

Tudjman exploits fascist heritage

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CROATIA is celebrating the first birthday of its modern statehood and marking a year of grisly war.

In spite of the ceasefire on January 3, the Croats have never really stopped fighting. The most disturbing problem is how far the war has distorted Croat society. Zagreb's hopes for speedy acceptance by the International Monetary Fund and an influx of Western credits have crumbled over the past six months. Ambitious privatisation plans are still blueprints and the government is in effect running a war economy.

The hundreds of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and parts of Croatia, the crippling of tourism on the Adriatic coast, and the uncertainty

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about Croatian air space have retarded Croatia's progress to a market economy.

It is no longer possible to speak of a free press in Zagreb; newspaper editors, television producers and the Croatian news agency are calibrating their political line

with that of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union of President Tudjman.

The president is now surrounded by advisers from western Herzegovina who believe, like the extreme right parties, in a greater Croatia stretching to the River Drina. It is plain from recent moves by Mr Tudjman that he is not separating himself from the bloody heritage of the wartime Croatian state and pro-fascist Ustashi fighters.

After declaring independence a year ago, Mr Tudjman dismissed a Serbian claim that he was trying to re-establish the pro-fascist Ustashi state. Yet the Croatian political spectrum has shifted to the right in the past months. Croatian television has done little to disperse a sense of uneasiness about the government's political direction. Mirjana Pavelic, the youngest daughter of Hitler's ally, Ante Pavelic, is given much air time and column space. She has reactivated the HOP, the Croatian Liberation Movement which her father, in Argentine exile, set up in 1955 and favours rehabilitation of the Ustashi state. The party has been registered in Zagreb since March.

During the war last autumn there was open criticism of Mr Tudjman's shortcomings as a military leader. Nowadays to attack the president is regarded as unpatriotic. Some commentators believe he is positioning himself for elections. Now he can tap popular right-wing sentiment, but closer to polling day he will shift to the centre. That has yet to happen.

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Tudjman takes advantage

By Phillip Sherwell In Zagreb

BUOYED by his comfortable election victory and conveniently ignored by a world community focusing its ire on Serbian aggression, President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia is quietly enforcing his authoritarian rule.

The former Communist general runs the new-born country like a mediaeval monarch, by-passing the normal decision-making process and surrounding himself with a coterie of courtiers, say critics.

Political opponents, Serbian leaders and the few critical media have borne the brunt of a government crackdown. The human rights monitors Helsinki Watch have condemned the clampdown on the media and free speech.

The mysterious death this week of Blaze Krajevic, a leading Croatian opposition military commander, in a shoot-out at an army roadblock has fuelled fresh speculation.

Krajevic, the Hercegovina com-

mander of the paramilitary wing (HOS) of the ultra-nationalist Croatian Party of Rights, strident opponents of the President, was gunned down at a Croatian military check-point near Mostar, allegedly after his car refused to stop. Ten people died in the exchange.

Only 12 hours earlier, Krajevic's men had entered the Serbian stronghold of Trebinje in eastern Hercegovina, apparently in defiance of official Croatian strategy.

Mr Tudjman is acutely aware that the West, which already has enough on its plate with Serbia and Bosnia, is inclined to turn a blind eye to his domestic authoritarianism.

The only hiccough would be if Croatian forces in Bosnia-Hercegovina attracted international condemnation with actions such as an HOS march on overwhelmingly Serbian Trebinje. Although details of the

shoot-out are shrouded in mystery, there are striking similarities with the killing of the Party of Right's vice-president at a roadblock last autumn.

Mr Tudjman is anxious to present a clean international image. Although he has long believed that Bosnia-Hercegovina is not a viable state and wants to annexe territory if it falls apart, he does not want Croatia to have been perceived as an aggressor.

The former Yugoslav republic is applying for full membership of the Council of Europe, and the President likes to portray his country as liberal, pluralistic, market-orientated and Western, in stark contrast to Communist, undemocratic, Orthodox Serbia.

