



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES REFUGEE

Vol. 14 • No. 3

June-July 1994

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Aiding and Abetting: Refugee Politics in the Territories of the Former Yugoslavia

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Probably the most vivid images in Western minds of the wars in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina are those of columns of people marching away from their burned-out villages, or of children leaving their parents and boarding buses to escape from their war-ravaged cities. These images are more than merely symbolic. Indeed, the massive movement of citizens of the former Yugoslavia away from their homes—whether a farm in a village caught in the crossfire, or a city apartment located on the wrong side of a bridge—is the central feature driving the war brought on by the collapse of the former Yugoslavia.

One of the common features of the many political crises of the post-Cold War era has been intense conflict between members of ethnic groups that had formerly lived together in the same state. With the disintegration of the federal states of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, the idea of re-associating populations with territories seems to have remarkable appeal. Indeed, each successive war in

Europe has shifted boundaries slightly in favour of conterminous territorial and demographic units. Thus, while there is nothing essentially new in the idea itself, it has managed in an unusually short period of time to launch

newly formed political parties into power and armies into war. Observers of these crises, as well as participants, debate the reasons for the dramatic resurgence of ethnic antagonisms, but on one point there would surely be

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