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FM PARIS

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 299

OF 211244Z MARCH 88

INFO SAVING EC POSTS, WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO, CGS IN FRANCE

MIPT: THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

SUMMARY

1. BEREGOVY TELLS ME THAT MITTERRAND WILL ANNOUNCE HIS DECISION TO STAND AGAIN LATER THIS WEEK. HE INSISTS THAT MITTERRAND'S DECISION IS A RELUCTANT ONE, BUT THAT HE HAS CONCLUDED THAT ONLY HE CAN BAR THE ROUTE TO CHIRAC AND THE RPR. BEREGOVY EXPECTS MITTERRAND TO WIN AFTER A HARD FIGHT WITH CHIRAC, BUT TO AVOID DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT BEFORE THE AUTUMN AT THE EARLIEST.

DETAIL

2. BEREGOVY (PS-FORMER FINANCE MINISTER) DINED WITH ME ON 18 MARCH. APART FROM COMMENTING ON BALLADUR'S UDF/RPR MERGER INITIATIVE (MIPT), HE RANGED WIDELY OVER THE POLITICAL SCENE:

(I) MITTERRAND: HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL RUN AGAIN AND CONFIRMED THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE THIS WEEK (BEREGOVY WILL BE CAMPAIGN MANAGER.) MITTERRAND HAD BEEN GENUINELY RELUCTANT TO STAND, AND DID NOT RELISH THE PROSPECT OF ANOTHER ELECTION CAMPAIGN, BUT HE HAD CONCLUDED THAT ONLY HE COULD PREVENT CHIRAC FROM WINNING, AND THE QUOTE BONAPARTIST UNQUOTE RPR WITH ITS QUOTE INSATIABLE GREED FOR POWER UNQUOTE FROM IMPOSING ITSELF ON THE COUNTRY.

(II) THE ELECTIONS: HE TEMPERED HIS CONFIDENCE IN A MITTERRAND VICTORY BY SAYING THAT IF THE TRICKLE OF SUPPORT AWAY FROM BARRE TO CHIRAC BECAME A FLOOD, THIS JUST MIGHT GENERATE ENOUGH MOMENTUM TO MAKE CHIRAC A SERIOUS THREAT IN THE SECOND ROUND. (THE LATEST POLLS SHOW CHIRAC OPENING A 4 OR 5 POINT LEAD OVER BARRE, BUT THEY CONTINUE TO POINT TO A COMFORTABLE MITTERRAND VICTORY OVER CHIRAC IN THE SECOND ROUND.)

(III) THE POST-ELECTION SCENE: HE THOUGHT THAT IF MITTERRAND WON, HE WAS UNLIKELY TO DISSOLVE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IMMEDIATELY. INSTEAD HE WOULD LEAVE TIME FOR THE SOLVENT EFFECT OF DEFEAT TO WORK ON THE CURRENT UDF/RPR MAJORITY. BEREGOVY DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THAT

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MAJORITY WOULD IMMEDIATELY MOVE TO CENSURE A MODERATE GOVERNMENT PUT IN PLACE BY A NEWLY RE-ELECTED PRESIDENT (AS SOME IN THE RPR ARE THREATENING). ON THE CONTRARY HE EXPECTED SOME ON THE RIGHT TO AGREE TO JOIN SUCH A GOVERNMENT, IF NOT IMMEDIATELY THEN WITHIN A FEW MONTHS (THIS IS NOT IMPLAUSIBLE). HE ADDED HOWEVER THAT POLITICAL LOGIC DICTATED THAT WHOEVER WON, INCLUDING CHIRAC (DESPITE HIS PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY), WOULD DISSOLVE THE ASSEMBLY WITHIN 6 MONTHS TO A YEAR. HIS OWN GUESS WAS FOR NEW ELECTIONS THIS AUTUMN (I.E. IN SEPTEMBER).

3. GIVEN HIS CLOSENESS TO MITTERRAND, AND THE FACT THAT HE IS A FRONT RUNNER FOR THE PREMIERSHIP IF THE PRESIDENT IS RE-ELECTED, BEREGOVY'S ASSESSMENT IS OF CONSIDERABLE INTEREST. (IT IS AS CLOSE TO MITTERRAND'S AS WE SHALL GET.) I FIND THE ESSENCE OF HIS ANALYSIS PERSUASIVE, NAMELY THAT MITTERRAND WILL WIN A HARD BATTLE WITH CHIRAC, BUT WILL TRY TO DELAY A PARLIAMENTARY DISSOLUTION TO THE AUTUMN OR BEYOND. BUT THERE ARE STILL FIVE WEEKS TO GO, AND WE HAVE YET TO SEE WHAT EFFECT MITTERRAND'S FORMAL DECLARATION WILL HAVE. THE REAL BATTLE BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING.

FERGUSSON

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