

# Republics gain Kohl's backing before EC talks

From John Eisenhammer in Bonn, Mary Hockaday in Prague and Sarah Lambert in Brussels

CHANCELLOR Helmut Kohl pushed Germany further ahead of its European Community partners yesterday with a statement effectively lending support to the independence struggles of Slovenia and Croatia. While in Prague, the first-ever emergency session of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe agreed late last night to offer Yugoslavia a mission of "good offices" to help solve the crisis.

Mr Kohl's comments set the tone for what is likely to be a difficult meeting today when EC foreign ministers meet to discuss the crisis, with some states leaning towards recognising the breakaway republics, and others preferring a more cautious approach.

"The peoples of Yugoslavia must be free to choose their own future," he said. "Free Europe must stand beside them." Mr Kohl said Germany would push for this position to be adopted at the emergency meeting of the EC foreign ministers today in the Hague.

"The importance of the principle of self-determination is that much more evident for Germans," the Chancellor said, "because by means of self-determination our nation was able to regain its unity".

He condemned "in the sharpest manner" the latest threats by the federal army to use force against Slovenia. His Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, said if the Yugoslav army continued to defy the federal authorities, especially if it undertook further actions against the people of Slovenia or Croatia, then Germany would press "for the severest political and economic sanctions".

But the Dutch foreign ministry, which will host the emergency meeting, said yesterday that the question of whether the EC should recognise Slovenia and Croatia as independent republics would not be on the agenda.

The Dutch Foreign Minister, Hans van den Broek, said on Wednesday that the first priority was to try to stop the violence. Thereafter it would be up to the people themselves to decide what form of constitution they wished to adopt.

Today's brief meeting will consider the possibility of enforcing an arms embargo and freezing EC aid to Yugoslavia. There will also be discussion of the proposal, presented in Belgrade by diplomatic representatives of the EC troika, that EC observers be sent to Yugoslavia in consultation with the federal and regional authorities.

In Prague, Soviet objections to send a political mission of "good offices" to Yugoslavia were finally overcome, but Moscow was still objecting to the idea of a CSCE-backed EC-led team of observers to monitor a ceasefire.

This means EC foreign ministers today are likely to press on with organising a team of observers but without the political weight of the 35 CSCE nations.

The head of the Yugoslav delegation, Novak Pribicevic, told journalists after long delays in a response from Belgrade that his government was prepared to accept an offer of good offices and he thought the question of an observer team could be resolved.

"We would prefer a different wording to 'observers' — we would accept a European Community mission to supervise a ceasefire." An EC delegate, however, said Belgrade was making unacceptable textual demands and asking for conditions which undermined the EC troika deal.

The meeting was also strained by resentment among non-European Community states including Canada, Sweden and Czechoslovakia that the EC was dominating events. A paragraph allowing non-Community observers was included in the initial proposal to appease these sentiments and it was hoped any good offices mission could be presented as a CSCE creation.

Delegates refused to accept that the slow progress towards consensus compromised this first test of CSCE emergency mechanisms. "We are trying to find a new solution overnight ... even silly things like who is paying the hotel bills ... whatever we decide is a precedent for the future," said Ernst Sucharipa, head of the Austrian delegation. "We are building on the European Community [initiative] but adding the weight of 35 nations."

The Italian Foreign Minister, Gianni de Michelis, who took part in the recent EC troika initiative, was received at the meeting during an official visit to Prague. He tried to inject a sense of urgency and told delegates: "It's your political and moral duty to help ward off developments in Yugoslavia." He said any CSCE initiative would have "high political value".

■ BUCHAREST — Western governments have dangerously ignored Balkan insecurities and the potential for conflict throughout Eastern Europe, according to an international symposium opened by the Nato Secretary-General, Manfred Wörner, in Bucharest yesterday, writes Marc Champion.

The symposium was overshadowed by fighting in neighbouring Yugoslavia, which some speakers took as a harbinger of worse to come. It was attended by security specialists from Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union. "What do we say to the people in the streets of Bucharest who tell me: 'Slovakia and Croatia now, maybe Transylvania will be next,' " said John Edwin Mroz, President of the Institute for East-West Security Studies in New York.

Both Mr Wörner and the specialists were short on solutions. Mr Wörner encouraged Romania to co-operate with Nato but said: "What Nato cannot offer is immediate membership, and you know it."