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FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT MITTERRAND

SUMMARY

1. IN MY FAREWELL CALL ON MITTERRAND THIS MORNING HE SPOKE WARMLY ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF ANGLO/FRENCH RELATIONS, BUT PUT DOWN A MARKER ABOUT IMPENDING DIFFICULTIES OVER AGRICULTURE.

DETAIL

2. IN MY FAREWELL CALL ON MITTERRAND HE STRUCK A VERY POSITIVE NOTE ABOUT RELATIONS IN GENERAL. AFTER A DIFFICULT FIRST TWO YEARS HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO WORK WELL WITH MRS THATCHER ON COMMUNITY QUESTIONS, PARTICULARLY AT FONTAINEBLEAU, AND MORE RECENTLY ON DEFENCE QUESTIONS, WHERE POSITIONS HAD COME CLOSER. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, IN RESPONSE TO MY COMMENT, THAT IT WAS NOW NORMAL FOR THE TWO COUNTRIES TO LOOK FOR COMMON POSITIONS INSTEAD OF EXPECTING AUTOMATICALLY TO FIND THEMSELVES ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE BARRICADES. CO-OPERATION IN COUNTERING TERRORISM HAD IMPROVED. THE DECISION TO BUILD THE CHANNEL TUNNEL WAS OF LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE.

3. THE MAIN SUBJECT WHICH MITTERRAND CHOSE TO RAISE WAS AGRICULTURE. HE SAID HE HAD PERSONALLY SUPPORTED MILK QUOTAS AND WAS READY TO ENDORSE OTHER MEANS OF HOLDING PRODUCTION WITHIN REASONABLE LIMITS. FRANCE COULD NOT EXPECT TO BENEFIT EXCESSIVELY FROM THE CAP. IT MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE TO ELIMINATE SURPLUSES ENTIRELY; AGRICULTURE WAS PART OF THE BACKGROUND OF CIVILISATION IN FRANCE AND IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND COULD NOT BE ABANDONED. BUT SURPLUSES COULD NOT BE BUILT UP UNDEFINITELY. HOWEVER HE FORESAW THE RISK OF CLASHES BETWEEN BRITAIN AND FRANCE ON AGRICULTURAL QUESTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. HE SAID IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS AGRICULTURAL QUESTIONS BILATERALLY AND IN CONFIDENCE TO SEE IF WE COULD ESTABLISH SOME COMMON POSITIONS. MITTERRAND AGREED AND SAID HE HOPED MY SUCCESSOR WOULD BE FULLY BRIEFED ON THESE QUESTIONS.

4. ON THE COMMUNITY BUDGET MITTERRAND SAID HE THOUGHT THE BRITISH POSITION TOO RIGID. HE UNDERSTOOD MRS THATCHER'S ARGUMENT THAT ONE SHOULD NOT GO ON POURING IN MORE MONEY WHEN THE EXPENDITURE APPEARED UNNECESSARY OR WASTEFUL. BUT THERE HAD TO BE SOME SORT OF COMPROMISE TO ENABLE THE COMMUNITY TO FUNCTION AND DEVELOP. THE 1.6 PERCENT OF VAT WHICH WAS IN PROSPECT WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH. ADMITTEDLY HIS OWN GOVERNMENT AT PRESENT TOOK A RESTRICTIVE VIEW, BUT HE WAS PERSONALLY CONVINCED ONE SHOULD LOOK AHEAD TO 1.8 PERCENT OR 2 PERCENT. THESE WERE RELATIVELY SMALL SUMS COMPARED WITH THE MAGNITUDE OF THE COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE. HE RESTATED OUR POSITION.

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5. Mitterrand concluded with further warm references to London and to its particular appeal to Frenchmen, due in part to the great historical differences they sensed on crossing the Channel. He was glad that some of the sense of rivalry had gone out of the relationship. But of course some would always remain between two such nations, as it did between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. He thought this no bad thing.

6. He slipped in a reference to my satisfaction at having served in Paris throughout the major part of his first seven year term. He did not take me up on the word 'first'.

FRETWELL

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