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MITTERRAND TELEVISION INTERVIEW

SUMMARY

1. FIRST PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT SINCE MID-FEBRUARY. MITTERRAND SUPPORTED ROCARD AND DISMISSED SOCIALIST CONGRESS FIASCO AS GROWING PAINS. STRUCK A NEW NOTE ON TIMING OF IGC. INSISTED NO SERIOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRANCE AND GERMANY, BUT EC POLITICAL UNION AND MONETARY UNION SHOULD MOVE IN PARALLEL TO GERMAN UNIFICATION.

DETAIL

2. PRESIDENT MITTERRAND GAVE A 90 MINUTE INTERVIEW ON THE FRENCH CHANNEL 1 TV PROGRAMME SEPT SUR SEPT YESTERDAY EVENING. HE MADE CLEAR THAT THE INTERVIEW HAD BEEN AT THIS INITIATIVE. THE MAIN POINTS TO COME UP WERE:

A) ON INTERNAL POLITICS AND HIS OWN POSITION, HE SAID HE REGARDED HIMSELF AS HAVING 5 YEARS OF HIS MANDATE LET TO SERVE (HE REFUSED TO GIVE ANY HINT AS TO WHETHER HE WOULD OR WOULD NOT GO ON AFTER 1993 IF THERE WERE A NON-SOCIALIST MAJORITY AFTER THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS). HE SUPPORTED ROCARD'S PRIME MINISTERSHIP SAYING THAT HE WANTED HIM TO REMAIN IN OFFICE FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. HE ADDED THAT 'OBJECTIVELY' IF ROCARD WERE SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH TO LEAD THE SOCIALISTS TO VICTORY IN 1993 HE WOULD BE IN A GOOD POSITION TO BECOME THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE IMPORTANT THING WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SEE THROUGH ITS PROGRAMME. HE REGRETTED WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT THE SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS, BUT TOOK THE UPBEAT LINE THAT THE PRESENT DIVISIONS WERE GROWING PAINS, THE PARTY HAD TO LEARN TO STAND ON ITS OWN FEET AND THAT THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH GOOD IDEAS. (HE INVITED THE OPPOSITION TO MAKE AN EFFORT TO PATCH UP THEIR DIFFERENCES TOO.) HE INSISTED THAT FABIUS WAS NOT HIS FAVOURITE BUT THAT THE YOUNGER GENERATION WOULD EMERGE IN DUE COURSE.

B) GERMANY: MITTERRAND SAID THAT THE GERMANS HAD BEEN TOO SLOW IN MAKING THEIR STATEMENT ON FRONTIERS (BUT DID NOT REPEAT THE FRENCH LINE THAT THE BUNDESTAG RESOLUTION HAD NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH). GERMAN UNIFICATION WAS LEGITIMATE AND HE SUPPORTED IT, BUT IT MUST

TAKE PLACE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACCELERATED EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

C) MITTERRAND SAID HE WAS NOT VERY CONCERNED WHETHER THE STARTING DATE FOR THE IGC WAS OR NOT BROUGHT FORWARD FROM DECEMBER. HE UNDERSTOOD THE GERMAN ELECTORAL COMPLICATIONS. MORE IMPORTANT WAS THE FINISHING DATE, WHICH SHOULD BE MID-1991. HE HOPED THAT THE FORTHCOMING DUBLIN SUMMIT WOULD CONFIRM THAT. HE ALSO HOPED THAT IT WOULD SET OUT A TIMETABLE FOR EUROPEAN POLITICAL UNION, WHICH SHOULD BE IN PLACE WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE SINGLE MARKET IN JANUARY 1993. (MITTERRAND DID NOT ELABORATE ON WHAT HE MEANT BY POLITICAL UNION, BUT ELSEWHERE IN THE INTERVIEW SPOKE OF STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY STRUCTURES. HE DID SUGGEST THAT AN INITIATIVE WOULD BE CONCERTED WITH THE GERMANS: HE SAID HE HAD ALREADY SPOKEN TO KOHL).

D) ON SECURITY ASPECTS OF GERMAN UNIFICATION HE SAID THAT HE EXPECTED SOVIET TROOPS TO REMAIN IN EASTERN EUROPE DURING A TRANSITIONAL PHASE, BUT HE SAID ALSO THAT THERE WOULD BE SOVIET DEMANDS FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF WESTERN TROOPS FROM WEST GERMANY. THE NATO STRATEGY OF FLEXIBLE RESPONSE WOULD HAVE TO BE REVISED, AND ALTHOUGH THE US SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE INVOLVED IN EUROPEAN DEFENCE, THE 'EUROPEAN AXIS' WOULD HAVE TO BE CLARIFIED.

E) ON LITHUANIA HE SAID THAT THE LITHUANIANS UNDOUBTEDLY HAD THE RIGHT TO INDEPENDENCE. HOWEVER, ONE SHOULD NOT THROW 'OIL ONTO THE FIRE' IN THE SOVIET UNION.

F) ON ECONOMIC QUESTIONS HE HANDLED SMOOTHLY CRITICISM THAT UNDER A SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT THAT GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR WAS GROWING. HE LINE WAS THAT A LOT WAS BEING DONE FOR THE POOR BUT THE SUCCESS OF THE ECONOMY WAS MAKING THE RICH RICHER. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE POLICY SET OUT IN HIS PRE-ELECTION LETTER OF 1988 OF NO PRIVATISATION, NO NATIONALISATION STILL HELD GOOD, HE REPLIED THAT THIS SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS THEOLOGICAL DOGMA. HIS POINT HAD BEEN THAT IT WAS DAMAGING TO FRENCH INDUSTRY FOR OWNERSHIP TO KEEP SWITCHING BACKWARDS AND FORWARD, AND HIS BASIC WISH HAD BEEN TO LEAVE THINGS AS THEY WERE. HE DEFENDED THE RENAULT/VOLVO DEAL AS SENSIBLE.

G) THE UK WAS MENTIONED TWICE DURING THE INTERVIEW. WE WERE MILDLY CRITICISED BY IMPLICATION FOR HAVING DONE A DEAL WITH THE SOVIET UNION OVER BALTIC GOLD IN THE 1960'S. MITTERRAND SAID THE FRENCH STILL HELD THEIR PORTION OF THE GOLD. AND AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW, HE SUGGESTED THAT WHAT HE CALLED 'ULTRA ECONOMIC

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LIBERALISM'' HAD RUN OUT OF STEAM AS WAS ILLUSTRATED IN BRITAIN. THERE WAS NO MENTION OF RELATIONS WITH THE UK AS OPPOSED TO OR IN ADDITION TO THE PARIS/BONN AXIS, OR OF BRITISH VIEWS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

COMMENT

3. THIS WAS A SKILFUL MITTERRAND PERFORMANCE, THOUGH SHORT ON SUBSTANCE. CHARACTERISTICALLY HE ANSWERED MANY OF THE QUESTION TANGENTIALLY, BUT BY THE END OF THE MARATHON THE INTERVIEWER LOOKED MORE EXHAUSTED THAN HE DID. HE WAS FEELING UNDER PRESSURE AFTER THE SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS TO MAKE A CALMING PUBLIC STATEMENT AND ALSO TO SHOW THAT IN THE LIGHT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE RECENT WEEKS FRANCE HAD BOTH A VIEW AND A PART TO PLAY. THERE WAS NO MAJOR NOVELTY. BUT JUDGING BY THE IMMEDIATE REACTIONS, THE INTERVIEW WILL HAVE SOME REASSURING EFFECT, AS INTENDED.

LLEWELLYN SMITH

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