

Prime Minister
An interesting document

②

FRENCH NATIONALISM AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: SOME REFLECTIONS
AFTER THE STRASBOURG EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The British Ambassador in Paris to the Secretary of State
for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

from Ewen Ferguson
which you may
care to read.

CDP 22/12.

SUMMARY

1. How do the French reconcile their profound nationalism with their powerful advocacy of European integration? (paragraphs 1-2)
2. European Community at heart of French foreign policy; means of: maximising French influence in the world, controlling pressures on French national identity and managing Germany. Assumption that these goals will be served by further integration. Little debate on "democratic gap" (paragraphs 3-7). On balance, France will come out on top. French will support integration for as long as this remains the case (paragraphs 8-10).
3. Balance of Franco-German relationship is changing; France's overriding aim remains to anchor Germany to Community but continuing possibility of tension (paragraphs 11-15).
4. Implications for UK: we share common strategic interests with the French; need to underline this in more frequent contacts; must continue to build up Anglo-French defence relationship (paragraphs 16-18).

CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs
LONDON

15 December 1989

Sir

FRENCH NATIONALISM AND EUROPEAN I..TEGRATION: SOME REFLECTIONS
AFTER THE STRASBOURG EUROPEAN COUNCIL

1. I recently set my staff an exam question. It was a question which was put to me by Mr David Howell MP and the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs when they visited Paris in November. The question, and I hope our answer, is of general interest.

2. The question is: how do the French reconcile their profound nationalism with their powerful advocacy of European integration. We see the French, I am sure rightly, as intensely French and intensely nationalistic. Yet they do not appear to fear, as many in Britain do, the loss of sovereignty which would flow from, eg, Delors Stages 2 and 3. Why not?

CONFIDENTIAL

../3.

CONFIDENTIAL

3. The European Community satisfies two main needs of France's post-war foreign policy; to maximise French influence on the world stage; and to control and manage Germany, which had invaded France three times within three-quarters of a century. Germany divided, with the western half anchored in the Community and the Western Alliance, was a Germany which posed no threat.

4. France accepted at an early stage that the Community provided the surest means for a medium sized state to make her voice heard and her impact felt on the world stage (though France is adept at making enough noise on her own to get her own way more often than her size would justify). Other countries came to the same conclusion, that some pooling of sovereignty was a necessary price for continuing influence in world affairs. France, allowing for the occasional hiccough, was comfortable with the transaction; she was there from the start of the process of European integration and able (at a time of relative German weakness and British absence) to write the rules of the club and to shape European institutions to reflect her interests and traditions. In some ways the French look on the Community as France writ large. It is not to them an alien organisation. There is no stereotype here of a distant, interfering, Brussels bureaucracy.

CONFIDENTIAL

../5.

5. Nor do the ancient prerogatives of a national parliament act as a constraint on French policy towards the Community. The French, having known so many varieties of republic, empire, monarchy in the last 200 years have a resigned scepticism about political institutions. Their intensely competitive élite, followed by public opinion, see the preservation of French leadership and influence as a mission. They reckon that what matters is the reality of influence over Community decision-making exercised by the Council. The French National Assembly sometimes wrings its hands over the apparent subordination of national concerns and over its impotence to exert control over Community legislation; but it is not and will not be a major player. Moreover, to the extent that there is concern for the principle of parliamentary control, the European Parliament is there to take up the democratic gap. It does not impinge much on the lives of ordinary Frenchmen (proportional representation and the list system remove all direct contact between electors and members). Nevertheless, the French have to be seen to take the Parliament seriously because it sits in Strasbourg, a visible symbol of Franco-German reconciliation. And there are domestic reasons for fighting off the challenge of Brussels. French party political structures fit into the European mould. I do not think that the French expect European parliamentary interference seriously to prejudice the role of their own executive.

