, the question of the coexistence of the SAC and Finbel was raised again. The Belgian Colonel Haerton suggested making a recommendation to the Ministers that the WEU be made responsible for standardisation, which would as a corollary enable the inclusion of the United Kingdom in the Finbel committee. However, the French General Zeller found that Finbel could not claim exclusive control

of standardisation⁶⁵. While the Dutch General Hasselman proposed, as a partition, that Finbel should be in charge of the definition of the military characteristics and the SAC of the choice of the prototypes and the production, the Italian General Liuzzi claimed that it would reduce Finbel's competences too much. The Luxembourgish Colonel Albrecht thought that Finbel should keep its role while informing the SAC and the MAS.

It was finally decided that Finbel would formulate the military characteristics, deal with the trials and recommend to the governments the prototypes to adopt. After this meeting, on 29 February, the French Chief of Staff wrote a memo about the relations between Finbel and the WEU Standing Armaments Committee. In this document, it was mentioned that the Chiefs of Staff "are surprised to see studies they already did or that they are doing now, repeated in the framework of the SAC, even though for some of the conclusions had already been adopted by the Chiefs of Staff". This led to a "duplication of the specialised technical staff, a significant increase in staff travel costs, and the greater consumption of rare and expensive ammunition"⁶⁶ as well as delay. The text thus called for the use, by the SAC, of the results of Finbel technical sub-committees as much as possible. It even called for better cooperation with these sub-committees to perform the experimentations they were asked to do. The memo was then studied in every Finbel country⁶⁷.

Once again reunited on 30 May 1956, the Chiefs of Staff agreed on a common declaration regarding relations between Finbel and the SAC of the WEU. The text reminded of the disadvantages of duplication of Finbel's

64. Finbel archives - « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major Finbel du 23 et 24 septembre 1955 »

65. Finbel archives - Annexe au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/605 du 8 février 1956 « Examen du mémorandum du Chef d'État-Major de l'Armée italienne »

66. Finbel archives - « Aide-mémoire de la délégation française sur « Les relations entre Finbel et le Comité Permanent des Armements de l'UEO », Secrétariat d'État aux Forces Armées Terre, État-Major de l'Armée, 29 février 1956 »

67. Finbel archives - « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 2 mars 1956 »

work by the WEU SAC asserted the legitimacy of the military authorities concerning the definition of materials and defined the different consecutive stages of procurement and the responsible body in each stage. The four stages were as follows:

1. definition of the use and the military characteristics of the materials (Chiefs of Staff)
2. creation of prototypes and execution of comparative trials (Chiefs of Staff and industries)
3. acceptance of prototypes (Chiefs of Staff)
4. production of the materials (WEU Standing Armaments Committee)⁶⁸.

Then, on 14 August 1956, the French Chief of Staff explained in a note that the field of the “prototypes studies and realisations made by the engineers, in conjunction with the military, is not under the exclusive competence of Finbel”. Even though Finbel was deeply interested in this field, he wrote that “there are only advantages to have the SAC acting in this domain”⁶⁹. On 21 September, in Cologne, the Chiefs of Staff unanimously approved that the Chief of the Finbel Secretariat takes part in the SAC meetings and that a representative coming from this Committee take part in the Finbel Chiefs of Staff meetings⁷⁰. Above all, their meeting led to the “Cologne Declaration”, very similar to the content of the May declaration about the relations with the SAC. Finally, a few days after the meeting, the German Federal Minister for Defence examined in further detail the distribution of compe-

tences between the SAC and Finbel. The SAC would be in charge of the “removal of the differences in the economic policy between the Member States, of the production coordination and will highlight the issues linked with standardisation and the rationalisation of the fabrication process, such as the fabrication of weapons in large series”⁷¹. On the contrary, Finbel’s activities would define by the military aspects, that is, tactical, technical and logistical viewpoints.

