

Yugoslavia needs Western monitors

From Dr Tomaz Mastnak
and others

Sir: Reports from Slovenia indicate that the brutality of the Yugoslav army exceeds that of Soviet forces in the Baltic states. In the first three days of fighting, more than 45 lives have been lost, and 200 people wounded. Most of the casualties are civilian.

Your leading article (27 June) rightly suggests that Western governments share responsibility for this bloodshed. In recent years they spoke softly of the need for democracy in Yugoslavia while failing to oppose either the immense abuse of human rights in Kosovo, or Serbia's drive to dominate the federation. The West has thereby contributed to the very implosion that it wished to avert.

Yugoslavia is currently in such a bad state because it has always been a bad state. Its maze of pseudo-federal structures was designed by Tito's élite to permit the autonomy of Yugoslavia's republics and regions while preserving the unaccountable power of the League of Communists to manage every aspect of political life. There is now no legitimate federal authority.

Only the Federal Presidency is constitutionally empowered to

sanction the use of federal armed forces. This body has not functioned for more than one month, and it is unclear under whose political authority these forces are acting, if any. The use of tanks and jet-fighters against the citizens and freely elected government of Slovenia is a logical outcome of efforts to reform and democratise this pseudo-federation.

In these circumstances, it is not enough for Western governments to condemn the violence of both sides. The immediate need is to ensure a binding ceasefire, so clearing a space for open political negotiations. No political authority in Yugoslavia is competent to resolve the conflict, and events since the departure of the European Community's delegation show that international monitoring will be essential to guarantee a ceasefire. The organisation of a monitoring body should be at the top of the CSCE's and EC's priorities.

Yours faithfully,

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