

THE BALKANS CONUNDRUM

**An Introduction
to
Balkans History and Politics**

EASTERN EUROPE AND BALKANS TOUR

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Introduction

This article has been prepared as a compendium to the East Europe and the Balkans motorcycle tour of 2016.

It's an amalgam of supposedly factual descriptions, observations and comments drawn from Internet sites (e.g., Wikipedia, Encyclopaedia Britannica, On-Line International Encyclopaedia of the First World War *et al*) and other readings¹; plus my own take on many developments. I'm no political scientist or historian so take that into account as you read it.

The Geography

Most of the 2016 tour of Eastern Europe and the Balkans will be in the Balkan Peninsula. This article seeks to provide some insights into various aspects of the area that might assist in understanding current situations and past developments.

There's intentionally far more focus on the past rather than current political structures.

The Balkan Peninsula doesn't necessarily coincide with the term 'The Balkans'. There seem to be a few definitions of the latter. Some include all the grey parts in the map (at right); others pick and choose, even dividing Romania and Bulgaria. Greece and Turkey usually get omitted. The US State Dept. lists only seven states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Slovenia isn't included probably because it's seen as having successfully removed itself from the Balkan problems and become more integrated with the EU.

For our purposes, definitions probably don't matter. I'll use the terms Balkans and Balkan Peninsula interchangeably, so don't read any political, historical or religious significance into that.

Ethnicity

An early issue to tackle in understanding The Balkans is ethnicity. Ethnicity in the Balkan context can be confusing. Current differentiations have their origins predominantly in medieval and more recent history. But a glimpse further back provides a good backdrop to understand current situations.

Antiquity

In Antiquity, several tribes or groups of tribes moved into the Balkan Peninsula as part of the early migrations of Indo-Europeans – a notional group of people devised from a reconstructed proto Indo-



¹ Unattributed mainly out of laziness. I should single out the On-Line International Encyclopaedia of the First World War, from which I paraphrased and copied heavily for sections relating to wars in the Balkans

European language that never really existed. The wonders of linguistic anthropology! These people eventually spread across the Euro-Asian Steppe and covered Europe, Central Asia, Iran and the Sub-continent. One of the earliest examples are the Hittites in Anatolia.

In the Balkan Peninsula, the main tribes were the Illyrians (most of the western part of the peninsula), the Thacians (to the east), the Dacians (north-east), Greeks (south), and Celts (further north). There's not much trace of these people in terms of identifiable ethnicity or even language. All that remains of them are some archaeological remnants. Mostly, they were suppressed or dispersed by the advent of the ancient Greek and Roman empires. The Romans conquered most of the area which later passed to the control of the Byzantine Empire.

One of the most significant events was the arrival of the waves of migrating Slavs in the 6th century AD. This was a time when the Slavs were spreading in all directions from their original homelands north of the Black Sea. They spread pretty much across the whole Balkan Peninsula and intermingled with and in some cases swamped the peoples that were inhabiting it.

Medieval Era

Most of the people of the Balkans, in particular those inhabiting the territory that became the former Yugoslavia, share a common Slavic ethnicity. In this sense, with the exception of Albanians, they can be said to be ethnically the same.

Some might regard that as an overstatement, given that the Slavs didn't actually move into *terra nullius*. Other ethnic groups had been in the region for centuries before them. However, for the most part, these other ethnic groups eventually lost their identities; and a Slavic ethnicity became dominant. Not that any ethnic group on the move, as with the Slavs, would retain a homogeneity of ethnicity as they intermingled with others and developed various subcultures amongst themselves.

But that aside, over the centuries since the arrival of Slavs in the Balkan peninsula in the 6th century, several historic developments affected different geographical groupings of these Slavic people in different ways. This led to the emergence of new subcultures that came to self-identify as separate ethnic groups based on their historical experiences, religions, cultural heritage (and its trappings such as cuisine, dress, customs etc.) and, to varying degrees, languages. But all the while retaining a generic Slav background.

