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MIPT: FRENCH POLITICS AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

1. FRANCE FACES A PERIOD OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY. IF MITTERRAND IS RE-ELECTED HE HOPES TO CONSTRUCT A CENTRE-LEFT GOVERNMENT AROUND A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PS AND A CDS DETACHED FROM ITS UDF/RIGHT WING MOORINGS. IF CHIRAC WINS, HE WILL ENCOURAGE THE RIGHT TO SET ASIDE ITS DIFFERENCES AND UNITE IN A SINGLE PARTY. IF CHIRAC LOSES, GISCARD MAY TRY TO REASSERT HIS AUTHORITY OVER AN INDEPENDENT UDF: BARRE MIGHT ENCOURAGE THE EMERGENCE OF A CENTRE/LIBERAL BLOC. LE PEN WILL HAUNT THEM BOTH. THE FRENCH POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING.

DETAIL

2. FRANCE LOOK SET FOR A PERIOD OF POLITICAL TURBULENCE:

THE LEFT

3. MITTERRAND HAS INDICATED THAT IF HE IS RE-ELECTED HE WILL GOVERN FROM THE CENTRE-LEFT. WITH NO SOCIALIST (PS) MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT, AND NO CERTAINTY THAT DISSOLVING THE ASSEMBLY AND CALLING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WOULD PROVIDE ONE, POLITICAL ARITHMETIC OBLIGES HIM TO LOOK TO THE CENTRE. BUT, BEYOND THAT, MITTERRAND HAS BECOME CONVINCED THAT FRANCE CAN ONLY BE GOVERNED FROM THE CENTRE, ON THE BASIS OF BROAD CONSENSUS. THE CENTRE-LEFT DESIGN IS THEREFORE A QUESTION OF CHOICE AS WELL AS NECESSITY. AS GISCARD FOUND BEFORE HIM, HOWEVER, IT IS NOT AN EASY IDEAL TO REALISE.

4. MITTERRAND'S STRATEGY APPEARS TO BE TWO-STAGE. IN THE FIRST, HE WOULD FORM A MINORITY ADMINISTRATION COMPOSED OF MODERATE SOCIALISTS AND NON-POLITICAL FIGURES (PARA 5 OF MIPT), WHICH HE HOPES WOULD SURVIVE UNTIL THE AUTUMN, OR EVEN THE SPRING OF 1989. AMONG ITS PRIORITIES WOULD BE THE REINTRODUCTION OF A MEASURE OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, DESIGNED TO HELP THE CENTRIST CDS (CURRENTLY PART OF THE UDF). THE SECOND STAGE WOULD BE TO HOLD ELECTIONS UNDER THE NEW SYSTEM AND TO INVITE A STRENGTHENED, AND GRATEFUL, CDS TO JOIN A CENTRE-LEFT GOVERNMENT AFTERWARDS.

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5. DOUBTS HAVE ARISEN, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE TIMING. SOME IN THE PS NOW ARGUE THAT MITTERRAND CANNOT REINTRODUCE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION BECAUSE AS WELL AS BENEFITTING THE CDS IT WOULD HELP SUSTAIN LE PEN'S FRONT NATIONAL. INSTEAD, MITTERRAND SHOULD CASH IN ON VICTORY BY DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT AND HOLDING NEW ELECTIONS, AFTERWARDS INVITING ELEMENTS OF THE MODERATE RIGHT (CDS BUT OTHERS TOO) CHASTENED BY A DOUBLE DEFEAT, TO JOIN A NEW CENTRE-LEFT GOVERNMENT. THEY CLAIM THAT HE CANNOT GAMBLE THAT THE CENTRE-RIGHT WILL FALL APART: HE MUST ENCOURAGE THE PROCESS.

6. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE SIZE OF MITTERRAND'S MAJORITY IF HE WINS. BUT HIS INTENTION IS TO COMPLETE THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PS INTO A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY THAT IS THE NATURAL PARTNER FOR CENTRISTS DETACHED FROM THEIR CURRENT RIGHT-WING MOORINGS. IF HE SUCCEEDS HE WILL HAVE TRANSFORMED THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AT THE ORTHODOX RIGHT'S EXPENSE.

