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FM MOSCOW

TO DESKBY 291430Z FCO

TELNO 116

OF 291300Z JANUARY 87

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, PARIS, BONN, UKDEL NATO, MOD

INFO ROUTINE EAST EUROPEAN POSTS, PEKING, HELSINKI, TOKYO

MY TELNO 101: CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

1. THE PLENUM DID NOT FULLY LIVE UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS WHICH HAD BEEN AROUSED BY THE LONG DELAY IN HOLDING IT AND THE BURGEONING RUMOURS OF RADICAL NEW POLICIES AND MAJOR LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN PROSPECT.
2. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THOSE EXPECTATIONS AND RUMOURS HAD NO SOUND BASIS FROM THE START OR WHETHER IN THE END GORBACHEV HAD TO COMPROMISE. ALTHOUGH THE RUMOURS WERE NO DOUBT EXAGGERATED AND IN SOME CASES WRONG, I AM INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT GORBACHEV HAD BEEN AIMING FOR RATHER MORE BOTH IN TERMS OF POLICY AND POLITBURO CHANGES THAN HE WAS IN THE EVENT ABLE TO ACHIEVE.
3. AS I POINTED OUT IN MY TELNO 109 THERE WAS SOME ROBUST AND RADICAL RHETORIC IN GORBACHEV'S MARATHON SPEECH AND HE PUT DOWN MARKERS FOR FURTHER REFORM. THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE PLENUM STATED THAT HAVING HEARD AND DISCUSSED GORBACHEV'S REPORT THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE 'FULLY APPROVED THE POLITICAL AND PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS WHICH THE POLITBURO HAD FORMED...', BUT IT READS LIKE A RATHER BOWDLERISED SUMMARY OF GORBACHEV'S REPORT. THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF HIS POLICIES ARE ENDORSED IN GENERAL TERMS BUT THE MORE RADICAL IDEAS AND LANGUAGE ARE NOT FULLY REFLECTED, EG ON GLASNOST' AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA SEMICOLON AND SOME SPECIFIC PROPOSALS ARE NOT MENTIONED, EG SECRET BALLOTING FOR PARTY SECRETARIES, AND THE CONVENING OF A PARTY CONFERENCE.
4. AS I REPORTED IN MY TELNO 112 THE THREE OFFICIALS PROMOTED AT THE PLENUM CAN ALL BE REGARDS AS, IN VARYING MEASURE, PROTEGES OF GORBACHEV SEMICOLON AND KUNAEV'S PREORDAINED DEMISE IS ANOTHER PLUS FOR HIM. BUT IT IS SURPRISING THAT THERE WERE NO PROMOTIONS TO FULL MEMBERSHIP OF THE POLITBURO. THE PROMOTION OF ELTSIN AND PERHAPS ONE OR TWO OTHER LIKE-MINDED YOUNGER LEADERS SEEMS OVERDUE AND WOULD BE TO GORBACHEV'S ADVANTAGE. IT IS NOTICEABLE THAT 4 OF THE 5 CHANGES ANNOUNCED AT THE PLENUM AFFECTED THE SECRETARIAT, WHICH GORBACHEV APPEARS ABLE TO MOULD TO HIS LIKING. OF THE 11 MEMBERS OF THE SECRETARIAT ONLY ONE, DOLGIKH, HAS NOT

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BEEN EITHER APPOINTED OR PROMOTED SINCE GORBACHEV BECAME PARTY LEADER. ON THE OTHER HAND 5 OF THE OTHER 10 MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO WERE IN SITU WHEN HE CAME TO POWER, AND HIS ABILITY TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN ITS COMPOSITION APPEARS TO BE LIMITED. (IN HIS REPORT GORBACHEV REFERRED WITH APPROVAL TO CONSIDERABLE TURNOVER WHICH HAD BEEN ACHIEVED SINCE APRIL 1985 IN THE SECRETARIAT, AMONG HEADS OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE DEPARTMENTS AND IN THE PRESIDUM OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS SEMICOLON BUT HE MADE NO MENTION OF THE POLITBURO).

5. I WOULD NOT HOWEVER REGARD THE FACT THAT THE UKRAINIAN PARTY LEADER SHCHERBITSKY, (WHO SPOKE AT THE PLENUM), IS STILL IN THE POLITBURO AS PARTICULARLY SURPRISING NOR AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. GORBACHEV IS CLEARLY GUNNING FOR SHCHERBITSKY SEMICOLON THE LATEST EVIDENCE IS THE SHARP CRITICISM OF THE UKRAINIAN CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR ITS POOR AGRICULTURAL PERFORMANCE WHICH LIGACHEV DELIVERED AT CENTRAL COMMITTEE CONFERENCE LAST WEEK, ON THE EVE OF THE PLENUM. BUT THE PARTY LEADER OF THE UKRAINE IS NOT EASY TO DISLodge AT THE BEST OF TIMES SEMICOLON AND PRECEDENT AND LOGIC SUGGEST THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO BE OUSTED FROM HIS FIEFDOM IN KIEV BEFORE HE CAN BE DROPPED FROM THE POLITBURO.

6. THE EVIDENCE OF THIS PLENUM IS CERTAINLY NOT THAT THERE IS ANY IMMEDIATE THREAT TO GORBACHEV'S POSITION BUT RATHER THAT THERE IS SERIOUS RESISTANCE TO HIS POLICIES AT THE TOP AS WELL AS IN THE MIDDLE RANKS OF THE PARTY AND THAT HIS POWER TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE LEADERSHIP AS QUICKLY AS HE WOULD LIKE IS LIMITED. BUT THE TONE OF HIS SPEECH WAS CONFIDENT AND DETERMINED. TIME IS ON HIS SIDE BUT THE GOING IS EVIDENTLY TOUGH.

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