

Tomorrow, in the first royal wedding to be held in the Vatican for 400 years, the Duke and Duchess of Kent's son Lord Nicholas Windsor will marry Princess Paola Doimi de Frankopan, a Croatian aristocrat. The Windsors are delighted at this clever addition to the family, but back home in the Balkans a dispute rages over her provenance, and right to use the royal Frankopan title. **Alex da Silva** investigates the twist in the fairytale

FROM CROATIA WITH LOVE

From the moment an official announcement was made by Buckingham Palace and the thick cream envelopes and invitations arrived at some of the smartest addresses in London and across Europe, tomorrow's wedding of Lord Nicholas Windsor and Cambridge-educated Croatian aristocrat Paola Doimi de Frankopan in the Vatican City State had royal fairytale engraved all over it.

They are an intriguing couple. Paola comes from a colourful Central European aristocratic Catholic family with a house in Kensington and a castle in Croatia. She is tall, blonde and bright - more academic and religious than Euro-social. Nicholas is a bespectacled part-time special needs teacher, and a devout Catholic convert who was once arrested for smoking cannabis in St James's Park. You are more likely to bump into them at the Brompton Oratory for a lunch-time service than lunching at Cipriani.

The ceremony itself - a private event with around 200 guests - will take place at the Church of Santo Stefano degli Abissini, discreetly tucked away behind St Peter's in Rome, and Lord Nicholas, Prince Charles's godson, will become the first member of the Royal Family to marry in the Vatican for 400 years. It will also be

the first open Catholic marriage of a British Royal since the reign of Queen Mary I.

Guests at tomorrow's chic society wedding will include royalty from across Europe, including Habsburgs, Braganzas, Bourbons and Prussians, as well as London society figures such as Lady Helen Taylor - Lord Nicholas's elder sister - and members of the Sainsbury clan. Paola's younger, Eton-educated brother Peter - a medieval history don at Oxford - is married to heiress Jessica Sainsbury. Together they created the hip country house hotel Cowley Manor in Gloucestershire and have recently added a new boutique hotel in Paris, L'Hôtel, to their collection. Jessica is the daughter of Sir Timothy (former MP and Minister for Trade) and Lady Sainsbury.

'The wedding will be a small and strictly private family affair,' says the couple's spokesman and friend Anthony Bailey. 'It is expected that only immediate family members and their friends will attend. Nevertheless, Lord Nicholas and his bride-to-be will be organising a private party to celebrate their marriage, in London sometime in the New Year, for other members of the Royal Family and close friends who are unable to travel or have other commitments.'

Despite Prince Charles and other senior Royal

YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO SEE THEM AT BROMPTON ORATORY THAN CIPRIANI





Main picture: Lord Nicholas Windsor with his bride Paola Doimi de Frankopan. The couple's engagement in *The Times* (below left). They marry tomorrow in the Vatican, in a small church behind St Peter's (below)


COURT CIRCULAR
London SW1.
The Duke and Duchess of Kent are pleased to announce the engagement of their son Nicholas to Paola, daughter of Don Louis and Donna Ingrid Doimi de Frankopan of London.



Left: Lord Nicholas of Windsor as a baby, cradled by his mother the Duchess of Kent. Right: the 1981 wedding of Charles and Diana. Lord Nicholas, who is Prince Charles's godson, served as a page; he is the page on the right in the front row

Family members not being present tomorrow, publicity for this glamorous international society wedding was always inevitable. It is not every day that an English Royal marries in the Vatican. But some of the attention the wedding has received has not been welcome. A report in *The Times* – published the same week as the Buckingham Palace press release in late September – claimed that Paola's family, although certainly aristocratic, were not really the Princes Frankopan after all, since they only added the name on to their own in 1991 (following the fall of the Iron Curtain and Croatian independence) and are therefore not entitled to use the titles of Prince and Princess. They adopted the name Frankopan legally in 1991. Before then, Paola and the rest of her family were simply called Doimi de Delupis, the name on their birth certificates. The Buckingham Palace announcement referred to Paola's parents as Don Louis and Donna Ingrid Doimi de Frankopan of London because the Palace cannot recognise titles from a republic.



