

EC team arrives in Yugoslavia

By Laura Silber
in Belgrade

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EC observers arrived in Yugoslavia yesterday to monitor a peace accord threatened by fresh clashes between Serbs and Croats in the breakaway republic of Croatia.

The mission got off to a faltering start when the team stressed their task was to oversee the ceasefire in the independence-minded republic of Slovenia, rather than look at violence in neighbouring Croatia. Croatia accused Yugoslav army units of killing one of its national guard. Shelling wounded another Croatian soldier, Mr Milan Brezak, deputy interior minister, claimed.

Mr Brezak accused the federal army of "violating a locally-agreed ceasefire". Yesterday's clashes followed fighting between local Serbs and Croatia's national guard. Local Serbs are demanding secession from Croatia to join Serbia. Croatian officials accused the EC mission of ignoring the latest violence in Croatia. Mr Branko Salaj, a Croat government official, said: "We are in a de facto state of war; it is important the EC mission will witness this and tell Europe".

The EC team arrived in Zagreb to monitor the peace accord reached on the island of Brioni on July 7. This seeks a three-month freeze on Slovenia's and Croatia's independence declarations, a ceasefire, and a federal army return to barracks.

The Yugoslav state presidency has accepted the Brioni declaration, but representatives from Montenegro and the Serbian province of Kosovo said they will not attend a meeting today, imperilling peaceful negotiation anew. Mr Sejdo Bajramovic, Kosovo's representative to the presidency, will stay away unless talks are held in Belgrade. Slovenia refuses to talk there.