

Intrigue returns to a Sarajevo caught in the political crossfire

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In Bosnia-Herzegovina there is real concern that Serbia and Croatia might make a deal on a carve-up of territory, writes Charles Richards in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO — Of all the names on the map of modern Europe, few conjure up more ominously the fateful course of history. Only perhaps Armageddon evokes a greater sense of doom.

History, however, need not repeat itself. Megiddo, modern-day Armageddon, is a small airstrip used by Israeli crop-sprayers. The defecting Syrian airforce pilot who landed there a couple of years ago did not spark off a cataclysmic war. And the very different postures of countries now on Yugoslavia's borders likewise suggest that modern Sarajevo is unlikely to unleash the pent-up forces of frustrated European states.

No visitor to the town can forget its doomsday past. Across the street from a cobbled, humpback bridge over the Miljacka river, two footprints embedded into a flagstone mark the spot where on 28 June 1914 the 20-year-old Gavrilo Princip loosed off two shots at the passing heir to the Austrian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, shots which reverberated throughout the summer weeks before plunging Europe into bloody war. Assassination as a political tool is celebrated by Serbian nationalists in the naming both of the bridge and of a street in Belgrade after Princip.

Sarajevo, the capital of the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, is once again the object of political intrigue over its future. The President of the Croatian republic, Franjo Tudjman, has spoken openly about integrating Croat-dominated areas of western Bosnia-Herzegovina into Croatia, as a quid pro quo for ceding to Serbia areas of Croatia with predominantly Serbian populations. It is not a new idea, but it is an idea that has gained increasing gravity because of the times.

A further round of talks in Split

between Mr Tudjman and the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic was attended by the president of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic. The Information Minister for the Bosnian republic stated that Mr Izetbegovic had insisted the term dismemberment not be used. He spoke instead of cantonisation.

The idea that Yugoslavia's seven republics should be further subdivided into cantons would make little practical sense. But the idea reflects the real concern in Bosnia-Herzegovina that a deal may be made between Serbia and Croatia on a territorial carve-up. Such a dividing up would not be clear-cut. More than 55 per cent of the ethnic Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina do not live in the

western districts eyed by Croatia, so would not be incorporated into a redrawn Croatia.

More significantly, the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina would feel threatened. The Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina constitute a nationality, not merely a religious identity as they do in Macedonia and Kosovo province. The president, foreign minister and deputy prime minister are all Muslims. They fear that if Croatia were to secede they would become isolated by a dominant Greater Serbia.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is like a miniature Yugoslav federation, with its diverse religious and ethnic identities. No one community has a majority. The largest are the Muslims, with 44 per cent, then

the Serbs (32 per cent), then the Croats (17 per cent). The republic has borders with no other European state. Instead it is flanked on two sides by Croatia, and another by Serbia, both with their territorial designs.

Modern Bosnia-Herzegovina has a recent tradition of religious tolerance and racial coexistence. Sarajevo itself is unmistakably a meeting-point between Western Christianity and Oriental Islam. Though Islam is a universal religion which crosses borders — the doorkeeper at the Kursumli Islamic *madrasah* was from Zaire — Bosnian Muslims are decidedly European, says one senior government official. What of the president's visits to Turkey, Libya and Iran? To drum up assistance for the ailing economy, comes the reply, just as he is visiting Austria and the United States.

In Sarajevo itself, there is little sense of impending civil war. There is no visible army or security presence. Young people throng the streets in the evening without an apparent care in the world. Muslim leaders, however, are anxious. Rumours abound of preparations for conflict, of Serbs in mainly Serbian regions in the north reinforcing barricades. Bosnian Muslims are against any partition of their republic by the two dominant national groups.

"To change the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina isn't possible without bloodshed," said Mr Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, the Deputy Prime Minister. "We will defend ourselves." He referred to the bloody civil conflict there during the Second World War, and asked the international community to continue to take an active interest to stop Bosnia-Herzegovina becoming a battlefield for rival Croatian and Serbian nationalist expansionism.

Peace hopes dwindle

BELGRADE (Agencies) — A Croat policeman and a civilian were killed in mortar and machine-gun attacks by Serbian squads yesterday and peace talks collapsed, increasing fears of a full-scale civil war. But in spite of Croatia's fears, the federal army said it would not attack the republic. Franjo Tudjman, the Croat President said the federal Defence Minister, Veljko Kadijevic, had promised him the army would "respect any peaceful settlement and will not attack Croatia".

Leaders of Yugoslavia's six republics dimmed hopes that they can end the violence. They exchanged bitter recriminations, blaming each other for the failure

of the State Presidency to agree on a venue for crisis talks.

"[We are] aware of the dramatic situation in the country and the ever-clearer orientation towards the use of force and war instead of a peaceful unravelling of the crisis," two members of the eight-man presidency, Vasil Tupurkovski and Bogic Bogicevic, said. They threatened to quit.

In yesterday's violence, a Croat policeman and a civilian died in a two-hour attack on a police station in the mainly Croat village of Lisani, 125 miles south of the Croat capital Zagreb, Croat officials said. Serbs attacked police patrols in two villages south of Zagreb but no one was hurt.