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10 September 1984

The Hon Peter Brooke MP
PUSS
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
York Road
London SE1

Prime Minister (2)

An attractive idea, provided it does not become as 'bureaucratic' as so many other European institutions. Peter Brooke is keen, and will float the idea in a speech shortly.

Dear Minister,

COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR RESEARCH
A "EUROPEAN ROYAL SOCIETY"

In recent weeks I have been thinking about a "European Royal Society" or "European Academy of Sciences" and want to outline my thoughts to you with the suggestion that you might mention the concept in your speech at the Paris meeting.

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2. The lead-up discussions to the Council of Europe meeting have shown rather clearly that Europe as a scientific entity barely exists. Most European scientists regard the USA as their most important point of contact, with Japan coming up fast in second place. The discussions have pointed to no dramatic solution to this problem - it is a combination of history, psychology and prejudice - and will need imagination and perseverance to solve.
3. Yet solve it we must if Europe as a whole and the individual European nations are to become a scientific force which can compete with the USA and Japan and generate a competitive modern industry.
4. What I believe is needed is a prestigious pan-European scientific organisation which can provide a European identity in science and which would provide a focus for European scientists. Obviously neither the Council of Europe nor the European Community bureaucracies provide this. The European Science Foundation could do so in principle but unfortunately this was set up with membership of institutions (the Royal Society, Research Councils etc) rather than individuals and has hardly captured the imagination to date.

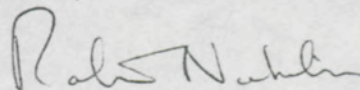
5. A "European Academy of Sciences" would be modelled on our own Royal Society, with a limited Fellowship by election, political independence from Governments but supported by Government grants and by subscription. It would organise exchanges of scientists within Europe, hold meetings and conferences and carry out the activities of a learned Society but on a European basis.
6. I have taken soundings (limited by the holiday period) on this subject and have received a somewhat mixed reaction with the negative comments coming from those associated with national institutions which might feel they have something to lose if the initiative went ahead.
7. I have mentioned the concept on an informal basis to my French colleagues who were extremely enthusiastic and wanted to write it in to the general conference papers. I restrained them on the grounds of UK ownership of the idea (!) and because you might wish to feature the concept in your speech.
8. More generally I am very concerned about the French bid for scientific and technological leadership in Europe which is being pushed so hard by the Mitterrand administration. In some ways it is laughable compared with our own and Germany's claims but if France goes on behaving as though she were leader and continues to fuel the claim with cash, people will eventually believe it and then it will happen. In my judgement this would have very adverse consequences on the UK's economic competitiveness in a future world dominated by science and technology led industries.
9. Thus, if the idea of a European Academy of Sciences has any merit, there are advantages in the UK taking a firm initiative at the start with a view to bidding to headquarter it in London. This will cost money and it is much too early to make any cost/benefit analysis. It is however relevant to the handling of the idea.
10. If you feel the idea has merit, my suggestion is that we draft for you a section of your speech in Paris which briefly analyses the problem, proposes a European Academy as an imaginative response to the situation, and announces a meeting later in the autumn in London, chaired by you, at which the concept will be examined in detail. Attendance at the meeting might be Heads of National Academies or their equivalents in countries without Academies.

You might also seek to involve the Prime Minister as the only scientist Head of Government in Europe.

11. Between now and the meeting it would be possible to take soundings, both nationally and in Europe, assess costs and identify benefits. If the idea seems desirable it is hard to see how another country can take it from us. If it seems undesirable there is an easy retreat in discussing it at your meeting and then allowing it to be developed through the existing European Science Foundation.

12. Perhaps you can let me know whether you would like a draft for your speech prepared. I am copying this minute to David Hancock, Sir David Phillips and David Tanner in your Department, to Crispin Tickell in FCO and for information to David Barclay in No 10 and Richard Hatfield here.

Yours ever,



ROBIN B NICHOLSON
Chief Scientific Adviser

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MR BARCLAY

14 September 1984

AN ACADEMY FOR EUROPEAN SCIENTISTS

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Dr Nicholson copied to you his letter of the 10 September on this subject. This matter has now been discussed with Mr Brooke, and he intends to make reference to the idea in his speech at the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Research. I attach a copy of his speech.

