

# Russian deputies vote to abandon sanctions on Serbs

BY MICHAEL EVANS AND EVE-ANN PRENTICE

THE new Russian parliament yesterday voted by an overwhelming majority to lift sanctions against Serbia and oppose Nato air strikes on the Bosnian Serbs.

The vote in the Duma, the lower house, was the result of co-operation between the opposition Communists and the neo-Fascist Liberal Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovksy. Deputies voted by 280 votes to two, with eight abstentions, for the use of exclusively political methods to solve the Bosnian conflict.

An earlier motion by the Communists and Liberal Democrats, calling for a withdrawal of "all foreign military contingents" from former Yugoslavia, was defeated by 131 votes to 114.

Moscow has always opposed United Nations or Nato use of force against the Serbs,

traditional allies of Russia. But the composition of the new parliament is likely to make Russian co-operation with the West over former Yugoslavia even more difficult.

Boutros Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary-General, gave a warning to the Bosnian Serbs yesterday that they could face air strikes within days unless they allowed rotation of UN troops in Srebrenica, eastern Bosnia. About 200 Canadian UN troops have been waiting since before Christmas to be relieved by a Dutch unit, but have been prevented from doing so by Serb forces besieging the Muslim enclave.

After the call by the Nato summit leaders last week for tactical air cover to help the Canadians to leave Srebrenica safely, Dr Boutros Ghali said: "If it [the rotation] does not happen, then we will have to

make the decision to use air power."

Speaking at a press conference in The Hague, he said he was personally in favour of using air power, "but I have never received any request to use any air power." He would "give the green light" if asked, but he added that he had received information that the Serbs would allow the required rotation of the UN troops in Srebrenica.

On the wider front of peace negotiations, European Union governments have reaffirmed their unanimous support for Lord Owen in his attempts to find a solution to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their backing came after the European parliament called for Lord Owen's dismissal.

Yesterday the Greek government, which holds the presidency of the European

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Union, spoke on behalf of the 12 member governments with a firm declaration of support for Lord Owen's efforts.

Lord Owen was also defended yesterday by his fellow mediator, Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Norwegian politician appointed to the talks by the UN. He said Lord Owen was not responsible for the collapse of the three-way talks in Geneva. "Nobody has put in more effort or been more committed to finding peace in the former Yugoslavia over a longer period than Lord Owen. He cannot be criticised for the situation."

France also gave its full support. "[Lord Owen] is acting with great perseverance in accordance with the directives of the EU," Richard Duqué, the French Foreign Ministry spokesman, said. "One should pay tribute to his action in search of a settlement." Although there is increasing frustration over the failure of the three warring parties to find a peace deal, European governments remain convinced that the only realistic, long-term solution is to split Bosnia three ways.