

Battlefields and Onlookers

The beginning of the Balkan Wars caused different reactions and mixed feelings among the population of the peninsula. Both combatant sides had their strong supporters and equally strong opponents. The officially proclaimed neutrality of the Entente and the Central Powers in the armed conflict went side by side with enthusiastic support for the “brothers in faith and in arms”.

The Balkan Wars started a new round of political and diplomatic discussions on the future of the region. Plans for the creation of new states in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire re-emerged. While the political circles were trying to exploit the new situation for their own reasons, ordinary people were moved by the disasters of the war and the unclear perspective of a peace, in which the victors would impose their terms without respect for the needs of others. The sense of solidarity among people from different denominations, and especially among the Slav nations, was perceived as a serious threat by the ruling circles of the neighbouring non-combatant countries, and remained so for many years after the end of the wars.

The sources in this chapter try to reconstruct the attitude of the Balkan people under different political regimes towards the Balkan Wars. They vary from total involvement to the point of forming corps of volunteers, to comparative indifference and good humour. Parallel to those natural reactions were the contradictory long-term political plans.

IVa. The Balkan Provinces of the Ottoman Empire

In the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars were met with different hopes. Some people entered the Ottoman army hoping to destroy its enemies and preserve its integrity, while others were struggling for their own nation-states.

ALBANIA. As Albania was granted limited autonomy immediately before the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, the attitude towards the belligerent sides was not homogeneous. The main aim was to secure, and if possible, to expand the autonomy in all the regions that were claimed as part of the Albanian lands. That could be achieved by acting on the side of the victors and with the support of the Great Powers. Ottoman defeats in the first Balkan War forced the Albanians to give up their traditional autonomist strategy and to strike out for full independence. However, the conflicting interests of the Great Powers compelled the new Albania to lead a precarious existence amid diplomatic intrigue and armed assault for several years.

IV–1. Decisions about the attitude that Albanians should adopt, in the case of a Balkan War - Skopje, 14 October 1912

The branch of the “Salvation” Committee in Skopje and the “Black Society” held an emergency meeting with the subject:

Turkey will bring the war. So how will we rescue Albania?

The decisions taken were:

1. Send a proclamation to the Great Powers
2. Form a group of delegates to break Scutari’s Highlanders agreement with Montenegro.

3. This delegation will have the capacity to unify the Albanian regions in order to rescue the country from the danger of breaking apart.

The proclamation signed on 16 October 1912 by the "Black Society" stated that: "The Black Society", as representative of the Albanian people, is honoured to inform you that the Albanian people is fighting not to enforce the Turkish domination in the Balkans but to take hold of the whole Albanian territory. Therefore, whatever the end of the war may be, Albanians will never admit any other form of administration for the four vilayets than that of a single government.

Akte të Rilindjes Kombëtare Shqiptare, pp. 255-256.



The "Black Society for Salvation" (1911-1912) was an Albanian revolutionary and nationalist society which was active in several towns such as, Vlorë, Gjirokastra, Korçë, Monastir, Skopje etc. Its primary aim was the unification of the Scutari, Kosovo, Monastir and Janina vilayets into a single autonomous political unit with an Albanian administration and a separate parliament. It was a society with radical views and regarded the armed uprisings as the means to realising its goals. It played an important role in organising and co-ordinating the uprisings of 1911-1912 in Albania against the Ottoman rule. It also kept close contact with the Albanian patriotic societies abroad.

IV-2. Herbert Adams Gibbons, a young history student who travelled around the Balkans, working for the Red Cross during the Balkan Wars, writes about the Albanian defence of Scutari

Scutari was invested but the Montenegrins who had been able to put into the field scarcely more than thirty thousand men, found themselves mobilised for the entire winter. The great fortress of Tarabosh, a high mountain, towering over the town of Scutari and the lower end of the lake, was too strong for their forces and their artillery. Inside the city of Scutari, it was the Albanians fighting for their national life, and not the Turks, who organised and maintained the splendid and protracted resistance.

Gibbons, pp.274-275.



Why were the Albanians supporting the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the war? Did they fight for the Sultan in Istanbul, or for their national cause?

What were the pros and cons of that policy?

► v48. Before leaving Scutari : a Montenegrin mother and her son in front of the father's tomb, May 1913



L'illustration, janvier-décembre 1913, p.449.



Look carefully at the picture. Do you think that this is a spontaneous picture or is it posed especially for the camera?

