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 FM OSLO
 TO IMMEDIATE FCO
 TELNO 196
 OF 121340Z AUGUST 86

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO NORWAY: MR WILLOCH

1. IN RESPONSE TO PERSISTENT STORIES IN THE PRESS, MR WILLOCH HAS DURING THE PAST WEEK MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT IS NOT NOW HIS INTENTION TO BE PRIME MINISTER AGAIN IF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS FORCED OUT OF OFFICE. THIS WOULD APPEAR TO CONFIRM SPECULATION WHICH STARTED WHEN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT FELL IN THE SPRING. HOWEVER, NO FORMAL DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. NOR IS IT CLEAR WHO WILL REPLACE WILLOCH AS THE COALITION'S PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE, ALTHOUGH PRESTHUS (CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY) IS THE OBVIOUS FAVOURITE. WILLOCH HIMSELF IS BEING CANVASSED AS A FUTURE FOREIGN MINISTER.

2. IN THE LIGHT OF THIS I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL TO KNOW WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER STILL WISHES TO RECEIVE WILLOCH ON 12 SEPTEMBER AS SUGGESTED IN MY TELNO 162. THE MFA HAVE NOT YET APPROACHED HIM ABOUT THE APPOINTMENT, AS THEY AWAIT AUTHORISATION FROM LONDON THAT THE REVISIONS SUGGESTED IN TUR ARE ACCEPTABLE.

3. AS SEEN FROM HERE, IT WOULD BE A PITY TO CANCEL THE MEETING AS IT WOULD BE MRS THATCHER'S ONLY CONTACT (APART FROM WILLOCH'S PRESENCE AS A GUEST AT THE DINNER AND RECEPTION, AND PRESTHUS' PRESENCE AT THE LATTER) WITH THE NORWEGIAN CONSERVATIVE PARTY. I HAVE CONSIDERED WHETHER PRESTHUS MIGHT BE INCLUDED IN THE MEETING. BUT THIS COULD BE AWKWARD DURING A FORMAL PRIME MINISTERIAL VISIT ORGANISED BY MRS BRUNDTLAND'S OFFICE. I THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT WE STICK TO A BILATERAL MEETING WITH WILLOCH. THIS WOULD ALLOW MRS THATCHER THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TALKS WITH A SENIOR AND INFLUENTIAL MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION WHOM SHE HAS MET BEFORE, AND WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF THE STORTING FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. GRATEFUL FOR INSTRUCTIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

BENTLEY

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