

SECRET

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11

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC AT CHEQUERS AT 11.45 A.M.
ON FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER 1973

Present: Prime Minister
Sir M. Palliser

M. Pompidou
M. Andronikof

Summit meetings

The Prime Minister suggested that this should be the first item for discussion. As the President knew the Prime Minister had warmly welcomed his initiative in proposing such a meeting. He hoped they could discuss the idea as well as the problems that had led up to it, especially that of the situation in the Middle East.

President Pompidou said that he was glad to follow his host's guidance: and he agreed that this was a good subject with which to begin. It had seemed to him that in the political field their position was rather like being on a toboggan where, when one reached the bottom of the run, one had to give a sharp new impetus to the movement. Europe had recently been absent from the international stage in an almost humiliating way. It therefore seemed desirable for the Nine to face up to the situation and decide whether they were ready to make a united attempt to relaunch the movement towards political co-operation. This was the key to everything else, however important in material terms much of the rest might be. The lead had to be given at the political level if they were not to lose themselves in matters which, important as they might be to Britain, to France or to the others, represented essentially obstacles rather than the driving force towards European union.

SECRET

- 2 -

President Pompidou said that this was why his initial concept had been that the nine men who carried the chief responsibility within the member countries should meet with complete informality for a wholly frank and sincere discussion. The meeting should be really confidential, and nothing would be said outside (except possibly what they all agreed should be said). Their purpose would be to try to see whether they all shared a genuine desire to make progress. The notion that this first meeting should be the model for subsequent meetings and indeed that it should in effect be the first in a series had not been exactly what he had had in mind. He had seen this first meeting as an exceptional or "extraordinary" one at which the Heads of State or Government could decide how they wished to meet in future, possibly in more formal and organised meetings with more specific agendas. It was because he had had this concept of the meeting that he had considered - and still considered - that the participants should be confided to the Nine Heads of State or Government.

The President continued that there had of course been differing reactions from other Governments and in particular the trades union of Foreign Ministers had taken a grip on the situation. He had been told that Sir A. Douglas-Home had said that he would rather be in Scotland than in Copenhagen: and Herr Scheel had told them in Paris that he was obliged to have a minor operation which, by coincidence, might take place at that time. But other Governments had greater difficulties, especially in the case of coalitions. In Italy, for example, Signor Moro clearly did not regard his Prime Minister as better qualified than he: indeed - and President Pompidou chuckled hugely - he had a feeling that Signor Moro actually took the contrary view. Equally the Belgian

SECRET

SECRET

- 3 -

Foreign Minister spoke of his own Prime Minister in affectionate but decidedly superior terms. The Dutch claimed that their Constitution was at stake. In this situation he would be glad to know the Prime Minister's view. In addition certain Governments - and he believed the British Government as well - had expressed directly or indirectly the view that it would be difficult to exclude the Commission from the meeting, since they were likely to be discussing matters falling within the competence of the Community.

The President repeated that his initial concept had been of the family meeting, for example, as it used to in the past - though times were greatly changing - in order to give its blessing to the desire of the youngest daughter to marry her suitor: but not in order to discuss the marriage contract, the menu of the wedding breakfast or similar mundane details. Leaving on one side national feelings and susceptibilities, he would like to know whether the Prime Minister saw this meeting as essentially a working meeting designed to take decisions on a number of tactical problems and not just on matters of principle; or whether he shared M. Pompidou's concept of it as an extraordinary meeting of a distinctive character different from previous summits and thus not necessarily an exact model for future summits.

In conclusion, President Pompidou said that he saw two possible dangers. One was that the Heads of State or Government would leave the proposed summit meeting chanting "Europe, Europe" at the tops of their voices rather like a stage army in a musical comedy singing "Onward, Onward" without actually moving from the stage: and that, in short, the only outcome would be vagueness and ambiguity. The second danger was that the meeting would find itself expected to cope with matters that

SECRET

SECRET

- 4 -

fell within the responsibility of the Council of Ministers of the Community, of the Committee of Permanent Representatives or of the Commission and which did not in reality justify a meeting of Heads of State or Government.

