

Republics warned of disaster

By John Kampfner
In Mezhegorye

PRESIDENT Gorbachev told the Soviet Union's independence-seeking nationalities yesterday that the Yugoslav crisis was teaching Europe a lesson about the perils of disunity.

"It reminds us all of how dependent we are on each other," he told a joint news conference with Chancellor Kohl of Germany after talks in the Ukraine.

Mr Gorbachev said: "The risks are huge. It is a lesson for all the peoples of the Soviet Union, a warning, if you wish. It forces us to think and to try to understand that we must go down the road of integration, not disintegration."

Mr Gorbachev, who is struggling to keep his country together in the face of demands for greater sovereignty from most of the Soviet Union's 15 republics, promised: "I will not divert an inch from this path, no matter what the pressures."

He continued: "We cannot break apart. It would pose an enormous risk with unpredictable, difficult, consequences."

Hardliners in Moscow have made clear that they are studying the actions of the Yugoslav army in Slovenia as a possible model for further attacks on the Baltics and other rebel Soviet republics.

But Mr Gorbachev stressed that the new relationship he envisaged with the republics would be based on mutual respect. "I passionately believe in fundamental political change in the Soviet Union, so that we can achieve the renewal of a Union of Sovereign Republics", he said.

Herr Kohl was paying a brief visit to discuss Moscow's efforts to secure western financial aid.