IV-3. Telegram from the Head of the Albanian Provisional Government sent to the foreign ministers of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, 29 November 1912

I would like to inform Your Excellences of a remarkable event in the national life of the Albanians.

The representatives from all the Albanian re-

gions, of different religious affiliations, gathered yesterday in a National Assembly, in the city of Vlora, declared the independence of Albania, and elected a Provisional Government.

Albanians are happy to join the family of the free nations of East Europe, having no other aim than to live in peace with all their neighbours. Hoping that this change in the national life and the Provisional Government will be recognised by the Governments of Your Royal Highnesses; that every hostile action from your armies inside our national land will cease and all the Albanian territories occupied by the Allies' armies now, will be free again.

Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës..., pp.42-43.

► **v49. Albanian insurgents from Mirdita prepared to go to war against the Turkish army, 1912 (before the Balkan War)**



Gjurme te Historise Kombetare ne Fototeken e Shkodres, p.127.

IV-4. Official message from the Austro-Hungarian Consul sent to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vlore, 30 November 1912

During the conversation in our consulate today, with Ismail Kemal Bey⁵¹, where our Italian colleague was

⁵¹ Ismail Kemal Bey, (1844-1919) was born in Vlora to a wealthy feudal family. He did his elementary schooling in his hometown and afterwards attended the "Zosimea" college in Janina. In 1859 he moved to Istanbul with his family where he began a distinguished career in the Ottoman service and remained to contribute substantially to the winning of Alba-

also present, the former assured us that he was satisfied with the administrative operations until now. His authority in the unoccupied parts of the country had been recognised. Moreover the Turkish troops and generals in these territories are staying totally neutral. [...]

Troops of the west Turkish army are located in huge number in Lushnje under Mahmud Pasha's command, in Kelcyra under Seid Pasha, in Berat under Xhavid Pasha, in Leskovik under Ali Riza Pasha. These troops are totally demoralised, tired and un-equipped.

Ismail Qemal and Documents, p.246.



What was the situation in Albanian lands at the end of the war?

Why was the Provisional Government seeking good relations with the Balkan allies?

Was there a contradiction between the demands of the Albanians, Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks?

IV-5. The dangers of delimitating Albania for European peace –a French perspective

European Implications of the Albanian Question

In what way, can the delimitation of Albania now be a threat to European peace? The reason for this danger is simple.

nian independence. He participated actively in the Young Turks movement, but opposed their policy when they established their authoritarian rule. Despite the Young Turks' efforts against his candidacy, in December 1908, Ismail Kemal was elected member of the Ottoman parliament for the sanjak of Berat. After the outbreak of the First Balkan War, together with a group of other Albanian patriots, he organised several meetings with Albanians in the diaspora to discuss the Albanian issue. He made public his views about the future of Albania in several articles and interviews given for foreign newspapers. He returned to Albania on 19 November and after a meeting of representatives from all regions inhabited by Albanians, on 28 November 1912 he proclaimed Albanian independence from Turkish rule and became the first Albanian Prime Minister. In 1914 his government resigned and a European prince was established by the European Powers as King of Albania. Ismail Kemal died in 1919 in Italy and was buried in his hometown, Vlora.

Austria-Hungary, which did not take part in the war, has in reality, no authority to intervene in the division of European Turkey between the allies who invoke the right of conquest and the enormous sacrifices that they had to make, both human and financial. *However the proposal for Albania, presented by Vienna's government, only aims at stripping the Montenegrins, Serbians, and Greeks of the main results of their victories.*

The Great Powers are already conceding a lot to Austria-Hungary by approving the principle of an autonomous Albania, but it is obvious that this Albania should be restricted in size, in order to reconcile the preferences of Austria with the rights of the victorious Balkan allies.

But, if Austria is more or less supported in its ambitions by Germany and Italy, the Balkan allies have, as natural support, the *Triple Entente* powers, whose doctrine was proclaimed on 9 November 1912 by Mr. Asquith, the British Prime Minister. He said during the banquet of the lord mayor: *"The victorious shouldn't be deprived of such an expensive victory."* Consequently, the two important political European groups are struggling with each other over the Albanian question.

André Chéradame, *L'Illustration*,
3650, 8 février 1913, p. 115.

MACEDONIA. The situation in Macedonia⁵² was far more complex than that in Albania. While parts of the population sought the opportunity to join the neighbouring nation states, the idea of autonomy, as given in Article 23 of the Berlin treaty in 1878 was raised once again by some political circles in the emigration.

