



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH FRENCH JOURNALISTS - TGV (VERY FAST TRAIN), PARIS - 19 JUNE 1989

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JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, can you tell us first about what happened this morning in the agreement of the environment?

PM: When we talked about the environment there were three elements for that. I guess the most important was our agreement in regard to the Antarctic. Let me give you the words of the agreement. They are - Australia and France call upon the consultative parties to the Antarctic Treaty to negotiate as soon as possible an agreement which would turn Antarctica into an international wilderness reserve. Australia and France will closely co-operate to this end. This means that we jointly believe that it is appropriate that this last great wilderness on the planet should be preserved and we undertake together now to push internationally for an acceptance of that position. This, I believe, has a significance in ways that are obvious and perhaps some ways which are not so obvious, and obviously we will try and see that there is an increasing understanding of the fragility of that area and therefore the responsibility that we have now to successive generations to preserve that region. What's perhaps not so obvious is this - that the Antarctic is a region which enables measurement of the Greenhouse Effect and the depletion of the ozone layer in an environment uncontaminated by the effects of human activity. That's very important and therefore if the world is going to keep itself in a position where it's going to be best able to monitor these developments and give itself a sensitive predictive base from which to make relevant decisions, it is important that we keep that environment, as I say, uncontaminated.

..... a number of other reasons I think is why we've made this decision and why we'll do our best to persuade relevant parties to the Antarctic Treaty system to support our position.

JOURNALIST: Will you be putting that near the top of the agenda when you go to Britain and see Mrs Thatcher?

PM: It will certainly be high on the agenda there and when I go to the United States, when I go to Germany and when I go to Hungary.

JOURNALIST: Mr Prime Minister, you've met Prime Minister Rocard this morning, you're going to see him again next August. Could you give us your assessment of the role of France in the South Pacific - as well as New Caledonia and other matters?

PM: Let me preface my answer by saying how much I welcome the attitude of the Rocard administration to its relations with Australia and its role in the region. Hitherto there had been a less than fully congenial atmosphere to the relationship, but under the Rocard administration I think we've reached a position where the cordiality in our relations is as high as it's ever been. We believe that there is a considerable opportunity for an expansion of the relationship at the bilateral level. We have in fact entered agreements an understanding that there should be an acceleration of the economic and trading commercial relationship. We hope that there will be a significant French trade and investment mission to Australia before the end of this year. We have made an agreement that we should extend the existing arrangement which covers the area of agriculture whereby there is an interchange of trainees in that area, that that should be extended now to the area of manufacturing, communications, the media and education. We have also agreed that there should be co-operation upon specific projects in the South Pacific region. In the area of New Caledonia, I have unqualifiably welcomed the approach of the French Government as embodied in the Martignon Accords and have indicated that we, in particular, appreciate the understanding by the Rocard administration the absolute necessity to accelerate the training of the Kanak population so that in the area of bureaucracy, education, technical and professional areas there shall be a body of trained and capable Kanak people ready to assume positions of authority and responsibility in whatever new constitutional position is adopted in the next decade. And in that respect, in particular, I have indicated that Australia is willing to help in this training program. We have a wide range of relevant, sophisticated training programs in Australia and we have said that if it is adjudged by the French authorities that we can be of assistance in this program, we are ready to do so. On the question of French nuclear testing program, I have the Australian position. Monsieur Rocard has indicated their position. He said there will be a reduction of the testing program from one under which there were two series of four tests - the unique series - to one under which there will just be one series with six tests. So, on that issue, we agreed to differ.

JOURNALIST: Did you receive any assurances that Australia won't be frozen out of the single market after 1992?

PM: I have talked with the President and the Prime Minister briefly about that issue. Because we had so many other areas to discuss I will be picking up that issue in more detail with Monsieur Fauroux in my discussions this evening.

JOURNALIST: Do you consider France as being part of the South Pacific?

PM: France is part of the South Pacific. It has a great history, a long tradition of involvement and there has been a mistaken apprehension by earlier French administrations that in some sense Australia wanted to displace France in the region. This is not the case - we think France has a continuing role to contribute to the well-being of the nations in this area and it is precisely because we feel that that we have agreed and suggested that there should be co-operative projects to assist the nations in this region.

JOURNALIST: You're sitting on a French high speed train. Is this just a PR exercise or is Australia really interested in buying one of these things?

PM: I don't know what the alternatives are - it's not a PR exercise and I'm not here thinking about buying, as you so inelegantly put it "one of these things". There is a very serious consideration in Australia involving three of our largest companies in a consortium which is examining the feasibility of a Very Fast Train on our eastern seaboard, particularly between Melbourne and Sydney. I believe that this will come to fruition and it is certainly a relevant experience for me to see the Very Fast Train in operation here.

JOURNALIST: Can you look ahead to the British visit - can you tell me what the main aims of the British visit are?

PM: A predominant aim will be to increase the level of Australian/United Kingdom economic relationship. I will be having discussions not only with a range of Ministers, including of course Mrs Thatcher, but we will be involved, Mrs Thatcher and myself, in a meeting of some three hundred leading Australian and British executives who will be examining in detail the opportunities for increased trade and investment between our two countries.

JOURNALIST: I hear you're also going to the Test match. Any predictions?

PM: Yes, I'm happy that I'm in a position that I made the prediction before the start of the Test Series - I sent a cable to the Australian captain, Alan Border, saying that I believed they would win the First Test and that I would see them at Lords when they were one up. The prediction's going well at the moment.

JOURNALIST: So your prediction is that they will win the whole Test Series is it?

PM: Yes I think we will win the Series. We deserve to.

JOURNALIST: You are going to see Mr Chirac in a few moments and a few years ago he called you names. What are you going to talk about with him.

PM: Essentially I will be talking about Australia's desire and intention to involve itself in the bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution. We intend to make significant contributions and not only because we want to, but also in part to repay the extraordinarily generous involvement by, and contribution by, the Government and people of France in our bicentenary celebrations which we held in 1988, and to thank Monsieur Chirac because a considerable part of those arrangements of course were put in place under his administration.

JOURNALIST: Mr Chirac can be even more direct and impolite than me Prime Minister, won't that cloud your discussions in the things he said in the past?

PM: I assume that our meeting will be civil as far as the past is concerned. As I've said before - bitterness, like jealousy, is amongst the most corrosive of human emotions and is not one in which I engage.

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