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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 December 1989

*Dear Charles,**Yes Mr**Agree with the Foreign Secretary*Euro-Arab Conference, Paris: 21-22 December

President Mitterrand told the European Parliament on 25 October that he intended to convene a meeting of the 12 EC states and the 22 Arab states and organisations in Paris before Christmas to discuss Middle East issues. The French Foreign Ministry were as surprised by this announcement as we and our EC partners, but have since been following up this ambitious goal in the EPC machinery.

*stand attend!**COO**bxii*

The Presidency have now told us that the Conference will take place in Paris on 21-22 December. It will be an ad hoc event outside the formal institutional framework of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. The first day is to consist of discussion at official level in two working groups, one to consider economic and technical cooperation between the EC and the Arab world, and the other to address the restructuring of the Euro-Arab Dialogue institutions. The second day will consist of a plenary conference at ministerial level to consider reports submitted by the previous day's working groups and to discuss political issues, notably the Arab/Israel dispute. Dumas will host a lunch, and Mitterrand will give a speech in the afternoon after he gets back from East Berlin. The proceedings will probably conclude with a press conference.

This meeting is not a very good idea. However, there is no way of stopping the initiative, which has been welcomed by the Arabs and by a number of our partners, with only the Dutch and ourselves expressing reservations. We would never have suggested such a gathering but in practice it is likely to be pretty harmless.

We have been giving some thought to the level at which we should attend. All other EC member states can be expected to be represented by their Foreign Ministers. The Dutch have said that van den Broek will go. The Egyptian, Bahraini, and Kuwaiti Foreign Ministers have all appealed to the Foreign Secretary to be there.

The peace process is always at a delicate stage and this should not, of itself, affect the level of our attendance. There is the particular problem of possible ministerial representation from Syria and Libya, though it is by no means certain that either country will attend: the Libyans have attacked the meeting as 'an imperialist plot'. But if we allow our policy on bilateral ministerial contact with Syria and Libya to govern absolutely our policy in a multilateral context, we could be painting ourselves into an unnecessary corner on Arab/Israel, where our objective is an international

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conference attended both by the parties to the dispute (ie including Syria) and the Five Permanent Members of the Security Council. Generally, we have sought to avoid our poor relations with Syria and Libya spilling over into contacts in multilateral fora. Both countries were, for instance, invited to attend the conference on AIDS in London in January 1988 by the device of having them invited by our co-organiser, the World Health Organisation. A similar arrangement was made for the London Conference on the Ozone Layer last March, when our co-host was the UN Environment Programme.

The Foreign Secretary has accordingly decided that, since his EC colleagues are all likely to be there, he should attend. He would expect to be able to turn the event to advantage by having meetings with key Arab Foreign Ministers, in particular the Saudi and the Iraqi. With the latter he would want to press the case for the release of British prisoners in Baghdad (Ian Richter and the nurse, Daphne Parish).

Yours,
Stephen Wall

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Private Secretary

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From the Private Secretary

7 December 1989

**EURO-ARAB CONFERENCE, PARIS:
21-22 DECEMBER**

Thank you for your letter of 6 December about the proposed meeting of EC and Arab States in Paris on 21-22 December. The Prime Minister agrees that it would be right for the Foreign Secretary to attend.

CHARLES POWELL

J S Wall Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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