

Still the Balkans

Early this century, any Balkan ruler's death meant a shudder in the capitals of the major powers. Those capitals have shown more curiosity than agitation about the death of Enver Hoxha, who had ruled Albania for 40 years. The Balkans are no longer seen as a cauldron which might at any moment spill over and devastate Europe. The echoes of the shots fired at Sarajevo in 1914 died away long ago. Yet there is trouble again stirring in the Balkan pot. And trouble in the Balkans has a habit of causing trouble elsewhere.

Before 1914 this was obvious enough. The Balkans were a crossroads of new states which had emerged between the pushy Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires and the fading Turkish one, and the struggles there eventually set off the explosion of a world war.

How many people, however, now remember that it was also in the Balkans that fighting first broke out in Europe in 1939? Threats and pressures had enabled Hitler's soldiers to occupy Austria, the Sudetenland, Prague and Memel without a fight. But in April, 1939, Mussolini's forces met with armed resistance when they invaded Albania. The next few years saw Germany and Italy sending whole armies to fight in the Balkans, and redrawing the region's frontiers to accommodate the client states that they acquired there by exploiting its local enmities.

New fears for old

After 1945, many people began to think that the old familiar kind of anxieties about the Balkans could be safely forgotten. There were, of course, new anxieties. Russia had got a firm grip on Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria and, until Tito boldly defied Stalin in 1948, the Soviet shadow loomed so darkly over the whole region that the main question was whether Greece was to pass under it too. With the "Truman doctrine" a drawing of lines began, and within a few years a pattern had been set which, at least in outward form, remains today.

Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria are still Russia's allies in the 30-year-old Warsaw pact—which looks like being solemnly renewed in Warsaw within the next few days. (They are also linked to Russia in the Comecon economic grouping, whose present uncomfortable condition is reviewed in a survey after page 52.) Turkey, Greece and Italy are America's allies in Nato; and the separate courses taken by Albania, Austria and Jugo-

slavia have kept all three of them outside the alliances. It looks a stable, if unsavoury, stalemate partly under superpower protection. But is it so stable? Do not underestimate the Balkans' capacity for turmoil.

The ultra-isolationist policies to which Hoxha steered Albania made it a stabilising factor in the region, or at least prevented the unsettling effects that its continued adherence to the Soviet block would have had. While Albania was Russia's ally, there was not only the headache that it gave Nato by offering a Mediterranean base for Soviet submarines; there was also the risk of some internal upheaval in Albania leading to a Soviet intervention there—which would mean a showdown with Yugoslavia. But this week Hoxha's heir, Mr Ramiz Alia, refused even to accept Soviet condolences on Hoxha's death, suggesting that if rapprochement with Russia is to happen at all, it is a long way off.

Both Albania and Yugoslavia are controlled by regimes that were installed by communist leaders of resistance to wartime occupation. Both have broken with Russia; each has a vital interest in seeing the other maintain that breach. But there, Balkan fashion, the community of interest ends. The Jugoslavs and the Albanians are historic enemies, and the old enmity still feeds on the fact that nearly 2m Albanians live in Yugoslavia, mostly in the Kosovo region.

That region has been given a limited autonomy, but the discontent of the Albanians who form a local majority there has taken violent forms in the past four years, and Yugoslavia has accused the government in Tirana of fomenting the trouble in Kosovo. Revealingly, although the two neighbours agreed six years ago to build a railway across the border by 1983, it has been completed only on the Albanian side. Trade between them has, admittedly, increased; but Hoxha always delighted in contrasting his country's economic independence with the plight of a Yugoslavia which had run up huge foreign debts.

Ugly though Yugoslavia's economic predicament may look, the five years that have passed since Tito died have assuaged the fears previously voiced about multinational Yugoslavia either breaking up after his death or falling into disarray and being forced to accept Soviet domination. But they have not entirely removed them and the latest wave of trials in Croatia has shown that separatist influences are still at work there. And



The Balkan macédoine

- Austria: small Slovene and Hungarian minorities in Carinthia and Burgenland
- Trieste: a mainly Italian-peopled city. Jugoslavia claimed it in 1945, but agreed in 1954 that Italy should keep it.
- Albania: a small Greek minority, mainly in the south.

