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INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, PARIS, UKDEL NATO, ATHENS

GENSCHER'S SPEECH IN ATHENS: 28 MARCH

SUMMARY

1. ANOTHER OPTIMISTIC SPEECH ON EAST-WEST RELATIONS. BUT A REFERENCE TO THE NEED TO REACT WITH RESOLVE IF GORBACHEV'S DEEDS DO NOT MATCH HIS WORDS. RISK THAT THESE REPEATED OPTIMISTIC ASSESSMENTS WILL MAKE DEFENCE DECISIONS, EG SNF MODERNISATION, EVEN HARDER.

DETAIL

2. ON 28 MARCH GENSCHER MADE A SPEECH IN ATHENS WHICH CONCENTRATED ON RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

3. GENSCHER SAID IN ANSWER TO THOSE WHO ARE SCEPTICAL ABOUT GORBACHEV'S INTENTIONS THAT 'WE CAN TEST GORBACHEV'S WORDS BY HIS DEEDS'. WHEN THE WEST FOUND THAT SOVIET ACTIONS DID NOT CORRESPOND TO SOVIET WORDS, THE WEST WOULD DRAW APPROPRIATE CONCLUSIONS WITH THE SAME DETERMINATION AS HAD BEEN SHOWN IN ANSWER TO SOVIET SS20 DEPLOYMENT. GENSCHER BELIEVED THAT GORBACHEV REALISED THAT THE SOVIET UNION'S INFLUENCE IN WORLD POLITICS INCREASED WHEN IT WAS NOT BASED PRIMARILY ON ARMED MIGHT, BUT ON THE CREATIVE FORCE OF ITS TALENTED PEOPLES. AND IF GORBACHEV'S WORDS TURNED OUT TO BE MERE WORDS, THEN HE HAD MUCH MORE TO LOSE THAN THE WEST.

4. GENSCHER SAID THAT THE WEST MUST COME FORWARD WITH SERIOUS, CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH WHETHER THERE WAS A CHANCE FOR EUROPE HERE. THIS REQUIRED BOLD PLANNING FOR THE BUILDING OF A EUROPEAN PEACE OR A COMMON EUROPEAN HOUSE. THERE WAS NO SUGGESTION THAT WE HAD TO GIVE UP OUR DEFENCE CAPABILITY. THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES WAS INDISSOLUBLE.

5. THE GERMANS, GENSCHER SAID, HAD FOR HISTORICAL REASONS A PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. GERMAN/SOVIET RELATIONS WERE OF CENTRAL IMPORTANCE, BUT GERMAN ATTEMPTS TO BUILD A RELIABLE RELATIONSHIP OF GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS SHOULD GIVE NO ONE IN THE WEST CAUSE FOR MISTRUST.

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COMMENT

6. THIS SPEECH IS IN LINE WITH GENSCHER'S OTHER RECENT EAST-WEST STATEMENTS SUCH AS THE DAVOS SPEECH OF JANUARY 1987 (WHEN HE COINED THE PHRASE EVENTUALLY TRANSLATED AS 'HOLDING GORBACHEV TO HIS WORD'.) THERE IS THE SAME TONE OF OPTIMISM ABOUT SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY AND EAST-WEST RELATIONS. BUT THIS TIME THERE IS ALSO A FLAVOUR OF WILLINGNESS TO REACT NEGATIVELY IF GORBACHEV'S DEEDS DO NOT LIVE UP TO HIS WORDS. THE REAL RISK WITH THIS TYPE OF PRESENTATION, AS I SEE IT, IS THAT THE OPTIMISTIC TONE MAY ENCOURAGE EXCESSIVE HOPES, IN PUBLIC OPINION AND THUS MAKE DECISIONS LIKE SNF MODERNISATION, WHICH WILL ANYWAY BE POLITICALLY DIFFICULT HERE, EVEN MORE CONTROVERSIAL. HENCE MY QUESTIONS TO GENSCHER ABOUT THE SPEECH (MY TELNO 303).

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