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KOHL'S VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION : FRG PRESS AND POLITICAL REACTIONS

SUMMARY

1. HIGH EXPECTATIONS BEFORE THE VISIT, AS A RESULT OF HEAVY ADVANCE BRIEFING AND PRESS COVERAGE. LITTLE ELSE IN THE FRG MEDIA THIS WEEK. SOME SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT AT LIMITED RESULTS, ESPECIALLY ON BERLIN. BUT THE PRESS HAS WELCOMED THE RESUMPTION OF TOP-LEVEL BILATERAL CONTACT. FAVOURABLE REACTION BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

DETAIL

2. IN INTERVIEWS BEFORE THE VISIT, KOHL SAID HE EXPECTED HIS JOURNEY TO MOSCOW TO OPEN A NEW CHAPTER. SUCH COMMENTS, TOGETHER WITH MASSIVE ADVANCE PRESS COVERAGE HELPED TO BUILD UP A HEADY ATMOSPHERE OF EXPECTATION.

3. GORBACHEV'S INTERVIEW WITH DER SPIEGEL ON THE EVE OF THE VISIT (WOODS' LETTER OF 25 OCTOBER AND TELELETTER DATED 26 OCTOBER FROM TUCKER, MOSCOW, TO SOVIET DEPARTMENT) HAD THE EFFECT OF LOWERING EXPECTATIONS. COVERAGE OF THE EARLY PART OF THE VISIT CONCENTRATED ON KOHL'S AND GORBACHEV'S PUBLIC REFERENCES TO BERLIN AND GERMAN REUNIFICATION. THOUGH MUCH WAS MADE OF GORBACHEV'S STATEMENT THAT "THE ICE WAS BROKEN" THE PRESS CLEARLY SENSED THAT THERE WAS UNLIKELY TO BE A BREAKTHROUGH ON THOSE OR OTHER MAJOR ISSUES. A TYPICAL COMMENT WAS THAT THE VISIT "WOULD NOT HAVE THE LANDMARK QUALITY OF ADENAUER'S IN 1955 OR BRANDT'S IN 1970".

4. FROM THAT POINT ON, MEDIA COMMENT BECAME MORE DOWN TO EARTH, CONCENTRATING ON THE PROGRAMME AND AGREEMENTS. THE FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG (FAZ) SAID THAT "GORBACHEV'S WORDS ON THE GERMAN QUESTION MAKE IT CLEAR HOW MUCH INTEREST HE HAS IN IT: HARDLY NONE". DIE WELT SAID THAT "THE VISIT IS NOT PROCEEDING IN QUITE AS A STREAMLINED A MANNER AS MANY HAD HOPED" BECAUSE OF GORBACHEV'S COMMENTS ON BERLIN AND GERMANY. THE SUDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG ADDED THAT GORBACHEV "HAD MADE CLEAR THAT THE CHANCELLOR WOULD PROBABLY HAVE

TO RETURN TO BONN WITHOUT A PRESENT FROM HIS HOST''.

5. DESPITE COMMENTS OF THIS SORT, KOHL HAS BEEN GIVEN CREDIT FOR A SOLID AND RELIABLE PERFORMANCE, AND IN PARTICULAR FOR HAVING SUCCESSFULLY RE-ESTABLISHED TOP-LEVEL POLITICAL CONTACT. THE ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS HAVE BEEN WELCOMED. THERE HAS BEEN NO TENDENCY TO ARGUE THAT MORE COULD HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED, IF KOHL HAD PLAYED THE VISIT DIFFERENTLY. SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS HAVE COMMENTED APPROVINGLY ON KOHL'S ADHERENCE TO ALLIED POSITIONS.

6. THE COALITION PARTNERS AND THE SPD HAVE COMMENTED FAVOURABLY. FOR THE SPD, EGON BAHR DREW PARTICULAR ATTENTION THE PARTICIPATION OF THE DEFENCE MINISTER, SCHOLZ, SAYING THIS WAS A GENUINE AND WELCOME ''FIRST''. SO FAR, NO SPD LEADER HAS SUGGESTED THAT THEY COULD HAVE DONE BETTER. THE OUTCOME ON BERLIN, SAID BAHR, HAD NOT BEEN SURPRISING. FRAU GEIGER (FOREIGN POLICY SPOKESMAN OF THE CDU/CSU PARLIAMENTARY GROUP) DESCRIBED THE VISIT AS OF ''GREAT, PERHAPS EVEN HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE'', ADDING (WITH SOMETHING LESS THAN COMPLETE LOGIC) THAT THE CHANCELLOR HAD MADE CLEAR BEFORE IT TOOK PLACE THAT NO SENSATIONAL RESULTS WERE TO BE EXPECTED. THE FDP SAID THAT THE RESULTS WERE DUE TO A POLICY OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION. THE FDP HAD PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN THIS FROM THE BEGINNING.

COMMENT

7. SO FAR THEREFORE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC RECEPTION OF THE VISIT HAS BEEN FREINDLY WITHOUT BEING ECSTATIC. NO LINE OF CRITICISM HAS YET OPENED UP AND THERE ARE NO OBVIOUS OPENINGS FOR THIS. KOHL WILL, I ASSESS, BE JUDGED AS HAVING DONE A COMPETENT JOB BUT NOT ONE THAT WILL GREATLY BOOST HIS POSITION DOMESTICALLY.

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