Key

- Ethnic minority areas
- Province regional boundary (Republic boundary in Jugoslavia and Soviet Union)
- Autonomous province boundary (Jugoslavia)

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- Moldavian SSR: a mainly Rumanian-peopled area which USSR took from Rumania in 1940.
- Transylvania: a partly Hungarian-peopled area in Rumania.
- Vojvodina: a largely Hungarian-peopled autonomous region of Serbia.
- Kosovo: a mainly Albanian-peopled autonomous region of Serbia.
- Macedonia: one of Jugoslavia's six federated republics; occupied 1941-44 by Bulgaria, which has not renounced all claims to it.
- Bulgaria: a small Rumanian minority in the southern Dobruja, a larger Turkish minority mainly in the south-east.
- Lemnos: demilitarisation dispute between Greece and Turkey.
- Aegean Sea: Turkey's 'continental shelf' claims include sea areas around many Greek islands.

Bulgaria from time to time still revives its claim on Yugoslav Macedonia.

No other Balkan state presents such a complex linguistic and ethnic patchwork as Jugoslavia, but minority problems affect them all. A year ago relations between Hungary and Rumania were worse than they had ever been since 1945, because of the display of chauvinism with which Rumania had celebrated the 65th anniversary of its annexation of Transylvania. That region's Hungarians have been deprived of many means of cultural expression. On the other hand, Rumania has grievances about the separation from the homeland of the many Rumanians who live in Soviet Moldavia and in Bulgaria's southern Dobruja region.

The Bulgarians are now hotly denying Turkey's charges that 1m Turks in Bulgaria are being "assimilated" by brutal measures, including enforced changes of name. The denials might carry more weight if Bulgaria had not prevented independent observers reaching the areas where its Turkish minority lives. In Athens there are fears that the Greek minority in Albania has been getting somewhat similar treatment.

The destabilising Greek

With this cat's cradle of local enmities, it is hardly surprising that present Balkan realities seldom fit a neat pattern of division into Soviet allies, western allies and neutrals. Greece, since Mr Andreas Papandreou became its prime minister, has earned a reputation as the Nato alliance's (and the EEC's) most awkward member. And it is now plunged into constitutional uncertainty under a controversial new president narrowly confirmed by the Socialist majority in parliament, with a hotly disputed election looming in June.

Mr Papandreou has shifted Greece's posture of defence so it is no longer mainly facing the Warsaw pact. But its new target is an old one, Turkey. Indeed, the issues that divide Greece and Turkey—the future of Cyprus, sea rights in the Aegean, the demilitarisation of the Aegean island of Lemnos—have more to do with historic Balkan antagonisms than with the cold-war division of Europe.

In the Warsaw pact ranks, Rumania is the conspicuous maverick. Recent news from Bucharest has mainly been focused on the miseries caused by the combination of an exceptionally hard winter and the Ceausescu regime's draconian enforcement of cuts in heating, lighting and transport. But the country's economic difficulties, largely created by mismanagement, have not made President Ceausescu abandon the independent tactics that have included cautious flirtations with China, Jugoslavia and even Israel; indeed, the Rumanians have taken pains to tell the world that they originally wanted this year's extension of the Warsaw pact to be only a brief one. And why is it that Bulgaria's blind loyalty to its Soviet patron has contrasted so sharply with the Rumanian insistence on at least a sliver of individuality? Not mainly for ideological reasons, but chiefly because the Bulgarians historically looked to the greatest Slav power for support against the Turks.

History lies heavily on the Balkans. In one sense, the bitter "east-west" division of Europe seems less unnatural here than in other regions, because the ancient traditions of hostility are so much stronger than those of neighbourliness. It would be unwise to assume the stability of the pattern of ideological and strategic alignment that has been imposed on the region since 1945. The Balkans are still the Balkans.