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SOVIET INTERNAL: YELTSIN AND THE RSFSR SOVEREIGNTY DECLARATION

SUMMARY

1. RSFSR CONGRESS ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY PASSES DECLARATION ON SOVEREIGNTY. INCLUDES PROVISION ON SUPREMACY OF RSFSR LAW OVER SOVIET LAW. YELTSIN WILL HAVE LESS UNANIMITY IN NEWLY ELECTED SUPREME SOVIET ON OTHER ISSUES. NO CENTRAL RESPONSE YET: CONFLICT MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR ON CONCRETE ISSUES.

DETAIL

2. ON 12 JUNE THE RSFSR CONGRESS PASSED THE DECLARATION OF SOVEREIGNTY OF THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC BY AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY (903 FOR, 13 AGAINST, 9 ABSTENTIONS). WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN A FULL TEXT OF THE DECLARATION, WHICH HAS NOT BEEN PUBLISHED OR ISSUED AT THE CONGRESS, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ORIGINAL VERSION, AS REPORTED IN MOSCOW TELNO 1079, HAS NOT BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY REDRAFTED. THE ONLY CONTROVERSIAL POINT WAS ONE ARTICLE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS AND OBLASTS WITHIN THE RSFSR ITSELF (ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT IF RUSSIA CAN DECLARE ITS SOVEREIGNTY VIS-A-VIS THE SOVIET UNION, THEN THE NATIONAL MINORITIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO LIKewise VIS-A-VIS RUSSIA).

TEXT

3. THE TEXT OF THE DECLARATION CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING POINTS

- THE RSFSR IS A SOVEREIGN STATE, AND RSFSR LAW HAS SUPREMACY OVER ALL OTHER LAW ON THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC.
- THE RSFSR RETAINS THE RIGHT TO SECEDE FROM THE SOVIET UNION. (THERE IS, OF COURSE, NOTHING NEW IN THIS: THE RSFSR, LIKE OTHER UNION REPUBLICS HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE NOTIONAL RIGHT TO SECEDE).
- RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS ENVISAGED IN THE RSFSR AND SOVIET CONSTITUTIONS ARE GUARANTEED.
- THE REPUBLIC GUARANTEES TO ALL ITS CITIZENS THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE

POLITICAL PARTIES, PUBLIC AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND MASS MOVEMENTS WHICH WORK WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RSFSR CONSTITUTION, AND AFFORDS ITS CITIZENS EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AFFAIRS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT.

- THE REPUBLIC PROCLAIMS ITS ADHERENCE TO THE UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, ITS WILLINGNESS TO LIVE IN PEACE WITH ALL NATIONS AND STATES, AND WILL DO ALL POSSIBLE TO AVERT INTERNATIONAL AND INTER-REPUBLICAN CONFLICT, WHILST AT THE SAME TIME DEFENDING THE INTEREST OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLES.

4. IF THE PRECISE DRAFTING POINTS OF THE DECLARATION - AND THE POSITION OF THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS - WERE CONTROVERSIAL, THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DOCUMENT, INCLUDING THE ARTICLE ON THE SUPREMACY OF REPUBLICAN LAW, WERE ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTED BY EVERY DEPUTY, FROM BOTH CAMPS. THIS IS ONE ISSUE, AT LEAST, WHICH UNITES ALL RSFSR DEPUTIES.

5. THERE IS MUCH SPECULATION ABOUT THE LIKELY REACITON OF GORBACHEV AND THE USSR GOVERNMENT TO THIS DECLARATION. GORBACHEV SAID, PERHAPS RASHLY, IN HIS WEEKEND PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE WAS 'ONE HUNDRED PERCENT CERTAIN' THAT THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE WOULD DO NOTHING TO CONTRADICT THE USSR CONSTITUTION. THE DECLARATION ITSELF - WHICH IS, SIGNIFICANTLY, NOT A LAW OF DECREE - DOES NOT YET REQUIRE GORBACHEV TO MAKE A RESPONSE. CONFLICT NEED ONLY OCCUR WHEN THE RSFSR MAKES A CONCRETE MOVE TO OVERRIDE A SOVIET LAW. ONE OBVIOUS POTENTIAL TROUBLE SPOT WILL BE THE USSR GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR ECONOMIC REFORM AND PRICE RISES. RSFSR DEPUTIES OF BOTH CAMPS ARE JUBILANT OVER THIS DECLARATION, AND WILL NOT BE IN A MOOD EASILY TO RETREAT FROM ITS MAIN PROVISIOINS. MASLENNIKOV, GORBACHEV'S PRESS SPOIKESMAN REFUSED TO BE DRAWN INTO A DISCUSSION OF WHOSE LAW WOULD PREVAIL IN THE RSFSR WHEN THIS WAS RAISED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON 13 JUNE. HE SAID SIMPLY THAT THE QUESTION WAS HYPOTHETICAL: THE RSFSR DID NOT YET HAVE A GOVERNMENT: THE DOCUMENT WAS ONLY A STATEMENT OF INTENT, AND THE DIVISION OF POWER BETWEEN REPUBLICS AND THE CENTRE WOULD BE DISCUSSED AS PART OF THE PROCESS OF RESTRAINING THE FEDERATION.

6. IN THE SUPREME SOVIET WHICH WAS NEWLY ELECTED ON 10 JUNE, IZVESTIYA ESTIMATED THAT THE TRADITIONALIST 'COMMUNISTS OF RUSSIA' HAVE A SLIGHT EDGE (52%) ON THE REFORMIST 'DEMOCRATIC RUSSIA' BLOC. DEMOCRATIC RUSSIA HAVE A SIMILARLY SLIM MAJORITY IN THE COUNCIL OF THE REPUBLIC, BUT A MINORITY IN THE COUNCIL OF NATIONALITIES. THIS COULD BE A RECIPTE FOR STALEMATE ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES.

7. GORBACHEV AND YELTSIN REPORTEDLY BEHAVED RESPECTFULLY TOWARDS EACH OTHER AT THE 12 JUNE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION. ACCORDING TO MASLENNIKOV, GORBACHEV CONGRATULATED ALL THE NEWLY ELECTED REPUBLICAN CHAIRMEN. BUT THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN A CLASH BETWEEN GORBACHEV AND YELTSIN, OVER A RELATIVELY PETTY ISSUE. AN INTERVIEW TO CENTRL TV WITH YELTSIN, WHICH TOOK THE FORM OF AN ADDRESS TO THE RUSSIAN NATION, WAS NOT SHOWN AS PLANNED ON 8 JUNE BUT WAS POSTPONED BY ONE DAY. THE RSFSR CONGRESS SUMMONED THE HEAD OF GOSTELERADIO TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF. RUMOURS THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS BEHIND THE POSTPONEMENT CAUSED GORBACHEV TO SEND PRIMAKOV TO THE CONGRESS ON 11 JUNE TO PROTEST THAT HE, GORBACHEV, HAD NOT INTERFERRED WITH THE TV PROGRAMMING. THIS IS A FURTHER EXAMPLE OF GORBACHEV BEHAVING OVER-SENSITIVELY TO EVENTS WHICH IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE DIGNIFIED AND SENSIBLE TO IGNORE

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