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BY HAND

The Rt. Hon. Mrs Margaret Thatcher, MP,
10 Downing Street,
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19th September 1980

Dear Prime Minister,

Ian Gow has kindly agreed to hand you this letter, which I hope may be of use to you during your visit to Greece next week from the point of view of relations between the Government party there, New Democracy, and the Conservative party here, with special application to the European Democratic Group in the European Parliament.

Contacts and negotiations between New Democracy and the European Conservative/Democratic Group have been going on for many years, in fact ever since the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974. In early 1975 Peter Kirk asked me to be the member of ECG mainly responsible for these links. This task was confirmed by Geoffrey Rippon when he took over as chairman of ECG and by Jim Scott-Hopkins when he became leader of the new EDG last year.

Since July 1975 I have attended all the twice-yearly meetings of the joint Greek Parliament/European Parliament committee charged with monitoring negotiations for Greece's entry. I have visited Greece about a dozen times with Peter Kirk, Geoffrey Rippon, Diana Elles and on my own. Last November I led a small EDG group to Athens, where we talked to most of the senior ministers - George Rallis, Evangelos Averoff, Constantine Stephanopolous - as well as party officials. Most recently, as Jim Scott-Hopkins has probably told you, I went with the EDG Bureau to Athens two weeks ago for a further meeting with ministers.

It seems to us in EDG that now is a crucial stage in ND's decision over which group to join in the European Parliament next year. They are clearly attracted by the idea of joining EDG and, as you will see from my enclosed note of last November's visit we have made them a set of practical proposals for cooperation, which they are still considering. But they are worried by our one-nationality character, by the possibility of our numbers being greatly reduced in the 1984 European elections and, like other continental parties, by wrongly preconceived ideas about the word "Conservative".

They face a crucial general election, probably next May, which looks like being touch and go. Opposition leader Andreas Panandreu has gained ground

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- 2 -

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because of many Greeks' sense of outraged nationalism vis-à-vis Turkey, especially the Aegean issue and Cyprus. The Greek right is also tarnished by the association of some of its members with the military junta that was overthrown in 1974. (I am afraid that some British Conservatives supported the junta publicly. And the Greeks know this.)

The other options open to ND are to join the Liberal group or the Christian Democrat group (European Peoples Party). Or they could remain on their own. In January they will be 14 nominated members, one short of the number required to form a two-nationality group. They may well decide, since they are a lame-duck nominated body and since elections are a few months away, that it would be sensible and cautious to remain unattached until their European elections, which will take place at the same time as their national elections.

But it is very much in our interest, I believe, to explain to the Greeks what they have to gain by joining EDG eventually. An input of non-British members would, in my view, be of great benefit to our effectiveness in the European Parliament. It would rid us of the label of being simply a British lobby. It would create many difficulties, especially at the beginning of such a merger, but in the end it would, I think, immensely increase our effectiveness as a political force, not to mention the practical and financial benefit that would come to us through increased numbers.

From this particular point of view, therefore, your visit to Athens could not be more appropriate and I do hope that you will find time during these extremely busy few days to mention to Mr Rallis your hopes for an EDG-ND alliance. The final decision on the matter will be made by Mr Rallis and a word from you will count for a great deal.

You could, if you thought fit, mention a number of reasons why it would be in ND's interest to join EDG rather than any other group. The points in our favour seem to me to be the following:

- 1) Being a British and Danish group, we have special concern for the problem of new members of the EEC. We are not tied down by precedent and believe in the flexible approach to the Community's development.
- 2) For the same reason we are specially concerned with the problems if member states on the periphery of the Community, especially the barriers to effective trade suffered by such countries. For instance, a road link through Yugoslavia and a better Greece-Italy sea link are important to them. A channel link is important to us.

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- 3 -

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3) If ND join us, they will be the second largest national element in the group and entitled to many senior positions.

4) We are a non-confessional party. There will be no conflict between Greek Orthodoxy and ourselves, as there might be with the Roman Catholic ideological base of the CDs.

5) Both the Liberal and EPP groups are federalist by conviction. For instance, majority voting in the Council is part of their platform. This is not our position. Nor is it NDs.

I hope that these points will be of use to you and I send you my very best wishes for a successful visit to Greece. It is very important, I think, apart from my particular concern with ND/EDG relations, that we should do everything possible to help Mr Rallis to win his elections next year. Greece's continued participation in the defence of the West is of vital concern to us and the Greek opposition are committed to ending such participation.

Yours ever

Nicholas