



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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*Jean Charles,*

Call by Monsieur Rocard: Seat of the European Parliament

We understand that M. Rocard may seek the Prime Minister's support for Strasbourg as the definitive and sole seat of the European Parliament.

The existing arrangements are that the EP's monthly plenary sessions take place in Strasbourg, its Committee meetings mostly take place in Brussels, and its Secretariat is based in Luxembourg. These arrangements are "provisional". Unanimity is required under the Treaty if a permanent seat is to be agreed or for any change to the status quo. There is considerable pressure within the EP, led by British members of the European Democratic Group, for all meetings of the EP, including plenaries, to be held in Brussels. A new hemicycle is under construction by a private contractor in Brussels, and the EP has recently discussed holding additional plenary sessions there.

The French, for whom this has always been a sensitive issue, have recently threatened to block progress on establishing sites for the new Community institutions and the EBRD unless the Informal European Council in Dublin on 28 April reaffirms support for Strasbourg: they may then try to formalise current arrangements at the end of the Inter-Governmental Conference. We have always taken the line that there is no prospect of early change. We have avoided siding with the EDG MEPs, without standing out against them.

The Prime Minister may like to reassure M. Rocard that the UK is not seeking a change, for which the necessary unanimity is in any case not in prospect. She may also want to stress that HMG have played no part in the efforts of the EDG to secure a move to Brussels.

*Yours ever,*

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