

Power lies with federal army chiefs

WHEN the Yugoslav Army chief of staff's General Blagoje Adzic pledged to wage war in Slovenia until his troops gain control, he demonstrated the crippled condition of the country's civilian federal authorities. The armed forces are nominally responsible to the presidency. But it is clear that the military leadership is acting with almost total independence.

Yugoslavia has three branches of federal power: the presidency, the parliament and the government. The presidency has eight members, one from each of the six republics and two provinces, and is the country's highest constitutional authority. Each region takes it in turn to head the presidency for one year. The intention was to make sure that no one nationality could dominate. However, the arrangement was a recipe for political paralysis.

The presidency reflects the wider divisions of Yugoslavia. On one side are Slovenia and Croatia, usually backed by Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; on the other are Serbia, the Serbian-con-

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in Belgrade

trolled provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and Montenegro. In May, Serbia was supposed to hand the leadership of the presidency to Croatia, but refused to do so, thus depriving Yugoslavia of a legal head of state and head of the armed forces.

On Sunday night, Serbia lifted its veto after pressure from the EC, and a non-Communist from Croatia, Stipe Mesic, became president. But if the EC thought this would break the political logjam, it was deluding itself. For Yugoslavia's military leaders are mostly Serbian Communists who are sworn enemies of Mr Mesic, and have no intention of obeying his orders. In addition, Serbia's representative on the collective presidency, Borisav Jovic, sees no point in co-operating with Mr Mesic, who is committed to a "union of sovereign states" as opposed to the Serbian desire for a more centralised Yugoslavia. Mr Jovic

can count on the support of Kosovo and Vojvodina, since Serbia has stripped these two of their autonomy.

The picture is complicated by Slovenia regarding itself as independent and so no longer obliged to attend sessions of the presidency. "The balance of power on the presidency can be neither the basis for an agreement on equal terms, nor for negotiations on mutual relations," said Janez Drnovsek, Slovenia's member of the presidency.

Parliament is relatively weak, having been used by Tito for decades as a virtual rubber stamp for Communist Party decrees. The government is headed by Ante Markovic, the prime minister, and the organ of power on which the EC has pinned its hopes for a solution. Such hopes are probably vain. In almost three years of office, Mr Markovic has proved incapable of stopping each republic from going its own way. Armed militias have sprung up with the government powerless to intervene. Mr Markovic's attempt

to set up a democratic, all-Yugoslav political party to support his government has collapsed.

Federal control of the economy is feeble, spectacularly demonstrated in December when Serbia's state bank made a loan to the Serbian Government of 18bn dinars (then worth about £800m). This amounted to robbing the Yugoslav National Bank, since the Serbian bank itself had no funds.

Mr Markovic has made it plain that the Yugoslav army leadership has not kept him informed of every move made in the past week. He has hinted that he regards the force used as unacceptable. Understandably, the leaders of Slovenia were sceptical that the federal government could keep its side of the bargain in the ceasefire, agreed on Sunday. Their suspicions have been justified.

In Mr Markovic's native Croatia, there is talk that he would like to set himself up as a strongman to rule Yugoslavia. The reality is that real power rests with the presidents of the six republics and the armed forces.