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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 583 OF 11 OCTOBER

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ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO BONN: DEFENCE ISSUES.

1. ACCORDING TO THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, THERE WAS AN ALMOST COMPLETE MEETING OF MINDS BETWEEN CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT AND PRIME MINISTER COSSIGA ON THE BREZHNEV SPEECH AND TNF. THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE FORMER WAS THAT IT WAS A MOVE DESIGNED PRINCIPALLY TO AFFECT ALLIANCE DECISIONS ON TNF. THE PROPOSAL TO REDEPLOY MISSILES EAST OF THE URALS CLEARLY HAD NOTHING IN IT OF ADVANTAGE TO THE WEST. THE CHANCELLOR THOUGHT THAT THE POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL OF UP TO 20,000 MEN AND 1,000 TANKS SHOULD BE LOOKED AT CLOSELY IN THE MBFR CONTEXT. BUT IT WAS NOT YET CLEAR EXACTLY WHAT IT AMOUNTED TO AND IN ANY CASE THE OFFER SHOULD NOT DETRACT FROM THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE WEST ATTACHED TO REACHING AN AGREEMENT WITH THE EAST ON DATA. MORE GENERALLY THE RUSSIAN OFFER ADDED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARMS CONTROL ELEMENT IN THE TNF PACKAGE.

2. AS REGARDS TNF BOTH THE CHANCELLOR AND COSSIGA AGREED THAT THE BREZHNEV SPEECH WOULD HAVE NO EFFECT ON THE DETERMINATION OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS TO PRESS AHEAD WITH TNF MODERNISATION. DOMESTICALLY NEITHER HEAD OF GOVERNMENT THOUGHT THAT HE WOULD ENCOUNTER SERIOUSLY INCREASED DIFFICULTIES IN CARRYING THROUGH SUCH A PROGRAMME. OF THE TWO COSSIGA SEEMED TO BE THE MORE BULLISH ABOUT THIS, ALTHOUGH IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF DEGREE. ( HE HAD APPARENTLY ALREADY CLEARED HIS LINES WITH LEADERS OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES EXCEPT BERLINGUER. CRAXI NEEDED SOME MORAL SUPPORT ). COSSIGA ALSO SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MORE ROBUST IN GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE DEFLECTED FROM ITS COURSE, EVEN IF THE DUTCH, POSSIBLY FOLLOWED BY THE BELGIANS, WERE TO DECIDE THAT THEY COULD NOT AT THIS STAGE AGREE TO STATION LONG-RANGE TNF ON THEIR SOIL. WE WERE TOLD THAT IN THE CHANCELLOR'S VIEW SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE QUOTE VERY SERIOUS INDEED UNQUOTE AND ALL EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE TO PERSUADE THE

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DUTCH TO AGREE. BOTH COSSIGA AND THE CHANCELLOR AGREED THAT IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE FOR DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN RATHER EARLIER THAN DECEMBER BUT SCHMIDT TOLD COSSIGA THAT THERE APPEARED TO BE INSUPERABLE DIFFICULTIES IN THIS FOR THE DUTCH.

3. THE IMPRESSION WE GAINED FROM THIS ACCOUNT WAS THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL NOW INTENSIFY THEIR EFFORTS TO BRING THE DUTCH AND TO KEEP THE BELGIANS ON BOARD AND IS LOOKING FOR SUPPORT FROM OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE ( COSSIGA WILL BE SEEING VAN AGT ON 13 OCTOBER ): BUT IF THIS AIM SHOULD NOT BE ACHIEVED THEY WILL TAKE SOME SOLACE FROM CONTINUED ITALIAN PARTICIPATION.

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