

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MADRID 07992 01 OF 02 212126Z

67

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7625

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MADRID 7992

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJECT: A CONVERSATION WITH MANUEL FRAGA

REF: MADRID 7756

BEGIN SUMMARY: FRAGA, IN A THOUGHTFUL MOOD, TALKED AT LENGTH WITH ME ABOUT THE POLITICAL SITUATION, DEFENDING THE POPULAR ALLIANCE AS THE SERVICE TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND INSURING THE PASSAGE OF THE REFORMS (WITH SOME UNSPECIFIED CHANGES) BECAUSE HE HAD PULLED FRANCO-ERA FIGURES TOWARDS HIS CENTRIST POSITION, GETTING THEM INTO THE NEW GAME AND AWAY FROM STERILE POSTURING. HE SAID THAT THE REFORM WOULD PASS THE CORTES AND THAT HE SAW THE POPULAR ALLIANCE AS AN ELECTORAL VEHICLE CAPABLE OF PUTTING TOGETHER A PLURALITY OF SEATS IN THE NEW CORTES, AND LEFT NO DOUBT THAT IN THE EVENT HE WOULD BE IN LINE FOR THE PRIME MINISTRY. HE THOUGHT THE KING HAD GOTTEN TOO DEEPLY INTO POLITICS BUT EXPECTED HE WOULD LEARN BY EXPERIENCE TO BACK AWAY, A COMMENT THAT TESTIFIES TO THE FRAGILE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRAGA AND THE KING. END SUMMARY.

1. FRAGA CAME TO THE RESIDENCE YESTERDAY FOR AN UNUSUALLY LENGTHY TALK. HE WILL BE IN THE US FROM NOV 16 THROUGH THE 21ST, FIRST FOR A LECTURE IN WASHINGTON,

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PAGE 02 MADRID 07992 01 OF 02 212126Z

D.C. AND THEN TO

PARTICIPATE AS A DISCUSSANT IN THE CHICAO COUNCIL OF FOREIGN RELATIONS-SPONSORED MEETING ON ATLANTIC AFFAIRS AT SEA ISLAND, GEORGIA. PRESS REPORTS NOTWITHSTANDING, HE HAD NO MEETINGS SCHEDULED WITH MAJOR US POLITICAL FIGURES. HE APPRECIATED MY OFFER TO BE OF HELP BUT THOUGHT IT WOULDN'T BE NECESSARY IN A SHORT VISIT.

2. HE THEN TURNED WITHOUT PROMPTING TO THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND GAVE US A RATHER FULL RUN-DOWN OF HIS THINKING, DEFENDING THE POPULAR ALLIANCE. HE REMINDED ME THAT HE HAD DECIDED NOT TO STAY ON WITH THE CHANGE TO SUAREZ BECAUSE, HE SAID, HE WAS UNSURE OF WHAT WOULD RESULT FROM IT. (COMMENT- THE KING DID MAKE A MILD ATTEMPT TO KEEP HIM) THEN HE HAD GONE OFF TO HIS NATIVE GALICIA TO KEEP QUIET AND THINK THROUGH THINGS AND CONCLUDED THAT AS HE WAS NEITHER A BISHOP NOR A GENERAL BUT A POLITICIAN, THE SERVICE A POLITICIAN COULD PERFORM FOR HIS COUNTRY WOULD BE TO TRY TO PUT TOGETHER A MAJOR POLITICAL FORMATION. LARGE ELECTORAL GROUPINGS WERE ESSENTIAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, SINCE THE PEOPLE COULD NOT BE ASKED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A HUNDRED DIFFERENT FIGURES.

