

# Letter from William Allan Cunningham Mathieson to Léon Pignon on the Strasbourg Plan (17 February 1955)

**Caption:** On 17 February 1955, William Allan Cunningham Mathieson, a British diplomat in the Colonial Office, sends a letter to Léon Pignon, Political Affairs Director in the Ministry for Overseas France, in which he outlines the concerns in the Colonial Office over Recommendation 61 of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on the so-called “Strasbourg Plan” for the integration of colonial development with European economic unity. British objections concern both economic reasons and also the political impact of the Strasbourg Plan. Recommendation 61 concerning the Special Report of the OEEC on the Strasbourg Plan sets out the principle that ‘the policy of European integration entails, as a corollary, cooperation in the interests of their common prosperity, between metropolitan powers, the overseas countries which have constitutional links with them and the other member countries of the Council of Europe’.

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COLONIAL OFFICE  
The Church House  
Great Smith Street  
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CONFIDENTIAL

17th February, 1955

Dear M. Pignon ,

We in the Colonial Office have felt some concern regarding the trend of events in the Council of Europe in connection with the so-called "Strasbourg Plan" for the closer integration of colonial development with European economic unity. Although on economic grounds alone we are not enthusiastic about these developments, it is their political implications which worry us most. Our immediate preoccupation is Recommendation 61 of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe which recommends :

a) that the Committee of Ministers adopt the principle of co-operation between the Metropolitan powers, the overseas countries and the other member countries of the Council of Europe ;

b) that the powers with overseas responsibilities examine together the fields in which they would be ready to accept the participation of other European countries ;

c) that a conference be called, under the joint auspices of the Council of Europe and O.E.E.C., between the member States and the overseas territories.

Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom have accepted (a) of this Recommendation but remain firmly opposed to the acceptance of (b) and (c). The latest stage reached in the consideration of this Recommendation is that the Committee of Ministers have referred it back to the Ministers Deputies for further considerations. If we are to succeed in rejecting (b) and (c) of the Recommendation at the forthcoming meeting of the Deputies, we feel that it is essential for us to have support from the other administering powers and, in particular, from France. For this purpose we are approaching the French Embassy in London but I am writing to you now to make sure that you are aware that we do not regard this only as an eco-

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conomic question affecting relations with the Council of Europe, but also as an important issue in the fields of our political relations with our African territories. I should, therefore, like to explain our objections which I hope are shared by you and your colleague, the Director of Economic Affairs.

2. As regards Recommendation 61 (b), we feel that the examination proposed would merely involve the duplication of work already undertaken in O.E.E.C. It has been hard enough there to resist pressures to regard the overseas territories of member states as a sort of public domain to be exploited in concert by the countries of Europe. In the course of this work our own position has already been made clear. It is not the policy of the United Kingdom to oppose unreasonable obstacles to the participation of other nations in the development of the colonial territories in appropriate ways, and we are always ready to consider sympathetically any specific proposals that may be put forward if we judge that these are in the interests of the colonial territories themselves. Furthermore, we have given concrete evidence of our readiness to co-operate internationally in many spheres outside the O.E.E.C., notably through the C.C.T.A. However, acceptance of Recommendation 61 (b) would in our view imply some modification to existing policies for the purpose of according preferential treatment to European countries, a subject which would be open to serious criticism and misinterpretation not only in the United Nations but also in the territories themselves. It would be too reminiscent of the mercantilist theories of exploitation by the metropolitan powers. The fact that it was carried out on a Pan-European basis would not in any way enhance its moral stature. Nor are we prepared to participate in such an examination with our tongue in our cheek. The eventual and inevitable disillusionment of our colleagues, who would then feel that they had been deceived, would be more damaging than a firm rejection now of the idea of such examination.

3. Recommendation 61 (c) which calls for a conference between Member states and the overseas territories is even more unacceptable. In our view such a conference would, for the reasons I have already referred to, serve no useful purpose and lead to general disappointment. It would also give rise to serious political difficulties in that it would confuse the relationship between Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, Colonial Governments and the other European states and, at this stage in the constitutional development of our territories, might give rise to embarrassing misunderstandings.

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4. I hope, therefore, that we can count on your support in obtaining firm instructions to the French Deputy to join with us in opposing the adoption of Recommendations 61 (b) and (c). As I have said our official approach on this question is being made through the French Embassy in London ; but, in accordance with the wish expressed by our two Ministers when they met in London last autumn that close contact should be maintained between our Ministries, I felt that it might be useful to let you have some background to the origin of a request which may be somewhat over-simplified by the time it reaches the Rue Oudinot through the usual channels.

Yours sincerely ,

signé: W.A.C. MATHIESON