

TEACHING MODERN SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN HISTORY
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

WORKBOOK 3

The Balkan Wars



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Alternative Educational Materials

The Balkan Wars

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Alternative Educational Materials

WORKBOOK 3

The Balkan Wars

Edited by

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Series editor

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Introduction

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 are an event of significant importance in the 20th century history of Southeast Europe. Their long-term consequences have influenced the political, socio-economic and cultural development of the region for decades and some of their effects are still the subject of scientific and even public discussions. Historiographies of the states involved in these wars have offered conflicting interpretations; varying not only between countries, but also within them. In countries such as Bulgaria and Turkey, the trauma of defeat triggered a quest for “responsibilities” while the identification of the “causes” of the war had political targets. For different reasons, in Serbia and Greece, who were the “victors” of the war, the Balkan Wars, became part of a further-reaching issue which included World War I (WWI) in the first case and the Asia Minor War in the latter.

The roots of the Balkan Wars date back to the consequences of the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, that marked the end of the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878, one of the most severe crises in the history of the so-called Eastern Question. That question consisted of three main elements: the diplomatic struggles between the Great Powers for influence in the Ottoman territories, the gradual decline of the Empire of the sultan and the national liberation movements of the Balkan peoples in striving for the establishment of their nation-states. The crisis of 1875-1878 was solved by the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin. It proclaimed the independence of Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, who all gained new territories, as did Greece, and created the Principality of Bulgaria and the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia. Reforms and autonomy had to be implemented in the other European lands of the Sublime Porte: Albania, Macedonia, Epirus, etc. Cyprus was ceded to British administration while Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina and Novi Pazar.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Berlin created a number of conflicts and tensions among the Balkan nations, because it did not follow the modern principle of nationality when it created the new borders. In many places it was not possible to follow this principle because different nationalities had lived there for centuries side-by-side. None of the Balkan nations achieved national unification inside one state, and that unification became the main goal in their foreign policies. That urge resulted in a set of crises: the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria and the subsequent Serbo-Bulgarian war in 1885, the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, the uprising in Macedonia in 1903, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, the proclamation of Bulgarian independence in 1908, and the Albanian uprising of 1910-1912, as well as some more minor tensions.

However, the main tendency in the history of the Balkan countries was of peaceful development and modernisation. Efforts were made to establish modern liberal constitutional institutions and political systems, and to create extensive communication networks, with an emphasis on railway and road construction, the building of industry and of active interior and foreign trade connections. In all respects, the Balkan countries were envisaging their integration into the European world. This created a spirit of competitiveness and progress. The development of national culture was one of the main fields for modernisation and competition in which the State acted as the key constructor of national identity. While all the Balkan nations created their nation-states, it was high time for the nation-states to consolidate the nations. The means used were public education, national holidays and celebrations, military service, national churches. The spirit of nationalism dominated every event and process.

At the same time, all of the Balkan States tried to consolidate their existence, creating perspectives for further territorial gains, at the expense of their neighbours and most of all of the Ottoman Empire. The motivation for this varied from ethnographical, geopolitical and economic realities, to historical and cultural rights. The

most efficient instruments of this policy of state nationalism were the “millet” schools and communal structures in the European Ottoman provinces and the clash between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate. They were supported by all kinds of civil and irredentist initiatives.

During the first decade of the 20th century, the situation in Europe gave an impetus to this development. The establishment of the two antagonistic military blocks, the Entente and the Central Powers, deeply influenced inter-Balkan relations. Arms races and militarism became characteristic features of Southeast European societies as well. The war budgets of Southeast European governments amounted to one third of state expenditure. Armies doubled their size and new armaments were bought from Europe. Everything was ready for war. Under constant pressure from the Entente and most of all from Russia, the idea for the creation of a Balkan union that could solve the common problems of the Balkan states through co-operation became very popular. The Italian-Ottoman war of 1911-1912, which resulted in the Italian conquest of Libya and the Dodecanese, and the permanent instability in the European Ottoman territories urged the Balkan politicians on, even more.

The Ottoman Empire’s disintegration was hastened after the Young Turk revolution of 1908. The Turkish nationalism of the Committee of Union and Progress increased Christian enmity while alienating the one people traditionally loyal to the regime, the Albanians. The Albanian rebellion in 1911 presaged radical changes in the balance of power in the Balkans. The Great Powers, particularly Italy and Austria-Hungary, were concerned with Albania’s fate, while the neighbouring Balkan States had territorial aspirations in the same region. The Albanian leaders, before the nightmare of partition among their neighbours – a likely perspective after Ottoman defeats in the Italian-Ottoman war – decided upon a full-scale insurrection in order to establish their autonomous position. By mid-July 1912, the Albanian rebels were victorious over the Turkish troops and on 30th July, demanded that the Ottoman parliament be dissolved within forty-eight hours.

