

Soltis, Marjorie A.

Heading:

MOSCOW 2656 ~~SECRET~~

EXDIS IMMEDIATE

DECAPTIONED

SUBJECT: DFM BERDENNIKOV'S MEETING WITH S/NIS SESTANOVICH ON N-K

RELEASE IN FULL

(U) CLASSIFIED BY GEORGE KROL, MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, REASONS: 1.5 (B, D).

2000

1. ~~(S)~~ SUMMARY: IN A FEBRUARY 1 MEETING WITH DFM BERDENNIKOV ON THE MARGINS OF THE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, S/NIS SESTANOVICH GAVE OUR ASSESSMENT ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH AFTER THE SECRETARY'S MEETINGS WITH ALIYEV AND KOCHARIAN IN DAVOS. BERDENNIKOV AGREED THAT WE MAY BE FACING A BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS AND THAT KOCHARIAN LACKS THE POLITICAL SUPPORT TO AGREE TO THE CURRENT SETTLEMENT. THE DISCUSSION ON CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CASPIAN IS REPORTED SEPTEL. END SUMMARY

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2. (SBU) S/NIS SESTANOVICH MET WITH DFM BERDENNIKOV ON THE MARGINS OF THE SECRETARY'S JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 2 VISIT TO MOSCOW. ALSO IN ATTENDANCE ON THE RUSSIAN SIDE WERE DIRECTOR FOR 1ST CIS (CIS AS AN INSTITUTION) HAKIMOV, DIRECTOR FOR 2ND CIS (WESTERN CIS) MUSATOV, DIRECTOR FOR THIRD CIS (CENTRAL ASIA) KORNIKOV, DIRECTOR FOR 4TH CIS (CAUCASUS) BORODOVKIN, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE ON ABKHAZIA MIRONOV, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH GRIBKOV, DIRECTOR FOR CFE ISSUES CHERNOV AND AN MFA NOTETAKER. ON THE U.S. SIDE WERE NSC SENIOR DIRECTOR MEDISH, AMBASSADOR FOR CFE ISSUES DUNKERLEY, S/NIS DEPUTY BEYRLE, MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS KROL, DIRECTOR OF EUR/RUS RUSSELL AND EMBASSY NOTETAKER SIBILLA.

3. ~~(S)~~ SESTANOVICH OPENED BY BRIEFING BERDENNIKOV ON THE SECRETARY'S JANUARY 29 MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENTS KOCHARIAN AND ALIYEV IN DAVOS, IN WHICH BOTH MEN GAVE A READOUT OF THEIR ONE-ON-ONE MEETING THE PREVIOUS DAY. AFTER MEETINGS, OUR ASSESSMENT CONCLUDED THAT THEY FACED A POSSIBLE BREAKDOWN IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND THAT KOCHARIAN NOW LACKED THE POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE AGREEMENT THAT HE AND ALIYEV HAD WORKED OUT. NONETHELESS, BOTH LEADERS WANTED THE PEACE PROCESS TO CONTINUE.

4. ~~(S)~~ BERDENNIKOV AGREED THAT OUR ASSESSMENTS WERE BROADLY SIMILAR; HE HAD HEARD MUCH THE SAME THING DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO YEREVAN AND BAKU. KOCHARIAN HAD TOLD HIM THAT IF DEMIRCHIAN AND SARKISSIAN WERE STILL ALIVE, HE WOULD BE ABLE TO PUSH SUCH AN AGREEMENT FORWARD. WITHOUT THEM, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. BERDENNIKOV SAID THE PRESENT PRIME MINISTER WAS WEAK POLITICALLY. KOCHARIAN ALSO TOLD HIM THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE THE INVESTIGATION OF THE OCTOBER MURDERS WOULD LEAD. HE NOTED THAT OPPOSITION TO THE AGREEMENT WAS ON THE RISE FROM THE RIGHT AND FROM THOSE WHO SUPPORTED FORMER PRESIDENT TER-PETROSSIAN. BERDENNIKOV SAID KOCHARIAN HAD TOLD HIM HE COULD ONLY SURVIVE IF THERE WAS SOME BORDER LINK WITH IRAN; OTHERWISE, HE WAS "DOOMED." AS FOR TURKEY, KOCHARIAN SAID THAT TURKEY'S REFUSAL TO DISCUSS THE GENOCIDE ISSUE WOULD BE THE REASON HE WOULD GIVE TO BAKU FOR BACKING DOWN FROM THE AGREEMENT.