The relationship between the two bodies

Regarding the communication between Finbel and the Standing Armaments Committee, during the principal military experts meeting on 9 October 1956, the German delegation asked how to act when the national delegates of the SAC request information from Finbel to be distributed to their country⁷². It was highlighted that some particular data had a confidential character and that Finbel countries committed themselves to not giving them to others. The issue was included in the agenda of the next meeting of deputies. During the meeting on 20 December, everyone agreed that the relations between the two organisations represented a susceptible political problem⁷³. It was pointed out that the Council of the WEU had not discussed the organisation’s relations with Finbel yet. Thus, the WEU being a political body, the German delegation did not see how to proceed to create a contact. If the SAC officially gave military-specific studies to Finbel, it would be simpler. Yet, independently from the relations

68. Finbel archives – « Annexe C au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/726 du 30 mai 1956 « Déclaration sur les relations entre Finbel et le CPA de l’UEO »

69. Finbel archives - Note « sur la répartition des attributions respectives de Finbel et du Comité de Production des Armements » du Secrétariat d’État aux Forces Armées Terre, État-Major de l’Armée française, le 14 août 1956

70. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 21 septembre 1956 »

71. Finbel archives – « Annexe A au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/851 du 25 septembre 1956, « Commentaire du Ministère de la Défense Fédéral au sujet des rapports entre Finbel et le CPA de l’UEO »

72. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Experts Militaires Principaux le 9 octobre 1956 »

73. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 décembre 1956 »

between the two bodies, the exchange of information quickly began. The “anti-aircraft defence” Finbel working group had already told the WEU its interest for the results of the SAC studies in this field in 1956⁷⁴.

On 23 February 1957, the German General Laegeler wrote to the Chief of Finbel Secretariat Jeanpierre to indicate that the work of the two bodies regarding anti-aircraft weapons was almost identical⁷⁵. Therefore, it would be useful to share studies done by Finbel with the SAC working group. In a letter destined to the Finbel Secretariat on 2 April 1957, the Chief of the SAC Secretariat asked to receive, progressively, the “military specifications for which an agreement has been reached”, with the documents following the security rules “WEU-Secret” or “WEU-Very-Secret”, corresponding to their Finbel classification. The purpose was to “allow the Union Member governments to take a position on the priority order they give to the realisation of this or that project and on the financial and technical support they are eager to give”⁷⁶. Colonel Jeanpierre explained that the question would be examined at the end of April by the Chiefs of Staff⁷⁷. However, in a new letter on 30 April, he told the SAC that “the reunion scheduled at the end of April had been postponed to a later date and will probably take place only during next June”⁷⁸, meaning that an answer could not be given until two months later.

Gathered on 28 June 1957, the Chiefs of Staff

again discussed the question of the relation and communication with the Standing Armaments Committee. They approved the Italian General Liuzzi’s proposal on the importance of Finbel towards all the bodies specialised in the examination of a study or the definition of new material⁷⁹. They said that they were not in favour of Chiefs of Staff meetings within the SAC, but they supported liaisons between the Secretariats of the two organisations. Regarding the communication of Finbel’s activities, they decided that the Committee would only send to the SAC a list of the agreements already reached and sent to the MAS or act while waiting for UK proposals. The Committee also estimated that “the efficiency of the liaisons to establish between Finbel and the SAC will be subordinated to the reciprocity of the exchanges in several areas discussed with Great Britain”. A few weeks later, the Chief of the SAC Secretariat informed Finbel that he had sent to the WEU Members the list of the agreements Finbel reached or will reach soon, as agreed⁸⁰. Starting from 16 September, Colonel Jeanpierre also sent to the SAC the agreements reached within Finbel and already sent to the MAS in London, the agreements projects submitted to the approval of the Chief of Staff and the main agreements projects that would be soon established, to have the SAC more aware of the precise activities of Finbel Committee⁸¹.

The Finbel Committee overcame the disappearance of the EDC and the creation of the WEU and its SAC. It did so by redefining its

74. Finbel archives – « Note pour le Secrétariat du Comité Finbel de Coordination « Communication de renseignements détenus par Finbel au Comité Permanent des Armements (UEO) », Secrétariat d’Etat aux Forces Armées Terre, Etat-Major de l’Armée française, le 20 mars 1956 »

75. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Général Laegeler au Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, le 23 février 1957 »

76. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Secrétaire Général Adjoint de l’Union de l’Europe Occidentale, Chef du Secrétariat International du Comité Permanent des Armements au Comité Finbel de Coordination, le 2 avril 1957 »

77. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Secrétaire Général Adjoint de l’Union de l’Europe Occidentale, Chef du Secrétariat International du Comité Permanent des Armements, le 10 avril 1957 »

78. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Secrétaire Général Adjoint de l’Union de l’Europe Occidentale, Chef du Secrétariat International du Comité Permanent des Armements, « Communication du Comité Permanent des Armements des Accords Finbel sur les caractéristiques militaires des matériels et armements » le 30 avril 1957 »

79. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’Etat-Major, le 28 juin 1957 »

80. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Secrétaire Général Adjoint de l’Union de l’Europe Occidentale, Chef du Secrétariat International du Comité Permanent des Armements au Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, le 12 juillet 1957 »

81. Finbel archives – « Lettre du Colonel Jeanpierre, Chef du Secrétariat Finbel, au Secrétaire Général Adjoint de l’Union de l’Europe Occidentale, Chef du Secrétariat International du Comité Permanent des Armements, le 16 septembre 1957 »

mission and competences to avoid any duplication between its activities and those of the SAC. As we are going to see, the Committee

has always changed depending on the context and on the evolution of the European Defence architecture.

