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Prime Minister

To note.

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A.T.C. 11/8

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FCS/82/72

CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY

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1. Thank you for your letter of 4 May commenting on the exchange of correspondence between Willie Whitelaw and myself of 3 and 19 April on Polish refugees.
2. I share your concern that, in the light of the other claims on our resources, we should be cautious in our response to this problem and should not at this stage offer a commitment to a UK quota or to a Polish resettlement programme more generally.
3. This is the approach which we and the Home Office have been exploring over several months and which we have also considered with our partners in the EC and NATO. I accept that we should not and indeed cannot undertake any open-ended commitments in this matter. At the same time, I feel strongly that we should take into account in our response the strong public sympathy and concern for the Polish people which has been aroused in Britain. We should also bear in mind the far greater response which others of our partners and allies are being called upon to make both towards the Poles in their own countries and those in Poland and Austria wishing to settle in the West.
4. As you will know, we and our partners in the Alliance made a public statement in the NATO Declaration of 11 January of our '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'. I am aware that a number of our partners and allies regard it as very important for us to recognise that we have a collective responsibility towards that commitment and to play a part in accordance with our resources and traditions and in line with what others are doing.

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5. In these circumstances, I believe that the response suggested by Willie Whitelaw in his letter of 3 April and endorsed in my minute of 19 April, is the right one. Such an approach does not commit the UK to a fixed quota of refugees or to a more generalised burden sharing arrangement. Nor does it constitute formal participation in an international resettlement programme. The numbers of Polish refugees either from Poland or Austria who would qualify for acceptance by these criteria is likely to be extremely small; and the requirement that any Polish applicant should have adequate sponsorship here including the provision of long term accommodation should ensure that the financial burden on HMG is modest and local community resources minimal.

6. You make the point that we must not overestimate the resources of the existing Polish community in Britain. But it is not intended the sponsorship should be confined to the Polish community. We want to get over the thought, and this is accepted by the Home Office, that the Polish community might, if they so wish, act as collective sponsors to Polish refugees. But we fully accept the Home Office's view that the applications of any Poles so sponsored should meet our criteria on all points, including long term accommodation. So I think the risk that an over-generous response to Poles outside the UK might reduce the protection currently given to those temporarily resident here by the Polish Community is negligible.

7. The question of the conditions affecting family reunification of those Poles already in the UK is more properly a question for the Home Secretary. But it is, I understand, strictly governed by the provision in the published immigration rules. I see no reason to dissent from your view that family reunifications, if and when they take place, should not constitute an unreasonable cost to the British taxpayer.



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8. I hope you will agree therefore that we may proceed as envisaged in my minute of 19 April to Willie Whitelaw and will instruct your officials to confirm that there is no objection to our replying to the Austrian Government on the lines the Home Secretary has proposed. As you will be aware, our reply is long overdue and I do not believe that we should delay this any longer than is absolutely necessary.

9. On the question of the Polish detainees, no immediate decision is required and we shall continue to make known to the Polish authorities our strong disapproval of any attempts to force detainees to emigrate. We are however increasingly coming under pressure from our allies to give a firmer indication of our thinking. I should be grateful therefore if you would also confirm that you have no objection to our responding to them on the basis of the criteria proposed by Willie Whitelaw. I shall keep my colleagues informed of developments, and consult them as necessary.

10. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister, members of 'H' Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

11 May 1982

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