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FM MOSCOW 011145Z MAR 85

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 275 OF 1ST MAR 85

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, PARIS, BONN, UKDEL NATO,
ROUTINE EAST EUROPEAN POSTS.

MOSCOW TELNO 251: CHERNENKO

1. A VERY FRAIL-LOOKING CHERNENKO MADE ANOTHER PUBLIC APPEARANCE ON 28 FEBRUARY, SHOWN ON TELEVISION LAST NIGHT. HE WAS SHOWN FIRST STANDING DURING A BRIEF CEREMONY, IN WHICH HE WAS HANDED HIS CREDENTIALS AS A DEPUTY TO THE RFSFR SUPREME SOVIET. IN RESPONSE, HE UTTERED A FEW UNSCRIPTED WORDS IN A TREMBLING, BREATHLESS VOICE. SUBSEQUENTLY HE WAS SHOWN SEATED AT A TABLE WITH GRISHIN AND LOCAL OFFICIALS. GRISHIN, VERY MUCH IN CHARGE OF THE PROCEEDINGS, SHOWED HIM A GIFT FROM A FACTORY IN HIS CONSTITUENCY, INFORMED CHERNENKO THAT HE HAD BEEN ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY AND SPOKE ABOUT MOSCOW'S SUCCESSES IN FULFILLING THE INDUSTRIAL PLAN AND IN THE CAMPAIGN FOR ECONOMIES. CHERNENKO THEN READ OUT FROM A TEXT, WITH PAINFUL EFFORT, A BRIEF SPEECH THANKING HIS ELECTORS AND CALLING FOR RENEWED EFFORTS IN THE APPROACH TO THE PARTY CONGRESS.

2. THE CEREMONY RECEIVED PROMINENT COVERAGE, INCLUDING A PHOTOGRAPH, ON THE FRONT PAGES OF TODAY'S CENTRAL NEWSPAPERS. GRISHIN'S REMARKS WERE NOT REPORTED.

3. THE EMBASSY DOCTOR (NOT FOR QUOTATION) DETECTED A DEFINITE DETERIORATION IN CHERNENKO'S CONDITION SINCE HE LAST OBSERVED HIM ON TELEVISION IN OCTOBER 1984. HE SAW NO (NO) EVIDENCE OF A STROKE, BUT SPECULATES THAT CHERNENKO HAS NOW REACHED THE STAGE OF "INCIPIENT HEART FAILURE".

4. CHERNENKO'S PUBLIC APPEARANCE IN THIS CONDITION MAY HAVE DONE MORE HARM THAN GOOD TO HIS DOMESTIC IMAGE.

KATFORD



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