The Prime Minister said that he fully shared the President's concept of this meeting. He had seen it as one simply of the nine Heads of State or Government, with appropriate interpretation. If the Head of Government who was in the chair saw fit to have someone who could, for example, make a note of their agreed conclusions, well and good. But he saw it essentially as a family gathering. He believed that if they could achieve this there was much to be gained from it. He had seen the Federal German Chancellor the previous weekend after Herr Brandt had attended the meeting of the Socialist International in London. He believed that Herr Brandt shared this view. Herr Brandt had said that Herr Scheel would be quite happy to go and play golf while they were meeting. Perhaps he preferred the golf course to an operation.

On the other hand the Prime Minister had been told that, when their senior officials had met, they had seen grave difficulties about this kind of meeting. But officials had a vested interest in a more fully attended meeting since they would hope thereby to become better informed of what had taken place at it. As he understood the matter, apart from the problems of domestic politics and of personalities in various countries to which the President had referred, the only country where substantial difficulty arose seemed to be the Netherlands because of their constitutional problem. Surely it should be possible to find some way around this. Herr Brandt had suggested that the Danish Government might invite the Ministers for Foreign Affairs to meet in Copenhagen at the same time as the

SECRET

SECRET

- 5 -

Heads of State or Government and to join the latter towards the end of their meeting for a brief joint session at which the Foreign Ministers could report on their discussions.

The Prime Minister said that he had been greatly impressed by the effective and constructive role that President Ortoli was playing in the Commission. He believed that M. Ortoli enjoyed President Pompidou's confidence: he certainly enjoyed that of the Prime Minister. In this situation and since it seemed certain that at some stage in their meeting the Heads of State or Government would wish to look at outstanding problems within the Community, and perhaps to review progress in the first year since enlargement and on the programme of last year's summit meeting, it would be helpful to the maintenance of good relations between the Heads of Government and President Ortoli for him to be invited to take part in their meeting. After all the President of the Commission had been present at the summit meeting the previous year and it would surely be desirable for M. Ortoli to be present this time to represent the Commission if not as a matter of right at least as a matter of courtesy and at the invitation of Heads of Government. Might not this be a satisfactory way of resolving the matter?

On the agenda for the summit meeting he had understood from President Pompidou's first suggestions that he thought it would be useful for the Heads of Government to consider how they should in future handle crisis situations, for example if something similar to the Middle Eastern war confronted them in the future. M. Pompidou had also suggested that they should consider how best to handle in the future the question of political co-operation in general. But he thought it would be unfortunate if the Copenhagen meeting appeared to be solely concerned with procedural matters. He thought that the President had also

SECRET

SECRET

- 6 -

suggested that they would need to consider the Middle Eastern problem, take stock of the way it was developing and discuss the attitude the Community should adopt towards it. But would this not lead naturally into a consideration of such matters as oil supplies and energy and perhaps other specific questions, linked with that question of political co-operation, which the Heads of Government could usefully discuss and then ask Foreign Ministers to tackle? He wished to be certain that he had correctly understood President Pompidou's approach to the discussions in the Copenhagen meeting.

President Pompidou said that before reverting to the question of attendance by Ministers for Foreign Affairs and by the President of the Commission he would try to reply to the Prime Minister's last question. He had had two different things in mind. First, there was the fact that they were meeting at all and that this should be seen as a readiness to demonstrate a common will. Clearly the Middle East had been the occasion for this meeting and it would be absurd not to discuss it. But there would no doubt be other subjects for discussion as well and the meeting should not be seen as solely designed to discuss the Middle Eastern crisis and its consequences. This was undesirable for various reasons. In particular the European Governments should not seem to be reacting out of pettiness or irritation, and in a situation where they were little able to influence events. This was particularly the case since they could count on the Israelis - and perhaps indeed on Dr. Kissinger too - to make these points publicly from time to time. On the other hand when he had referred to "crisis situations" he had intended that the summit meeting should make clear - admittedly in procedural ways - the determination of the Nine to consult

