

Bloodshed mars EC

talks with Yugoslavs

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EUROPEAN and Yugoslav leaders yesterday held talks on the country's crisis against a background of further ethnic bloodshed and bombings in Croatia.

Seven more people were killed yesterday bringing the number of deaths in the last week to at least 57.

The renewed violence prompted Yugoslavia's state presidency to call for a halt to the fighting. The eight-man collective presidency, the highest state body and supreme commander of the army, said at a meeting in Belgrade it was requesting "an urgent ceasefire as the main condition for seeking a political solution."

But with the presidency split along familiar lines between Serbia and Croatia, it is difficult to see what measures it can take to stop the growing violence.

Yesterday's statement was issued as the foreign ministers of Italy, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, met in the Adriatic city of Dubrovnik for a two-day session, with Yugoslavia's instability dominating the

agenda. Mr Ante Markovic, the Yugoslav prime minister, attended. The foreign ministers will be joined by their prime ministers today. Leaders from Croatia and Slovenia, which declared independence on June 25, will meet separately with the European leaders.

Yesterday Serbian guerrillas killed a Croatian policeman in an ambush near the Adriatic coast and three policemen were crushed to death when a Yugoslav army tank smashed through their patrol car near Kostajnica in central Croatia, police said.

They said a German journalist and two other policemen were shot dead in villages near Kostajnica, 80km southeast of the capital Zagreb, and a fierce battle raged for several hours in nearby Glina.

Three more soldiers from the Croat national guard were killed in overnight clashes.

The violence in Croatia since the republic declared independence has forced 44,316 people to flee strife-torn regions according to figures released yesterday by the Red Cross.