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FM ROME 111115Z APR 79
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 147 OF 11 APRIL

TOP COPY

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INFO SAVING TO WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO, UKREP BRUSSELS, AND ALL OTHER EEC POSTS.

WRT 01A/2	
RECEIVED	3.13
25 APR 1979	
DEPT	COUNTRY

MY TELNO 136: ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION.

1. THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY, 10 APRIL, THAT THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE ON 3 AND 4 JUNE, IE ONE WEEK BEFORE THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS.
2. ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN EXPECTED UP UNTIL A WEEK AGO THAT THE TWO ELECTIONS WOULD BE COUPLED, IT WAS ONLY REALISED AT THE LAST MINUTE THAT LEGISLATIVE ACTION WOULD BE REQUIRED TO ENABLE VOTING IN THE NATIONAL ELECTION TO TAKE PLACE ON SATURDAY 9 AND SUNDAY 10 JUNE (RATHER THAN ON A SUNDAY AND MONDAY AS USUAL IN ITALY). SINCE PARLIAMENT HAD ALREADY BEEN DISSOLVED, LEGISLATION COULD ONLY BE INTRODUCED BY DECREE LAW WITH THE UNANIMOUS APPROVAL OF ALL PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS. THIS APPROVAL WAS NOT FORTHCOMING, AND THE UPSHOT WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO ACCEPT THE ADVICE OF ITS CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERTS AND HOLD THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS ONE WEEK EARLIER. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE CRITICISED THE DECISION ON THE GROUNDS OF THE ADDITIONAL EXPENSE AND DISRUPTION THAT WILL BE CAUSED BY HAVING TWO ROUNDS OF ELECTIONS. THE SOCIALISTS, WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO AVOID HAVING NATIONAL ELECTIONS FIRST, HAVE DESCRIBED IT AS A CYNICAL DECISION DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS. THEY ARE THREATENING TO TAKE THE MATTER TO THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE "TO PROTECT THE EUROPEAN ELECTORAL RIGHTS OF ITALIAN CITIZENS".

3. DESPITE THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE DECISION THERE NOW SEEMS NO DOUBT THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL GO AHEAD ON 3/4 JUNE. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN DOES NOT FORMALLY OPEN UNTIL 4 MAY BUT THE

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POLITICAL PARTIES ARE ALREADY STAKING OUT POSITIONS. FOLLOWING BERLINGUER'S RALLYING CALL AT THE RECENT COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS (PARA 5 OF MY TUR) THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PRESIDENT, PICCOLI, STATED CATEGORICALLY LAST WEEK THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WOULD NOT FORM A GOVERNMENT WITH THE COMMUNISTS. HE SAID THAT THIS WAS NOT A MATTER OF DISCRIMINATION, BUT A RATIONAL CHOICE DESIGNED TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE ALTERNATION OF POWER. MEANWHILE THE SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY CRAXI HAS MADE CLEAR, IN REPLY TO OVERTURES FROM BERLINGUER FOR "UNIFIED PARTICIPATION OF THE LEFT" IN A GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS, THAT THE SOCIALISTS WILL NOT FIGHT AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN BASED ON SUPPORT FOR COMMUNIST DEMANDS TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT. CRAXI ADDED THAT THE IMPORTANT ISSUE WAS NOT COMMUNIST ENTRY INTO GOVERNMENT (THOUGH THE SOCIALISTS WOULD NOT OPPOSE THIS) BUT THE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT THIRD FORCE ROLE FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

4. FCO PLEASE PASS TO ALL SAVING ADR// ADDRESSEES.

CAMPBELL

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