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TO FLASH FCO

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INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, PARIS, BONN, UKDEL NATO, MODUK,  
ROUTINE OTHER NATO POSTS, EAST EUROPEAN POSTS, PEKING, TOKYO,  
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MY TELNO 317: ELECTION OF GORBACHEV

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV HAS BEEN INSTALLED RAPIDLY AND SMOOTHLY. CHERNENKO IS BEING DISPOSED OF ALMOST WITH IMPATIENCE. A LIVELY FIRST SPEECH BY GORBACHEV AS PARTY LEADER BUT EMPHASIS ON CONTINUITY AND NO INDICATION OF NEW POLICIES.

DETAIL

2. GORBACHEV HAS BEEN INSTALLED WITH RECORD SPEED AND IS ALREADY INTO HIS STRIDE. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS ELECTION CAME LESS THAN 24 HOURS AFTER CHERNENKO DIED AND 4 HOURS AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS DEATH. (THE GAP BETWEEN DEATH AND ELECTION WAS TWO AND A HALF DAYS IN THE CASE OF BREZHNEV AND ANDROPOV, AND 4 DAYS IN THE CASE OF ANDROPOV AND CHERNENKO).

3. CHERNENKO HAS RECEIVED THE STANDARD TRIBUTES AND HONOURS BUT HIS OBSEQUIES HAVE BEEN SO TELESCOPED AS TO PRODUCE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS BEING DISPOSED OF IN SOME HURRY AND WITH LITTLE REGRET. PRAVDA'S FRONT PAGE TODAY IS DOMINATED BY A PHOTOGRAPH AND BIOGRAPHY OF GORBACHEV, WHILE CHERNENKO'S PHOTOGRAPH AND OBITUARY ARE RELEGATED TO THE INSIDE PAGE. IT IS HARDLY NECESSARY TO SAY THAT NO SIGN OF PUBLIC GRIEF IS TO BE OBSERVED. EVEN OFFICIALS HAVE NOT TROUBLED TO CONCEAL THEIR INDIFFERENCE. DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RYZHOV EXPRESSED NO REGRET WHEN HE ANNOUNCED THE DEATH OF 'CHERNENKO' AT HIS LUNCH FOR DEREK THOMAS YESTERDAY.

4. THIS RAPID AND EFFICIENT TRANSITION OF POWER MAY OWE SOMETHING TO THE FACT THAT PRACTICE, WITH TWO RECENT PRECEDENTS, MAKES PERFECT. BUT IT ALSO SUGGESTS THAT GORBACHEV'S ELECTION, IF NOT FORMALLY PRE-ARRANGED, REQUIRED VERY LITTLE DISCUSSION. THE DECISION WAS PRESUMABLY TAKEN BY THE POLITBURO BEFORE SHCHERBITSKY RETURNED FROM THE UNITED STATES. IT IS

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DISCUSSION. THE DECISION WAS PRESUMABLY TAKEN BY THE POLITBURO BEFORE SHCHERBITSKY RETURNED FROM THE UNITED STATES. IT IS, HOWEVER, ODD BOTH THAT GORBACHEV WAS NOMINATED BY GROMYKO, RATHER THAN THE NEXT SENIOR PARTY SECRETARY ROMANOV OR THE SENIOR POLITBURO MEMBER IN PROTOCOL TERMS, TIKHONOV SEMI COLON AND THAT GROMYKO'S NOMINATION SPEECH HAS NOT BEEN PUBLISHED (AS WERE THOSE OF CHERNENKO FOR ANDROPOV AND TIKHONOV FOR CHERNENKO).

5. GORBACHEV'S BRIEF ACCEPTANCE SPEECH WAS VIGOROUSLY PHRASED BUT GAVE NO REAL HINT OF NEW POLICY DIRECTIONS. HE STRESSED THE COLLECTIVITY IN LEADERSHIP TO WHICH CHERNENKO WAS DEDICATED (A POINT REPEATED IN THE COMMUNIQUE OF THE PLENUM), INVOKED THE SUPPORT AND HELP OF HIS POLITBURO COLLEAGUES AND DECLARED THAT THE PARTY LINE FORMULATED UNDER ANDROPOV AND CHERNENKO REMAINED UNCHANGED.

6. ON ECONOMIC POLICY, HIS WORDS WERE CAREFULLY BALANCED, AND CALCULATED NOT TO AROUSE HOPES OR FEARS OF RADICAL REFORMS. HE SPOKE OF THE PLANNED ECONOMY AND SOCIALIST OWNERSHIP, AS WELL AS THE RIGHTS AND INDEPENDENCE OF ENTERPRISES. HIS ANDROPOVIAN INVOCATION OF ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IS BY NOW STANDARD SEMI COLON BUT IT WAS INTERESTING THAT IN HIS FIRST SPEECH AS PARTY LEADER HE RAISED THE ISSUE OF GREATER "OPENNESS" IN PARTY AND GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES.

7. ON FOREIGN POLICY, GORBACHEV'S PRIORITIES WERE PREDICTABLE AND HE STRUCK NO NEW NOTE ON EAST/WEST RELATIONS. HE INCLUDED REFERENCES TO DETENTE AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AND REITERATED CHERNENKO'S IDEA FOR "NEW STEPS" TO MARK THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY. HE CHOSE FAIRLY STRONG LANGUAGE ABOUT MAINTAINING THE STRENGTH OF THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES AND ITS CAPABILITY TO DEAL A "CRUSHING RETALIATORY BLOW" IF NECESSARY.

RATFORD

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Handwritten notes and stamps at the bottom of the page, including a stamp that reads "H2A10" and several lines of illegible handwriting.