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SOVIET UNION: POLITICAL SCENE

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV NOW URGENTLY ENGAGED IN ESTABLISHING AN EXECUTIVE .  
PRESIDENCY WITH WIDE POWERS. THE SUPREME SOVIET WILL NEED CAREFUL  
HANDLING IF IT IS TO AGREE THE CHANGE. THE TIMETABLE FOR A  
MULTIPARTY SYSTEM REMAINS UNCLEAR AND WILL RAISE MORE CONTENTIOUS  
ISSUES. MUCH SPECULATION ABOUT WHETHER AND WHEN THE PARTY WILL  
SPLIT. THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE INCREASINGLY SEEN BY THE PARTY RANK AND  
FILE AS DRAGGING THEIR FEET OVER REFORM.

DETAIL

2. THE FOLLOWING IS A SURVEY OF THE UNSETTLED POLITICAL SCENE  
FOLLOWING THE CPSU PLENUM OF 5-7 FEBRUARY AND THE PUBLICATION OF THE  
PARTY'S NEW PLATFORM, AND ON THE EVE OF WHAT ARE EXPECTED TO BE LARGE  
AND PERHAPS UNRULY RALLIES ON SUNDAY.

TIMETABLE

3. FOR THE COMING WEEKS, THIS LOOKS AS FOLLOWS:

24 FEBRUARY - ELECTIONS IN LITHUANIA

25 FEBRUARY - MASS DEMONSTRATIONS IN MOSCOW, LENINGRAD AND OTHER  
CITIES (DETAILS REPORTED SEPARATELY)

END FEBRUARY/EARLY MARCH (MORE PROBABLY LATTER) - FURTHER CPSU PLENUM  
TO AGREE ON NEW PARTY RULES AND ON ARRANGEMENTS TO ELECTIONS TO THE  
PARTY CONGRESS.

4 MARCH - SUPREME SOVIET AND LOCAL ELECTIONS IN RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND  
BELORUSSIA

MID-MARCH? - EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S  
DEPUTIES (PRECISE TIMING IS LIKELY TO DEPEND ON PROGRESS IN DRAFTING  
NEW LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN THE PRESIDENCY (SEE PARA 4 BELOW).

ESTABLISHING AN EXECUTIVE

4. THIS IS NOW THE NUMBER ONE ITEM ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA. OUR  
CONTACTS SEEM AGREED THAT GORBACHEV MADE A BAD ERROR OF JUDGEMENT IN  
ATTEMPTING TO RAILROAD THE SUPREME SOVIET LAST WEEK INTO CALLING AN  
IMMEDIATE MEETING OF THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES TO APPROVE THE  
CREATION OF AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY. THIS SUGGESTED HE WAS OUT OF

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TOUCH WITH THE GROWING INDEPENDENCE OF THE SUPREME SOVIET. NEVERTHELESS, GORBACHEV CONTINUES TO PURSUE THE IDEA AS A TOP PRIORITY. THE PRESIDUM OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET MET ON 21 FEBRUARY TO DISCUSS A DRAFT OF THE NECESSARY LEGISLATION. A DOCUMENT WAS AGREED. ONE OF OUR CONTACTS IN THE SUPREME SOVIET SECRETARIAT TELLS US THAT IT WILL BE TABLED ON 27 FEBRUARY AND IS VERY CONTROVERSIAL. ACADEMICIAN RYZHOV, WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE PRESIDUM, TOLD US THAT DEPENDING ON THE SUPREME SOVIET REACTION, AN EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES COULD BE CALLED AS EARLY AS THE SECOND WEEK OF MARCH SPECIALLY TO GIVE FINAL APPROVAL.

