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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 June 1985

BELGIAN BAN ON BRITISH SOCCER CLUBS

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to Phil Dykins, reporting on the Home Secretary's discussion with his Belgian opposite number on the possibility of relaxing the existing comprehensive Belgian ban on visiting United Kingdom football teams. The Prime Minister believes it must be for the Belgians to make any offer on relaxation in return for our co-operation on other matters connected with the follow-up to Brussels. She does not think we should put ourselves in the position of pleading for a change.

The Prime Minister also thinks the proposals set out in your letter run the risk of being a bureaucratic way of approaching the problem and of locking the Government into vetting individual clubs' applications. Furthermore, there seems little point in doing this at a stage when the football ~~discussion~~<sup>season</sup> does not get under way until mid-August.

I am copying this letter to Phil Dykins (Department of the Environment), Colin Budd (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and John Graham (Scottish Office).

MARK ADDISON

Hugh Taylor, Esq.,  
Home Office

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Rohi Bhatu.

No opinion here. But the  
letter caption that the Regre's  
approved, at bottom, is strongly  
consistent with ours.

You will not to have  
this to hand when you see  
Neil McF.

MBAT 24/6

PRIME MINISTER

BELGIAN BAN ON BRITISH SOCCER CLUBS

You will see from the attached letter that the Home Secretary has been discussing with his opposite number in Belgium the possibility of relaxing the existing comprehensive Belgian ban on visiting UK football teams.

The Home Secretary is suggesting that Neil Macfarlane pursue the idea by writing to the Belgian Minister of the Interior and suggesting that amateur clubs, etc, should be able to put in special applications to the Belgian Government via the UK Government with a view to obtaining permission to play in Belgium.

However confidential that approach might be, it seems bound to get out. We therefore run the risk of losing much of the goodwill you generated through early and prompt action in condemning the violence at Brussels, and accepting the punishment which was meted out. So far, the Government's (and even more so the football authorities') measures have yet to take effect, so special pleading of this kind seems premature. It also runs the risk of being a very bureaucratic way of approaching the problem, locking the Government, effectively, into vetting individual clubs' applications to play in Belgium. Finally, there seems little point in doing it at this stage when the football season does not get under way until mid-August.

Content for me to pass on your view to the Home Office, Minister for Sport's Office and Foreign Office, that any approach of the kind suggested in the letter would be premature, bureaucratic, unnecessary at this stage, and possibly thoroughly counter-productive?

MAA

MARK ADDISON

24 June 1985

VC2AIE

Yes - it is for Belgium  
to make the offer in  
return for our  
co-operation on other things  
connected with the follow up  
to Brussels. It is not  
for us to plead  
no

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HOME OFFICE  
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE  
LONDON SW1H 9AT

24 June 1985

Dear Phil,

BELGIAN BAN ON BRITISH SOCCER CLUBS

During the margins of the meeting of Ministers of the Interior in Rome on 20/21 June, the Home Secretary has the opportunity to discuss the events in Brussels and their follow-up with Mr Scarfaro and Mr Nothomb, respectively the Italian and Belgian Ministers of the Interior.

The Home Secretary reiterated the Government's deep regret over what had occurred. Both Ministers expressed satisfaction with HM Government's response, Mr Nothomb indicating in particular his gratitude for the co-operation of the Merseyside police in the investigation of the riot and the offer to assist through the Director of Public Prosecutions in preparing cases for extradition and the repatriation of any offenders eventually sentenced to imprisonment in Belgium following the investigation to serve their sentences in Britain.

Mr Nothomb said that he was also anxious to make progress towards relaxing the current ban on all British soccer teams in Belgium. In discussion between the two Ministers a possible way forward emerged which the Home Secretary said he would commend to Mr Macfarlane for consideration when he returned to London. This would involve a scheme on the following lines:

Any club not affected by the UEFA ban (and amateur clubs in particular) wishing to play in Belgium should obtain from their local authority a letter setting out the circumstances of the proposed visit, the names and number of players and supporters involved, with an indication from the local authority that to their knowledge there was no record of any violence or misconduct associated with the club or team. Such letters should then be forwarded formally to the Belgium Government through the United Kingdom Government (presumably through your Department).

On handling Mr Nothomb said that for internal political reasons it was difficult for him to be seen to be making an approach to us about all this. The Home Secretary explained that there were also obvious presentational difficulties for our Government in making a first approach towards relaxing the current ban. It was agreed between the Ministers that the best way of overcoming these difficulties might be for Mr Macfarlane to write to Mr Nothomb saying that he understood that there might now be some feeling in

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Belgium that this was the right time to begin to consider some relaxation of the ban and suggesting the scheme outlined above as a possible way forward. The Home Secretary assured Mr Nothomb that all this could be done on a confidential basis at this stage.

During the discussion the Home Secretary was at pains to emphasise that this was not an area in which he exercised personal responsibility. He would, however, be grateful if Mr Macfarlane could give urgent consideration to this approach and to following it up on the lines indicated if, like him, he thinks it provides a possible opening.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mark Addison (No 10), Colin Budd (FCO) and John Graham (Scottish Office).

Yours sincerely,  
Hugh Taylor

H H TAYLOR

P Dykins, Esq.

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