

# Plan to honour Ustashe killers outrages minorities in Croatia

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**P**RESIDENT Franjo Tudjman of Croatia sparked a fresh historical controversy at the weekend by proposing that the Croatian dead from the recent war with the Serbs be commemorated at an infamous second world war concentration camp, where Croatian fascists slaughtered tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies.

He further outraged the hostile Serb minority by saying that "all the victims of communism" in Croatia should also be honoured at Jasenovac, the camp in southern Croatia where some of the worst Balkan atrocities of the second world war were perpetrated — overwhelmingly against Croatia's Serbian minority.

Mr Tudjman made his proposals at a congress of his ruling Croatian Democratic Union in Zagreb, which ended on Saturday. The call for a common memorial at Jasenovac, which would commemorate both the victims of Croatian fascism and some of the perpetrators of those war crimes, is seen as the latest element in an attempt partially to rehabilitate the Nazi-allied Independent State of Croatia, the fascist Ustashe state that lasted from 1941 to 1945, and included all modern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"It's an insult", Simon Wiesenthal, the veteran Nazi-hunter, said of Mr Tudjman's call. "He wants to put the guilty next to the victims. Tito had many of the Ustashe killers exe-

cuted after the war. Now Tudjman wants them to be remembered alongside their victims."

Slavko Goldstein, a Zagreb opposition figure and a leader of Zagreb's small Jewish community, said the suggestion could "only cause new disturbances and bad feelings".

"The families of the people killed at Jasenovac will not be satisfied that Ustashe are buried with them. This is a bad thing. It's one thing to be killed on the battlefield. It's another to be killed in a concentration camp," he said.

Mr Tudjman's statement recalls one of his first moves after being elected president in 1990, when he ordered a main Zagreb square dedicated to "the victims of fascism" to be renamed. It is now called "the Square of Croatian Giants".

Mr Tudjman, aged 71, was a young communist partisan officer in the second world war, fighting against the Ustashe. But as a nationalist historian, he has sought for 20 years to revise Croatian history, many say by belittling the atrocities against the Serbs.

Belgrade claims more than 1 million Serbs were slaughtered by the Ustashe. Mr Tudjman has put the figure at 60,000. The true number is not known.

In Croatia, Ustashe memorabilia are now openly traded, and streets have been renamed after Mile Budak, a deputy Ustashe leader. The Croatian parliament recently voted to rename the national currency the *kuna*, which was last in circulation in 1941-45.

The Croatian foreign minis-

try has nominated Ivo Rojnica as a foreign ambassador. As the Ustashe chief in the Dubrovnik region during the second world war, he was, according to Mr Wiesenthal, the first local Croatian leader to order an evening curfew for Jews.

Mr Tudjman said a "special place" in Jasenovac should be reserved for Croats killed in the 1991 war that United Nations officials say is on the brink of reigniting.

Mr Tudjman also paid tribute to Ante Starcevic, a virulent 19th-century Croatian nationalist whom the president hailed as a heroic guiding spirit for today's ruling party.

Starcevic is widely regarded as the intellectual godfather of the Ustashe, whose savage policy against the Serb minority was to kill one-third, expel another third, and convert the remainder to Catholicism. The atrocities shocked even some German and Italian occupying forces in wartime Yugoslavia.

The historian Aleksa Djilas has described the Starcevic ideology as "mystical and fanatical, intolerant and violent, territorially expansionist and nationally homogeneous".

The Serbian insurgents; who seized a quarter of Croatia in the 1991 war, control the Jasenovac site, regarding it as the Serbs' Auschwitz, and are unlikely to surrender it. So Mr Tudjman's proposal has little chance of being implemented. By calling for "reconciliation" at Jasenovac, he was pitting the extremist, fascist wing in his governing party against the moderates, with their roots in the partisan movement.