The ethnic groupings that have more recently dominated the history books are the Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians. Other Slavic people that have emerged with their own ethnic identities are the Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians. The Albanians, while at times affected by Slavic influences and dominated by Serbs, have managed to preserve a distinctly non-Slav ethnicity – some say dating back to the tribes of Antiquity.

Influences of History

There are probably three key historic developments that most impacted on the people of the Balkans dating from even before the settlement of Slavic people there in the 6th century to the end of the Second World War. These developments in part laid the foundations for all the subsequent turmoil and tragedies; in part ignited them; and in part moulded, shaped and controlled them. It's complicated!

The first of these developments was the split of the Roman Empire and the lasting legacies brought about by the split. A lot of today's issues go back that far.

The second was the rise of the Ottoman Empire but particularly its expansion into the Balkans. That's probably been the most pervasive irritant.

The third was a series of 20th century manoeuvres and wars that involved or impacted on the Balkans. These aggravated and exacerbated animosities that had already taken root.

Split of the Roman Empire into a Western and Eastern Empire.

The Roman Empire had been divided along West/East lines for administrative reasons in the 3rd century, with Rome and Byzantium² being the respective administrative centres. With the accession to the throne of Constantine the Great (306 AD) and his victory in civil wars (324 AD), the empire was sort of reunified in the sense that he became the sole emperor. He did two things of significance in this context. He moved the capital from Rome to Byzantium and, no doubt with due humility, renamed it Constantinople; and he adopted Christianity as the official religion of the empire.

That remained the *status quo* until the death of Theodosius in 395 AD when the empire was divided between his two sons, one ruling the western empire from Rome and the other ruling the eastern empire from Constantinople. There were now two separate empires, with the split dividing the Balkans along the Drina River – roughly the current border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The subsequent history of the empires took very different paths. The western empire soon fell into sharp decline. The Western Roman Empire as such disappeared to be replaced in effect by the Holy Roman Empire over which various European powers vied for influence and control. The Catholic Church became an important political player in power vacuums that appeared. The Eastern Roman Empire flourished and morphed into a new empire in its own right, the Byzantine Empire.

Although there was no split in the Christian Church at the time the Roman Empire split, Greek had already become the dominant language of the Eastern Empire while Latin became the dominant language of the Western Empire. This division was replicated in the Christian liturgies of each part of the empire. Over the years, particularly following the formal split of the empire, scholarly interaction between the two halves weakened, with knowledge of Greek diminishing in the west. Meanwhile all the early Christian theology was being developed in the East – in Greek. Theological differences began to emerge, many initially attributed to mistranslations of the Greek into Latin. Whatever the reasons, ultimately in the western part of the empire the Roman Catholic Church became the dominant religion, while in the eastern part it was the Orthodox Church that emerged as the dominant religion.

These divisions eventually flowed into the Balkans along the split between the old west and east Roman empires.

The Invasion of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century.

The Byzantine Empire was eventually overthrown by the emergence and unification of various Turkic tribal groups that had arrived in Asia Minor (Anatolia) from the Eurasian Steppes.

The main tribal group was known as the Oghuz Turks. As with all Turkic clans, they had their origin in the Altai region of Asia (today's Mongolia). This particular group had migrated into Transoxiana (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) by about 700 AD where and when they converted to Islam and adopted the Arabic script. They later went on to found the Seljuk Empire in today's Persia before ending up in Anatolia following the fall of that empire. A tribal leader, Osman, is credited with

² Byzantium became Constantinople which became Istanbul.

conquering and unifying the various tribes in Anatolia; and eventually establishing the Ottoman Empire in 1299.

At that time, the Byzantine Empire, centred on Constantinople, was still in existence but with diminishing territory. The Ottoman forces were extending their conquests beyond Anatolia. During the reign of Sultan Murad I (1362 to 1389) the Ottoman Kingdom was divided into two provinces: Anatolia (Asia Minor) and Rumelia (the Balkans). It was in this period that the Ottomans extended their suzerainty deep into the Balkans with several wars against Serbian princes and feudal lords.

