

# Bush fears anarchy and plays a waiting game

## America

**Martin Walker in Washington, Ian Traynor in Vienna, and Michael White**

**A** CAUTIOUS President Bush held back yesterday from recognising the independence of the Baltic states and warned that the US did not expect to make significant new financial commitments to Soviet reform at the reconvened G7 summit of leading industrial nations.

His statement came as the European Community prepared to discuss diplomatic recognition of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia today, with France and Germany openly backing the move after a multitude of countries, from Canada to the Vatican, yesterday announced that they were establishing ties.

"I don't want to be part of any mistakes that could lead to anarchy in the Soviet Union," Mr Bush said. "I want to see a few more cards on the table."

"We have certain special responsibilities," Mr Bush said, stressing that sense of caution which has gripped the White House since his Soviet experts began late last week to suggest that the wholesale dissolution of the Soviet Union was a possibility, carrying prospects of destabilisation across Europe and Asia.

Mr Bush's reluctance to respond swiftly to the dizzy pace of change was in contrast to Canada's Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, who stood beside the US

President at their joint Kennebunkport press conference and announced that Canada had just formally recognised the independence of the Baltic states.

"We have got to deal from strength, got to deal from principle, got to know what we're dealing with," Mr Bush said, groping for words to explain his reluctance to join the euphoria gripping much of America. "They are going in the direction of freedom and democracy and I remain optimistic that these enormous changes will come about without disorder and anarchy."

The US, he said, would stand ready to assist when it could. "But nothing will come out of this meeting that will commit us to the signing of cheques," Mr Bush said, in reference to this week's gathering of G7 officials.

Iceland set the ball rolling on Sunday by becoming the first country to re-establish diplomatic ties with the Baltic countries. It was joined by their Scandinavian neighbours, Norway and Denmark. Yesterday Otto Borch arrived in Riga from Copenhagen as Denmark gained the distinction of having the first foreign ambassador in Latvia since Stalin annexed the three republics in 1940.

All of the former Warsaw Pact countries said yesterday that they were establishing relations with the Baltic states, and France sent a special envoy to the Baltic to iron out the final details of the French government's decision.

Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, is to

receive his counterparts from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia today, after calling for international recognition as a matter of urgency after the failed Soviet coup.

With the pace of events quickening, Whitehall officials were last night anxious to deny suggestions that Britain is dragging its feet on the conclusion of a 50-year-old diplomatic controversy.

"Most members of the EC are moving at the same speed on the same road," insisted one official, who stressed that Britain had simply not taken such a high public profile on the issue as countries like France.

As John Major flies to Washington — and on to see Mr Bush at Kennebunkport — on a pre-arranged four-day visit, the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, will make Britain's cautious case in Brussels. His deputy, Douglas Hogg, flies to the Baltic later this week.

Boris Yeltsin's Russia has already recognised the Baltic troika and all the signs yesterday were that Mr Gorbachev's plans for a new union treaty, however hastened, were being overtaken by events.

Thomas Pickering, the US ambassador to the United Nations, said that Washington would back Baltic applications for membership of the UN. "The general trend is to lend credibility to applications or potential applications," Mr Pickering told reporters in India.

He added that the critical question would be how much independence the Soviet republics achieved.