



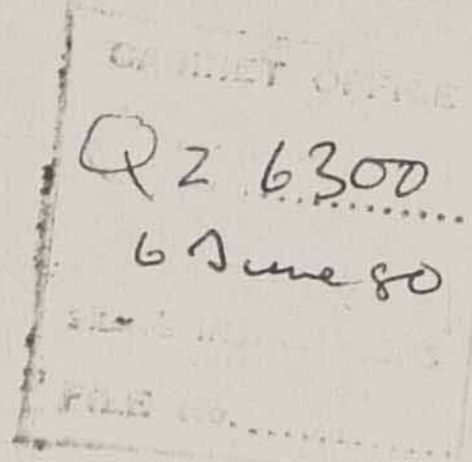
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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 June 1980

M D M Franklin Esq CMG  
CABINET OFFICE



*My dear Michael,*

EUROPEAN COUNCIL: MEETING IN VENICE

1. Tom Bridges and I have discussed your letter to me Qz 01604 of 5 June and the following represents our joint view.
2. We think it would be a very good thing if Heads of Government could use the occasion of the meeting in Venice next week to get back to the original concept of the European Council and re-establish the principle that it is valuable for them to meet at three times a year without necessarily taking operational decisions or issuing public statements. If this point is not made now, with the agenda unexpectedly liberated from what had been foreseen as the main item, I am not sure when it will be done. Tom's and my strong preference is therefore for advising the Prime Minister that she and her colleagues need not feel under any pressure to justify this meeting by concrete results. Although to say so may be disloyal, and the precedent is not a happy one, I must admit to some sympathy with the remark made by Mr Callaghan after the Four-Power Summit in Guadaloupe that 15 hours of discussion at that level were worth 15,000 Foreign Office telegrams.
3. There is of course the strong possibility of both a decision being taken and a public statement being issued next week on one particular subject in political cooperation, namely the Middle East. The line-up on this at the meeting in Rome which I attended on 4 June, and which unfortunately prevented me from being present at EQS that day, was not quite as suggested in para 2 of your letter, the UK being rather less confident than our partners of finding a way round the American objections. My hope is that one outcome of Venice will be a declaration on the Middle East, launching a program of diplomatic soundings and stating the main principles of our joint approach, with the UK and France taking the lead. Given the importance of the subject, this might be enough to satisfy those who do believe that the European Council must always produce concrete results.
4. On the main theme of your letter, I agree with a great deal of your paras 4-5, and having heard John Palmer talking on Radio 4 yesterday morning about what he described as the possibility of bringing foreign policy under the Treaty I had rather expected to find some of these ideas surfacing again. Afghanistan and Iran could no doubt have been handled better if it were not for the separation between Treaty business and PoCo, and the same may be true of the Euro-Arab Dialogue which I hope will be re-launched

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next week as part of the decision on the Middle East - although I think it is not correct to describe the Dialogue as the Community's. It would also help, as you say, if Foreign Ministers could more regularly combine meetings in PoCo with meetings of the Council: what has prevented this in the past has been less often the "sharp distinction" which you mention (a distinction which becomes more blurred with every month that goes by) than the practical difficulty of getting all Nine Foreign Ministers together, sometimes at short notice, to discuss even the most obviously urgent items.

5. There are two points on which Tom and I do not really share your views. The first is the institutional suggestions towards the end of para 5 of your letter. We doubt whether facilitating contact between COREPER and the Political Directors would be likely to lead to anything except yet more meetings. Your phrase about improving the Secretariat arrangements of PoCo merely underlines the fact that PoCo has no central Secretariat and that efforts to create one have not succeeded. And we see it as the job of the Foreign Ministers, rather than the Secretary General of the Council, to improve the working relationships between Treaty and non-Treaty organs, over both of which they preside.

6. Secondly, we wonder whether an intervention in Venice by the Prime Minister in the terms of your para 5 would promote the UK objectives suggested in your para 2. Might not the result just as well be a complaint from some of our partners that when the ink was scarcely dry on the agreement about the budget etc, Britain was already throwing another apple of discord into the Community's midst? This might give satisfaction to those who have a score to settle with the French, but I am not sure how well it would go down with other partners, even those who have long wanted to see some of the changes which you mention. The Belgians, for example, have more than once in recent years taken up the same problem without getting anywhere. The Prime Minister's intervention might thus achieve nothing except yet more headlines in the British press about disagreement between her and her fellow Heads of Government.

7. Our strong preference is therefore for advising the Prime Minister that the European Council should content itself with the agenda as it stands, take the suggested decisions on the Middle East and otherwise make the most of the unstructured discussion which is supposed to be an important part of these meetings. There is no reason at all why, as part of this discussion, the Heads of Government should not discuss improvements to the work of both PoCo and the Community, including ways of bringing these closer together. But we would advise approaching this point more gingerly than you suggest.

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8. As you may know, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has been doing some private advocacy with his colleagues in the Nine for ways of improving the conduct of business at Foreign Ministers' meetings in PoCo, and he wrote privately about this some weeks ago to M. Thorn. I hope shortly to send a follow-up letter to my Luxembourg colleagues about parallel improvements in the work of the Political Committee, where things have not been going well lately.

*Yours ever*

*Julian*

J L Bullard

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