THE RIGHT

7. MOST OF THOSE ON THE RIGHT SEE THE NEED FOR UNITY BUT THERE IS NO AGREEMENT ON HOW TO ACHIEVE IT, CHIRAC'S AIM IS TO UNITE ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THE PRESENT UDF/RPR MAJORITY IN A SINGLE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. LEOTARD AND HIS PARTI REPUBLICAIN (PR) LOYALISTS ARE ATTRACTED BY THE IDEA OF A SINGLE PARTY BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT THEIR OWN IDEAS AND CAREERS ARE LIKELY TO PROSPER IF THEY MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH CHIRAC. THE CDS (THE PR'S MAIN UDF PARTNERS) HAVE BEEN MUCH LESS ENTHUSIASTIC: THEIR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES ARE TO THE LEFT OF THE RPR'S AND PR'S: THEIR COMMITMENT TO EUROPE IS DEEPER THAN CHIRAC'S: THEY ARE ALLERGIC TO GAULLISM. IT IS THROUGH THESE ISSUES THAT MITTERRAND HOPES TO SEDUCE THEM: AND HE IS BEING HELPED BY THE UNEXPECTED WEAKNESS OF CHIRAC'S POSITION FOLLOWING THE VOTE ON 24 APRIL. ACROSS THE SPECTRUM THE DAGGERS ARE OUT.

8. IF, IMPLAUSIBLY, CHIRAC WINS ON 8 MAY, THE PROBLEM MAY RESOLVE ITSELF RELATIVELY EASILY. A SINGLE CONSERVATIVE PARTY COMPOSED OF THE RPR AND UDF (WITH OR WITHOUT THE CDS), IS LIKELY TO EMERGE.

9. IF CHIRAC LOSES, THE PROBLEM WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT. ONCE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT RESIGNS, ITS MEMBERS WILL HAVE NO PARLIAMENTARY VOICE (SINCE MINISTERS CANNOT BE DEPUTIES) THE RPR IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL BE WITHOUT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP. GISCARD (WHO REMAINS A DEPUTY) MAY TRY TO ASSERT HIS LEADERSHIP OVER THE UDF, ARGUING THAT IT SHOULD REMAIN DISTINCT RATHER THAN THROW IN ITS LOT WITH A DEFEATED CHIRAC. IT WOULD THEN BE IN A POSITION TO BARGAIN BLOC TO BLOC WITH CHIRAC OR MITTERRAND. BARRE, (ALSO DEPUTY) WHOSE

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RELATIVELY NARROW FIRST ROUND DEFEAT BY CHIRAC SEEMS TO HAVE
CONVINCED HIM THAT HE SHOULD REMAIN IN POLITICS, MAY TRY TO EMERGE
AS THE POLE OF ATTRACTION OF A NEW CENTRE-LIBERAL GROUPING COMPOSED
OF THE CDS, ELEMENTS OF THE PR AND EVEN OF THE RPR. LE PEN AND HIS
GROUP OF FRONT NATIONAL DEPUTIES WILL HAVE A DISPROPORTIONATE
SIGNIFICANCE WHATEVER HAPPENS, LE PEN MAY FIND A FERTILE
HUNTING-GROUND AND THE RPR RISKS BEING MARGINALISED, WHICH IS PART
OF CHIRAC'S CALCULATION AS HE REDOUBLES HIS EFFORTS TO CAPTURE THE
ELYSEE.

CONCLUSION

10. THERE IS GREAT UNCERTAINTY AND APPREHENSION. THE POLITICAL MAP
IS CHANGING BUT NO-ONE CAN YET DISCERN THE NEW OUTLINES. THE RESULT
ON 8 MAY WILL HELP DETERMINE THE OUTCOME: SO WILL LE PEN ON WHOSE
DRAMATIC APPEARANCE AT CENTRE-STAGE I SHALL COMMENT SHORTLY. THE
IMMEDIATE IMPLICATION IS THAT, IN THE EVENT OF MITTERRAND'S VICTORY,
WE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR GOVERNMENTAL UNCERTAINTY AND DIFFICULTIES
OVER DECISION MAKING IN THE RUN UP TO THE MADRID NAC AND THE HANOVER
EUROPEAN COUNCIL.

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