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FM PARIS

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

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INFO PRIORITY EC POSTS, WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO

INFO SAVING HMCBS IN FRANCE

MY TELNO 555: FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: FIRST ROUND RESULTS.

SUMMARY

1. THE SOCIALISTS (PS) HAVE DONE LESS WELL THAN THEY HOPED, BUT ARE STILL IN SIGHT OF AN OVERALL MAJORITY. THE RIGHT HAVE DONE BETTER THAN EXPECTED, PARTICULARLY THE UDF. THE COMMUNISTS (PCF) HAVE REGAINED A LITTLE LOST GROUND AND WILL WIN A FEW SEATS. THE FRONT NATIONAL HAS DONE RELATIVELY BADLY AND MAY WIN NONE: BUT IT WILL CONTINUE TO COMPLICATE THE CALCULATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT. THE RESULTS SHOW THAT MITTERRAND'S VICTORY WAS A PERSONAL ONE, NOT A VICTORY FOR THE LEFT, AND THAT FRANCE WANTS MODERATE GOVERNMENT AROUND THE CENTRE.

DETAIL

2. WITH MOST OF THE VOTES COUNTED, THE FIRST ROUND RESULTS ARE:

COMMUNISTS (PCF)	: 11.3 PER CENT
SOCIALISTS AND ALLIES	: 37.5 PER CENT
URC (UDF AND RPR COMBINED)	: 40.4 PER CENT
FRONT NATIONAL (FN)	: 9.7 PER CENT

THE ABSTENTION RATE WAS 34.2 PER CENT, THE HIGHEST IN ANY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC. THIS IS PROBABLY EXPLAINED BY A PUBLIC WEARINESS WITH ELECTIONEERING, AND BY A WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT THE RESULT WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

THE SOCIALISTS

3. THE RESULT IS A DISAPPOINTMENT FOR THE SOCIALISTS. OPINION POLLS PREDICTED THAT THEY WOULD GET OVER 40 PER CENT, AND SECURE A LARGE MAJORITY. INSTEAD THEY ARE 3 PER CENT BEHIND THE COMBINED UDF AND RPR TOTAL. PART OF THE EXPLANATION MAY BE THAT THE EXPECTATION OF A SWEEPING VICTORY PERSUADED SOME SOCIALIST SUPPORTERS THAT THEY NEED NOT BOTHER TO VOTE, WHILE CONVINCING RIGHT-WING VOTERS THAT THEY MUST. BUT THE ELECTORATE ALSO SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SIGNALLING THAT IT WANTS A ROUGH BALANCE BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT, AND IS WARY OF GIVING

THE SOCIALIST PARTY THE SORT OF MAJORITY THAT MIGHT TEMPT IT TO BECOME MORE SECTARIAN AGAIN IF THE OPENING TO THE CENTRE (OUVERTURE) PROVES DIFFICULT. NEVERTHELESS, DESPITE DOING LESS WELL THAN THEY HOPED, THE PS HAVE EQUALLED THEIR RECORD 1981 SCORE, AND COMPUTER PROJECTIONS SUGGEST THAT (BENEFITTING FROM THE WAY IN WHICH CONSTITUENCY LINES WERE REDRAWN AFTER THE 1986 ELECTION) THEY WILL EMERGE WITH BETWEEN 290 - 320 SEATS AFTER THE SECOND ROUND. THIS WOULD GIVE THEM A NARROW MAJORITY OF 3 AT ONE END OF THE SCALE AND A COMFORTABLE ONE OF 63 AT THE OTHER.

THE URC.

4. FOR THE UDF AND RPR COMBINED IN THE UNION DU RASSEMBLEMENT ET DU CENTRE (URC), THE RESULTS ARE A SURPRISE AND A TONIC. THEY WERE BRACED FOR A HEAVY DEFEAT AND HAVE INSTEAD POLLED SLIGHTLY MORE VOTES THAN THE PS. A WEEK AGO THEY WERE ANXIOUS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT GET 200 SEATS: NOW COMPUTER PROJECTIONS SUGGEST THAT THEY WILL SECURE 250 - 280. THERE IS EVEN AN OUTSIDE CHANCE THAT THEY COULD BEAT THE SOCIALISTS, ALTHOUGH THIS WOULD REQUIRE AN UNLIKELY CHANGE IN VOTING PATTERNS (INCLUDING THE ABSTENTION RATE) IN THE SECOND ROUND. A NOTABLE FEATURE OF THE URC'S PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE UDF. THEIR CANDIDATES SECURED 18.5 PER CENT, LESS THAN A POINT BEHIND THE RPR ON 19.2 PER CENT. THIS IS A BOOST TO THE MODERATE CENTRE-RIGHT, AND PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT OF THOSE WITHIN THE RIGHT WHO ARE MOST RECEPTIVE TO THE IDEA OF OUVERTURE. THIS COULD HAVE AN IMPORTANT BEARING IN DETERMINING THE FUTURE SHAPE OF FRENCH POLITICS.