SECRET

SECRET

- 7 -

appropriately (i.e. not necessarily at the highest level) in times of crisis, so as to demonstrate to others that they were not prepared in future to be simply overtaken by events. In reply to this, it might be said that all the necessary machinery was already in existence, including the Council of Ministers which could be called to a meeting at any time by its current President or indeed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

M. Pompidou said that he wanted to make it clear that his purpose was not the creation of a political secretariat. His idea was that the Nine should decide that in a crisis situation they should meet at once. The initiative for this might be taken by the current President or by any one of the other member Governments. The meeting could either be at the level of Foreign Ministers or at that of Heads of State or Government if this seemed necessary. Indeed, if the situation were less serious it could be at the level of political directors. But the purpose was to ensure that they should not simply stand by passively and disunited while a crisis situation developed: and then, once this had happened, should be obliged to meet no doubt in painful circumstances and simply to assess their respective reactions. In short, it was necessary that the nine countries should underline their resolve, if a crisis situation were developing, to consult and try to define a common position so as to ensure that Europe acted collectively before and not after the event.

On the question of attendance at the summit by Ministers of Foreign Affairs, M. Pompidou said that he believed that the Netherlands' attitude might well be a decisive difficulty. Speaking personally, he attached little credence to the constitutional arguments being advanced by the Netherlands Government. He believed that their real problem stemmed from

SECRET

SECRET

- 8 -

domestic political considerations. The Prime Minister would remember that at the Paris summit, despite the fact that the then Foreign Minister of the Netherlands was a man of particularly strong personality, it was the Netherlands Prime Minister who had done the talking - indeed he had talked for most of the time.

The Prime Minister interjected that he could not recall the Netherlands Foreign Minister speaking a single word at the meeting.

M. Pompidou continued that, contrary to the view generally taken of him by the Dutch, he was not in the least mulish in this matter. Clearly they had to seek some way around it. What the Prime Minister had proposed was a possibility. It seemed to him to have the disadvantage of possibly giving the impression that the Foreign Ministers had met to discuss matters of secondary importance and had then to be summoned into the presence of the Heads of State and Government to receive their marching orders. This might transform the summit into a sort of Court of Appeal against the Council of Ministers of the Community. This seemed to him bad from the point of view of the Community institutions and for the Council as such. But he was obliged to admit that, much as he had reflected on the matter, he could not at present think of a better way of dealing with it.

As regards attendance by the President of the Commission, M. Pompidou was happy to hear what the Prime Minister had said about M. Ortoli. He too thought that it would be a little difficult to exclude M. Ortoli from the summit completely. It would look too much like one further manoeuvre by the French against the Commission. Nevertheless two points struck him.

SECRET

- 9 -

First, he did not think that they should treat the Commission simply as a function of the personality of its President. Secondly, he would see serious objection to the notion that the Commission through its President was automatically associated with governmental meetings held within the framework of political co-operation: the Prime Minister knew the French Government's view in this matter. In this situation he thought that while they would not wish to have too precise an agenda for their meeting - if it were too precise that kind of meeting lost much of its value - they should nevertheless approach the agenda in a practical way. They could expect broadly to have three half days of meetings. They could perhaps agree to devote the first day to discussing matters that genuinely fell within the ambit of political co-operation. But on the second day they would almost inevitably have to examine some problems which, though linked with political co-operation, were also linked with Community business; for example, energy. Although he had not yet seen any programme for the Summit and he hoped in particular that purely social or ^{protocolaire} ~~practical~~ functions could be kept to an absolute minimum, he thought it reasonable to assume that on the Friday evening there would be some kind of formal dinner. The President of the Commission might be invited to that dinner. This would enable him to appear on a suitable formal and public occasion with the Heads of State or Government. On the second day he could also be associated with the summit discussions that would flow more or less from what they had said to each other the previous day, but that would ^{no doubt} affect Community competence and thus that of the Commission. In this way they could establish a satisfactory distinction between what was political co-operation proper and what was directly related to the Community. They could thus enable the President of the

SECRET

Commission and, through him, the Commission as a whole to see that he was not excluded when problems that fell within his competence were under discussion.

