

Yugoslav and EC politicians seek to avert civil war

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FEDERAL forces in Slovenia are to return to barracks under an agreement reached last night, as Yugoslav politicians and European Community foreign ministers sought to prevent civil war in the country.

The accord - between federal prime minister Ante Markovic and the breakaway Slovene government - appears a cautious breakthrough in halting Yugoslavia's slide into civil war. The troop withdrawals are expected to start today, but it was not clear who would be left in control of Slovenia's international border crossings.

In another step back from the brink, Yugoslavia's eight-man collective presidency elected Mr Stipe Mesic, a Croatian, as head of state - a move that had been blocked for six weeks by the hard-line republic of Serbia.

An end to this deadlock was one of the demands being made by the troika of EC foreign ministers from Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy, on their second emergency mission to Yugoslavia in three days.

The EC ministers flew to Belgrade to press for firm assurances that the federal army would cease its military activities in Slovenia. They

had failed earlier to get replies to warning letters sent after Friday night's abortive compromise proposals.

The ministers, who said they wanted "signatures, not words", planned to go on to Zagreb for assurances from both independence-minded republics of Slovenia and Croatia that they, too, would stick to a ceasefire accord.

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The diplomatic pressure was exerted as the federal army faced a wave of foreign criticism for its military action against Slovenia. The region remained tense, with air raid sirens wailing over the Slovene capital of Ljubljana and reports of a police attack on a Serbian village in east Croatia.

In Washington, the US said it "deplores the intimidation and threats emanating from the high command of the Yugoslav army, which have further raised tensions in the country."

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher said he too would go to Yugoslavia today to help find a diplomatic solution to the crisis indepen-

dently of the EC peace mission. Mr Genscher is chairman of the recently created crisis mechanism body of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe).

A meeting of the CSCE crisis committee could take place in Prague on Wednesday.

Forty people have been reported killed in fighting between federal troops and Slovenia's territorial defence units since the federal army entered the territory on Wednesday night to seize control of Slovenia's border crossings with Austria, Italy and Hungary.

Under last night's agreement, federal troops and tanks bottled up inside Slovenia would go back to barracks, but other federal forces in control of border points might only withdraw a little distance.

The accord nevertheless appeared a step towards establishing negotiations about the military's future role along the republic's borders. It seemed a tentative step towards the federal government establishing a *modus vivendi* with the republic.

The agreement suggests that Mr Markovic is trying to regain control of Yugoslavia's political agenda, which over Continued on Page 16



Keeping watch: A Slovene soldier at Ljubljana airport

Yugoslavia

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the past few days, appeared to slip into the hands of the federal army.

On Saturday the army, which is controlled by hard-line Serb generals, said it would call up reservists and threatened to "take decisive military action" against Slovenia unless it accepted unconditionally a 12-point ceasefire plan.

Neighbouring Croatia, which

declared independence with Slovenia on Tuesday, denounced the army's action against Slovenia as "aggressive and criminal".

In Ljubljana, Slovene deputies gathered in the cellar of the darkened parliament building for fear of air raids. They vowed to forge ahead with plans to sever Slovenia's ties with the multi-ethnic federation.

The parliament called for international EC observers to be sent to Slovenia. Prime Minister Lojze Peterle said the government had received threats of an attack on Ljubljana. "I think only foreign intervention can prevent this," he said.

The Slovene government, confident that it had won the propaganda war, said it would not renounce its declaration of independence.