

CONFIDENTIAL
FM MOSCOW
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 338
OF 231349Z FEBRUARY 89

1. cc Mr Powell No 10
2. Dade Wm
R.S.

VISIT OF KOROTICH
SUMMARY

1. KOROTICH IS A CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL FIGURE WHO, TOGETHER WITH HIS MAGAZINE HAS BECOME ONE OF THE SYMBOLS OF GLASNOST. HE IS THE MAN THE TRADITIONALISTS LOVE TO HATE. HIS VIEWS WILL PROVIDE A USEFUL OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE WHO MEET HIM TO GET A VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINE OF HOW PERESTROIKA IS GOING.

DETAIL

2. VITALY KOROTICH, CHIEF EDITOR OF OGONYEK, WILL BE PAYING A SPONSORED VISIT TO THE UK FROM 26 FEBRUARY UNTIL 5 MARCH. HE WILL BE CALLING ON YOU ON 1 MARCH AND WILL HAVE A 45 MINUTE INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ON 28 FEBRUARY. THIS IS LIKELY TO BE PUBLISHED IN OGONYEK IN THE SECOND HALF OF MARCH, BEFORE GORBACHEV'S VISIT. I HAVE ALREADY GIVEN AN INDICATION OF THE GROUND KOROTICH WILL WISH TO COVER IN THIS INTERVIEW IN MY TELNO 206. IN THIS TELEGRAM I OFFER SOME BACKGROUND ON KOROTICH AND HIS POLITICAL ROLE WHICH I HOPE WILL BE OF INTEREST TO YOU AND OTHERS WHO ARE TO MEET HIM.

3. KOROTICH HAS BEEN A WRESTLER, A POET, A JOURNALIST AND A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE UKRAINIAN WRITERS UNION. HE TOOK OVER THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OGONYEK IN THE SUMMER OF 1986 UNDER GORBACHEV AND IN THE PAST TWO AND HALF YEARS HAS TRANSFORMED IT FROM A STAID ESTABLISHMENT JOURNAL INTO THE MOST ADVENTUROUS AND TALKED-ABOUT MAGAZINE IN THE COUNTRY, WITH A CIRCULATION OF 3.2 MILLION AND A READERSHIP THAT IS MUCH HIGHER. UNDER KOROTICH OGONYEK HAS LED THE WAY IN DEBUNKING STALIN AND IN EXPOSING PRESENT DAY CORRUPTION AND BUREAUCRATIC INCOMPETENCE.

4. OGONYEK'S BLEND OF TOUGH INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND PENCHANT FOR TAKING UP SENSITIVE ISSUES HAS MADE KOROTICH ONE OF THE FOLK-HEROES OF PERESTROIKA. LAST YEAR A 1500 SEAT THEATRE WAS FILLED TO CAPACITY JUST TO HEAR HIM ANSWER QUESTIONS. BUT HE HAS ALSO MADE A LOT OF ENEMIES. AT LAST YEAR'S PARTY CONFERENCE OGONYEK CAUSED A MINOR SENSATION BY ALLEGING THAT A NUMBER OF DELEGATES HAD BRIBED THEIR WAY TO THE CONFERENCE. KOROTICH WAS CALLED TO THE CONFERENCE PLATFORM TO ANSWER FOR HIS ACTIONS. HE WAS LATER VINDICATED: BUT IT WAS ALREADY APPARENT AT THIS STAGE THAT FOR THE BUREAUCRATIC AND TRADITIONALIST CULTURAL ESTABLISHMENT HE HAD COME TO REPRESENT THE

UNACCEPTABLE FACE OF PERESTROIKA.

5. OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE LIBERAL AND TRADITIONALIST CULTURAL ESTABLISHMENTS WITH KOROTICH AT ITS CENTRE HAS BROADENED OUT INTO OPEN WARFARE CONDUCTED THROUGH THE COLUMNS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE JOURNALS. SIX PROMINENT RUSSIAN WRITERS DESCRIBED OGONYEK IN A LETTER PUBLISHED IN PRAVDA LAST MONTH AS THE "'SCUM'" BUBBLING FORTH ON THE CREST OF PERESTROIKA. A FEW WEEKS AGO A GROUP FOR THE ANTI-SEMITIC PANYENT ORGANISATION BROKE UP AN ELECTION MEETING AT WHICH KOROTICH WAS PUTTING FORWARD HIS CANDIDACY. GORBACHEV ATTEMPTED TO CALL HIS TROOPS TO ORDER IN HIS SPEECH TO THE INTELLECTUALS IN JANUARY (MY TELNO 36) BUT IT IS STILL SMOULDERING. ONLY THIS WEEK VIKTOR AFANASIEV, THE INFLUENTIAL CHIEF EDITOR OF PRAVDA, TOOK UP THE CUDGELS WITH KOROTICH OVER SOME UNFLATTERING REMARKS THE LATTER HAD PUBLISHED ABOUT AFANASIEV'S ROLE AS A PROPAGANDIST FOR THE BREZHNEV REGIME.

6. KOROTICH ALMOST CERTAINLY ENJOYS GORBACHEV'S SUPPORT AND, I BELIEVE, SEEM HIM QUITE OFTEN. I WOULD JUDGE THAT HIS POSITION AT OGONYEK WILL BE SECURE AS LONG AS THIS REMAINS THE CASE. BY THE SAME TOKEN, IF HE IS UNSEATED IT WILL BE AN IMPORTANT SETBACK FOR GLASNOST. KOROTICH'S RELATIONS WITH LIGACHEV ARE STRAINED. BUT HE TOLD ME WHEN I INVITED HIM TO LUNCH RECENTLY THAT HE SAW LIGACHEV, FOR ALL HIS CONSERVATISM, AS A DECENT ENOUGH MAN. LIGACHEV HAD APPARENTLY RUNG HIM ON NEW YEAR'S EVE WITH BEST WISHES AND HAD PRAISED HIM FOR BEING A BONNY FIGHTER.

7. KOROTICH IS AN ENGAGING AND WITTY CONVERSATIONALIST. HE IS OF COURSE A HIGHLY PARTISAN SUPPORTER OF GORBACHEV AND PERESTROIKA. BUT YOU AND OTHERS WHOM HE MEETS WILL NEVERTHELESS FIND HIS VIEWS ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE, GORBACHEV'S POSITION AND THE STRENGTH OF PRO AND ANTI-PERESTROIKA FORCES STIMULATING AND WELL INFORMED. HE TOLD ME AT LUNCH THAT HE DID NOT THINK GORBACHEV WAS UNDER ANY PARTICULAR THREAT AT THE MOMENT. BUT HE HAS ALSO EXPRESSED THE VIEW RECENTLY TO MY US COLLEAGUE THAT "'MARCH COULD BE A VERY CRUCIAL MONTH'" GIVEN CURRENT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, THE ELECTION PROCESS AND FORTHCOMING CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM ON AGRICULTURE. KOROTICH HIMSELF IS LIKELY TO BE STANDING FOR ELECTION TO THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLES DEPUTIES ON 26 MARCH, BUT HAS TOLD US THAT HE SEES HIS FUTURE AT OGONYEK WHERE HE HAS MORE INFLUENCE RATHER THAN IN THE SUPREME SOVIET.

BRAITHWAITE

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