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THE MADRID EUROPEAN COUNCIL : DUTCH DOMESTIC SCENE

SUMMARY

1. THE DUTCH REMAIN POTENTIAL USEFUL ALLIES DESPITE HAVING ONLY A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT. THE EUROPEAN ELECTION RESULTS MAY BE A POINTER TO THE OUTCOME OF THE SEPTEMBER GENERAL ELECTION. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS DID WELL BUT BOTH THE LIBERALS AND DUTCH LABOUR PARTY HAD POOR RESULTS. A CONTINUING COALITION GOVERNMENT LED BY LUBBERS IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE. IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES DUTCH OBJECTIVES FOR MADRID ARE LIMITED. WITH AN EYE ON THE ELECTION LUBBERS WILL WISH TO APPEAR POSITIVE ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION. THE DUTCH MAY BE READY TO WORK FOR A NON-CONFRONTATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE DELORS REPORT.

DETAIL

2. IN HIS ROLE AS LEADER OF A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT PENDING A 6TH SEPTEMBER ELECTION, LUBBERS HANDS ARE TIED A LITTLE MORE THAN AT PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETINGS. HE CANNOT EMBARK ON ANY NEW DOMESTIC LEGISLATION. BUT HE HAS MADE IT CLEAR TO THE DUTCH PARLIAMENT THAT HIS CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE THE LINES OF ESTABLISHED POLICY AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO SPEAK ACTIVELY FOR NETHERLANDS INTERESTS INTERNATIONALLY. THIS IS, IN EFFECT, BUSINESS AS USUAL. MINISTERS NEED TO AVOID CONTROVERSIAL COMMITMENTS IN WHICH THEY MIGHT HAVE DIFFICULTY IN COMMANDING A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, BUT IN IS THE MAJOR INPUT WHICH VAN DEN BROEK HIMSELF MADE TO THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME OF THE MAY NATO SUMMIT IN CHAIRING THE MINISTERIAL DRAFTING GROUP. HE SUBSEQUENTLY ROBUSTLY DEFENDED WHAT HAD BEEN ACHIEVED AT BRUSSELS AGAINST LEFT WING CRITICISMS IN THE DUTCH SECOND CHAMBER.

3. BECAUSE OF THE IMPENDING SEPTEMBER GENERAL ELECTION THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS IN THE NETHERLANDS HAVE HAD A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE. THE TURNOUT (47.2%) WAS LOW BY DUTCH STANDARDS AND NONE OF THE PARTIES FEELS CERTAIN THAT THE TRENDS LAST WEEKEND WILL BE

CARRIED FORWARD TO SEPTEMBER. HOWEVER, LUBBERS AND VAN DEN BROEK WILL BE ENCOURAGED BY THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE CDA. THE PARTY RECEIVED 34.6% OF THE VOTE. THIS WAS THE SAME AS AT THE SUCCESSFUL CDA GENERAL ELECTION IN 1986, AND UP ON THEIR FIGURES AT THE EUROPEAN ELECTION IN 1984. THE VOTE CAN BE INTERPRETED AS A PERSONAL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN LUBBERS.

4. SOME OF THE VOTES FOR THE CDA WERE AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR LIBERAL COALITION PARTNERS WHO HAD BAD RESULTS. THE DUTCH LABOUR PARTY ALSO HAD A DISAPPOINTING ELECTION IN COMMON WITH THEIR COUNTER-PARTS IN FRANCE AND GERMANY. THEIR SHARE OF THE VOTE, IF REPEATED IN SEPTEMBER, WOULD REDUCE THEIR SEATS IN THE DUTCH LOWER HOUSE. THEY LOST GROUND TO A FAR LEFT/GREEN ALLIANCE. THE VOTE MAY ALSO INDICATE A PREFERENCE ON PERSONAL GROUNDS FOR LUBBERS RATHER THAN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD LABOUR LEADER, KOK.

5. DESPITE THE LOW TURNOUT, THE RESULTS DO SUGGEST THAT THE CDA HAS A GOOD CHANCE OF BEING RETURNED AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER AS THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE SECOND CHAMBER. THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE LIBERAL AND LABOUR VOTES WOULD THEN DETERMINE WHETHER THE PRESENT CENTRE/RIGHT COALITION WOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE OR BE REPLACED BY A CENTRE/LEFT COALITION. EITHER WAY THIS WOULD NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT LUBBERS HIMSELF MIGHT CONTINUE IN OFFICE AND HE CERTAINLY APPEARS TO HAVE AN APPETITE TO DO SO.

6. FOR THE PRESENT, DUTCH OBJECTIVES IN MADRID ARE LIKELY TO BE FAIRLY LIMITED. THEY ARE UNSURE HOW THE SPANISH INTEND TO PLAY THE COUNCIL AND ARE WAITING TO HEAR MORE FROM GONZALES. DUTCH MINISTERS ARE ASSUMING THAT THE TWO MAIN POINTS FOR DISCUSSION WILL BE MONETARY UNION AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION. VAN DEN BROEK HAS TOLD ME THAT THE DUTCH ARE ANXIOUS TO AVOID ANY OPEN SPLIT ON EITHER ISSUE AND COULD BE FAIRLY FLEXIBLE IF THIS HELPED TO ACHIEVE AN AGREED CONCLUSION. BUT HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY HAS TOLD US SEPARATELY THAT ON THIS OCCASION MINISTERS HAVE NOT YET REALLY FOCUSED ON WHAT THEY HOPE TO GET OUT OF MADRID. MOREOVER, WITH THE SEPTEMBER ELECTION IN VIEW, LUBBERS WILL NEED TO SHOW APPROPRIATE CONCERN ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES. ON MONETARY QUESTIONS THE DUTCH POSITION HAS NOT CHANGED AND THEY COULD CONTINUE TO BE USEFUL SUPPORT FOR A NON-CONFRONTATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE DELORS REPORT.

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