

CONFIDENTIAL



Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

*In the light of these explanations, agree that we should still to prevent policy on sporting contacts with Argentina as at X below.*

26 July, 1983

*A.C. 26.7*

*Yes MB*

*Dear John,*

Sporting Policy Towards Argentina: Polo

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has had a word with the Prime Minister about the questions that have arisen out of the possibility of Argentine polo players coming to Britain in 1984 (your letter of 13 July).

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary believes that, if we were to seek to prevent Argentine polo players from entering Britain, we would be open to charges of inconsistency. This would be so whether they came as individuals or as a team (although, as far as we are aware, there is no question of the latter). Our present guidelines, as set out in February in a letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Environment to the Chairman of the Sports Council (copy enclosed) make clear that the Government no longer considers it necessary or appropriate to prevent sporting contacts with Argentina, while not of course encouraging them and being ready to consider particular cases on an individual basis. These guidelines flowed from our decision last August (my letter of 19 August to Tim Flesher and his reply of 25 August) not to obstruct participation by an Argentine team in the world cycling championships. It was agreed then that our sporting policy towards Argentina should be the same as towards any other country except South Africa, which is covered by the Gleneagles agreement. On the basis of this policy, which I understand the Department of the Environment wish to maintain, Argentine tennis players have competed at Wimbledon, and two Argentines have played football regularly for Tottenham Hotspur. We are not aware of any problems having resulted from this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary acknowledges that polo may be particularly sensitive, not least because of its royal connections, but believes that it would be difficult to find grounds for discriminating between polo players and other sportsmen that would stand up in public.

*Sport, Apr 83 - Sporting Relations with Argentina*

*X.*

This is particularly significant in the light of the probability that we would face questioning on our position on the Gleneagles agreement if we were to exclude Argentine polo players coming here as individuals. Although Government policy is firmly to discourage sporting contacts with South

/Africa



Africa, it has, at the same time, been made clear that the Government cannot prevent individual South African sportsmen from entering Britain; nor would we wish to take powers to do so. If we were to find some means of excluding individual Argentines, we could soon face calls from other countries, particularly members of the Commonwealth, to institute similar measures against all South African sportsmen. Our action could also be misunderstood in Latin America, where we have taken pains to put over our wish to develop a more normal relationship with Argentina.

Sir Geoffrey Howe also believes that it would be very difficult in practice to exclude the polo players. We could only do so by refusing to issue visas. In order to do this, we should need to know the names of the players in advance. This would entail approaches to the polo organisations interested in inviting Argentines. Even this would not necessarily catch people who secure visas in some other capacity who went on to play polo. Moreover, even if we knew the names of the prospective visitors, the Home Secretary could only refuse the issue of visas on the grounds that to allow entry 'would not be conducive to the public good'. This sanction is only rarely used, and we and the Home Office cannot easily envisage the necessary considerations applying to polo players.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary continues to believe, therefore, that our response to enquiries from polo bodies should be limited to a reiteration of the policy already explained to the Sports Council, and that we should make it clear that the decision on whether to invite Argentines must rest with the organising bodies themselves. Among these are bodies in the polo world whose events are often attended by The Queen and other members of the Royal Family (the Prince of Wales is often a participant). We must continue to keep carefully in mind the need to avoid embarrassment to the Royal Family,

*Passage deleted and closed, 40 years, under  
FOI Exemption. P Wayland  
22 January 2013*

I am copying this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office) and Warwick Smith (Department of the Environment).

*Yours ever*

*J E Holmes*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

29 July 1983

Sporting Policy Towards Argentina: Polo

Thank you for your letter of 26 July to John Coles. In the light of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's advice, the Prime Minister agrees that we should stick to the guidelines set out in February in the letter from Mr. Macfarlane to the Chairman of the Sports Council.

I am copying this to Hugh Taylor (Home Office) and Warwick Smith (Department of the Environment).

W. F. S. RICKETT

John Holmes, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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