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INFO SAVING UKDEL STRASBOURG, UKDEL OECD, CONSULATES-GENERAL IN
FRANCE

MY TELNO 661: MITTERRAND'S SPEECH TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

SUMMARY

1. MITTERRAND'S SPEECH CAN BE ANALYSED IN BOTH A SHORT AND A LONG TERM CONTEXT, THE DIVIDING LINE BEING THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND EUROPEAN COUNCIL NEXT MONTH. IN BOTH CONTEXTS THERE IS A MIXTURE OF IDEALISM AND CYNICISM. FROM THE BRITISH POINT OF VIEW THE SPEECH IS MORE INTERESTING FOR THE LIGHT IT MAY THROW ON THE TACTICAL MANOEUVRING IN WHICH MITTERRAND IS ENGAGED IN RELATION TO THE UK AND THE BUDGET.

DETAIL

ELECTORAL FACTORS

2. AS AN ACT OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING THE SPEECH WAS CLEVER, IT STOLE AS MANY OF THE OPPOSITION'S EUROPEAN CLOTHES AS POSSIBLE (EG ON EUROPEAN SECURITY, A SECRETARIAT, MAJORITY VOTING AND EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY). THE PASSAGES ON ENLARGEMENT AND COMMUNITY FINANCE WERE DRAFTED DEFENSIVELY WITH OPPOSITION ARGUMENTS IN MIND. THE PROPOSAL ON EUROPEAN UNION COULD OPEN UP STRAINS WITHIN THE OPPOSITION COALITION. IN A LIMITED, TACTICAL SENSE, THE SPEECH ALLOWS THE SOCIALIST PARTY TO PROJECT ITSELF IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AS THE PARTY WITH THE MOST POSITIVE AND COHERENT VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE. WHETHER IT WILL HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE COURSE OF THE ELECTIONS IS ANOTHER MATTER: I DOUBT WHETHER AT A POPULAR LEVEL IT HAS MADE MUCH IMPACT. IN ANY CASE MITTERRAND'S COMMUNIST SUPPORTERS, AND SOME OF HIS SOCIALIST ONES, WILL NOT ENDORSE SEVERAL KEY POINTS IN HIS SPEECH.

EUROPEAN IDEALISM

3. MITTERRAND CAN REASONABLY CLAIM A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO A EUROPEAN VISION AND WOULD NOT BE AVERSE TO TAKING HIS PLACE IN HISTORY AS A VISIONARY AND AN ARCHITECT OF EUROPE. THERE IS A TRADITION OF FRENCH PRESIDENTS DREAMING UP IDEAS FOR INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCE, PARTLY DETACHED FROM THEIR ATTITUDES TO THE PRACTICAL CONDUCT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS. IT WAS POMPIDOU WHO RELAUNCHED EUROPEAN UNION IN 1972. GISCARD LAID HIS CLAIM TO FAME BY PROPOSING THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (MEETING REGULARLY INSTEAD OF AD HOC SUMMITS) AND ACCELERATING THE START OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE FRENCH SEEM TO REGARD IT AS MORE IMPORTANT TO BE IN THE LEAD ON SUCH MATTERS THAN TO CONSIDER

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WHETHER THEIR PROPOSALS ARE REALISTIC OR USEFUL. IN ANY CASE IT HAS ALWAYS SEEMED EASIER FOR FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY AND BENELUX - FOR DIFFERING REASONS - TO ENDORSE HIGH SOUNDING DECLARATIONS ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR THE REST OF THE TEN.

PRACTICAL REFORMS: MAJORITY VOTING

4. ON INCREASED USE OF MAJORITY VOTING, MITTERRAND'S SPEECH DOES LITTLE MORE THAN ADVOCATE WHAT IS NOW BECOMING ESTABLISHED PRACTICE. THE FRENCH AND OTHERS SEEM GENUINELY TO HAVE COME TO ACCEPT OVER THE LAST YEAR OR SO (BUT PARTICULARLY IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS) THAT MAJORITY VOTING IS NECESSARY AS A NORMAL PRACTICE TO ENABLE THE COMMUNITY TO FUNCTION EFFICIENTLY. THEY DUCK THE DIFFICULT QUESTION OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COUNTRY INVOKES IMPORTANT NATIONAL INTERESTS ON A MATTER WHERE THE OTHERS DO NOT THINK THE QUESTION MERITS THAT DESCRIPTION.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. FOR SEVERAL MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN ECHOES OF QUITE EXTENSIVE FRANCO-GERMAN EXCHANGES ON THE THEMES OF POLITICAL UNION, MULTI-SPEED EUROPE ETC. I THINK THE FRENCH MAY BE EXPLOITING GERMAN IDEALISM FOR A NARROWER PURPOSE. THIS APPLIES TO THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF EUROPEAN UNION. IT MAY ALSO APPLY, AND WITH A MORE SPECIFICALLY ANTI-BRITISH INTENT, TO THE REFERENCES TO MAJORITY VOTING.

