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move to recognise the independence of Slovenia and Cro atia. But the smidereference to the Austro-Hungarian empire’s domination of large parts of the Balkans, not to speak of Germany’s support for the Nazis during the second world war, was not lost on public opinion. Even if Mr Mitterrand’s suspicions of German empire-building were plausible, they would still not justify the finality of a Yugoslavia at all costs. What appeared to be a sensible policy only a few months ago has been overtaken by events and has become more and more unreal- istic. It is no such as those of the legendary Dutch lad who stuck his finger in the hole in the dike.

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between Croats and Serbs, countless thousands of whom died in various conflicts. The passion- ate support given by fans to Croatia and Slovenia has already disappeared in Yugoslavia. But it must clarify its ultimate political objectives in offering its help, otherwise what is it doing in Yugoslavia at all?

The EC is found wanting with Yugoslavia fast sliding into civil war, it is right that the European Community should be making efforts to stem the bloodshed and help find a peaceful solution to the country’s future. The EC, with which Yugoslavia has trade links and which might have a role to play in the eventual resolution of the conflict, ought to be more involved. The EC relies on the momentum of the majority of the republics to undertake such a task.

Yet the means so far employed by the Community or any country have been derisory as those of the legendary Dutch lad who stuck his finger in the hole in the dike. The decision this week to increase the number of EC peace monitors from 50 to 150 and cover operations to areas in Croatia, where scores of Croats and Serbs have been killed over the past few days, can do little to stem the relentless tide of ethnic conflict.

Neither the EC nor anybody else can impose a solution on the Yugoslav people. But the EC must clarify its ultimate political objectives in offering its help; otherwise what is it doing in Yugoslavia at all? Is this the aim still to preserve the Yugoslav federation as a single state or are the Community and the US now prepared to contemplate a break-up of the country and to forge links with its former constituent republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, which have already declared their independence?

Opinions are clearly divided within the Community, reflecting historical alliances which have no part in an objective analysis of the situation in Yugoslavia. For Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany and his Christian Democrat supporters appear to be anxious to recognise the independence of Croatia and Slovenia here and now, while the Community is still in the process of forging new relations with eastern Europe.

The era of great empires in the Balkans is over,” Mr Mit- terrand said after his recent meeting with Mr Kohl at which he apparently persuaded the German leader to delay any