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THE PRIME MINISTER

26 September 1988

*Dear Mr. Branson,*

Thank you for your letter of 8 September about your plans to circumnavigate the world in a hot air balloon.

Bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union have improved greatly over the last few years, not only through contacts at the governmental level but through more direct contact between British and Soviet citizens. Inviting a Russian cosmonaut to participate in your venture would, I think, not only symbolise the new possibilities now opening up, but possibly encourage others on both sides to come forward with their own, perhaps less dramatic but nonetheless useful, ideas and thus build up a network of practical co-operation across what unfortunately still is not a "Common European House" but a divided continent. So I support your idea wholeheartedly.

I think, however, that the approach to the Soviet authorities would best come from you direct. I see no reason why you should not write to Mr. Gorbachev giving details of your proposal and offering to discuss the venture further with whoever he cares to designate. I would be quite happy for you to say that you have mentioned the proposal to me and that I fully support it.

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If you would like to send your letter to the Soviet Department in the Foreign Office (Ms. Ewan, telephone number 01-270 2413) they will forward it to our Embassy in Moscow for onward transmission to Mr. Gorbachev. They will also ensure that the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs receives a copy.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Dabbs

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Richard Branson, Esq.