ELIZABETH KANSOM

Draft Speaking Note concerning European Academy

1. We all recognise the growing importance of science and technology as a force for economic change, for adaptation and for industrial growth. It is clear that new technologies based on scientific and technological innovation will be vital, both in modernising mature industries and in creating new industrial products and new services.

2. The growing significance of science and technology is both an opportunity and a threat to Europe. It is an opportunity in so far as we can be proud of the excellence of European scientists and technologies and, in them, we have an asset unrivalled in the world. It is a threat, because our efforts are fragmented, our markets divided, and there is no sense in which Europe pulls together to realise its potential as the third economic force, alongside USA and Japan. There is a real danger that Europe will lose out in the technological revolution because each European country, on its own, cannot hope to compete with USA or Japan.

3. We must look forward to the day when we can truly talk about European science and technology as an entity, as a reality, and that this in turn is the foundation upon which the uninhibited exchange of ideas and of the products of those ideas, in the form of goods and services, is built.

4. The question facing us is how we can build on the undoubted strengths of our different nations' science and technology, and how to create the circumstances in which European collaboration can flourish.

5. The answer surely lies in developing a feeling of European identity, so that our scientists' natural partners are fellow European scientists, and so that they find within Europe opportunities to develop their potential. This is what I understand by the notion 'A European Science and Technology Area', and these ideas underlie the political declaration, which is an important statement of our countries' will enhance European collaboration.

6. The resolutions before us focus on the practical difficulties, and how we might take steps to overcome them, and they are valuable for that reason. But, increasingly, my view is that the real barriers may be less tangible, and stem from history, psychology and prejudice. These kinds of obstacles are not easily overcome just by administrative action. They require more imaginative steps.

6a. I want to pay tribute to the European Science Foundation, which has been fortunate indeed Mr Chairman to have you as President this year. The ESF is, of course, an organisation whose membership takes the form of our great national organisations in Europe: National Academies, Research Societies and Institutes.

7. But we also need to engender in our individual scientists this greater feeling of European identity, of being a European researcher, so that, in time, it becomes as natural for a British scientist to collaborate with his or her counterparts in France, Austria, the Netherlands, the Federal Republic, Spain, Turkey or wherever in Europe, on the same basis as collaboration with colleagues in London, Edinburgh or Manchester. An American scientist thinks no differently of collaboration with a scientist in his own State to one in a different state across a continent 4000 km away.

8. The need to develop a European identity raises in my mind whether, amongst our existing European scientific institution, we have a focal point for individual European scientists. I ask myself if the gap in our institutional arrangements is at the level of an academy of European scientists, and that what we might think about is a fellowship of European scientists, a prestigious, self regulating body which fulfils the functions of a national academy but on a European basis. If set up, it could perform the vital functions of such a society. By that I mean it could confer fellowships on a limited basis by election, offer prestigious awards for the exchange of scientists, hold meetings and so on. It would be free from political interference, and without the mediation of national institutions.

9. If there is virtue in this idea, I wonder whether it can succeed unless the motive power for it comes from within the European scientific community itself; and thus this question which I put, initially in this forum because of our

raison d'être today, is really put to the scientific community at large. That said, if I may be allowed to embroider the idea, I am attracted to its taking its name not from some impersonal expression of our European spirit but from the very individuality of a single scientist, to reflect the spirit I am envisaging for the institution itself; and of course the name of Leonardo appeals in aptness, reflecting the lead which historically Europe has given to science and implying the distinctive nature of the body that might be created.

10. Just as I think the initiative would have more profound foundations if it were designed by the scientific community, so I think its freshness, momentum and prestige would be enhanced if it were also to capture the imagination of the great foundations and the great companies in our individual countries, as a testimony that they see the importance of European Science and Technology in the same way that we do at this Conference. Although it might receive Government funds for specific tasks such as exchanges of scientists, I would hope its core funding could be derived from private sources.

11. I am conscious of springing this idea into today's debate and, as I say, that the views of the scientists matter more than those of anyone here, but I do sincerely hope that the scientific community might see virtue in exploring this idea for its merits and its implications. If it were helpful for someone to provide the framework for those consultations, then it is a role we should be happy to undertake.

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