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(U) ITALY: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS RESURGENT

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Summary

(U) Following his election as party secretary, Ciriaco De Mita has surprised many observers by leading the Christian Democrats (DC) away from rather than toward greater cooperation with the Italian Communists (PCI). The DC has rebuilt bridges to Italian business and has adopted conservative economic policies which Prime Minister Fanfani is now beginning to implement.

(C) By a series of bold statements, De Mita, a self-styled political visionary, has displaced Socialist leader Craxi as Italy's preeminent political party spokesperson. De Mita has portrayed the DC and the PCI as Italy's only meaningful political alternatives and depicts the Socialists (PSI) and other smaller parties as having a permanent secondary role.

(C) As the DC wrestles with De Mita's concepts, the Socialists are coming under heavy pressure. Progress toward Craxi's goal of forging an influential "third pole" of PSI-led smaller parties between the DC and the PCI appears to have peaked last summer. To stay in coalition with the DC, the Socialists are agreeing reluctantly to austerity measures unappealing to the labor component of their constituency. To break with the DC, on the other hand, could expose the PSI to a suffocating relationship with the much larger PCI.

(U) As De Mita posits bipolarism rather than cooperation with the Communists, they have been moving toward a reciprocal stance. The PCI's March 1983 congress likely will endorse this position. The stage will then be set for a major political battle between the two parties in Italy's next parliamentary election, which could occur within months.

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The Communist Question: De Mita Confounds the Seers

(U) De Mita rode a surge of anti-Socialist sentiment to a personal 55-percent victory at the May 1982 DC congress. Generally identified with a pragmatically skeptical attitude toward the Socialists, De Mita benefited from strong rank-and-file resentment and anger at what many perceived to be the disloyal and cynical tactics of the DC's key coalition partner.

(U) In a break with previous DC tradition, De Mita was elected directly by the congress delegates. Framers of the direct-election reform hoped to bolster the DC's popular image by making its secretary less hostage to infighting between DC factions. De Mita has described the reform as providing "a greater authoritativeness at the helm of the DC," and as representing a "healing of the previous exasperation" of intra-party factionalism. Although De Mita's assessment may be overly optimistic, the fact that it would take another direct election to replace him enhances his stature compared with his predecessors.

(C) A strong minority of the DC greeted De Mita's ascendancy with dismay. Judging cooperation with the Socialists essential to keeping Italy's large Communist Party isolated in opposition, many Christian Democrats were anxious about De Mita's alleged support for eventual DC-PCI cooperation. Furthermore, some Christian Democrats thought that De Mita's provincial, southern background would present an unappealing party image to many educated Italians, especially in the north.

(U) Fears about De Mita's attitudes toward the Communists were hardly allayed by statements by Giovanni Galloni, a senior party spokesperson reportedly close to De Mita on the DC left. At a May 15 colloquium in Washington, D.C., which was widely reported in Italy, Galloni:

- asserted that it was unrealistic for the much smaller PSI to pretend that the DC would run second-fiddle to it;
- praised positive evolution of the PCI into a truly "Italian" party and not a Soviet surrogate; and
- stated that differences between the DC and the PCI had become no greater than those between contending democratic parties in other West European nations.

In a June 22 editorial in the DC party newspaper, Galloni asserted that the DC was not ideologically prejudiced against the Communists. He implied that exclusion of the PCI from government was merely a matter of practical politics, for the time being.

(C) With such statements Galloni may have thought himself to be telegraphing De Mita's views, or perhaps he hoped to condition those views. But De Mita himself had begun expressing quite different judgments.

(C) In a May 21 meeting with the US Ambassador, De Mita said: "I would not want or permit the PCI in the government insofar as I have anything to do with it." In a major interview September 9, De Mita said that Italy had been living as a "blocked democracy" largely because the Communists' particular ideological and political frame of reference had denied them acceptance as a true, democratic opposition party. But De Mita said that the PCI had evolved to the extent that at some point it might be permitted to take control of the government. In another interview October 3, De Mita declared that the DC and the PCI were parties:

"...culturally, historically and politically alternative to one another. I do not think possible a government together with the PCI. I hold that it is possible to govern even 'against' the PCI if that word has its natural meaning of a contest of ideas and programs and not of violence. What cannot be done is to pretend that the PCI does not exist and does not count."

(U) In these and other public statements, De Mita was suggesting nothing less than alternating DC-led and PCI-led governments. Only when such could safely occur, argued De Mita, could the 30 percent of Italians who had consistently voted Communist be brought fully into the political process and Italy's postwar democracy be "completed." The time would not be ripe for this soon, De Mita cautioned, but he saw the DC's duty as working to set the conditions for that "real democratic alternative" in the future. According to De Mita, the PCI could then displace the DC if the voters so wished. But the challenge for the DC, he added, was to govern so well that the voters would never wish to take that step.

#### De Mita the Visionary

(C) De Mita's statements are unprecedented for a Christian Democratic leader. Even Aldo Moro, the broker of the 1976-79 mini-version of the DC-PCI "historic compromise," envisioned at most an eventual sharing of power between the two parties but not an alternation of power between them. Accused by his interlocutor in the October 3 interview of "dreaming," De Mita replied:

"...a political man, if he really wants to be that and not a mere maneuverer and intriguer, must dream.... Whoever doesn't have a dream to aspire to, call it even an ideal, an elevated objective, otherwise perforce becomes a petty political merchant.... I am not here for that."

