

MORE THAN a century ago, came one of the great speeches of British public life. Bulgarians, struggling to free themselves from the Turks, were slaughtered: and the great Gladstone spoke in their defence, denouncing the "bashibazouks" and inviting them to leave the land which, for centuries, they had "desolated and profaned".

That speech did not suit the existing Tory government; but it struck home, and the said government was overthrown for its cravenness in dealing with what, for most people in these isles, was a straightforward matter of right and wrong.

So it is today with what is happening over Slovenia and, increasingly, Croatia.

Curiously enough, the "Bulgarian Horrors" which so excited Gladstone would today be considered rather small beer. But the fact is that already the casualties in northern Yugoslavia have exceeded those of the Bulgarian Horrors; and if things proceed as they have been doing, the figures will be very comfortably in excess.

There were this morning rumours in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, that masses of Yugoslav tanks, making war on their fellow citizens, were making for the nuclear reactor in eastern Slovenia. There were rumours to the effect that an artificial Chernobyl would be started "to bring the Slovenes to their senses".

Meanwhile Europe's TV screens show scenes we have not seen for decades. Slovenia looks much like Austria, with which it was once part of the Habsburg Empire — wonderful landscapes, excellent roads, all mod cons. And now we see planes strafing overhead, and women with babies in prams running desperately for shelter as vast tanks rumble through cobbled streets.

APEOPLE whose sin has been to want freedom — freedom to be themselves, within a peaceful and prosperous Europe — face brutal repression.

Europe's foreign policy in this regard has been grotesque: sometimes I wonder if we should not substitute, as the supra-national anthem of the Common Market, for Beethoven's *Freude Schoene Gotterfunken*, the words "Oh, Dear".

The "Oh, Dear" school of foreign policy has been well to the fore of late; in fact, our response has obviously encouraged the most thug-like elements in Yugoslavia to attempt this tragic counter-coup.

"Europe" got stuck over the Gulf, quite rightly, for not agreeing a foreign policy. We, with Mrs Thatcher at the helm, were very good indeed — seeing what needed to be done, and doing it. The Germans bit their fingers. The Belgians rattled — even then, doing so in a way that was both ultra-devilish and insulting to their old ally, Britain.

The French defence minister wobbled, said good things about Saddam, and wobbled again until he was forced out. Now, over Yugoslavia, a line was agreed by the Twelve.

Mr Poos, current chairman for these things, has a responsibility that is usually



Flashpoint: A Yugoslav soldier gestures at two captured Slovenia militia men to remain still and raise their hands

Why Europe must unite in the cause of freedom



by **NORMAN STONE**

rather less than that of the Works Department of Shropshire County Council. With colleagues from Lisbon and Rotterdam he finds himself trying to sort out the Yugoslav mess.

Up to last weekend, "Europe" was presenting the communists in Belgrade with aid — £500 million — and the Italians in particular were well to the fore in uttering warnings.

"Tanks are sometimes the only solution," said Andreotti over Lithuania last January. This was the same Italian who towed thousands of pathetic Albanian refugees out to sea when they attempted to find refuge — clearly intended as a warning to the inhabitants of Yugoslavia as well.

Out of it all, only the Austrians so far emerge with much credit. What a pity that we don't yet have a presentable president to speak Vienna's lines.

To be fair, "Europe" is now back-tracking. The curious thing about a consensus foreign policy is that no one really believes in it very much so they all jump ship when it turns out to be quite wrong.

Our own Douglas Hurd knows full well that, in the end, we are going to have to deal with independent

Slovenia, and probably Croatia as well. Other foreign ministers, in Germany most importantly, are seeing this as well; and such parts of the foreign press that I have seen are now pretty adamant in a cause that, uniquely, unites Ken Livingstone (to whom all honour for speaking out early on) and Margaret Thatcher.

AS AN historian, I am tired of reading the stuff about the "historic" enmity of Serb and Croat. Of course it is true that the line between eastern and western Christianity ran between the Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, and the difference in these religious mentalities of course matters.

But for most of the time the two sides got along rather well; and though there were extreme Croat nationalists who turned Fascist, they were always in a minority, quite incapable of winning power in elections.

No, the reason for the new demands for Croatian and Slovene independence are different. These people are just sick of communism.

Croats and Slovenes voted overwhelmingly against the system. They offered to

remain in a confederation; they got no answer beyond tanks. In Serbia itself communists are much more powerfully entrenched — not least in the army, as we have seen — and they had the power to gerrymander the elections.

But the communists, even in Serbia, would not survive a free election, and if these thug-like generals are repressing Slovenes and Croats, it is really because they know what will happen to them if elections are seriously held.

What now are the "givens" for foreign policy? We could do with another of Mrs Thatcher's splendid speeches (and irony it would be if she consulted Ken Livingstone over its formulation).

Here we have a country that is splitting apart on Europe's edges. The two would-be breakaway parts are fully "European" in every sense, just as, say, Portugal is. They would bring us a great deal in the way of skills and eagerness to prove themselves.

Slovenes, in particular, deserve a leg-up: for centuries they were overshadowed by the rather grander Croats or the Italians, but they slogged their way quite decently, never causing trouble.

This mouse has now roared. In doing so, it should provide "Europe" with a cause that means a great deal more than all of the tiresome chatter from the likes of Signor Andreotti.