

Telegram to issue



Private Secretary

Mr Fergusson

Handwritten notes and stamps:
 014/2 1/11
 6 APR 1980
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cc: ECD(I)
 Defence Department

NEW ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

Flags A & B (17) (18)

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1. Signor Cossiga has succeeded in forming a new government, which includes the Socialists, and was sworn in on 4 April. (Rome telegrams 254 and 255 of 5 April refer).

The new Foreign Minister

2. A Personality Report on Signor Colombo is attached. We have not yet received the further comments on the new government promised in Rome telegram number 254.

3. You may like to see this before your departure for Lisbon, where the Secretary of State will be meeting Signor Colombo. The Secretary of State may subsequently wish to send a message. I attach a draft in the form of a telegram to Rome.

P Vereker

P W M Vereker
 Western European Department

8 April 1980

P Vereker
 9/4

P.V. 14/4
 M. Vereker
 Miss Sandil
 14/4

P Vereker
 14/4

28 COLOMBO, Onorevole Emilio

President of the European Parliament (Christian Democrat).

Born in 1920 in Potenza (Basilicata), which he has represented in Parliament as a Christian Democrat since 1946. Doctor of Law. Like Andreotti (qv), another protege of De Gasperi, he became a junior Minister at 28; Minister of Agriculture 1955-58, and for Foreign Trade 1958-59. As Minister for Industry in the following three years he was responsible for organising the nationalisation of the electricity industry (a watershed in Italian politics). He was concurrently in charge of relations with the EEC and led the Italian delegation in the first British entry negotiations. Minister of the Treasury without a break from 1963-70 and, together with Carli (qv) overcame more than one economic crisis, and successfully defended the lira.

Prime Minister of a centre-left government from August 1970 to February 1972. His task was made difficult by intense squabbling within the Christian Democrat party, aggravated by his own efforts to put through needed reforms, and by the Socialist overtures to the Communists. Colombo's position became untenable when the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, though parties in the same coalition government, supported different candidates in the presidential election at the end of 1971. Resigned February 1972.

Colombo returned to the Treasury in Andreotti's single party Christian Democrat government, February-June 1972, but occupied the comparatively unimportant post of Minister without Portfolio for relations with the UN during Andreotti's second government. Colombo returned to a senior post, that of Minister of Finance, when Rumor formed his government in July 1973. He once more took over the Treasury in March 1974, remaining there until the General Election in June 1976. Mr Roy Jenkins tried to interest him in joining the Commission, but he declined. Elected President of the European Parliament in March 1977.

Colombo is a devout Catholic. Unmarried, he is said to be a lay Franciscan who has taken a vow of celibacy. A handsome, highly intelligent and hard working man with quiet sense of humour. He is a good speaker. Beneath his gentle exterior, he is a capable politician, especially in his limited area of the Mezzogiorno. At the same time, his lack of a real power base was probably his own undoing as Prime Minister. He gives the impression (eg at a lunch given by the Ambassador for Mr Edward Heath in April 1978) that he does not consider himself by any means finished on the Italian political scene. He runs a small faction in the Christian Democrat party which is nominally allied with Andreotti's, but, in general, he takes a neutral stand in internal party squabbles. He appears to suffer from catarrh of a rather pronounced kind which makes him restless and twitchy.

Colombo has been a good friend of Britain, which he has often visited, once in June 1971 as Prime Minister. Speaks good French but scarcely any English. He likes music and collects old silver.

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TO IMMEDIATE LISBON

TELEGRAM NUMBER 72 OF 9 APRIL.

FOR PS TO S OF S.

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM NOW REPEATED TO YOU AT REQUEST OF DEPT WAS RECEIVED FROM ROME TLELNO 277 OF 8/4.

INFO PRIORITY BONN PARIS UKREP BRUSSELS
SAVIN UKDEL NATO WASHINGTON COPENHAGEN THE HAGUE BRUSSELS
DUBLIN LUXEMBOURG.

MY TEL NO 254 : ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION.

1. SIGNOR COSSIGA'S NEW THREE-PARTY COALITION IS MADE UP OF 16 CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS , 8 SOCIALISTS AND 3 REPUBLICANS. BY BRINGING IN THE SOCIALISTS , COSSIGA HAS SUCCEEDED IN FORMING A GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL HAVE A MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT WITHOUT OUTSIDE SUPPORT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1974. THIS SHOULD GREATLY STRENGTHEN COSSIGA'S PERSONAL POSITION.

