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PRIME MINISTER'S RESIGNATION: ITALIAN MEDIA REACTIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE NEWS OF MRS THATCHER'S RESIGNATION DOMINATED THE ITALIAN PRESS ON 23 NOVEMBER. FURTHER EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OVER THE WEEKEND MAINLY CONCENTRATES ON THE CONTEST TO SUCCEED HER. THE GENERAL VIEW IS THAT SHE WAS A GREAT LEADER BROUGHT DOWN BY HER OWN INTRANSIGENCE. SEVERAL PAPERS COMPARE HER WITH QUEEN ELIZABETH I AND QUEEN VICTORIA. POLICY TOWARDS EUROPE, THE POLL TAX AND THE DOMESTIC ECONOMIC SITUATION ARE REGARDED AS HAVING BEEN HER MAIN STUMBLING BLOCKS. MANY COMMENT ON THE ENORMOUS CHANGES SHE WROUGHT IN BRITAIN, ONLY TO SEE THE BENEFITS ERODED AS TIME PASSED. FAVOURABLE COMMENT ATTRIBUTED TO ANDREOTTI AND SPADOLINI. FERVENT HOPES THAT HER SUCCESSOR WILL BE LESS VOCIFEROUSLY OPPOSED TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. TELEVISION COVERAGE EXTENSIVE BUT MAINLY FACTUAL, AND WILL REVIVE WITH THE BALLOTING TO COME.

2. LA REPUBBLICA'S LEADER (CENTRE-LEFT, NATIONAL) ON 24 NOVEMBER APPLAUDED HER DECISION TO RESIGN (A) AS A GRAND GESTURE, AND (B) BECAUSE SHE WAS THUS REMOVING A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO EUROPEAN UNION, WHICH REMAINS 'UNTHINKABLE' WITHOUT THE UK. MUCH OF EUROPE'S ECONOMIC POLICY HAS BEEN INSPIRED BY HER. REPUBBLICA IS NOT THE ONLY PAPER TO POINT OUT THAT, HAVING RESIGNED, SHE WILL ACTUALLY LEAVE OFFICE: A LESSON WHICH SHOULD BE LEARNED BY ITALIAN POLITICIANS. THE REST OF THE EC WERE TIRED OF HER UNRELENTING INTRANSIGENCE AND SIMPLY IGNORED HER. CORRIERE DELLA SERA (CENTRIST, NATIONAL) CALLS HER THE ONLY LION AMONG A PACK OF WOLVES: NO OTHER POLITICIAN IN RECENT TIMES HAD BEEN SO INFLUENTIAL WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD.

3. IL SOLE (FT EQUIVALENT) WARNS THAT HER DEPARTURE FROM THE SCENE IS NOT THE TRANSNATIONAL VICTORY IT SEEMS, SINCE MRS THATCHER WAS ONE OF THE FEW WHO WAS NOT AFRAID TO MAKE DECISIONS. EUROPE HAD THUS LOST ITS BEST ALIBI AND SCAPEGOAT. CONTRARY TO PUBLIC OPINION, SHE WAS NOT ANTI-EUROPE: LOOK AT BRITAIN'S RECORD OF DIRECTIVES

COMPLIED WITH. OTHER PARTNERS WOULD BE UNABLE TO LEAVE HER TO DO THEIR DIRTY WORK ANY MORE. QUOTE THE ONLY GREAT EUROPEAN LEADER OF THE EIGHTIES LEAVES THE STAGE UNQUOTE. PRESIDENT BUSH ESPECIALLY WOULD MISS HER FIRM SUPPORT AND DECISIVENESS. LA STAMPA (CENTRIST, N ITALY) SAYS MRS THATCHER WAS NOT ALWAYS WRONG TO CRITICISE THE EC, BUT SHE WENT OVERBOARD AND LOST CREDIBILITY. 'HER STRENGTHS WERE ALSO HER WEAKNESSES'.... IT WAS TIME SHE WENT BEFORE PEOPLE FORGOT HOW GREAT AND INNOVATIVE SHE HAD BEEN.

4. THE WEEKLY PANORAMA TOOK THE LINE THAT, ALTHOUGH THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY, THE POLL TAX AND EUROPE WERE MAJOR FACTORS IN HER INCREASING UNPOPULARITY, MOST BRITISH POLITICIANS FOUND IT INTOLERABLE THAT A WOMAN SHOULD CONTINUE TO LEAD THEM. THE MORE POLITICALLY AWARE WEEKLY L'ESPRESSO REITERATED A POINT MADE BY SOME OF THE DAILIES, THAT THE BRITISH DO NOT (NOT) REALLY APPROVE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY ANYWAY, AND THAT IT WAS BASICALLY THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE POLL TAX WHICH LED TO MRS THATCHER'S INCREASINGLY UNPOPULARITY. AS FAR AS EUROPE WAS CONCERNED, HER DEPARTURE FROM DOWNING STREET WOULD BE THE EQUIVALENT OF DISMANTLING OF THE BERLIN WALL (SIC).

5. APART FROM THE BENEFICIAL IMPACT THAT ITALIANS HOPE HER RESIGNATION WILL HAVE ON UK-EC RELATIONS, MOST POLITICAL COMMENT IS FULL OF ADMIRATION AND RESPECT FOR MRS THATCHER'S HONESTY AND COURAGE IN RESIGNING IN THE WAY SHE DID. ANDREOTTI (PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL) IS SAID TO HAVE COMMENTED THAT ITALIANS DO FIND ANYTHING TRAUMATIC IN CHANGING PRIME MINISTERS (CF. LA REPUBBLICA, PARA 2 ABOVE): ALTHOUGH MRS THATCHER'S VIEWS ON EUROPE, NOTABLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF OTHER PARTNERS, HAD CAUSED PROBLEMS, ONE HAD TO ADMIRE HER, EVEN IF HER ISOLATION AT THE OCTOBER ROME COUNCIL HAD STARTED HER DOWNFALL. SPADOLINI, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, COMMENTED THAT MRS THATCHER'S GREATNESS WOULD PRESERVE HER A PLACE IN BRITISH HISTORY. NO EUROPEAN CITIZEN COULD FORGET THE OVERALL CONTRIBUTION OF ONE OF THE MAIN PLAYERS ON THE POLITICAL STAGE FOR OVER A DECADE. NILDE IOTTI, PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES, COMMENTED THAT THERE QUOTE HAD BEEN A LITTLE TOO MUCH IRON UNQUOTE AND HOPED THAT THE WAY WAS NOW OPEN FOR SMOOTHER RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND HER OTHER EC PARTNERS.

6. TELEVISION COVERAGE WAS EXTENSIVE BUT MAINLY FACTUAL ON 23 AND 24 NOVEMBER, BEFORE GIVING WAY TO THE WEEKEND'S SPORTING NEWS. IT WILL REVIVE TO COVER THE BALLOTING ON 27/28 NOVEMBER, AND ON 29/30 NOVEMBER IF A THIRD ROUND PROVES NECESSARY.