3. HE DISCOUNTED MUCH OF THE CRITICISM AGAINST THE POPULAR ALLIANCE AS FRIVOLOUS OR ILL-INTENTIONED, NOTING THAT YOU HAD TO BE A LEFTIST TO GET A GOOD PRESS. IN A THOUGHTFUL MOOD, HE VOLUNTEERED THAT HE RECOGNIZED A SERIOUS ASPECT TO THE CRITICISM THAT MERITED CONSIDERATION, E.G. THAT THE ALLIANCE WAS TOO FAR TO THE RIGHT. TO THIS ISSUE HE WISHED TO ADDRESS HIMSELF. HE HAD FIRST SOUGHT TO DO SOMETHING WITH MORE CENTRIST FIGURES SUCH AS PIO CABANILLAS AND AREILZA, BUT CABANILLAS WAS INDECISIVE AND AREILZA TOO OCCUPIED WITH CHASING ILLUSIONS. HE WAS A CENTRIST AND WISHED TO CUT DOWN THE SWINGS OF THE PENDULUM. FERNANDEZ DE LA MORA AND THE REST HAD COME TOWARDS HIM, THEY HAD SIGNED A DOCUMENT APPROVING REFORM AND RECOGNIZING THE VALIDITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. HE HAD PULLED THEM TOWARDS THE CENTER. IN ADDITION, THE EXISTENCE OF A COHERENT CONSERVATIVE GROUPING TRANQUILIZED THE MILITARY AND, REFUTING THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MADRID 07992 01 OF 02 212126Z

CRITICISM THAT THE POPULAR ALLIANCE WAS DESIGNED TO BLOCK THE REFORMS, IN FACT MADE THE PASSAGE OF THE REFORMS MUCH EASIER.

4. I ASKED HIM WHAT ATTITUDE THE ALLIANCE WOULD TAKE TOWARD THE REFORM, AND FRAGA SAID THAT HERE AGAIN THE ALLIANCE HAD MOVED TOWARD HIS POSITION. THERE WOULD BE THREE OR FOUR MODERATE SUGGESTIONS, THOUGH HE REFUSED

TO GET INTO SPECIFICS (LEAVING OPEN THE QUESTION OF HOW MODERATE THE SUGGESTIONS WILL BE). THEY WILL OPPOSE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, AND, WE SUSPECT, THE NEW POWERS OF REFERENDUM GIVEN TO THE KING. HE WAS SURE THE REFORMS WOULD PASS IN GOOD SHAPE. HE REITERATED THAT WERE IT NOT FOR THE ALLIANCE SOME OF ITS MEMBERS, LIKE GONZALO FERNANDEZ DE LA MORA, WOULD BE TAKING A MUCH HARDER LINE IN THE CORTES.

5. WITH A TOUCH OF WOUNDED PRIDE, HE SAID THE KING HAD ERRED IN GETTING HIMSELF SO DEEPLY INTO THE POLITICAL GAME IN JULY. HE ADMITTED THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE THEORY POSED BY HIS FRIEND PIO CABANILLAS THAT THE KING MUST RULE FOR AWHILE IN ORDER TO REIGN FOR A LONG TIME AND A PERMANENT EFFORT BY THE KING TO HOLD POWER. NONETHELESS, HE THOUGHT THE KING HAD RUN THE RISK OF DAMAGING HIMSELF AND WAS FLIRTING TOO MUCH WITH THE IDEA OF CONTROLLING THE PROCESS. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN INEVITABLE, PARTICULARLY AFTER HIS TRIUMPHFUL VISIT TO THE US AND SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES THE KING HAD ENCOUNTERED HERE, HE SAID HE HAD TOLD THE KING WITH RESPECT TO THE POPULAR ALLIANCE THAT THEY WOULD FORM IT WITHOUT DIRECTION FROM THE GOVT OR THE KING SINCE THE NAME OF THE GAME WAS TO PUT TOGETHER COHERENT POLITICAL OPTIONS AMONG WHICH THE PEOPLE WOULD CHOOSE. (IN ALL THIS ONE WAS AGAIN REMINDED OF THE RATHER FRAGILE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KING AND FRAGA.)

6. HE SAID THE GOVT WAS DIVIDED AMONG PEOPLE WHO OPPOSED THE POPULAR ALLIANCE, THOSE WHO WERE UNCERTAIN ABOUT ITS UTILITY, AND THOSE WHO REALLY THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD THING (HE NAMED NO ONE FROM THE LATTER GROUP.) HE SAID OSORIO
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MADRID 07992 01 OF 02 212126Z

VIEWED HIM AS A THREAT AND WAS INVOLVED IN TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE POPULAR ALLIANCE. SUAREZ, HE FELT, WAS UNCERTAIN, BUT AFTERALL, SUAREZ HAD BECOME AN ADVOCACY OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY RATHER LATER THAN HE, FRAGA. OSORIO, ON THE OTHER HAND, SAW THE UNION OF SILVA WITH HIM AS A THREAT TO OSORIO'S ATTEMPT TO DOMINATE THE UDE GROUP WHICH HAD SPLIT.

