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GISCARD

SUMMARY

1. GISCARD ADVOCATES ADOPTION OF THE ECU AS A COMMON EC CURRENCY BY 1992; AND A DIRECTLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PRESIDENT BY 1995. HE ANNOUNCES THE HE IS NOT A CANDIDATE FOR NEXT YEAR'S FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, BUT PROMISES AN INITIATIVE ON SHORTENING THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM. THIS COULD DAMAGE BARRE'S AND CHIRAC'S PROSPECTS WHILE HELPING MITTERRAND'S SO FUELLING THE SUSPICION THAT GISCARD WANTS MITTERRAND TO WIN. GISCARD APPEARS TO HOPE THAT WERE BARRE AND CHIRAC TO BE DEFEATED, HE WOULD RE-EMERGE AS THE DOMINANT FIGURE ON THE RIGHT.

DETAIL

2. IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW ON 11 FEBRUARY, GISCARD PUT PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON EUROPE. HE INSISTED ON THE NEED FOR FURTHER PROGRESS AND URGED THAT BY 1992, WHEN THE INTERNAL MARKET IS ESTABLISHED, THE ECU SHOULD CIRCULATE FREELY IN ALL EC STATES ALONGSIDE NATIONAL CURRENCIES. (HE PRESENTED A SPECIALLY PRODUCED 10 ECU NOTE TO EX-CHANCELLOR HELMUT SCHMIDT WHO WAS IN THE AUDIENCE FOR THE INTERVIEW.) HE ALSO RENEWED HIS CALL FOR A MOVE, IN TWO STAGES, TO THE DIRECT ELECTION OF A EUROPEAN PRESIDENT. IN THE FIRST STAGE, IN 1992, EC HEADS OF GOVERNMENT WOULD NOMINATE A PRESIDENT WHO WAS, OR HAD BEEN, A MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL. IN THE SECOND, FROM 1995 ONWARDS, THE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE DIRECTLY ELECTED BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE. (IT IS NO SECRET THAT GISCARD HAS HIS EYE ON THE JOB.) !!

3. TURNING TO INTERNAL AFFAIRS, GISCARD ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS NOT A CANDIDATE FOR NEXT YEAR'S FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. BUT HE WAS CAREFUL TO ADD THAT, IF FRANCE FOUND ITSELF IN SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES, THE PEOPLE COULD COUNT ON HIM (HE HE IS STILL AVAILABLE IF CALLED). HE ALSO INSISTED THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BRING FORWARD PROPOSALS TO HOLD A REFERENDUM ON SHORTENING THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM FROM 7 TO 5 YEARS. IF IT FAILED TO DO SO, HE WOULD HIMSELF INTRODUCE A BILL WHEN PARLIAMENT RE-ASSEMBLES IN APRIL.

COMMENT

4. THIS WAS GISCARD AT HIS MOST CUNNING AND DIVISIVE, SLIDING THE STILETTO IN WITH A SILKEN TOUCH. BY APPARENTLY RENOUNCING PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS, AND PLAYING THE EUROPEAN CARD FOR ALL ITS WORTH, HE IS SEEKING TO PORTRAY HIMSELF AS THE CHAMPION OF A GREATER CAUSE, ABOVE THE FRAY OF DOMESTIC POLITICS. AND YET HIS PROPOSAL FOR A REFERENDUM ON SHORTENING THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM (WHICH THE POLLS SUGGEST HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE ELECTORATE) IS NOTHING BUT NICELY JUDGED DOMESTIC POLITICAL MANOEUVRE, CAREFULLY CALCULATED TO DIVIDE AND EMBARRASS THE RIGHT.

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5. AS GISCARD KNOWS, BARRE IS OPPOSED TO THIS PROPOSAL AND CHIRAC IS ONLY LUCK-WARM. MITTERRAND HOWEVER IS STRONGLY IN FAVOUR, SO THAT A REFERENDUM ENDORSING THE CHANGE WOULD APPEAR TO BE AN ENDORSEMENT OF HIM (AND GISCARD) TOO. IT WOULD PROBABLY ALSO HELP MITTERRAND'S CHANCES OF RE-ELECTION SINCE VOTERS RELUCTANT TO RETURN HIM FOR ANOTHER 7 YEARS MIGHT SEE LESS OBJECTION TO A SECOND TERM OF ONLY 5 YEARS. IT IS HARD NOT TO CONCLUDE THEREFORE THAT GISCARD'S INTENTION IT TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR BARRE OR CHIRAC TO WIN NEXT YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, IN THE HOPE THAT, ONCE THEY WERE DEFEATED, HE WOULD RE-EMERGE AS THE DOMINANT FIGURE ON THE RIGHT. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES HE MIGHT EVEN HAVE AMBITIONS TO REPLACE CHIRAC AS THE RE-ELECTED MITTERRAND'S COHABITATIONIST PRIME MINISTER (THOUGH I DOUBT WHETHER MITTERRAND WOULD IN FACT CHOSE HIM.

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