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TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 363 OF 30 MAY 1980  
INFO PRIORITY UKREP BRUSSELS  
INFO SAVING OTHER EC POSTS, UKDEL NATO, WASHINGTON AND MILAN.

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MY TELNO 351: ITALIAN INTERNAL SITUATION

1. AS REPORTED IN TELECON GOODISON/GLADSTONE, A SUDDEN DOMESTIC CRISIS HAS ARISEN IN ITALY. THE YOUNG SON OF DONAT-CATTIN, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY AND A FORMER MINISTER, HAS BEEN PINPOINTED BY THE RECENT CONFESSION OF A TERRORIST NOW IN PRISON AS A MEMBER OF A TERRORIST GROUP. ANOTHER TERRORIST NOW IN PRISON HAS ALLEGED THAT NOT ONLY DONAT-CATTIN BUT ALSO COSSIGA, THE PRIME MINISTER, HAVE BEEN AIDING AND ABETTING THIS YOUNG MAN TO HIDE FROM JUSTICE. THE PRIME MINISTER, AT THE REQUEST OF THE MAGISTRATES, HAS BEEN INTERROGATED BY A PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION ON THIS TOPIC ON 30 MAY.

THE OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC (WHO IS AT PRESENT IN BARCELONA) HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING THAT IF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION IS NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S ANSWERS THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC WILL EXPECT HIM TO RESIGN. BUT THE PRESIDENT HAS APPARENTLY SUBSEQUENTLY SAID THAT HE GAVE NO SUCH AUTHORITY FOR SUCH A STATEMENT.

2. THE NORMAL OUTCOME OF SUCH A SCANDAL IN ITALY WOULD NOT BE THE RESIGNATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER. IT ALL LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE A STORM IN A TEACUP, AND ITS TIMING MAY WELL BE CONNECTED WITH THE FORTHCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS ON 8 JUNE. THE AMERICAN EMBASSY'S ASSESSMENT, AS OF THIS EVENING, IS THAT COSSIGA WILL SURVIVE.

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3. ON THE OTHER HAND, PRESIDENT PERTINI HAS FOR SOME TIME MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE IS ANXIOUS TO IMPOSE HIGHER STANDARDS IN ITALIAN PUBLIC LIFE AND HE MAY YET DEMAND COSSIGA'S HEAD. WE UNDERSTAND FROM COSSIGA'S OFFICE THAT A DECISION MAY BE TAKEN WITHIN A FEW HOURS BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION. EVEN IF THE MAJORITY SUPPORTS THE PRIME MINISTER, A SUBSTANTIAL MINORITY VOTE WOULD WEAKEN HIS POSITION AND DAMAGE THE PROSPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY IN THE ELECTIONS.

4. IF COSSIGA WERE OBLIGED TO RESIGN IT IS QUITE LIKELY THAT THE FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE SOME TIME AND THAT COSSIGA WOULD PRESIDE, AS AN OUTGOING PRIME MINISTER, OVER THE TWO VENICE SUMMITS.

5. FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES.

ARCULUS

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[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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