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RESTRICTED (CORRECTED VERSION)

FM PARIS

TO DESKBY 211530Z FCO

TELNO 373

OF 210833Z MARCH 89

INFO PRIORITY HMCBS IN FRANCE, EC POSTS, UKDEL STRASBOURG
INFO SAVING WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, HM TREASURY, DEPT OF EMPLOYMENT

MY TELNO 343: FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE SECOND ROUND OF THE FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ON 19 MARCH WENT EVEN BETTER FOR THE SOCIALISTS THAN THE FIRST. THEIR NET GAIN IN THESE ELECTIONS OF 12 LARGE TOWNS (OVER 30,000 POPULATION) COMPARES WELL WITH THE COMMUNISTS, WHO LOST FIVE LARGE TOWNS OVERALL. OPPOSITION LOSSES WERE FAIRLY EVENLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE UDF AND RPR, BUT THE RPR HAS COME OUT BETTER THANKS TO ITS SUCCESS IN PARIS AND LYONS. UNLIKE THE EXTREME RIGHT (FN), THE ECOLOGISTS IMPROVED THEIR SCORE IN THE SECOND ROUND AND HAVE EMERGED AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH. OVERALL, THE RESULTS ARE GOOD FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND WILL REINFORCE ROCARD'S MODERATE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH. AND, SINCE HIS STATUS IS SUCH A SUBORDINATE ONE, IT WILL STRENGTHEN THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION TOO.

DETAIL

2. IN THE SECOND ROUND THE SOCIALISTS IMPROVED ON THEIR FIRST ROUND ADVANCE BY TAKING 18 TOWNS OF OVER 30,000 POPULATION, TO ADD TO THEIR 2 FIRST ROUND GAINS. TWO OF THEIR TOWNS WERE WON FROM THE COMMUNISTS, THE REST FROM THE RIGHT. THEY ALSO LOST 8 TOWNS TO THE RIGHT, GIVING THEM A NET GAIN OF 12 TOWNS. THE SOCIALISTS NOW CONTROL 78 OF THE 220 LARGER TOWNS AND ARE ROUGHLY BACK TO THEIR STRENGTH IN 1977. THEY WERE PARTICULARLY DELIGHTED TO HAVE TAKEN STRASBOURG AND MULHOUSE IN NORTH-EASTERN FRANCE, WHICH HAD LONG BEEN A CENTRIST STRONGHOLD.

3. THE COMMUNISTS BY CONTRAST DID MARKEDLY LESS WELL IN THE SECOND ROUND AND THEIR OVERALL VOTE HAS CONTINUED TO DECLINE: THEY CONTROLLED 72 LARGER TOWNS IN 1977, 53 IN 1983 AND ARE NOW LEFT WITH 48. COMMUNIST VOTERS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO TRANSFER THEIR SECOND-ROUND VOTES TO THE SOCIALISTS. SOCIALIST VOTERS WERE LESS WILLING TO SUPPORT A COMMUNIST-LED LIST.

4. ON THE RIGHT THE NET LOSS WAS 10 LARGE TOWNS. LOSSES AND GAINS WERE FAIRLY EVENLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE UDF, RPR AND RIGHT-WING

INDEPENDENTS. BUT FOR THE RPR THERE WAS THE COMPENSATION OF NOIR'S ACROSS-THE-BOARD VICTORY IN LYONS AND CHIRAC'S SUCCESS IN REPEATING HIS 1983 GRAND SLAM IN PARIS, TAKING ALL 20 ARRONDISSEMENTS. THE RPR'S GENERAL SECRETARY, JUPPE (WHO WILL BE SEEING THE PRIME MINISTER ON 23 MARCH), HAS EMERGED PARTICULARLY WELL FROM THESE ELECTIONS. HE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED NOIR'S CANDIDATURE IN LYONS (AGAINST CHIRAC'S INCLINATION), HELPED CHIRAC TO ACHIEVE VICTORY IN PARIS, AND IS SEEN AS RESPONSIBLE FOR REJUVENATING THE RPR'S IMAGE AFTER CHIRAC'S PRESIDENTIAL DEFEAT AND NOW SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF FORCES BETWEEN THE RPR AND THE UDF IN THE RPR'S FAVOUR.

