Yugoslavia enjoyed extensive links with the EC, dating back to a trade agreement with it in 1970. As a non-aligned state, Yugoslavia was in a relatively privileged position vis-à-vis its east European neighbours. Yet it was not until 1989 that Yugoslavia indicated that it wanted to build formal links with the EC by which time others, such as Hungary, were also making similar gestures. Although the Commission did respond in 1990 with a package of arrangements, including PHARE eligibility, further progress was blocked by Belgrade’s difficulties in meeting the EC’s standards and strictures, such as the need for open, multi-party federal elections organised in a democratic manner. Already by 1991, secessionist strains made the organisation of federal elections well nigh impossible. Under the Yugoslav constitution, the rotating Federal Presidency was due to be assumed by a Croat, Stipe Mesić. Jacques Delors offered, on behalf of the Community, substantial economic assistance in return for a peaceable dialogue on a solution to the brewing constitutional crisis. This was not only blocked by Slobodan Milošević and other Serb nationalists, but opposed by a majority of Croats who made transparent their wish to secede from the federation in a referendum held on 19 May 1991. This followed an earlier resolution, of 20 February 1991, by which Slovenia disassociated itself from Yugoslavia. The EC, almost against all odds and defying the referendum, continued to support the idea of a federation with a rotating presidency with a variety of infrastructure programmes and by expanding PHARE. Informally, the implicit message was that potential EC membership would be endangered by Croatian independence. However, the secessionist strains gradually became more pronounced. Croatia and Slovenia gave notice of their intention to declare themselves independent states, which they formally did on 25 June 1991.

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In response to Croatia and Slovenia’s declarations, Yugoslav Federal forces entered Ljubljana on 27 June. Federal army units also moved into Croatia and eventually into Bosnia-Herzegovina. The EC’s first reaction was to underline the importance of keeping Yugoslavia’s borders unchanged and to insist upon the significance of maintaining the Federal President’s office. Initial EC reactions also stressed diplomatic efforts to find a settlement, commencing with a fact-finding visit of Foreign Ministers of the EC ‘Troika’ (the past, current and future EC Presidents from, in order, Luxembourg, Italy and the Netherlands as well as a Commission representative). The Troika threatened suspension of EC aid unless the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) was disengaged. It also proposed a three month suspension of any independence movements plus the election of Stipe Mesić to the rotating Presidency. The CSCE emergency consultation procedures were also activated. The result of these diplomatic endeavours was the first of numerous cease-fires that were promptly ignored. Realising the futility of their diplomatic efforts, on 5 July 1991, the Foreign Ministers of the Twelve agreed to impose an embargo upon all armaments and military equipment on Yugoslavia as a whole. It was also agreed that the Troika should continue negotiating on behalf of the Community. Indeed, the Troika’s Brioni Agreement of 7 July raised hopes that some form of compromise between the republics and the federal authorities could be reached. The agreement concerned Slovenia primarily but also stipulated that a Monitoring Mission should be dispatched. At this juncture there was little else the EC could do since it had no formal military or security structures (only the EPC) and the Maastricht Summit, where such structures would be discussed, was not due until December. Moreover, the unravelling was taking place in a (nominally) sovereign state; any other form of intervention would be considered meddling in domestic jurisdiction.\(^1\) Even when heavy fighting broke out in Slovenia in the spring, EC mediation efforts were very much geared toward keeping Yugoslavia together. The outcome of the Brioni meeting however left some room for optimism and this no doubt inspired Jacques Poos, then holding the EC Presidency, to proclaim it was ‘The hour of Europe’.\(^2\)

Poos’ comments were perhaps made more wishfully than factually since, even when they were uttered, the first of many cease-fires was in the process of dissolving. The collapse of the July Brioni Accords, which were designed to act as the foundation for subsequent negotiations, saw renewed attempts to support EC monitoring missions and to negotiate cease-fires. It should be noted that the Brioni Accords extended to Slovenia and not Croatia (although an offer was made to