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Yugoslavia: The Incoming Party Leadership

Summary

Yugoslavia is laying the groundwork for the largest turnover in its collective Communist Party leadership in four years. The change, to be formalized at a party congress in June, will eclipse the generation of leaders who fought as Tito's partisans during World War II and ran the country for much of the past 40 years. They will be replaced by a diverse mix of younger leaders, who in general are more pragmatic but also tied more to parochial interests than their Pan-Yugoslav elders. From the standpoint of US interests, the shift to the new leadership could create sharper strains at the federal level among the country's many rival ethnic groups. It could also hinder efforts by the incoming premier, Branko Mikulic, to promote national stability. [Redacted]

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Impending Changes

Yugoslavia will soon be making one of its biggest leadership changes in recent years. On 16 May, Branko Mikulic of Bosnia will replace Premier Milka Planinc as head of government. Barely six weeks later, from 25 to 28 June, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Communist Party) will hold its 13th Congress and elect both a new 165-member Central Committee and a 23-member Presidium. The change will be the first for both the government and Party leaderships since 1982 and only the second since Tito's death in 1980. Both the new premier and Party leadership will rule for four years until 1990.

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The premier and the Party Presidium are two of the key decisionmaking centers in the complex Yugoslav political system. The premier is more influential than the government heads of most other Communist countries, with the main say on economic policy and a voice on other issues under the government's purview.

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The 23-man Party Presidium is a collective body with broad policy oversight. On the one hand, it has significantly less authority than Politburos in most Communist states because of its unwieldy size, its members' close ties to their home regions, and its dependence on those regions to carry out decisions. Its decisions have sometimes been overturned by the Central Committee, and it must share power outside the party apparatus, in an ad hoc system of checks and balances, with the premier, a nine-member State Presidency, and a bicameral Federal Assembly.

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On the other hand, the Presidium has regained some of its traditional assertiveness during the past year both toward the regions and the federal legislature. It overrode the views of Slovenia and Croatia on a controversial foreign exchange bill and intervened in a dispute over authority between Serbia and its autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. The Party President late last year had to defend the Presidium's new-founded activism. The scope of the Presidium's activity is illustrated by the agenda of a recent session, where it demanded better government economic performance, condemned the US air strike on Libya, and promoted steps to ease ethnic strains in Kosovo.

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### Choosing a Presidium

The composition of the Presidium has begun to crystallize in recent weeks as each of the regional Central Committees held elections to nominate its candidates. Some 21 of the 23 names so far have been made public. Each of the six republics gets three seats on the Presidium, Serbia's autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina two apiece, and the Army party organization one. Of those seats, one from each of the nine party organizations is reserved for its party chief. [redacted]

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Once nominated, the candidates go through a lengthy, quasi-democratic ratification process. They must first be endorsed by the congresses of their home regions and then by the National Congress in June for membership on the National Central Committee. The Central Committee in turn will elect the Presidium by secret ballot at its formative session right after the congress. [redacted]

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Fights over candidates from the floor or in back rooms are possible at every step. Barring more than the normal tumult in the Yugoslav system, most or all the candidates probably will be approved. But at least two of the nominees--the Croatian ideologue Stipe Suvar and the Serbian nationalist Radisa Gacic--may already be in trouble either at home or in other regions [redacted]. There is even a slim chance the Congress or Central Committee will reverse a previous decision and vote to scale back the size of the Presidium. Such a move would strand many of the Presidium nominees, upsetting plans by the powerbrokers to hand out top jobs. [redacted]

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### Generational Change

The incoming Presidium will look very different from the one that preceded it. And that, in turn, could have a broader impact on the Yugoslav political landscape. The most striking difference between the incoming and outgoing Presidiums is age. The incoming members average nine years younger than their predecessors, with a mean age of 51 as opposed to 60. At least a third of them are still in their 30's or 40's. Many are new, unfamiliar faces on the national scene, having been pulled up from the second rungs of their regions' hierarchies. One Macedonian candidate, at age 35, probably will be the youngest member of a top party body in Eastern Europe. [redacted]

