

# Slovenia ratifies EC peace plan

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From Marcus Tanner  
in Belgrade

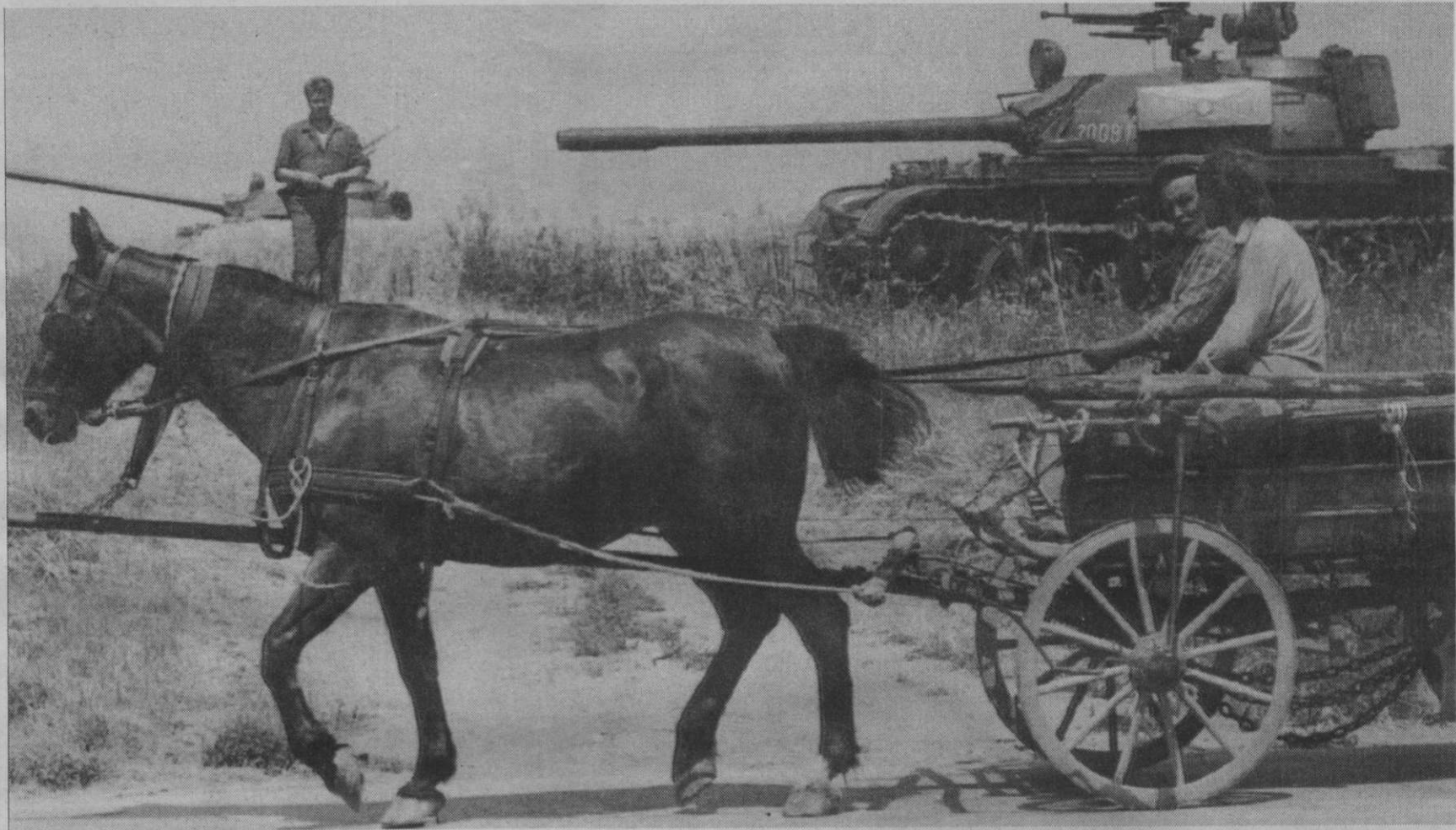
THE SLOVENE Parliament voted yesterday to accept the peace plan put forward by the troika of European Community foreign ministers in Brioni. The decision removed one of the last obstacles to the arrival of an EC delegation which will supervise the observation of the ceasefire.

Slovene delegates ratified the proposal by a majority of 189 to 11. The accord called on Slovenia and Croatia to take no further steps towards independence from Yugoslavia for three months. It also called on Yugoslav army units to return to barracks, and for the demobilisation of Slovenia's Territorial Defence Force.

Defending the accord, Milan Kucan, the President of Slovenia, said it did not mean Slovenia was backtracking over the issue of independence. "Today is the sixteenth day of our independence and the fifteenth day of the war," he said. "Those few days have changed our little world, Yugoslavia and Europe."

But Mr Kucan called on the delegates to vote in favour of the accord, which he said represented the successful "internationalisation" of the Yugoslav crisis. "Only international controls can halt the vengeful march of the Yugoslav army against Slovenia," he said.

But many Slovene delegates remained unmoved. They complained that Mr Kucan's team in Brioni conceded too much ground to the Yugoslav authorities. "This is a bitter pill," said Joze Pucnik, leader of the ruling coalition, Demos, although he called on Slovenes to "grit their teeth and swallow it" rather than sacrifice European sympathy by rejecting the accord. Leaders of the Slovene Peasants Party complained Slovenia made no political use of its



Life goes on as normal for villagers living near the Croatian border town of Batina, where Yugoslav army tanks maintain a watch on the republic *Photograph: David Rose*

"military victory" against the Yugoslav army.

The ratification of the Brioni agreement by Slovenia and Croatia opens the way for the arrival in Yugoslavia of a 35-member delegation of EC observers. Yugoslavia's collective State Presidency has yet to ratify the agreement, but the eight-member body is not expected to obstruct it. The delegation, which will include military and civilian representatives,

will ensure that both the Yugoslav army and the Slovene forces observe the terms of the ceasefire.

The biggest question mark is over the delegation's possible involvement in Croatia. The Serb-Croat dispute remains at the centre of the crisis, and any attempt by the West to solve the situation in Slovenia without reference to Croatia may be impossible.

The Croatian government insists that Yugoslav army units in

Croatia must withdraw to barracks, and it has tried to persuade the EC team to visit Croatia. The Europeans have proved reluctant to do this, as it would involve the EC in the bitter guerrilla war between Serbs and Croats in Slavonia, in eastern Croatia.

Yesterday it was unclear whether the European observers would enter Croatia. The EC's reluctance to get involved in the fighting in Slavonia is under-

standable. Any interference in this dispute would encounter passionate opposition from Serbia and the Yugoslav army, endangering the entire mission.

Serbia insists parts of Slavonia must be ceded to Serbia if Croatia breaks away from Yugoslavia, and it regards the Serb-run Yugoslav army as an indispensable proxy force protecting Serbian interests in the region. It would bitterly oppose the EC siding with the Croat

authorities in calling for the army's withdrawal to barracks.

So far the EC troika has avoided the hot potato in Croatia, by concentrating on the simpler and more immediate case of Slovenia. But tackling the problem may prove impossible to avoid if the present rash of tit-for-tat ethnic killings in Croatia explodes into a full-scale war while the EC team is going about its peace-keeping activities in Slovenia.