THE PCF

5. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE IMPROVED ON LAJOINIE'S FIRST ROUND SCORE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS BY OVER 4.5 PER CENT, RECORDING THEIR BEST NATIONAL RESULT SINCE THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN 1984. COMPUTER PREDICTIONS SUGGEST THAT THEY MAY EMERGE WITH UP TO A DOZEN SEATS AFTER NEXT WEEK-END'S SECOND ROUND. THEY EXPECTED AN IMPROVEMENT ON THEIR PRESIDENTIAL PERFORMANCE BUT ARE BLINKING IN SOME DISBELIEF AT ITS SIZE. THEY ARE ALSO DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEATEN THE FN WHICH, AFTER LE PEN'S PERFORMANCE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, HAD CLAIMED TO HAVE REPLACED THEM AS THE FOURTH LARGEST POLITICAL FORMATION IN FRANCE. THE PCF'S SCORE IS PROBABLY EXPLAINED BY THE LOCAL POPULARITY OF SOME OF THEIR CANDIDATES, AND BY MITTERRAND'S CENTRIST STRATEGY WHICH HAS GIVEN THEM SPACE ON THE POLITICAL LEFT. NEVERTHELESS, THEIR RECOVERY IS RELATIVE: THEY HAVE DONE 5 PER CENT WORSE THAN IN 1981 AND WILL FALL FAR SHORT OF THE 30 SEATS NEEDED FOR PARLIAMENTARY GROUP STATUS. FOR THE MOMENT THEIR DECLINE HAS BEEN HALTED, BUT THIS RESULT DOES NOT NECESSARILY SIGNAL A REAL

RECOVERY IN THEIR FORTUNES.

THE FN

6. FOR THE FN THE OUTCOME IS A SETBACK. WITH 9.7 PER CENT THEY ARE DOWN NEARLY 5 PER CENT COMPARED WITH LE PEN'S SCORE IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND BACK AT THE LEVEL OF THE 1986 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO WIN MORE THAN 2-3 SEATS IN THE SECOND ROUND AND COULD EMERGE WITH NONE. LE PEN AND HIS LIEUTENANTS DID WELL IN MARSEILLES (LE PEN'S SCORE WAS 34 PER CENT IN HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY) BUT NOT WELL ENOUGH TO MAKE THEIR ELECTION LIKELY. LE PEN MAY, HOWEVER, CONCLUDE THAT THE FN'S SHOWING WAS GOOD ENOUGH TO ENCOURAGE HIM TO STAND FOR MAYOR OF MARSEILLES NEXT YEAR.

7. WHATEVER THE FN'S FINAL TALLY IN THESE ELECTIONS, IT WOULD BE RASH TO ASSUME THAT THEIR BUBBLE HAS BURST. LE PEN DID SPECTACULARLY WELL IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS BECAUSE HE PROVIDED A FOCUS FOR PROTEST AT NATIONAL LEVEL. THE FN WAS ALWAYS LIKELY TO SLIP BACK IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WHEN VOTERS ARE CHOOSING THEIR DEPUTY. LE PEN WILL HOWEVER CONTINUE TO COMPLICATE THE CALCULATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT, AND WILL CAPTURE SEATS FROM THEM IN THE LOCAL ELECTIONS THIS AUTUMN AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS NEXT SPRING.

8. THE PARTIES ARE NOW ENGAGED IN INTENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE SECOND ROUND. THE PCF SEEM LIKELY TO STAND DOWN IN CONSTITUENCIES WHERE PS CANDIDATES ARE BETTER PLACED, AND VICE VERSA. ON THE RIGHT THERE WILL BE AN ARGUMENT BETWEEN THOSE WHO WISH TO STRIKE A SIMILAR DEAL WITH LE PEN AND THOSE (PARTICULARLY UDF CENTRISTS) WHO DO NOT. SUCH DEALS WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT BEARING ON THE FINAL RESULT. SOME FIFTY FN CANDIDATES DID WELL ENOUGH IN THE FIRST ROUND TO QUALIFY FOR THE SECOND, WHICH GIVES LE PEN CONSIDERABLE SCOPE TO EMBARRASS THE URC AND PREJUDICE ITS PROSPECTS.

CONCLUSION

9. THE FIRST ROUND RESULT THROWS FURTHER LIGHT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. MITTERRAND'S COMMANDING VICTORY APPEARS MORE THAN EVER TO BE A PERSONAL ONE, RATHER THAN THE VICTORY OF THE LEFT. HIS ADVOCACY OF MODERATION, TOLERANCE AND OUVERTURE WAS IN LINE WITH THE MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE. HE WON BECAUSE HE PLAYED DOWN HIS SOCIALIST CREDENTIALS AND OCCUPIED THE CENTRE GROUND.

10. IN THE EYES OF THE ELECTORATE THE PS HAS BEEN LESS CONVINCING IN MOVING TO THE CENTRE. THE PARTY WILL PROBABLY GET AN OVERALL MAJORITY AFTER THE SECOND ROUND ON 12 JUNE, NOT LEAST BECAUSE THERE IS LITTLE OBVIOUS ENTHUSIASM FOR A RETURN TO COHABITATION WHICH IS

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WHAT A URC VICTORY WOULD IMPLY. BUT IF IT DOES, IT WILL BE A
MAJORITY CAUTIOUSLY GIVEN WITH THE CLEAR WARNING THAT THE FRENCH
WANT MODERATE GOVERNMENT AROUND THE CENTRE.

FERGUSSON

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