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TO ROUTINE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 279 OF 07 SEPTEMBER

AND ROUTINE BRUSSELS LUXEMBOURG AND UKREP BRUSSELS  
SAVING INFO OTHER EC POSTS WASHINGTON OTTAWA AND TOKYO

BENELUX : A RELANCE ?

1. IN A SPEECH AT A CEREMONY IN BRED A ON 05 SEPTEMBER TO MARK THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF BENELUX, THE NETHERLANDS FOREIGN MINISTER, VAN DEN BROEK, CALLED FOR BENELUX TO BE ADMITTED AS THE EIGHTH MEMBER OF THE WORLD ECONOMIC SUMMIT. RECALLING THAT BENELUX HAD LONG OBJECTE

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TO THESE 'PRIVATE AFFAIRS' OF THE SEVEN, VAN DEN BROEK SAID THAT AFTER 10 MEETINGS THE SUMMITS HAD BECOME AN ESTABLISHED INSTITUTION AND IT WAS A CASE OF 'IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM, JOIN THEM'.

2. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TINDEMANS AND LUXEMBOURG FOREIGN MINISTER POOS WERE ALSO PRESENT. THEY TOO LAMENTED BENELUX'S FAILURE TO TRANSLATE ECONOMIC POWER INTO POLITICAL INFLUENCE, BUT SEEM TO HAVE STOPPED SHORT OF ADVOCATING BENELUX'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMIC SUMMITS. VAN DEN BROEK IS REPORTED TO HAVE CALLED FOR TALKS WITHIN BENELUX OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS TO CONSIDER UNSPECIFIED PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY HIMSELF, TINDEMANS AND POOS.

COMMENT

3. THE DUTCH (AND THEIR BENELUX PARTNERS) ARE ACUTELY SENSITIVE TO THEIR EXCLUSION FROM FIRST DIVISION STATUS, DESPITE THEIR COLLECTIVE ECONOMIC STRENGTH. THEY POINT OUT THAT BENELUX IS THE FOURTH LARGEST TRADING PARTNER IN THE WORLD, THE FIFTH LARGEST FOREIGN AID DONOR, THE SEVENTH LARGEST OIL IMPORTER AND HAS TWO OF THE WORLD'S FIVE LARGEST PORTS. ITS COMBINED GNP RANKS IT EIGHTH IN THE WESTERN WORLD.

4. THE MFA HAVE TOLD US THAT VAN DEN BROEK HAS ASKED HIS OFFICIALS TO WORK UP IDEAS FOR A 'RELANCE' OF BENELUX. THE DUTCH ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE INCREASINGLY SOLID PARIS-BONN AXIS IN THE COMMUNITY AND MAY SEE A STRONGER BENELUX IDENTITY AS A NECESSARY COUNTER-

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BALANCE TO THIS. THEY ARE ALSO FRUSTRATED BY THE STAGNATION OF THE COMMUNITY : THEY SEE BENELUX AS A POTENTIAL DYNAMO OF CHANGE AND A MODEL FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (THERE IS SOME SUBSTANCE IN THIS ARGUMENT, EG, THE REMOVAL OF FRONTIER CONTROLS WITHIN BENELUX IN 1971 OR THE INTRODUCTION OF A SINGLE CUSTOMS DOCUMENT FOR BENELUX EARLIER THIS YEAR). WE MAY THEREFORE HEAR MORE IN THE COMING MONTHS ABOUT AN ENHANCED ROLE FOR BENELUX IN THE COMMUNITY WORKING FOR MORE INTEGRATION, PARTICULARLY IF THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE CONTINUES TO STAGNATE. IN PRACTICE, HOWEVER, THE SCOPE FOR A GREATER ROLE FOR BENELUX WILL REMAIN LIMITED BY THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND OUTLOOK BETWEEN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM.

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