President Pompidou underlined however that this was still a wholly personal idea: he had not discussed it yet with anyone else and not even with M. Jobert (this was because he had not yet had an opportunity to do so). And in his reply to the Danish President he had deliberately taken a somewhat more negative and "theoretical" view. He thought it necessary to emphasise this because the Prime Minister knew as well as he ~~did~~ the reactions of their partners within the Community framework. The Prime Minister and he had to be very careful indeed not to give the others the feeling that the two of them had taken decisions and were simply handing them down to their partners.

The Prime Minister said that this was an interesting suggestion and he thought it could be a useful way of organising the summit meeting. On the President's first point, namely the handling of the crisis situation, he agreed that the Nine should meet. He thought it would be helpful to Governments if the Heads of State and Government could try to define clearly in which areas of policy they thought that useful work could be done so that an effort could be made to clarify the views of the Nine on them before a crisis situation developed. As an example of this, he took the present Middle Eastern crisis. From the outset the position of Britain and France had been very clear and clearly known to each other. The Foreign Secretary had discussed the matter with M. Jobert and vice versa, ^{each} ~~and both~~ knew ^{the case} ~~clearly~~ what ~~each~~ was doing and they had had very satisfactory prior consultation. This was a situation that had obtained for a long time. Indeed during the Four-Power discussions in New York, France and Britain had always worked closely together.

But he did not think that either of them had consulted as fully with other members of the Community nor had those others consulted with each other. During his visit to Bonn in May he had discussed these matters with Herr Brandt and talked about them to members of the Federal Government in a post-dinner meeting. He had warned them then that he saw the possibility of the Arabs and of Saudi-Arabia in particular using the oil weapon before very long against the United States. But this had been essentially an academic discussion and he doubted whether it had had much effect on the policy of the Federal Government. The Netherlands Government were in difficulties because they had consistently followed an anti-Arab policy and as a result the oil embargo had been used against them. If their situation deteriorated they would say that other members of the Community should help them over energy supplies. There was no Community energy policy as yet but the argument would be that there was a moral obligation on members of the Community to help each other in difficulties of this kind. But in logic, if there was to be a common policy in the economic field and support for each other therein, there should also be a common foreign policy approach and agreement that each would support the other in that as well. This situation now obtained since the adoption the previous week of the declaration by Nine Ministers of Foreign Affairs. But this had come too late to prevent the damage.

The Prime Minister said that, for the reasons M. Pompidou had given, he agreed that the Copenhagen summit should not be confined to the Middle East. The Community was now establishing with some success its position as a European entity in its relationship with the United States. It might be useful for the Heads of State and Government to consider a similar process

SECRET

- 12 -

of definition in respect to the Community's relationship with other countries or groups of countries in the world: and it might be best to choose those where a situation of crisis might most readily be expected to arise.

With regard to the position of the President of the Commission, another reason in the Prime Minister's mind why he should not be excluded from the Copenhagen meeting was that certain other Heads of Government who, for whatever reason, wished to have more than one participant per country present, might be readier to accept the situation if President Ortolí were invited as a courtesy: and they might also be readier to accept that the summit was not simply a meeting at which the smaller powers were being expected to accept the imposition of the views of the larger ones. This might not seem a very rational argument, but he believed that it should nevertheless be taken into account. If it was clear that the Commission was not just being pushed to one side, there was a better prospect of the representatives of the smaller countries feeling reassured about the protection of their own interests.

M. Pompidou said that when he had recently seen the Dutch Foreign Minister the latter had indeed referred to a "directorate of the three great powers". No-one could prevent the political or economic weight of a country being what it was. But he had told the Netherlands Foreign Minister that the tradition within the Community, and especially the rule of unanimity when a country's major interests were at stake, provided the necessary reassurance against any such fears of the three larger powers imposing their views on the others. The trouble was that the Dutch still thought that France was living in the age of Louis XIV and Spain in that of Philip II - they sometimes also seemed to think of England in terms of William of Orange.

