

EC force to take in Croatia

30/7/91 THE INDEPENDENT

From Sarah Lambert in Brussels
and Marc Champion in Belgrade

ANSWERING a desperate plea not to allow Yugoslavia to "become another Lebanon", the European Community yesterday made its boldest move yet to try and staunch the bloodshed. The 12 foreign ministers pledged to triple the size of the EC observer force and to extend its peace-monitoring mission to Croatia.

"Unless we can bring a stop to the bloodshed and hostility it remains pointless to discuss the future of Yugoslavia or how to remedy the economic crisis," the Dutch Foreign Minister, Hans Van den Broek, said.

The President of the Croatian parliament, Zarko Domljan, said yesterday that Croatia was "losing the war" in Yugoslavia, but that Croatia would not give up its struggle for independence, "regardless of the victims or the cost". More than 100 people are reported to have died in recent days in the worst violence yet.

There are 50 EC observers monitoring the ceasefire in Slovenia, from which the federal army began withdrawing tanks and combat vehicles yesterday. It is proposed to expand the group to 150 or 200 plus auxiliary staff and broaden its mandate to cover Croatia. The group may include representatives from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Despite the talks in Brussels, the prospect of a ceasefire seems further away than ever. Croatian television reported yesterday that more than 1,000 Serbian "terrorists" are hiding in forests around Glina, 60 miles south of Zagreb, where the worst fighting took place. Overnight and during the day, there were skirmishes in those areas of eastern and central Croatia with mixed populations of Croats and Serbs.

The Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, invited to Brussels for yesterday's meeting, gave the impression that his ability to stop Yugoslavia sliding into civil

war is limited. He made an impassioned plea for all sides to observe the *status quo ante* ensured by a 90-day moratorium that, it had been agreed in June, should precede any constitutional discussion.

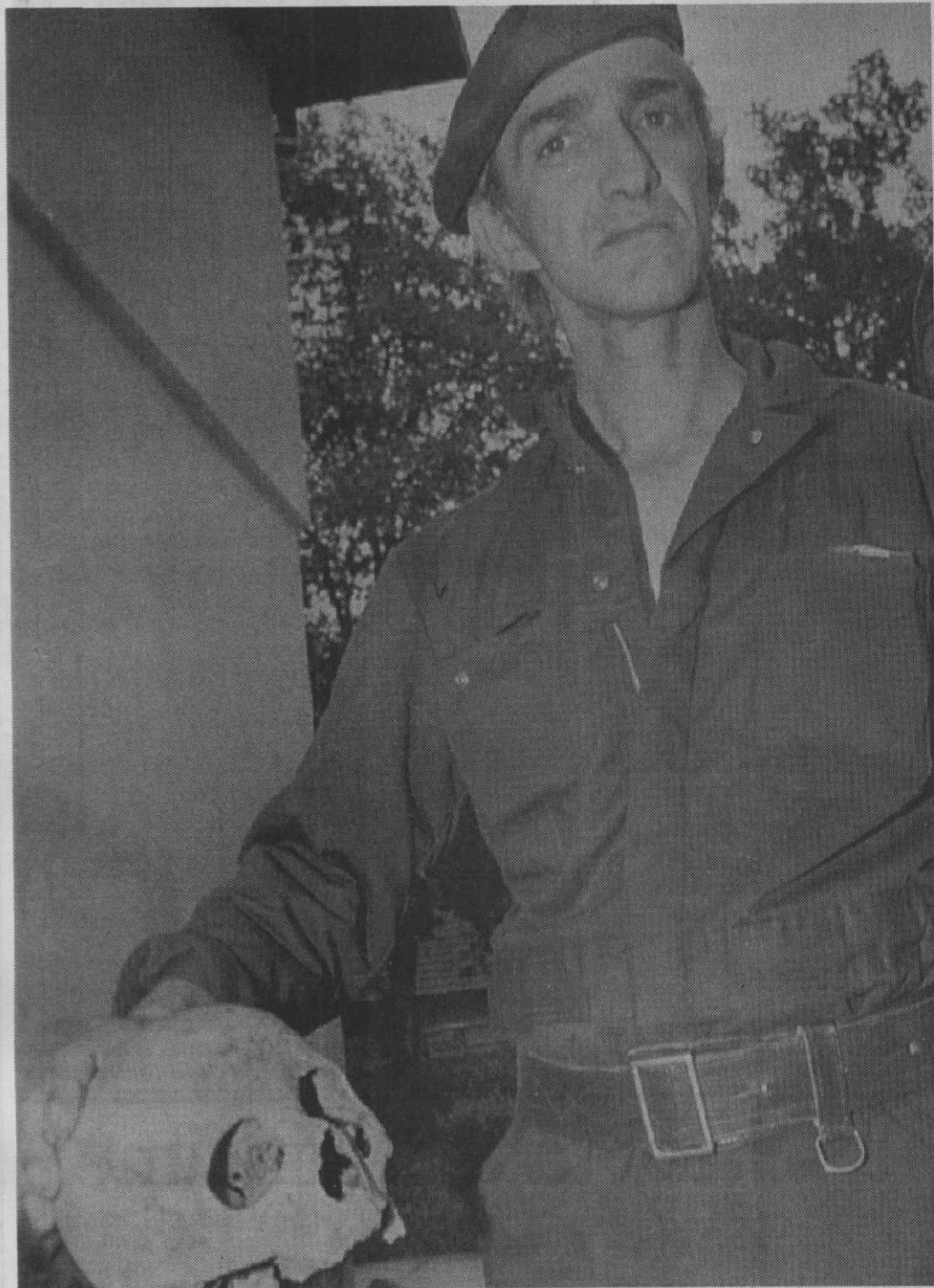
"If we fail to agree how the country will function during the moratorium we risk a situation of anarchy... No one in his right mind could assume responsibility for what will ensue," he said.

It is clear that Yugoslavia is looking primarily to the EC to help resolve a crisis that it would prefer to keep in the European family. The European Commission President, Jacques Delors, stressed that "all Europe" was implicated: "It is a traumatic situation but we cannot let it end in drama - in another Lebanon."

The expansion of the EC's role is contingent on all parties accepting a ceasefire and providing guarantees of safety. It was decided yesterday to establish joint patrols to ensure the ceasefire holds. They will consist of units from both the federal armed forces and the Croatian National Guard and will report back to the EC monitors. Mr Markovic backed the idea, but it is not clear whether it will win the support of the Croatian National Guard and the governments of Croatia and Serbia all of which, the EC said, would have to give their approval.

The role of the federal army is now the crucial sticking point in ceasefire negotiations. Croatia refuses to disarm its militia or police unless the Serbian-dominated federal army withdraws, convinced that it is being used to grab territory for a new Greater Serbia. The Zagreb-based Croatian daily newspaper, *Vjesnik*, yesterday called for the "blue helmets" of an international peace-keeping force to come to Croatia.

Serbs say the army is required to protect Croatia's 600,000-strong Serbian minority from attack by the Croatian police and National Guard.



A Serb guerrilla leader, Captain Dragan, with a skull taken from Croat police which bears the name of his commander, Milan Martić and which, he says, is a tantamount to a death-warrant Photograph: Srdjan Petrovic/Reuters