

Bosnian Referendum Said to Support Independence

By Laura Silber
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SARAJEVO, Yugoslavia, March 1—Voters in the ethnically volatile republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina appear to have given strong support today to formal secession from what remains of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav federation.

Citing unofficial returns in a two-day referendum on independence, Bosnian Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic told reporters here: "The majority of citizens of Bosnia have voted for independence. . . . These results confirm the support of the people for a sovereign, independent, united and unified Bosnia-Herzegovina."

Bosnia, a tense mixture of 4.3 million Slavic Muslims, Serbs and

Croats, has been the focus of much international concern that the bloody Balkan civil war between Serbs and Croats could spread here from neighboring Croatia.

The republic lies between Croatia—whose secession from the six-republic Yugoslav federation last June triggered the civil war—and Serbia, which has fought powerfully to preserve some form of Yugoslav federal structure or to maintain its close political ties with Serb-populated lands in other republics.

A referendum that would demonstrate republic-wide support for independence was a key condition set by the European Community for extending diplomatic recognition to Bosnia, and Silajdzic called on the EC tonight to follow through. "If the Eu-

ropean Community is concerned with stability in the region, Bosnia should be recognized at once," he said.

Still, it was unclear how encompassing the mandate for Bosnian independence is since the republic's Serbs—about 31 percent of the population—appeared to be boycotting the ballot. Indeed, some Serb-populated regions have sworn to declare their own sovereignty if today's vote gains international acceptance.

Muslims, who comprise about 44 percent of the republic's population, and Croats, who make up 17 percent, appeared to be voting overwhelmingly for establishment of Bosnia as an independent, multi-ethnic state with its present borders intact. Final returns are not expected until Monday or Tuesday.

The former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Croatia have already won West European recognition, and Macedonia, the easternmost republic, hopes to be recognized soon, leaving only Serbia and Montenegro—the largest and smallest of the original republics—as the basis for a reorganized federal state.

A separate referendum on sovereignty also was underway today in Montenegro, where voters were expected to support a continued political union with Serbia.

Silajdzic told a television audience that Bosnian independence would unite the republic's Serbs, Croats and Muslims, but even as he spoke, there were reports of violent confrontations here between Serb and Croat nationalists.

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Bosnia Sets Vote On Independence

BELGRADE—Bosnia-Herzegovina announced yesterday a date for a referendum on independence that could deal the final blow to the already splintered Yugoslav federation.

After a heated debate in the legislature in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, Muslim and Croat lawmakers voted to hold the referendum over the weekend of Feb. 29 and March 1.

Serb deputies staged a walk-out, saying they opposed any split with Yugoslavia and would refuse to regard the vote as binding.

The Yugoslav federal army poured troops into Bosnia-Herzegovina when the civil war with Croatia erupted seven months ago and have operated from army and air bases in Bosnia.