EC and CSCE Involvement in the Yugoslav Crisis in 1991¹

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Looking at recent history is always hazardous. At this early point in time a number of questions can be addressed to shed some lights on the EC's involvement in the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Could the EC have acted more effectively to prevent the crisis at an earlier stage? This would have been possible only if all member States would have shared the same view on the fundamental nature of the crisis and the best common response to be given to it. Neither in NATO nor in the EC these conditions were met: although the US wished for joint political pressure at the end of 1990, others generally preferred not to conjure up further deterioration by openly expressing concern. Only a more generous financial and economic attitude by the EC in the years preceding 1989 could have bolstered the reformist Prime minister Markovic sufficiently to prevent economic disintegration from spilling over into the core of the political system of Yugoslavia; however, the EC only gradually embarked upon this type of course towards Central European countries — formerly of the Warsaw Pact — in 1989. Yugoslavia had already for more than a decade enjoyed a relatively privileged relationship with the EC which in fact made a special effort on its behalf more difficult to consent to: one felt that much had been done over the years, but that Yugoslavs had not used the additional resources to reform their system.

As the Slovene take over of the external borders at the end of June 1991 followed their own and the Croatian declarations of independence, the EC embarked upon a damage control operation: Ministerial missions achieved the Brioni declaration, which suspended implementation of independence, helped to bring about — partially observed — cease fire arrangements and led to withdrawal by mid October 1991 of the YNA, the Yugoslav army, from Slovenia. The EC backed up its diplomatic intervention by a Monitor Mission based in Zagreb, staffed by all member States and the Commission and from September onwards, also by Canada, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Sweden as a token of CSCE involvement and endorsement of the EC effort. From July onwards, a number of Ministerial and other negotiating missions by the EC Presidency attempted to implement the Brioni declaration in order to create a

¹. This article expresses a personal viewpoint only.
climate for intra Yugoslav negotiations towards a new system of inter-republican cooperation. The monitor mission was extended to crisis areas inhabited by Serbs in Croatia after great difficulties and only in September. On 7 September and in the absence of Yugoslav negotiations, the EC convened the Yugoslavia Conference in The Hague to bring the parties together. The Federal authorities participated alongside the Republics, but gradually, by November had lost their standing in the proceedings. These were led by the Chairman appointed by the EC Ministers, Lord Carrington and also could make use of an Arbitration Commission composed of five presidents of EC member States highest courts in order to clarify legal aspects. The conference was adjourned when Serbian intransigence made further talks useless for the time being.

Already in July the EC backed up its verbal involvement by limited restrictive measures: freezing the financial protocols and introducing an arms embargo; the latter was consolidated by the UN Security Council on 27 September, after the YNA had started military operations against Croatian units and had occupied parts of that Republic. Further non-observance of cease fire arrangements and disengagement commitments, as well as lack of constructive behaviour by the Serbian party in the Conference with regard to a draft Convention proposed on behalf of the EC, led the EC to introduce trade and cooperation restrictions on 8 November against all republics except those who were deemed to be cooperative: by 2 December, only Serbia and Montenegro were targeted by this restrictive attitude. On 16 December 1991, the EC decided to recognize the independence of all republics wishing so, provided they would abide by international and CSCE standards in particular concerning human rights and minority protection and non use of force with regard to border changes. Germany decided before Christmas 1991 to recognize Slovenia and Croatia in this context. The other member States preferred to wait until the situation had clarified by 15 January to give the UN a chance to establish some peacekeeping presence in Croatia, as called for both by Serbian circles and the Croatian leadership and differed decision taking till 15 January 1992.

The internal obstacles the EC encountered in steering a coming course in the crisis can be summarized as follows: as decision taking on foreign policy aspects proceeds by consensus, each member State has a veto. Alongside and sometimes at counterpurpose with the EC Presidency, individual member States continued to keep contact with Yugoslav parties. This made for misunderstanding and contributed to exploitation of differences of opinion by the Yugoslavs. Even the Maastricht Summit of 9-10 December 1991 has not improved this fundamentally intergovernmental way of doing international business by the European Community.

The inadequacy of the EC’s ‘organization for crisis’ also led to ad hoc policy making which member States were reluctant to base on a Common Strategic Context: this was understandable because the potential precedent policy towards Yugoslavia could constitute for policy towards a simultaneously disintegrating Soviet Union, and because of parallel intra EC negotiations on a