

Ref. A084/183

MR COLES

When I was in Paris yesterday, I called (at his request) on Monsieur Roland Dumas, the new Minister for European Affairs.

2. The visit was largely an exchange of courtesies, and we did not discuss the substance of European Community business to be done.

3. On the process, Monsieur Dumas said that the President wanted to resolve the post-Stuttgart problems by the March meeting of the European Council in Brussels. He was not in favour of using "Special Councils" of the kind used in the run up to Athens. Clearly Heads of Government could not decide all the outstanding issues in the course of a two day meeting in Brussels in March. The preparatory discussions in other fora had to create a framework on the basis of which the European Council could take the major political decisions that needed to be taken, and did not have to concern itself with technical detail. The French Government envisaged the preparations being undertaken partly by the functional Councils (including the Council of Ministers for the budget questions and the own resources issue), and by extensive informal contacts, mainly of a bilateral kind. He was himself expecting to engage in a great deal of informal contact during this period, with a view to finding out what the needs and positions of the various countries were and exploring the possibilities for reconciling those needs and positions. He suggested that it would be extremely useful if there could be such informal contacts between the President and the Prime Minister. He did not appear to know of the meeting that had already been arranged and I therefore confined myself to saying that, when the Prime Minister saw the President on their own at Athens, she had said that she would be very willing to have such informal contacts during this period. I was sure that that was still her view, that she would respond accordingly to any proposal made by the President.

4. Monsieur Dumas said that he was much looking forward to his contacts with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary; he would of course be paying an official visit to London on 8 February. It was evident, however, that he attached great importance to establishing contact with the Prime Minister. Not only did he hope to meet her when he came over on 8 February but he said he would be very willing to come across to London informally before then if there was a chance of meeting her. I said that I hoped that there would be an opportunity for him to meet the Prime Minister when he came to London on 8 February, but I thought that her diary was extremely crowded before then, including as it did not only the regular domestic business but overseas visits to Rome and to Hungary.

5. As I said, we did not discuss matters of substance, but I did take the opportunity of giving Monsieur Dumas a brief resumé of the history of our budget contribution, starting with the entry negotiations in 1970 and 1971 and the Community's commitment to deal with "unacceptable situations".

6. I concluded by looking forward to meeting Monsieur Dumas when he visited London on 8 February. Monsieur Dumas said that Lord Gowrie was an old friend of his and he hoped to have an opportunity of meeting him while he was in London.

7. I formed the impression that Monsieur Dumas was going to go about his job in very much the manner of the lawyer that I gather he is, seeking to work on positions by a series of private and informal negotiations which can then be consolidated into formal agreements when the time is right. He seemed to me to be shrewd and agreeable to deal with, though as yet relatively unversed in the complexities of the Community problems.

7. He talks readily in English.

8. I am sending a copy of this minute to Mr Fall.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 January 1984