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FM DUBLIN  
TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELNO 102  
OF 171330Z FEBRUARY  
INFO IMMEDIATE NIO (B)  
INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON, BIS NEW YORK, UKREP BRUSSELS

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: POLITICAL SCENE

1. WHEN DR FITZGERALD MEETS THE PRIME MINISTER ON WEDNESDAY IT WILL BE AGAINST A VERY DIFFERENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL BACKDROP FROM THAT LAST NOVEMBER. HE WILL RETURN HOME ON 20 FEBRUARY TO FACE A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE PUT DOWN BY FIANNA FAIL IN REPOSE TO LAST WEEK'S GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE. THE GOVERNMENT IS EXPECTED TO SURVIVE THE VOTE WITH A MAJORITY OF FOUR, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY IN HIS OWN PARTY WHOSE CONFIDENCE IN THE TAOISEACH HAS BEEN SHAKEN BY WHAT MOST SEE AS A PANICKY AND BOTCHED JOB.
2. UNDERLYING BOTH THIS AND THE TAOISEACH'S OTHER IMMEDIATE WORRIES (PUBLIC REACTION TO THE BUDGET AND TO PROPOSALS TO CLOSE SOME HOSPITALS AND A THEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE - HARDLY THE STUFF CRISES ARE MADE OF) IS CONCERN AT THE LONGER TERM PROSPECTS. AFTER A MOMENTARY IMPROVEMENT IN ITS STANDING AFTER THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT IN NOVEMBER, THE GOVERNMENT IS NOW AT ITS LOWEST EBB SINCE IT CAME TO OFFICE IN DECEMBER 1982. A POST-BUDGET OPINION POLL, PUBLISHED LAST WEEK, GAVE FINE GAEL ONLY 23 PER CENT AND THEIR COALITION PARTNER, LABOUR, ONLY 4 PER CENT. BY CONTRAST, MR HAUGHEY'S FIANNA FAIL POLLED 42PER CENT AND THE NEWLY FORMED PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS (PDS) 25 PER CENT. WITH NO EASY OR OBVIOUS POLICY OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO DR FITZGERALD HE APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED THAT HE COULD IMPROVE MATTERS BY IMPLEMENTING A GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE ORIGINALLY MOOTED LAST AUTUMN. IN THE EVENT IT ALL WENT WRONG. DR FITZGERALD WAS UNABLE TO PREVAIL OVER THE WISHES OF THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH (THE LABOUR DEPUTY LEADER) TO STAY IN HIS JOB. THIS THREW THE TAOISEACH'S PLANS RIGHT OFF COURSE, AND THE RESULTING SHUFFLE MAKES VERY LITTLE SENSE. HENCE FIANNA FAIL'S MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE IN THE TAOISEACH, WHO, THEY CLAIM HAS SHOWN THAT HE IS NOT ABLE TO EXERCISE HIS CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY OF APPOINTING MINISTERS ON HIS SOLE AUTHORITY.

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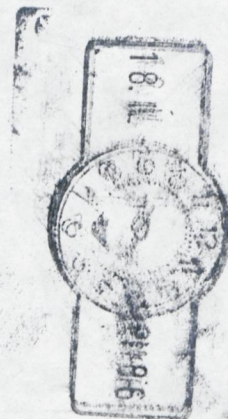
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