

Guide to territory and governance in the Balkans during and after the Balkan Wars and World War I

Non-independent territories (e.g. Bessarabia, Croatia) are grouped under the country to which they belonged in the 1920's.

During the Wars

ALBANIA

Revolts from 1910 on secure limited autonomy for core Albanian regions in Aug. 1912. After their neighbors break Ottoman power in the First Balkan War and start to occupy Albanian soil, Albanian leaders **declare independence in Nov. 1912**. Serbian armies advance to the sea at Durrës (committing long-remembered atrocities as they go); Montenegrin forces besiege Shkodër; and Greece claims most of southern Albania. However, the Powers force an independent Albania on its neighbors and **confirm this in the Treaty of London in May 1913**, so as to prevent Greece or especially Serbia from controlling a key stretch of the Adriatic coast.

The borders are set by international commissions in Dec. 1913 and June 1914, leaving many Albanians in Greece (Epirus), Montenegro, and above all Serbia (Kosovo). **No one treats the borders as definitive**, not even the Albanians. Mutually suspicious regional leaders and foreign interference prevent the creation of a functioning central government. No constitution is adopted, and order is not restored. The German princeling imposed as monarch by the Powers flees soon after WWI starts. **An Albanian state remains more a fiction than a reality.**

Early in WWI Greece, Serbia and Montenegro reoccupy most of Albania, aided and opposed by Albanian factions. **The secret London Treaty of May 1915 anticipates dismembering Albania.** After Serbia's defeat in fall 1915 its army and many civilians flee to the sea in winter through a hostile Albanian population. In Jan. 1916 **most of Albania is overrun by Austria and Bulgaria.** By autumn 1916 **Allied forces (chiefly Italian) occupy the southern third of the country**, where they remain for the rest of the war.

BULGARIA

Fully independent from Ottoman suzerainty since its unilateral declaration in 1908, following the Young Turk Revolution. A constitutional monarchy with a strong (but unpopular) king and a managed parliamentary system.

In the First Balkan War of 1912-13 Bulgarian forces defeat Ottoman armies in eastern Thrace

Afterwards

The Paris Peace Conference considers an Italian mandate over Albania (resisted by Wilson) or an Albania enlarged to include more Albanians (resisted by Yugoslavia and Greece). **In Feb. 1920 Albanian leaders refound their state**, drive out the Italians (Sept. 1920), and win international recognition.

In 1921 the Allied Council of Ambassadors restores the 1913 borders with adjustments. Kosovo, now part of Yugoslavia but mainly Albanian in population, is the main focus of Albanian irredentism. **Italy gains a special protecting status.** The 1921 borders are Albania's borders today.

The new system of government, with a council of regents and a parliament, is dependent on coalitions of prominent men and subject to manipulation from abroad. The country's affairs are turbulent and unstable until Ahmed Zogu (later King Zog) gains power in the mid-1920s.

Bulgaria **signs an armistice in Sept. 1918**, the first of the Central Powers to do so. King Ferdinand abdicates in favor of his son, Boris III. Bulgaria is swept with social radicalism; Stamboliiski's Agrarian Party and its allies take power in the

and press on almost to Constantinople; they also conquer eastern Macedonia and the rest of Thrace. In the Treaty of London of May 1913 imposed by the Powers, Bulgaria **gains eastern Macedonia, down almost to Salonika, and western and Central Thrace** from the Struma to the Maritsa, including the Aegean coast. It has to withdraw from the environs of Constantinople, but keeps Edirne.

Dissatisfied with its share of Macedonia (always Bulgaria's main irredenta), Bulgaria **attacks Serbia and Greece in June 1913, starting the Second Balkan War**. It quickly finds itself in a losing war against all four of its neighbors. In the Treaty of Bucharest of Aug. 1913 **the Ottomans take the Edirne region; Romania takes southern Dobruja** (incl. Silistra); **Serbia takes strategic bits of Macedonia**; and **Greece takes the hinterland of Salonika and western Thrace** (incl. Kavalla). Bulgaria keeps the central Thracian coast between the Mesta and the Maritsa.

