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TELNO 590

OF 18 NOVEMBER 1983

INFO IMMEDIATE BONN

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, PARIS, THE HAGUE, BRUSSELS,
 UKDEL NATO, COPENHAGEN

NY TELNO 579: ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON INF

1. ON 16 NOVEMBER, AT THE END OF THE THREE DAY DEBATE, THE GOVERNMENT OBTAINED A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY OF 132 FOR ITS MOTION CONFIRMING ITALY'S INTENTION TO PROCEED WITH DEPLOYMENT AS PLANNED. NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES EMERGED BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTIES.
2. THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE DEBATE WERE DULL, AND THE GOVERNMENT BENCHES WERE AT TIMES ALMOST EMPTY. SPOKESMEN RESTATED THEIR PARTIES' RESPECTIVE POSITIONS IN STANDARD TERMS. THE ONLY MOMENT OF TENSION (AND THEREFORE EXAGGERATED BY THE ITALIAN PRESS) WAS A SCUFFLE OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT BETWEEN POLICE AND PEACE DEMONSTRATORS (INCLUDING A FEW EXTREME LEFT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT). THE DEBATE CONCENTRATED ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES RATHER THAN ON THE DETAILED ARITHMETIC OF THE NUCLEAR BALANCE. LITTLE ATTENTION WAS PAID TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CRUISE MISSILES AT GREENHAM COMMON.
3. ON 16 NOVEMBER THE PCI SECRETARY, BERLINGUER, SUGGESTED THAT NATO'S INF DEPLOYMENTS SHOULD BE DELAYED, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME THE USSR SHOULD BEGIN DISMANTLING ITS SS20S. THIS NEW SUGGESTION, AND THE MODERATE TONE ADOPTED BY BERLINGUER, WAS IN CONTRAST TO THE TWO MOTIONS ALREADY PRESENTED BY THE PCI: ONE (LATER WITHDRAWN) HAD CALLED FOR ALL NATO AND WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES TO BE

WITHDRAWN) HAD CALLED FOR ALL NATO AND WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS, AND THE OTHER (DEFEATED IN A SEPARATE VOTE) ASKED THE GOVERNMENT TO PROPOSE CONTINUATION OF THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS FOR A YEAR, IN WHICH TIME NO PERSHING II OR CRUISE DEPLOYMENTS WOULD BE MADE AND THE USSR WOULD ALSO FREEZE ITS SS20 DEPLOYMENT. BERLINGUER'S REFINEMENT OF THE PCI POSITION WAS WELCOMED BY SUBSEQUENT SPEAKERS FROM THE COALITION PARTIES.

4. IN HIS WINDING UP SPEECH CRAXI REPEATED THE STANDARD ARGUMENTS FOR DEPLOYING CRUISE MISSILES, QUOTING FROM REAGAN'S LETTER TO HIM TO DEMONSTRATE U S WILLINGNESS TO REACH A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION ON THE BASIS OF A GLOBAL LIMIT OF 420 WARHEADS FOR EACH SIDE. HE CRITICISED THOSE IN EUROPE (OBVIOUSLY A REFERENCE TO THE SPD) WHO HAD SINCE 1979 CHANGED THEIR ATTITUDE TO THE DOUBLE DECISION. HE ALSO EXPLAINED FRENCH VIEWS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ENLARGED NEGOTIATIONS INCLUDING THEIR SYSTEMS (NO DOUBT CRAXI HAD ONE EYE ON HIS SUMMIT WITH MITTERRAND, WHICH BEGAN IN VENICE YESTERDAY. FIRST REPORTS SUGGEST THAT MITTERRAND TURNED ENLARGED NEGOTIATIONS DOWN FLAT).

5. CRAXI MADE TWO POINTS IN REPLY TO BERLINGUER. FIRST, IN ITALY THERE WOULD BE A SLIGHT DELAY FOR TECHNICAL REASONS, AND THE MISSILES AT COMISO WOULD THEREFORE NOT BE OPERATIONAL UNTIL MARCH 1984. SECOND, THE GOVERNMENT COULD SOUND OUT NATO ALLIES TO DISCOVER THEIR REACTION TO BERLINGUER'S SUGGESTION OF A DE FACTO POSTPONEMENT BALANCED BY SOVIET SS20 REDUCTIONS. CRAXI WAS CAREFUL NOT TO ENDORSE THE PCI PROPOSAL, AND SAID THAT ANY DECISION WOULD HAVE TO BE A COLLECTIVE ONE BY NATO. THE PCI, ALTHOUGH STILL COMMITTED TO VOTING AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, WERE PLEASED WITH CRAXI'S RESPONSE AND IT SHOULD FOR A TIME REDUCE THE RISK OF FRICTION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION OVER INF.

6. THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE CONTENT THAT THIS DEBATE CAUSED THEM SO LITTLE DIFFICULTY AND PROVED AGAIN THAT THEY HAVE A SOLID MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT IN FAVOUR OF DEPLOYMENT AT COMISO. CRAXI'S OWN PERFORMANCE WAS DETERMINED AND SKILFUL: IN PARTICULAR THIS GESTURE TOWARDS THE PCI HELPED TO DEFUSE THEIR OPPOSITION WITHOUT MAKING ANY CONCESSION OF SUBSTANCE. WE SHALL CHECK WITH THE MFA HOW HIS VAGUE UNDERTAKING TO CONSULT NATO ALLIES WILL BE PUT INTO PRACTICE, IF AT ALL: IT IS PROBABLE THAT AS ON OTHER OCCASIONS CRAXI'S PURPOSE WAS TACTICAL, TO OVERCOME A DOMESTIC DIFFICULTY, RATHER THAN TO LAUNCH A SERIOUS NEW PROPOSAL WITHIN NATO.

BRIDGES

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*A gesture of weakness which can
never be cloaked by skills*