



## CABINET OFFICE

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From: Sir Patrick Nairne KCB, MC

CONFIDENTIAL

29 July 1975

*Dear Michael,*

### THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

There has been the usual backwash of comment about the recent European Council. I have been brooding a little myself about its character and organisation - now that the dust has more or less settled.

2. I think that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State enjoyed the meeting and, in general, judged it to be the kind of 'Summit' they wanted to attend. The Prime Minister's thinking is reflected in the Foreign Policy section of the Foreign Affairs item of Cabinet last Thursday 24 July (CC(75) 37th Conclusions). Helmut Schmidt also seemed pleased, judging from the account of his Press briefing in Bonn telegram no. 603. And the Le Monde editorial of 19 July was almost certainly in line with Giscard's thinking when it remarked that the Council had, for the first time, taken the form of the exchange of views between statesmen that President Pompidou and his successor had envisaged from the first. It has been the smaller Member States who have expressed feelings of disenchantment - though I suspect that this has been due to the usual Benelux wish that the Community should be a different political animal from what it is.

3. Are there any lessons for the future? Here are one or two thoughts which occur to me:-

#### a. Character of European Council Meetings

It will be surprising if the Community does not, sooner or later, need to hold another more formal 'Summit' for major decisions. But, at the present stage of the Community's political evolution, the kind of European Council we have just had makes good sense as a pattern for the regular thrice-yearly meetings. The Heads of Governments, with their Foreign Ministers beside them, are not yet a form of Supreme Council for the Community; and they are not going to be so for at least a great many years. I would judge Giscard's approach (as reported in paragraph 2 of Paris telegram no. 722 of 11 July) to be right:-

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UK Representative to the EEC  
Brussels

"He sees it as giving direction to the Community, ordering priorities, taking stock, laying down the lines of advance, and seeking common positions on the major world problems. He does not want issues to be referred to it by the rest of the Community machinery or prepared by officials: the channel of impetus and influence leads down from it, not up to it."

I do not think that it will always work out like that; but this approach at least minimises the risk of the European Council (I note that the Danes now accept the title) becoming a court of appeal or getting bogged down in the details of draft texts.

b. Whitehall Preparations

X | The approach at a. suggests perhaps that we might be rather more relaxed in our preparations in Whitehall for European Council meetings. But I do not think so. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State are on their own; the former, for his part, may not always be up in the hunt on important elements of the agenda issues until he has been briefed. The Prime Minister said that he was generally satisfied with the briefs for 16/17 July, and he certainly made use of the speaking notes. But it will be important to ensure that the briefs continue to be crisp and clearly presented. I also think that it would be useful to repeat in future the rather carefully 'stage-managed' oral briefing which the Prime Minister had at No 10 before he went to Brussels.

c. Brussels Preparations

I suggest that it may also be true that special care should be taken with the preparations by COREPER and the Political Directors. The Heads of Governments were short of time in Brussels, as they were in Dublin and Paris. Should the aim be to avoid, if possible, more than four main agenda items, including the standing dish of a review of the Community economic scene? Digest papers will be useful, if only as a focus for a common approach to briefing in all the Community capitals; but they really must be short. There is a valuable spin-off from this work - the increased momentum applied to the resolution of current issues, even though the European Council itself avoids specific decisions or conclusions.

4. Finally, a wider point. Perhaps we should now be fairly relaxed in our approach to the results of these European Council meetings? As I see it, there were no gainers or losers from the meeting in Brussels: even the dramatising Press were unable to suggest otherwise. Looked at from the bureaucratic angle, the French did not get all that they might have liked; nor did the Germans; and nor did we. But that was principally due to the political style of the meeting - which, as it appears, suits the Bigger Four, if not the smaller Member States. I am sure that we should continue to define our objectives in advance; I think that we should also (taking a leaf from Schmidt's book) be ready to air new ideas of our own: but at the same time - if we accept paragraph 3.a. above - we should not look to the European Council

for more than it can give. It is relevant that the Prime Minister decided in the end to make no Parliamentary statement after Brussels, and to rest instead on a brief written answer to a Parliamentary Question. Not a dog has barked.

4. You may care to comment at leisure. Perhaps other members of the European Unit may too; with the agreement of the Secretary of State's office, I am also sending them, on a personal basis, copies of the Secretary of State's personal record of the European Council discussion.

*Yours ever,*

*Pat*

PATRICK NAIRNE

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O6. Mr. Graham asked the Prime Minister whether he has any plans to meet the Heads of Government of the European Community; and whether he will make a statement.

**The Prime Minister:** I attended one of the regular meetings of the European Council on 16th and 17th July. It was a useful meeting. The Heads of Government discussed the future development of the Community following the British referendum, the world economic situation, Portugal, the forthcoming CSCE summit meeting, the rôle of the United Nations in international co-operation, the energy dialogue, the raw materials in preparation for the special session of the United Nations. The House will have seen the statements after the meeting, copies of which are being placed in the Library.

The date of our next meeting will be arranged by the Italian Presidency, probably towards the end of the year.