Bulgaria **enters WWI on the side of the Central Powers in Oct. 1915**, with the aim of reversing the outcome of the Second Balkan War and acquiring Macedonia. Within months Bulgaria **overruns most of Serbian Macedonia**, parts of Serbia proper and parts of Albania; in 1916, with German reinforcements, it **recovers Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika**. When Romania surrenders to the Central Powers in May 1918, Bulgaria **recovers southern Dobruja**. At home public opinion is agitated by mismanagement, severe food shortages, and the seemingly endless war.

GREECE

In the Treaty of London of May 1913 after the First Balkan War, Greece **gains Janina and most of Epirus** (the northern part goes to Albania) **and Salonika and southern Macedonia** as far as the Struma; it also wins **international recognition of its rule in Crete** (under Greek control since 1908). After the second war in summer 1913 Greece **gains western Thrace** as far as the Mesta (from Bulgaria) **and the islands of the northern and eastern Aegean** (except Rhodes and the other Dodecanese, seized by Italy in 1912). Greece is now roughly double its prewar size.

Greece is neutral at the start of WWI, divided between the pro-German king and conservatives and the pro-Allied liberals. Early in the war it reoccupies southern Albania. Greece **enters the war on the Allied side only in June 1917 after bitter controversy and ongoing intervention by the Allies**, who use

elections of Aug. 1919 for what turns out to be four years of radical rule. Thereafter things return to oligarchic/monarchic control.

In the Treaty of Neuilly of Nov. 1919, imposed by the Powers, Bulgaria **loses its last strip of coastal Thrace to Greece and several small territories to Yugoslavia**, while **Romania recovers southern Dobruja**. Bulgaria today has its 1919 borders plus southern Dobruja, regained after WWII.

In the Treaty of Neuilly of Nov. 1919 Greece **gains Bulgaria's last stretch of the Aegean coast**, to the Maritsa. It occupies southern Albania ("northern Epirus") until 1923 but is not allowed to annex it.

With the collapse of Ottoman power, the Greeks **claim eastern Thrace, Constantinople, the Straits, and much of western Anatolia**. The Treaty of Sevres of Aug. 1920 gives them much of this, with provisions for a later plebiscite, but Constantinople and the Straits are to be internationalized. Even before the treaty Greek forces invade western Anatolia and march inland.

All these plans fail when **a new Turkish army serving a new**

Greek territory as a base of operations from 1915 on, with or without permission. The Balkan front, largely stable after autumn 1916, runs near the Greek-Serbian border, though Bulgaria holds western Thrace. Greek forces are auxiliaries to combined Allied forces on this front. In Sept. 1918 an Allied offensive finally breaks through in Macedonia, the Central Powers' front collapses, and Bulgaria leaves the war.

Turkish (not Ottoman) state drives the Greek army back into the sea. In the Treaty of Lausanne of July 1923 the 1913 border with Turkey is restored and populations are exchanged, contributing to the ***1,300,000 million immigrants Greece must absorb in the 1920s.*** Greece's borders today are those of 1923, except that it gains the Dodecanese from Italy after WWII.

The bitter conflicts of the extended war (1912-23, with brief intermissions), compounded by the drastic population movements, leave a legacy of turbulent politics for the interwar years.

ROMANIA

An independent state since 1878, ruled by a constitutional order with a strong monarchy and an oligarchic parliamentary system.

