

Yugoslav splits bring unity to EC

THE GUARDIAN 15/7/91

John Palmer reports that the Community's role in keeping the peace will encourage European federalists

THE crisis in Yugoslavia has done more in two weeks to give the European Community a sense of identity than two years of haggling among the 12 member states about the planned treaty on European political union.

Assuming the latest problems about its peacekeeping mandate are cleared up with the Yugoslav parties, a team of about 50 EC ceasefire observers will criss-cross Slovenia, Croatia, and — probably — Serbia over the next three months in convoys carrying the European Community flag.

It will be the EC's first peacekeeping operation since it was established 34 years ago.

Those who believe the EC should eventually control foreign, security, and defence policy are encouraged by the way it has responded to the crisis. The energetic shuttling of the troika of foreign ministers between Belgrade and Ljubljana to broker at least a temporary peace, contrasts with the inactivity of Nato and its European pillar, the Western European Union (WEU).

Neither Nato nor the WEU has a mandate to intervene in civil strife in Yugoslavia, even though it could trigger more general unrest in the Balkans which would hardly leave western Europe unscathed. An attempt by either body to play the kind of role being undertaken by the EC would be rejected by the Yugoslavs and would antagonise the Soviet Union.

The EC has been careful to work within a framework of political legitimacy provided by the 35-nation Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). Indeed, the Yu-

goslav operation suggests the role of the EC may be to provide a delivery mechanism for the collective European security order promised when the CSCE was created.

This has enormous implications for evolving EC common foreign and security policy. If the response to the Yugoslav crisis prefigures the shape of an EC security and defence union, there is little for neutral European states, many of which are queuing for EC membership, to object to.

None of this will significantly alter the final treaty on European political union being prepared for the December EC summit in Maastricht, which will ensure that, for the time being, security policy will be laid down by the European Council — the regular summit meetings of EC leaders — with defence remaining outside the Community in the WEU.

However, most EC governments seem determined that these arrangements should be temporary and that foreign, security, and defence policy will be brought into the EC decision-making processes by 1996. After what has happened in Yugoslavia, this logic will be hard for the British Government to resist.

The EC's security role is in its infancy, but the links between the EC and the CSCE seem certain to grow stronger. They will be reinforced when neutral and very pro-CSCE states such as Austria, Sweden, and, probably, Finland join the EC. They will be further strengthened as the former Warsaw Pact countries of central Europe evolve through stages of ever-closer association to full membership of the EC.

The Yugoslav crisis is the first test of whether it is time for the EC to act as though it were already a political union. Disaster in Yugoslavia could prove a devastating blow to federalist aspirations. Success, however, will surely accelerate the emergence of a fully fledged EC security and defence union.