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The demographic shift on the Presidium contrasts with the continuity that marked the last party congress in 1982. The Presidium installed at that time--even though virtually the whole membership was replaced then also--was of the same age as the one that was leaving. Most of that group were familiar faces, many with prior national-level experience. Only two were under age 50, but just barely. [redacted]

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The generational change is likely to affect the tone and substance of Yugoslav politics. The outgoing leaders were of the generation whose experience was shaped by several historic events--the wartime fight of Tito's partisans against the Nazis, the break with Stalin in 1948, and the struggle to build a viable Communist state out of the many ethnic groups. While generalizations about Yugoslav age groups are tenuous at best, this partisan generation has tended to be more unquestioning, self-congratulatory, and committed to Tito's Pan-Yugoslav ideal. Several of the senior leaders who are leaving-

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[redacted] seem to fit this mold. [redacted]

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The new group is a different breed. Most of its members were under 15 years old when the war ended. They came to political maturity in the period, during the past two decades, when economic realities often had more impact than ideology and when narrow regional interests increasingly took precedence over national goals. The younger generations of several ethnic groups in particular--Serbs, Albanians, and to some extent Croats and Slovenes--are reputedly more parochial and nationalistic than their elders. The incoming Presidium candidates as a group seem better educated, more sophisticated, and in some ways more flexible. Yet many have scant experience outside their own regions and will probably be at least as beholden as their predecessors to their home bases. [redacted]

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The generational change will probably be repeated on the 165-member Central Committee, the body to which the Presidium will report. The mean age of the outgoing Central Committee is about 57, nearly that of the departing Presidium. According to Yugoslav media, more than half (53 percent) of an interim list of 147 nominees for the new Central Committee are no older than 50. The final list, still being drawn up, may look even more youthful, even if

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it includes some of the senior leaders who have been elbowed out of more meaningful jobs. [redacted]

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### Lines of Conflict

Apart from the age factor, the backgrounds and political reputations of the current nominees to the new Presidium suggest that destabilizing factional infighting will probably increase. Most of the issues in question are perennial troublespots, which even the most high-minded Yugoslavs could do little to ameliorate. Still, the incoming leaders seem even more internally divided and less impartial than their predecessors. Following are highlights of some of the more likely conflict areas. As in past years, regional alliances will probably shift depending on the issue:

Interregional Economic Relations: Polemics within the Presidium probably will sharpen over allocating economic resources at a time of slow growth and nationwide austerity. Several of the more moderate, federally-inclined members of the departing Presidium will be replaced by staunch advocates of their regions' interests. Many of the newcomers to the Presidium [redacted]

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[redacted] have built their careers on looking after local interests. [redacted]

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The longstanding dispute between the richer north and poorer south is likely to worsen. All three candidates from Slovenia, the country's richest republic, are uninhibited proponents of the decentralized system that has allowed Slovenia to keep much of its resources [redacted]

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[redacted] Meanwhile, Jakov Lazarevski, the incoming party chief of Macedonia, is a forceful spokesman for the distressed south, warning recently of impending nationwide strains without more northern aid. The three Serbian representatives, moreover, appear to favor a stronger central government and will probably draw the ire of the Slovenes and other northern regionalists. [redacted]

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Dissent: The new Presidium will probably come to blows over the limits for freedom of expression, long an inflammatory issue in authoritarian Yugoslavia. Several of the new Presidium members seem equally as rigid as some of their predecessors. The most notable among them is the

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50-year-old Croatian Stipe Suvar, viewed [Redacted] as one of the country's most notorious dogmatists. Even if Suvar fails to be seated--because of opposition within Croatia or from other republics--the banner of intolerance will probably be waved by the other Croatian candidate, Ivica Racan, and by the Bosnian Ivan Brigic and the Vojvodinan Bosko Kronic. Each of these three men has publicly demanded crackdowns on ideological "enemies" and "opposition forces"--conventional codewords for liberal dissidents. Kronic two years ago claimed that an opposition "political bloc" had already been formed. [Redacted]