Romania takes no part in the First Balkan War of 1912-13, fought to drive the Ottomans out of the western Balkans. In the Second Balkan War of June-July 1913 it ***gains Southern Dobruja from Bulgaria.***

At the outset of WWI Romania remains neutral despite its alliance commitments to Austria. It ***joins the war on the Allied side in Aug. 1916*** after receiving territorial promises. Romanian forces move into Transylvania but are driven out within two months. By Jan. 1917 German-Austrian and Bulgarian offensives have overrun most of the country; the government sits in Iași in eastern Moldavia, in lands held by their Russian ally. Russia leaves the war early in 1918, and Romania is forced to accept the Treaty of Bucharest of May 1918 that makes the country a client of Germany and Austria. Romania yields control of the Carpathian passes to Austria and cedes Dobruja and the mouths of the Danube partly to Bulgaria, partly to a condominium of Germany, Austria and Bulgaria. The Central Powers accept Romania's acquisition of Bessarabia from Russia.

Romania ends the war with little glory and few friends, but it has an intact army and no strong neighbors. It is able to ***acquire all of Bessarabia and the Bukovina, all of historic Transylvania*** with adjacent lands to the west, and ***most of the Bánát.*** As a result, Romania after 1919 is twice the size of pre-war Romania. A less happy result is the acquisition of large minority populations of Hungarians and Germans (in Transylvania) and Ukrainians (in the Bukovina and Bessarabia).

Romania's monarchic and oligarchic constitutional order survives the war with little immediate change.

Most of Romania's borders today are those of 1919, but WWII costs it Bessarabia and northern Bukovina (annexed by Soviet Russia) and southern Dobruja (restored to Bulgaria).

Bessarabia

Historically a Romanian province with a mainly Romanian population, except near the Black Sea where the people are Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish. Russian territory from 1812 until 1917. During the Russian Revolution Bessarabia becomes a separate Soviet Republic in Dec. 1917, and declares its independence as the Moldavian Republic in March 1918. As compensation for Romania's losses elsewhere ***the Treaty of Bucharest of May 1918 awards Bessarabia to Romania,***

In Dec. 1918, a council of ethnic Romanians formally carries out ***Bessarabia's union with Romania.*** Soviet Russia is too weak at the time to contest the loss of Bessarabia but it never recognizes it.

In WWII Bessarabia reverts to Russia as the Moldavian SSR. Today most of it forms the independent Republic of Moldova.

which has already sent in troops.

Bukovina

Easternmost province of the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, with a mixed population that is predominantly Romanian in the south, predominantly Ukrainian in the north. The Bukovina is the scene of much fighting between Austrian and Russian forces during WWI.

When Austria-Hungary collapses in Oct. 1918, Romania enforces its claim to the Bukovina by force of arms and by arranging declarations of loyalty from local Romanians. The Treaty of St. Germain in Sept. 1919 **recognizes Romania's annexation of the Bukovina.**

Since a division at Stalin's hands during WWII, the northern half of the Bukovina (populated mainly by Ukrainians) has formed part of Ukraine.

Southern Dobruja

A rich agricultural region with a mixed population, probably more Bulgarian than anything else. **Seized by Romania from Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War of 1913.** Overrun by Bulgaria in 1916 and **ceded to Bulgaria in the Treaty of Bucharest of May 1918.**

The Treaty of Neuilly **restores southern Dobruja to Romania in Nov. 1919.**

During WWII southern Dobruja reverts to Bulgaria, and on ethnic grounds it is left with Bulgaria after the war.

Transylvania (w/ Crisana, Maramures & most of the Bánát)

Until 1918 belongs to the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy. Historically associated with Hungary, and dominated socially and politically by Magyar landlords and ethnic German townsmen and farmers, but the overall majority of the population is ethnic Romanian, and Romanian nationalism is rising. Romania has long aspired to annex Transylvania.

The province takes no part in the Balkan Wars. Early in WWI (1914-15) Russian forces hold a narrow strip of northern Transylvania, but the front never advances so far again. In August 1916 Romania declares war and invades Transylvania, but Austrian troops (with German reinforcements) drive them out within two months.

In the Treaty of Bucharest of May 1918 Romania cedes to Austria the control of the Carpathian passes between Romania and Transylvania.

