

Europe exorcises ghost of Gulf war

WHEN European Community foreign ministers gather again in The Hague today, there will be no complacency about their peace-making efforts in Yugoslavia. All will feel gratified, however, that over this crisis the Twelve have reacted, perhaps for the first time, like a real world power.

The impact of the Yugoslav crisis on the Community's negotiations on union are likely to be very significant. A main goal of union is the development of a common foreign policy. For some, the EC's response to the Yugoslav crisis shows such a policy already exists.

For now, all energies remain focused on ensuring that the latest truce is made to stick. But already, the different players in the EC's union negotiations are beginning to play the Yugoslav card.

Current drafts on political union envisage a common foreign policy governed by strict rules. Heads of government would select areas of common interest to members; foreign ministers would conduct policy in these areas and could, if they chose, implement them by majority vote. Once common policy was agreed, countries would not be able unilaterally to take contradictory action.

Britain welcomes a greater co-ordination of national foreign pol-

On Yugoslavia, the EC has reacted as a real world power — and this will affect negotiations on a common foreign policy, writes David Osborne in Brussels

icies, but is firmly opposed to any straight-jacketing of member states or use of majority voting. British officials are clear about what the Yugoslav experience demonstrates: that the current arrangements for foreign policy co-operation can work very well and should not be abandoned.

Support for the British view can perhaps be expected from Denmark, Ireland and Portugal. But the other members, inspired by the taste of world leadership from the Yugoslav crisis, are likely to pursue their vision of a more

structured common foreign policy with even more enthusiasm.

Jacques Delors, the EC Commission President, has made his move. On Monday he argued that the Yugoslav situation showed the sense in creating a rapid reaction European defence force. It would have given the EC an "additional instrument" in combating the collapse of Yugoslav order.

Britain would point out that it supports the formation of such a force — on condition that it is not under the political control of the EC. But that, clearly, is what Mr

Delors has in mind. He and others will argue that it is the Community, with all its economic and diplomatic leverage, that has emerged as the main player in Yugoslavia and that therefore it must be the Community that takes the reins of a future defence force.

At last month's Luxembourg summit, the EC leaders left open the question of majority voting. At first sight, the Yugoslavia experience has done nothing to dampen the enthusiasm for majority voting in the areas of common foreign and security policy. Those coun-

tries claiming to support majority voting — which implies them accepting the principle that they could be overruled in the Community — include those which could claim world status on their own: Germany, France and Italy. A spokesman for the French Foreign Minister, Roland Dumas, was firm about the implications. "It is obvious that if we accept the principle of majority voting, we accept the principle that we may be overruled on foreign policy sometimes," he said yesterday.

A German spokesman agreed that with majority voting Germany would last week have been formally outvoted when it wanted to signal a readiness to recognise Slovenia and Croatia. Germany and others point to the probable enlargement of the Community in the future as another reason why majority voting will become indispensable. Without it, they say, foreign policy would never be agreed.

The Community's Yugoslav initiative may not succeed. But the experience has already helped to exorcise the ghost of the Gulf conflict, where the EC performed so poorly. The appetite of most of the member states for a greater world role for the Twelve can only be enhanced.