Apart from clashes of history-bestowed inheritances, cultures, ethnicities and armies, one lasting outcome of this historic development was the spread of a new religion into the Balkans: Islam. This new religion would be met differently by different groups: it would come to be embraced irrevocably by some, strategically tolerated and exploited by some and vehemently resisted and opposed by some.

Two of the many battles that ensued as part of the Ottoman expansion stand apart in this context:

Savra (1385): Balsa II, lord of a Serbian politic entity called Zeta covering southern Macedonia and northern Albania, was taking over more of Albania when a local Albanian lord asked the Ottomans for help. Following the victory of the Ottoman forces over the Serbs, most of the Serbian and Albanian lords became vassals of the Ottomans. The Battle at Savra in southern Albania was significant in giving the Ottomans a stronghold in the Balkans and in providing the Ottoman forces with many Albanians who contributed to their strength over the next 500 years.

Kosovo Field (1389): The Serbs amassed a strong army in an attempt to push the Ottomans out of Serbian territory and to exact revenge for earlier defeats. The Serbian forces were led by Prince Lazar and included a Bosnian contingent and Knights of the order of Hospitallers (Crusaders). The Ottomans were led by Sultan Murad I. Both armies were pretty much wiped out and both leaders killed (Murad I at the hands of a Serb assassin after the battle). Although the Ottomans suffered great losses, they had the resources to push home a victory. Serbian principalities that were not already vassals became so in the ensuing years.

These two battles more so than the myriad of others fought marked the end of Serbian power in the area and paved the way for Ottoman expansion into Europe. Meanwhile the fate of what was left of the Byzantine Empire was delayed with the invasion of Anatolia by Timur/Tamerlane who routed the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara in 1404 and took the sultan prisoner. A civil war ensued until Mehmed I emerged as the sultan and restored Ottoman power.

Part of the Ottoman territories in the Balkans (such as Thessaloniki, Macedonia and Kosovo) were temporarily lost after 1402 but were later recovered by Murad II between the 1430s and 1450s. In 1444, Murad II defeated the Hungarian, Polish, and Wallachian armies at the Battle of Varna (Bulgaria), although Albanians under Skanderbeg continued to resist. Four years later Murad II consolidated his victories in the Second Battle of Kosovo in 1448.

Over many years there were any number of battles and skirmishes between the Ottomans and Serbs. The one most deeply engraved into the Serbian psyche remains Kosovo Field in 1389. Of all the ethnic groups, nationalities, states and vassal states, the Serbs stand out as the most doggedly and relentlessly persistent in their passion to maintain a national identity, in their expansionist forays extending the Serbian Kingdom in whatever form and in their resistance to Ottoman control

or influence whether geographical, political or religious. It's evident that the centuries of conflict with the Ottoman Empire engendered deep animosity on the part of the Serbs towards anything Ottoman or seen as derived from the Ottoman Empire. This animosity was further intensified by Serbian perceptions about its history and its destiny; and its convictions about its political heritage, roles and legacies.

The Kosovo Field battle resonates deeply because it was a defeat; it drove the Serbs from land they saw as their sovereign inheritance; it was a valiant fight that all but annihilated both armies; both leaders were killed, the Ottoman Sultan at the hands of a Serb assassin after the battle (providing a little Serbian gloat); most of all it stamped indelibly on the Serbs the identity and objective of their enmity for generations and centuries to come.

The Early Twentieth Century Manoeuvrings and Wars

Manoeuvrings isn't exactly a geopolitical technical term. It's intended to include a series of political deals, border skirmishes and inter-nation wars culminating in the First and Second World Wars.

