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NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT

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LONDON PLS PASS U/S EIZENSTAT'S PARTY - SPECASST MOORE

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FROM EMBASSY VATICAN/MESSAGE NO. 250/97

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/07

TEXT

TAGS: ECON, EFIN, KNAR, VT
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: U/S EIZENSTAT DISCUSSES "NEUTRALS REPORT" AND
-- LONDON CONFERENCE WITH VATICAN ARCHIVIST

REF: A) ROME 9143, B) ROME 10040, C) ROME 6708

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE YVONNE THAYER. REASON 1.5(D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: U/S EIZENSTAT MET ON 7 NOVEMBER WITH FATHER MARCEL CHAPPIN, ONE OF THE TWO VATICAN OFFICIALS WHO WILL REPRESENT THE HOLY SEE AT THE LONDON CONFERENCE ON NAZI ASSETS. VATICAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MIGLIORE ARRIVED LATE AND SO MISSED THE DISCUSSION OF NAZI ASSETS. EIZENSTAT BRIEFED CHAPPIN ON THE "NEUTRALS REPORT" AS IT PERTAINED TO THE VATICAN. HE WELCOMED THE HOLY SEE'S DECISION TO SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO LONDON AND ENCOURAGED THEM TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY. EIZENSTAT URGED THE VATICAN TO SPEED ITS DOCUMENT REVIEW PROCESS, AND TO OPEN ITS ARCHIVES ON NAZI ASSETS-RELATED ISSUES TO OUTSIDE RESEARCHERS. CHAPPIN DISCUSSED VATICAN ARCHIVAL REVIEW EFFORTS, LAMENTED THE HOLY SEE'S SHORTAGE OF STAFFING FOR THE UNDERTAKING, AND CITED REPORTS ON WARTIME CROATIAN CLERGY'S INVOLVEMENT IN USTASHE GOLD AND OTHER ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS STUART EIZENSTAT MET ON 7 NOVEMBER WITH FATHER MARCEL CHAPPIN, A DUTCH JESUIT HISTORIAN WHO SINCE 1996 HAS BEEN HEAD OF THE VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTRY ARCHIVES. (VATICAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CELESTINO MIGLIORE, WITH WHOM THE MEETING HAD BEEN ARRANGED, APPEARED ONLY AFTER THE NAZI ASSETS ISSUE WAS ADDRESSED.) EIZENSTAT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY CHARGE, EB DAS DAVID MARCHICK, E SPECASST HOLLY MOORE, AND POLOFF (NOTETAKER).

BRIEFING ON THE "NEUTRALS REPORT"

3. (C) U/S EIZENSTAT BEGAN BY INFORMING FR. CHAPPIN THAT THE USG EXPECTS TO RELEASE PUBLICLY THE "NEUTRALS REPORT" IN LATE NOVEMBER, AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE 7 MAY REPORT. HE QUOTED PASSAGES IN THE DRAFT PREFACE WHICH MENTION THE VATICAN, AND TOLD CHAPPIN THAT THE REPORT'S CONCLUSION (VIS-A-VIS THE VATICAN) ESSENTIALLY IS THAT MORE RESEARCH IS NECESSARY. EIZENSTAT ASSURED CHAPPIN THAT WE WOULD INFORM THE HOLY SEE IF "ANYTHING NEW OR DRAMATIC" REGARDING THE VATICAN CAME TO LIGHT BEFORE RELEASE OF THE REPORT.

LONDON CONFERENCE

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4. (C) U/S EIZENSTAT COMMENDED THE VATICAN'S DECISION TO SEND TWO EXPERIENCED HISTORIANS TO REPRESENT THE VATICAN AT THE DECEMBER LONDON CONFERENCE. (80-YEAR-OLD FRENCH JESUIT PIERRE BLET, WHO HELPED DRAFT THE VATICAN'S 11-VOLUME ACCOUNT OF THE CHURCH DURING WORLD WAR II, WAS UNABLE FOR HEALTH REASONS TO ACCOMPANY CHAPPIN BUT WAS REPLACED BY VATICAN DIPLOMAT GIOVANNI D'ANIELLO - REF B.) EIZENSTAT URGED THEM TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE AT LONDON, AND TO PRESENT A PAPER, AS OTHER DELEGATIONS ARE PLANNING TO DO. HE TOLD CHAPPIN THAT THE U.S. HAS ASKED THAT LONDON ATTENDEES BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THEIR RESPECTIVE ARCHIVAL DECLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES AT THE CONFERENCE. HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR ALL PARTIES TO SPEED THEIR ARCHIVAL REVIEW, AND TO OPEN THEIR ARCHIVES TO INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS. EIZENSTAT ALSO ENCOURAGED THE VATICAN TO FORM AN HISTORICAL COMMISSION TO OVERSEE THE REVIEW PROCESS AND THEIR ROLE DURING WORLD WAR II AND THEREAFTER.

