

CONFIDENTIAL

139

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Your reference

Our reference

Date

15 October 1979

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Rhodesia Department
FCO

RHODESIA: ITALIAN ATTITUDE

I called on Ferrero, the acting Head of the African Department in the MFA, on 12 October to give him one of our regular round-up briefings on the progress of the Constitutional Conference.

2. Ferrero started by saying that the Italians were very grateful for the way we had kept them informed through briefings of the Nine in London and through the documentation we have passed on to them here. This had enabled them to keep their Ministers well briefed, eg for the visit of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State on 4/5 October.

3. I referred to the fact that at the lunch for the Prime Minister on 5 October Lord Carrington had thanked both Prime Minister Corchia and Foreign Minister Malfatti for the support they had shown for our position over Rhodesia in the past, and had expressed the hope that they would continue to do so in future. Ferrero said that the Italians would of course go on supporting our efforts to reach a solution acceptable to all parties. He readily agreed with me that, apart from subscribing to joint positions of the Nine, the most effective way for the Italians to do this was by seeking to promote understanding for our efforts on Rhodesia in the course of contacts with third parties, eg during the forthcoming visit of Hua Guofeng. I stressed the importance we attached to obtaining Chinese understanding of our position during this visit.

4. Ferrero went on to say that the aspect which worried him most for the future was the possibility that we might in the end be forced to go for a sort of settlement which fell short of full involvement of both Mugabe and Nkomo as well as Muzorewa. In these circumstances, given the political balance here and the degree of sympathy felt by the Italian left for the Patriotic Front (especially for Mugabe, who has long-standing contacts with the PCI), it would be very difficult for the Italian Parliament to approve legislation lifting sanctions (since positive parliamentary action will be required here to get the existing sanctions legislation repealed). Assuming that HMG would not, in these circumstances, seek to renew the UK Sanctions Order there was a real risk that we would find ourselves out of step with Italy and possibly others of our partners.

15.

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5. Ferrero agreed, however, that the situation described in para 4 was purely hypothetical at this stage. For the time being I am sure that the Italians feel a genuine admiration for our efforts and will continue to lend us such support as they can.

M E PELLEW