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EUROPEAN COUNCIL: FRENCH APPROACH

SUMMARY

1. FRENCH ACTIVITY TO PREPARE FOR COUNCIL HAS PROLIFERATED IN THE PAST FEW DAYS. VARIOUS, APPARENTLY UNCOORDINATED, IDEAS FOR SETTling THE BUDGET IMBALANCES ISSUE ARE IN CIRCULATION. THE SCENE CHANGES FROM DAY TO DAY AND AS USUAL THERE IS NO FIRM INDICATION OF MITTERRAND'S PREFERENCES, EVEN SUPPOSING THAT HE HAS MADE UP HIS MIND.

DETAIL

2. MITTERRAND, CHEYSSON AND DUMAS HAVE ENGAGED IN A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY TO PREPARE FOR THE COUNCIL AS THE DATE DRAWS NEAR. THE EMERGENCE OF APPARENTLY COMPETING AND UNCOORDINATED IDEAS FOR RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF BUDGET IMBALANCES SERVES TO SHOW THE SMALLER COUNTRIES THAT THE PRESIDENCY IS BUSILY DOING ITS JOB. IT COULD ALSO OWE SOMETHING TO A COMPLEX GAME PLAN, BUT ON PAST FORM IS MORE LIKELY TO REFLECT INDIVIDUAL ENTERPRISE BY DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE GOVERNMENT MACHINE, WITH ELYSEE ADVIERS AND DUMAS AND HIS OFFICIALS WORKING SEPARATELY AND EVEN COMPETITIVELY. BY DESIGN OR ACCIDENT, THIS MAY RESULT IN THE BREAKING DOWN OF FIXED POSITIONS ADOPTED BY DIFFERENT PARTIES TO THE NEGOTIATION, ALLOWING GREATER ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

3. MITTERRAND LEFT FOR MOSCOW TODAY WITHOUT HAVING VISIBLY IMPOSED HIS OWN IMPRINT ON THE PREPARATION OF THE BUDGET ISSUE. HIS LAST MAJOR EFFORT ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS WAS HIS SPEECH TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND HE MAY STILL BE LIVING OFF THAT INVIGORATING DRAUGHT OF RHETORIC. IF SO, HE HAS NOT SUCCEEDED IN CARRYING PUBLIC OPINION WITH HIM. MORE THAN BEFORE PREVIOUS SUMMITS, THE FRENCH PRESS HAS ADOPTED A SOBER AND SCEPTICAL TONE WITH REGARD TO MITTERRAND'S RHETORIC, THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S PENCHANT FOR 'GREAT EUROPEAN PROJECTS', THE SOLIDITY OF THE FRONT OF THE NINE AND THE AMOUNT OF SUBSTANCE IN THE SUPPOSEDLY REVIVED BONN-PARIS AXIS.

4. THE ASSUMED AIR OF NONCHALANCE ABOUT THE NEED FOR A QUICK SETTLEMENT OF THE BUDGET QUESTION ALSO LOOKS RATHER THIN TO THE MORE INTELLIGENT COMMENTATORS HERE.

5. MITTERRAND IS ENOUGH OF A REALIST NOT TO BELIEVE ALL HIS OWN GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA AND I WOULD EXPECT HIM TO WORK FOR A SETTLEMENT OF THE BUDGET ISSUES AT FONTAINEBLEAU. ACCORDING TO THE DUTCH EMBASSY, HE AGREED WITH LUBBERS, WHEN THEY MET TODAY, THAT IT WAS FOR THE UK TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE TOWARDS COMPROMISE ON A REFUND SYSTEM BUT THAT EVEN THEN IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SETTLE ON A FIGURE, GIVEN THE NEED TO PRODUCE SOMETHING WHICH COULD BE PRESENTED BY ALL SIDES AS A SUCCESS. THEY DISCUSSED, IN VAGUE TERMS, THE POSSIBILITY OF PROPOSING THAT THE REFUND BE CALCULATED AS A STRAIGHT PERCENTAGE, IN PLACE OF THE SYSTEM OUTLINED IN THE DRAFT DECLARATION OF THE BRUSSELS COUNCIL. THE DIRECTOR OF DUMAS' CABINET TOLD US EARLIER TODAY THAT A STRAIGHT PERCENTAGE WOULD HAVE TO BE APPLIED ONLY ABOVE A FRANCHISE. (PERRIN DE BRICHAMBAUT ADDED THAT FRENCH OFFICIALS AND PERHAPS DUMAS HIMSELF WOULD BE AVAILABLE IF WE WISHED TO PURSUE CONTACTS BETWEEN NOW AND FONTAINEBLEAU).

6. DESPITE THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF GIVING SUBSTANCE TO THE LOFTY CONCEPTS OF EUROPEAN UNION, MITTERRAND WILL WISH TO KEEP THIS THEME IN PLAY, AT LEAST IN PART IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL IMPRESS ON US THE DANGER OF STANDING OUT AGAINST THE NINE AND SLIPPING INTO PROGRESSIVELY DEEPER ISOLATION.

7. MITTERRAND EVIDENTLY AIMS TO KEEP UP HIS GAME OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE RIGHT UP TO AND INDEED AT THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, COUNTING ON HIS CONDUCT OF THE CHAIR TO MARSHALL THE SOMEWHAT UNRULY FLOCK OF THE NINE AND IMPOSE A SOLUTION IF ONE SEEMS TO BE WITHIN REACH. IT HAS BEEN AND REMAINS A FAIRLY HIGH RISK STRATEGY. UP TILL NOW IT HAS SUITED US TO APPLAUD THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY AND TO ENDORSE MITTERRAND'S CLAIMS TO HAVE SOLVED ALL THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES BUT ONE. BUT THE FACT IS THAT IF THAT ONE IS NOT SOLVED, THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY WILL HAVE BROUGHT THE COMMUNITY TO THE EDGE OF DISASTER AND BEQUEATHED AN AWFUL LEGACY TO ITS SUCCESSOR. IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR THIS THEME TO BEGIN TO EMERGE IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS ALONGSIDE THE PANEGYRICS.

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