Romanian armies and Allied intervention defeat attempts by postwar Hungarian governments, incl. the Soviet Republic of April-Aug. 1919, to hold Transylvania by force of arms. In the Treaty of Trianon of June 1920 **Romania gains all of historic Transylvania** with some ethnically disputable strips west of it, plus **two-thirds of Hungary's rich Bánát** (the other third going to Yugoslavia).

All these lands are part of Romania today.

YUGOSLAVIA

Before 1912 the South Slav lands that later join together as Yugoslavia are **under six distinct jurisdictions.** Two are independent South Slav states, Serbia and Montenegro. South Slav lands in Austria-Hungary are under three jurisdictions: Hungarian rule (most of Croatia, the later Voivodina); rule by the Western half of the Empire (Slovenia, Dalmatia); and joint rule (Bosnia-Herzegovina). The Ottoman Empire still holds Macedonia and the Sanjak of Novipazar.

Territorial changes are treated below under the rubrics of the eight familiar Yugoslav

Already during the war, because of Serbia's wartime services, **the Allies support the goal of a broad South Slav state in the western Balkans** at the expense of Austria and Hungary. Émigré committees lay the foundation. **The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is proclaimed in Dec. 1918.** In 1929 the name is changed to Yugoslavia.

The borders cause much trouble, especially those with

republics and autonomous regions of the Tito era after 1945.

Italy (see under Slovenia and Croatia below) **and Albania** (q.v.). Not until 1924 are all the country's borders set. The territory delimited between 1919 and 1924 (plus some districts gained from Italy after WWII) is the Yugoslavia of 1991, at the time of its dissolution.

The Serbs are the most numerous of the South Slav peoples, the most widespread (well represented in Croatia and Bosnia as well as in Serbia), and the ones with the proudest recent political and military history; they take the lead in constructing the new state. **Prewar Serbia's institutions form the core around which the new state coalesces:** the Karadjordjević dynasty, the Serbian royal army, much of the civil service, and the capital of Belgrade. **The 1921 constitution imitates the centralism of prewar Serbia,** making little provision for ethnic differences or the distrust among at least six major nationalities.

Bosnia- Hercegovina

Annexed from the Ottoman Empire by the Austrians in 1908, after an occupation starting in 1878. Governed jointly by the two parts of the Empire, with no institutions of self-government until 1908. Ethnically the most perplexing of the major South Slav provinces, with **three major communities (Serb, Croat, and Muslim) none of which is even nearly a majority of the population.**

In the Balkan Wars there are battles in the adjacent Sanjak of Novipazar, but Bosnia is not directly involved.

Serbia has long wanted to annex Bosnia, and **WWI is sparked by the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne by a Serb student in Sarajevo.** After Austria's initial attack on Serbia, Serbian counterattacks are launched into Bosnia in 1914-15. After 1915 the front moves south.

Bosnia-Hercegovina, surrounded by active constituent members of the new Yugoslav state, is incorporated into this as a matter of course, but its undeveloped and divided political forces play no significant role in the creation of the state. The province continues through the 1920s as an administrative region with its prewar boundaries.

Croatia (w/ Dalmatia)

A long-standing entity within the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire, properly called Croatia-Slavonia. Its **limited self-government in internal affairs is exercised by a parliament dominated by noble landowners.** The population contains **a significant minority of Serbs** along the borders with Bosnia and Serbia.

The coastal regions known as Dalmatia,

Croats are among the leaders in assembling the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at the end of the war. However, because of prewar Serb institutions at the core of the new state, plus Serbian pride, experience, and demographic preponderance, **many Croats feel disadvantaged in their new**

inhabited mainly by Croats, mostly form a separate province; this belongs to the western half of the Empire, as does the Croat-inhabited part of the Istrian peninsula.

Nationalism has been active among Croat intellectuals since the early 19th century, with a strong component of "Yugoslavism". It is kept on a short leash by the authorities.

