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TO IMMEDIATE FCC

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INFO IMMEDIATE BONN

YOUR TELNO 159: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE M MITTERRAND'S VICTORY AS THE RESULT OF POPULAR ENTHUSIASM FOR HIM. IT IS MUCH MORE A REJECTION OF M GISCARD AND HIS STYLE, WITH MANY GLAD TO SEE HIM TOPPLED. AT THE TIME OF WRITING, M MITTERRAND SEEMS TO HAVE WON BY ABOUT 4 PERCENTAGE POINTS, WHICH IS A GOOD SHOWING IN FRENCH TERMS. BUT HE WOULD BE FOOLISH TO REGARD IT AS A STRONG VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF OR IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY. AND, QUITE APART FROM THE AMBIGUITY OF THE COMMUNIST VOTE, THE SOCIALIST PARTY ITSELF WILL NOT NECESSARILY STAY UNANIMOUSLY BEHIND HIM. AS WELL AS BEING A VOTE AGAINST M GISCARD, THE VOTE HAS BEEN AGAINST THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. M MITTERRAND WILL NOW HAVE TO TRY TO DELIVER ON HIS PROMISES TO SOLVE UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION.

2. AS I EXPLAINED IN MY TELNO 334, M MITTERRAND IS COMMITTED TO DISSOLVING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STRAIGHT AWAY IN ORDER TO TRY TO GET A MAJORITY WHICH WILL SUPPORT HIM. DURING THE PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD WHICH WILL NOW FOLLOW, THE SAME CONSTRAINTS WHICH MADE HIM APPEAR SO IMMOBILE DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WILL CONTINUE TO OPERATE. WHILE HE WILL HAVE TO TAKE OVER THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT AND START MAKING THE EXTENSIVE CHANGES IN PERSONNEL NECESSARY TO GET AN EFFECTIVE GRIP ON THE ADMINISTRATION, HE IS UNLIKELY TO BE IN A POSITION TO TAKE ANY MAJOR POLICY INITIATIVES IN THE PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD.

3. ONCE THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER, WHICH WOULD AT THE EARLIEST BE BY END JUNE, HE WOULD HAVE TO FACE UP TO FINDING A MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. I ASSUME, AND SO DOES EVERYONE ELSE, THAT HE CANNOT GET A SOCIALIST MAJORITY, ALTHOUGH THE SOCIALIST PARTY MAY BE STRENGTHENED. HE WILL NOT WANT TO DEPEND ON THE COMMUNISTS. HE IS THEREFORE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE TO PATCH UP SOME ARRANGEMENT WITH THE CENTRE OR RPR. THIS WOULD INVOLVE SOME VERY HARD BARGAINING AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME EMERGING (EG WITH THE FULL SLATE OF PROMISED NATIONALISATIONS). THE ASSUMPTION MUST BE THAT HE WOULD OFFER MODERATE POLICIES ANGLD TO ECONOMIC EXPANSION AND MODEST REFLATION IN ORDER TO CURB UNEMPLOYMENT. BUT THE QUESTION WILL BE WHETHER THIS WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR HIS OWN FOLLOWERS.

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4. THERE IS A REAL CHANCE THAT FRANCE COULD BE UNGOVERNABLE AFTER THE ELECTIONS IF THE CENTRE AND RIGHT DO WELL ENOUGH AND OPT FOR CONFRONTATION. ON THE OTHER HAND M MITTERRAND HAS BEEN ELECTED AS PRESIDENT OF FRANCE FOR SEVEN YEARS AND IT CANNOT BE EXCLUDED THAT A COMPROMISE WILL BE WORKED OUT. IT SEEMS TOO EARLY TO SPECULATE ON THIS NOW, ALTHOUGH SOME GISCARDIANS COULD BE HEARD MUTTERING THIS EVENING THAT M MITTERRAND COULD NOT POSSIBLY LAST.

