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VISIT BY THE ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

28 MAY 1980

THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Signor Cossiga was sworn in on 4 April on reappointment as Prime Minister, at the head of a new coalition Government which includes the Socialists. He had resigned in mid-March rather than face defeat on a key vote but was given a mandate by President Pertini to form a new Government. Within 16 days - a record by recent Italian standards - Cossiga succeeded in forming a 3-part coalition made up of 16 Christian Democrats, 9 Socialists and 3 Republicans. By bringing in the Socialists, Cossiga succeeded in forming a Government which has a majority in Parliament without outside support, for the first time since 1974. This has strengthened Cossiga's personal position.

2. It is too early to assess the performance of the new Government. The inclusion of Socialists and Republicans in place of Social Democrats and Liberals in Cossiga's new Government might be expected to produce a more leftward-looking Government. On the other hand, the new coalition is effectively an anti-Communist alliance, which has been made possible by recent strengthening in the position of the right wing in both the Christian Democrat Party and the Socialist Party. This trend is apparent in the composition of the Government: members of the centre and right factions predominate among the Christian Democrat Ministers, and there is only one left-winger among the 9 Socialists.

3. Political activity is now focussed almost entirely on the Administrative Elections which will be held on 8 June, and in which the Communists are expected to lose further ground. The results will also be important for the Cossiga Government: if the Socialists do badly, left-wing Socialists may press for the party to withdraw from the coalition.

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COLOMBO, ONOREVOLE EMILIO

Italian Foreign Minister

Born in 1920 in Potenza (Basilicata), which he has represented in Parliament as a Christian Democrat since 1946. Doctor of Law. Like Andreotti other 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 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. Appointed Foreign Minister April 1980.

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 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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