

Decision represents breakthrough for 'supranational' security policy

EC approves Yugoslavia ceasefire observer mission

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John Palmer in The Hague

EUROPEAN Community foreign ministers yesterday gave their formal blessing for the dispatch of the first EC ceasefire mission since the foundation of the Community in 1957. The departure of the group to Yugoslavia represents a major breakthrough in the long-standing campaign for a common "supranational" European foreign and security policy.

A symbol of the breakthrough was the inclusion of representatives of the European Commission in the civilian ceasefire monitoring force which is expected to be in place early next week. The peace keeping force will operate under the European Community's own flag — 12 stars on a blue backcloth — and the EC symbol will be worn promi-

nently wherever the mission goes.

The EC mission in Yugoslavia will concentrate on supervising the return to barracks of federal Yugoslav and Slovene forces when it begins operations, probably next week. But the foreign ministers agreed that the Community's peacekeeping operations might have to be extended not only to Croatia but to Serbia — the largest republic in the Yugoslav federation.

The ministers made it clear that the EC operation could not be extended to Serbia without the agreement of the authorities in Belgrade. They feel it may be necessary if the EC observer force is to be sure of tracking the withdrawal to their barracks of federal Yugoslav troops currently in the breakaway republics of Croatia and Slovenia.

The foreign ministers yester-

day greeted the news of the Slovene parliament's acceptance of the EC peace plan as a big boost for its chances of success.

"This is a very significant fact which we welcome," said the Dutch foreign minister, Hans van den Broek, who presided over yesterday's meeting. "This decision means that the Brioni agreement can be a real vehicle to help Yugoslavia achieve stability."

The president of the EC Council of Ministers stressed it was now up to the Yugoslav federal authorities to give the Brioni agreement "their full endorsement". This he said was vital if the European Community was to be able to assist in getting negotiations under way about a new constitution for Yugoslavia.

The foreign ministers agreed that, for the present, the 50-strong group of ceasefire observers would be restricted to

participants from EC member states and the European Commission. But they left open the possibility of seeking additional contingents from member countries of the Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) if that is acceptable to the Yugoslav authorities.

Finland, Sweden and Canada have already offered to send personnel to take part in the monitoring force. Although this will contain military experts, it will be civilian in character, will not carry arms, and will be escorted by both Yugoslav federal and republican forces.

Commission officials were last night hailing the decision to include them as part of the EC mission as a breakthrough in Commission president Jacques Delors' campaign for greater Commission involvement in a common European foreign and security policy.