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DESIGNATION OF NEW PRIME MINISTER: FRENCH PRESS REACTIONS
SUMMARY

1. EXCEPTIONAL PROMINENCE GIVEN TO BRITISH POLITICS OVER LAST FORTNIGHT CONTINUES WITH DETAILED ACCOUNTS OF PRIME MINISTER'S ELECTION. INITIAL JUDGEMENTS: LIKELIHOOD OF SOFTER TONE AT HOME AND ABROAD, BUT GENERAL POLICY CONTINUITY AND NO YIELDING ON GULF. ATTITUDE TO EC EXPECTED TO BE MORE POSITIVE, BUT BRITISH OPPOSITION TO CERTAIN SPECIFIC PROPOSALS UNCHANGED.

DETAIL

2. THE SELECTION OF THE NEW LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY/PRIME MINISTER IS THE LEAD STORY IN MOST PAPERS AND ON MOST NEWS BULLETINS. MUCH IS MADE OF THE SUPPORT MR MAJOR ENJOYED FROM THE OUTGOING PRIME MINISTER, THE ENCOURAGEMENT SHE GAVE TO HIS CAREER AND HIS READINESS TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF CLOSELY WITH HER POLICIES. HIS VICTORY IS DESCRIBED BY SEVERAL PAPERS AS HER ''REVENGE'' ON MR HESELTINE, AND THERE IS ALSO SOME COMMENT ON THE PARADOXES THAT THE LEADERSHIP ELECTION SYSTEM HAS THROWN UP.

3. ON CLOSER ANALYSIS MOST COMMENTATORS CONCLUDE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S RAPID AND SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL CAREER DENOTES REAL ABILITY AND THAT THERE COULD BE EARLY SIGNS OF AN APPROACH DISTINCT FROM MRS THATCHER'S. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS SEEN TO HAVE APPOINTED A LEADER WHO EXEMPLIFIES THE VIRTUES OF HARD WORK AND SELF ADVANCEMENT. ''THE ACCESSION OF MR MAJOR.... SHOWS THE CAPACITY OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY TO RENEW ITS LEADERSHIP BY DIGGING DEEP INTO BRITISH SOCIETY'' (LE MONDE). THERE IS ADMIRATION FOR THE SPEED AND LACK OF RANCOUR WITH WHICH THE OTHER CONTENDERS WITHDREW FROM THE CONTEST IN THE CAUSE OF THE PARTY UNITY (A CONTRAST WITH THE CONTINUED INTRA-PARTY BICKERING HERE).

4. MR MAJOR'S FINANCIAL EXPERIENCE IS EMPHASISED. HIS DOMESTIC POLICIES ARE WIDELY EXPECTED TO FOLLOW THE GENERAL LINES OF MRS THATCHER'S BUT WITH MORE OF A VELVET GLOVE AROUND THE IRON HAND AND MORE INSTINCTIVE SYMPATHY FOR THE DISADVANTAGED AND CONCERN FOR THE PROBLEMS OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION.

5. WITH COMMENTATORS HERE EXPECTING NO CHANGE AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE, IT IS ASSUMED THAT BRITAIN WILL REMAIN FIRM OVER THE GULF. ON EUROPE, THE NEW PRIME MINISTER IS EXPECTED TO BE LESS COMBATIVE IN TONE AND READIER TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALIDITY OF ASPIRATIONS TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNITY. BUT IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT BRITAIN MAY PROVE LITTLE MORE ACCOMMODATING THAN BEFORE OVER THE METHODS OF THE TIMETABLE OF PROPOSALS DESIGNED TO FURTHER IT.

LLEWELLYN SMITH

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