

Letter from Sir Arthur Michael Palliser to Lord Bridges on the future of WEU (Paris, 25 August 1971)

Caption: On 25 August 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 outlines the debate within the British Government over the role that should be given to Western European Union (WEU) once the United Kingdom joins the European Economic Community (EEC). Sir Arthur Michael Palliser believes that the new European defence should be built on the fledgling political organisation of the enlarged Community. But because of a potential conflict with the French, who see WEU as vital to maintaining the aspects of the Brussels Treaty that deal with control over Western Germany rearmament, he suggests that it would be unwise to try to replace WEU for the time being.

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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BRITISH EMBASSY

PARIS

1. Copy to: **29**
Sir T. Brimelow
Mr Wiggan
Mr James
Mr Coady
Mr Statham
2. Mr French Mr Cable
Please discuss.

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25 August 1971

Lord Bridges
Western Organizations Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Also Department B 3/9

RECEIVED IN
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Dear Tom

FUTURE OF WEU

(26)

1. In your letter of 11 August (not to all), you asked whether I had anything to add to the preliminary reactions to your letter of 2 July to Christopher Audland in Bonn, given in Roger du Boulay's letter of 22 July. We have discussed this within the Embassy since my return and I can perhaps most easily give you our further comments by reference to Robin O'Neill's interesting and stimulating letter of 4 August. O'Neill has naturally put the case as seen from Bonn. It will not surprise you (or him) that some of our comments should represent the mirror-image of his.

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2. Before commenting on the substance, however, may I endorse, in respect of the French, the plea which Dick Faber made in his letter of 13 July (not to all) for a confidential exchange of views with the Dutch? The problem of "the velocity of gossip" mentioned in your reply to Faber need surely not inhibit such a discussion, for which there is no real substitute - certainly the speculation on which we have largely to base this letter is not! - as a means of finding out what the French really think about this problem, to the extent that they have started to do so. In fact, it would not surprise me to find that they have already given thought to it and in some respects they could be ahead of us. Tom Brimelow will recall that he had a brief and quite informal exchange of views about this with Beaumarchais (over lunch during their talks in Paris as long ago as last November), when to the best of my recollection they agreed that after enlargement some rationalisation between the respective functions of the Ten and of WEU would be required, at least as far as political consultation was concerned. I accordingly hope that the subject can figure near the top of the agenda at their next meeting (provisionally arranged for October in London). Meanwhile, the news that the WEU Assembly's General Affairs Committee is itself preparing a report on WEU's future, with Lord Gladwyn as rapporteur, is another reason, surely, for starting to exchange views in some depth with our partners sooner rather than later - though of course without commitment - on what policy we might eventually decide to adopt. If Gladwyn (with whom I imagine you will be in touch) is to talk

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to Schumann (and other WEU Foreign Ministers) should not we discuss things with the Quai too?

3. To come now to the substance, may I first say where I think the views of the French are likely to resemble those of the Germans, as described by Bonn, and indeed of the rest of us? In the first place, they will expect, almost by definition, that the new-style political consultation à dix should replace the present exchanges on this subject in WEU. The French have been far from happy with the way political consultation has so far developed within the Community (the fate of the Six's report on the Middle East is an instance of this); but I am sure they would accept the general proposition that the future of "European" political consultation lies through whatever arrangements are made by the Ten rather than through WEU. And some of them, at least, hope that we may prove a helpful (to France) influence in these discussions à Dix. In the second place, I should expect them to agree that, once enlargement has taken place and parliamentarians from the candidate countries have taken their places in the European Parliament, then the functions of the WEU Assembly will be largely redundant. It remains to be seen whether they will have considered in any detail how these functions might be redistributed as between, say, the European Parliament or the Council of Europe Assembly; but it will not have escaped them that, since the delegates to the WEU Assembly are also appointed to the Council of Europe, the disappearance of the former will not deprive the parliamentarians concerned of all prospect of foreign travel and activity!

4. For the rest, however, we see material for a potential clash of views between the French and the Germans in almost every other aspect of the Revised Brussels Treaty and the arrangements accompanying it which Robin O'Neill examines. The underlying reason for this is all too familiar: that the French attach continuing importance to the Treaty, essentially for its arms control provisions, as a way of asserting moral ascendancy over the Germans and of reminding them tacitly that past history is not forgotten. This French attitude is based partly on cold political calculation, but partly too on the continuing fear and mistrust of the Germans which remains widespread among ordinary people in France and which, after so many years, is still strong in the mental make-up not only of many politicians (with Debré pre-eminent among them), but of their senior military men and officials too. It is true that, as O'Neill implies on page 9 of his letter, the rigidity of the French attitude has been qualified from time to time in respect of the controls on conventional weapons, as in the present proposal involving Exocet which the French have commercial reasons for supporting. But I would still expect them to feel that anything more than the odd minor and ad hoc amendment of the conventional controls could endanger the whole "package" of controls including those on ABC weapons.