5. (C) UNDERSCORING THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH THE USG TREATS THE MATTER, EIZENSTAT INFORMED CHAPPIN THAT THE USG HAS DECLASSIFIED 800,000 PAGES OF DOCUMENTS THUS FAR, INCLUDING SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE REPORTS, THE LARGEST DECLASSIFICATION IN U.S. HISTORY. EIZENSTAT NOTED THAT OTHER GROUPS WERE ALSO INTERESTED IN VATICAN WARTIME ARCHIVAL HISTORY, INCLUDING THE SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER AND THE FRANKLIN AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE, WHICH IS ORGANIZING A CONFERENCE ON FDR AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN OCTOBER 1998. (CHA RGE NOTE: CHAPPIN SUBSEQUENTLY MET WITH FDR CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS, ONE OF WHOM WAS HIS FORMER STUDENT. HE TOLD CHARGE HE IS PLANNING TO ATTEND AND TO PRESENT A PAPER AT THE CONFERENCE.)

TRIPARTITE GOLD COMMISSION

6. (C) ON THE ISSUE OF THE TRIPARTITE GOLD COMMISSION (TGC), EIZENSTAT UPDATED CHAPPIN ON THE TGC'S WORK TO DATE, INCLUDING AMOUNTS OF CLAIMED GOLD IT HAD RETURNED, AND ON THE ISSUE OF "NON-MONETARY" GOLD. HE OUTLINED THE PROPOSED VICTIMS' FUND, AND DESCRIBED USG INTEREST IN MAKING A CONTRIBUTION. U/S EIZENSTAT ENCOURAGED THE SUBJECT: U/S EIZENSTAT DICUSSES "NEUTRALS REPORT" AND

-- LONDON COFERENCE WITH VATICAN ARCHIVIST
VATICAN TO CONSIER MAKING A SIMILAR GESTURE.

VATICAN ARCHIVES

7. (C) CHAPPIN THANKED EIZENSAT FOR HIS BRIEFING, AND DESCRIBED VATICAN ARCHIVL EFFORTS REGARDING THE NAZI ASSETS ISSUE. THE OPE HAS FINAL AUTHORITY ON ACCESS TO

ALL HOLY SE RECORDS AND COULD DECIDE "TOMORROW" TO MAKE THE PUBLIC. THE JESUIT NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT VATICAN PRACTICE IS TO OPEN ARCHIVES FOR FULL REVIEW BY PONTIFICATE. BEYOND THE 11-VOLUME RELEASE, THE PIUS XII PONTIFICATE IS NOT SCHEDULED FOR FULL REVIEW AND RELEASE UNTIL AFTER THE YEAR 2000. HE OPINED THAT IMMEDIATE RELEASE WOULD BE A MISTAKE, AS THE MATERIALS HAVE NOT YET BEEN FULLY CATALOGUED BY VATICAN ARCHIVISTS. AT THE SAME TIME, CHAPPIN SAID, HE HAS BEEN REVIEWING RECORDS RELATED TO NAZI ASSETS, INCLUDING THE CROATIAN USTASHE GOLD ISSUE.

8. (C) ASKED ABOUT VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTRY ARCHIVES PERTAINING TO THE WORLD WAR II PERIOD, CHAPPIN SAID THAT THERE WERE AS MANY AS 2000 BOXES, EACH CONTAINING 800-2000 PAGES OF DOCUMENTS. THE RECORDS ARE KEPT BY COUNTRY, HE SAID, NOT BY TOPIC AND YEAR, AND NO GUIDE EXISTS TO INDICATE WHAT ANY PARTICULAR BOX CONTAINS. CHAPPIN NOTED THAT VATICAN ARCHIVAL STAFF IS VERY LIMITED; PRESENTLY, HE HAS A FEW ASSISTANTS WITHOUT THE LANGUAGE AND OTHER SKILLS TO INDEPENDENTLY REVIEW DOCUMENTS.

9. (C) CHAPPIN SAID HE COULD NOT VENTURE A GUESS AS TO HOW MUCH MATERIAL MIGHT BE PERTINENT TO A SEARCH ON HOLOCAUST ASSETS AS THE COUNTRY MATERIALS ARE NOT CATALOGUED. WEEDING OUT IRRELEVANT MATERIALS IS A MASSIVE TASK. TO DATE, HE HAD FOUND NOTHING TO SUPPORT VATICAN INVOLVEMENT IN LAUNDERING NAZI GOLD.

10. (C) U/S EIZENSTAT ENCOURAGED THE VATICAN TO CREATE AN HISTORICAL COMMISSION TO OVERSEE THE DOCUMENT SEARCH AND TO EXAMINE THE CHURCH ACTIVITIES DURING THE RELEVANT PERIODS BEFORE, DURING, AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II, PERHAPS INCLUDING A RESPECTED OBJECTIVE OUTSIDER, AS PORTUGAL HAD DONE WITH FORMER PRESIDENT SOARES. CHAPPIN REITERATED THE DISORGANIZED STATE OF THE VATICAN'S HOLDINGS, AND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOME CLERGY HAD "DONE EVIL THINGS DURING THE WAR PERIOD, THINGS THEY PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE KEPT RECORDS OF".

