

Peace deal fails to calm fears of war

SERBIA, Yugoslavia's biggest republic, staged military exercises yesterday only hours before a European Community-brokered peace settlement was due to take effect in the country. The muscle-flexing raised fears in Slovenia and Croatia that the settlement, seen as a last chance to avert civil war, would prove as fragile as two previous EC-sponsored truces.

"Peace starts from today," a triumphant Yugoslav President, Stipe Mesic, said after the talks. "I think we have got away from war." But even as the deal was hammered out, a nine-hour battle raged on Sunday between Croatia's National Guard, Serbian militants and Yugoslav forces trying to separate them. At least five people were killed in the clashes around the village of Tenja in eastern Croatia.

The Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic, travelled to the town of Aradac in the Serbian-controlled province of Vojvodina to watch manoeuvres by the province's territorial defence forces. It was the first time he had reviewed a military exercise since Yugoslavia's crisis erupted on 25 June with Slovenia's and Croatia's declarations of independence. A statement said the purpose of the exercise was to "test the mobilisation readiness, marksmanship training and tactics, as well as the combat readiness" of the forces.

Mr Milosevic broke his silence on the crisis last Saturday by calling on Serbia's citizens to prepare for war. Although he told the units yesterday they would "never get any tasks which were not in the interest of peace and freedom", he has joined Yugoslav army generals in calling for intervention in Croatia to protect the republic's 600,000 Serbian minority.

The peace plan provoked heated debate among Slovenia's lead-

From Tony Barber
in Belgrade

ers, with some officials disputing the view of President Milan Kucan that the concessions were reasonable and would not affect Slovenia's move to full independence.

Croatia's leaders said they doubted the agreement would deter Serbia and the Serbian-led Yugoslav army from seeking to impose their will on Croatia. "The military leaders reject all these agreements. I am afraid they will not stick to any deal at all," said Croatia's Defence Minister, Sime Djodan. "Maybe a miracle can happen and Milosevic or another group in Serbia can grasp the tragedy of war and bring positive change."

The army made clear at the Brioni talks that it still held the upper hand over the civilian federal leadership. A Supreme Command statement said that the Defence Minister, Gen Veljko Kadijevic, had warned Slovene leaders at the talks that if they did not release all Yugoslav soldiers "the Supreme Command staff would act independently and carry out combat operations in Slovenia". It said President Mesic, who as head of state is nominally in charge of the armed forces, had merely been "informed of the demand" — a broad hint that the army is paying little attention to the provisions of the constitution.

The army's weekly, *Narodna Armija*, accused Germany and Austria of instigating Slovenia's secession. "Germany and Austria were not only acquainted with the plan for Slovenia's move to independence and forcible secession from Yugoslavia but, directly or indirectly, actually participated in its preparation and realisation," it said.