

46

2

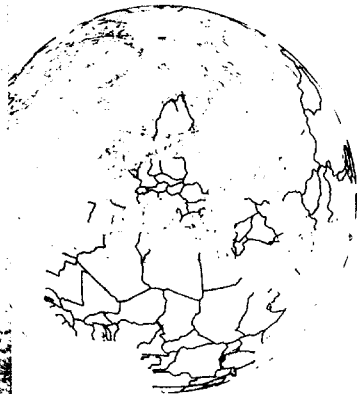
Memorandum for: DDI

This memorandum was prepared at the request of Dr. Harlan Strauss at ISA. He probably intends to place it in Secretary Weinberger's briefing book, to prepare the Secretary for a meeting with Belgian Defense Minister Vreven in early August. Dr. Strauss has asked for the memorandum today, if possible.

[Redacted]
Chief, British Isles,
Benelux, Canada Branch
EURA/WE

27 July 1984

25X1



EURA

Office of European Analysis

EUR M 84-10153

27 July 1984

MEMORANDUM

Belgium: Martens Soldiers On

Prime Minister Wilfried Martens's Social Christian-Liberal coalition -- in office for over 2 1/2 years -- has a better than even chance of remaining in power until its full term ends in 1985. We expect the government to surmount its next major hurdle, disputes over the 1985 budget. The coalition partners are haggling over whether there should be more social welfare budget cuts -- as called for by the Liberals -- or tax increases -- as demanded by leftwing Social Christians. Preliminary discussions are underway, but the cabinet is unlikely to make final decisions until parliament reconvenes in September.

[REDACTED]

25X1

Even if the budget disputes can be easily resolved, the ever-present linguistic rivalry between Flemings and Walloons can quickly inflame passions and put the coalition governments at risk. Flemish and Walloon politicians are sparring over the election of a Francophone hardliner to the European Parliament and over what compensation should be provided to the two regions because of the government's decision to award a jeep contract to a Canadian firm. The Prime Minister, however, has shown considerable dexterity in avoiding such economic and linguistic minefields.

[REDACTED]

25X1

Martens seems determined that the present government will last a full four-year term, in part to give his austerity policies more time to work. Such longevity is remarkable by recent Belgian standards, and both Social Christian and Liberal ministers probably hope to benefit at the polls if the coalition can "stay the course" into 1985. The government's term expires in November 1985, but due to a quirk in Belgian law calls for elections to be held by the end of May. The government has proposed amending the constitution to permit elections to be postponed until the chronological end of its tenure in November 1985. We expect the proposed change to pass, thus permitting Martens and his colleagues more flexibility about when to call the next election.

[REDACTED]

25X1

EUR M 84-10153

25X1

The date of elections almost certainly will have a significant impact on INF decisionmaking. Construction at the Florennes base site is proceeding, and the first flight of GLCMs is scheduled to become operational in March 1985. (Major INF-related equipment could begin arriving next month.)

25X1

25X1

Proceeding with INF as discreetly as possible is a vital part of Belgium's approach, especially given what the Embassy reports as increased nervousness among Martens's Flemish Social Christians the potential risks of about too forthright a stand. Martens publicly attributed his party's losses in the June European Parliamentary elections in part to support for INF.

25X1

The inclination to temporize among Flemish politicians was undoubtedly increased by the Dutch decision to postpone action on INF until late next year.

25X1

Delay of a formal decision until after elections in late 1985, in our view, entails a number of risks. The current center-right government is much more likely to make a definitive deployment decision than any other coalition combination. Any coalition which included the Socialists would present many more problems for INF. A renewed center-right coalition following elections is by no means assured although Social Christians and Liberals (who often are fighting for the same voters, especially in Wallonia) apparently remain convinced that they have more in common with each other than with the opposition Socialists. Martens has said that he is prepared to lead such a group after the next national elections.

25X1

A coalition including the Walloon Socialists would face strong pressure to postpone a deployment decision. We believe that the Walloon Socialists, Belgium's major opposition party, are likely to acquiesce in INF if the decision is made by the Social Christians and Liberals. This view was affirmed by Walloon Socialist leader Spitaels recently to US officials, although he also warned that concern over INF was increasing among Flemish politicians and that the Flemish Socialists remain adamantly opposed to deployment. Given the prospect of increased tension in Flemish Social Christian ranks

25X1

it will become increasingly important for Martens and Tindemans to remain in their present positions.

25X1

25X1

25X1

Distribution:

Orig - Harlon Strauss, ISA Pentagon

1 - DDI Registry

1 - DDI

1 - ADDI

1 - OD/EURA

2 - Production Staff

4 - IMC/CB

1 - Branch file

1 - Division file

EURA/WE [redacted] (26Ju184)

25X1

25X1

Page Denied

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Denied