



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 November 1989

Dear Charles,

Europe's Borders

Among the points which arose at the Elysee dinner on 18 November was that of the implications of the Helsinki Final Act for Europe's borders. There was some discussion of this issue on the plane to Paris. You may like to have the following summary of the position.

The Helsinki Final Act says that frontiers cannot be altered by force (Principle III on inviolability of frontiers). It further states that each participating state "will respect" the territorial integrity of other participating states (Principle IV). But it also stipulates that "frontiers can be changed in accordance with international law by peaceful means, and by agreement" (Principle I), and that all peoples have the right of self-determination (Principle VIII). The Act was viewed at the time as signifying acceptance of the realities of post-war Europe but it did not fix frontiers. We made our position clear that the Helsinki Final Act was not a Treaty, and was a politically, but not legally, binding document.

The Helsinki Final Act has relevance to the incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union, in the sense that we are committed to treating all existing Soviet frontiers as inviolable. However, Principle VIII on self-determination could be invoked in support of Baltic aspirations for independent statehood on the assumption that the Balts are to be regarded as "peoples". But, in accordance with the Final Act, these aspirations could only be fulfilled through peaceful change - not by force (and thus in practice with the acquiescence of the Soviet government).

Since 1946, it has been the policy of successive British Governments to refuse to recognise de jure the incorporation of the former Baltic states in the Soviet Union, but to accept de facto that they form part of the Soviet Union. We do not have any dealings with the Soviet governments of the Baltic republics, and as a matter of policy Ministers and our Ambassador in Moscow do not visit the Baltics. We do, however, seek to foster commercial, cultural, educational and other links with the Baltic peoples, and we are also developing contacts with political figures (many of who are members of the Popular Fronts) in the Baltics.



While we support the right of the Baltic peoples to decide their own future, we have taken care not to appear to be giving active support to secessionists, or to allow our policy to become a point of contention in our dealings with the Soviet leadership. The Balts have by their own activities won very considerable room for manoeuvre during the past 18 months.

The expert view is that the Principles of the Final Act reflect a balance of interests between participating states, and that they need to be read together. Western governments are entitled to draw attention to the well-defined Final Act provisions on peaceful change of frontiers and on self-determination as concepts to which they attach importance.

I am copying this letter to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

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Mtg of EC Leads

to discuss Eastern

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