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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

UNITED KINGDOM PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY:  
JULY - DECEMBER 1981

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

Colleagues will be aware that membership of the European Community has two distinct aspects: activities on Community subjects covered by the Treaty of Rome; and the voluntary coordination of foreign policy, known as Political Cooperation.

2. OD(E) have been invited to endorse a report by officials on the arrangements, problems and British objectives as regards the Community aspects likely to arise during our forthcoming Presidency (OD(E)(81)4). A copy of this report will be circulated separately for the information of the Committee.

3. As regards Political Cooperation, to which we attach importance because of the opportunity it offers to gain support for our view of international affairs both within and outside the Community, I have instructed my officials to review the problems and opportunities

offered by our Presidency. The main points which emerge from this review are:-

a. The Middle East, on present form, is likely to be the most active subject dealt with in Political Cooperation during our Presidency.

b. Opportunities for advancing UK and European foreign policy objectives in other fields may arise during our Presidency; we shall need to be ready to respond rapidly as such opportunities present themselves.

c. It may be possible to achieve progress in strengthening the machinery and effectiveness of Political Cooperation during our Presidency.

4. I invite my colleagues to take note of the attached paper.

C.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
23 February 1981

NOTE BY ECO OFFICIALS

THE UK PRESIDENCY JULY - DECEMBER 1981: POLITICAL COOPERATION

1. A paper has already been prepared for OD(E) reviewing preparations for the second UK Presidency of the Council of Ministers, setting out UK objectives during the period of our Presidency, and listing the main issues which we expect to have to handle during that period in the Community framework (OD(E)(81)4). The Presidency of the Ten member states in Political Cooperation will also make large demands on the time of Ministers and officials, but may provide more opportunities for achieving tangible results and for building up UK prestige in Europe and elsewhere. This paper describes some opportunities that could arise during our Presidency and suggests the broad considerations we should bear in mind in our conduct of Political Cooperation business during the Presidency.

2. In Political Cooperation, no less than in the Community, the Presidency's role is a limited one. No Presidency can expect to be a success unless it is seen by others to be impartial. The chair has the opportunity to state its national views but is not expected to press them. However, in Political Cooperation it is the Presidency which proposes meetings and suggests agendas for them and, provided it works within the limits of the consensus, it is possible for the Presidency to allocate priorities and give a lead in stimulating joint action. It may also be possible to encourage further the bringing together of Political Cooperation and Community business, for example by making it a regular practice for a period in each Foreign Affairs Council to be set aside for Political Cooperation discussion. At the same time the Presidency's prerogative as chairman and host can be used to help to establish the habit of business-like meetings.

3. We have deliberately arranged the informal weekend meeting of Foreign Ministers on 5-6 September as the first major European meeting following the summer holiday. We intend to use this meeting to review priorities and handling of the European agenda in

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the remaining 4 months of the year. (We shall also aim to restore to the informal weekend meeting its intimacy and off the record character.)

4. The Presidency's role as spokesman for the Ten presents both opportunities and pitfalls. We will be called upon to speak for the Ten on many occasions during our Presidency, in particular at the United Nations, where the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will address the General Assembly on behalf of the Ten, and where UK officials will subsequently make numerous interventions on behalf of the Ten. While these occasions can bring us additional weight and prestige, it will be difficult for us to make specifically UK points or to distinguish between the UK and the European positions.

5. Our position as the spokesman for Europe may also make us attractive interlocutors for other countries: visits which are nominally bilateral may thus acquire an additional significance. For the most important talks it will be desirable to seek the views of European colleagues in advance. At this stage few firm arrangements for inward and outward visits have been made, and it will be best to maintain as large a margin of flexibility as the crowded Presidency programme will permit, so that we can respond to opportunities as they arise during the Presidency.

6. The broad objectives of our Presidency in Political Cooperation will be the same as those set out in the companion paper on the Community aspects of our Presidency. In addition we shall want to use our Presidency of the member states in Political Cooperation to animate and intensify Political Cooperation, within the limits of the consensus; to secure some strengthening of its machinery; and to improve the arrangements for keeping friendly third countries in touch with the Ten, or at least to make better use of the existing possibilities.

7. Subjects on which we may expect to concentrate during our Presidency are discussed in the following paragraphs.

## THE MIDDLE EAST

8. The process which began with the Venice Declaration is likely to be the main subject of international interest in our Presidency, which is widely seen as well-timed so far as the Middle East question is concerned. The new US Administration should have completed its review of Middle East policy; there is a good chance of a different and slightly more flexible Israeli Government in July, and the Arabs, who look to Britain for a lead, are increasingly interested in real progress. The Dutch are currently engaged in testing out on the parties ideas elaborated by the Nine last year, but little is expected from their Presidency.

9. It is difficult to predict how the situation will look by the second half of the year. At worst, we could face a difficult task in maintaining European credibility in the face of a lack of results, Arab splits and intransigence and opposition from at least Israel and possibly also increasingly the United States. The new US Administration has not yet decided its position but could well come to regard European activity as unhelpful. At best, the current fluid situation could evolve to a point where a European initiative led by us could result in real progress towards a lasting settlement. In this latter case we should not spare our efforts to take advantage of an historic opportunity; there are risks, but the potential rewards are considerable. In any event an active and visible role for the UK as President is almost certain.

