

Ref. A083/0403

PRIME MINISTER

*I agree with
these conclusions
approach
a concerted / by the Ten, as you have already agreed,
than by a bilateral deal?*

Prime Minister

Better to act through

F.R.B. 4.2.

Lord Sieff came to see me yesterday, to discuss the plight of Mr Scharansky.

2. Lord Sieff said that the Soviet authorities were playing cat and mouse with Mr Scharansky. He was being held incommunicado. His family were not allowed to see him. His mother had been told that she might see him, and had travelled a thousand miles to do so, but when she arrived she was not allowed in: she was permitted only to receive a note. There was reason to think that Mr Scharansky was ill, and that, unless he was released he might well not live for more than a year.

3. Lord Sieff suggested that, if the British Government were able to arrange the release of Mr Scharansky, that would not only be a good deed in its own right, but it would also improve relations with the Israeli Government.

4. Lord Sieff suggested that the Government should consider proposing an exchange of Mr Scharansky with someone here, perhaps someone who had been sent to prison for spying for the Russians.

5. I said that there could be clearly no question of sending someone to Russia who had defected from there: that would be to send a man back to certain death; and would ensure that nobody defected in future.

6. As to possible spies, it seemed as if the only candidate for an exchange would be Geoffrey Prime. He had been sentenced to 35 years' imprisonment last November. There was no certainty that he would wish to be exchanged and go to Russia: he had the opportunity of defecting before his arrest but had not been able to bring himself to do so. There were also wider political considerations for the Government: it would obviously be very desirable to get Mr Scharansky out, if possible, but a decision to release Prime and send him back to Russia so short a time after his conviction



impossible

would be ~~very difficult~~ to defend. An exchange would also encourage the Russians to believe that anybody who was arrested and imprisoned for spying could be got out simply by their getting hold of a dissident in Russia and maltreating him to the point where public opinion forced a Western Government to propose an exchange.

7. All things considered, I think that the disadvantages of an exchange on these lines would be such that it is not worth embarking upon the wider talks which would be necessary if it were to be arranged. But I know that you saw Mrs Scharansky a year or two ago and have taken a close interest in the case, and before I reply to this effect to Lord Sieff I should be glad to know whether you agree with these views.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

4 February 1983



COMPTON

4 JUL 1983

11

DK
9
8
7



10 DOWNING STREET

Z. C. A. H.

Soviet Union

From the Principal Private Secretary

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Prime Minister has considered your minute of 4 February (A083/0403) following your conversation with Lord Sieff about the plight of Mr Scharansky.

The Prime Minister agrees with your conclusion. With regard to an exchange for Geoffrey Prime, she goes further: she believes that a decision to release Prime and send him back to Russia would be impossible to defend. She concludes that it would be better to act in support of Lord Sieff through the concerted approach by the Ten, on the lines which she has already authorised: the Foreign Office will be able to bring you up to date on this initiative which was authorised on the Prime Minister's behalf in John Colles's letter of 24 January to Roger Bone at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The best reply to Lord Sieff might be to tell him that this initiative is being taken.

F.E.R.B.

AH

7 February 1983