



THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO PARIS: 19-21 MAY 1971

SUMMARY OF PARIS DESPATCH EP6/79 OF 9 JUNE 1971

1. The Prime Minister visited Paris, as the guest of President Pompidou, from 19-21 May. The bulk of his full programme was spent in tête-à-tête talks with the President. The Prime Minister and the President discussed the future of Europe in all its aspects and established the closeness of their thinking on many points (paragraph 1).
2. The preparations for the meeting. By an early stage in the resumed negotiations for Britain's entry to the Communities, it had come to seem very likely that a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President offered the best hope of achieving both success in Brussels and a broader reconciliation between Britain and France. But the failure of such a meeting would have been disastrous. Detailed preparation was needed. There were the problems of strategic and tactical timing. On the substance, President Pompidou wished to be sure about our attitude on the broader European issues. The Prime Minister wished to expound his whole concept of united Europe; and it would also be unthinkable not to have a discussion of the detailed problems outstanding in Brussels (paragraph 2-3). The President entrusted the preparations exclusively to his own personal staff at the Elysée. The Quai d'Orsay were kept in ignorance. There were, and are, risks for us in this method of work. Nevertheless the discussion led to the decision that a meeting was timely and would have every chance of success (paragraph 4).
3. The reasons for the President's decision. He had agreed at The Hague summit to the opening of negotiations with Britain. At that time he was probably already coming to the conclusion that the negotiations ought to succeed, provided French interests were adequately protected. It was clear from the start that he did not want to be blamed for the negotiations' failure (paragraph 5). The arguments for success were reinforced by outside developments, such as the failure of France's negotiations with Algeria, and the ructions within the Community over economic and monetary union (paragraph 6).
4. Physical arrangements for the meeting. The French could not have been more co-operative. The President, exceptionally, arranged to entertain the Prime Minister twice at the Elysée and accepted an invitation to a meal at the Embassy. We reciprocated, emphasizing the "European" spirit of the visit (paragraph 7).
5. The Prime Minister's programme. 19 May. Welcome at Orly by the French Prime Minister. Statements by the two Prime Ministers (paragraph 8). 20 May. First two sessions of talks between the Prime Minister and the President. The Prime Minister



lays a wreath on the tomb of the French Unknown Soldier, followed by a talk at the Matignon with Monsieur Chaban-Delmas (paragraphs 9-11). Formal dinner at the Elysée, with toasts by the President and the Prime Minister (paragraph 12). 21 May. Third session of talks. Luncheon at the Embassy, with toasts by Her Majesty's Ambassador and the President. Fourth session of the talks. Joint press conference at the Elysée by the President and the Prime Minister. Monsieur Pompidou's carefully chosen words designed both to reassure Britain as to France's intentions, and to warn his own diehards that the President did not share their interpretation of Britain's intentions (paragraphs 13-14). The Prime Minister's departure (paragraph 15).

6. Conclusions. On the negotiations it would be superfluous and inappropriate to add to the Prime Minister's statement in the House of 24 May, except to say that by the way he handled the talks the Prime Minister dispelled Monsieur Pompidou's doubt and disbelief about Britain. The latter's expressed desire to proceed with the building of a united Europe on the basis of an enlarged Community has already begun to be translated into practice at the Luxembourg meeting of 7 June. Her Majesty's Ambassador believes that the President intends these meetings to succeed, and that enough was said during the Elysée conversations to enable agreement to be reached in Brussels before the end of the summer. As regards Anglo-French relations, the improvement since December 1967 has established the necessary infrastructure for the closest degree of co-operation between our two countries. This co-operation will be an indispensable condition of the future progress of Europe which can follow success in the negotiations. The Prime Minister's visit to Paris has ensured that this co-operation can be fruitfully developed (paragraphs 16-18).



BRITISH EMBASSY

PARIS

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The Right Honourable  
Sir Alec Douglas-Home KT MP  
etc etc etc

Sir

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1. The Prime Minister paid an official visit to Paris, as the guest of the President of the French Republic, from 19-21 May. He was accompanied by members of his personal staff and by a team of senior advisers concerned with European questions (their names are recorded at Annex A). He carried out a full programme, the bulk of which was devoted to four sessions of talks with President Pompidou. During these four meetings, which lasted about eleven hours and were almost entirely tête-à-tête, apart from the presence of interpreters, the two Heads of government discussed the future of Europe in all its aspects and established the closeness of their thinking on many points. I have the honour in this despatch to recall briefly the preparations for this meeting; to describe the Prime Minister's programme while he was here (the detailed timetable is at Annex B); and to offer some comment, tentative as this must necessarily be while we are still negotiating in Brussels, on the results which the Prime Minister's visit has achieved.
2. "The President of the French Republic and the Prime Minister," said the communiqué announcing the visit on 8 May, "consider that a meeting to discuss matters of common interest would now be useful" - a delightfully bland formula to describe so momentous



