

# A brief history of the Balkans

## 1878

After years of conflict, the world's Great Powers redraw the map of the Balkans at the Congress of Berlin. Three new countries, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania are established, but the wishes of local populations are largely ignored.

## 1912-13

Two Balkan wars are fought to try to end several centuries of Ottoman rule. All the regional powers, Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and Albanians are involved.

## June 28, 1914

A Serb assassin kills Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, precipitating World War I.

## December 1, 1918

Yugoslavia, the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' is created from territories formerly occupied by the old Turkish and Austrian empires.

## October 24, 1944

Josip Broz Tito's partisans liberate Belgrade from the Nazis and establish a communist regime in Yugoslavia.

## June 25, 1991

Croatia and Slovenia proclaim independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Serb forces overrun 30 percent of Croatian territory.

## October 8, 1991

Yugoslavia asks for UNHCR's assistance. The U.N. Secretary-General then designates the organization as the lead humanitarian agency in the crisis.

## March 3, 1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaims independence. Serb forces seize 70 percent of the country's territory and lay siege to Sarajevo.

## July 3, 1992

UNHCR begins a 3<sup>1/2</sup> year airlift into Sarajevo which will become the longest-running humanitarian airbridge in history. At the height

of the conflict agencies are helping as many as 3.5 million people throughout the former Yugoslavia while an estimated 700,000 Bosnians flee.

## July 11, 1995

Srebrenica, one of several regions in Bosnia designated by the U.N. as 'safe areas' falls to Serb forces. Around 7,000 men and boys are slaughtered in the worst single atrocity in Europe since World War II. Other safe areas such as Gorazde survive.

## August 12, 1995

Croatia launches Operation Storm and retakes the Krajina area from rebel Serbs, 170,000 of whom flee. Many remain refugees.

## November 21, 1995

The Dayton Peace Accord is signed to end hostilities in Bosnia and pave the way for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. Hundreds of thousands of persons have still not gone back. The NATO-led Implementation Force deploys to the region.

## March 1998

Fighting erupts in Serbia's southern Kosovo province between the majority ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Within months 350,000 people have been displaced or fled abroad.

## March 24, 1999

After the failure of peace talks in Rambouillet, France, and repeated warnings, NATO launches a 78-day airwar. Within three days, ethnic Albanians begin to flee or are forced out of the region by Serb forces. Eventually nearly 444,600 civilians fled to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro. More than 90,000 people are subsequently airlifted to 29 countries for temporary safety to ease regional political pressures.

## June 12, 1999

NATO and Russian forces enter Kosovo after Yugoslavia accepts a peace plan requiring withdrawal of all forces from Kosovo. The next

day UNHCR and other agencies return. Refugees flood back and in one of the fastest returns in history, 600,000 people go home within three weeks. In a reverse exodus, an estimated 230,000

the solution of the refugee problem in the region and return of displaced persons to Kosovo will be one of the country's top priorities.



As generalized war broke out in the 1990s, ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina established prisoner of war camps such as this one near Banja Luka.

Serbs and minority Roma, fearing revenge attacks, seek safety in Serbia and Montenegro. A U.N. Civil Administration is put into place and the task of rebuilding the province begins.

## December 11, 1999

Political change begins to sweep the region. Croatian strongman Franjo Tudjman dies in Zagreb, paving the way for democratic government in that country.

## October 6, 2000

Slobodan Milosevic concedes defeat in presidential elections after protestors set the Yugoslav parliamentary building on fire. He is placed under house arrest and on June 28, 2001, he is handed over to the International Tribunal in The Hague to face war crimes. Economic sanctions are ended, diplomatic relations restored. A new government in Belgrade says

## February 2001

Conflict breaks out in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). As international mediators and the government struggle to hold the country together, more than 150,000 people flee, principally to neighboring Kosovo.

## July 2001

Despite massive aid during the last few years, resumption of regional and international diplomatic relations, the establishment of democratic governments, the Balkans remain in turmoil. Many war criminals remain free, more than one million civilians have still not returned to their homes and the region remained braced for another possible major conflagration.

## August 13, 2001

Under the watchful eye of western powers and NATO, FYROM's two sides sign a peace agreement. ■