

The EC's role in Yugoslavia

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SO FAR, so good. The European Community foreign ministers, meeting today in The Hague to consider their next moves in the Yugoslavian crisis, have cause for limited self-congratulation. The EC's first serious attempt to intervene collectively in a crisis on its border was an *ad hoc* affair, but it has proved its worth. Member states with rather divergent views have come together to produce a policy that is more than a lowest common denominator.

The fragile truce brokered by three foreign ministers is, however, no more than that. Yugoslavia could easily stumble into renewed conflict at any moment, and if any of the major players actively wants war, they may yet have it. What the EC has done is to buy time and to provide a framework within which the issues might be resolved if the will is there, as well as offering observers whose presence may be expected to make people behave with greater circumspection. It has also issued a warning that there would be a high price to pay for further violence.

It is appropriate that international intervention should have come from the EC and not from the United States, or from the UN, which would inevitably have acted far more slowly and bureaucratically. Yugoslavia is a European problem in three distinct senses. A major conflagration would almost inevitably have grave implications for the rest of Europe, as refugees spilled across neighbouring borders and as those nations that have ethnic kinfolk within the republic pondered their duty to them. A bungled approach to the Yugoslav crisis could have sent misleading signals to the Baltic states, to other Soviet republics and to restive minorities within

several former Warsaw Pact nations. Finally it would have been intolerable for Europe — if the concept is to have any moral meaning — to have acquiesced in the rape of two democratic republics by a military machine whose loyalty is either to its own version of communist totalitarianism or to a chauvinistic and dictatorial Serbian regime.

From the point of view of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, and of those who still claim to speak for the federation, the active goodwill of the EC is important. The EC has both carrots and sticks at its disposal. Whether Yugoslavia survives as a loose confederation or splits into a number of internationally recognised states, economic support from the EC will be essential for many years. Freezing EC aid last week drew attention to the power of the purse. The possibility that Slovenia and Croatia might be recognised as independent states by members of the EC (as we have recommended) must carry a sobering implication. If federal forces resumed their attacks on EC-recognised states, appeals for military aid could be considered on merit rather than being circumscribed by traditional notions of national sovereignty.

The most urgent item on today's EC agenda will be the evolving European response to the crisis. But soon foreign ministers will have to see what broader lessons can be learnt from the events of recent days. The crisis points up the urgent need for a European defence component to underpin a common foreign and security policy. In addition, it underlines the importance of defining guiding principles for the recognition of new states. *Ad hoc*-ery has worked — so far — but it is no substitute for a coherent policy.