In February 1912, a pact of alliance was signed between Serbia and Bulgaria and in May 1912 a similar pact was signed between Greece and Bulgaria. In August 1912, a verbal agreement was reached between Bulgaria and Montenegro. The attempts to include Romania in the Balkan League were futile. The union was constructed under the close control of the Entente and the plans were to use it in the forthcoming World War, but the interests of the Balkan Allies made things different. They took the initiative to exercise pressure on the Ottoman government for reforms and autonomy in Albania and Macedonia. When the Porte rejected these initiatives, the war started at the beginning of October 1912, despite the efforts of the Great Powers to postpone it.

Up to the beginning of November, when the first phase of the war ended, the Balkan Allies had been victorious. The Bulgarian army moved close to Istanbul and Salonica, the Greek army entered the second city and controlled Epirus and part of Macedonia, the Serbian and Montenegrin armies took Kosovo, Novi Pazar, Northern Albania and part of Macedonia. The Greek navy paralysed Ottoman communications in the Aegean Sea, while the Bulgarian navy did the same in the Black Sea. A truce was signed in late November, but Greece did not join it and continued the war, taking the Eastern Aegean islands of Limnos, Lesbos, Chios and Samos and advancing into South Albania.

The peace negotiations started at the beginning of December 1912 in London, where the ambassadors of the Great Powers held their conference, elaborating the conditions of the peace. The Balkan Allies tried to obtain all European Ottoman possessions to the west of the Midia-Rodosto line and the Aegean islands, including Crete. The Porte suggested giving autonomy to Macedonia and Albania, but to lose no territories. The agreement, proposed by the Great Powers, was similar to that proposed by the Allies. This generated a coup d’état in Istanbul and the new government broke the negotiations and renewed hostile actions in mid-January 1913.

The second phase of the war lasted for nearly three months. The Ottoman counterattacks in Eastern Thrace were driven back by the Bulgarian army; the Montenegrin army took the fortress of Shkodra, the Greek army took the fortress of Ioannina and the Bulgarian army took Adrianople.

The peace negotiations in London were renewed and on 17 May 1913 the peace was signed. The Allies

received all Ottoman lands in Europe to the west of the Midia-Enos line and also Crete. They had to distribute the acquisitions between themselves and this crucial problem led to the disintegration of the Balkan league. Meanwhile, Romania claimed compensation in South Dobrudja. At first, Bulgaria rejected the claim but later in April 1913, agreed to cede the town of Silistra at the conference of Saint Petersburg. The real distribution of the spoils of war was still to come.

All the Balkan statesmen, armed with all possible kinds of arguments, claimed more and more territories. The “apple of discord” was Macedonia where the delimitation of frontiers proved to be an almost insoluble problem. While the partition was easier between Serbia and Greece, Bulgaria’s aspirations were horizontal and cut across the Greek and Serbian occupation zones. In the Balkan States, the opposition parties were extremely radical, pleading for a new war, this time against the former allies. The irredentist organisations threatened their own ministers with death if they were to agree to concessions. Despite this, the governments tried to reach demarcation agreements among the armies and in many respects were successful. The growing tension was manifest in minor clashes and incidents between the Allies.

On 19 May 1913, Greece and Serbia signed a pact of alliance and broad territorial arrangement. The Russian attempt to hold another conference of the Balkan prime-ministers in Saint Petersburg to solve the territorial dispute was late and ineffective. On 16 June 1913, King Ferdinand ordered general Savov to attack the Serbian and Greek lines in Macedonia. This marked the start of the Second Balkan (Interallied) War. Greece, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Bulgaria and were backed by Romania. The Ottoman Empire also drove its armies against Bulgaria. After more than a month of fierce battles, the Great Powers intervened again and stopped the military actions. The treaties of Bucharest and of Istanbul set the new territorial arrangement in Southeast Europe. Romania took South Dobrudja. Serbia acquired Kosovo, Novi Pazar and Vardar Macedonia. Greece received Epirus, Aegean Macedonia and Crete. Montenegro annexed a number of neighbouring territories. Bulgaria took Pirin Macedonia and Western Thrace. The Ottoman Empire reacquired Eastern Thrace. Albania was proclaimed an independent country.