PART 4 – FINBEL’S ACTIVITIES IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF A HYPOTHETICAL NUCLEAR WAR IN THE NEAR FUTURE

The hypothesis of an atomic war considered by Finbel

The nuclear threat was taken into account in Finbel’s activities from the very beginning. For instance, the specification of requirements for the first vehicle studied at the start of 1954 noted the possibility of a full blockage of the machine to allow it to cross areas contaminated by radiation. During a meeting in October 1954, the Chiefs of Staff recognised the new circumstances brought by an atomic weapon: “at the time when a new era is opening from a tactical and strategic viewpoint when the modern atomic weapons, in particular, represent an increasing part of the firepower, the gain obtained by the transition from the 105 mm to the 110 mm calibre seems on the whole quite negligible”⁸². On 8 February 1955, in a “note on the organisation”, the first implications of nuclear weapons were tackled by experts: “the re-organisation and the re-equipment of the land forces to adapt them to the future conditions involve a considerable financial effort. Suppose the forces must be able to conduct some operations with the use of atomic weapons and other operations with conventional weapons. In that case, they will need an organisation with a dual purpose that will be highly costly. Suppose their organisation must be adapted above all for op-

erations using atomic weapons. In that case, this will be simplified by replacing conventional weapons”⁸³. Considering a conflict erupting in the near future, in the next 4–5 years, the experts explained that “the enemy’s atomic weapons will be very efficient against the logistical organisation, which will lead to reducing the supplies drastically”. The Finbel Chiefs of Staff took a keen interest in the progress made regarding the new weapons. They notably wrote a letter to the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), asking for observers to be able to assist the new units’ experimentations (modern war, atomic weapons) conducted by the American and British Armies on the Continent and in their respective countries”⁸⁴.

At the meeting on 31 May 1955, the Chiefs of Staff exchanged extensively about the possibility of a nuclear war. Italian General Liuzzi considered that it was crucial to bear in mind that “the enemy is perfectly able not to use the atomic bomb in some areas of the theatre of war. And the arrangements required to face an atomic attack are characterised by dispersion, an unfavourable situation if the enemy must be stopped in a certain position”⁸⁵. The

82. Finabel archives – « Annexe D du Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/196 du 6 octobre 1954 « Comité de Coordination Finbel » »

83. Finabel archives - Note sur l'organisation Finbel, le 8 février 1955

84. Finabel archives – « Lettre des Chefs d’État-Major des Armées de Terre Finbel au Général, Commandant Suprême des Forces Alliées en Europe, le 31 mai 1955 »

85. Finabel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 31 mai 1955 »

discussion of the Chiefs of Staff was based on a note of the Finbel tactical sub-committee, which assessed the power balance between USSR and Finbel countries, the objectives to reach and the SACEUR viewpoint. Regarding the forces, after the German rearmament, the land forces on the front line in Central Europe could be estimated at 30 divisions, of which one third to a half were mechanised or armoured. The length of the front to defend was 700 kilometres at the east from the Rhine, and 500 kilometres on the Rhine⁸⁶. On the other side, the enemy possessed 70 divisions, a great majority of which were mechanised or armoured. The note argued that the enemy “will certainly have the initiative and the surprise, thus a considerable numerical superiority, the air-land allied forces will consequently need to gain the necessary challenge so that the air forces can operate with their full power”.

The mission of the land forces on the front line was, according to the experts who wrote the note, to “limit the successes of the enemy by resisting or counterattacking to prevent it from capturing vital areas in the first days, to wear the enemy land forces through atomic interventions”. To reach this goal, SACEUR prescribed the implementation of “forces alongside the obstacles lines, as close to the Iron Curtain as the field and the force allows”, to use “mobile intervention forces to support the counterattacks done with the atomic weapons” and to attack “the Soviet concentrations with atomic projectiles”.

The Chiefs of Staff approved the mission of the considered units, consisting in bearing the first shock of the enemy air-land forces on the front line and earning the necessary time, within a context of total atomic war.