The first elections since Croatia achieved independence returned Mr Tudjman to the presidential palace

of West's blind eye

and gave his ruling Croatian Democratic Union a comfortable parliamentary majority.

Mr Tudjman, 70, tends to present his ministers and parliament with decisions as *faits accomplis*.

He relies heavily on his kitchen cabinet, the supreme state council, which includes his son Miroslav. The Prime Minister-designate, Mr Hrvoje Sarinic, was previously the President's chief of staff.

Mr Vladimir Seks, the country's state prosecutor and also a senior party leader, has already demonstrated his willingness to crack down on political opponents and free speech. Three journalists from Slobodan Dalmacija, the biggest-selling morning newspaper and the only opposition daily, face prosecution for a satirical article juxtaposing photographs of Mr Tudjman, Hitler and Stalin as students.

And Prof Milorad Pupovac, the leader of the Serbian Democratic Forum, an alliance of liberal Croatian Serbs, has appeared in court after claiming that Orthodox Serbian children are under pressure to learn the catechism and convert to Catholicism in Croatian schools.

Investigations into the murders and disappearances of hundreds of Serbs living in Croatia are progressing at snail's pace, if at all. Zagreb's Serbian Orthodox Museum and the seat of the leading Orthodox churchman in Croatia were blown up in April.

Persecution continues, with Serbians facing summary dismissal from jobs in Croatia and hounding from their homes in a small-scale version of the "ethnic cleansing" practised in Bosnia. About 60 Serbian homes were recently destroyed in the southern Croatian town of Metkovic.

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The knife over Bosnia

Franjo Tudjman's plan for a Greater Croatia involves silencing all critics. Jelena Lovric, a Croat, argues that his intolerant policies helped push his country into war

maintain its editorial independence — has been forced to cease publishing. The government used its financial difficulties as an excuse for closing it down, and refused all offers from businessmen who wanted to buy the paper.

When the *Danas* team, using private capital, tried last month to start *Novi Danas* ("New Danas"), the courts banned the magazine — allegedly because of the name. Meanwhile, the setting up of private television and radio stations has been forbidden by law; state television is heavily biased. The ruling party, and especially its President, are untouchable.

But it is in Bosnia that the real essence of Mr Tudjman's policy is laid bare, in all its anachronistic glory. The policy is based on the idea of territorial expansion.

From the early talks with Mr Milosevic, when the division of Bosnia was agreed in principle (only the borders were yet to be decided), to the meeting in Graz a few months ago, Mr Tudjman has always been careful to ensure that he will receive a slice of the cake. The only thing that has changed is *how* he gets his slice. New maps have already been drawn up. When the international community insisted that frontiers could not be changed, "cantons" were proposed, which is just another way of saying the same thing — a slower path to the same Greater Serbian and Greater Croatian goal.

With the official creation last

The President of Croatia, Franjo Tudjman, looks set to be returned to power. Opinion polls days leading up to yesterday's Croatian elections suggest that he had twice the support of any other candidate. But with Slobodan Milosevic in the lead — Mr Tudjman's electoral success will prove to be bad news for Croats.

Tudjman was ready to accept the shameful agreement earlier this year between him and the Serbs and Croats, in the Austrian town of Graz. According to that agreement, Bosnia-Herzegovina — whose independence Croatia has, in theory, promised — would be divided, like a cake, between Serbs and Croats.

Under international pressure, Tudjman began to back off. How seriously should we take his *volte-face* — and how long will it last? For Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the few regions in which Mr Tudjman has not been consistent. From the start, he has shared a common aim with Milosevic, the Serbian nationalist leader: the division of Bosnia. From that basic principle, everything else has followed.

It is here that Croatian policy reveals its true face. Mr Tudjman was freely elected in 1990, a fact which is often quoted as proof that his government is "democratic". In reality, the behaviour of the Croatian presi-

