

Letter from Lord Gladwyn to Thomas Brimelow and Peter Carrington on the future of WEU (London, 5 October 1971)

Caption: On 5 October 1971, Lord Gladwyn Jebb, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords and spokesman on foreign affairs and defence, sends a letter to Sir Thomas Brimelow, Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and Lord Peter Carrington, Secretary of State for Defence, in which he summarises a discussion with French Defence Minister Michel Debré on Western European Union (WEU). The letter emphasises the different positions of the British and French authorities on the future of WEU and the issue of a concerted Western defensive effort. The Foreign Office seems to be of the view that in practice the various Member States will make very little move as regards WEU during the coming year.

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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THE LORD GLADWYN

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23, CHAPEL STREET,
LONDON,
S.W.1.

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W.D. 113 October 5, 1971.

Dear Tom,

I send you herewith a copy of a letter I have sent to Peter Carrington which is self-explanatory. I also send you a very tentative draft Recommendation which I am distributing to my colleagues on the General Affairs Committee of W.E.U.

If you have any comments on this I should be very glad to discuss them with you when I get back from America, say, on Friday afternoon, October 15th? The Report itself is a long document which investigates all possibilities, but makes the point that in practice it is probable that the various governments concerned will make very little move as regards W.E.U. during the coming year! This does not, however, prevent the Parliamentarians from urging them to do so.

Yours
Gladwyn

Sir Thomas Brimelow, KCMG,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
London, S.W. 1.

P.S. If you think Peter would
like to see me on Oct. 15 I am
of course at his disposal

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October 5, 1971.

[Mr. Dear Peter]

In accordance with your wish, I duly asked Debré what impression he had had of his visit to London and you will be pleased to hear that he said he had been delighted with his talks with you which had, he thought, gone very well.

Not so, I fear, with me, though I confined myself to asking him entirely innocent and not even very leading questions! For instance, when asked whether, given the possibility of some American withdrawal, he thought there was any chance of the Western European democracies now producing some sort of concerted defensive effort within the Atlantic Alliance, he embarked on a harangue, which got more and more excited, about how these countries (with, I understood, the exception of France) were all now reducing their expenditure on defence. But when I said that I did not think that we were doing so, nor the Germans either, he got quite upset and proceeded to denounce the Low Countries - more particularly Belgium. Anyway, no connected effort was any good: everything depended on how much money the individual countries were going to cough up.

On my observing that we might perhaps nevertheless evolve some common policy or attitude

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The Rt. Hon. Lord Carrington, KCMG, MC,
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in Western Europe provided we had the means of doing so, he said that he would be much opposed to even having a try. If some great crisis did actually present itself, well there would be an instant meeting of Heads of States and Governments and they would themselves decide on the right line: any preparatory work in this direction would be out of the question.

This brought us naturally on to Davignon, under which procedure, I ventured to say, it looked as if France was at any rate cooperating with her partners to some extent in the search of some common policy? At this point the Minister exploded. His eyes seemed to swivel in different directions, his gestures were really quite extraordinary, and I thought he might be going to bite the carpet. At one point he held the Davignon formula between his fingers and made as if to tear it up and fling it out of the window (after all, it is a Belgian formula!). Monsieur Mounias of the Western European Union Secretariat (and the Quai d'Orsay) and I did our best to calm him down. Finally he became quite affable, realizing, perhaps, that I was not personally responsible for Davignon, and we parted all smiles. Surely he is slightly cuckoo?

Quite a different talk with Lipkowski who was most reasonable about the possible future of W.E.U. and thought that we ought quite soon at least to exchange views on the subject. The French Government for their part had simply not as yet made up their mind, though they

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thought that the political exchanges of view between the Seven Ministers were now bound to become less important, and that the future of W.E.U. was henceforth more likely to lie in the field of defence. Since, however, the French were opposed to the Parliament of Europe occupying itself with the subject, the W.E.U. Assembly might have to continue a separate existence concentrating only on defence. I had the usual lecture on the absolute necessity of not changing one comma of the modified Treaty of Brussels (incidentally in one of his calmer moments Debré insisted on this too).

In Bonn they are, as you know, very keen on the "Eurogroup" in spite of the admitted difficulty that it does not include the French (incidentally both Debré and Lipkowski said the French would not join) and does include the Greeks and Turks, all of which rather detracts from its credibility as an adequate vehicle for the defence of Western Europe. But they were very sensible about W.E.U.; showed no signs (as suspected by the French) of wanting to revise the Treaty; and were quite critical of Davignon as not going as far or as rapidly as required. Helmut Schmidt was loud in your praises. You were, he thought, an outstanding statesman. His one desire - which he particularly asked me to ^{convey} ~~carry~~ to you - was that you should stay on for another year as Chairman of the Euro-group. If, indeed, you can be equally popular with such different characters as Debré and Schmidt you are, in fact, an outstanding statesman, or possibly

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an outstanding diplomat.

I am sending a copy of this letter
to Thomas Brimelow.

Yours ever
(s) Gladwyn