



The siege in Osijek at its height yesterday morning with (above) the Croatian National Guard attacking Serbs, and (below) an attacker lies dead Photographs: David Rose



Ethnic war threatens EC peace plan

THE INDEPENDENT 12/7/91

From Marcus Tanner in Belgrade

THE Yugoslav army yesterday accused Slovenia of "deliberately breaking" the Brioni peace accord and warned "the Slovene people will pay the price".

In a statement on behalf of the army high command, Colonel Milan Gvero said Slovenia was "waging a dirty, dishonest war" and accused the Slovene authorities of "consistently lying". "In defiance of the agreement, they continue to lay minefields and tank-traps in front of army barracks, and take up favourable positions for battle," he said. "Slovenia is trying by force to prove a sovereignty to which it has no right."

Colonel Gvero also raised the possibility of court-martial procedures against hundreds of Yugoslav soldiers, who deserted the army during the fighting. "Deserters and traitors will get what they deserve."

The Slovene Territorial Defence Force took 2,984 Yugoslav army men as prisoners

of war in their short struggle with the federal forces. But army spokesmen have refused to say how many soldiers deserted. The number is believed to be large.

Jelko Kacin, the Slovene information minister, said the army, not Slovenia, was breaking the Brioni agreement. Mr Kacin said the army launched an armed incursion in Slovene territory yesterday, breaking an agreement for all troops to withdraw to barracks. He said a column of five armoured troop carriers crossed the Croat-Slovene border yesterday morning, and threatened to open fire on the Slovene border police. The column later withdrew on to the Croatian side of the border after "discussions" with the Slovene police, he said.

The escalating war of words between Slo-

venia and the army high command in Belgrade suggests that the peace agreement reached at Brioni is already falling apart, well before the EC delegation has even begun its task of observing the cease-fire. The delegation, which reportedly will comprise 30 to 50 military and civilian representatives, is expected to arrive in Yugoslavia within the next few days.

Croatia and Slovenia have voted to accept the Brioni declaration, clearing the way for the observers to start work. A group of EC officials arrived in Zagreb earlier this week, with a view to arranging the observers' itinerary. The Croatian government has called on the observers to include Croatia in their field of activity, although the conflict there is much more complicated, and in-

cludes not only a two-sided dispute between the governments of the two republics and the army, but a third protagonist in the form of the local armed Serb minority.

Gun battles and a deadly ambush threatened to wreck the fragile ceasefire in Croatia yesterday. Snipers killed a policeman and wounded three colleagues in an ambush near the town of Zadar in western Croatia. Sporadic shooting also broke out during the night in eastern Croatia where rival Serbs and Croats live side by side near the border with the republic of Serbia. Zlatko Kramaric, mayor of the region's main city, Osijek, said shooting was heard around the towns of Tenje, Mirkovci Vin-kovci and Borovo Selo.

Alija Izetbegovic, President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, yesterday appealed for the EC observers also to include his central Yugoslav republic in its activities.