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FM ATHENS 291215Z MAR 85
TO FLASH FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 180 OF 29 MARCH
INFO FLASH UKREP BRUSSELS (FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY)
INFO PRIORITY COPENHAGEN, DUBLIN, THE HAGUE, LUXEMBOURG, BRUSSELS
UKDEL NATO, WASHINGTON, ANKARA, NICOSIA AND
UKMIS NEW YORK

WSG 014/2
RECEIVED
17 APR 1985

GREEK PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

1. SARTZETAKIS WAS ELECTED BY 180 VOTES, THE MINIMUM REQUIRED AT THE THIRD BALLOT. THIS INCLUDED THE CONTROVERSIAL VOTE OF ALEVRAS, PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT AND ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION OF KARAMANLIS. NEW DEMOCRACY, WHICH AGAIN DID NOT VOTE, DID NOT ACCEPT THAT A NEW PRESIDENT HAD BEEN LEGALLY ELECTED. MITSOTAKIS SAID THAT IT WAS NOW UP TO SARTZETAKIS TO DECIDE WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE PRESIDENCY IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.

2. THE OUTCOME IS BOUND TO CAUSE WIDESPREAD CONTROVERSY AND INCREASE THE NERVOUSNESS AND UNCERTAINTY ALREADY FELT AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF KARAMANLIS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER, IF SARTZETAKIS TAKES OFFICE, NEW DEMOCRACY GO TO THE LENGTH OF BOYCOTTING HIM.

DETAIL

3. IN A TENSE, SOMETIMES NOISY, BUT RELATIVELY ORDERLY PARLIAMENT THE VOTE FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TOOK PLACE THIS MORNING AFTER AN INTERVENTION BY MITSOTAKIS COMPLAINING AGAINST THE CONTINUED USE OF COLOURED BALLOT SHEETS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VOTES. AS BEFORE HE CLAIMED THAT THIS UNDERMINED THE SECRECY OF THE BALLOT AND STATED NEW DEMOCRACY'S READINESS TO JOIN IN THE VOTE IF THERE WERE NO DIFFERENCE IN COLOUR BETWEEN THE TWO SHEETS. PAPANDREOU REPLIED THAT THE USE OF COLOURED BALLOT SHEETS DID NOT CONTRAVENE THE CONSTITUTION OR THE RULES OF PARLIAMENT.

4. IN THE EVENT 186 VOTES WERE CAST. THERE WERE FOUR BLANK AND TWO INVALID. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO BE SURE OF THOSE WHO CAST THESE VOTES. THE FOUR BLANKS ARE PROBABLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO INDEPENDENTS. THE TWO INVALID COULD HAVE BEEN CAST BY PASOK DISSIDENTS. ALEVRAS VOTED AMID SHOUTS OF PROTEST FROM NEW DEMOCRACY: HE DID NOT REMAIN TO HEAR THE RESULT.

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5. AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE VOTE MITSOTAKIS STATED THAT NEW DEMOCRACY DID NOT ACCEPT THAT A PRESIDENT HAD BEEN LEGALLY ELECTED. HE SAID THAT HIS PARTY HAD ALL ALONG MADE IT CLEAR THAT IF A VOTE BY ALEVRAS WERE INCLUDED IN THE NECESSARY MAJORITY THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT THE DECISION. IT WAS NOW UP TO SARTZETAKIS TO DECIDE WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE PRESIDENCY IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES. IF HE DID NOT TAKE OFFICE THE PEOPLE WOULD DECIDE THE ISSUE IN THE FORTHCOMING GENERAL ELECTION.

6. PAPANDREOU IN RESPONSE REFERRED TO THE MANY YEARS DURING WHICH PRESIDENTS OF THE REPUBLIC HAD BEEN ELECTED BY PARTIES OF THE RIGHT. IT WAS NOW THE TURN OF THE 'DEMOCRATIC SIDE'. HE CLAIMED THAT THE DECISION OF PARLIAMENT HAD MADE CLEAR THAT A VOTE BY ALEVRAS WAS VALID.

7. ON 1ST APRIL THERE IS TO BE A VOTE OF CENSURE AGAINST THE WAY IN WHICH THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT HANDLED THE OCCASION. THIS WILL BE ON A MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE BY MITSOTAKIS.

COMMENT

8. THE OUTCOME CAN ONLY ADD TO THE EXISTING NERVOUSNESS AND UNCERTAINTY. IF SARTZETAKIS TAKES OFFICE, HE WILL BE BRANDED IN THE EYES OF MANY AS A CONTROVERSIAL PRESIDENT. IT IS HARD TO SAY HOW MUCH EFFECT THE OUTCOME WILL HAVE ON THE ELECTORAL PROSPECTS OF EITHER SIDE: BUT, IF NEW DEMOCRACY PLAY THEIR CARDS RIGHT, THERE SHOULD BE A POSSIBILITY OF EXPLOITING IT AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF PASOK'S APPARENT CONTEMPT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL PROPRIETY. IT WOULD ALSO BE ANOTHER REASON FOR PASOK TO POSTPONE A GENERAL ELECTION IN ORDER THAT THE DUST SHOULD SETTLE.

9. DESPITE THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE ELECTION I MUST STICK TO MY RECOMMENDATION OF A MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATION FOR SARTZETAKIS ONCE WE ARE SURE THAT HE HAS ACCEPTED THE PRESIDENCY AND AFTER THE SWEARING IN CEREMONY WHICH IS PLANNED FOR THE EVENING OF 30TH MARCH.

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