The Balkan Wars created a new situation in the peninsula. None of the countries was fully content with the new borders, although this discontent was stronger in the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria and Albania. Greece demanded the Aegean islands, Serbia aspired to an outlet to the sea and Bosnia and Herzegovina; Montenegro wanted Shkodra, while Romania was interested in Transylvania and Bessarabia. These aspirations shaped the policies of the Balkan States at the outbreak of World War I that started in the Balkans and was considered by many contemporaries and historians as the next Balkan war, but this time involving the Great Powers as well.

At the same time, the Balkan Wars created hatred, suspicion and fear among the Balkan people. National narratives obliterated personal memories and common feelings and, in neighbouring nations, shaped the image of the enemy. The psychological trauma of the wars, which had existed for many years in each of the belligerent countries, merged with the new trauma, caused by World War I, and was extremely strong in the Ottoman Empire and in Bulgaria. It was borne for decades by the families of the refugees and influenced the collective memory of every Balkan nation. On that ground, the wars strengthened national feelings and national identity, increasing the notion of national solidarity and a common fate.

The aim of this Workbook is to break away from the traditional way of presenting the Balkan Wars in schools and universities as a predominantly political event, where the main figures are kings, ministers and generals. Of course, they played important roles, but the military actions were carried by the lower ranks; people who, in normal life, were civilians, and the wars influenced the everyday life of the whole society. The common idea of a war as something consisting only of battlefields, victories and defeats has little to do with reality, where ordinary people in the rear suffered the hardships of war under the fear of losing their most beloved. In those hard times, there were acts of cruelty and atrocities, but also acts of humanism and solidarity. Even in the trenches and during ceasefire, human relations developed across the lines through common suffering.

Our idea is to portray, side-by-side, the different aspects of the wars and how they were perceived by different groups of people throughout Southeast Europe. A comparative approach will enable us to understand the multi-perspective aspect of the historical processes, considering not only the different positions of states and nations, but also to follow the different trends in a single society, that is thought to be, by definition, "homogeneous". By comparing the different contemporary and modern perspectives, we shall avoid the illusion of a "monolithic" history where the relativity of the "truth" is seen as an obstacle for understanding the past.

This Workbook is to be read in comparison and in parallel with all the other three Workbooks. First, it is a complement to Workbook 1, which describes the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's disintegration. Second, it overlaps with Workbook 2, which follows the process of nation-building in Southeast Europe. The Balkan Wars were an important episode in the consolidation of the Balkan nation-states and in the culmination of antagonistic nationalisms. Finally, Workbook 4, covering World War II, may be used as a point of cross-reference, in order to better understand the war phenomenon and the war experience in the 20th century.

Chronology

Year	Month	Event
1911	Summer	Activation of the Albanian national movement.
	mid-July	Assault by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) in Shtip, Macedonia. The Ottoman reprisals give impetus to the initial talks between Bulgaria and Serbia.
	September, 16 th	Italy declares war on the Ottoman Empire for the acquisition of Libya.
1912	February, 29 th	Bulgarian-Serbian treaty of defensive alliance.
	May, 16 th	Secret Bulgarian-Greek treaty of defensive alliance.
	May, 21 st -27 th	Italy takes over the Dodecanese islands.
	July, 19 th	Assault by the IMRO in Kozani, Macedonia. The Ottoman reprisals outrage the Balkan Christian States.
	July, 30 th	Albanian rebels demand that the Ottoman parliament be dissolved within forty-eight hours and present their specific demands for autonomy (the four vilayets of Scutari, Kosovo, Janina, and Monastir to be united into one province; Albanian soldiers to serve only in that province; Albanian to be the language of administration and education; all Albanians to have the right to bear arms).
	August, 15 th (circa)	Oral agreement between Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro: Bulgaria gives a military loan to Montenegro and pays for the Montenegrin army during wartime. Montenegro agrees to attack the Porte without provocation.
	September, 15 th	Secret instruction No. 5669 is issued by the Serbian government to its embassies to act for the incorporation of Ohrid and Prilep into Serbia.
	September, 17 th	Ultimatum of the Balkan League (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia) to the Porte: immediate autonomy to Macedonia according to the Treaty of Berlin. State of emergency and general mobilisation declared in Turkey and in the Balkan countries (18 September).
	September, 18 th	Formation of 70 small bands of IMRO activists in Sofia for reconnaissance and sabotage actions in Macedonia and Thrace.
September, 22 nd	A secret military convention between Bulgaria and Greece.	
September, 23 rd	Formation of the Macedonian-Adrianople VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachments) from refugees under general Petar Darvingov—circa 14,600 participants.	
September, 26 th	The Montenegrin army attacks the Porte.	

