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THE CERCLE

The CERCLE is an informal group of mainly European and American conservatives -informal in the sense that our existence is not publicly acknowledged.

The Cercle was founded by Antoine Pinay in the period after the Second World War when France, Italy, Germany and the Benelux countries all had 'Demo-Christian' governments. His idea was to establish closer liaison between political leaders and so enable them to cut through the nationalist bureaucracies of the countries concerned, which often stopped their Governments from closer co-operation.

In the course of time the 'Demo-Christian' Parties ceased to be in power in the different countries concerned. It was then decided to expand the CERCLE to include Britain, United States, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal. I took over as Chairman when M. Pinay retired some years ago. Our Secretary is Ambassador (retd.) Franz Josef Bach who was, at one time, Adenauer's Private Secretary.

We are usually 25-30 strong, foregather on a Thursday evening and hold discussions on the following Friday and Saturday. According to events we invite guests to meals or to give us a talk, but much of the discussion is between ourselves. The agenda consists of the main topics of international interest at the time. No decisions are reached. We simply try to exchange ideas with a view to influencing our governments, parties etc. afterwards.

The CERCLE is run on a shoestring and we each pay for our own accommodation and airfare. We meet as a rule twice a year, once in Europe and once in the United States although our last meeting was in South Africa and before that in Oman, when General Schwarzkopf spoke to us.

18.9.91
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NOTE about the CERCLE

There was a period shortly after World War II when France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg all had Demo-Christian Governments. Yet, despite the close identity of view between the leaders, they found their efforts at co-operation repeatedly frustrated by the bureaucracies of their own countries. Antoine Pinay, at one time Prime Minister of France and a greatly respected Finance Minister, formed the CERCLE as a kind of informal Demo-Christian cabinet where leading members of the countries concerned could exchange views privately on matters of common interest, and cut through red tape on their return home.

In due course, given the ordinary processes of democracy, other non Demo-Christian Parties took office particularly in Paris and Bonn. The Cercle thus lost its original role. Pinay, however, thought it worthwhile keeping it in being but making it instead of a Demo-Christian gathering, a Conservative gathering to include Britain and America. The Cercle was thus enlarged to a group of European and American Conservatives meeting in principle twice a year, once in Europe and once in the United States. On occasions we have also met in South Africa.

Participation is usually limited to about thirty members. Our talks are completely off the record. We don't attempt to reach decisions. Our hope is that individual members will be strengthened by what they learn in seeking to exercise influence on their respective Governments or legislatures.

On reaching the age of ninety Pinay asked me to take over the Chairmanship which I have now held for a number of years. Our representatives are invited by colleagues in the different countries. At various times in the United States they have included Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Brezinski, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Richard Perle, Dick McCormack, Norman Bailey, Ted Shackley and Jamie Jameson. I am told but it is not yet confirmed that Scowcroft will come to our next meeting.

On the European side Franz Josef Strauss was nominally my co-chairman until his death. I say nominally, because though he once came to a meeting in Washington he usually only came to our meetings in Germany. Andreotti is still a member but seldom appears. Pasqua, Admiral Lacoste (the former French DMI), and Senator Bourguine have been regular attenders on the French side. The British, apart from Jonathan Aitken and myself have included Sir Philip Goodhart, Winston Churchill Jr., Lord Chalfont and Lord Cranborne (Lord Salisbury's eldest son). Ardeshir Zahedi and Van Heerden (the P.U.S. to the South African Foreign Office) are also attenders.

Financially the Cercle operates on a shoestring. Members pay for their own hotel and travel arrangements. Contributions from German, Dutch, French and British industry pay for conference facilities and meals.

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