This period really had its beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was a period when the Great Powers – so called – held sway over much of Europe and particularly South East Europe encompassing the Balkans in the widest sense of the term. Then there were the Empires – mostly coinciding with the Great Powers – that saw the world, again particularly the Balkans, and themselves through their own wall mirrors. The Great Powers were Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Germany. The Empires were the Russian Empire, the German Empire, the Austria-Hungary Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

The first part of this period leading to the First World War was characterised by a toxic mix of conflicting and duplicitous political, strategic and territorial ambitions on the part of the Great Powers and Empires, on the one hand, and the states of the Balkans, on the other. Suspicion, mistrust, betrayal and conflict were organic to the diplomacy of the period.

Russo-Turkish War

The most obvious starting point for this period was the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. This was the last and most important of a series of Russo-Turkish wars throughout the 17th to 19th centuries. They were all about Russia seeking to push back Ottoman occupation of territories that obstructed Russia's gaining warm water ports in the Black Sea, access to the Mediterranean and expansion into the Caucasus Mountains of Central Asia.

By the late 19th century the Ottoman Empire was ageing and stumbling. Balkan states, such as they were, were flexing their newly-developing courage to push the boundaries both literally and metaphorically. Outside political entities were hovering: Austria-Hungary had a vested interest in seeing the Ottoman Empire stay strong; Russia saw developments in the Balkans as an opportunity to further advance its strategic interests in the Caucasus and in gaining access to the Mediterranean; Britain saw the Ottoman Empire as a foil to Russian ambitions and objectives.

It didn't take long for Russia to find a pretext to intervene ostensibly in support of fellow Slavs. Russia joined with its ally Serbia in coming to the aid of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria in their rebellions against Ottoman rule. The Russians imposed a peace settlement at San Stefano in March 1878 that augmented all the Balkan states, especially Bulgaria, which gained its maximum territorial expectations including Macedonia.

Austro-Hungarian and British objections caused German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to summon representatives of the Great Powers to Berlin in the summer of 1878. The Congress of Berlin that

year established a Great Power aegis over South Eastern Europe. Bulgaria was greatly reduced in size and Macedonia reverted to Ottoman rule. The Congress of Berlin also gave Austria-Hungary the right to occupy and administer Bosnia and Herzegovina temporarily, but the provinces officially remained possessions of the Ottoman Empire.

While borders were more or less settled by the Berlin Treaty, nationalistic aspirations of the Balkan states for control over territory were not dampened. Macedonia, in particular, with its mixed population of Orthodox Slavs, Catholic and Islamic Albanians, Turks, Jews, Roma, Vlachs³ and others, became the primary target of Balkan nationalist aspiration, especially in Bulgaria, during the last quarter of the 19th century.

Any nationalist advance, however, would have to obtain the sanction of the Great Powers. This compelled the Balkan states to establish subordinate but fragile relationships with individual Great Powers, especially Austria-Hungary and Russia. These relationships were based upon the realization that the Ottomans would make no concessions without force, and that the Balkan peoples themselves lacked the power to force the Ottomans to do so.

Bosnian Crisis

The Berlin Treaty started to unravel in 1908 when Austria-Hungary, capitalising on brewing political turmoil within the Ottoman Empire, annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. This incident and its aftermath has been recorded as the Bosnian Crisis.

The trigger for this development was the entry of the eponymous Young Turks onto the Balkan stage. They were a bunch of mainly junior officers in the Ottoman army which had emerged from reform-minded groups that had formed in the empire. They seized power in Constantinople and announced a program of reform. These reforms included restoration of the 1876 constitution, promotion of an Ottoman identity and military modernization.

The possibility of a reformed and strengthened Ottoman Empire alarmed the Great Powers, especially Austria-Hungary and Russia. In an effort to protect their aspirations and interests in South Eastern Europe from possible Ottoman revival, Russia and Austria-Hungary agreed that Russia would not oppose an Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina; and in return the Austrians would not object to opening the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to Russian warships. Before the Russians could gain the agreement of the other Great Powers, the Austro-Hungarians announced the annexation of the Ottoman Provinces on 6 October. The day before, by prior arrangement with the Austrians, Bulgaria declared complete independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The Russians were angry. They thought the Austrians had betrayed them. The Montenegrins and Serbs also were furious. The Montenegrins had long coveted Herzegovina, while the Serbs wanted Bosnia.

