

# New Slovenia peace effort

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## EC trio back in Belgrade as Yugoslavia teeters on the brink and Foreign Office tells Britons to leave

THE European Community sent three foreign ministers back to Belgrade yesterday in an urgent effort to stop Yugoslavia sliding into civil war. For the second time in three days, the troika — from Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy — tried to persuade Slovenia and Croatia to suspend their declarations of independence in return for the Yugoslavian army's withdrawal to barracks.

At the same time, Foreign Office officials, hoping to take advantage of a lull in fighting, reversed earlier advice telling British tourists to remain in their hotels and began evacuating them from Slovenia last night. The Foreign Office told UK citizens to "leave now if at all possible".

Jets screamed over Ljubljana and other Slovene cities, and air raid sirens sounded. Shooting erupted again on the Austrian-Slovene border, and a Slovene civilian plane made a forced landing in the Austrian town of Klagenfurt yesterday after the pilot feared that Yugoslav fighters were seeking to down it while on a domestic flight to Zagreb.

The Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante

Markovic, flew to Ljubljana in a last-minute move aimed at halting the three days of bloodshed. But in Slovenia he is now hated as the man most responsible for the deaths of some 45 civilians and soldiers during the past three days. While he was away, the three Slovenian members of Yugoslavia's federal government resigned, according to Slovenian radio. No reason was given for the resignations.

The EC backed up its initiative with a threat to freeze all economic aid to Yugoslavia if the warring parties rejected its terms. But, after an all-night session in the cellars of the parliament building, the Slovene parliament said it "condemned the brutal aggression of the Yugoslav army and most decisively rejects the ultimatum of the aggressor".

The army, too, was intransigent. A general of the high command went on televi-

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From Marcus Tanner in Ljubljana  
Tony Barber in Belgrade  
David Connett in London  
and Michael Wise in Vienna

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sion on Saturday night to warn Slovenia that if it did not cease resistance it would face "decisive military action".

Slovene officials claimed that their fledgling defence forces had captured hundreds of Yugoslav prisoners as well as military equipment.

Clashes broke out in Croatia over the weekend with four policemen killed in Gracac, near the Adriatic coast, and heavy gunfire reported elsewhere.

The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, said there was a "very great" danger of killings, "village by village, town by town".

Mr Hurd told BBC Television: "At the end of the day, people cannot be coerced . . . into a particular union. But the sensible answer lies through discussion not through fighting and coercion."

The EC ministers, Gianni de Michelis of Italy, Hans van der Broek of the Netherlands, and Jacques Poos of Luxembourg, were to confer with federal authorities as well as the Presidents of Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia. Despite the failure of their first mission on Friday, when gun battles erupted almost immediately after they had left Yugoslavia, the ministers intended to repeat their same three points for a settlement: a freeze on the declarations of independence, the army's withdrawal, and an end to Serbia's veto on a Croat taking over the federal presidency. Slovene officials said that a meeting of the presidency was due to take

place in Belgrade last night, at which it was hoped that Serbia might lift its veto.

The 35-nation Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe meets in Prague this week. All 35 countries are sending experts to Vienna today to discuss the military implications of the turmoil. The meeting was called by Austria, which fears the EC has misunderstood the crisis. "Anyone who talks of the need to maintain the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia fails to see that . . . the political groups in Yugoslavia can no longer negotiate with each other," said the Austrian Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky.

Milan Kucan, the President of Slovenia, yesterday placed strict limits on the concessions which Slovenia could offer in order to agree to a peace plan. He placed all the blame for the three days of fighting on Mr Markovic. With uncharacteristic passion, he insisted that "Slovenia is at war", and once again said that Slovenia would not retract the republic's declaration of independence.

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