a decision. Ever since the French decision at The Hague summit meeting in December 1969 to agree to the opening of negotiations with Britain, it had, I think, been clear - to informed opinion among the Five no less than in Britain and France - that success in Brussels was likely to depend finally on agreement between Britain and France; and for such agreement to become possible, this had to form part of a broader reconciliation of the two countries, based on the mutual acknowledgement that our future interests lay in working together both in the fields covered by an enlarged community, and in those where broader co-operation on a European scale is still in the future. Given the link between our entry and a broader Anglo/French reconciliation, and adding to the equation the last decade's history of Anglo/French differences, it had come to seem very likely, by an early stage in the resumed negotiations, that the best hope of achieving the twin objectives lay in a meeting between the French President and the British Prime Minister. But first the success of such a meeting had to be assured, for failure would have been disastrous.

3. It was in February that, during a talk with President Pompidou's Secretary-General at the Elysée, it became clear that the President foresaw a meeting with the Prime Minister which, if successful, would pave the way for agreement in Brussels. It remained to be seen whether the ingredients of success were there, and to this end detailed discussions were begun. It was necessary to deal with the problems both of timing and of substance. There was the question of strategic timing - for



how long should our two negotiating teams be obliged to conduct their war of attrition in Brussels, so as to show public opinion that the utmost had been done to defend each country's special interests? This was particularly important for President Pompidou as General de Gaulle's successor. Then there was the question of tactical timing - once the choice of date had been narrowed, which particular negotiating meeting should it precede or follow, and when exactly should it be announced? On the substance, it was clear that the two heads of government would not wish to concern themselves solely with particular aspects of the negotiations, for this would be both to pre-empt the proper function of the Ministers negotiating in Brussels and to miss the opportunity for a real meeting of minds across a wider spectrum. It became clear that President Pompidou wished to be sure in his mind about our attitude on such broader issues as the future of European institutions, majority voting, the place of the French language in the enlarged community, the provisions for France's former colonies when the time came to renegotiate the Yaoundé convention - and the handling of sterling. On our side, the Prime Minister wished to expound to the President, and engage his interest in, the whole concept of united Europe and the role it should rightfully play in the world which has been cardinal to the Prime Minister's own thinking for the past twenty years. But it would also be unthinkable for the Prime Minister to spend two days at the Elysée without a discussion in depth leading to a meeting of minds on the detailed problems which remained to be resolved in the negotiations.



4. Patient discussion of these and other aspects of the meeting was needed before agreement could be reached, both on the timing and on the agenda for a meeting between the two heads of government. With a secretiveness which is characteristic, but also because he believed, rightly, that he could not rely on some elements in the Quai d'Orsay not to disrupt the careful preparations if they knew about them, the President decided that the preliminary and preparatory contacts should be handled exclusively by his own personal staff at the Elysée. It has now become common knowledge that the Quai d'Orsay were kept in ignorance and that Monsieur Schumann only learned of the impending meeting when he returned from a visit to Moscow a few hours before the announcement was to be made. Even the French Prime Minister was only informed the day before. There were, and must still remain, risks for us in this method of work, if only because of the bitterness it has undoubtedly engendered among certain of the senior French officials engaged in the negotiations, whose goodwill towards us has in any case always been questionable. But be that as it may, these discussions led both Her Majesty's Government and President Pompidou to decide that a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President was timely and that it would have every chance of success.

5. Monsieur Pompidou had taken his time over this critical decision. By the end of 1969 he had calculated that it was necessary to allow negotiations to open with the United Kingdom in order to secure the final stage of the Community's agricultural



policy: and it was so agreed at The Hague summit. I am less certain how convinced he was at that time that it was in France's interest that the negotiations should succeed. But I believe his mind was already moving along the lines that, provided vital French negotiating objectives were adequately protected, then on balance success would be advantageous to France. What was quite certain from the start was that, if the negotiations should fail, Monsieur Pompidou did not want to be blamed for this; and it became increasingly clear, as the negotiations went on, that if they did break down he would be hard put to it to avoid being cast as the man responsible for failure.

6. Developments outside the negotiating room reinforced the arguments in favour of allowing the negotiations to succeed. Monsieur Pompidou was widely blamed for the fiasco of France's negotiations with Algeria, on the grounds that he should have intervened personally at a much earlier stage. Many commentators asked whether he might be going to make the same mistake over the Community's negotiations with Britain: this sort of criticism could only be answered by a "positive" result in Brussels. Within the Community itself, the ructions over monetary and economic union reminded those few in France who have ever forgotten it, that their neighbour across the Rhine could not be content for ever to adopt the complaisant attitude towards France's pretensions within the Six which had satisfied Dr Adenauer, under the spell of General de Gaulle. France's perennial mistrust of Germany was undoubtedly (however regrettable its consequences in other contexts) one of the more compelling factors which decided Monsieur Pompidou to disregard the misgivings of the orthodox Gaullists and invite Mr Heath to visit him