The implications of the Young Turk Revolt and the breach of the Berlin Settlement had a profound impact on the Balkan states. Clearly they too had to act to obtain their national agendas before the Young Turk reforms reinvigorated the Ottoman Empire.

Two key developments followed from the Austria-Hungary annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One was the emergence of terrorist groups based on narrowly focussed nationalist objectives. The other was a series of bilateral alliances among the Balkan nations aimed at locking in mutual support against the Ottomans. These began with Serbia and Montenegro and soon expanded between

³ Romantic-language speaking peoples – loosely Romanian and Moldavian in this context.

others. Serbia was a lead player in this development. Thus emerged the Serbian-inspired Balkan League of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece. It was more a series of bilateral agreements than a multilateral agreement of mutually shared outcomes beyond, of course, removing the Ottomans from the Balkans.

First Balkan War

While the Balkan League was developing, things began to deteriorate in northern Albania. The Albanians had been a loyal Ottoman subjects but the Ottomanization plans of the Young Turks had aroused concerns. These had been fomented in part by an influx of migrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following the Austria-Hungary annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Young Turks sought to convince Muslims there to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire by offering them to be settled in Islam-sparse Macedonia. Instead they gravitated to Fellow-Muslims in Albania and subsequently contributed to the Albanian Uprisings of 1912.

Montenegrins and then Serbians and the other Balkan nations launched attacks on the Ottoman Empire in October 1912. The Bulgarian army had substantial successes in Thrace. The Serbs defeated Ottoman forces in Macedonia and were quick to occupy Kosovo and northern Albania. The Greeks played a significant role in containing Ottoman forces. The Ottoman armies were essentially defeated and Ottoman European territory reduced to areas bordering on the Ottoman heartland.

Armistice negotiations were launched in various forums as the Great Powers and belligerent states sought to reach agreements. While this was happening, Albania declared itself an independent state claiming much territory that had been overrun by the Serbs. The Austrian and Italian protectors of the new state insisted that the Serbs evacuate northern Albania.

Fighting resumed in 1913 but a final truce and armistice was eventually reached.

The outcomes of the armistice did little to allay tensions. The failure of the Serbs to retain northern Albania increased their determination to hold Macedonia in the face of growing Bulgarian opposition. The Bulgarians and Greeks never reached an agreement for the disposition of conquered Ottoman territories. Their forces soon began skirmishing in northern Macedonia. The Greeks and Serbs, recognizing they had similar interests, concluded an alliance directed against Bulgaria. To complicate the situation, the Romanians, who wanted compensation for Bulgarian gains in the war, began to make demands. Thus followed a gambler's most nightmarish throw of the dice.

Second Balkan War

No sooner had the First Balkan War ended than Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece to get a better share of the spoils. Not only did Serbia and Greece counter attack but Romania, which had some unresolved territorial disputes with Bulgaria, decided to get in on the act. Meanwhile The Ottoman Empire wasted no time in regaining some of its lost territory. The outcome of this Second Balkan War, which lasted only a few months, was that Bulgaria – far from gaining more territory – had to cede portions of its First Balkan War gains to Serbia, Greece and Romania. It also lost to the Ottomans the city of Edirne which it had gained in the First Balkan War. Edirne was a significant city for the Ottomans. It was the Empire capital for a period and a fortress city protecting Constantinople.

Situation after the Balkan Wars

The two Balkan Wars resulted in significant changes on the map of South Eastern Europe. A fragile Albania emerged, challenged by Greek and Serbian territorial claims and protected by Austria-Hungary and Italy. Bulgaria, despite its defeat in the Second Balkan War and the loss of Macedonia, gained territory all along its southern frontier. Serbia got Kosovo and a large portion of Macedonia.

Serbia, the great victor of the Balkan Wars, was now Russia's only reliable Balkan connection. The Serbs were determined to take advantage of this situation. Even though exhausted by their efforts during the Balkan Wars, the Serbs understood that they had Russian protection. They had realized their objectives against the Ottoman Empire and against Bulgaria. They then turned to their Austro-Hungarian antagonist in order to unite with the Serbs of Bosnia.