No part of Croatia is touched directly by the Balkan Wars, though there is an upsurge of nationalist excitement. The eastern tip of Slavonia (known as Syrmia) is on the front lines of Austria's see-sawing war with Serbia in 1914-15, but quiet thereafter.

country.

Historic Croatia in the 1920s is still divided into Croatia-Slavonia (enlarged by two small parcels from Hungary) and Dalmatia (minus the city of Zadar and three islands, which go to Italy). Croatia has an ethnic claim to the port of Rijeka (Fiume) and parts of Istria, but Italy's historical claims prevail. A compromise settlement makes Rijeka a free city, but the Italians seize the city in 1922.

Kosovo

Until 1912 a loosely defined Ottoman region. Kosovo is remembered historically by Serbs as "Old Serbia" but has had a mainly Albanian population for centuries; both Serbian and Albanian nationalists see it as integral to their national territory. ***Serbian forces conquer it in the First Balkan War and keep it***, ignoring Albania's impotent protests. Serbian treatment of the local Albanian population is harsh.

Kosovo is occupied by Austrian and Bulgarian forces from 1915 to the end of WWI, when Serbian armies reconquer the province.

Retained by Serbia (within Yugoslavia) after the war despite a mostly unwilling population and protests from Albania. The final border settlement by the Allied Council of Ambassadors in 1921 leaves ***Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia with no conditions or special status.***

Macedonia

Formerly a vague regional term for the Vardar valley and adjacent lands. Ethnic Macedonians have some national consciousness, but they are not recognized as a people by any neighbor. Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece each regards much of Macedonia as theirs by right; no clear division is agreed upon before they join to wrest it from the Ottomans in the Balkan Wars.

Serbian armies conquer the greater part of Macedonia from the Ottomans in the First Balkan War, and gain additional bits from the Bulgarians in the Second. The Serbian view is that Macedonians are merely Serbs speaking a dialect, and the new lands are incorporated directly into Serbia without any special status.

In WWI most of Serbian Macedonia is overrun by Bulgarians from the east and Germans and Austrians from the north in late fall 1915, with further advances in 1916. The occupation continues until the end of the war, with an active front on the south.

The Treaty of Neuilly of Nov. 1919 requires defeated Bulgaria to cede further small frontier areas to victorious Serbia. All of Serbian Macedonia is ***incorporated into Serbia as before without regard for Macedonian ethnicity or any special status.*** This resolution becomes a lasting point of strife with Bulgaria.

Montenegro

A more or less independent princely state for generations, independent in international law since 1878; the prince adopts the title of king in 1910. There is no parliament. Montenegrins share their dialect, their literary history and the

In Nov. 1918 ***the Montenegrin assembly deposes the king*** in preparation for joining with Serbia in the new South Slav state, which happens the following month.

Orthodox faith with the Serbs; the two peoples normally cooperate readily.

Montenegro, a party to the Balkan League against the Ottomans, **launches the First Balkan War in Oct. 1912** with an attack into the Sanjak of Novipazar, later pushing also into northern Albania, taking Shkodër. Afterwards Montenegro is allowed to keep very little of its Albanian conquests, but it **gains about half of the Sanjak** after the Second Balkan War.

Montenegro fights beside Serbia in WWI, and it also retakes Shkodër in June 1915. When Serbia collapses late in 1915 and Montenegro is overrun by the Austrians, the king orders his armies to surrender and flees to Italy. It remains occupied for the rest of the war.

During the war **Montenegrin exiles agitate for union with Serbia**.

Serbia

A fully independent constitutional monarchy (since 1878) with parliament having real authority. Serbia's antagonism towards Austria since 1903, and especially since Austria's annexation of Bosnia in 1908, is a defining feature of the Balkan scene.

In the First Balkan War Serbia **conquers Kosovo ("Old Serbia") and most of Macedonia** from the Ottomans, and **divides the Sanjak of Novipazar with Montenegro**. Her armies drive through central Albania to the Adriatic at Durrës, but Serbia is not allowed to keep these gains. Serbia wins its battles with Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War but contents itself with small gains in Macedonia.

