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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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SPOT COMMENTARY: Italy: The Government Resigns--What Next?

Background: Italian Prime Minister Cossiga's government will resign tomorrow after failing to obtain parliamentary approval for its controversial economic program by a single vote today. The government won an earlier rollcall confidence vote by a comfortable margin, but its subsequent defeat on the secret ballot test of the economic program apparently convinced the Prime Minister that future defections from his Christian Democratic-Socialist-Republican parliamentary majority would seriously hamper his coalition's ability to govern.

Comment: The government's defeat represents a severe blow to the aspirations of the moderate-conservative Christian Democratic and Socialist leaders who had pinned their hopes on the Cossiga government's ability to provide an alternative to a government with Communist support. Conversely, today's developments can be interpreted as a victory for leftwing Christian Democrats and Socialists who have fought tenaciously during Cossiga's tenure for greater cooperation between the government and the Communists. The government's resignation can also be seen to bolster Communist chief Berlinguer's arguments that no Italian Government can govern effectively without some assistance from the Communists.

Italian President Pertini will likely now tap Cossiga to form a new government and the Prime Minister's initial efforts may be aimed at a cabinet shuffle among the partners of his current coalition. Cossiga reportedly has taken his parliamentary defeat hard and may refuse to accept the charge. In this case, Pertini probably would designate another Christian Democrat--perhaps Party Secretary Piccoli, Party President Forlani or Minister of Industry Bisaglia--to try his hand. The new Prime Minister-designate--whoever he is--will almost certainly be forced to confront the interparty tensions which led to the collapse of Cossiga's coalition and will be faced with a revival of the question of Communist participation in the national governing process.

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