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SIC
OUR TELNO 478: LITHUANIA: PRESIDENTIAL DECREE. COMMENT

SUMMARY

FURTHER MEASURES TO AVERT FEDERAL CONTROL OVER LITHUANIA ADD TO THE RISK OF ACCIDENTIAL VIOLENCE. BUT WIDE SUPPORT HERE FOR GORBACHEV'S POLICIES, MINGLED WITH APPREHENSION.

DETAIL

2. THIS IS GORBACHEV'S FIRST DECREE AS PRESIDENT. LIKE THE GOVERNMENT DECREE OF 19 MARCH FROM WHICH IT FOLLOWS ON, IT IS CAREFULLY PRESENTED AS A MEASURE TO IMPLEMENT THE DECISION OF THE USSR CONGRESS OF PEOPLES' DEPUTIES WHICH DECLARED LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE TO BE ILLEGAL.
3. THE INSTRUCTION TO HAND IN FIRE ARMS WILL BE DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE RISK OF VIOLENCE AND ALSO TO PRE-EMPT ANY IDEAS THE LITHUANIANS MIGHT HAVE ABOUT CREATING THEIR OWN MILITARY, OR PARA-MILITARY STRUCTURES. THE MEASURES ON PASSPORT ISSUE, CONTROL OVER FOREIGNERS AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE BORDER GUARD PRESENCE ON THE FRONTIER WITH POLAND WILL BE DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT SOVIET SECURITY REGULATIONS CONTINUE TO BE APPLIED. MUCH OF LITHUANIA IS STILL, ACCORDING TO SOVIET REGULATIONS, A CLOSED AREA FOR FOREIGNERS. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER THIS DECREE WILL AFFECT FOREIGN TRAVEL TO LITHUANIA. JOURNALISTS HERE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY THE MFA THAT THEY CAN CONTINUE TO TRAVEL AS USUAL. OUR ASSISTANT AIR ATTACHE IS INTENDING TO FLY THERE TOMORROW AND WE INTEND TO APPLY FOR ANOTHER CHANCERY VISIT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE NEXT WEEK.
4. THE LITHUANIAN PARLIAMENT HAS REMAINED IN SESSION THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, BUT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US HERE TO KEEP TRACK OF ALL THE DECISIONS THEY ARE TAKING. OFFICIAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF LITHUANIA IN THE PAST FEW DAYS HAS BECOME TENDENTIOUS AND BIASED. EXTENSIVE TV

COVERAGE WAS GIVEN TO THE ANTI-SECESSIONIST RALLY IN VILNIUS ON 18 MARCH: THERE IS DETAILED PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RUMP COMMUNIST PARTY, BUT VIRTUALLY NO COVERAGE OF STATEMENTS BY LANDSBERGIS OR THE PROCEEDINGS OF PARLIAMENT. MEASURES THE LITHUANIANS HAVE TAKEN INCLUDE: A DECREE AIMED AT CLOSING DOWN MILITARY COMMISSARIATS (RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CALL UP), A STATEMENT THAT THE STATUS OF SOVIET MILITARY UNITS IS "LEGALLY UNDETERMINED," AN ADDRESS TO LITHUANIANS ON SOVIET MILITARY SERVICE TO CONTINUE AT PRESENT UNTIL A RETURN TO LITHUANIA CAN BE ARRANGED WITH THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT, AND AN INSTRUCTION TO THE GOVERNMENT TO START WORK ON MARKING OUT BORDERS.

5. THESE LATEST PRESIDENTIAL MEASURES WILL, FOLLOWING THOSE IN THE RECENT GOVERNMENT DECREE, FURTHER INCREASE THE PRESSURES ON THE LITHUANIANS. OUR CONTACTS HERE STILL BELIEVE THAT MOSCOW HAS RULED OUT MILITARY FORCE: BUT THERE IS CONCERN THAT MOSCOW'S POLICY RUNS THE RISK OF PROVOKING VIOLENT INCIDENTS. SOME ARE WORRIED THAT THE RUSSIAN MINORITY IN LITHUANIA MIGHT DELIBERATELY PROVOKE VIOLENCE. NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE NOT HEARING ANY SUGGESTIONS THAT GORBACHEV IS OVERSTEPPING THE MARK OR PANDERING TO HARD LINERS. HIS POLICIES SEEM TO HAVE VERY WIDE SUPPORT. THE SAME DOES NOT GO FOR THE LITHUANIANS. EVEN OUR MORE LIBERAL CONTACTS WHO SUPPORT BALTIC ASPIRATIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE, BELIEVE THAT THE LITHUANIANS ARE BADLY RUSHING THEIR FENCES AND DO NOT HAVE A REAL GRIP ON POLITICAL REALITIES. MOST EXPECT THAT MOSCOW WILL NOW STEADILY INCREASE THE ECONOMIC PRESSURE - POSSIBLY GOING AS FAR AS DECLARING A FULL ECONOMIC BLOCKADE IF THE LITHUANIANS CONTINUE WITH FURTHER MEASURES TO ASSERT THEIR INDEPENDENCE.

6. SEVERAL LITHUANIAN DEPUTIES ATTENDED YESTERDAY'S SESSION OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET - AS OBSERVERS. THEY ARE RESIGNING ALL OFFICIAL POSITIONS THEY HOLD ON OFFICIAL SUPREME SOVIET COMMISSIONS. SOME OF THE DELEGATION APPARENTLY HAD A MEETING WITH GORBACHEV EARLY THIS WEEK WHICH HE OFFERED THEM WHAT AMOUNTED TO CONFEDERATION. BUT ONE OF THEM (LAURINKUS) TOLD US YESTERDAY (21 MARCH) THAT GORBACHEV WAS STILL ADAMANTLY REFUSING TO HAVE ANY DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM ABOUT INDEPENDENCE. THIS WAS CONFIRMED TO US BY ANOTHER DEPUTY (STAROVOITOVA) WHO SAID THAT SHE HAD TALKED TO GORBACHEV ON THE SUBJECT. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER MOSCOW HAS GIVEN THE LITHUANIANS ANY PRECONDITIONS FOR SUCH TALKS. LAURINKUS TOLD US THAT THE LITHUANIANS WERE STILL RELAXED ABOUT RECENT EVENTS. BUT STAROVOITEVA SAID THAT THE LITHUANIAN DELEGATES IN MOSCOW HAD EXPRESSED ANXIETY TO HER THAT THEIR COLLEAGUES IN VILNIUS WERE BECOMING OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE ATMOSPHERE IN MOSCOW

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