

January 24, 1990

Special Analysis: Yugoslavia: Prospects for Stability□□□

Citation:

"Special Analysis: Yugoslavia: Prospects for Stability", January 24, 1990, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Approved for Release by the Central Intelligence Agency, October 29, 2019. Approved for Release by the Central Intelligence Agency, October 29, 2019.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/209534>

Summary:

An analysis of the Yugoslav Congress's decision to establish a multi-party system and its effects on ethnic tensions.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

3425

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[redacted]

6.2(d)

Special Analysis

YUGOSLAVIA: Prospects for Stability

The Communist party congress that ended Monday did little to clarify uncertainties about Yugoslavia's future. Sharp conflicts and a walkout by the Slovene delegation will erode the party's prestige and authority and will speed movement toward a multiparty system, but they may also aggravate the ethnic tensions at the root of the country's instability.

[redacted]

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The congress voted for a multiparty system, abolishing the Communist party's constitutionally-mandated leading role, and endorsed greater protection for human rights. These steps amount to an endorsement of the liberal platform championed by the Slovenes, who nonetheless walked out after losing a vote that would have enhanced the autonomy of the republic parties. The refusal by the other republics to endorse Serbia's effort to continue the congress without the Slovenes was a defeat for Serbian strongman Milosevic.

[redacted]

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Movement to a Multiparty System

The practical effects of the party's breakup are likely to be minimal; the national party has been paralyzed for the past two years by internal differences and has made few meaningful decisions. Endorsement of a multiparty system represents a belated recognition of a political trend that has already gained significant momentum. There are already some 40 opposition political parties in the country, some with as many as 70,000 members.

[redacted]

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Of Yugoslavia's eight republics, Slovenia and Croatia are already planning to hold multiparty elections this spring; Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia are moving more cautiously in the same direction. Even orthodox Serbian leaders now publicly support a multiparty system, a largely meaningless concession because no elections are scheduled in Serbia until 1994.

[redacted]

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The evolution toward a multiparty system will do little to ease ethnic tensions and may make them worse this year. The new parties may pander to nationalist, and even secessionist, sentiments. Parties with nationalist agendas have already been formed in Serbia, Slovenia, and Croatia.

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Implications for the Markovic Government

The tensions within the national party probably will enhance the clout of Premier Markovic's government. Nonetheless, Markovic must surmount imposing obstacles to put Yugoslavia on the road to political and economic health. He will have to persuade powerful regional leaders to agree on badly needed economic reforms; failure to do so would mean the continued decline of an economy already suffering hyperinflation. [redacted]

6.2(d)

The government will also have to coax the Army's senior officer corps to accept tighter budgets, a gradual loss of the Army's political role, and a diminution of the military's prestige. Finally, Markovic must obtain help from political leaders in Slovenia and Croatia to brake the secessionist forces that could fragment the country and risk civil war. [redacted]

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Grounds for Guarded Optimism

Markovic and other reformists nonetheless have some things working in their favor. Although the secessionist fever might grow apace with nationalist sentiments, the shrill ethnic squabbles that dominate the Yugoslav headlines probably exaggerate the depth of secessionist sentiment. Published polls indicate that even most Slovenes want greater autonomy within Yugoslavia, not secession. [redacted]

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The military and security forces have resisted the ethnic divisions that have weakened other Yugoslav institutions, and they continue to support a united Yugoslavia. Memories of a bloody civil war during World War II remain vivid, persuading many Yugoslavs that ethnic tensions must not be permitted to get out of hand. Finally, Yugoslavs—including many in the leadership—have not given up hope that the country can be politically reformed. [redacted]

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