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HUNGARY : MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM

SUMMARY

1. ACCORDING TO JUSTICE MINISTER KULCSAR, THE HUNGARIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME IS NOW BEING SIGNIFICANTLY ACCELERATED. KEY LAWS LIKELY TO BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT IN EARLY AUTUMN, INCLUDING A NEW CONSTITUTION AND A PARTY LAW, WHICH WILL REGULARISE AND PROTECT THE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES. THE COMMUNIST PARTY INTENDS TO FORM A VOLUNTARY GRAND COALITION WITH THE MAIN ALTERNATIVE PARTIES. THE AIM IS TO CREATE A POLITICAL SYSTEM CLOSER TO THE WESTERN EUROPEAN MODEL THAN THE EAST EUROPEAN SYSTEM BY NEXT YEAR.

DETAILS

2. WHEN I CALLED ON 25 JANUARY ON JUSTICE MINISTER KULCSAR I ASKED HIM ABOUT THE CURRENT STAGE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME IN WHICH HE IS PLAYING THE LEADING ROLE. KULCSAR IS A CLOSE ALLY OF POSZGAY AND SPENT FOUR YEARS TEACHING CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AT AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY.

3. KULCSAR REPLIED THAT THE PASSAGE OF THE LAWS ON ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY (MY TELNO 19) REPRESENTED A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THE HUNGARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM. IT WAS ALSO A MARKED STEP FORWARD THAT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP HAD AGREED TO PRESENT A NEW LAW ON POLITICAL PARTIES TO PARLIAMENT ON 1 AUGUST. IN ADDITION WORK WAS NOW GOING AHEAD RAPIDLY ON THE NEW DRAFT CONSTITUTION, AND LAWS ON ELECTIONS AND A CONSTITUTIONAL COURT WHICH WERE NOW SCHEDULED TO BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT IN EARLY AUTUMN. THUS THE WHOLE TIMETABLE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME HAD BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY ACCELERATED.

4. KULCSAR SAID THAT THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION WERE NOW BEING DISCUSSED WITH PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES. AN OUTLINE TEXT

WOULD BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT IN EARLY MARCH. THIS WOULD COVER CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES LIKE THE LEADING ROLE OF THE PARTY WHICH WOULD NO LONGER BE ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION. IF PARLIAMENT APPROVED THE BASIC OUTLINE DOCUMENT, THE TEXT WOULD BE WORKED UP DURING THE SUMMER AND PRESENTED IN FULL IN EARLY AUTUMN. KULCSAR ADDED THAT MUCH PREPARATORY WORK HAD BEEN DONE IN SECRET IN THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS AGAINST THE EVENTUALITY OF CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM.

5. THE LAW ON THE POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD GOVERN THREE PRINCIPAL ASPECTS: REGISTRATION, FINANCIAL CONTROL AND LEGAL SUPERVISION. THE NEW POLITICAL GROUPS WOULD REGISTER AS POLITICAL PARTIES. KULCSAR HAD DELIBERATELY KEPT BACK THE LAW ON POLITICAL PARTIES SINCE HE WANTED THEIR LEGALITY TO BE GOVERNED NOT BY THE ADMINISTRATION NOR BY THE LOWER COURTS, BUT BY THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. THE PURPOSE WAS TO PROTECT THE POLITICAL PARTIES FROM INTERFERENCE OR SUPPRESSION BY THE AUTHORITIES. THE COMPOSITION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT WOULD ACCORDINGLY BE VERY HIGH-LEVEL.

6. SO FAR, KULCSAR SAID, THE KEY POLITICAL DECISIONS ON THE ELECTORAL LAW HAD NOT YET BEEN TAKEN. THERE WAS STILL A DEBATE ON WHETHER THE ELECTIONS SHOULD BE ON A CONSTITUENCY BASIS, OR A SET OF NATIONAL LISTS ON A PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION BASIS, OR A MIXTURE OF BOTH. PERSONALLY HE THOUGHT THAT THE END RESULT WOULD BE MIXTURE SINCE HE DOUBTED WHETHER THE NEW POLITICAL GROUPS WOULD YET BE SUFFICIENTLY REPRESENTED NATIONWIDE TO SCORE WELL IN CONSTITUENCY ELECTIONS. THERE WAS ALSO A DEBATE ON WHETHER THE PRESENT PRE-SELECTION PROCESS OF CANDIDATES BY THE PATRIOTIC PEOPLE'S FRONT (PPF) SHOULD BE DISCONTINUED. PERSONALLY HE WAS AGAINST PRE-SELECTION AND THOUGHT THAT THE PPF HAD OUTLIVED ITS ROLE. BUT THIS CRUCIAL ISSUE STILL HAD TO BE FOUGHT OVER.

7. KULCSAR CONFIRMED THAT THE PARTY'S TACTIC WOULD BE TO ENTER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, STILL SCHEDULED FOR NEXT YEAR, IN A VOLUNTARY GRAND COALITION WITH THE THREE OR FOUR MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPS, NOW OPERATING AS SEPARATE PARTIES. THIS WOULD BE A TOTALLY DIFFERENT PICTURE FROM THE ARTIFICIAL COALITION IMPOSED BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY AFTER THE WAR. SO THE PARTY COULD CONFIDENTLY EXPECT TO HAVE A MAJORITY, POSSIBLY ON ITS OWN AND CERTAINLY WITH THE COALITION. THE REMAINDER OF THE SEATS WOULD BE OCCUPIED BY INDEPENDENTS AND REPRESENTITIVES OF THE NEW PARTIES WHICH HAD DECIDED AGAINST JOINING THE COALITION. THE NEW GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL CONTAIN MINISTERS FROM THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE COALITION.

SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT WOULD REQUIRE CONSIDERABLE MODERATION FROM THE PARTY AND THE MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPS, WHICH WERE STILL DIVIDED ABOUT WHETHER TO ACCEPT THIS PLAN. BUT IT WOULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY STABILITY FOR A MANAGED TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT STRUCTURE TOWARDS A GENUINE MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM.

8. KULCSAR CONCLUDED THAT, IF HIS PROGRAMME GOT THROUGH AS PLANNED, HUNGARY WOULD END UP BY NEXT YEAR WITH A POLITICAL SYSTEM MUCH CLOSER TO THE CURRENT WESTERN EUROPEAN MODEL THAN THE PREVAILING EAST EUROPEAN SYSTEM OF THE PAST 40 YEARS, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A HISTORICAL ABERRATION. IN ADDITION HUNGARY WAS LIKELY TO ABANDON ITS PRESENT SOVIETISED NATIONAL EMBLEM IN FAVOUR OF EITHER THE KOSSUTH EMBLEM (1848) OR, PREFERABLY, THE ANCIENT ROYAL EMBLEM WITH ST STEPHEN'S CROWN. ALL IN ALL, THE WHOLE PLACE WOULD LOOK A LOT DIFFERENT.

9. COMMENT IN MIFT.

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