

Prime Minister

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1. Herewith letter dated 8th November from Nicholas Ridley with which he encloses a copy of a letter dated 14th October which he has received from Fred Warner.
2. As you know, I think that the European Parliament is a costly exercise in nonsense.
3. Are you content that I should reply to Nicholas Ridley in the terms of the letter attached to this note?

Yes
and

10.11.82

Jesson
11 IAN GOW

Ridley



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Ian Gow MP
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

8 November 1982

Dear Ian

... I enclose a copy of a letter which Fred Warner wrote to Geoffrey Howe on 14 October, on the subject of better liaison between European Members of Parliament of the EDG Group and the principal Ministers concerned with Europe here. I believe Henry Plumb may be making a similar approach to you directly.

Fred Warner makes in essence three suggestions:-

- i. that civil service representatives could attend debates in the European Parliament;
- ii. that there might be a European equivalent of a PPS for some of the main Ministers;
- iii. that Westminster MPs might more regularly attend sessions in Strasbourg and Brussels and MEPs appear at backbench committees.

It would be possible for us to arrange (i) above as and when it seemed relevant to the work of particular Civil Servants; although my impression is that those concerned already know quite a lot about debates of the EP, and indeed sometimes attend them. We would have to watch travelling costs.

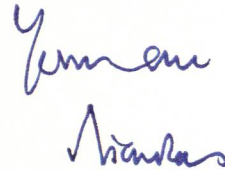
(ii) is a more radical suggestion. There would be problems with the terms under which "Euro PPS's" received confidential information: it would not be possible to ask them to undertake the corresponding Trappist vow which Westminster PPS's make in relation to the subject of their Departments. It would presumably be more in the nature of Liaison Officer that such appointments could be made. Nonetheless it is an interesting idea.

As to (iii) there is nothing to stop MEPs attending backbench Committees here, nor back benchers attending the EP at present. Equally there is no way of making MPs and MEPs do anything! But there may be obstacles that we could remove - travelling costs for MP's being I suspect one of the main ones, and three line whips another.

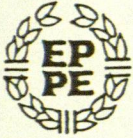
It would I suspect be a pity if these arrangements resulted in sizeable extra expenditure, just when the expenses of MEPs are coming under increasing criticism. Nevertheless the problem is a real one and we should certainly try and improve mutual understanding.

I would be grateful for your views on these suggestions, so that I may discuss them with Geoffrey with a view to his making proposals, and giving Fred Warner a substantive reply. If you feel it necessary we could have a brief meeting to discuss this matter.

I am sending copies of this letter to Douglas Hurd, Michael Jopling and Peter Walker.



NICHOLAS RIDLEY



PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Sir Fred WARNER, G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G.

Member
of the European Parliament
33 Moreton Place,
London SW1
Tel: 01-828 7531

25 OCT 1982

14 October 1982

The Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe QC, MP
The Chancellor of the Exchequer,
H. M. Treasury,
Parliament Street,
London SW1P 3AG.

EX-CHEQUER	
25 OCT 1982	
MR FRENCH	- advice draft reply pt.
PS/FST,	MRS HEDLEY-MILLER
TO	

Dear Geoffrey,

I was just about to write and thank you for having been so extremely kind as to come to our European Members' Dinner last week when I received your note of thanks. It was good of you to write.

I think the matter which we discussed at the greatest length was the incomplete nature of the relationship between the Conservative Party in the European Parliament (the European Democratic Group) on the one hand and the Conservative government and its Administration on the other. I hope you will forgive a further claim on your time if I try to summarise some of the thoughts which emerged.

The problem is certainly not one of differences of view; the EDG has consistently tried to represent British interests and Conservative government policy in the European Parliament. There have been a very few occasions when our commitment to Europe or the political requirements of avoiding really bad decisions by the Parliament have led our Group into voting in a way which was not immediately intelligible to the Party at home; but when we did so, I think we were usually justified and I hope that everyone accepts that we acted in good faith. So the problem is really one of not having sufficient channels of communication and all the right sort of links in order to make the most of the situation as it exists today.

Of course the essential link is that between the Leader of the EDG on the one hand and the Prime Minister and her senior Ministers on the other. This we believe is working well since Henry Plumb took over. But it is the day to day integration into Government business that is lacking. I think that you and the rest of us all agreed that institutionalized meetings between Ministers and the whole Group (at ordinary MEP's level)

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are not really much help. This is reflected in the fact that such meetings are tending to take place at longer and longer intervals, that the level of attendance is falling off and that so are the numbers. While it seems very important to us in the EDG that Ministers should come and speak to us and explain their policies from time to time at our monthly meetings in London, that certainly does not in itself constitute a working relationship. Much more productive are the relations between EDG spokesmen and Ministers with their Civil Servants. These are excellent but not necessarily frequent.

