

19 November 1980

EUROPEAN COUNCIL, LUXEMBOURG

1-2 DECEMBER 1980

EURO/ARAB/AFRICAN "TRILOGUE"

Brief by Foreign and Commonwealth Office

POINTS TO MAKE

French ideas imaginative and interesting, but they have obviously developed since first put to us and we are now examining the information provided at a recent meeting of Political Directors. Have meanwhile instructed our Embassy in Paris to discuss French plans in greater detail with M Jean-Baptiste.

BACKGROUND

1. President Giscard proposed the idea of intensifying trilateral cooperation between Western Europe, the Arab world and Africa at the European Council in March 1979. It aroused little interest at the time, but it was agreed that Heads of Government would reflect on the idea. It is possible that President Giscard will raise this subject at the European Council and enquire what the results have been of his colleagues' reflection.
2. The French have now worked out their ideas in greater detail. They have explained that they see the "Trilogue" as reflecting historical, geographical and commercial ties between the 3 continents. They propose to develop trilateral contacts over the long term, particularly in the following areas:
 - a. In the field of culture the French are proposing a "high level cultural colloquium" and have suggested also the eventual establishment of institutions such as a foundation to support cultural exchange between the 3 continents or a standing symposium on the lines of the Club of Rome; they have indicated that work might be sponsored in European universities to re-evaluate African and Arab culture,

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science and technology; there might also be travelling exhibitions and a tri-continental encyclopaedia. They have many other similar ideas.

- b. It is also proposed that the Trilogue could become a forum for discussion on economic and financial questions. The French view is that this would be a contribution to the North/South dialogue, but would provide a more concrete regional focus than the framework of the global negotiations.
- c. The Trilogue could provide a framework for development projects in particular countries. At its crudest the French idea is African needs being met by Arab money and European technology; but other permutations will also be possible.
- d. The above elements might be brought together in a political framework. The French have suggested that there might eventually be a meeting of Foreign Ministers and have suggested that this could endorse a "charter for development and security".

3. Our most recent information on French proposals comes from a presentation given by M Jean-Baptiste (economic adviser to President Giscard) at the Political Committee on 18 November. It appeared from his explanation that the French have had some success in selling this idea, at least in Francophone countries, both in Africa and in the Middle East. The French expect that at their next meetings both the Arab League and the OAU will mandate their Secretary Generals (by coincidence they are both French speaking) to explore the French proposals further. There is therefore a possibility that the project may eventually get off the ground. The French have not made known their views on how the European side of the triangle would be organised. Their proposal is to include all "liberal democratic European" (ie presumably Council of Europe) countries, and they have suggested that ad hoc machinery could be set up to represent them in dealings with the Secretariat of the Arab League and the OAU.

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One advantage of ad hoc machinery from the French point of view is that it would enable them to keep close control of developments. Although at this stage the French proposals may have few practical advantages, and appear in many respects to be an attempt to replace substance by form, it is possible that they might be attractive to countries in Africa and the Middle East, who could be flattered by an invitation to participate in a grand design of this kind which set their continents on an equal footing with Europe.

4. The UK approach so far has been to avoid close involvement or commitment. There could, however, be advantages in the idea from the British point of view if it were to get off the ground with the active participation of the Anglophone African and Arab States. We should at least take steps to ensure if necessary that Anglophone African countries are included in the plan on the one hand and that UK industry shares fully in any commercial opportunities that may arise from it on the other. However, our basic attitude remains one of considerable scepticism about the likely practical value of what seems on the face of it to be a proposal of mainly rhetorical content. But if it began to make progress we should not want to be left on the sidelines.

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