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Market Forces: Disputes also will flare over the use of market forces, an issue that continues to concern the IMF and Western creditors. One faction of the incoming Presidium is made up by the several ideologues and other traditionalists who prefer the conventional Yugoslav mix of market forces with planning by governmental, workers, and managerial bodies. The other faction includes the Serbian, Slovene, and other Presidium members who appear to see a greater use of market forces as necessary to promote economic recovery. The actual implementation of such measures, however, will almost surely remain in the hands of the regions. Premier Mikulic, [Redacted] will probably set the tone. [Redacted]

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The Serbia Problem: One of the most volatile political issues--Serbia's campaign to regain greater control over its two reluctant provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina--seems bound to ignite in the new Presidium. The issue heated up in 1984 and was "federalized" last summer when the Presidium adopted a statement setting a framework within which it could be handled. But the efforts to dampen the conflict so far have

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had little effect, and Serbia's frustrations have darkened inter-ethnic relations and affected other policy issues. The incoming Presidium will face an even more inflammatory situation. In recent weeks, members of Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority have turned out in the thousands in public demonstrations to highlight their concerns, and the protest actions already have sharpened inter-regional strains. [ ]

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The new Presidium delegates of the main parties to the dispute are more defensive of local interests than their predecessors. Serbian moderate Vidic will be leaving, as will Dragoslav Markovic, a colorful Serbian nationalist who actually directed most of his energies beyond the two provinces. In their place will be Radisa Gacic, described by the US Embassy as the leading "province basher," and--even if Gacic is not seated--the like-minded Serbians Kkrebic and Milosevic. Kosovo's moderate old-guard member Sukrija will be replaced by the assertive young Azem Vlasi, and Vojvodina rights advocate Bosko Krunic will supplant the more restrained Petar Matic. [ ]

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#### Outlook

Factional rivalries probably will sharpen on the new Presidium, hampering its effectiveness. But non-party bodies that have preserved more of a Pan-Yugoslav outlook may increasingly try to fill the vacuum. These would include Mikulic's government and the nine-man State Presidency, many of whose members are still old guard Titoists. The Army also might feel compelled to assert itself in its traditional role as the ultimate defender of Yugoslav national integrity. [ ]

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The Presidium may be less strife-ridden than its composition suggests. [ ]

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Those that are may grow into their jobs, tone down their rhetoric, and develop a broader federal outlook. They will probably develop an institutional stake in preserving the Presidium's authority. And they are likely to override parochial interests if the system itself is threatened. [ ]

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For US interests, a weakened, fractious Presidium could have mixed effects. On the one hand, it could move Yugoslavia even closer to the models of its pluralistic,

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democratic West European neighbors and away from the more monolithic one-party systems to the East. On the other hand, it could be harmful to national stability. The Presidium has helped reconcile conflicting interests and enforce central decisions. An erosion of its authority could leave Yugoslavia with fewer means to confront mounting political, ethnic, and economic problems. [REDACTED]

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Presidium Candidates

<u>Region</u>	<u>Party Chief</u> <u>(ex officio Presidium member)</u>	<u>Regular</u> <u>Presidium Members</u>
Bosnia	Milan Uzelac (54)	Ivan Brigic (49) Milanko Renovica (57)
Croatia	(not yet announced)	Ivica Racan (42) Stipe Suvar (50)*
Kosovo	Azem Vlasi (38)	Kolj Siroka (64)
Macedonia	Jakov Lazarevski ( )	Milan Pancevski (51) Vasil Tupurkovski (35)
Montenegro	Miljan Radovic (52)	Marko Orlandic (55) Vidoje Zarkovic (59)
Serbia	Slobodan Milosevic (44)	Dusan Ckrebic (58) Radisa Gacic (47)**
Slovenia	Milan Kucan (45)	Stefan Korosec (48) Franc Setinc (57)
Vojvodina	Djordje Stojisic (58)	Bosko Krunic (56)
Yugoslav People's Army	(not yet announced)	

\* Fair to good chance of being rejected.

\*\* Fair chance of rejection.

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