IV-6. Memorandum by a group of Macedonian intellectuals living in Saint Petersburg, dated 7 June 1913, and addressed "To the governments and societies of the allied Balkan States"

[...] In the name of the natural law, in the name of history, in the name of the practical purposefulness, we beg You, brothers, to accept to be informed of the following:

Macedonia is populated by a homogenous Slav people, that has its own history, its own way of life, it had its own State in the past, its own ideals, and therefore has the right to self-determination;

Macedonia should be an independent State within its own ethnographic, geographic and cultural-historical borders, with a government responsible to a people's assembly;

The Macedonian State should be a separate and

equal unit within a Balkan union with common custom borders;

In ecclesiastical matters, it is necessary to re-establish in Macedonia the old autocephalous church of Ohrid, which would then establish its canonical relations with the other Orthodox churches: the Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian, and Syrian-Arab;

In order to work out a better internal arrangement of the Macedonian State, a general representative body (national constitutional assembly) should be convened as soon as possible in Thessaloniki through general elections under the patronage of the other countries.

Brother allies – liberators! We hope that our words will find the way to your heart and mind and that You, following the example of the generous country of Russia and in the interests of your own future, will support the immediate creation of an independent Macedonian State by which You will preserve the peace and harmony amongst you. The sooner, the better for all of us. Such a solution de-

52 As variously defined: see table 13.

rives from the realisation of the great Slavo-Hellenic idea of a Balkan alliance and that is also what the interests of the world's culture and justice demand you to do.

Signed by Dimitar Chupovski (probable author), Gjorgji A. Georgov, G.K. Konstantinovich, Nace D. Dimov, I.G. Georgov.

Odbrani tekstovi za istorijata na makeonskiot narod,
pp.810-812.



What are the main political ideas expressed in this document?

What do you think they are referring to when they write 'generous Russia'?

Compare with Texts II-4, II-5 and II-6: try to understand what the meaning of 'Balkan Union' is in each of the four cases.

IV-7. The idea of an autonomous Macedonia questioned by a French journalist, August 1912

Are we going to apply this progression towards the autonomy of Macedonia? The idea of a Macedonia for the Macedonians has progressed in these last few years and tends to replace the idea of a more dangerous breaking up of Macedonia and its division between the different Balkan States. But the convulsions which have been continuously disturbing this province seem to originate in a Bulgarian movement rather than a Macedonian movement. In these conditions, it would be difficult to organise

Macedonian autonomy without considerably favouring the Bulgarian party by sacrificing other nationalities' parties. This would provoke apparently desperate outbreaks of resistance even in the heart of Macedonia. Finally, we should not forget that the Greeks and Koutzo-Vlachs (Romanians) of Macedonia, for fear of hegemony of Slavic elements, are in favour of the *status quo*. [...]

A Balkan war at the moment would be a significant threat for Europe. Europe should make an effort to avert this threat with the means at its disposal. Nothing is more legitimate.

Albéric Cahuet, "La situation en Turquie et la proposition Berchtold", *L'illustration*, 3626, 24 août 1912, p. 123.

► v50. Greek and Serbian diplomats and military representatives on the Kajmakchalan mountain discussing the borders in the partitioning of Macedonia



Overall Questions on Chapter IVa

What were the common elements in the expectations of the political circles in Albania and Macedonia at the end of the Balkan Wars?

Do they have anything in common with the expectations of the other Balkan nations and if so, in what respect? Point out the differences in these expectations and try to establish "the best solution".

IVb. The Balkan Lands of Austria-Hungary

The Balkan provinces of Austria-Hungary had to follow the official neutrality, proclaimed in Vienna, but for many reasons the population that inhabited these regions felt far more implicated than the cabinet ministers in the imperial capital.

SLOVENIA. The Slovenes showed great interest in the Balkan Wars and strong sympathy for South-Slav nations was evident. The war was presented as a war of the suppressed nations against Turkish supremacy, as a cultural and religious (Christianity against Islam) war, and also as a war for the union of South-Slav nations. Though the policy of the Slovenian political parties was not directed towards finding perspectives for the solution of the Slovenian national question outside the borders of Austria-Hungary, they shared the belief that the liberation of South-Slav nations would strengthen the position of the Slav nations within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

IV-8. *War in the Balkans 1912/13*, a book published in 1914, brought an in-depth analysis of the nations involved in the war, the causes and consequences of the war

Before the War - Reasons for War

...SERBIA WILL TO THE SEA

It is obvious that Serbia could not develop accordingly within such borders. Only if Serbia could get the Old Serbia, from which there is the shortest access to the Adriatic coast along the river Drina valley, to the ports of Sv. Ivan, Lješ and Drač, would it have the necessary conditions for normal life and economic development. [...]