Top: Lord Nicholas with his parents the Duke and Duchess of Kent, sister Lady Helen Taylor and brother the Earl of St Andrews in 1973. Above: with Lady Helen in Oxford, 2001

So, is the fairytale wedding really a fairytale? In Croatia, Frankopan is a highly emotive name, similar to Hanover in Germany or Borgese in Italy. In the cliquy and backbiting royal circles of Europe, there are actually several similarly contested royal titles – one example being the battle between the two houses (Italian and Spanish) of the Bourbon-Sicily family as to who has the right to call themselves Duke of Calabria (they both do).

While the English tend to find name changing a bit strange, it is actually quite common in Europe, where dynastic and titular disputes often simmer for centuries.

The facts in this case are as follows. Nobody has ever denied that the Doimi family are one of the oldest aristocratic families in Croatia. Although they don't appear in the *Almanach de Gotha*, the blue-blood directory of displaced Euro-royals – since the family have never been rulers over sovereign territory – the family do appear in many books dealing with the nobility of Croatia and particularly of Dalmatia, such as the standard works of Bojnicic and Heyer von Rosenfeld, the *Burke's Peerage of Central Europe*.

The family is well-known from the mid-13th century onwards in Dalmatia, where Nicholas

Doimi held the title of Count of Split. His son Peter became the son-in-law of Paul Subic, ruler of Bosnia and Prince of Dalmatia, whose descendants were granted the right to his titles and his possessions in perpetuity by King Andrew III of Hungary in 1293 – which is one of the family's claims to the right to be able to use the title of Prince.

Over the years, titles were also given to the Doimi family by rulers of Venice, as well as by the Holy Roman Empire (1688). The family history, its titles and nobility were confirmed by ducal letter by Francesco Loredan, Doge of Venice, in March 1753. After that point, further titles and honours were given to the family by the rulers of Austria and the Kingdom of Italy. They were also given a Papal Knighthood. In 1907, Peter and Lawrence Doimi represented the aristocracy of Dalmatia in Vienna. The family owned large estates on the islands of Hvar and Vis from the 18th century, producing prize-winning wine on the latter.

THE ROYAL MARRIAGE HAS ONLY INFLAMED BALKAN PASSIONS

The genealogical problems only began in 1991, following the fall of the Iron Curtain, when Paola's aristocratic London-based father Louis de Doimi, who was then head of the Croatian Nobility Association, fell out dramatically with his fellow members when he announced that the family were taking back the Frankopan name, which he said they were entitled to use as the Doimi family were originally descended from the founder of the Frankopan family. This was a fellow called Doimus, after whom Louis' family claim to be descended and named – in a direct line. According to sources close to the family, the Doimis are the branch of the

Frankopan family who moved to Dalmatia in the mid-13th century.

A source close to the family adds: 'The Doimi/Frankopan link had been common knowledge in the family for centuries: the Doimi coat of arms (a star) is identical to that of the Frankopan family; however, theirs also contains the Subic eagle wing, which they took on marrying into that princely family in the 13th century.'

Squabbles over use of titles, coats of arms and aristocratic rank are hardly new. But in the recently independent Croatia – where nationalistic and partisan feelings were running strong in 1991 – for Louis de Doimi to now style himself and his family Princes and Princesses Frankopan was guaranteed to cause trouble. And it did. An almighty row ensued over use of this adoptive title and name, which many thought Louis did not have the right to use.

Despite Paola's father Louis having actually set up the Croatian Nobility Association, he eventually resigned in the mid-Nineties because of infighting between rival factions of the Croatian nobility, who were vying for non-existent power and influence in the newly independent state.

The announcement of Paola's wedding to British royalty has only further inflamed passions, with the result that a handful of the association's members whom Louis fell out with have now – many years later – attacked him again in the press for taking the controversial step of adopting the Frankopan name in 1991. The attacks have been led by the

association's president, Ivo Durbesic.

A family source is quick to retaliate, pointing out to me that Durbesic himself does not appear in any of the standard books on Croatian aristocracy. 'His claims about expulsion are just Balkan positioning,'