6. Thus the French regard themselves as having, through their geography, history and culture, a central position in European affairs, a right to lead and to shape. And the Community, with France at the centre, is seen as a means to amplify France's voice in the world; only thus will it be possible to deal as equals with the United States and Japan.

7. At the same time, the French feel insecure about their place in the world. They are worried about the pressures on their national identity, for instance from immigration and 'Anglo-Saxon' cultural penetration, the use of English and the decline of French, and about domination of their economy by the Deutsch Mark. But they realise that these pressures will not go away, and they see the strengthening of European institutions as a means of controlling them and reconciling the French people to them. Thus EMU is calculated to reduce German influence over French monetary policy. The Social Charter helps to give reassurance about the impact of the Single Market on French workers. And 'audiovisual Eureka' is presented as protecting European, which is of course French, culture. This sense that their culture is under threat, above all from the Anglo-Saxons, helps to explain some of the French feelings of ambivalence about British membership of the Community.

CONFIDENTIAL

8. There have from time to time been tensions and questions about France's commitment : de Gaulle's empty chair policy in 1965; the in-out approach to the European Monetary "snake" in the mid to late 1970s; more recently the reaction to the 'excessive liberalism' of the Single Market - reflected in the size of the Le Pen vote in the 1988 Presidential elections and in the current emphasis on the social dimension; and finally the faint stirrings today of Parliamentary concern at the loss of national control which institutional reinforcement might bring. But each time the crunch has come, the French establishment have concluded that a France standing alone would be less influential and more vulnerable than France as a full and leading member of the European Community. In the economic field they hold no equivalent of the nuclear weapons which allow France an 'independent' defence philosophy. And the French people, who believe that they have benefitted substantially from the Community, particularly the CAP, and who do not have an exaggerated respect for France's erratic democratic traditions, have gone along with this, however fiercely they feel themselves to be French.

9. As for the longer term future, do the French have an agreed vision of what is meant by a European

CONFIDENTIAL

../political

CONFIDENTIAL

political union? Is the enthusiasm for a Federal Europe of, say, Prime Minister Rocard, shared by most? I cannot offer a clear answer. As the French approach to the Delors report has shown, their instinct is to look for centralised and therefore institutional construction. But there is virtually no debate about how such evolution will affect ordinary Frenchmen, or French sovereignty, whatever that is taken to mean. We come back to the assumption that the French themselves, by the exercise of their talents and by working from inside, will have sufficient control over the institutions as they evolve, to ensure that France's interests will be safeguarded.

10. These answers to the exam question - none of which suggests that France will ever be other than tough and insistent in fighting its national corner in the Community, - suggest to me that European integration is not itself a prior and intrinsic good for France but a means, first for assuring French security vis-a-vis Germany and second for assuring French prosperity and greatness in the world. If it turned out not to assure these things, the French attitude could change, and could change quite quickly.

CONFIDENTIAL

../11.

CONFIDENTIAL

11. At present, that does not look likely. As we saw before the Strasbourg European Council, France will at present do everything in her power to maintain the familiar terms of the equation, resting on Franco-German understanding. Strasbourg was seen by the French as part of a continuing struggle for the soul of Germany. The fear that Germany might prefer a Central European destiny to a firm Western European attachment was a real one for President Mitterrand. Consequently, Chancellor Kohl's hesitations about committing himself to a timetable for opening an Inter-Governmental Conference on European Monetary Union were seen as potentially very dangerous; carried further, to the extent of putting Germany's Central and Eastern European interests before her interests in the Community, they would have thrown into doubt the basis of post-war French foreign policy. Mitterrand concluded that Kohl must be stopped in his tracks before things could slip further.

12. The French pressure for a firm date for an Inter-Governmental Conference was not only a necessary cap to President Mitterrand's achievements during the French Presidency, but a test of German loyalty and commitment; after some cliff-hanging Kohl passed that particular test. There are others to come.

CONFIDENTIAL

../13.