...BULGARIA WILL LIBERATE THE MACEDONIANS

Now, that their happier brothers in the Balkans went into battle to free themselves from terrible slavery, the Macedonians have risen again too. They forgot party disputes and embraced each other in a brotherly spirit, when fighting for their home country. Some of them have joined the Bulgarian army as volunteers, others went to the mountains; they were both fighting for the freedom which they had craved for such a long time and for which so much blood had already been shed. They have risen to

avenge themselves for the innumerable wrongs and atrocities, to avenge their fathers and mothers, their wives and children. Now, they did not retreat to the mountains to hide from the Turks, they were allured by a bright glow, which announced a new, free life to the home country. The big day now came for them. [...]

...GREECE DEMANDS CRETE

The reason, which led the Greeks to join the Balkan States in the war against Turkey, was the island of Crete. [...]

Anyway, Greece had a number of other reasons for the attack. Like the Slavs, the Greeks had also suffered under Turkish rule. Particularly in Epirus, the Turks and the Albanians slaughtered each other constantly. There was no peace on the islands either; shortly before the war, a ruthless rebellion was raging on the island of Samos.

Vojska na Balkanu (War on the Balkans), pp. 27, 42.



What do the Slovenes see as the main reasons for the outbreak of the Balkan Wars?

Are they familiar with the problems in the Balkans?

Although recognising the interests of the Balkan nation-states, why do they not recognise the interests of the Ottoman Empire?

IV–9. A Slovenian perspective on the situation in Macedonia

A dispute about Macedonia

Slovenes are surely friends of the Slav nations in the Balkans. They are fond of all of them. Therefore they feel very sorry that the Serbs and Bulgarians have got into a quarrel. Slovenes do not take sides and behave impartially. This however does not mean that they are indifferent observers of the dispute; for we know well that what matters here is not only the destiny of individual ethnic groups, but the destiny of the Balkans, of all South Slavs and of Slavs in general. No Slav would think of setting fire to this dispute; even the Russians, as the oldest brothers avoid interfering directly in the conflict as arbiters. [...]

The “Russian Word” (“Ruskoje Slovo”) explicitly warns the Serbs – and implicitly also the Bulgarians – that in the case (of the war) they should not reckon upon Russian support nor on the sympathies of the Entente...” A new Balkan War should in no way be allowed. The Great Powers have the necessary means

at their disposal to put an end to the stupid disputes and intransigence of one or the other side. Such a measure is the autonomy of Macedonia – it is clear that such a measure will be taken only in an extreme case, when all the other means become ineffective”.

The opinion of the Russian newspaper is nothing new to the world. It has been known in smaller circles in the Balkans for months that a party exists – a more or less important one – which would like to create an autonomous Macedonia; this is the party of separatists. They act secretly, and it is clear why. But if they get support from such a strong side as the Russian one, this can pluck up their courage, they can soon get new followers and the future can unexpectedly smile on them.

Slovenec, 122, 31 May 1913.



The author of this article is Anton Bezenšek, a Slovene stenographer and translator living in Sofia. *Slovenec* (Slovene) was a daily Catholic newspaper.

CROATIA. Being closer to the allied Balkan nations, Croatia took a closer and more concrete look at the Balkan Wars. Side by side with analytical materials, some of the Croats shared their personal impressions of the belligerent countries in the Zagreb newspapers. At the same time, both points of view were subjected to the criticism of the cartoons.

IV–10. The *Obzor* (*The Horizon*), daily paper in Zagreb, 10 October 1912

WAR IN THE BALKANS

The Balkan countries surely don't enter the war only to obtain that little promises for reforms in Turkey, but also with the hope of getting complete autonomy for the Christian provinces, or at least to widen their territory (...) Of course, the final success of the Balkan countries depends on their readiness for war and the understanding and carrying out of their mutual interests. If this Alliance is based on a solid foundation, its success is guaranteed; they will be

able to oppose all external attempts as a whole, as a new authority.



