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Britain to seek end to ban on investments in S Africa

EC split on sanctions widens

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John Palmer in Brussels,
David Beresford in
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THE gulf between Britain and its European Community partners over South Africa is set to widen today, as European Community ministers reaffirm their commitment to sanctions while considering a plan to dispatch a fact-finding mission to assess at first hand President F. W. de Klerk's reform initiative.

When EC foreign ministers meet today in Dublin to discuss the issue, the Foreign Secretary, Mr Douglas Hurd, will argue for an immediate lifting of the ban on new investments in South Africa.

Without waiting for the results of any EC mission, Mr Hurd will visit South Africa next month — breaking a long-standing ban on high-level ministerial visits to the country.

Normally, Britain would have been among the first to support the EC's proposal to send to South Africa a troika of the foreign ministers of Italy, France and Ireland, the current holder of the EC presidency.

But the Foreign Office fears that most of Britain's EC partners will argue that the sanctions issue should properly be deferred until the troika reports back to the Council of Ministers.

The EC mission will aim to make an on-the-spot assessment of the prospects for early negotiations between Mr De Klerk's government and the African National Congress leading to political reform.

Yesterday, the ANC leader, Mr Nelson Mandela, said he had a "suggestion" to put to Mrs Thatcher, adding: "We regard the attitude of the British government on the question

of sanctions as of primary importance." Last night, Downing Street was waiting for his telephone call.

Mr Mandela appears to be considering proposals to defuse the row over sanctions but, like other initiatives he may have, they are unlikely to bear fruit until after his talks in Lusaka next week with other leaders of the ANC.

The organisation's general secretary, Mr Alfred Nzo, yesterday restated the ANC's firm opposition to any lifting of sanctions.

"There has been no change whatsoever. We are still very firm that sanctions must be maintained, despite what Mrs Thatcher says," he said.

Mr De Klerk will reap the first diplomatic reward for legalising the ANC and releasing Mr Mandela when he attends a one-day summit with African leaders in Zaire on Saturday. South African government officials were refusing to say who he was going to meet, but there was speculation that it could include leaders of the frontline states.

In Dublin today, France and some of the other EC nations might agree to scrap some measures if the Pretoria government ends the state of emergency and begins a political dialogue with the ANC and other opposition groups. Few governments other than the British believe EC sanctions should be abolished just yet.

Denmark and Holland, which have taken the firmest stand in favour of economic sanctions in the past, still stress the need for apartheid to be abolished before economic pressure by the community is removed.

Mr Mandela said yesterday that he is planning a tour of trouble spots in South Africa — as part of what appears to be a domestic peace initiative — before flying north to meet the ex-

iled leadership of the ANC early next week. He is tentatively scheduled to attend a political rally on Thursday in Port Elizabeth, the scene of violent township clashes recently. At the weekend he plans attending two rallies, in Durban and Bloemfontein.

The Durban trip is of considerable significance, in view of the regional civil war which has been raging in Natal between ANC supporters and followers of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Mr Mandela's close friend and aide, Mr Walter Sisulu, is flying to the province on Thursday, and he is expected to join talks with representatives of Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha movement, as well as the United Democratic Front.

Mr Mandela is to fly on to Zimbabwe on Monday to meet President Robert Mugabe, continuing to ANC headquarters in Lusaka on Tuesday. It is reported from Lusaka that the ANC leadership is toying with proposals to try to get agreement with Pretoria on an amnesty for political prisoners.

This would involve prisoner swaps between the frontline states and South Africa, as well as a startling initiative whereby the ANC would offer co-operation in the townships to try and improve law and order in the country. Mr Mandela, in speeches since his release from prison 10 days ago, has placed emphasis on the need to reduce levels of crime in black communities.

Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, the convenor of the Nelson Mandela International Reception Committee and president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, yesterday urged the EC to reject any moves to relax sanctions.

Michael White, page 10;
Matthew Engel, page 17