5. THE IDEA OF ESTABLISHING AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY - IE THE POST OF PRESIDENT OF THE USSR IN PLACE OF GORBACHEV'S CURRENT POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET - HAS BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION FOR SOME MONTHS. IT WAS ENDORSED IN THE DRAFT PARTY PLATFORM. THE UNDERLYING LOGIC OF THE IDEA IS CLEAR. WITH THE ADVENT OF A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM AND THE CONSEQUENT CHANGE IN THE FUNCTIONS OF THE POLITBURO, A NEW SOURCE OF EXECUTIVE POWER IS REQUIRED - TO BE PROVIDED BY A PRESIDENT WITH, ACCORDING TO YAKOVLEV, HIS OWN CABINET. THIS WOULD THEN BE A CLEAR SEPARATION OF POWERS. IT IS ASSUMED THAT GORBACHEV WANTS THIS POST ESTABLISHED IN TIME FOR HIM TO OCCUPY AND RETIRE AS PARTY LEADER AT THE PARTY CONGRESS.

6. THERE IS ALSO A SECOND STRAND TO THE ARGUMENT FOR AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY. THE COUNTRY IS NOW IN CRISIS: A PRESIDENT IS THEREFORE NEEDED WITH INCREASED POWERS TO MAINTAIN CIVIL AND ECONOMIC ORDER AND FORCE THROUGH THE UNPOPULAR REFORM MEASURES NEEDED TO TAKE THE COUNTRY OUT OF CRISIS. THE PRECEDENT OF DE GAULLE IN FRANCE IS CITED. IT IS THIS CONSIDERATION WHICH PRESUMABLY EXPLAINS THE URGENCY WITH WHICH GORBACHEV IS NOW PURSUING THE ISSUE.

7. BOTH THESE ARGUMENTS COMMAND A WIDE DEGREE OF SUPPORT. IN PRACTICE, IT MAY PROVE RATHER DIFFICULT TO DESIGN A PRESIDENCY CAPABLE OF FULFILLING BOTH THESE RATHER DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS. ACCORDING TO ACADEMICIAN RYZHOV, THE DRAFT LEGISLATION PUT TO THE SUPREME SOVIET PRESIDUM THIS WEEK WAS CONFUSED. IF ONE WAS GOING TO DESIGN AN AIRCRAFT (RYZHOV IS DIRECTOR OF AN AVIATION INSTITUTE) ONE NEEDED TO KNOW WHETHER THE REQUIREMENT WAS FOR A FIGHTER OR A PASSENGER LINER. THIS SUGGESTS THE LEGISLATION MAY HAVE RATHER A DIFFICULT RIDE IN THE SUPREME SOVIET AND PEOPLE'S CONGRESS. IT WILL NEED A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY BEFORE BECOMING LAW. BURLATSKY, IN HIS TELEVISION COMMENTS, SAID THAT RECENT SOUNDINGS SUGGESTED THAT THERE WAS A 70/30% MAJORITY IN FAVOUR OF AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY BOTH IN THE SUPREME SOVIET AND AMONG THE POPULATION AT LARGE. BUT HE

CONCEDED THAT THERE WERE DIFFERING VIEWS ABOUT PROCEDURES FOR ELECTING THE PRESIDENT AND OVER HIS PERIOD OF OFFICE. IT WAS CLEAR FROM WHAT BURLATSKY AND OTHERS HAVE SAID THAT GORBACHEV IS THINKING IN THE FIRST INSTANCE IN TERMS OF THE POST AS BEING ELECTED BY THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES AND NOT IN A NATIONAL VOTE. LATER ON (ONE CONTACT THOUGHT THIS COULD BE IN TWO TO THREE YEARS) THE PRESIDENT MIGHT BE ELECTED ON A POPULAR VOTE ON THE BASIS OF PROPERLY WORKED OUT CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS AND RESTRAINTS. GORBACHEV SHOULD NOT HAVE TOO MUCH DIFFICULTY IN SECURING HIS OWN ELECTION BY THE PRESENT CONGRESS. BURLATSKY ALSO ARGUED THAT THE INSTITUTION OF A STRENGTHENED PRESIDENCY SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PARALLEL STRENGTHENING OF THE LEGISLATURE. HE SUGGESTED THAT, AS A SAFEGUARD, AN IMPEACHMENT MECHANISM SHOULD BE INTRODUCED AND THE SUPREME SOVIET GIVEN INCREASED BUDGETARY CONTROL. NEVERTHELESS, A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REMAIN - EG THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NEW PRESIDENT AND THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, RYZHKOV (WHO WAS REPORTED TO BE COOL ABOUT THE IDEA), AND THE ATTITUDE OF REPUBLICS TO WHAT WILL AMOUNT TO A SUBSTANTIAL STRENGTHENING OF CENTRAL POWER. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR EXAMPLE TO IMAGINE THAT THE BALTIC STATES AND A NUMBER OF OTHER REPUBLICS WILL BE PREPARED TO AGREE TO THE PRESIDENT BEING GIVEN POWER TO DESPATCH TROOPS TO MAINTAIN ORDER WITHOUT COINSENT OF REPUBLICAN AUTHORITIES.

