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cf. Mr. Webb.
Assessments Staff.
Cabinet Office.
Mrs. Colvin. R.D.

Miss M Savill
WED
FCO

Your reference

Our reference

Date 1 October 1980

Dear Margaret

Mr. Noster. Cossiga seems to have suffered an amusing slip of the tongue which rather than planned opposition.

ITALIAN INTERNAL SITUATION

46+ 48

1. Please refer to our tels no 519 and 528. You may wish to have some further background.
2. In the confidence vote on 27 September, the Government obtained a majority of 65 (329 to 264), but in the secret vote which then had to follow on the decree as a whole, it was defeated by one vote (297 to 298). You will note that absences were less of a factor than in the tied vote on 23 September (see my letter of 25 September). This second, secret vote contained an element of farce: one DC Deputy was in the lavatory at the crucial moment and another arrived just too late to vote. La Malfa, the Republican Minister for the Budget, was present but his vote did not register, apparently because he did not use the electronic voting apparatus correctly. Zamberletti, after flying back from Shanghai specially, reached the Chamber five minutes too late. Finally the coalition lost the vote of Colombo, who was still abroad: as you know, the Italians have no system of "pairing" for those abroad on Government business.
3. There is no doubt that the 30 or so 'sharpshooters' who altered their vote for the secret ballot did so in the full knowledge that the Government might be defeated as a consequence: the warning of the 23 September vote was not enough to bring them back into line. About 20 of them must have been Christian Democrats, reflecting the dissatisfaction with Cossiga within his own party. It is a familiar political adage here that Prime Ministers are usually brought to grief by their own party, not by outside pressure. The PSI and the PRI, partly for tactical reasons, have both indicated their wariness of being again linked to a party rent by such internal divisions
4. Cossiga looked tired and flat after the vote. He was not constitutionally obliged to resign but it was very much in character for him to do so. No-one was surprised that he did not want a mandate to try again. This does not mean however that he could not emerge at a later stage of the process as a compromise candidate, as in August 1979, acceptable to the 'preambolisti' of the DC right as well as to the 42% minority.

Yours ever
C. Culshaw

pp. R N Culshaw