According to the Chiefs of Staff, adjusting to a nuclear war and surface operations was the best way to compensate numerical inferiority, even if this meant sacrificing some armaments for the benefit of indispensable elements. They rejected the idea of a permanent and uninterrupted defence line, too vulnerable to atomic projectiles. If the infantry had to be staffed appropriately, to achieve its surveillance, reconnaissance and counter-infiltration mission, it would also have to be mechanised to possess high tactical mobility, and slightly armoured to protect it from the firepower of conventional weapons and the effects of atomic weapons.

Reunited on 23 and 24 September 1955, the Chiefs of Staff examined the question of the atomic organisations, in charge of analysing the question of a potential nuclear confrontation. Agreeing on the idea that with the Cold War, “no country in the world will be able to abandon an existing military organisation, partly or fully, in the short term (5 to 10 years)”, they considered that the existing organisations would have to adapt, taking into account the “general influences” of the atomic weapon and will have to formulate “general principles” for the use of units if nuclear weapons were used. Indeed, as decisive as it was, the atomic weapon was already classified in the category “conventional means of confrontation”. In the first instance, within the Finbel committee, the logistical representatives were in charge of studying the implications of the atomic war on the logistics. During a meeting on 23 April 1956, they concluded that it was necessary, in the case of a nuclear conflict, to spread the bodies of the service and disperse the supplies, to give them the highest flexibility, to increase the number of shelters, to

86. *Ibid.*



Public domain image of an underwater nuclear weapons detonation test during the Cold War.
 Forbes website

The necessity of a Committee dedicated to the study of the atomic weapon

establish logistic personnel specialised in an atomic war, and to provide for the formation of polyvalent advanced logistical centres”⁸⁷. However, for several reasons, the existing committees like one of the logistical representatives soon proved insufficient for dealing with studies about nuclear war. During the 21 September 1956 meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) proposed to create a tactical and organisational sub-committee dedicated to the study of such conflict⁸⁸. Taking into account the “development of modern means of combat” and the monitoring of the evolution resulting in every domain, the “several questions asked by the committees during their studies on military characteristics” or the necessity, for political reasons, to “bring to light the significance and the competence of Finbel about the WEU”, the FRG highlighted that the atomic power was dominant at this time but that the data about it was impoverished, hence the need

for a committee in charge of these questions. The proposal was unanimously approved. The Committee of the deputies was thus in charge of giving guidelines regarding the creation, the mission and the working method of the tactical and organisational Committee. The final purpose of the tactical studies was to reach, in the shortest timeline possible, the standardisation of “those of the materials and armaments for which the Finbel nations estimate they can study and produce themselves or find”, and, to this end, to “study the tactical and organisational framework within which they have to integrate”⁸⁹.

The working method first consisted in keeping abreast of the directives given by the NATO command, and gathering and keeping up-to-date studies from the organisation linked with the evolution of the forms of war. Then, the conclusions of these studies would be adapted to the theatres of war that particularly interest

87. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Représentants Logistiques, le 23 avril 1956 »

88. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d’État-Major Finbel du 21 septembre 1956 »

89. Finbel archives – « Directives données par le Comité des Suppléants concernant la mise sur pied, la mission et la méthode de travail du Comité tactique et d’organisation, 28 septembre 1956 »

Finbel, namely Central Europe and Northern Italy, in the perspective of conflict in the short term (5 to 10 years). Finally, the Committee would identify the best way to organise the different kinds of divisions during coverage, defence and counterattack operations. Once the tactical and organisational Committee reaches a viewpoint on a question, the approval of all the Chiefs of Staff would be needed to continue the study.

The deputies asked the Committee of the military experts to establish this new Committee. Consequently, during their meeting on 9 October 1956, the military experts exchanged about the composition and the mission of the tactical and organisational Committee⁹⁰. The experts agreed on the idea that when the possible conflict would occur (within 5 to 10 years), both the East and the West would possess “tactical nuclear means in large quantity” and “plenty of high-range launch facilities will be at the disposal of the land forces”⁹¹. The experts also refined the working method proposed by the deputies. The work would start with the exchange of views aiming at defining the form the tactical operations in Central Europe and Northern Italy might take, based on the technical data on armaments already known. However, since the field conditions and the capabilities available in the Central European and Northern Italian were different, the research would focus on “the continuation of the studies in a parallel way”.