6. THE FRENCH MAY BELIEVE THAT FOLLOWING THEIR OWN SHIFT OF POSITION THE UK IS LEFT AS THE SOLE DEFENDER OF AN EXTREME VERSION OF THE LUXEMBOURG COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD MORE OR LESS RULE OUT VOTES ON ANY OCCASION. THEY MAY ALSO HAVE A FEELING, FOLLOWING THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE AGRICULTURAL PRICE FIXING IN 1982 WHEN THE BRITISH VETO WAS OVERRIDDEN BY MAJORITY VOTING, THAT VOTING PROVIDES AN ANSWER TO ATTEMPTED BRITISH OBSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY BUSINESS IN THE PURSUIT OF OUR BUDGET CLAIMS. THIS LINKS WITH VAGUE TALK ABOUT THE COMMUNITY BEING ABLE TO FORGE AHEAD DESPITE THE PROBLEM OF THE BRITISH CONTRIBUTION AND A SUGGESTION THAT THE SUCCESSES OF THE LAST FIVE MONTHS HAVE SOMEHOW BEEN ACHIEVED IN SPIITE OF BRITAIN. IN AN ILL-DEFINED WAY IT EVEN SEEMS TO BE HINTED THAT VOTING CAN CARRY THE COMMUNITY FORWARD PAST THE BRITISH OBSTRUCTION ON THE MATTER OF THE VAT CEILING. I DO NOT BELIEVE THE FRENCH HAVE THOUGHT THIS THROUGH. THEY MAY NOT BELIEVE IT THEMSELVES AND IT MAY BE DESIGNED SIMPLY TO PUT POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE ON US. BUT I SUSPECT IT PLAYS SOME PART IN THEIR THINKING.

FURTHER OUTLOOK

7. HOW MUCH OF THE MITTERRAND PROGRAMME IS LIKELY TO PERSIST AFTER THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND THE FONTAINEBLEAU EUROPEAN COUNCIL? MITTERRAND WILL WANT HIS INITIATIVES LINKED TO HIS NAME IN THE HISTORY BOOKS: AND HE WILL FIND THAT THE ENTHUSIASM OF SOME OF HIS PARTNERS AND OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL CREATE A BANDWAGON WHICH MIGHT BE QUITE HARD TO SLOW OR EVEN TO STEER. THE

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WISH TO SHOW UP THE UK AS LESS EUROPEAN THAN FRANCE WILL ALSO REMAIN A FACTOR. BUT I LEAN TO THE SCEPTICAL INTERPRETATION OF FRENCH CONDUCT AND WOULD EXPECT ENTHUSIASM TO WANE AS THE MOMENT APPROACHES TO TAKE HARD DECISIONS EG WHETHER A NEW COUNCIL, OPERATING UNDER A NEW TREATY, COULD ACTUALLY TAKE DECISIONS IN MATTERS CONCERNING EDUCATION, JUSTICE OR TERRORISM IN A MEMBER STATE. AN ELABORATE COVER FOR ANOTHER TALKING SHOP IS SURELY ALL THAT FRANCE WOULD ULTIMATELY TOLERATE.

UK RESPONSE

8. YOU HAVE ALREADY PUT THE BALL BACK IN THE FRENCH COURT BY MAKING IT CLEAR THAT BRITAIN WOULD EXPECT TO PLAY A FULL PART IN ANY DISCUSSIONS AND IN ANY POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DIRECTIONS SUGGESTED BY MITTERRAND. PERHAPS FURTHER RESPONSE TO THE FRENCH PROPOSAL COULD INCLUDE THE LINE THAT WE ARE ALREADY ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN COOPERATION ON SUCH MATTERS AS TERRORISM; WE ARE READY TO GO FORWARD; WE DO NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF A FURTHER TREATY OR TREATIES IF THEY PROVE ESSENTIAL; BUT WE WOULD LIKE THEM TO GROW OUT OF A DEMONSTRATED NEED TO IMPROVE THE MACHINERY FOR COOPERATION RATHER THAN TO BE SUPER-IMPOSED AS A HOLLOW FRAMEWORK WHICH MIGHT INDEED MERELY SERVE TO DISGUISE A LACK OF REAL WILL TO WORK TOGETHER.

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