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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.

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.

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.

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.

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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TCS 2719/90 24 January 1990

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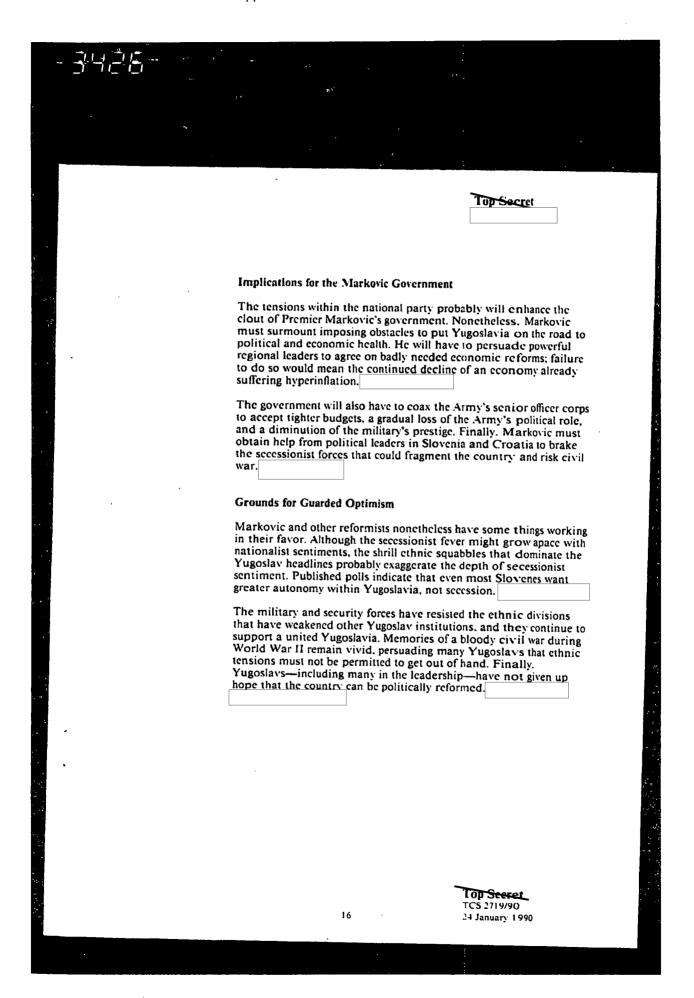
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