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18 NOVEMBER MEETING OF THE TWELVE: FRENCH ATTITUDE TO 'THE GERMAN PROBLEM'

SUMMARY

1. REFLECTIONS ON FRENCH ATTITUDES TO GERMANY PRIOR TO 18 NOVEMBER INFORMAL PARIS SUMMIT MEETING. COMMON INTEREST OF MITTERRAND AND THE PRIME MINISTER IN CAUTIOUS APPROACH ESPECIALLY TO REUNIFICATION.

DETAIL

2. IN EVERY PUBLIC STATEMENT MITTERRAND AND HIS MINISTERS HAVE THE DIFFICULT TASK OF RECONCILING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE ITSELF WITH THEIR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS. TO UNDERSTAND THEIR CAUTION AND AMBIGUITY ONE HAS TO MAKE SOME ASSESSMENTS ABOUT CURRENT FRENCH ATTITUDES TO GERMANY AND THE GERMAN PROBLEM.

3. MITTERRAND MOST OF ALL, VIRTUALLY ALL OF HIS SENIOR MINISTERS AND THE SOCIETY FROM WHICH THEY COME, HAD EXPERIENCE OF THE HUMILIATION OF DEFEAT IN 1940 AND THE MISERY OF GERMAN OCCUPATION. SINCE THE WAR RECONCILIATION HAS BEEN A NECESSITY. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE FRANCO-GERMAN BARGAIN ON WHICH IT WAS BASED WERE MOTIVATED ON THE FRENCH SIDE BY THE NEED TO KEEP GERMANY UNDER CONTROL. THE DIVISION OF GERMANY WAS, IN THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES, A SOURCE OF CROCODILE TEARS NOT OF GENUINE LAMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, GIVEN THE FRAGILE ANTECEDENTS OF FRANCO-GERMAN RECONCILIATIONS AND THE NEED NOT TO ROCK THE BOAT IT HAS ONLY BEEN IN PRIVATE THAT THE RELEVANT GENERATION OF FRENCH PEOPLE HAVE EVER BEEN PREPARED TO EXPRESS THEIR INHERENT FEARS OF GERMAN POWER. THAT SITUATION HAS BEEN CHANGING SOMEWHAT IN RECENT YEARS AND FRUSTRATION AND IRRITATION WITH THE PRESENT DAY FRG HAS OCCASIONALLY SURFACED (EG OVER FINANCIAL AND MONETARY ISSUES) BUT THE RELATIONSHIP ON THE WHOLE IS GOVERNED ON THE FRENCH SIDE BY AN OFTEN UNCOMFORTABLE SELF-IMPOSED DISCIPLINE OR INHIBITION. AS GERMAN MUSCLE AND ASSERTIVENESS INCREASES, SO THE FRENCH INSTINCT IS TO GRIT THEIR

TEETH AND HANG ON TO THEIR POLICY OF RECONCILIATION/ANCHORING OF THE FRG.

4. THE STRUCTURES OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN TREATY OF 1963 MASSIVELY ENCOURAGED EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF FRENCH AND GERMANS, AND TIME AND 'LIFE ITSELF' HAVE DONE MUCH IN THE INTERVENING PERIOD TO SOFTEN MEMORIES AND TO ENCOURAGE A MUCH MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. THAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE LEADING ROLE WHICH THE FRG PLAYS IN ANY OPINION POLLS ON WHO FRANCE'S FRIENDS ARE AND IN RECENT PUBLISHED OPINIONS ON 'REUNIFICATION'. THE DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ASSESS IS WHETHER THE YOUNGER GENERATION ARE NONETHELESS INHERITING THEIR PARENTS' UNDERLYING CAUTION AND AMBIGUITY.

5. FROM MY OWN CONTACTS (BUT THEY TEND INEVITABLY TO BE AMONG THOSE WHO, AT THEIR YOUNGEST, ARE IN THEIR MID 40S) THE NERVOUSNESS ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON AT PRESENT IN EAST GERMANY IS VERY APPARENT. WHEN ASKED WHY IT IS THAT THE OPINION POLLS INDICATE A MUCH MORE POSITIVE RESPONSE, THE ANSWER IS THAT, ON SO SENSITIVE A SUBJECT NO ONE WOULD DREAM OF ANSWERING A POLLSTER HONESTLY. THAT MAY BE SO FOR THE OLDER ONES. BUT THERE IS PROBABLY A GENUINE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCE. PERHAPS ALL THAT CAN BE HAZARDED IS THAT FEARS AND CAUTION REMAIN SUBMERGED IN THE PSYCHE AND COULD EASILY RE-EMERGE EVEN AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION: PARTICULARLY IF GERMAN ASSERTIVENESS COMES TO BE WIDELY SEEN AS DIMINISHING FRANCE'S ROLE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP.

6. PRESIDENT MITTERRAND (ACTIVE IN THE RESISTANCE) AND M. DUMAS (FATHER SHOT BY THE GERMANS) WILL BOTH BE VERY SENSITIVE TO THE CURRENTS OF DOMESTIC OPINION. EXPERIENCES HAS SHOWN THAT THAT IS LIKELY TO LEAD THEM TO BE PARTICULARLY ACTIVE IN PRESSING FOR WHAT IN THEIR EYES IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF BINDING WEST GERMANY TO THE WEST - THE CEMENTING OF EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION.

7. IN THIS CONTEXT 'REUNIFICATION' IS OBVIOUSLY A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE WORD. I AM SURE THAT PRESIDENT MITTERRAND WILL SEEK TO FOCUS ATTENTION RATHER ON THE NEED NOT TO DO ANYTHING TO ROCK MR GORBACHEV'S BOAT THAN ON THE PROS AND CONS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF POSSIBLE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN EAST GERMANY AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY. IN THAT PRIME MINISTER AND HE SEEM TO SHARE A CLEAR COMMON INTEREST.

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