Letter from Sir Arthur Michael Palliser to Lord Bridges on the future of WEU (Paris, 10 September 1971)

Caption: On 10 September 1971, Sir Arthur Michael Palliser, Minister at the British Embassy in Paris, sends a letter to Lord Thomas Bridges, head of the Western Organisations Department in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which he speculates on the future of Western European Union (WEU) once the United Kingdom joins the European Economic Community (EEC). He suggests that any examination of a new European defence organisation should include WEU as one of the alternatives.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Western Organisations Department: Registered Files (W and WD Series). WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION (WEU). The future of WEU: Western Organisations Department memorandum. 01/01/1971-31/12/1971, FCO 41/880 (Former Reference Dep: WDU 11/13 PART A).

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PARIS

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10 September 1971

Lord Bridges
Western Organizations Department
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

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Dear Tom.

THE FUTURE OF WEU

1. At the risk of wearying you, I should like to comment on Robin O'Neill's "supplementary comment" on this subject in his letter to you of 2 September, which considerably narrows the differences between us. I shall try to make this no longer than O'Neill's, even if I cannot match the admirable brevity of Pat Hancock's letter of 3 September!

2. I would not accept, at least at this stage, O'Neill's suggestion that, in our internal consideration of the problem of developing "European" defence (his paragraph 3), we should exclude WEU. We cannot, it is true, say that WEU would be more acceptable to the French than any other vehicle (though it would certainly be more acceptable than the Eurogroup), if only because we have not put this question to them. My own view, as I said in paragraph 9 of my letter to you of 25 August, is that the "third" choice (represented by building on the embryo political organization of the enlarged Community) may prove the best bet. But, as I tried to make clear, Ibelieve that we should not, for the moment, limit our options by ruling out WEU as one of the alternatives. (I have developed my view at greater length in a letter of 27 August to James Cable which he may have shown you.) Indeed, I would go so far as to say that any examination we make of the form of a new European defence organization should include WEU as one of the alternatives, and should consider whether it could be adapted both so as to provide some place for the "flank" countries and to make it more palatable to the Germans without at the same time alienating the French.

3. To revert now to Robin O'Neill's paragraph 2 and the controls on conventional armaments. I am glad to see that he is fairly sure that, in the fact of clear French opposition, the Germans would drop the idea of trying to get rid of the restrictions, for the next few years at least. If Bonn are now content with

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"the path of silent discretion", then we are too. But is it really the case that you would be prepared to "raise no difficulties" in every case where the Germans ask for some qualification of the present list; should we not need to judge each case on its merits? In any event, what I was trying to say in my last letter was that any attempt to "lobby on the German behalf", or "to press the Germans to take the initiative" (paragraph 8(ix) of O'Neill's original letter), would have inevitably embroiled us with the French. And, as you will have seen, we received confirmation of this feeling when Lord Gladwyn saw M Schumann last week. Schumann made clear to Gladwyn that he was particularly concerned to preserve those provisions of the treaty that impose restrictions on German arms production in certain conventional as well as in ABC fields, and the treaty provisions for inspection and enforcement of these controls. He thought there should certainly be no attempt to tamper with WEU for the next year or so. (Gladwyn emphasized that Schumann's remarks should be treated as wholly confidential, since his final report to the WEU Assembly will not record details of his separate conversations.)

Yours ever,

Alistair

A M Palliser

Copied to:

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