

EC pursues delicate balancing act of support for Yugoslavia

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By David Buchan and Ronald van de Krol in The Hague

EC FOREIGN ministers meeting in The Hague yesterday made it clear that the Community was "not on the side of Belgrade, but of Yugoslavia" in the words of Mr Hans van den Broek, the Netherlands foreign minister.

It was a delicate balancing act. Mr van den Broek spelled out that "in asking for a suspension of the implementation of the declarations [by Slovenia and Croatia] of independence, the EC means a return to the position of June 25". Only after that date did Slovene paramilitary forces start to enforce the independence declaration by displacing federal police and customs officers along the republic's borders.

Mr van den Broek, who as president of the EC Council of Ministers will lead the third troika mission in a week to Yugoslavia, gave two reasons why the Community was pursuing its policy of supporting Yugoslavia, and not any one side in the conflict.

First, the EC was urging the federal presidency - whose head, Mr Stipe Mesic, was able to assume office last week after EC intervention - to exert



Hans van den Broek: not on the side of Belgrade

full "political and constitutional control over the Yugoslav People's Army".

Second, while much of the federal governments' ultimatum to Slovenia was "in line with the EC proposals", Mr van den Broek said, "without any doubt, the deadlines [in Belgrade's ultimatum] will have to be extended."

The moves to suspend Ecu857m (£600m) of outstanding EC financial aid to Yugo-

slavia, to cut off all arms sales to Belgrade and the republics and to appeal to other states to do the same, won quick approval from the Twelve.

In contrast, deep divisions were revealed over whether, and how, to brandish the weapon of diplomatic recognition of Slovenia and Croatia over Belgrade's head. Mr Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, said he would have liked a clear reference to the diplomatic threat in yesterday's EC communiqué, and would push hard for it once more, if the Yugoslav army started shooting again.

Virtually all other states were more exercised about the consequences elsewhere in eastern Europe of seeming to back secession in Yugoslavia. Denmark alone appears to champion both Balkan and Baltic self-determination.

Leading the opposition to early recognition was Mr Roland Dumas, the French foreign minister, who warned of the need to avoid Yugoslav republics becoming "too openly under foreign influence".

He clearly had Austria in mind.