2. THE INCLUSION OF SOCIALISTS AND REPUBLICANS IN PLACE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND LIBERALS SHOULD, ON THE FACE OF IT , PRODUCE A MORE LEFTWARD-LOOKING GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND , THE NEW COALITION IS EFFECTIVELY AN ANTI-COMMUNIST ALLIANCE WHICH HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH (A) THE SUCCESS OF THE ANTI-COMMUNIST (AND PRO-SOCIALIST) RIGHT WING OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY AT THE DC PARTY CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY , AND (B) CRAXI'S SUCCESS IN RE-ESTABLISHING HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE PRO-COMMUNIST LEFT WING OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY , WHOM HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN PERSUADING TO JOIN A COALITION AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS. TO THIS EXTENT THE NEW GOVERNMENT REPRESENTS A STRENGTHENING OF THE FORCES OF THE RIGHT IN BOTH THE MAJOR COALITION PARTIES. THIS TREND IS APPARENT IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT: MEMBERS OF THE CENTRE AND RIGHT FACTIONS PREDOMINATE AMONG THE DC MINISTERS, AND THERE IS ONLY ONE ANTI-CRAXI LEFT-WINGER (ANIASI AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH) AMONG THE 9 SOCIALISTS.

3. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW IS AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. EMILIO COLOMBO (WHO I UNDERSTAND WILL BE PRESENT AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MINISTERIAL MEETING IN LISBON ON 9/10 APRIL) HAS LONG EXPERIENCE OF EC AFFAIRS AND WAS HELPFUL TO THE UK AS ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER IN 1970-72 AT THE TIME OF OUR ENTRY NEGOTIATIONS. THE MINISTER IN THE NEWLY CREATED PORTFOLIO FOR COMMUNITY AFFAIRS , SCOTTI , IS YOUNG AND ENERGETIC, BUT WE UNDERSTAND FROM THE MFA AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE THAT HE WILL BE CONCERNED WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY POLICIES WITHIN ITALY RATHER THAN THE CO-ORDINATION OF COMMUNITY POLICY TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY, WHICH WILL REMAIN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MFA. IT WILL NO DOUBT TAKE TIME FOR HIS PRECISE ROLE TO BE ESTABLISHED, BUT OUR CONTACTS SAY THAT SCOTTI WILL HAVE NO ROLE TO PLAY IN THE UK BUDGET PROBLEM, AND IS UNLIKELY TO ATTEND COUNCILS EXCEPT OCCASIONALLY FOR SPECIFIC BUSINESS CONNECTED WITH HIS RESPONSIBILITIES. ZAMBERLETTI WILL APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO BE COLOMBO'S DEPUTY FOR EC MATTERS.

4. THE SOCIALISTS APPEAR TO HAVE INSISTED ON AT LEAST ONE MAJOR PORTFOLIO. SINCE THE DC HAS KEPT FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THERE WERE NO VACANCIES AT THE TREASURY OR THE INTERIOR, THE LOGICAL CHOICE WAS TO MOVE SARTI FROM DEFENCE. THE NEW MINISTER, LAGORIO, WHO HAS BEEN SOCIALIST SPOKESMAN ON POLICE AND INTERNAL AFFAIRS FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS, IS CLOSE TO CRAXI AND IS ROBUSTLY ANTI-COMMUNIST. HE HAS NO DEFENCE EXPERIENCE ,BUT IS PROBABLY AS GOOD A CHOICE AS ANY IF THERE HAD TO BE A SOCIALIST IN THIS PORTFOLIO. I RECOMMEND THAT MR PYM RENEW TO HIM THE INVITATION WHICH I HAD ALREADY PASSED TO SARTI TO VISIT THE UK IN THE AUTUMN.

5. IT IS NOTABLE THAT NEITHER CRAXI NOR THE REPUBLICAN PARTY SECRETARY , SPADOLINI, HAS SOUGHT TO BE INCLUDED IN THE GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH RUMOURS OF A "DIRECTORATE" OF PARTY SECRETARIES HAVE BEEN DENIED, COSSIGA IS CLEARLY ANXIOUS TO HAVE REGULAR CONSULTATIONS WITH THE LEADERS OF THE THREE COALITION PARTIES. THIS SHOULD HELP TO MAINTAIN THE STABILITY OF THE COALITION AND OFFSET PRESSURES FROM THE DISGRUNTLED LEFT-WING MINORITIES IN BOTH THE DC AND THE SOCIALIST PARTIES. NEVERTHELESS , CRAXI WILL STILL HAVE

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6. COSSIGA HAS FORMED HIS NEW GOVERNMENT IN ONLY 16 DAYS (WHICH IS EXCEPTIONALLY FAST BY RECENT ITALIAN STANDARDS) HE STILL HAS TO PREPARE HIS DETAILED POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE CONFIDENCE DEBATE WHICH IS DUE TO START ON 14 APRIL. THE VOTE WILL PROBABLY TAKE PLACE ABOUT 17 OR 18 APRIL. EVEN THOUGH THE RESULT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION HE WILL BE PREOCCUPIED UNTIL AFTER THE VOTE, WHICH LEAVES AN UNCOMFORTABLY SHORT PERIOD BEFORE THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL. BUT SENIOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS ARE WORKING HARD ON THE PREPARATIONS. I EXPECT TO SEE COLOMBO ON 11 APRIL .

CARRINGTON

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