5. ~~(S)~~ BERDENNIKOV SAID KOCHARIAN HAD DISCUSSED DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEGHRI REGION AS A WAY OF WORKING OUT SOME KIND OF COMPROMISE, BUT THAT THE POSSIBILITIES WERE EXTREMELY LIMITED. BERDENNIKOV FURTHER STATED THAT

KARABAKHI INTERLOCUTOR MELKUNIAN HAD TOLD HIM THAT TRANSFER OF ANY PART OF MEGHRI WAS UNACCEPTABLE. AGAIN CITING THE IMPORTANCE OF A LAND LINK WITH IRAN, KOCHARIAN SAID THAT THE GOAM WAS VERY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT HE TERMED AN INDEFENSIBLE "ENCLAVIZATION" OF ARMENIA, WHERE THE COUNTRY IS SURROUNDED ON THREE SIDES BY "TURKEY AND ITS RELATIVES." ALIYEV, FOR HIS PART, TOLD BERDENNIKOV THAT IT WAS UNFAIR TO ASK MORE OF HIM AND THAT HE COULD NOT MAKE ANY MORE CONCESSIONS.

6. (S) BERDENNIKOV SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE KEY TO A SETTLEMENT WAS STABILIZATION OF THE REGION. IF KOCHARIAN FELT MORE SECURE IN HIS POSITION, HE WOULD BE MORE PREPARED TO MOVE FORWARD WITH AN AGREEMENT. AS IT STOOD NOW, HE COULD NOT. IN THIS REGARD, BERDENNIKOV SAID RUSSIA WAS TRYING TO HELP BY "TALKING TO OTHERS" WHO OPPOSED KOCHARIAN. BERDENNIKOV NOTED THAT AZERBAIJAN WAS "PRESSED FOR TIME," IN PART BECAUSE ALIYEV WAS NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER. THE QUESTION REMAINED WHETHER AZERBAIJAN WOULD STILL BE READY TO COMMIT ONCE ARMENIA WAS PREPARED TO DO SO AND VICE VERSA. HE SAID THAT GIVEN THE DELICATE NATURE OF THE SITUATION, "WE CAN LOSE STABILITY IN THE REGION IF WE DO SOMETHING RECKLESS." FOR THAT REASON, RUSSIA'S MOTTO WAS "FIRST, DO NO HARM."

7. (S) SESTANOVICH REPLIED THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, KOCHARIAN PROBABLY WOULD NEVER FEEL SECURE ENOUGH TO GO AHEAD ON HIS OWN. FOR THAT REASON, THE MINSK GROUP NEEDED TO LOOK AT A VARIETY OF SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS THAT WOULD MAKE A SETTLEMENT MORE ACCEPTABLE TO ARMENIA. AS FOR THE MINSK GROUP GOING PUBLIC WITH A PROPOSAL, SESTANOVICH SAID THAT

MIGHT BE POSSIBLE BUT ONLY IN THE FUTURE. BERDENNIKOV SAID HE AGREED WITH SESTANOVICH'S OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND THE NEED TO HELP KOCHARIAN. HE SAID THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THE ALTERNATIVE TO KOCHARIAN WOULD BE ANY BETTER OR ANY MORE STABLE. HE ADDED THAT ANY MINSK GROUP PROPOSAL MADE NOW COULD DESTABILIZE THE TALKS AND FOR THAT REASON HE ADVISED PATIENCE.

8. (U) S/NIS CLEARED THIS CABLE.

COLLINS

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~~S E C R E T~~ MOSCOW 002656

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E.O.12598:DECL: 12/31/10
TAGS: PREL, OSCE, AM, AJ, RS