In the early phases of WWI Serbia **repels two Austrian invasions, counterattacking into Bosnia and Hungary**. Its armies also **reoccupy northeastern and central Albania**, which the London Treaty of 1915 says they may keep. But a massive Austro-German attack in Oct. 1915, combined with Bulgaria's entry into the war, spells defeat. Rather than surrender, **the Serbian army and many civilians flee across the Albanian mountains to the sea in winter**, suffering dreadful losses. Nearly the entire country is under harsh occupation from late 1915 to the end of the war. Overall, a fifth of the population perishes.

Early in 1916 the Allies pick up the surviving soldiers at Vlorë and settle them on Corfu. **A rebuilt Serbian army plays an important role on the Allies' Balkan front** across northern Greece from the fall of 1916 until the collapse of the Central Powers in Sept. 1918.

The Serbian government **in Dec. 1914 raises the vague program of a union of the South Slav peoples**. Serbia's leaders and

Montenegro's revived ambition to expand into northern Albania is frustrated, apart from some minor border adjustments as determined by the Council of Ambassadors in Nov. 1921. Its other 1920s borders are unchanged from before WWI.

The victorious Serbs, the only South Slav people with an army in the field at the end of the war, readily assume the role of **first among equals in the creation of the postwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes** (see above under "Yugoslavia").

Within Yugoslavia Serbia keeps its prewar territory, including Kosovo and Macedonia, plus minor border regions from Bulgaria and Albania in the postwar settlements. The Voivodina (part of Serbia today) remains distinct in the Yugoslavia of the 1920s.

many of its intellectuals **view this prospect as a form of "Greater Serbia"**, an expansion of Serbia.

Slovenia

Before WWI the lands with a heavy Slovene population are **integral parts of inner Austria** (since the early Middle Ages); they make up all of one province and parts of four others. It is a prosperous agricultural region with some mining and industry, and high levels of education. Slovenes are culturally aware, but agitation for political autonomy or independence is muted before 1914.

The Slovene region is unaffected by the Balkan Wars, but after May 1915 border areas with Italy are part of the WWI front. Slovene émigrés, claiming to represent Slovene public opinion, **join in the planning and propaganda for a future South Slav state.**

The postwar "Slovenia" that joins the new South Slav state in Dec. 1918 with little controversy has only one pre-set border, with Croatia. On the north, the **border with Austria is favorably drawn in the Treaty of Saint-Germain of Sept. 1919**, though Yugoslav claims to the Klagenfurt area are defeated in a plebiscite of Oct. 1920. In the east, **two small pieces of prewar Hungary come in the Treaty of Trianon in June 1920**, confirmed in 1922 after a struggle.

In the west, where Slovenia's border is with Italy, Yugoslavia is **unable to resist Italian claims to Gorizia, Gradisca, and northern Istria**, despite predominantly Slovene populations in most of this area. The border is **confirmed in the Treaty of Rapallo** with Italy in Nov. 1920.

Until 1929 Slovenia exists as a regional entity within the South Slav state.

Voivodina

Before the war **a loosely conceived region where Serbs settled in southern Hungary** in the early 18th century, in the provinces of the Bačka and the Bánát. Others (Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, Romanians, and still more) settled these lands along with the Serbs, making the population ethnically ambiguous.

The wars of 1912 to 1918 touch these lands very little, except where the Danube is Austria's frontier with Serbia in the fighting of 1914-15.

After WWI Yugoslavia is able to **push through its claim to the Bačka and a third of the Bánát** (the rest going to Romania). These provinces at first remain separate entities within the structure of Yugoslavia; only later do they come to be treated as territories annexed to Serbia.

Recent historical atlases useful for this topic:

Richard and Ben Crampton. *Atlas of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
 Dennis P. Hupchick and Harold E. Cox. *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of the Balkans*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
 Paul Robert Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993.