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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister.

London SW1A 2AH

Generally, this idea
does not attract me.

AR 7/3

2 March 1984

Peter Crompton
once proposed
something similar.

Jan Thur.

I prefer each country to
provide its own for the
Presidency.

French Ideas for a European Council Secretariat

In his speech in The Hague on 7 February, M. Mitterrand referred to the idea of having a special Secretariat to prepare the ground for European Councils. One idea that the French seem to have in mind is to try to transfer the Sherpa concept from Economic Summits to European Councils. It is just possible that M. Mitterrand may refer to this when he sees the Prime Minister on Monday.

We do not have an agreed view on this issue in Whitehall though as you know we have ourselves proposed in the past that there might be a Political Cooperation Secretariat and it is conceivable that this could also service the European Council. The Sherpa idea also has attractions and is certainly worth looking at.

I enclose a note containing some points on which the Prime Minister may wish to draw in the subject is raised. Sir Geoffrey Howe has not seen the enclosure. I shall be showing him a copy in his box tonight.

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

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FRENCH IDEAS FOR A EUROPEAN SECRETARIAT

POINTS TO MAKE

1. Agree with you that we ought to give some thought to handling both preparation and follow-up to European Councils.

 2. We must not neglect the existing machinery but it does not always deliver. A good example of this was preparatory work for Athens where the combination of the Preparatory Group and Special Councils clearly identified all the areas of disagreement but was not really capable of narrowing the gap. The idea of transferring the Sherpa concept to the European Council has many attractions not least the ability to reflect closely the views of Heads of Government and, as with Economic Summits, to ensure that decisions taken by the European Council are followed up.

 3. The important thing is to have a flexible system which actually works. We should be wary of proposing a new system if this would simply run into hostility from other Member States. After all, in practice, the system of contacts we have had under your Presidency, Foreign Secretary/M Dumas and Robert Armstrong and David Williamson/ M Attali almost amounts to an informal Sherpa system.

 4. We should certainly avoid adding another large bureaucracy to the existing cumbersome Brussels bureaucracy. We already have the Council Secretariat which could not simply be pushed to one side. We have given some thought to the idea of a small Political Cooperation Secretariat. We might look at that too.
- [REDACTED]

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