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DOCUMENT\_ID: 25737808  
INQNO: DOC5D 00734003  
DOCNO: TEL 007778 87  
PRODUCER: VIENNA  
SOURCE: STATE  
DOCTYPE: IN  
DOR: 19870520  
TOR: 145136  
DOCPREC: O  
ORIGDATE: 198705201823  
MHFNO: 87 4870683  
DOCCLASS: U

HEADER

OO RUEAIIB  
ZNR UUUUU ZOC STATE ZZH  
STU5523  
OO RUEHC  
DE RUFHVI #7778/01 1401825  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 201823Z MAY 87  
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3447  
INFO RUFHOL/AMEMBASSY BONN 6171  
RUFHRN/AMEMBASSY BERN 5029  
RUFHBE/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 8784  
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 9630  
RUDKDA/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST 3265  
RUFHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0189  
RUFHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 3473  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2549  
RUFHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3549  
RUFHLD/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1015  
RUFHMB/USMISSION USVIENNA 0047  
BT

CONTROLS

UNCLAS VIENNA 07778

E.O. 12356: N/A

TEXT

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AU  
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO WALDHEIM SPEECH OF MAY 19

REF: FBIS AU192013

1, SUMMARY: PRESIDENT KURT WALDHEIM'S SPEECH ON NATIONAL TV MAY 19 WAS WELCOMED BY THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AUSTRIAN NEWSPAPERS EVEN THOUGH COMMENTATORS AGREED THAT IT HAD BEEN LONG OVERDUE. THE MEDIA HIGHLIGHTED FOUR "KEY ASPECTS" OF THE ADDRESS: (1) WALDHEIM'S STATEMENT THAT NEITHER YUGOSLAV ARCHIV FILES NOR THE U.S. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DELEGATION HAD PRODUCED ANY HARD EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM; (2) HIS ADMISSION THAT, IN HESITATING TO ANSWER TO QUESTIONS REGARDING HIS

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WARTIME RECORD, HE HAD CAUSED MISUNDERSTANDINGS; (3) WALDHEIM'S "SOUL-SEARCHING" RECLARIFICATION OF A MUCH-CRITICIZED EARLIER STATEMENT THAT HE "HAD MERELY DONE HIS DUTY". (WALDHEIM EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD NOT MEANT TO IDENTIFY WITH THE NAZI REGIME BUT HAD TRIED TO INDICATE THAT HE DID NOT BELONG TO THE GROUP WHICH HAD THE COURAGE TO RISK THEIR LIVES TO FIGHT THE REGIME). (4) WALDHEIM'S OUTSPOKEN CONDEMNATION OF THE WAR CRIMES AND HIS APPEAL TO FIGHT ANTI-SEMITISM. SOME COMMENTATORS WERE CONCERNED THAT WALDHEIM'S 11TH-HOUR ATTEMPT TO TAKE THE HIGH ROAD MIGHT NOT ASSUAGE OR CONVINCHE HIS CRITICS. TRADITIONALLY PRO-WALDHEIM EDITORIALISTS EXPECTED THAT, GIVEN WALDHEIM'S STATEMENT, HE AND AUSTRIA CAN NOW DEMAND FAIRNESS FROM THE OTHER SIDE. THE COMMUNIST PARTY ORGAN "VOLKSSTIMME" WAS THE ONLY PAPER WHICH FLATLY DISMISSED WALDHEIM'S SPEECH AS AN UNCONVINCING, TACTICAL MANEUVER UNABLE TO RESTORE WALDHEIM'S SHAKEN CREDIBILITY.

2. AUSTRIA'S LARGEST DAILY, THE INDEPENDENT TABLOID "KRONENZEITUNG", EMBRACED THE PRESIDENT'S "CLEAR WORDS". IT WAS IMPORTANT, STAFF WRITER PETER GNAM EMPHASIZED, THAT WALDHEIM HAS PUT THOSE TIMES INTO THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE. THE PRESIDENT, GNAM WROTE, WAS WISE TO RECALL WHAT ALTERNATIVES HIS GENERATION WAS FACED WITH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR: COURAGEOUSLY RESISTING THE FORCED SERVICE AT THE RISK OF ONE'S LIFE (AND WALDHEIM SAID HE "WAS NOT AMONG THOSE"); OR ELSE, UNABLE TO DECIDE FREELY, GIVING IN TO SUCH IMPOSED PARTICIPATION, WHICH WAS WHAT WALDHEIM AND THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY DID. MOREOVER, IT WAS WALDHEIM'S "NEVER AGAIN", HIS DEEPLY-FELT REGRET FOR THE CRIMES IN THE BALKANS, AND HIS "INSIGHT" THAT PAST SUFFERING AND GUILT MUST NEVER BE FORGOTTEN, THAT DESERVES OVERALL RECOGNITION, SAID GNAM. WHILE WALDHEIM'S WORDS MIGHT HAVE COME LATE, THEY CAN NEVER BE IN VAIN, THE EDITORIAL NOTED. DESPITE UNJUSTIFIED STIGMATIZATION OF WALDHEIM IN THE U.S. AND ANTI-WALDHEIM AGITATION BY LEFT-WING SPO CIRCLES, ONE WOULD BE QUITE MISTAKEN TO BELIEVE THAT AUSTRIA HAS DROPPED WALDHEIM, GNAM CONCLUDED.

