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MIPT : FABRUS CRITICISES THE UK

SUMMARY

1. TWO WAYS OF REACTING TO FURTHER SOCIALIST (PS) CRITICISMS OF THE UK: PUBLIC REBUTTAL NOW AT A HIGH LEVEL, OR A PRIVATE WARNING TO MITTERRAND AND DUMAS AT THE SUMMIT.

DETAILS

2. WE MIGHT MOST EFFECTIVELY REACT TO THIS FURTHER CRITICISM IN ONE OF TWO WAYS.
3. THE FIRST WIS TO ISSUE A STRONG PUBLIC REBUTTAL BACKED UP BY A COMPARISON OF THE UK AND FRENCH STATISTICS FOR EG EMPLOYMENT (650,000 NET JOB CREATION IN THE PAST TWO YEARS IN THE UK, 450,000 JOBS LOST IN FRANCE IN THE SAME PERIOD); PROFITS; INVESTMENT AND GDP GROWTH. THIS WOULD NEED TO COME FROM YOU OR THE PRIME MINISTER, AND QUICKLY, IF IT WERE TO STAND A CHANCE OF BEING WIDELY REPLAYED BY THE FRENCH MEDIA. BUT IF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY GRANTS THE REQUEST OR AN INTERVIEW FROM THE L'EXPRESS TEAM CURRENTLY IN LONDON (PREPARING A FEATURE SCHEDULED TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE ISSUE APPEARING 15 NOVEMBER), THIS COULD BE A USEFUL ALTERNATIVE PLATFORM.
4. THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS APPROACH WOULD BE TO CORRECT THE DISTORTED PICTURE WHICH FABRUS AND THE SOCIALISTS ARE PAINTING, AND TO WARN THAT WE SHALL GIVE AS GOOD AS WE GET, WHICH MAY NOT BE HELPFUL TO THE PS IN THE RUN UP TO THE MARCH ELECTIONS. THE DRAWBACKS ARE THAT SUCH A POLEMIC COULD LEAD TO A DETERIORATION IN THE BILATERAL CLIMATE SHORTLY BEFORE THE ANGLO-FRENCH SUMMIT AND THE FALKLANDS VOTE AT THE UN, AT A TIME MOREOVER WHEN RELATIONS ARE ALREADY UNDER SOME STRAIN (GREENPEACE, THE CHOGM COMMUNIQUE ON PACIFIC QUESTIONS, EFA, RHITA ETC). THERE IS ALSO A RISK THAT THE SOCIALISTS WOULD TRY TO USE SUCH EXCHANGES TO PROVOKE AN ANTI-BRITISH REFLEX ON WHICH THEY WOULD HOPE TO CAPITALISE ELECTORALLY.
5. AN ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TO SAY LITTLE OR NOTHING PUBLICLY, BUT TO REACT VIGOROUSLY IN PRIVATE. BOTH YOU AND THE PRIME MINISTER MIGHT USE THE SUMMIT TO TAKE MITTERRAND DUMAS TO TASK, TO WARN THAT OUR FORBEARANCE IS NOT LIMITLESS, AND THAT THE SOCIALISTS...



5. AN ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TO SAY LITTLE OR NOTHING PUBLICLY, BUT TO REACT VIGOROUSLY IN PRIVATE. BOTH YOU AND THE PRIME MINISTER MIGHT USE THE SUMMIT TO TAKE MITTERRAND DUMAS TO TASK, TO WARN THAT OUR FORBEARANCE IS NOT LIMITLESS, AND THAT THE SOCIALISTS RISK UNLEASHING A DAMAGING POLEMIC IF THESE ATTACKS CONTINUE. THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS WOULD BE TO PREVENT A SLANGING MATCH BEFORE THE SUMMIT AND THE FALKLANDS VOTE, WHILE GIVING MITTERRAND A CHANCE TO STOP THE SOCIALIST PARTY MALIGNING THE BRITISH RECORD BEFORE THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN GETS INTO FULL STRIDE. IT COULD BE COMBINED WITH PREVIOUS ACTION AT THIS END.

6. WHETHER OR NOT WE DECIDE TO MAKE AN EXPLICIT REPOSTE, THE PREVALENCE AND LIKELY PROLIFERATION OF THIS SORT OF COMMENT REINFORCES THE DESIRABILITY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S GIVING A PRE-SUMMIT INTERVIEW TO THE FRENCH MEDIA (MY TELNO 900).

7. ON BALANCE, I THINK THE RIGHT COURSE WOULD BE TO PUT THE FRENCH ON NOTICE HERE THAT THIS QUESTION WILL BE RAISED AT THE SUMMIT AND THAT (IF THE CAMPAIGN CONTINUES) A FULL-SCALE COUNTER-ATTACK WILL BE INEVITABLE. IF IN THE MEANTIME BRITISH PRESS REACTION OR PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS LEAD TO SOME FAIRLY ASTRINGENT COMMENT ON FABRUS'S REMARKS IT WILL NOT DO UNDUE HARM AND MAY SERVE AS A USEFUL WARNING OF WHAT COULD FOLLOW.

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