The *Obzor* (*The Horizon*), issued between 1860 and 1941, was one of the most widely-read daily papers in Zagreb. When the Balkan Wars broke out, the editor was Slavko Vodvarka.



According to the text above, in Croatian public opinion, what is the attitude towards the Balkan Alliance and towards the Ottoman Empire?

► v51. Croatian cartoon, 1912



Koprive (Nettle) satirical magazine, 1912.

Translation:
 –“Mum, mum, the war has been declared!”
 –“I’ll show you what the real war is!”

Why were some Croats so enthusiastic about the declaration of the Balkan War?
 Is the official neutrality of Austria-Hungary reflected in the above sources?
 What kind of similarities and differences do you see in the attitudes of the Croats and the Slovenes?

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. As a new province in Austria-Hungary since 1908 and as a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, it was in a very particular position when the Balkan Wars started. The provincial government had to secure neutrality, but the population was not so reserved.

IV–11. The provincial Habsburg authorities developed special measures in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Since the beginning of the Balkan Wars, the Head of State Government [in Bosnia and Herzegovina], Oskar Potchiorek, has taken many actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to prepare for war against Serbia and Montenegro. Personally, he has great desires for this war, with the central Austro-Hungarian Minister for War. So they have just been waiting for a good reason. The expansion of military functions was given to Potchiorek, so he was promoted to

army inspector and commanding general. The mobilisation of recruits has started.

Even before the First Balkan War, Potchiorek had been preparing the introduction of so-called special measures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to secure his back in case of eventual war against Serbia. The Skadar crisis was a good reason for him to introduce this special status in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through an agreement with the central Minister of Finance, Bilinski, and central Minister for Foreign Affairs, Berthold. The Emperor’s approval for this action was granted on 1 May, and already on 3 May 1913, posters with information about special measures were

posted all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under the special measures, some citizens' freedoms have been restricted or aborted: some articles of the Bosnian constitution have been suspended; freedom of movement and freedom of press have been restricted. This status has had a very negative affect on the whole population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Madzar, *Balkanski ratovi i iznimne mjere u Bosni i Hercegovini...*, pp. 64-65.



What kind of measures did the Habsburg authorities implement in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Were they caused solely by the outbreak of the Balkan Wars or did they have wider aims?
Why did the population have a negative attitude to state policy?

IV-12. Restriction of the volunteer movement inside Bosnia and Herzegovina

After the escorting of 300 soldiers on their way to volunteer for the Turkish army in October 1912, public manifestation of volunteering became illegal. On that occasion, together with the volunteers, a group of a few thousand Muslim demonstrators marched under green flags until the railway station. The central ministry protested against this kind of public support for one of the sides involved in the war. The order was immediately sent to regional institutions that the gathering of volunteers had already been

forbidden on 14 October. From then on, volunteers only passed the border illegally.

Ekmečić, *Uticaj balkanskih ratova...*, p. 416.

IV-13. Serbian volunteers in Bosnia and Herzegovina

It was not easy to become a member of the volunteer units, especially not when it was about a special one. The criteria were extremely specific in order to be taken into units led by vojvodas [commanders] Vojislav Tankosić and Vuk Popović, but many Serbs wanted to be a part of these units. Still, only tall people could be accepted into those units. So, in the front of the command office of Tankosić's unit there were a lot of happy and sad pictures. Of course, happy were those to whom admittance was granted, and sad, even crying, were those who had been rejected, for different reasons, mostly because of age or physical status. Among the group rejected by vojvoda Tankosić, was one short dark-skinned boy. It was Gavrilo Princip.

Micević, *Srpski dobrovoljci u ratovima...*, pp. 15-16.



Why do young men go as volunteers to a war in which their state is not participating?
Compare this with the volunteer movement in WWI.
Do you know of any cases where young men volunteered to go to war for motives other than nationality (i.e. from Western Europe to Balkan countries)?



General questions on Chapter IVb

Why were some of the peoples in the Balkan provinces of Austria-Hungary trying to participate in the Balkan Wars, while others merely showed interest?
To what extent does a feeling of common belonging exist between them, or a common loyalty to the country they live in?
Can we compare it to the feelings of the peoples living in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire or in the Balkan nation states?



Overall questions on Chapter IV

What were the key factors in the formation of Balkan public opinion at the beginning of the Balkan Wars?
Could the Ottoman Empire or Austria-Hungary have relied on the loyalty of all their citizens?