11. (C) CURIOUSLY, CHAPPIN VOLUNTEERED TO EIZENSTAT THAT THE USG WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT THE VATICAN'S WORD THAT IT WOULD NOT DESTROY ANY "UNPLEASANT" DOCUMENTS IT MIGHT ENCOUNTER, AND TRUST HIM SHOULD HE REPORT HAVING FOUND NOTHING IN HIS FILE REVIEW. EIZENSTAT REPLIED THAT WE WERE NOT LOOKING TO ESTABLISH BLAME ON WHAT HAD HAPPENED, ONLY TO ENSURE THAT A RESPONSIBLE AND ACCURATE ARCHIVAL REVIEW TAKES PLACE. HE SAID THAT WE WELL UNDERSTOOD FROM OUR OWN EXPERIENCE THE DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN SUCH STUDIES AND WOULD HAVE NO REASON TO THINK THE VATICAN WOULD DESTROY ANY DOCUMENTS.

CROATIAN FRANCISCANS AND USTASHE GOLD

12. (C) CHAPPIN VOLUNTEERED THAT HE WAS LOOKING INTO THE ISSUE OF CROATIAN USTASHE GOLD, ABOUT WHICH THE VATICAN HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE. (U.S. MEDIA REPORTED IN JULY THAT U.S. DOCUMENTS HAD BEEN FOUND INDICATING VATICAN BANK INVOLVEMENT IN THE LAUNDERING OF USTASHE GOLD. SEE REF C.) CHAPPIN DISCUSSED AT LENGTH POST-WAR NEWSPAPER REPORTS (FORWARDED TO ROME BY THE PAPAL NUNCIO IN BELGRADE AT THE TIME) HE HAD FOUND IN VATICAN ARCHIVES REGARDING THE TRIAL OF THEN-ZAGREB ARCHBISHOP STEPINAC AND OTHER "TRAITORS". THE CLIPS INCLUDED STATEMENTS BY SOME CROATIAN FRANCISCANS THAT THEY HAD HIDDEN STOLEN USTASHE GOLD, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "VICTIMS' GOLD", IN A CHURCH. ASKED WHY CROATIAN FRANCISCANS WOULD HAVE HIDDEN STOLEN GOLD, CHAPPIN REPLIED THAT MANY OF THE FRANCISCANS HAD BEEN STRONG NATIONALISTS WHO WERE "MORE CROATIAN THAN CATHOLIC." ACCORDING TO CHAPPIN, THE TITO GOVERNMENT TOOK POSSESSION OF THE GOLD IN 1946. CHAPPIN SAID THE CLIPPINGS WERE THE ONLY RECORDS HE HAD FOUND WHICH DISCUSSED THE MATTER, AND THAT OFFICIAL RECORDS PERTAINING TO THIS GOLD SHOULD BE AVAILABLE IN BELGRADE. EIZENSTAT REQUESTED THAT CHAPPIN PROVIDE COPIES OF THE CLIPPINGS. CHAPPIN DID NOT ANTICIPATE IT WOULD BE A PROBLEM TO HONOR THE REQUEST ("NEWS CLIPPINGS ARE PUBLIC DOMAIN"), BUT HE WOULD HAVE TO INFORM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. (NOTE: CHAPPIN TOLD US 28 NOVEMBER THAT HIS SUPERIORS DID NOT APPROVE HIS FORWARDING THE COPIES, ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE ARCHIVES SECTION IS SHORT OF STAFF AND REQUESTS SHOULD FOLLOW ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES REGARDING ACCESS TO ARCHIVAL MATERIAL.)

COMMENT

13. (C) CHAPPIN TOOK CAREFUL NOTES THROUGHOUT THE MEETING AND INDICATED HE WOULD CONVEY U/S EIZENSTAT'S SUGGESTIONS TO HIS SUPERIORS. HE WAS VISIBLY NERVOUS FROM THE OUTSET. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MIGLIORE'S UNEXPECTED ONE-HOUR DELAY IN ARRIVING MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO CHAPPIN'S EVIDENT NERVOUSNESS ON SOME OF THE BROADER ISSUES THAT U/S EIZENSTAT RAISED, OR IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE SENSITIVE SUBJECT MATTER DISCUSSED. MIGLIORE EVENTUALLY APPEARED TO DISCUSS OTHER ISSUES (SEPTEL). IN ANY EVENT, U/S EIZENSTAT CLEARLY AND FIRMLY OUTLINED THE RELEVANT PORTIONS OF THE "NEUTRALS REPORT", AND URGED THE VATICAN TO COME TO LONDON PREPARED TO DISCUSS ARCHIVAL ACCESS.

14. (C) U/S EIZENSTAT'S WILLINGNESS TO COME PERSONALLY TO THE VATICAN TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER PROVIDED THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY FOR A FRANK DISCUSSION ON THE ISSUE SINCE THE TESTY JULY EXCHANGE (REF C). CHAPPIN'S COMMENTS AND THE FACT THAT HE AND ANOTHER VATICAN OFFICIAL WILL PARTICIPATE AT THE LONDON CONFERENCE INDICATE THAT THE VATICAN RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE TO WORLD OPINION AND LEADERS.

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15. (U) U/S EIZENSTAT HAS REVIEWED THIS CABLE. THAYER

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END OF MESSAGE

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