

GRS 980

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

FM PARIS 121515Z MAY 81

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 346 OF 12 MAY 1981

INFO PRIORITY UKREP BRUSSELS, WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO.

INFO SAVING BONN, BRUSSELS, COPENHAGEN, DUBLIN, THE HAGUE,

LUXEMBOURG, ROME, ATHENS, UKDEL STRASBOURG, HM CONSULS GENERAL FRANCE.

MY TELNO 342: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. THE REACTION OF THE DEFEATED PARTIES TO M. MITTERRAND'S ELECTION HAS BEEN OMINOUSLY UNGENEROUS. ATTEMPTS TO APPORTION BLAME FOR M. GISCARD'S DEFEAT AND MANOEUVRING FOR POSITION IN THE APPROACH TO LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS HAVE NOW BEGUN IN EARNEST. ALL THE INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE ELECTORAL PERIOD IS GOING TO BE BITTERLY CONTESTED BETWEEN THE UDF AND RPR AS WELL AS BETWEEN BOTH OF THEM AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY, WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY BEING ITS USUAL UNHELPFUL SELF.

2. M. GISCARD HAS NOT HIMSELF COMMENTED DIRECTLY ON THE RESULT SINCE THE STATEMENT WHICH HE MADE ON SUNDAY EVENING CONCEDED DEFEAT (MY TELNO 339, NOT TO ALL). THE ELYSEE SPOKESMAN INDICATED LAST NIGHT THAT M. GISCARD WOULD MAKE A STATEMENT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE EXPIRY OF HIS MANDATE TO THOSE VOTERS WHO HAD GIVEN HIM THEIR CONFIDENCE IN SPITE OF THE CRITICISMS LEVELLED AGAINST HIM AND THE "PRE-MEDITATED TREASON" OF WHICH HE HAD BEEN VICTIM. M. GISCARD WOULD SET OUT THE PATH WHICH NEEDED TO BE FOLLOWED TO DEFEND THE ESSENTIAL INTERESTS OF FRANCE. THIS PATH WOULD BE NEITHER THAT OF "A POPULAR FRONT NOR A REACTIONARY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RIGHT AND LEFT BUT A DEMOCRATIC UNION IN THE CENTRE OF FRENCH POLITICS".

3. THIS STATEMENT SEEMS TO SHOW THAT M. GISCARD DOES NOT INTEND TO WITHDRAW FROM POLITICS, EVEN TEMPORARILY, AS A RESULT OF HIS DEFEAT. BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW HE CAN EXPECT TO BE THE RALLYING POINT FOR THOSE OPPOSED TO M. MITTERRAND. THE ELECTION HAS ALREADY SHOWN THAT A SIGNIFICANT SLICE OF THE GAULLIST ELECTORATE IS UNPREPARED TO FOLLOW HIM, AND HE CAN HARDLY INSPIRE HOPE OF VICTORY EVEN IN HIS FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS. ON TOP OF THIS THERE ARE LEGAL DOUBTS WHETHER AN EX-PRESIDENT IS ENTITLED TO TAKE A PLACE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

4. M. GISCARD'S STATEMENT FOLLOWED THE EARLIER MOVE BY M. CHIRAC, AS SOON AS THE ELECTION RESULT WAS KNOWN, TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS DE FACTO LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. HIS APPEAL ON SUNDAY NIGHT WAS ADDRESSED TO ALL THOSE "ATTACHED TO THE VALUES OF LIBERTY AND

CONFIDENTIAL / PROGRESS

PROGRESS" WHO WERE INVITED TO UNITE WITHOUT PARTISAN FEELING. HIS PROPOSAL YESTERDAY THAT THE FORMER PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY SHOULD PUT FORWARD COMMON CANDIDATES IN EACH CONSTITUENCY WAS DESIGNED TO GUARANTEE THAT THE GAULLIST RPR WOULD PREDOMINATE ON THE CENTRE/RIGHT BRANCHES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WHERE THERE ARE AT PRESENT 154 RPR INCUMBENTS AS AGAINST 119 UDF. M. LECANUET, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UDF, HAS ALREADY REJECTED THIS PROPOSAL BY ANNOUNCING THAT THE UDF WOULD PRESENT CANDIDATES IN EACH CONSTITUENCY. HE SUGGESTED HOWEVER THAT BEFORE THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AGREEMENT SHOULD BE REACHED WITH THE RPR ON AUTOMATIC WITHDRAWALS AT THE SECOND ROUND IN FAVOUR OF THE BETTER PLACED CANDIDATE WHETHER HE WERE UDF OR RPR. THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UDF, M. PINTON, HAS IN ADDITION CALLED ON M. GISCARD TO LEAD A UNION BRINGING TOGETHER THE UDF AND ALL THOSE WHO SHARE THE IDEALS OF LIBERTY AND JUSTICE.

