

Letter from Arthur Michael Palliser to John Percival Waterfield on the question of a French return to WEU (Paris, 25 March 1970)

Caption: On 25 March 1970, Arthur Michael Palliser, a Minister at the British Embassy in Paris, sends a letter to John Percival Waterfield, Head of Western Organisations Department at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which he gives details about a conversation he had with Philippe Cuvillier, the Assistant Private Secretary of French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann, on Western European Union (WEU) and a formula that would enable France to return to the organisation.

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). Attitude of France to WEU. 01/01/1970-31/12/1970, FCO 41/720 (Former Reference Dep: WDU 5/2 PART A).

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Dear John,

W.E.U.

As you will have seen from the Ambassador's telegram No. 303 of 25 March, he had a brief exchange yesterday with M. Schumann about W.E.U. I should perhaps supplement this by reporting that Cuvillier, M. Schumann's Assistant Private Secretary told me on the evening of 23 March that he and Davignon had worked together on 20 March on a revised text of a formula to enable French return to W.E.U. He hoped this would prove satisfactory. (He gave no details: but the formula was presumably the one referred to in Brussels telegram No. 147).

2. Cuvillier said that while it was important to find a satisfactory formula for French return, the French were also concerned that there should be no misunderstanding, in the event of their return, about the need for agreement over the agenda for future Ministerial Meetings. They had noted that both in the Permanent Representatives' and in the Ministerial Council there had been discussion of a wide range of topics during the period of France's absence. In principle (provided it was agreed that topics relating to E.E.C. enlargement should not be discussed, which was the purpose of the formula) France did not exclude a priori any potential subject for discussion. But equally it must be open to Permanent Representatives to consult their Governments before agreeing that any particular topics should be discussed. When I asked him for examples of such topics, Cuvillier referred to the recent Mirage deal with Libya. It would, he said, have been highly embarrassing if France had been attending W.E.U. meetings and if an attempt had been made to discuss this subject in W.E.U. Another example was that of the difficult and delicate discussions on the Middle East which were taking place at present in the Four Power forum in New York. It was not clear that progress in these discussions would be an appropriate subject for consideration in W.E.U.

3. I said that, speaking personally, I hoped that any French return to W.E.U. would not be characterised by an apparently much more restrictive and negative approach to the topics for discussion than that of France's other partners. An unfortunate psychological impression would be created if the French appeared to be returning only in order to apply the brake. Cuvillier professed fully to take this point and repeated that there was no French desire in principle to inhibit discussions in W.E.U.: but equally it would be difficult for the French Government (and surely for other Governments too) if their partners took the line that any particular subject must be discussed despite reservations about it that might be held by one or other member of W.E.U.

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J.P. Waterfield, Esq.,
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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

BA
C.E.P.
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4. I should add that the Belgian Ambassador tells me that Cuvillier took exactly the same line with him during a talk on this subject last week.

Tommy,

Michael

(A.M. Falliser)

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