

objective of *perestroika*, Republican and local councils will have enhanced powers and responsibilities over regional and local social, cultural and economic affairs.

As the executive president of the new Supreme Soviet, with the enhanced powers attached to that position, Gorbachev's leadership position has clearly been strengthened by these institutional innovations. At the crucial Central Committee Plenum, from 4 to 7 February (hereafter the February Plenum), on the new Soviet Party Platform, Gorbachev gave a further, dramatic and enlarged perspective of his evolving conception of executive power and democratic processes that would bring about a "humane democratic socialism." Thus the new political system he is fashioning will be a "law-based state" and a self-governing society, subject to a constitution which will "stand for the diversity of modes of ethnic life" and will involve the creation of legal conditions opening up "the possibility for diverse forms of federative ties" on a voluntary basis. With such language Gorbachev seemed to be leaving the nature of the future of the relations between the republics and the centre open to a very broad construction, perhaps intended to suggest to the more secessionist-minded nationalities that what might well eventuate would be an association of free nations.

In addition to the acceptance of political pluralism and the consequential fundamental change in Party-State relations, noted further below, Gorbachev called at the Plenum for the immediate introduction of a presidential form of government that would decisively establish the separation of powers between the executive, the judiciary and representative institutions. Thus the State President would have the specially legitimating feature of an elective office; the incumbent would appoint his own cabinet of executive officers, and his hold on office would, as well as his election, be independent of the will of the Soviet Party Politburo and Central Committee. Gorbachev justified this sweeping extension of executive power as urgently necessary for the effective implementation of the policy of *perestroika*, thereby, in effect, indicating that the proposed presidency would take over completely the centralizing and coordinating role in the country at large, one that could not now be performed by the Soviet Communist Party in its present state of reorganization or, indeed, in the future role he envisaged for the Party.