He had repeated to Mr. van der Stoep a remark he had made to his predecessor, Mr. Schmelzer, that it would also be a mistake to think that Europe consisted of Benelux. The Prime Minister interjected "plus Ireland". The Irish continued to think in historical terms analogous to those ascribed by the President to the Dutch.

President Pompidou continued that it would be wrong to accept that any purely Community organisation must inevitably be run by Benelux because the French would not want it run by the British, who would not want it run by the Germans, who would not want it run by the French. This was an unrealistic concept. The Community must be genuinely communautaire, representing the nine member countries equally and not simply Benelux as a kind of lowest common denominator of European unity. It was not reasonable to think in terms of the three main powers dictating to the Community - and in that event anyway he did not know what became of Italy. In any event, if that ever seemed to be the situation the smaller powers would inevitably be tempted to try to divide the three and to set them at odds with each other. It was essential that there should be less suspicion and mistrust if the Community was to make progress. As an example of this he had in mind the declaration of the Nine on the Middle East. He could tell the Prime Minister in strict confidence (though Mr. Heath no doubt knew of this already) that the French Chargé d'Affaires in Tel Aviv had been told by someone in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the Israeli Government knew very well that it was the French and British Governments who had forced their partners to accept the declaration. When the Chargé replied that, on the contrary, the declaration was common to the Nine, he was told that the Israeli Government had been given a detailed account of the

SECRET

- 14 -

discussions within the Nine - and M. Pompidou said that he had no doubt this was true. But against that kind of background one had to admit that the notion of European unity towards the world outside was at present distinctly spurious. The Prime Minister said that, during the summit last year in Paris, President Pompidou had entertained the Heads of Government to lunch on their own on each of the two days of the conference. As he recalled, they had dealt the first day with financial matters and the second day with regional policy and related matters. They had thus been able to have a really frank conversation and to understand each other's point of view. This had been most valuable. It would be very helpful for the summit meeting in Copenhagen to be of the same nature. His experience was that so much was happening in the Community that it was exceptionally difficult for Heads of Government to form a judgement of each other's position. They could of course exchange messages but this tended to be an unduly formal procedure. If they could simply meet quite informally as they had at the Elysée and get a better perception of each other's views he believed that this would be conducive to eventual agreement: and it should certainly also serve the purpose to which the President had referred of reducing mutual suspicion and mistrust.

President Pompidou agreed. In dealing with the economic questions of the Community, whatever they might be, it was natural that each member Government stood out very firmly in defence of its own interests, a process which also led naturally to opposition between them, but in the end usually resulted in a compromise solution. What he had in mind was of a different nature. They needed to know whether it was possible progressively and even without complete agreement between them on such matters

SECRET

as sugar or secondary cereals, to advance towards really common attitudes in the broad political field. It seemed to him that, in this context, the spirit in which they approached their discussions was more important even than the subject matter itself. Of course economic questions influenced politics - they all had ample evidence of that. But the key question was whether the Nine recognised that the European continent did not at present play the part internationally that it could and that others were seeking either to use it as an instrument or simply to ignore it; whether they felt that in all fields, economically, politically, culturally, etc., they wished their continent to play a major role; and whether they were prepared to draw the necessary conclusions. If, in the light of such a discussion, it emerged that Britain and France, who had always had such a concept of their own role in the world, were in fact the only ones within the Nine who still felt this way; then, the situation would be serious indeed. It was a conclusion in this respect that he sought from the summit meeting. He did not see it as a meeting at which France or Britain or Germany would seek to impose their views on Benelux or their other partners, but as a one in which they would see whether it was possible really to reach agreement - but in that event they must stick by whatever they agreed to and not go away afterwards saying privately to third parties that they did not really mean what they had said to each other.

The meeting ended at 1.10 p.m.