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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

18 February 1977

Dear Joop,

I read with great interest the suggestions, based on Dutch experience as President of the European Council, which Mr. van der Stoel made in his letter of 16 December to Tony Crosland about ways in which we might organise the business of the European Council in future. It was particularly useful to me to receive these views, as well as those which President Giscard put forward in his letter of 21 January, since it falls to me as President-in-office to suggest the arrangements for the agenda of our next meeting in Rome on 25 March.

My preliminary comment is that, like President Giscard, I value the intimate and frank nature of our discussions and I do not wish to see them become too formalised. Secondly, we must beware of becoming an appellate body from the Council of Foreign Ministers. There will of course be occasions when the decision to be reached is so important or so contentious that it cannot be resolved except by Heads of State and Government. But our bias should be to encourage the Council of Foreign Ministers to settle issues and not to leave them over until we meet.

I am sure that all our colleagues, to whom I believe both you and President Giscard have circulated your ideas, will wish to study them in greater depth. Perhaps we should reserve some time at our next meeting to discuss them and any other suggestions that are made. Meanwhile it might help if I were to indicate the results of my own preliminary thinking - very similar in many respects to your own and President Giscard's - and the lines on

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which I propose, if my colleagues agree, to direct the preparations of our agenda and discussions in March. Plainly these ideas can at this stage only be tentative, since the actual topics we shall want to discuss will not become clear until much nearer the time; I shall look forward to discussing the physical arrangements for the meeting in Rome with our Italian hosts; and all these proposals must be subject to review in the light of experience.

But subject to these qualifications, my conclusions are as follows:

- (i) We should accept the fact that European Councils will remain a mixture of general informal discussions without records or written conclusions, and discussions of specific subjects on which decisions or public declarations are hoped for. Good order and public presentation can be ensured by careful preparation and appropriate handling of the distinct types of discussion.
- (ii) A draft agenda should be circulated by the Presidency about three weeks in advance covering both categories. The general discussion might have standard headings, such as economic and monetary situation, external relations and internal Community affairs. It should be left to the Presidency to decide whether a short paper on any particular topic might help to focus discussion; and in that case the Council/Foreign Ministers or the Commission could be asked to produce it. It would be open to individual Ministers to raise additional points if they wished.
- (iii) For topics on which decisions are wanted, discussion should be based on a short agenda note prepared in advance by the Council/Foreign Ministers. It would of course be recognised that some topics in the second category might also be touched on in the first. It would be the object under both categories to keep the number of papers to the minimum.

- (iv) Foreign Ministers should be generally responsible for preparing for European Council meetings, and should normally meet briefly immediately before the European Council to compare notes on last minute developments. If they considered that any of their colleagues - e.g. Finance Ministers - needed to be associated with the preparations they would make appropriate arrangements to consult them.
- (v) Attendance at meetings of the European Council would be restricted as hitherto; but the Presidency would be responsible for arranging for the necessary records of conclusions in cases where decisions were made or declarations approved. When in the course of a meeting further drafting is required, the official who would chair the drafting group could be called in to hear the Chairman's summing up and any comments on it.
- (vi) Formal communiqués should not be made as a routine, and only when special declarations had been prepared or when other important decisions required to be announced. Agreed statements of the Council's views on individual issues could continue to be issued by the Presidency, as at present.

Unless you or any of our colleagues, to whom I am writing in similar terms, see objection I propose to set in hand the preparations for our meeting on 25 March on the above lines. In the light of experience thus gained we might discuss further the procedure to be followed at the succeeding Councils, including the second one under British Presidency in London in June.

Yours sincerely
Jim Callaghan

His Excellency Mr. Joop den Uyl.