#### MOVES TO A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM

8. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER ARTICLE 6 WILL BE ABOLISHED OR SIMPLY AMENDED. BOCHAROV, A DEPUTY AND CLOSE ADVISER OF ELTSIN, TOLD US THAT CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S PLAN WAS TO DELAY INTRODUCING THIS ISSUE UNTIL THE AUTUMN SESSION OF THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES - IE AFTER THE PARTY CONGRESS. IT WAS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE SUPREME SOVIET WOULD ACCEPT THIS. OTHERS, EG BURLATSKY ON TV ON 22 FEBRUARY, ARGUE THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MULTI PARTY SYSTEM MUST GO HAND IN HAND WITH THE CREATION OF AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY. A NEW LAW ON PARTIES WILL ALSO BE NEEDED. THIS TOO IS LIKELY TO PROVE HIGHLY CONTENTIOUS. IT WILL HAVE TO MAKE CLEAR THAT, IN LAW, THE COMMUNIST PARTY HAS THE SAME STATUS AS OTHER PARTIES, AND DEFINE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEIR PARTIES, THE STATE AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE. IT WILL ALSO HAVE TO SET OUT THE CONDITIONS ON WHICH POLITICAL GROUPS CAN BE REGISTERED AS PARTIES. THE PARTY PLATFORM SUGGESTS THAT PARTIES SHOULD ONLY BE ALLOWED IF THEIR AIMS ACCORD WITH THE (SOCIALIST) CONSTITUTION. THIS WOULD RULE OUT A NUMBER OF THE GROUPS LIKELY TO APPLY FOR REGISTRATION.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

9. THERE IS STILL MUCH TALK OF A SPLIT. IT SEEMS WIDELY ACCEPTED

THAT A DIVISION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WILL BE THE ONLY MEANS, IN THE SHORT TERM, OF CREATING A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE PARTY AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL. BUT THERE WILL BE OBVIOUS PROBLEMS, AS WITH EASTERN EUROPE, OVER THE DIVISION OF PARTY PROPERTY AND OTHER ASSETS. AND RYZHOV REMARKED THAT ANY RUMP PARTY WHICH CONTINUED TO USE THE WORD 'COMMUNIST' IN ITS TITLE WOULD GO DOWN TO ELECTORAL DEFEAT. THE 'DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM', A REFORMIST GROUP WITHIN THE PARTY WHICH IS RAPIDLY GAINING STRENGTH, COULD FORM THE NUCLEUS OF A NEW PARTY WITH A SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC ORIENTATION. AS YET ITS LEADERS HAVE NOT DECIDED ON THEIR TACTICS. THE GENERAL ASSESSMENT IS THAT THEY WILL NOT WANT TO PROVOKE A SPLIT BEFORE THE PARTY CONGRESS. ELTSIN WHO IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE GROUP, SAID AS MUCH IN A RECENT SPEECH AT THE HIGHER PARTY SCHOOL. BOCHAROV, HOWEVER, TOLD US THAT HE THOUGHT THE SPLIT WOULD OCCUR BEFORE THE CONGRESS.

