

EXCLUSIVE YUGOSLAVIA'S PRESIDENT
LASHES OUT AT SERBIAN LEADER

Croats fear 'Europe's new Hitler'

THE EUROPEAN 12-14/7/91

YUGOSLAVIA'S President Stipe Mesic launched an astonishing attack this week on Serbia's hard-line leader as the country entered a new stage of its simmering civil war. In an exclusive interview in his office in the Croatian capital Zagreb, Mesic, who is Croatian, told *The European* that Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic had "a huge appetite for territory" and was now behaving like Hitler and Mussolini did in the build-up to the Second World War.

Mesic said that Milosevic only pretended to be interested in protecting the rights of the hundreds of thousands of Serbs living in Croatia and the other Yugoslav republics.

"He is using this as an excuse to gain land," said Mesic. "What is taking place now happened in Europe before the Second World War. You can compare Milosevic to Hitler. Then Hitler kept saying that he wanted to 'protect' Germans who lived outside Germany. Now Milosevic says that he wants to 'protect' Serbs living outside Serbia when he is actually attacking other nations."

Mesic said: "This is strong language. But it is important that Europe and the rest of the world realise that he is an imperialist."

Mesic, 56, is a Croatian lawyer and a former communist who was jailed for two years in the 1970s for his liberal views. He now describes himself as a Christian Democrat. His recent election to Yugoslav's revolving, eight-man presidency was blocked by the Serbian leadership in Belgrade until pressure from the EC, following the attack on Slovenia, forced the Serbs to back down.

Sitting in shirtsleeves and chain-smoking throughout his first major interview since taking office, he made it clear that he was not a neutral president. He is adamant that the break-up of Yugoslavia is inevitable and unstoppable and that the only solution to full-scale civil war is the acceptance by the Serbs of a loose association of sovereign states modelled on the EC.

If the Serbs try to prevent other republics becoming independent then "Yugoslavia would vanish amid a great deal of bloodshed". The timing of Mesic's statement is crucial. It comes as an EC monitoring team begins its efforts

Simon Freeman
ZAGREB

to ensure that all sides observe the terms of the three-month cooling-off period negotiated on the Adriatic island of Brioni.

Mesic has now made it clear that neither Croatia nor Slovenia will give up their dreams of sovereignty and that other republics - Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia - will soon follow suit.

"I am not neutral," Mesic said. "I am a Croat. I want to protect Croatia but not at anyone's expense. Let everyone live at their own expense and with their own resources." The EC-brokered truce merely gave time for Yugoslavs and Europe to realise the price of failure to reach a lasting settlement. He said: "If you imagine Europe as a house and Yugoslav as a room in the house, it is obvious that if the room catches fire so does the house."

He dismissed the idea of a European or United Nations peace-keeping force, now being urged by senior members of the governing Croatian Democratic Union Party (CDU) of president Franjo

Tudjman. That, he said, would solve nothing. Mesic's stance will not please senior Croat politicians, who told *The European* that outside military help was vital in eastern Croatia, where the army and extremist Serbs have been battling Croat defence units all week. Ante Beljo, general secretary of the CDU, said: "We want EC

or UN peace-keeping troops. The European observers who are coming here must threaten the army with that. The army has moved into eastern Croatia. They want to destroy as much as possible.

"It is a very dangerous situation. They are bringing in Serbian reservists to reinforce them. We are being occupied by a Serbian army. But we will not give in. We will fight them. We, the Croats, and the Slovenes, will not give up our independence. The people have voted in both republics for that." He accused Milosevic of wanton abuse of human rights in the Albanian province of Kosovo and said that the Serbs had ensured there were no Albanian doctors or policemen there to treat the sick or keep order.

Such behaviour by the Serbian leadership in Belgrade meant, he said, that Yugoslavia had already been crippled. All that remained now was to negotiate the terms of a peaceful dissolution. But, what if the army refused to retreat and actually attacked Croatia, as many people in Zagreb fear?

"Europe must tell the army that it cannot do that. Europe's peace depends on the army realising that."

**'Yugoslavia
would vanish
amid great
bloodshed'**

**'Milosevic
has a huge
appetite
for
territory'**



Milosevic

- President Mesic