



FCS/82/29

THE HOME SECRETARY

Prime Minister

There is broad agreement between the Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary about our approach to the problems of resettling the Poles who are in Austria. The Foreign Secretary proposes (last para.) that we do not for the time being specify a total for those whom we might admit to the U.K.

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1. In his letter of 29 January, Humphrey Atkins promised to let you have a more substantive reply to your earlier letter of 20 January about resettling the large number of Poles in Austria.
2. Since then we have consulted our partners in the Ten to establish what their attitude is likely to be. Of those who have named a figure, Luxembourg has said it will take 75 and the Netherlands 100. Denmark and Ireland have indicated that they will take numbers comparable to these. France, Belgium and Germany have not yet said what their response will be, but have drawn attention to the large numbers of Poles already in their countries; 50,000 in France, 10,000 in Belgium and 200,000 in the FRG, a large number of whom are putting forward applications for asylum.
3. The response or likely response of our EC partners has of course to be seen in the context of the general Western reaction to the Austrian Chancellor's request. So far I understand that the US have agreed to take 5,000 Polish refugees from Austria, Australia 4,000 and Canada 3,000. New Zealand will accept 100. Generous as these responses are, taken together they amount to little more than a third of the 30,000 Poles in Austria whom the Austrian authorities wish to resettle.
4. It is against this background that we must now consider what response the UK should make. As Humphrey Atkins said in his letter of 29 January, I think it is right that our policy on this should be consistent with our policy towards those Poles now temporarily in Britain. I agree therefore that we must respect the internationally agreed definition of refugee status and take care to accept only those Poles who are eligible to qualify.

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5. I feel strongly, however, that it will be necessary for the Government to take account of the wide public sympathy and concern that have been aroused in Britain for the plight of the Poles in Austria. Our response will be judged in the light of the NATO Foreign Ministers Declaration of 11 January which stated 'willingness to contribute, with other governments, to the solution of the problem of Polish citizens now abroad and unable and unwilling to return to their own country.' We must also bear in mind the greater response which others of our partners and allies are being called upon to make both towards the Poles in Austria and those now in their own countries.

6. I note that you are prepared to interpret the two conditions of acceptability mentioned in your letter in a flexible manner. I am sure this is right. While I agree that we should seek where possible to ensure that the majority of Poles we accept should have the connections and/or resources to integrate rapidly and successfully into the community, there are bound to be some deserving cases which it would be desirable to consider on their merits. The general constraints imposed by broad considerations of immigration policy are well understood, but in the circumstances we must ensure that our response is consonant with the public perception of the scale and urgency of their problem.

7. The next step, I believe, should be to reply to the Austrian Government. I note your suggestion that it would be desirable for the UK response to be presented as part of a wider European operation. At the present time, however, I see little scope for a joint move of this kind and in view of the urgency of this issue I do not think that we should delay longer.

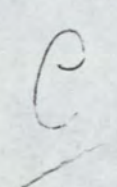
8. If you agree, therefore, I believe that our officials should now be instructed jointly to prepare a reply to the Austrians taking into consideration the points set out above. The reply would include the suggestion that the office of the UNHCR in Vienna be asked urgently to assist in providing necessary facilities to enable an adequate selection process to be set up. It would also contain a statement of willingness thereafter to consider with a



reasonable degree of flexibility the applications of those whose eligibility to refugee status under the 1951 Convention had been established, and for whom ties of family, education or language make Britain the most appropriate country of resettlement. Thereafter valid applications should be referred to the British Embassy in Vienna for processing.

9. I doubt whether it would be sensible to specify a total that we could be prepared to admit into this country. Britain should be seen to play a part in accordance with our traditions and resources and in line with what others are doing. Once the UNHCR exercise gets under way we should have a clearer idea of the total number of those who might be eligible to come to this country and thus be able to compare the burden we may be asked to bear with those shouldered by our Allies and partners.

10. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister.


(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

19 February 1982



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