



PM/84/3

PRIME MINISTERPossible Meeting with President Mitterrand

1. I understand that you would welcome my advice on the suggestion that has come from President Mitterrand's office that, following your talk with him at Athens, you should go to Paris on 16 or 23 January mainly to discuss the European community. I gather that 16 January is not on for you and that 23 January is therefore the only practical proposition.

2. I think it is a very welcome sign that the French have taken up this idea without any prompting from us. It may be that the penny has dropped with Mitterrand that he cannot bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion without our agreement and that building up a 9 : 1 confrontation is not the best way to set about that. I think we both recognised at Athens that Mitterrand was still far from coming to terms with or even understanding the fundamental conditions on which we will insist. An informal discussion held well away from European Council deadlines would be an excellent opportunity to get these points across to him. It is also clear from our experience in the run-up to Athens that no carefully established official level channels of communication are a substitute for personal contact with the President himself, and this, as you know, is the advice Sir J Fretwell has given recently.

3. I have considered carefully whether the dates Mitterrand has proposed are too early, but I do not think this is so. Indeed, I think it will be a good deal easier to hold the discussion at the sort of level of generality which Mitterrand himself favours if your meeting with him takes place before the detailed preparation of the March European Council gets under way. I also think that a reasonably early meeting with Mitterrand will give a very welcome public signal to our partners that we are working with determination for decisive



progress at the March Council. If we were now to propose later dates we could be held partly responsible for the slowing down of the pace of negotiations which we believe may be a French objective. Finally, a meeting on 23 January, at Mitterrand's invitation, coming only a week or so before his meeting with Kohl, would be timely.

4. As to the content of the talks, the post-Stuttgart agenda will largely define this so far as European Community topics are concerned. I believe it would be useful however if you were to lead into those with some discussion of the major issues of East/West policy, defence, disarmament and also perhaps the Middle East on which there is a good deal of common ground between us and with which President Mitterrand is more at home. I doubt very much whether he will want to go into specific details on Community issues. He is more likely to be aiming to establish in very broad terms whether there is the makings of a deal with us which he can defend at home. He may also have some new ideas, for example on control of expenditure. If he should go into detail, you would be a great deal better equipped to deal with it than he is. But I think it more likely that the outcome of the meeting will be a decision to set officials (or possibly Dumas and myself) to follow up.

5. This meeting does, I think present us with a real opportunity to get things moving from the very beginning of the French Presidency. Mitterrand will still be feeling his way and so perhaps more than usually open to guidance of the kind that only you can give.

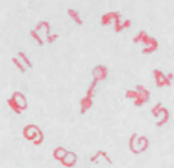
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

5 January 1984

5 JAN 1984



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

6 January 1984

Possible Meeting with President Mitterrand

The Prime Minister saw last night the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 5 January and has noted its contents.

You will see from my minute of today's date to Sir Robert Armstrong that the Prime Minister has agreed to visit Paris for lunch with the French President on 23 January.

A. J. COLES

Roger Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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