#### REACTIONS TO THE NEW PARTY PLATFORM

10. IN A SPEECH EARLIER THIS WEEK, YAKOVLEV (POLITBURO) SAID THAT THE PLATFORM SHOULD SERVE AS A BASIS FOR MAINTAINING PARTY UNITY WHILE CONTINUING TO PURSUE REFORM. THIS HAS ALSO BEEN THE THEME OF COMMENT IN THE PARTY PRESS. BUT THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF HEAVY CRITICISM OF THE PLATFORM FROM THE RANK AND FILE. ONE PARTY ACTIVIST TOLD US THAT, AS FAR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WAS CONCERNED, THE PLATFORM REPRESENTED A MAJOR STEP FORWARD: BUT THE PARTY AND THE PEOPLE HAD EXPECTED A LOT MORE. IN HIS VIEW, THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE PACE AT WHICH PUBLIC OPINION WAS MOVING.

SHOSTAKOVSKY, A LEADING FIGURE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM ECHOED THIS VIEW IN A RECENT SPEECH AND SAID THAT UNLESS THE TEMPO OF REFORM PICKED UP, THE CRISIS OF THE PARTY WOULD DEEPEN. THE VAST MAJORITY OF SPEAKERS AT THIS WEEKS MEETING OF THE INFLUENTIAL MOSCOW PARTY ORGANISATION STRONGLY CRITICISED THE PLATFORM FOR ITS TIMIDITY AND VAGUENESS. SPEAKERS ALSO CALLED FOR MEMBERS OF THE TOP LEADERSHIP TO BE MORE ACCOUNTABLE INDIVIDUALLY FOR THEIR AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND FOR CHANGES IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP AS A GESTURE TO REFORMIST SENTIMENT IN THE COUNTRY. THERE ARE ALSO NOW PROPOSALS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM AND OTHERS FOR A ROUND TABLE OF PARTY AND OPPOSITION GROUPS ON THE EAST EUROPEAN MODEL TO AGREE ON A PROGRAMME OF POLITICAL STABILISATION AND MORE RADICAL ECONOMIC REFORM. THIS COULD BECOME A MAJOR DEMAND AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

#### PEOPLE POWER

11. PUBLICATION OF THE PLATFORM HAS DONE NOTHING TO STEM THE TIDE OF POPULAR PROTEST AGAINST THE REGIONAL PARTY APPARATUS. NINE OF THE 25 UKRAINIAN REGIONAL PARTY LEADERS HAVE NOW BEEN REMOVED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, AS HAVE A SIMILAR PROPORTION OF LEADERS FROM

THE URALS/VOLGA REGION OF THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC. THIS IS THE REGION WHICH SEEMS TO BE MOST AFFECTED BY GROWING CONSUMER SHORTAGES.

12. IN ITS INTIAL STAGES GORBACHEV WILL HAVE WELCOMED THIS DEMONSTRATION OF POPULAR INITIATIVE. THE FACT THAT THE RANK AND FILE WERE TAKING THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATISING THE PARTY INTO THEIR OWN HANDS PROVIDED HIM WITH A MEANS OF FORCING THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO ACCEPT THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN THE RUN UP TO THE LAST PLENUM. BUT IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THERE HAVE BEEN SIGNS OF INCREASING NERVOUSNESS THAT THE PROCESS IS BUILDING UP TOO BIG A HEAD OF STEAM. IT WILL HOWEVER PROVE DIFFICULT TO DAMP DOWN.

13. MEANWHILE, TENSION IS STILL RISING OVER THE PROSPECT OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS PLANNED FOR 25 FEBRUARY (OUR TELNO 298). AT PRESENT, RIGHT WING GROUPS (INCLUDING PAMYAT AND THE O F I) ARE INTENDING TO MEET AT 1100 HRS, WITH THE RADICAL GROUPS MEETING TWO HOURS LATER. RUMOURS ABOUND AND DEPUTIES AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING TO US FEARS THAT THERE WILL BE VIOLENCE.

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