The point we tried to make was that the MEPs now have unique knowledge of European events and forces and are perhaps often aware of the trend of European political thinking before it shows itself in negotiations or conflicts between European governments at the highest level. We would like to be able to feed this knowledge and these perceptions into the British government machine. At the moment, we often fail to do so. We also sometimes get the impression that Ministers and Members of the House of Commons at home do not really feel the need for this inter-action.

The practical suggestions which came out the other evening were as follows:-

1. A suggestion which came from you yourself was that we should seek to find some way of making up for the absence of an "Official Box" in the European Parliament. You said that there was financial provision for civil servants to travel and that you could see that there might be advantage in officials sometimes attending important sessions of the Parliament. I think this would be true for such important items as the annual Budget debates, the Farm Price Review debates and perhaps the occasional unpleasant Northern Ireland debates or exceptional occasions such as the Falklands debate. However, as somebody pointed out, attendance of civil servants at the Committee stage might be far more instructive and helpful in most cases, particularly with regard to the Budget. It would be for the EDG spokesman in a particular Committee to suggest to the EPA those occasions when he considered the Ministry might wish to send a representative. It may be argued that this is the role of the FCO and that UKREP already has his representative with the Parliament, which should be sufficient. But although the FCO has the coordinating role for Europe in Whitehall, all Departments have direct access to the Commission and Council and they should have it also to the Parliament.
2. We suggested that there might be room in the offices of senior Ministers for the European equivalent of a PPS. Of course an MEP would not expect to have the same status as a Westminster PPS and his programme would certainly not allow him anything like equal access to the Minister.

But he could become a regular feature of the life of the Minister's Private Office and could keep the Minister informed of all important trends and developments. If he was any good, his advice and opinions would be sought from time to time.

I believe that, if this proposal were to be followed up, it should be in a very modest way. The Member should certainly not be referred to as a PPS but as (perhaps) a European Parliamentary Adviser (EPA). I think that in the first place, such an arrangement should be very restricted and confined to the Foreign Office, The Treasury, the Department of Trade and Ministry of Agriculture. If the system proved useful and successful, then other Departments such as the Ministries of Industry, Transport and Energy would no doubt wish to follow suit. The Member would obviously have to be selected by the responsible Minister in each case but in consultation with the Leader of the EDG who would be in a position to advise on ability and suitability.

3. Finally, we talked about parliamentary relationships, a matter which has vexed us ever since we were elected. One of the answers here must be to bring Conservative Members of the Westminster Parliament and Junior Ministers much more frequently to Parliamentary sessions in Strasbourg or (perhaps more profitably) to Committee days in Brussels. We also need to review our own attendance as MEPs, at back-bench committees of the House of Commons. This has become more and more difficult as our own programmes have tended to become heavier and heavier.

I wonder whether you would like to brood on these matters and consider whether you could discuss them with some of your senior colleagues. It might then be that you would find sufficient interest for some Members of the Government to perhaps sound out the Chairman of the Party and the Prime Minister. I have of course shown this letter to Sir Henry Plumb before sending it to you and he has asked me to say that he fully supports this approach and will be floating similar views when he meets Ian Gow, Douglas Hurd and Peter Walker shortly.

Yours ever
J
Ired.



Ridley

10 DOWNING STREET

10th November 1982

Thank you for your letter of 8th November, together with its enclosure which I have shown to the Prime Minister.

I have discussed your letter with the Prime Minister.

I comment on the three numbered paragraphs as follows:-

1. If it really is desirable for Civil Servants to attend debates in the European Parliament, that could, as you say, be arranged; however, proceedings in the European Parliament are reported verbatim and I would have thought that the occasions on which it would be possible to justify attendance of Civil Servants in Strasbourg while the European Parliament is sitting would be very limited indeed. Would the cost of sending Civil Servants to Strasbourg be paid by the European Parliament, or by the British taxpayer (who of course pays a substantial part of the costs of the European Parliament anyway)?
2. I think that Ministers in the Government would not welcome an additional PPS who was a member of the European Parliament; nor do I think that such an innovation would be desirable. The Prime Minister has managed to survive for 3½ years with a single PPS and certainly one has been enough for her. I think that this suggestion is a non-starter.
3. As you rightly point out, Conservative members of the European Parliament are already welcome at any of the meetings of the Party's backbench Committees, although they do not, out of their own choice, attend very frequently. A large number of our colleagues visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg (at the expense of the European Parliament) and I would expect this to continue.

If you would like to have a meeting with Peter Walker, Michael Jopling and Douglas Hurd, to whom I am sending copies of this letter, I would be delighted to attend one.

IAN GOW

The Hon Nicholas Ridley MP