

# Russia critical of US plan for Bosnian state

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AMERICAN efforts to forge a Muslim-Croat federation in Bosnia appeared to suffer a setback yesterday when Russia said it was not satisfied with the US plan. "We are still studying it. It might be an interesting option and an interesting possibility, but we are not fully satisfied that all the legal consequences have been thought through," said Russia's special envoy on Yugoslavia, Vitaly Churkin, after talks in Moscow with the Bosnian Prime Minister, Haris Silajdzic.

Bosnian Serb leaders have also expressed doubts about the US initiative, saying they will oppose it if the Muslims and Croats use the federation as a base to invade Bosnian Serb-held territory, or if pressure is applied on the Bosnian Serbs to join the new entity. The Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, said last week that only "political illiterates" would expect his people to rejoin the Muslims and Croats in a single state rather than stay on their own or merge with Serbia.

In an interview with *Pravda*, the former Soviet Communist Party newspaper, Mr Karadzic also raised the prospect that US and Russian involvement in Bosnia could split the republic into Western and Russian spheres of influence. "I would like to believe that the war will end soon and we will create a new border between East and West, so that there are no more intrigues against the Slavic world," he said.

Despite the Russian and Bosnian Serb objections, US mediators reported that they had made "enormous progress" in bringing the Muslims and Croats together. The US plan envisages a federation, made up of semi-autonomous cantons, that would then be linked economically, but not administratively, with Croatia.

The chief US envoy, Charles Redman, says the door is open for the Bosnian Serbs to join the federation and thus restore Bosnia-Herzegovina as a single, albeit highly decentralised state. The implicit threat behind the US plan is that if the Bosnian Serbs stay out or unite

TONY BARBER

East Europe Editor

with Serbia they will face continued isolation, economic ruin and possibly a Muslim-Croat offensive to recapture territory.

Serbian determination to resist Western pressure was illustrated yesterday when the rump Yugoslav state, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro, accused Nato of repeatedly violating its airspace last month. In a letter to the United Nations, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Vladislav Jovanovic, said that new violations would have "unpredictable consequences".

The protest followed an incident on Tuesday when Serbian forces in the occupied Krajina region of Croatia attacked a Nato plane flying from Zagreb to Split. Four passengers were injured and the Spanish plane was forced to make an emergency landing in the port of Rijeka.

On 28 February Nato fighter planes shot down four Serbian light attack aircraft over Bosnia. Now the Western alliance is considering whether to provide unarmed military planes with fighter escorts in former Yugoslavia. This step, coupled with the likelihood that more Western troops will go to Bosnia under the UN flag, would represent deeper Western military involvement in the Yugoslav wars.

The UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva yesterday singled out Bosnian Serb forces as the party bearing most guilt for abuses of civilians in the 23-month-old Bosnian war. The commission said that both Serbian and Croatian extremists had practised "ethnic cleansing" but that "the primary though not the sole responsibility lies with the Serbian forces".

■ BONN — Germany yesterday called off the deportation of 160 illegal refugees from rump Yugoslavia because of objections by Romania, which was to have been used as a transit route. North Rhine-Westphalia said the flight would not now go ahead today.