

Plus Ca Change

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Milosevic has changed his cabinet but not his policies.

In his latest cabinet reshuffle, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic dropped two vice presidents and eleven ministers. However, despite the degree of turn-over, the changes do not herald any deviation from the current political course.

The new appointees appear to be from the same stock as the individuals they are replacing, all of whom had demonstrated loyalty to Milosevic over many years. They come from all three ruling parties: Milosevic's Socialist Party (SPS), his wife Mira Markovic's Yugoslav United Left (JUL) and Vojislav Seselj's Radical Party.

Of the three parties, the Radicals have done best out of the reshuffle since they had previously not had any members in the Yugoslav government. Now they hold two vice-presidential and three ministerial seats.

The reshuffle should not, however, be interpreted as a triumph for Seselj. Rather it is a restructuring of the federal government so that it mirrors the make-up of the Serbian government, in which Milosevic enjoys absolute power and Seselj's party was already represented. Montenegro, supposedly Serbia's partner in the Yugoslav federation, had no say.

Milosevic has carried out the reshuffle in his time-honoured fashion, ditching former associates by appointing them as advisers. The major casualty of the reshuffle is Zoran Lilic, the vice president, who has been appointed Milosevic's adviser for economic relations with foreign countries.

Lilic was generally viewed as one of Milosevic's three closest associates, together with Nikola Sainovic, another Yugoslav vice president, and Borka Vucic, Milosevic's key financial aid. Lilic had been Yugoslav president himself before Milosevic, was the original SPS candidate in Serbia's last presidential elections and is a vice president of the SPS.

As a trusted lieutenant, Lilic was the third member of a team including Sainovic and Vucic, which negotiated on Milosevic's behalf co-operation with China and the trade of military hardware with Libya. Sainovic has been indicted for war crimes by The Hague Tribunal and Vucic has been prohibited from travelling to the European Union and had her foreign bank accounts frozen.

Lilic's dismissal is attributed to his alleged desire to join the political movement which has just been founded by former Yugoslav Army chief-of-staff Gen. Momcilo Perisic. That said, just a week earlier at the last meeting of the SPS executive board, everything appeared fine between Lilic and Milosevic.

At that meeting, Milosevic urged "each individual to give his all." He said that the party would no longer pardon the mistakes of its officials, of government ministers, company directors and mayors. It was a threat which analysts believed heralded further purges, and likely still not the last.

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