5. THE UDF, WHICH IN THE 1988 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OUTSTRIPPED THE RPR IN SEATS, HAS SUFFERED A PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOW. WORST AFFECTED INSIDE THE UDF COALITION ARE THE CDS AND THE GISCARDIENS. THE PARTI REPUBLICAIN HAS THE CONSOLATION OF SEVERAL VICTORIES BY ITS YOUNGER CANDIDATES.

6. GIVEN THE BOREDOM OF THE ELECTORATE WITH THE NUMEROUS ELECTIONS IN THE LAST YEAR, THE HISTORICALLY HIGH ABSTENTION RATE OF 27 PERCENT IN THE SECOND ROUND OF THESE ELECTIONS IS NOT TOO BAD, BUT IT AND THE STRENGTH OF THE VOTE FOR THE EXTREME RIGHT (FN) AND THE ECOLOGISTS POINT TO THE CONTINUING DISILLUSIONMENT IN FRANCE WITH THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR POLICIES. IN THE SECOND ROUND THE FN VOTE ON AVERAGE DECLINED SLIGHTLY, BUT FN CANDIDATES STILL MANAGED IN OVER 40 TOWNS EITHER TO OBTAIN MUNICIPAL COUNCILLOR SEATS OR TO SPLIT THE OPPOSITION VOTE SUFFICIENTLY TO ENABLE THE LEFT TO WIN. IN THE 20TH ARRONDISSEMENT OF PARIS LE PEN POLLED ONLY 11 PERCENT, THEREBY FAILING TO DENY CHIRAC HIS GRAND SLAM AND LOSING HIS CHANCE OF BECOMING A MUNICIPAL COUNCILLOR. THE ECOLOGISTS' VOTE IMPROVED MARKEDLY IN THE SECOND ROUND, AVERAGING 15 PERCENT IN THE 16 TOWNS WHERE THEY STOOD. BOTH THE FN AND THE ECOLOGISTS ARE NOW LOOKING TO THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS TO MAINTAIN THEIR MOMENTUM. THE PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM WILL SHOW CLEARLY THE STRENGTH OF THEIR SUPPORT.

7. IN GENERAL, THE CANDIDATES WHO DID BEST IN THESE ELECTIONS, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL COLOUR, WERE THE ONES WHO WERE SEEN AS YOUNG, POLITICALLY MODERATE (OR EVEN APOLITICAL) AND GOOD MANAGERS. CANDIDATES WHO WERE EXPELLED BEFORE THE ELECTION FROM THEIR POLITICAL PARTIES (EXCEPT THOSE EXPELLED FOR SUPPORTING THE EXTREME RIGHT) USUALLY FOUND THAT THIS HELPED THEM TO WIN VOTES. BOTH THE GISCARDIENS IN THE PS AND THE MODERNISTS IN THE RPR ARE INTERPRETING THIS TREND AS A VINDICATION OF THEIR RESPECTIVE EFFORTS TO MODERATE THEIR PARTIES' POLICIES AND TO ATTRACT CENTRE VOTERS. ON THE LEFT,

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ROCARD'S MODERATE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH HAS BEEN REINFORCED. THE SOCIALISTS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO INTERPRET OUVERTURE AS A CALL TO OTHERS TO RALLY TO THEIR OWN POLICIES, RATHER THAN THE SEEKING OF A FORMAL ALLIANCE WITH EITHER THE COMMUNISTS OR THE CENTRISTS. ON THE RIGHT CHIRAC NOW LOOKS IN BETTER SHAPE THAN EITHER GISCARD D'ESTAING OR BARRE. BUT HE WILL HAVE TO COPE WITH THE INCREASING CHALLENGE TO HIS LEADERSHIP FROM THE SUCCESSFUL NEW GENERATION ON THE LEFT OF THE RPR.