3. WRITING IN THE CONSERVATIVE INDEPENDENT "DIE PRESSE", EDITOR-IN-CHIEF THOMAS CHORHERR WELCOMED WALDHEIM'S EFFORTS TO MAKE AMENDS BY FINDING SUCH "OPEN WORDS" AND BY "ADMITTING MISTAKES". CHORHERR CONCEDED THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER HAD WALDHEIM DELIVERED SUCH AN ADDRESS A YEAR AGO. WALDHEIM'S "SOUL-SEARCHING" HAD PRODUCED A "CONFESSION", AND NOW WALDHEIM HAS SHOWN THE INSIGHT THE WORLD HAS EXPECTED FROM HIM, CHORHERR STATED. HAVING THUS JUSTIFIED HIMSELF BEFORE THE AUSTRIAN PEOPLE AND THE WORLD, WALDHEIM AND AUSTRIA CAN NOW EXPECT "FAIRNESS", WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN DENIED SO FAR. CONTINUED CONDEMNATION OF WALDHEIM WOULD INDICATE MALICIOUS WILL ON THE PART OF HIS CRITICS, CHORHERR WROTE.

4. QUOTING FROM WALDHEIM'S TV KEYNOTE ADDRESS, THE INDEPENDENT TABLOID "KURIER" HEADLINED THAT "WALDHEIM HAS CALLED ON EVERYBODY TO FIGHT ANTI-SEMITISM". THE PAPER'S

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MAIN EDITORIAL FOUND THAT "IT WAS (WALDHEIM'S) BIGGEST MISTAKE" THAT HE DID NOT MAKE THE SPEECH WHEN HIS PAST FIRST BECAME A CONTROVERSY. THIS WOULD HAVE MADE WALDHEIM AT LEAST MORALLY IMMUNE, THE PAPER SAID. THE ADDRESS WAS POSSIBLY NOT TOO LATE, ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT NOT UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 VIENNA 07778

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ASSUAGE OR EVEN CONVINCING WALDHEIM'S "ENEMIES".

5. REFERRING TO WALDHEIM'S OPENING REMARKS THAT NEITHER THE YUGOSLAV ARCHIVE FILES NOR THE U.S. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DELEGATION (REPORTEDLY) PRESENTED ANY HARD EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM, THE SOCIALIST "AZ" REGRETTED THAT "WALDHEIM STILL SEEMS TO BE RELUCTANT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT EXACTLY IS AT STAKE". AT LEAST HE HAS TRIED TO MAKE AMENDS FOR SOME OF THE LACK OF CREDIBILITY HE HAS BEEN ATTACKED FOR. AND ON THE FIRST TIME HE HAS ADMITTED HAVING BEEN "IMPOTENT WHEN FACED WITH COMPULSION" AND UNABLE TO RESIST, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF MANFRED SCHEUCH POINTED OUT. STILL, BITTERNESS REMAINS THAT ALL THIS IS BEING SAID TOO LATE AND AT THE INVITATION BY OTHERS, SCHEUCH CONCLUDED.

6. THE INDEPENDENT "SALZBURGER NACHRICHTEN" NOTED THAT, BY ADMITTING HIS VARIOUS MISTAKES, WALDHEIM HAD FOR THE FIRST TIME "JUMPED OVER HIS OWN SHADOW". IT ALSO WELCOMED WALDHEIM'S CORRECTION OF HIS MUCH-CRITICIZED REMARK THAT HE HAD "MERELY FULFILLED HIS DUTY" IN THE GERMAN ARMY. THE PAPER RESPECTED HIS ADMISSION THAT HE "HAD NOT BEEN AMONG THOSE" WHO SUMMONED ENOUGH COURAGE TO RISK THEIR LIVES BY FIGHTING FORCED SERVICE DURING WW II. HOWEVER, WALDHEIM'S STATEMENT THAT "RECONCILIATION CAN ONLY BE INITIATED BY THE VICTIMS" WAS HIGHLY MISLEADING AND REQUIRED IMMEDIATE CLARIFICATION; THE PAPER CRITICIZED. MOREOVER, ONE SINGLE SPEECH WILL HARDLY REPAIR THE DAMAGE DONE TO AUSTRIA'S IMAGE, THE EDITORIAL ARGUED.

7. THE INDEPENDENT PROVINCIAL "OBEROESTERREICHISCHE NACHRICHTEN" LIKewise CALLED WALDHEIM'S SELF-CRITICAL STATEMENTS "REMARKABLE". NEVERTHELESS, THE SPEECH, WHICH DID NOT CONCEAL THE HANDWRITING OF MANY ADVISORS, DOES NOT COMPARE IN ITS "SUBSTANCE" TO THAT OF FRG PRESIDENT FRIEDRICH VON WEIZSAECKER, THE PAPER STATED.

8. THE COMMUNIST "VOLKSSTIMME" FLATLY REJECTED WALDHEIM'S SPEECH AS A TACTICAL MANEUVER BY SOMEBODY WHO HAS COME UNDER SEVERE PUBLIC PRESSURE. IT HAS NOT MADE WALDHEIM MORE CREDIBLE. HIS "ANALYSIS" OF THOSE TIMES WAS ONLY AIMED AT HAVING WALDHEIM APPEAR AS A VICTIM OF A "HISTORIC TRAGEDY", THE PAPER WROTE AND CRITICIZED HIS REJECTION OF ANY MORAL CORESPONSIBILITY. INSTEAD OF

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RE-INTERPRETING HIS FATEFUL STATEMENT THAT HE ONLY DID HIS DUTY, WALDHEIM SHOULD HAVE LEARNED FROM HISTORY AND STATED THAT IN THOSE TIMES "I DID NOT DO MY DUTY AS AN AUSTRIAN", "VOLKSSTIMME" CONCLUDED. BLOCH

ADMIN  
END OF MESSAGE

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