



Members of the Croatian National Guard. Fighting continues between the Guard and the Serb-dominated federal army in eastern Croatia

Photograph: David Rose

Belgrade pulls troops from Slovenia

YUGOSLAVIA'S collective presidency agreed yesterday to withdraw all federal army troops immediately from the breakaway republic of Slovenia, the Serbian representative, Borisav Jovic, said. "This is in complete accordance with our political stand that the Yugoslav Army should not be stationed in those parts of the country which see it as an occupier," Mr Jovic told Belgrade television.

He made no mention of the future of 70,000 Yugoslav troops on the territory of neighbouring Croatia which declared independence along with Slovenia on 25 June. The withdrawal "should begin immediately according to a plan which foresees a period of no more than three months".

A senior Slovene official said during the meeting, which was described as difficult, that Croatia opposed the move but was outnumbered in the eight-member presidency. "The army is in favour for practical and strategic reasons," he added. Withdrawal from Slovenia appears to leave Croatia isolated in its own drive for independence which its arch-rival Serbia, the largest of the six Yugoslav republics, opposes.

The head of the European Community monitoring group in Yugoslavia affirmed that the current troublespots in eastern Croatia lie outside his mandate, as the Croat President, Franjo Tudjman, went to Germany to seek to internationalise the conflict.

From Charles Richards
in Zagreb and
John Eisenhammer in Bonn

Since the EC group's arrival in the Croatian capital Zagreb on Monday, Croat officials have been bullying it to extend its area of operations to their republic. The mission, however, is only now showing signs of getting into gear.

At a press conference in Zagreb, the head of the EC group emphasised once again that his mandate was to help to stabilise the ceasefire after the hostilities in Slovenia. Jo van der Valk said the terms of the mandate also state that the monitors' activities should, "where appropriate", in-

clude Croatia. The Croat authorities differ in their interpretation. Mr Van der Valk explained: "Hostilities [which led to the EC mission] took place in Slovenia. Therefore we should concentrate our activities on Slovenia."

The 50 monitors from the 12 EC members are thus overseeing a ceasefire already in operation. Theirs is not a peacekeeping mission that can end the fighting between the Serb-dominated federal army and the Croatian National Guard in eastern Croatia. "In terms of the mandate, we are not concerned with what is happening in the eastern parts of Croatia," Mr Van der Valk said. "Eastern Croatia requires first a ceasefire before we can act." Mr Van der

Valk, a former Dutch ambassador to Belgrade, gave the impression that the mission was hastily put together and that many problems are being dealt with *ad hoc* on the ground.

In Bonn Chancellor Helmut Kohl, ignoring the misgivings of several European partners, held talks with Mr Tudjman, invited to Bonn as a sign of German solidarity with Croatia. After the talks the Chancellery issued a bland statement warning against a repetition of the use of force in Yugoslavia, seen as aimed against Serbia. Sources emphasised that Mr Kohl issued the invitation to underline Germany's support for the right of Croatia, and Slovenia, to self-determination.