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E.O. 12356: N/A

TEXT

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: WALDHEIM, HART COMPARED

INDEPENDENT, 52,000-CIRCULATION AARGAUER TAGBLATT
CARRIED THE FOLLOWING COMMENTARY BY FOREIGN EDITOR GAUDENZ
BAUMANN: (BEGIN EXTRACTS) AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT KURT
WALDHEIM SEEMS AT LAST TO BE COMING TO TERMS WITH THE
GROWING NUMBER OF ACCUSATIONS OF A NAZI PAST MADE AGAINST
HIM. WHETHER HIS RECENT TELEVISED ADDRESS, IN WHICH HE
TRIED TO EXPLAIN HIS BEHAVIOR DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR
AND IN THE RECENT CONTROVERSY ABOUT IT, WILL SILENCE THE
CRITICISM IS QUESTIONABLE. THE SPEECH LEFT THE IMPRESSION
HE FELT HE WAS ONLY DOING HIS DUTY. THE MOST CREDIBLE
SENTENCE WAS HIS "I DIDN'T BELONG TO THEM"--MEANING THOSE
WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES IN RESISTANCE TO THE NAZI

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REGIME.

IN AMERICA, GARY HART HAS HAD TO ABANDON HIS PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS BECAUSE HIS WOMANIZING HAD REACHED INSUPPORTABLE PROPORTIONS. BUT THE THING AMERICANS MOST REPROACHED HIM FOR WAS HAVING CONSISTENTLY LIED, AND NOT GIVEN ANY SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION WHY HE CHANGED HIS NAME AND FALSIFIED HIS AGE.

WALDHEIM, TOO, HAS FAILED TO CLEAR UP OPEN QUESTIONS SATISFACTORILY, SUCH AS WHY HIS OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY MADE NO MENTION OF HIS SERVICE IN THE BALKANS AS A WEHRMACHT OFFICER IN 1942-45. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT HE COULD HAVE FAILED TO HEAR ABOUT THE CRUELITIES PERPETRATED ON YUGOSLAV PARTISANS AND CIVILIANS, AS WELL AS GREEK JEWS, AT THAT TIME. WALDHEIM ADMITTED RECENTLY THAT IN RETROSPECT HE HAD "WRONGLY APPRECIATED THE SITUATION AND MADE MISTAKES." HE ALSO CLAIMED IT WAS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT A PERSON, EVEN IF GUILTLESS, WOULD NOT WANT TO DWELL ON THAT "MOST DIFFICULT PERIOD OF HIS LIFE."

BUT A PERSON WHO HAS BORNE HIGH PUBLIC OFFICE LIKE WALDHEIM--AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND UN SECRETARY-GENERAL BEFORE BECOMING AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT--SHOULD NOT COMPLAIN, AS HE DID, IF "HISTORICALLY PRECISE ANSWERS" ARE REQUIRED OF HIM, EVEN REGARDING EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE ALL OF 40 YEARS AGO.

"HISTORICALLY PRECISE ANSWERS" WERE ALL THAT THE SWISS PRESS, INCLUDING THIS NEWSPAPER, HAS EVER EXPECTED FROM WALDHEIM. WE THEREFORE FOUND IT PARTICULARLY SHOCKING THAT AN OFFICIAL OF THE AUSTRIAN EMBASSY IN BERN COULD WRITE TO US ON NOVEMBER 13, 1986, SAYING: "I FEAR LEST THE CONTINUAL ATTACKS ON THE FREELY ELECTED AUSTRIAN HEAD OF STATE PROVE DAMAGING TO THE FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND." APART FROM THE FACT THAT THIS SENTENCE DISPLAYS RATHER A PECULIAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, IT SEEMS LIKE A CASE OF THE POACHER TURNED GAMEKEEPER. WE WOULD NEVER HAVE DREAMED OF REPROACHING THE NEWSPAPERS OF OUR NEIGHBOR AUSTRIA FOR THEIR CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT REAGAN.

HIS PAST HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL RUNNER HART, AND IT IS NOT UNLIKELY THAT THE SAME THING WILL HAPPEN TO WALDHEIM. IT IS TO BE EXPECTED THAT IN THE FALL HE WILL TAKE EARLY RETIREMENT "ON HEALTH GROUNDS."

THIS DOES NOT ALTER THE FACT THAT THE AMERICANS--FOR DOMESTIC RATHER THAN FOREIGN-POLICY REASONS--HAVE WITH THEIR ENTRY BAN ON WALDHEIM AS A PRIVATE PERSON BEEN GUILTY OF KICKING A MAN WHEN HE IS DOWN. FOR THE AUSTRIAN HEAD OF STATE WAS ALREADY SO ISOLATED THAT, DESPITE HIS FORMER HIGH POSITION IN THE UNITED NATIONS, HE WAS NO LONGER OF ANY INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND FOR HIS FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN, ONLY AN ENCUMBRANCE. "THE EXECUTION OF A POLITICAL CORPSE IS NO DIPLOMATIC MASTER-STROKE, BUT CAN HOWEVER HARDEN OPPOSITION," EDITORIALIZED THE

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SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG OF MUNICH RECENTLY. IT WAS JUST SUCH
A DEFENSIVE REACTION OF SOLIDARITY THAT LED TO WALDHEIM'S
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ELECTION, FOR IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WOULD ONLY BE A
LIABILITY FOR AUSTRIA.

WEST GERMAN PRESIDENT RICHARD VON WEIZSAECKER SERVED AS A
MAJOR IN THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT, BUT NOBODY REPROACHES HIM
FOR IT TODAY. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO HEADS OF
STATE LIES IN THEIR APPROACH TO PAST AND PRESENT.
WEIZSAECKER HAS MADE NO ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL HIS PAST
ASSOCIATIONS; WALDHEIM HAS, TO HIS COST. (END EXTRACTS)
(5/23/87) HENZE

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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