Year	Month	Event
1912	October, 2 nd	The Peace Treaty between Italy and the Ottoman Empire is signed in Ouchy.
	October, 3 rd	The Porte rejects the ultimatum and breaks diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Serbia but tries to improve relations with Greece.
	October, 4 th	The Ottoman Empire declares war on the Allies. The next day, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia (5 th October) declare war on the Porte. Beginning of military activity. Romania declares neutrality.
	October, 7 th -15 th	The Bulgarian troops take Eastern Rhodopes and stop the Ottoman counteroffensive (15 th -25 th October).
	October, 8 th -13 th	1 st and 3 rd Bulgarian armies break the first Ottoman defence line at Eskipolos-Petra, take Lozengrad and the 2 nd Bulgarian army surrounds Adrianople. On October, 13 th the Serbian army takes Skopje, Kumanovo, Veles and Shtip in Macedonia.
	October, 9 th -10 th	The Greek army wins the battle at Sarantaporo.
	October, 15 th	Implementation of the Serbian administrative system in the new territories in Macedonia and Kosovo.
	October, 16 th	First aeroplane bombing in Europe -of Adrianople fortress by Bulgarian airforce.
	October, 17 th -20 th	1 st and 3 rd Bulgarian armies break the second Ottoman defence line at Ljule Burgas-Bunarhissar.
	October, 19 th -20 th	The Greek army wins the battle of Yannitza.
	October, 27 th	A new government is formed in Romania headed by Titu Maiorescu.
	October, 28 th	The Greek army enters Thessaloniki (surrendered on October, 27 th) in the morning and the Bulgarian Rila division enters in the afternoon. Beginning of the Thessaloniki dispute.
	October, 29 th	The Porte asks for an armistice in Sofia, but the Bulgarian government, forced by King Ferdinand I, neglects the proposal and hides it from the Allies.
	November, 1 st	Beginning of the Christianisation of the Pomaks in the Rhodopes. Official Bulgarian church mission is sent in December.
	November, 4 th -5 th	1 st and 3 rd Bulgarian armies unsuccessfully attack the third Ottoman defence line at Chataldja.
	November, 4 th -9 th	Declarations of the Central Committee of IMRO against the Serbian and Greek activity in Macedonia.

Year	Month	Event
1912	November, 9 th	Implementation of the Bulgarian administration in the new territories.
	November, 14 th	The Macedonian-Adrianople VAD defeats the Ottoman forces in Western Thrace.
	November, 18 th	The Macedonian-Romanian society presses the government for action.
	November, 20 th	Armistice between the Allies and the Porte. Greece rejects the armistice and continues military action in North Epirus.
	November, 20 th -21 st	First conflict between the Bulgarian and Greek troops near Thessaloniki, settled at the end of the month.
	November, 28 th	A national congress assembled in Valona proclaims the independence of Albania.
	December, 3 rd	Greek-Ottoman naval battle at Elly island.
	December, 3 rd -24 th	London peace conference. The Allies demand all European Ottoman provinces to the west of the line Midia-Rodosto and Crete. The Porte proposes to grant autonomy to Macedonia and refuses to cede territories. On Christmas day the Porte breaks away from the negotiations, the Great Powers exercise pressure (note of 1913, January 4 th) and the proposals of the Allies are accepted. The London Conference of Ambassadors announces that Albania should become an independent state (20 th December).
	December, 8 th -17 th	Bulgarian secret mission in Constantinople for separate peace with the Ottoman Empire fails.
	1913	January, 5 th
January, 16 th		Bulgarian-Romanian protocol in London in order to rectify the positions of these countries in Dobrudja. Under Russian pressure, Sofia is ready to rectify the border.
January, 21 st		The Porte denounces the armistice and starts hostile actions with the cry "Sofia or death!".
January, 26 th -28 th		The Ottoman counterattacks in Gallipoli and at Chataldja and the landing at Sharkjoi is thrown back by the Bulgarian troops.
January, 30 th -February 2 nd		Futile Bulgarian-Romanian negotiations in Sofia on Dobrudja.
February, 5 th		The secret treaty between Romania and Austria-Hungary is renewed.
February, 21 st		The Greek army captures Ioannina. Bulgarian-Greek incidents at Nigrita.
March, 5 th		Assassination of King George I of Greece in Thessaloniki.

