

JUGOSLAVIA HAS A NEW CHANCE - MARTENS

Brussels, September 11, 2000

EPP President Wilfried MARTENS today welcomed what he hoped was "a new chance" for Yugoslavia following the first round of the Yugoslav presidential elections, and also the first hint of change in Moscow's attitude to its former protégé, President Slobodan MILOSEVIC.

"If the first indications are right - an overwhelming victory for the opposition candidate Vojislav KOSTUNICA - then Serbia at last has the possibility of joining the other free nations of Europe," Martens said.

"Milosevic has to a large extent been kept afloat by the absence of a clear and credible alternative, and it has to be said by western countries as well as Russia, which did not recognise just how dangerous he was.

"If Milosevic is at last out of the way, what is left of Yugoslavia can begin the slow road to recovery, and look forward to substantial help from the Union."

Martens also welcomed reports that Milosevic has lost the support of his Russian protectors.

Earlier in the day, German Chancellor Gerhard SCHRÖDER said in Moscow that he and Russian leader Vladimir PUTIN were agreed that Yugoslavia had opted for change, according to a report by the Interfax news agency. Schröder also told Ria Novosti: "We agreed with Putin that the result of the elections must be respected, whatever they are."