5. M BARRE HAS ALSO STAKED A CLAIM TO SOME SORT OF LEADERSHIP. IN STATEMENTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY M BARRE HAS TAKEN ISSUE IN VERY SHARP TERMS WITH THOSE WHO HAD WEAKENED AND DIVIDED THE FORMER GOVERNING MAJORITY. M BARRE SAID THAT HE INTENDED TO STAND FOR ELECTION IN LYONS AT THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. IT IS PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT THAT IN HIS DECLARATIONS M BARRE HAS MADE NO REFERENCE TO M GISCARD AS THE LEADER OF THE NEW OPPOSITION. IT IS BEING ASSUMED IN PARIS THAT M BARRE INTENDS TO BE SEEN AS BEING "EN RESERVE DE LA REPUBLIQUE".

6. THE TONE OF PRESS COMMENT IS UNYIELDINGLY PARTISAN, WITH LE FIGARO WHICH IS CLOSE TO M GISCARD TRYING TO INSIST THAT THE QUESTION CAN BE REDUCED TO THE SIMPLE ONE OF FIGHTING COMMUNISM AND HINTING AT THE OVERTHROW OF THE LEFT BEFORE LONG PROVIDED ONLY THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT HARD ENOUGH.

7. MEANWHILE, THERE IS STILL UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE EXACT DATE FOR THE TRANSFER OF POWER. TO ADD TO THE CONFUSION, SOME CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERTS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT M GISCARD'S TERM ENDS NEITHER ON 24 MAY NOR 27 MAY BUT ON 19 MAY, THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. IT LOOKS AS IF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE TO ADJUDICATE. IT HAS IN ANY CASE TO DECLARE OFFICIALLY THE RESULT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BEFORE 20 MAY. THE TIMING OF THIS DECLARATION MAY DECIDE THE TIMING OF EVERYTHING ELSE. THERE IS NO SIGN THAT M GISCARD INTENDS TO HASTEN HIS DEPARTURE. IN THE PRESS THERE HAS BEEN UNFAVOURABLE COMPARISON DRAWN BETWEEN THE MOROSENESS WITH WHICH THE GISCARDIANS HAVE REACTED TO DEFEAT AND THE DIGNIFIED WAY IN WHICH GENERAL DE GAULLE RAPIDLY LEFT THE ELYSEE ON THE DAY FOLLOWING HIS DEFEAT IN THE REFERENDUM IN 1969.

8. M MITTERRAND HAS HIMSELF MADE NO PARTICULAR POLITICAL MOVE SINCE HIS VICTORY STATEMENT ON SUNDAY EVENING MAKING A BID TO BE PRESIDENT OF ALL THE FRENCH. HE WILL APPARENTLY MAKE NO DECLARATION BEFORE THE OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION OF THE RESULT. FOR

CONFIDENTIAL

THE MOMENT HE CAN AFFORD TO SIT BACK AND LET THE NEW OPPOSITION
REND ITSELF. HE SPENT YESTERDAY IN CONSULTATIONS WITH HIS ADVISORS.

A TRANSITIONAL WORKING GROUP HAS APPARENTLY BEEN SET UP, BUT
ITS COMPOSITION HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED. LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, THE
PS WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY M MITTERRAND'S VICTORY. THERE IS
LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT THE ORGANISATIONAL PROBLEMS OF TAKING OVER
GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN ADDRESSED WITHIN THE PARTY. THERE IS NO
TRADITION OF CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT UNDER THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, AND
PRESIDENT GISCARD WOULD HAVE STAMPED ON ANY SUGGESTION THAT CHANGE
WAS POSSIBLE. AS A RESULT THE CIVIL SERVICE TOO APPEARS TO HAVE
BEEN TAKEN UNPREPARED. BUT CONTACTS BETWEEN M MITTERRAND'S TEAM
AND THE ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING THE ELYSEE STAFF, ARE NOW REPORTED
TO BE UNDERWAY.

9. M MAUROY, M MITTERRAND'S SPOKESMAN, SAID THIS MORNING ON THE
RADIO THAT NOT JUST THE SOCIALISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS BUT ALSO
THE LEFT RADICALS, THE ECOLOGISTS AND THE LEFT-WING GAULLISTS
WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE DISCUSSION OF A CONTRACT OF GOVERNMENT.
THIS DISCUSSION WOULD TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE PARTIES THEMSELVES
ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT INDICATE WHEN THIS WOULD BE. HE ADDED THAT
THE DECISIONS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT TEAM WOULD NOT BE MADE PUBLIC
BEFORE 24 MAY.

FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES EXCEPT HM CONSULS GENERAL
FRANCE.

HIBBERT.

[REPEATED AS
REQUESTED]

FCO/WHITEHALL
WED