Year	Month	Event
1913	March, 11 th -13 th	2 nd Bulgarian army captures Adrianople.
	March, 18 th -April, 26 th	Saint Petersburg Conference of the Great Powers on the Dobrudja dispute. Bulgaria cedes Silistra to Romania and guarantees the privileges of the Vlachs in Macedonia, but the tension remains.
	April, 10 th	The Montenegrin army takes the fortress of Shkodra.
	April, 13 th	Armistice between the Porte and the Balkan League.
	April, 22 nd	Greek-Serbian protocol signed, followed by a military pact (1 st May 1913).
	May, 19 th -21 st	Meetings of the Bulgarian-Greek delimitation commission in Thessaloniki come to an agreement. By the end of the month the delimitation is established with some exceptions.
	May, 17 th	London Peace Treaty.
	May, 19 th	Greek-Serbian Treaty in Thessaloniki.
	May, 30 th	Serbia breaks the railway connections with Bulgaria.
	June, 1 st	Bulgarian Prime Minister, Iv. Ev. Geshov resigns and is replaced by Stojan Danev. Prime Minister N. Pashich resigns in Belgrade. Both acts put pressure on Russia in connection with the arbitration settlement.
	June, 5 th -13 th	Bulgarian-Serbian military clashes around Zletovo.
	June, 15 th	The Tikvesh uprising of IMRO at the rear of the Serbian army with the consent of the Bulgarian general command.
	June, 16 th	By secret command of King Ferdinand I, the Bulgarian troops attack the Serbian army to help the insurgents. Other Bulgarian troops take the port Leftera and shell the Greek cruisers there. Beginning of the Second Balkan War.
	June, 18 th	The Bulgarian government cancels all military action and changes the supreme commanding general, appointing the pro-Russian general Radko Dimitriev. The Russian government proposes a conference.
	June, 19 th -21 st	Bulgarian-Greek battle of Kukush/Kilkis.
	June 21 st - July 11 th	Greek offensive in Eastern Macedonia reaches Simitli (13 th July), where it is stopped by the Bulgarian army. By 15 th July the Greek army takes Western Thrace.
	June, 22 nd -28 th	The Bulgarian army takes Pirot in Serbia.
June, 28 th	Romania declares war on Bulgaria and by 5 th July occupies Northern Bulgaria without resistance. On 11 th July Austria-Hungary stops the Romanian advance.	

Year	Month	Event
1913	June, 30 th	The Porte begins its advance in Eastern Thrace and takes Adrianople (10 th July).
	July, 3 rd	The Romanian army occupies Varna in Bulgaria, on 6 th July. A Romanian cavalry detachment arrives in Sofia.
	July, 4 th	A new pro-Austro-Bulgarian government is formed headed by Vassil Radoslavov.
	July, 13 th	Muslim uprising in Western Thrace against the withdrawing Bulgarian and the advancing Greek troops – “the Gjumurdjina/Komotini republic”.
	July, 15 th -17 th	Bulgarian counteroffensive against the Greek army around Kresna.
	July, 29 th	The Conference of Ambassadors decides that Albania should become “an independent, sovereign principality”. The powers select Prince William of Wied, a 35-year-old German army captain, to be the ruler of Albania. On 3 rd September 1914, Prince William flees the country.
	July, 17 th - August, 16 th	Bucharest peace conference; armistice on 18 th July.
	July, 25 th -August 15 th	Evacuation of the Romanian army from Bulgaria.
	September, 16 th	Constantinople peace treaty between Bulgaria and the Porte. The latter takes back Eastern Thrace with rectifications of the border in favour of Bulgaria and the former takes Western Thrace.
	November, 1 st	Peace treaty between Greece and the Porte signed in Athens.
	December, 19 th	Protocol of Florence. The frontier commission appointed by the London Conference of Ambassadors delimits Albania’s southern frontier and assigns Koritsa/Korcë and Argyrokastron/Gjinokastër, occupied by Greece, to Albania.
	1914	February, 13 th
February, 28 th		The Greeks of southern Albania (called northern Epirus by them) declare their independence under the leadership of G.Ch. Zographos, the former Foreign Minister of Greece.
July, 28 th		Assassination of Crown Prince Franz-Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Vienna delivers an ultimatum to Belgrade—beginning of the July crisis.
August, 1 st		Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia—outbreak of World War I. All other Balkan countries declare neutrality.

