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France



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

13 May 1982

Avail brief

Dear John,

AB 13/5

Visits of M Mauroy and President Mitterrand

h.c.

In your letter of 4 May you wrote that the Prime Minister would rather avoid having on the agenda a Channel Fixed Link item on which she considered that we have nothing to say.

Since then British officials have, in accordance with the discussions in "E" on 4 May, discussed the question further with French officials. The French expressed themselves surprised and disappointed by the way in which British Ministers' views were developing; and they made it clear that M Mauroy and possibly also President Mitterrand would wish to raise the subject with the Prime Minister at their meetings this weekend. (I attach a copy of Paris telno 452 reporting the officials' discussions.)

You will by now no doubt have seen Mr Howell's minute to the Prime Minister suggesting how she might respond to M Mauroy and President Mitterrand should they raise the subject. In the meantime there have been a number of indications that M Mauroy at least will be briefed to raise the subject, probably on the lines that the French Government is not fully convinced of the economic viability of the project and that further studies, notably on financing, should be carried out before the two governments reach any final conclusions. Until then, however, the French Government would find it difficult to associate itself with a negative appraisal of the Report of the Joint Study Group.

In these circumstances it seems that discussion of the Fixed Link in Edinburgh will be unavoidable. The FCO will, therefore, be including a brief on the Link among those being prepared for the Mauroy/Mitterrand visits.

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I am sending copies of this letter to John Kerr
(HM Treasury), David Wright (Cabinet Office) and Anthony
Mayer (Department of Transport).

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'F N Richards', written in a cursive style.

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

TOP COPY

GRS 460
CONFIDENTIAL
FM PARIS 101605Z MAY 82
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 452 OF 10 MAY 1982

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RECEIVED IN REGISTRY No. 69	
12 MAY 1982	
FCO OFFICER	REGISTRY
PA	Action Taken

FOLLOWING PERSONAL FOR ADAMS.
CHANNEL FIXED LINK

1. ROWSENFELD, BROWN AND NOULTON, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT, ACCOMPANIED BY GRAY, MAED AND MISS SPENCER, CALLED ON BRAIBANT TODAY. ROSENFELD SPOKE ON THE LINES AGREED WITH MR HOWELL ABOUT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF THE CFL PROJECT.

2. BRAIBANT WAS CLEARLY BOTH SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED. HIS IMMEDIATE RESPONSE WAS TO REITERATE THE VIEW HE HAD EXPRESSED AT EARLIER STAGES THAT, IF THE PROJECT FAILED NOW, IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO REVIVE IT FOR 10 YEARS OR SO. HE DID NOT SEEM ATTRACTED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF GIVING FURTHER CONSIDERATION TO A BRIDGE OPTION. BRAIBANT SAID THAT AT AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEETING LAST WEEK, IT HAD BEEN AGREED THAT NO DECISION IN PRINCIPLE COULD YET BE TAKEN, AND THAT THE BRITISH AND FRENCH PRIME MINISTERS OR MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT AT THEIR NEXT MEETING MIGHT TAKE NOTE OF THE REPORT AND COMMISSION FURTHER STUDIES BY LEGAL AND FINANCIAL EXPERTS (WHO WOULD BE INDEPENDENT OF TRANSPORT MINISTRIES) WITH A VIEW TO THE SUMMIT IN SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER. BUT HE SAW NO VIRTUE IN DELAY IF A POSITIVE OUTCOME COULD NOT BE REALISTICALLY HOPED FOR. INDEED, IT WOULD BE BETTER TO ANNOUNCE A NEGATIVE DECISION NOW THAN TO DO SO AT THE SUMMIT.

3. AFTER A LUNCH INTERVAL (BRAIBANT SAID BEFOREHAND THAT HE INTENDED TO CONSULT THE QUAI D'ORSAY), ROSENFELD HANDED OVER A FIRST DRAFT OF A POSSIBLE JOINT STATEMENT. BRAIBANT TOOK THE LINE THAT THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY WITH A JOINT OR IDENTICAL - STATEMENT WHICH POINTED TO DOUBTS ABOUT THE PROJECT'S ECONOMIC VIABILITY, IN VIEW OF THE RELATIVELY POSITIVE CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP. MOREOVER, THERE WAS NO NEED FOR ANY FORMAL STATEMENT BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT. WHILE MR HOWELL WOULD NO DOUBT NEED TO REPORT TO PARLIAMENT, M. FITERMAN WOULD SIMPLY MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE PRESS. BRAIBANT SEEMED TO BE CONCERNED MAINLY TO AVOID TYING HIS MINISTER'S HAND IN ANY WAY OVER AN ANNOUNCEMENT. HE NOTED IN THE COURSE OF DISCUSSION THAT THIS "CONSIDERABLE CHANGE" IN THE SITUATION WAS BOUND TO HAVE NEGATIVE POLITICAL EFFECTS BOTH IMMEDIATELY AND IN THE FUTURE.

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4. A DECISION ON HOW EXACTLY TO HANDLE THIS WITH THE FRENCH MUST TAKE ACCOUNT OF WHAT IS HAPPENING SIMULTANEOUSLY IN BRUSSELS OVER AGRICULTURAL PRICES AND THE MANDATE. IF WE ARE MOVING INTO A FULL-SCALE COMMUNITY CRISIS, THERE WILL BE A TENDENCY TO ASSUME THAT THE NEGATIVE DECISION ON THE FIXED LINK REFLECTS A MORE GENERAL DRIFTING APART OF THE UK AND ITS EC PARTNERS.

FRETWELL

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PS
PS|MR RIFKIND
PS|PUS
LORD BRIDGES
MR BOLLARD
MR ADAMS

COPIES TO
MR ROSENFELD D/TRANSPORT



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 May 1982

VISIT OF M. MAUROY

Thank you for your letter of 30 April.

The Prime Minister agrees to meet M. Mauroy on his arrival at Turnhouse Airport at 1400 hours. Mrs. Thatcher also agrees to have a short private meeting with M. Mauroy at Hopetoun House at 1945 hours so that they can go to the Reception together.

The Prime Minister is content with the suggested agenda for her talks with M. Mauroy except that she would rather avoid the Channel Fixed Link item, on which she considers we have nothing to say at the present time.

I have minuted separately to Sir Robert Armstrong, with a copy to Brian Fall, about the confusion caused by President Mitterrand's wish to visit London on 17 May.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Muir Russell (Scottish Office).

A. J. COLES

Francis Richards, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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