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5. Accordingly, I would expect the French to wish to retain at least those parts of the Revised Treaty which provide the "re-armament" restrictions on the Germans. Certainly any attempt to do away with these obligations of the Germans would be likely to encounter strong French opposition. If this judgment is correct, and given this "package" approach of the French to the general question of controls, I question whether it would be wise to "continue to encourage the Germans to think in terms of sweeping away some or all of the production limits on conventional weapons", as is recommended in the last paragraph on page 8 of O'Neill's letter. Unless there are over-riding reasons of military security for doing this, it could well embroil us with the French (and them with the Germans) to no good purpose. If we are right in this assessment of French views and if O'Neill is right in thinking that the Germans "would not agree to the renewal of these controls in any successor organization to WEU" (first paragraph on page 8 of his letter), the conclusion seems fairly inescapable that we must settle, if we can, for retaining the present controls in their present form.

6. On a related point, one of the attractions for the French in the present Treaty and the arrangements made under it is clearly that these are demonstrably separate from NATO - where it is the French who are the "black sheep". We must therefore expect them to resist any suggestion (page 5 of O'Neill's letter) for the "residual functions" of the WEU permanent representatives in London to be transferred to the permanent representatives to NATO, once the political work had come to an end. There is a further subsidiary point. While the French, as we all know, have no particular affection for WEU as an instrument of political consultation and acknowledge that that least-noticed of all the Brussels Treaty's organs, the Standing Armaments Committee, has virtually no positive achievement to its name (and is already partly dependent on NATO), it nevertheless sits in Paris and is at present run by a Frenchman (M Roux), for whose recent proposals the French may feel a certain amount of protective sympathy. All in all, therefore, if there were to be any suggestion in 1973 or later of moving the Permanent Council from London, the logical choice for the French would probably be Paris, since this is already the seat of two bodies which the Council would henceforth be largely limited to supervising.

7. In suggesting that we should be in no hurry to change the present military arrangements under the Revised Treaty, I am thinking too of the key problem of the future which O'Neill calls "the Europeanisation of defence within NATO" and which is discussed in his paragraph 7(vi). Let me say straight away that I accept without reservation the concept implicit in this phrase, that for the foreseeable future it will be meaningless to envisage

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an effective defence of Europe without the Americans. I therefore of course agree that we should not abandon the Eurogroup, if only because this is the device we have evolved to try and show the Americans that the European members of NATO are serious in accepting the need for them to bear a larger share of the burden of European defence. The Eurogroup has already had some success in this and its activities have helped the US administration counter congressional pressure for the immediate withdrawal of some American troops. It has thus already become an integral part of the US/European defence relationship, on which our security is going to depend for the foreseeable future. Clearly, we should weaken this at our peril.

8. But while the Eurogroup may suit us well at present, it will always appear too much a part of NATO to appeal to the French. And it may look very much less suitable should the time come - as it may, sooner than we think! - when we have to get down in earnest to creating, in the face of substantial American troop withdrawals, a truly "European" defence organisation which can act as well as talk, and which might even be obliged one day to aspire to the ability to deter attack without the reassurance of a related American commitment. In those (happily still hypothetical) circumstances, we should find that, just as "Europe" cannot be made without France (as we all had to acknowledge even in the days of the veto), so neither can "European defence". It therefore surely behoves us to give thought to the sort of European defence organisation which the French would be prepared to join, and to try if we possibly can, discreetly to develop it pari passu with the Eurogroup. I like Robin O'Neill's phrase for it - "an effort parallel to NATO, but formally separated from it": but, if we want the French in it, this effort can not be equated with the Eurogroup, or any such attempt at a "European wing of NATO" - precisely because they would not be "formally separated" from NATO.

9. At this point in time it strikes me as unrewarding to try to be too precise about the ideal forum we want - and in any case this question is not germane to the present correspondence. My personal view, however, is that the best bet may lie in building on the embryo political organisation of the enlarged Community. This will presumably begin to acquire its own institutions after Enlargement, or even before, and it might be a natural progression for these to start discussing some aspects of defence and eventually establish related arrangements to cover this field (with which such doubtful military allies as the Irish might or might not choose to associate themselves). Alternatively (if less probably) it could still prove that the military provisions of the Revised Brussels Treaty could provide a spring-board for this development. What we can say, I think, with greater certainty is that it would be unwise at this stage to rule out one of



the alternatives by deliberately attempting to alter the provisions of a defence treaty which includes European members only and which enshrines the important commitments of mutual military aids and force levels to which O'Neill refers in his paragraph 7(iv) and (vii).

10. My advice would be, therefore, that for the time being we should not try to replace the Revised Brussels Treaty in its existing military aspects. We should in principle plan to stick to this policy at least until the enlarged Community has begun to shake down, ie mid-1973, when we should review the position. (If such a review seems feasible sooner than that, of course, so much the better.) It should by then be clearer - which at the moment it is not - whether, given in any case that the Eurogroup is likely to be ruled out because of its unacceptability to France, the further development of "European" defence might more suitably be based on the Revised Brussels Treaty itself or on some new arrangement. My personal hunch - but it is no more than that - is that we shall need to plump for the latter. But there is no need to commit ourselves at the moment, provided we do not take any (in my view) wrong decisions such as to try and "tidy up" the Brussels Treaty in all its aspects as soon as we have joined the Community. Nor, of course, should such a holding exercise at this time inhibit us in the least from pursuing our studies on the form a new European Defence Organisation might take. Whatever the future of the Brussels Treaty, we shall need some coherent European framework for European defence. ~~And~~ that is not the subject of this letter.

A M Palliser
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