10. There is also the prospect of a Ministerial meeting in the framework of the Euro/Arab Dialogue either in the Dutch or early in the UK Presidency. This will also offer an opportunity for Europe to exert some leverage on the Arab side, although (lacking Egypt, Israel and the US) it cannot provide a forum for progress towards settlement of the dispute as a whole. The European side has already agreed in principle to a ministerial meeting, but neither the venue nor the format has been discussed. The Arab side are likely to keep the PLO in the chair until such a meeting takes place, and their objective will be to have the largest and most spectacular gathering possible. They will want it to take place in London. Our current objective is to avoid committing ourselves



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ourselves to a meeting in London and meanwhile to persuade the Europeans to agree to a negotiating position which will make a meeting such as the Arabs want conditional on the Arabs, including the PLO, going at least some way towards acceptance of the principles of the Venice Declaration.

11. Other areas, where, depending on events, we may expect Political Cooperation to be active during the UK Presidency, include:

- a. Poland. The Foreign Ministers of the Ten will have to meet quickly and take appropriate decisions if the Soviet Union intervenes, or if there is serious internal repression by force. Action will have to be coordinated carefully between the Political Cooperation framework and the Community, and with NATO.
- b. Iran, and Iran/Iraq. If public indignation in the United States continues to prevent a better relationship with Iran, it may fall to Europe to try to improve Iranian ties with the West. If the British detainees were still in custody, however, this would present a serious obstacle to constructive action.
- c. Afghanistan. We will want to keep the subject of Afghanistan in the public view and encourage Europe to give strong moral and material support to Pakistan. One possibility that should be kept in mind is a meeting with the Pakistan Foreign Minister just before the UN General Assembly.
- d. Lebanon. Irrespective of whether progress can be made on the broader Arab/Israel conflict it may be possible for Europe to play a role in stabilising the situation in South Lebanon and enabling UNIFIL to fulfil its mandate more effectively. Progress may be easier if there is a change of Government in Israel following the elections there.

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- e. Africa. Our aim will probably be to try and focus attention on problems other than those of South Africa and Namibia, eg Libyan activities, Soviet involvement, and possible developments in East Africa.
- f. Turkey. Pressure for an early return to democracy is likely to increase. The UK will work to maintain a consensus among the Ten in favour of allowing the Turkish authorities time to settle their problems.
- g. Caribbean. We may seek to generate wider European interest in the Caribbean and encourage support for democratic and sensible regimes such as Jamaica.

#### STRENGTHENING POLITICAL COOPERATION

12. The UK has already put forward proposals for improving the machinery of Political Cooperation, in the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's speech in Hamburg on 17 November 1980 and in discussions among the Nine during the Luxembourg Presidency. The interest in this subject generated by the UK has since been reflected in speeches by the German and Italian Foreign Ministers. A report by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament on the same theme is expected shortly. As a result of persistent British persuasion, now receiving strong support from the FRG, work by officials has begun on collecting ideas for improving Political Cooperation. These will be considered by Foreign Ministers of the Ten in due course (probably not before the French Presidential election). The discussions could well come to the point of decision during the UK Presidency. We shall want to secure some clear advance so far as machinery is concerned. We could also envisage a "London Report" clarifying and elaborating the rules of Political Cooperation set out in the Luxembourg and Copenhagen Reports of 1970 and 1973 respectively, embodying any improvements in machinery on which agreement might have been reached and strengthening the commitment of the Ten to consultation and coordination of policy.

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RELATIONS WITH US AND OTHER NON-EUROPEAN PARTNERS

13. The Presidency is responsible for keeping the United States informed about activity in Political Cooperation. We shall follow the example of our predecessors in the Presidency in giving the United States the fullest briefings possible while saying as little as possible about this in open meetings. Officials will hold discussions in advance with Americans with a view to agreeing procedures which will provide as much information as possible to the United States while ensuring that our exchanges with them remain completely confidential. Other friendly countries will also turn to us for information about developments in Political Cooperation. We should do our best within the existing discretion of the Presidency to brief them fully, paying particular attention to Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Japan and the old Commonwealth countries. At the same time we shall seek more lasting improvements as part of our efforts to strengthen Political Cooperation; eg a permanent staff would provide a point of contact for all third parties.

14. The Presidency may also provide an opportunity to improve contacts with other regional organisations. The ASEAN countries have already hinted that they would welcome a meeting at ministerial level in London during our Presidency. (There is a commitment on the part of the Community to have a meeting within one and a half to two years of the last ministerial level meeting, which took place in Kuala Lumpur in Spring 1980.) There could be advantages both for the UK and for Europe/ASEAN relations if we were to take this up. We shall also consider in due course the possibility of developing contacts with, in particular, the Islamic Conference. Other organisations with which contact might prove useful include the Andean Pact, the OAU, the OAS and the Non-Aligned Movement. The immediate practical value of these contacts may vary, but there could be long term benefits for Europe's reputation (and that of the UK) in the third world.