

Thousands Mark Tito's Death Anniversary in Serbia

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Thirty-six years after Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito died, several thousand of his admirers paid tribute to him in Belgrade and remembered what they believe were better times. Carrying flowers, Communist flags and pictures of Tito, several thousand people from all over the former Yugoslav region gathered on Wednesday in front of the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade to mark the 36th anniversary of his death on May 4, 1980. Some came on buses organised to transport Tito's admirers from as far away as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

"May 4 [represents] nostalgia, and also as time passes, we see that in the past we used to live better," said Boris Bilicic, the head of the Association of Anti-Fascists from Zagreb, who told BIRN that this was the fifth time he and his group had come to Belgrade to commemorate Tito's death. Bilicic admitted however that he had seen few young people among the largely elderly mourners marking the anniversary at the House of Flowers, Tito's mausoleum at the museum complex. "In Zagreb, just like it is here, one has to work. And if younger people wish to come on work days, then they have to take a day off, which is hard to get. Because this is capitalism," he said. A family from Bosnia and Herzegovina with two small children wearing military caps saluted outside House of Flowers. The children's uncle, who gave his name as Svjetlan, said he hoped they would embrace Tito's heritage and ideology. "They are interested in all that, they also watch films about [Tito's] Partisans. Besides, their grandfather is a huge communist. However, it is up to them to decide whether they will love it or not," he said. Also in attendance were some of Tito's relatives, the Alliance of Associations of the National Liberation War Veterans of Serbia and other veterans' organisations. Josip Broz Tito ruled Yugoslavia from its formation in 1945 to his death in 1980, after leading the Partisans during World War II. Because of his non-aligned diplomatic stance, he was admired by many in the West as a benign dictator, and was praised for maintaining peaceful coexistence between the peoples of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was the only socialist country to successfully escape from the Soviet Union's dominance, splitting with Stalin in 1948 to pursue a neutral foreign policy during the Cold War. The country fell apart just over ten years after Tito's death in 1980. Tito was laid to rest at the Belgrade's House of Flowers on May 8, 1980, at what the media reported as one of the largest statesmen's funeral. The House of Flowers is one of the best-kept memorial complexes in the region, while monuments to Tito elsewhere in the region have been removed since Yugoslavia collapsed. Apart from the veterans' associations and ordinary mourners, there were also vendors using the opportunity to sell souvenir photos, books, flags and badges dedicated to the late president. One of them, an 86-year-old who called himself "Comrade Mitrovic", said he sells photos and badges at the Museum of Yugoslav History every May 4 to people who also feel nostalgic for Tito's era. "People buy these things so they can recall the better life they once had. We have never lived better [than under Tito's rule] and we will never live better," he told BIRN. Ivana NikolicæBIRN 4.5.2016. #JosipBrozTito #Jugoslavija #Yugoslavia #SFRJ #antifašizam #antifascism