

Serbia and the Balkans Early 20th Century

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Political background

- The Balkan Regions included: Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Rumania
- The national and racial groups in the Balkan peninsula were struggling to attain national self-determination.
- The Ottoman Empire had controlled most of the Balkan peninsula since the 18th Century.
- Britain and France had, for most of the 19th Century supported Turkey against Russia to preserve the balance of power in Eastern-Mediterranean
- Britain and France had wanted to prevent Russia from becoming too strong.
- By the 19th Century the Ottoman Empire was crumbling as a result of corruption and an overburdened administration system.
- The collapse of the Turkish power left Turkish Balkan territory vulnerable.

Political background continued

- 1829 the Greeks successfully broke away from the Ottoman Empire, this resulted in the Serbs, Rumanians, and Bulgars all clamouring for Independence.
- Austria-hungary argued for the continued maintenance of 'legitimate' rule in the Balkans.
- Russia encouraged the nationalistic movements of the Balkans on the grounds of common Slavic backgrounds and common religious membership.
- The Serbs were the most active nationalists.
- 1829 - Serbia was granted semi-autonomy within the Turkish Empire.
- 1878 - Serbia achieved separate territorial identity, however this new nation did not include all the Serbian and Slavic people as many were still under the Austrian rule.
- "Pan Slavism" gained support in 1878-policy of uniting all such peoples into one nation, including all Slavs of south Austria. However this would only happen if the remainder of the Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Poles, Ruthenians and Italians were released from the rule of the Hapsburg Empire.

Political background

1878 Bosnia-Herzegovina was assigned to Austria administration, which basically meant that it remained Turkish territory.

1908 - Hapsburg Empire formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, this was perceived by the Serbs as a deliberate move to counter “Pan-Slavism”.

Serbia then prepared for war, who would be backed by Russia, but once Germany assured Austria of support, Russia backed away from the conflict.

Further instability in the Balkans resulted in the Balkan wars of 1912 - 1913.

The Balkan league of Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro → attacked Turkey and forced it to surrender its possession of European mainland. This led to Balkan states managing to liberate themselves from Ottoman rule.

1879 - Dual alliance of Germany and Austria - Hungary.

1882 - Triple Alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary, between Germany Austria Hungary and Italy.

The First Balkan War - 1912

- October 1912 - Balkan League took combined strengths to attack already weakened Turkey.
- Austrian generals called for a quick war to “crush” Serbia.
- However, if Austria attacked Serbia, Russia would back Serbia, then if Russia attacked Austria, Germany would back Austria. If Germany attacked Russia, France would become involved, which Britain would also be pulled in. This would be the trigger for a European war.
- This was not desired, therefore, “great powers” stepped in and forced peace settlement on the Balkan states.
- At conference, Austria thwarted Serbia’s plans for a coastline by having a new country, Albania, placed b/w Serbia and the Adriatic Sea.
- The rest of the Turkish lands were shared among the Balkan league.

The Second Balkan war

- Within a month the Balkan league had fallen out over the spoils.
- Bulgaria quarrelled with Serbia and Greece.
- June 1913 - Bulgarians began 2nd Balkan war by attacking their former allies. And were quickly defeated
- Peace settlement followed and Bulgaria surrendered nearly all the lands they had won in the first was to Greece and Serbia.
- **The Legacy of the Balkan wars:** disastrous effect on Austro-Serbian relations.
- Serbia felt cheated at being cut off from the sea by Albania.
- Serbian press became virulent in demands for Slavic unity.
- Austria resented Serbia's success, this was Serbia doubling in size and turn into a formidable military power.

Political leaders of Balkan Regions

- Serbia: Peter I of the Karageorgevich dynasty since 1903
- Bulgaria: Ferdinand I (Prince until 1918)
- Greece: Georgios (George I) Monarch
- Albania: Turhman Pashe Permeti, 1914 President. Esad Toptani, 1914 President

Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Strengths:** all Balkan regions states had same aim and were fighting for the same cause, self-determination. All are very patriotic nations, therefore have power in numbers.
- **Weaknesses:** Were less economically advanced, in comparison to Germany and Austria-Hungary, because were formed out of the Turkish Empire. Meaning they weren't as advantaged with artillery for conventional warfare.
- Serbia's economy was still greatly agriculturally based.
- Were behind in industrialisation.

Events of 1914

- Assassination of austrian archduke Ferdinand in June, led to the seven European nations at war between each other.
- Serbia was given and ultimatum by Austria demanding to suppress all anti-Austrian activities.
- Serbia ordered mobilisation, but also agreed to most of Austria's demands.
- 28th July, Austria declared war on Serbia.
- 30th July Russia committed to the defence of Serbia.
- August brought first invasion of Serbia by Austria. Second invasion of Serbia occurred in September. The third took place in November.

Cultural Identity/Glossary

- Self-determination: free will, choice of polity or allegiance exercised by a nation. The deciding by the people of one nation what form of governments they shall have, without reference to the wishes of any other nation, especially one to which it has been subject. Eg: All citizens of Balkan regions had this aim in common, which was to claim independence for their country.
- Multi-racial: Many of racial of a race, concerning, caused by etc, differences in relationship between races. Eg: The theory of the “Mixing pot” meaning the Balkans was a mixture of various races.
- Patriotism: Love and loyal support of one's country. Eg: Serbians were the most prominent nation to achieve self-determination after Greece.
- Nationalism: Patriotic feelings or efforts, devotion to the interests of one's own nation. A form of socialism which advocated govt, ownership of all industries.
- Mobilisation: The act of mobilising, calling troops, or other units into active military service.