5. THE IMPLICATION OF ALL THIS FOR EUROPEAN AND WORLD AFFAIRS SEEMS TO BE THAT FRANCE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE OR EVEN TAKE PART WITH OTHERS IN CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY MAKING UNTIL THE END OF JUNE AT THE EARLIEST AND MORE PROBABLY UNTIL AFTER THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS. THERE IS A DANGER TOO THAT DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND AFTER, THE CENTRE AND RIGHT WILL USE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS A STICK WITH WHICH TO BEAT M MITTERRAND AND DEMAND THAT HE TAKES UP TOUGH POSITIONS FOR FRANCE. IT IS TRUE THAT HE HAS SAID THAT HE WILL BE TOUGH ANYWAY. BUT IN PRACTICE, IF HE GETS THE CHANCE, HE WILL HAVE AN INTEREST IN PUTTING FORWARD CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS TO SHOW HE IS MORE CREATIVE THAN HIS PREDECESSOR.

6. ON DEFENCE AND EAST/WEST RELATIONS NO EARLY INITIATIVE SEEMS LIKELY, ALTHOUGH HE HAS SPOKEN OF A NATO SUMMIT TO CLARIFY OBLIGATIONS AND HE HAS PROMISED HIGHER PRIORITY FOR ARMS CONTROL.

7. THE OTHER IMMEDIATE PROBLEM WILL BE THAT, HOWEVER QUICKLY HE APPOINTS MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND NEW SENIOR OFFICIALS, THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET A GRIP OF THE DOSSIERS STRAIGHT AWAY. IF THE RUMOUR THAT CHEYSSON WILL GET HIGH OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTER OR FOREIGN MINISTER IS CORRECT, HE WILL BE FAMILIAR ENOUGH WITH COMMUNITY SUBJECTS. THE NATURE OF HIS IDEAS CAN MORE EASILY BE ASSESSED IN BRUSSELS THAN IN PARIS.

8. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT M MITTERRAND WOULD GO IN FOR ANYTHING LIKE THE PERSONAL AND HIGHLY PERSONALISED RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FRG THAT M GISCARD CULTIVATED. HE HAS EXPRESSED MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP. HE HAS NO COMMITMENT IN THAT DIRECTION ALTHOUGH HE IS ON GOOD TERMS WITH HERR BRANDT. IF THE FRANC IS SHAKEN BY THE CHANGEOVER TO M MITTERRAND THE FRG'S FIRST EXPERIENCE OF A MITTERRAND ADMINISTRATION IS LIKELY TO BE AN IMMEDIATE NEED TO SUPPORT THE FRANC IN THE EMS. MUCH IS LIKELY TO DEPEND ON M MITTERRAND'S EARLY CONTACTS WITH THE PRINCIPAL PARTNERS, BUT IT SEEMS POSSIBLE TO EXPECT THAT HE WILL NOT AIM AT A FRENCH EUROPE BASED ON A PRIVILEGED RELATIONSHIP WITH GERMANY AND THIS MAY MAKE HIM A BETTER NEGOTIATING PARTNER FOR THE UK, IF HE MANAGES TO SETTLE DOWN ON A STEADY COURSE AT HOME.

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9. THE ELECTION HAS OFFERED THE FRENCH PEOPLE A CHOICE BETWEEN "ALTERNANCE" AND STABILITY. THE ELECTORATE HAVE CHOSEN "ALTERNANCE" AND IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT LOSS OF STABILITY. IF IT CAN BE, AND IF THE IMPORTANT POLITICAL CHANGE BROUGHT ABOUT IN THE ELECTION THROUGH THE DIMINUTION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S VOTE CAN BE CONSOLIDATED FRANCE MAY EVENTUALLY BECOME A LESS BRITTLE AND SHARP EDGED PARTNER. BUT IN THE SHORT TERM, THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION IS PROBABLY GOING TO CAUSE FRANCE TO BECOME A PROBLEM CHILD IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS FOR AT LEAST A PERIOD, ACTING AS A DRAG ON THE DESIRE OF OTHERS TO PUSH ON.

HIBBERT.

FCO/WHITEHALL

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