After that, during the 20 December 1956 meeting, relying on a working paper prepared by the President of the military experts’ Committee, the deputies again addressed the question of a potential nuclear conflict. The first recognised that both organisation and armaments must be adapted to the “future

war”, whose determining factor would be “the nuclear device”⁹². They assessed that nuclear weapons were characterised by its power and the speed of its effects, and that land forces would have to be adapted accordingly. The enemy – the USSR –, had the “initiative of the surprise”, possessed “troops on a war footing” in more significant numbers than the ones of Finbel countries. In addition to that, the enemy’s big units were “mostly armoured or mechanised. They are heavily equipped regarding firepower and watercourse crossing”. The enemy also possessed “airborne troops and helicopters that allow doing air landing in tactical liaison with the land forces” as well as “important aviation support” and “tactical nuclear devices in abundance”. Furthermore, it was considered that the enemy “applied a very aggressive tactical doctrine, initially based on plenty of mechanised troops progressing on a large front and looking to penetrate the enemy’s resistors, hiding them, knocking them off through overflow and pushing them incessantly in the depth of the military structure”. Finally, against large troops, the enemy “tries to adopt what we call a two-envelope military strategy and destroy the defence forces”.

Yet, the deputies acknowledged that the forces of Finbel countries, “while being in a lower number, can face the enemy’s forces long enough”, “that they are organised in divisions with a combat strength similar to the current divisions and that a great part of them will be armoured or mechanised”. The deputies also agreed that, at the time of the conflict, Finbel countries would have “atomic means in abundance”, that “the divisions will be equipped with these means”, that “the air situation

90. Finbel archives – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Experts Militaires Principaux le 9 octobre 1956 »

91. Archives Finbel – « Annexe F au Procès-verbal FIN/SEC/940 du 9 octobre 1956, « Proposition du Comité des Experts Militaires Principaux concernant la composition et la mission du Comité Tactique et d’Organisation » »

92. Archives Finbel – « Procès-verbal de la réunion des Suppléants, le 20 décembre 1956 »

will be sufficiently positive to allow the implementation of mobile forces at the decisive moments” and that “sufficient logistic means will have been prepared in time of peace to permit the support of the operations stage”.

At the beginning of 1957, the Chiefs of Staff once again studied the question of the atomic war. Lieutenant-Colonel Palm reminded that they first needed to agree on the principles of this type of war – for example, whether the basic unit is the company or the battalion. The French Colonel Leguay estimated that it was necessary to obtain unit structures able to participate both in an atomic war and a non-atomic war. In particular, he said the focus should be put on surface operations and revolutionary war in Central Europe and Northern Italy. In support of his thesis, he specified that during the recent manoeuvres in Czechoslovakia, the “general theme planned the invasion of France and Italy whose mobilisation would have been previously crippled by general strike and actions from the 5th column”. Colonel Leguay explained what revolutionary war meant: partisans actions, guerillas, 5th column actions, sabotage. The question of the atomic war should thus be placed in the broader context of the threat posed by the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

To conclude, the concrete aspect of the work done by Finbel Committee as well as the pragmatic approach it developed regarding its relations with the other Euro-Atlantic defence structures of that period can explain its conservation through time. Eager to collaborate with the EDC, NATO and its Military Agency for Standardization, the Committee appeared not only compatible but even

complementary with these structures. What threatened the existence of Finbel Committee was the birth of a Standing Armaments Committee within the Western European Union that was established as an alternative for the EDC. Even if the idea of abolishing Finbel's activities was initially advanced by the Dutch Chief of Staff to avoid any duplication with the SAC, Finbel survived in the end. The two organs exchanged their work, and the agreements reached within the organisations.

Because of the Cold War context within which Finbel came into being and evolved, some of the tasks undertaken by the Committee were directly linked with the principal component of this context: the possibility of a nuclear conflict. The creation, within the organisation, of a sub-committee in charge of analysing the tactical and organisational aspects of such a conflict, can be understood in that light.

The debate on whether to subordinate European defence to Atlantic structures remains relevant to this day. Consequently, it is instructive to observe how a purely European defence organisation succeeded in staying alive for decades, and how it adapted to always remain complementary to Atlantic structures. Building on this study of the Finbel Committee's early years, future work could examine how the organisation changed the nature of its activities to remain useful during the changing contexts of the Cold War, and after the Cold War.

Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

- Promoting interoperability and cooperation of armies, while seeking to bring together concepts, doctrines and procedures;
- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



Tel: +32 (0)2 441 79 38 – GSM: +32 (0)483 712 193
E-mail: info@finabel.org

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