CONFIDENTIAL

13. A year ago one would have confidently predicted that the Franco-German relationship - and the Community which encompasses it - would remain the central fact, and main driving force in the construction of Europe. Now events move so fast around us that very little can be taken for granted. I have no doubt that we shall see further strains within the Community itself as the Germans continue to flex their muscles, over EMU, enlargement, and other issues. Above all, any further sign that Germany puts her interests in Eastern and Central Europe, and above all in German unity, before her 'loyalty' to the Community will be watched for nervously here. There has already been talk of France strengthening her ties with the Soviet Union, more obviously too with Britain, as counterweights to the increasing weight of Germany. The French Government are more and more conscious of the importance of a strong defence relationship with the United Kingdom, and uncertainty about Germany is not the least reason for this.

14. I do not believe that Mitterrand sees such developments as alternatives which would lead him to place less weight on the need for a central Franco-German entente in the Community. Though the Franco-German relationship

CONFIDENTIAL

.../is changing

CONFIDENTIAL

is changing its balance as Germany increases in weight, it is hard to see the current generation of French leaders willingly allowing it to lose its central position in French foreign policy. Too much is at stake. France will do its utmost not to be forced to turn back. Assuming that reunification will take place, France will ride with the strains caused by the effort to accommodate an enlarged Germany within the Community, in order not to lose the levers which she possesses over German policy. This will pose uncomfortable choices and continuing tension.

15. One way or another, Germany's influence in the Community looks certain to grow - even though EMU is seen by the French as a way of moderating it. It will remain the overriding French aim to hold Germany - whether or not enlarged and united - firmly anchored and moving in line with France on the broad lines of Community policy within a structure in which France holds a major influence. It is only if Germany herself makes that impossible that a major reshaping of France's strategy will become necessary.

16. What operational conclusions can be drawn from this analysis? First, developments in Eastern and Central Europe are a sufficient cause of nervousness

CONFIDENTIAL

.../in France

CONFIDENTIAL

in France to risk affecting balanced judgement. The French, especially the generation who remember the war, turn to us for reassurance and reinsurance. We can give it to them. Their relationship with the United States, important as it is, is no substitute; and the US attitude to Europe is not without its uncertainties and unpredictabilities (Baker in Berlin). On the underlying strategic issues Britain and France share a common anxiety about where the Germans are going. We share the aim of anchoring Germany without destabilising the Soviet Union. Moreover, as the Western European component of the post-war Four Power grouping, we have the role and the opportunity to influence and to calm the Soviet Union, the more so the more, together we are seen to be. At the least, we need therefore to talk together and to be seen to be doing so - more frequently and, especially, more frequently at the level of President and Prime Minister.

17. Second, we must continue to build on the Anglo-French defence relationship. It has strengthened significantly in the last few years; I have no new suggestions, but it can take more weight. This is not the moment to raise the issue of France and NATO, though it will not go away. I see no sign at present that current events are pushing the French Government

CONFIDENTIAL

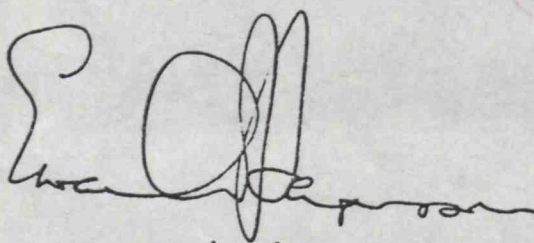
../towards

towards a recantation of their traditional policies, but every indication that they wish to explore new forms of European defence solidarity.

18. Third, we should not stop talking to the French at all levels on the detailed issues on which we may find ourselves disagreeing, especially within the Community, just because our contacts on the strategic issues may become closest.

19. I am sending a copy of this despatch to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of the Cabinet. I am also copying it to HM Representatives at EC posts, Washington, Moscow and UKDel NATO and HM Consuls-General in France.

I remain, Sir
Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ewen Fergusson', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

EWEN FERGUSSON

CONFIDENTIAL