(C) Were matters to evolve as De Mita envisions, the Socialists would as a corollary lose their present pivotal position in Italian politics. They would be permanently reduced to collaborating with the DC or the PCI, a far cry from PSI leader Craxi's design for the Socialists eventually to lead an influential "third pole" of laic parties between the DC and the PCI. Craxi had hoped by his tactically bold sallies against the PSI's larger coalition partner to pick up sufficient votes from the DC left and the PCI right to make Socialist "third pole" leadership a reality. Instead, DC reaction to his "disloyal" performances gave him De Mita.

(U) De Mita has not minced words about his view of the future role of the Socialists and the other smaller lay parties (the Social Democrats, Liberals, and Republicans). In a series of statements beginning in late 1982 he asserted bluntly that a third pole for smaller parties between the DC and the PCI did not make sense. De Mita argued that the much greater size of both the DC and the PCI, and their fundamentally alternative natures, deprived the smaller parties of any pretense to a brokering role between them--much less a controlling role as envisioned by Craxi. De Mita publicly relegated the lay parties--the Socialists in particular--to a permanent secondary role in Italian democracy.

(C) De Mita's stance will probably force Craxi to cooperate more closely with the DC, or break with it. De Mita evidently has decided to force the issue in the expectation that the DC would benefit from either of two likely outcomes:

--If the Socialists break ranks soon (for example, over Fanfani's economic austerity program) and precipitate early elections, De Mita calculates that the Socialists would gain little, if at all, and the DC would lose little if any electoral support. He reasons that such an outcome would support his view that Craxi's aim of pulling together a third pole is futile; De Mita would point to any Communist gains at the PSI's expense as further proof.

--Alternatively, the Socialists might, under protest, stand by Fanfani's austerity program. Craxi is sensitive to the fact that a party seen as precipitating early elections for political reasons tends to suffer at the polls. Craxi may prefer to opt for time to rebuild his strategy and his party's image as a pivotal force in Italian politics. He

also may wish not to risk exposing his party, divorced from the DC, to a possibly suffocating Communist embrace under Berlinguer's proposed PSI-PCI "left alternative."

(C) Either choice by Craxi could postpone elections to the end of Parliament's term in early 1984. By then, De Mita probably reasons, the shock of the imposition of austerity measures would be past and the DC could benefit from the beginnings of a hoped-for economic upturn. Moreover, De Mita would have had more time to give the DC a politically appealing rejuvenated and modern image.

#### De Mita and "Demitismo"

(C) To overcome the reputation of unsophisticated southerner which some had ascribed to him, De Mita undertook a series of visits to Christian Democratic local party units and constituencies around the country shortly after his election as secretary. His dynamism made a favorable impression, especially in contrast with the waffling image of his predecessor, Flaminio Piccoli. De Mita also cultivated and was cultivated by senior business leaders in a series of meetings, dinners, and social occasions. He convincingly projected an image of a man and a party on the move--interestingly, one similar to that which PSI leader Craxi had enjoyed until relatively recently.

(U) De Mita accomplished his selling task so effectively that by the end of the year commentators were speaking of a new political concept called demitismo. Its basic elements were described as: a return by the DC to "making politics" rather than "undergoing" the politics of others, and a DC shift from trying to be all-things-to-all-constituents to a more hardheaded insistence on necessary economic rigor and rationality. Clearly, De Mita appears determined to reestablish a reinvigorated DC as Italy's unquestioned leading party--and to be perceived as the architect of that success.

#### Communists Approach Important Congress

(U) As De Mita has been professing bipolarity vis-a-vis the Communists, the PCI for its own reasons has been moving toward a mirrorlike stance relative to the DC. The slow Communist decline since 1979 may be coming to a halt. That year's parliamentary election saw the PCI drop from its 1976 postwar high of more than 34 percent of the vote to barely 30+ percent. Since the breakup in early 1979 of the DC-PCI cooperative arrangement, the Communists have been preoccupied by debates over how to regain effective influence in domestic politics. They were also sidetracked by recurring wrangles over what the party's proper relationship with the Soviet Union should be. The latter question

became especially topical in the wake of the Soviet-inspired imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981. Had national elections been held in 1982, the Communists probably would have polled somewhat less than 30 percent.

(U) As the PCI's 16th congress scheduled for early March 1983 approaches, the party leadership appears to have made two fundamental choices:

- It has dispelled the lingering notion of a historic compromise with the DC by calling for all-out opposition to the DC in favor of a vigorously reformist "left alternative" governing arrangement built around the PCI and the PSI, excluding the DC.
- The leadership appears resolved to continue to criticize perceived defects in the Soviet model of socialism as unwise, "undemocratic," and at times even hazardous to international peace and stability.

(C) The party's position toward the USSR is an amalgam of a degree of genuine disdain and concern for Soviet "errors," and practical Italian politics. The PCI believes that it must keep some distance between itself and Moscow lest Italian voters identify the party as a Soviet surrogate. It should be noted that distance between the PCI and the USSR does not imply greater closeness between the PCI and positions congenial to the US. For the PCI, the USSR remains at worst a misguided friend, but one welcomed and necessary as a superpower buffer against the "true historic enemies" of progress--capitalism and the US.

(U) The PCI leadership's positions will in all likelihood be endorsed by the March congress. The stage will then be set for political battle between the PCI and De Mita's DC when Italy elects its next Parliament--at the latest when the current term expires in early 1984.

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