8. MY GENERAL FEELING IS THAT THE OUTCOME WILL HAVE HELPED MITTERRAND, GIVEN THAT ROCARD IS SEEN AS ACTING VERY LARGELY UNDER HIS TUTELAGE SO FAR AS DOMESTIC POLITICAL MANIPULATION IS CONCERNED. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE VIEW THAT THE PRESIDENT'S AIMS REMAIN (A) TO STAY IN POWER WITH THE SUPPORT OF A MODERATE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT:
(B) TO EMASCULATE THE EXTREME LEFT: AND
(C) TO WEAKEN THE RPR, AS THE ONLY THREAT ON THE RIGHT, BY SEEKING TO BLUR THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN IT AND THE EXTREME RIGHT, THE FN, NOW CLEARLY EMERGING AS A THREAT TO THE RPR RATHER THAN TO THE BODY POLITIC AS A WHOLE.

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TELNO 343

OF 131846Z MARCH 89

INFO SAVING HMCBS IN FRANCE, ATHENS, BONN, UKREP BRUSSELS
INFO SAVING BRUSSELS, COPENHAGEN, DUBLIN, LISBON, LUXEMBOURG
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(COLLAR)

MY TELNO 313 : FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1. THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE FIRST ROUND OF THESE ELECTIONS ON 12 MARCH WERE:

(A) A HIGHER ABSTENTION RATE (30 PERCENT) THAN IS USUAL FOR THE MUNICIPALS.

(B) A SLIGHT ADVANCE BY THE SOCIALISTS AND NO PROTEST VOTE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

(C) THE PREFERENCE OF URBAN VOTERS FOR CANDIDATES PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS ABOVE NATIONAL PARTY POLITICS AND CAPABLE OF BOOSTING THEIR TOWN'S COMPETITIVITY IN THE RUN-UP TO 1992.

(D) A GOOD SCORE BY ECOLOGICAL CANDIDATES (10 PERCENT OR MORE IN 60 OF THE 148 TOWNS WHERE THEY STOOD).

2. THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE RELIEVED THAT, DESPITE A RELATIVELY HIGH ABSTENTION RATE, THE SOCIALISTS' SCORE IS HOLDING UP WELL ENOUGH TO ENABLE THEM TO WIN BACK SOME OF THE TOWNS THEY LOST TO THE RIGHT IN 1983. JACK LANG LOOKS LIKELY TO WIN BLOIS. ROCARD WAS EFFORTLESSLY RE-ELECTED, EVEN WITHOUT COMMUNIST SUPPORT. THE LEFT WILL HOLD ON TO MARSEILLES, THANKS NOT TO THE OFFICIAL PS CANDIDATE, BUT TO THE HANDSOME SCORE BY THE STANDING MAYOR VIGOUROUX, WHO WAS RECENTLY EXPELLED FROM THE PS BUT IS KNOWN TO HAVE MITTERRAND'S SUPPORT. IN PRIMARIES AGAINST THE PCF THE SOCIALISTS DID BETTER THAN THE COMMUNISTS IN TOWNS HELD BY THE OPPOSITION, BUT LESS WELL IN TOWNS WHERE THE OUTGOING MAYOR WAS COMMUNIST. IN GENERAL, THE PCF VOTE HAS HELD UP WELL.

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3. THE MAJOR EVENT ON THE RIGHT HAS BEEN THE SPECTACULAR RESULT IN LYONS BY MICHEL NOIR (RPR). HE NOW LOOKS SET TO REPLACE THE AGEING COLLOMB (UDF) AS THE NEXT MAYOR. THIS, PLUS THE FACT THAT CHIRAC HAS SEEN OFF JOXE'S CHALLENGE IN PARIS AND MIGHT EVEN RETAKE ALL 20 ARRONDISSEMENTS, WILL MORE THAN COMPENSATE FOR A FEW RPR LOSSES IN SMALLER TOWNS. THE BIGGEST OPPOSITION CAUSUALTY IS BARRE, NUMBER TWO ON COLLOMB'S LIST, WHO WAS ELIMINATED IN THE FIRST ROUND IN LYONS AND WILL NOT EVEN BECOME A MUNICIPAL COUNCILLOR.

4. THE FRONT NATIONAL (FN), STANDING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE MUNICIPALS, ACHIEVED LOWER SCORES THAN IN THE PRESIDENTIAL OR LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. BUT FN CANDIDATES WILL GO THROUGH TO THE SECOND ROUND AND CAUSE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE OPPOSITION IN A NUMBER OF TOWNS. LE PEN SCORED OVER 15 PERCENT IN THE 20TH ARRONDISSEMENT OF PARIS.

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MADRID

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