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PAGE 01 MADRID 07992 02 OF 02 211812Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7626

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MADRID 7992

7. IN RESPECT OF THE PLANS OF THE RIGHT TO HOLD A MASSIVE, DISRUPTIVE RALLY IN DOWNTOWN MADRID NOV 20, THE ANNIVERSARY OF FRANCO'S DEATH, FRAGA SAID HE HAD POINTED THE WAY LAST YEAR BY PROHIBITING A FRANCO-ITE RALLY IN THE PLASA DE ORIENTE AND IMPLIED THE GOVT SHOULD FOLLOW THE SAME COURSE. THE POPULAR ALLIANCE, REGARDLESS OF THE INCLINATIONS OF SOME OF ITS MEMBERS, WOULD MAKE NO PRONOUNCEMENT ON THIS ISSUE. FRAGA WAS BULLISH ON THE PROSPECTS OF THE POPULAR ALLIANCE PRODUCING A PLURALITY IN THE ELECTIONS (HE SAID MAYBE EVEN 40PER CENT) AND OBVIOUSLY ENTERTAINED NO DOUBTS ON THE SCORE OF WHO WOULD BE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD THIS HAPPEN. HE THOUGHT CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY TOO DISPARATE TO COME TOGETHER (SOMETHING ONE MIGHT HAVE SAID OF THE POPULAR ALLIANCE). AND HE HOPED FELIPE GONZALEZ AND TIERNO GALVAN WOULD PUT TOGETHER A REAL SOCIALIST PARTY, DIVORCED FROM THE COMMUNISTS. IF SO, THEY WOULD BE A MAJOR FORCE.

8. I MADE CLEAR TO FRAGA THAT THE US HAD NO PREFERENCES AMONG DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND OUR POSTURE REMAINED ONE OF SUPPORTING A PEACEFUL PROCESS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT LEADING TO A CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC MONARCHY, A POSTURE THAT HE THOUGHT SENSIBLE AND CORRECT. HE WAS GLAD TO HEAR IT AGAIN, I THINK, BECAUSE THERE IS NOT END TO THE RUMORS THAT WE SOMEHOW FAVOR ONE POLITICAL
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MADRID 07992 02 OF 02 211812Z

GROUP OR ANOTHER.

9. COMMENT: I CONTINUE TO FEEL THAT THE POPULAR ALLIANCE IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD, AND THAT OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS UNTIL THE FINAL DENOUCMENT IN THE CORTES ON THE SUAREZ REFORM PACKAGE IT CAN POSE DANGERS. AT THE SAME TIME, FRAGA IS QUITE RIGHT IN SAYING THAT SOMEBODY HAD TO START PUTTING TOGETHER COHERENT POLITICAL FORCES IN THIS COUNTRY. AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE EFFORTS OF THIS DYNAMIC ALTHOUGH UNPREDICTABLE MAN HAVE ACTED AS A CATALYST IN BEGINNING A PROCESS NEEDED TO MAKE ELECTIONS PRODUCE A VIABLE GOVERNMENT. I AM ALSO REASSURED BY HIS STATEMENT THAT HE HAS NO INTENTION OF PLAYING A GAME IN WHICH THE ALLIANCE WOULD GUT THE REFORM PACKAGE, THOUGH IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT THE ALIANZA'S THREE OR FOUR SUGGESTIONS MAY CONSIST OF, SINCE IT IS NOT THE NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS, BUT THE CONTENT THAT IS CRUCIAL. LOOKING AHEAD, THERE IS ROOM FOR DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER THESE DISPARATE FIGURES WILL HOLD TOGETHER UNTIL ELECTIONS (MUCH LESS AFTERWARDS, WHEN THEY MUST AGREE ON A GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAM), AND WHETHER SUCH A GROUPING WILL COMMAND THE ELECTORAL STRENGTH THEY ENVISAGE. IN PART THIS RESTS UPON WHETHER, BY ELECTIONS, THERE IS A COHERENT CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC OR CENTRIST ALLIANCE TO COMPETE WITH THE ALIANZA POPULAR FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE SPANISH ELECTORATE WHO LOOK FOR CHANGE WITHOUT DISRUPTION.

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