The end of the Balkan Wars did not mean an end to the fighting in the Balkans. Albanians in Kosovo resisted the Serbian occupation. Serbian troops skirmished with Albanian irregulars in northern Albania. Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum in Belgrade demanding that the Serbs withdrawal from Albania. Although the Serbs agreed to remove their forces from Albania, some stayed there to enforce Serbian claims to the region and to assist in the suppression of the Kosovo insurgency. For the third time in a year, the Serbs antagonized Austria-Hungary. Greek irregulars also maintained a presence in southern Albania throughout 1913-1914.

First World War

Given the tensions and animosities that had brewed ferociously between Serbia and Austria-Hungary since at least 1908, what happened in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, the 525th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Field, was no less surprising than the Austria-Hungary reaction a month later.

First up, Bosnian Serb teenager, Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Austrian heir Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este and his wife Sophia, Archduchess of Austria on the streets of Sarajevo. A cabal of officers in the Serbian army aided and abetted the actions of Princip and his cohorts. The Austro-Hungarians quickly uncovered this connection, and decided to utilize it to resolve their ongoing problems with their southern neighbour. That was the cue for Austria-Hungary to declare war on 28 July, one month after the assassination. The European alliance systems quickly engaged, with France, Great Britain and Russia (the Entente) joining the Serbs, and Germany supporting Austria-Hungary. Montenegro joined the Serbs. Montenegro's lack of success in the Balkan Wars had forced King Nikola to more or less subordinate his realm to his larger Serbian neighbour. Bulgaria, Greece and Romania affirmed their neutrality.

At this point the position of Bulgaria became critical. For the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary at this stage), Bulgaria would insure communication with the Ottoman Empire and the destruction of Serbia. For the Entente, the adherence of Bulgaria would greatly facilitate an attack on Constantinople and would support Serbia.

Bulgaria was prepared to intervene on whichever side could guarantee the attainment of its nationalist objectives in Macedonia. Because the Serbs were unwilling to concede Macedonia, their prize from the Balkan Wars, the Entente could not meet the Bulgarian demand. For the Entente, Serbia was the ally whose distress had been a cause for the outbreak of the war. The Central Powers had no such inhibitions. Bulgaria could have Macedonia immediately. Bulgaria joined the Central Powers.

It wasn't long before Serbia was overcome from both sides, with Austria-Hungary and Bulgarian troops occupying it and imposing a harsh regime on the civilian population. The remnants of the Serb army retreated and took refuge on Corfu to return to fighting on the Macedonian front in 1917. The fall of Serbia was followed by the occupation of Montenegro and the collapse of the fragile Albanian State, resulting in Albania becoming a hotbed of squabbling and outright fighting involving all warring states and Albanian irregulars being armed from both sides.

Romania eventually entered the fray on the side of the Entente, which led to fierce encounters with Bulgaria. Russia's exit from the war following the October 1917 revolution left its allies, including

Romania, abandoned and exposed. The whole situation gets very messy. Romania, whose main ambition in entering the war was to secure Transylvania from Austria-Hungary, was forced to exit the war with no goals attained; only to re-enter the day before the German armistice to share the Entente spoils!

Perhaps one key development worth noting was the emergence of an interest group of southern Slavs (Yugoslavs⁴). It began with a committee of mainly Croats from Dalmatia and Bosnia engaging with the Entente in recognition that the state of Austria-Hungary might be lacking longevity. Once they learned of the Entente's intention to cede extensive Habsburg territories containing Croat, Serb and Slovene populations to Italy, the Serbs got involved and there emerged a call for a democratic South Slav state with equality of alphabets and religions, under the rule of the Serbian royal dynasty. Even at this early stage, there were Croat nationalists who opposed any subservience to the Serbs.

Outcomes of First World War

The final outcome of the war on the map was the establishment of a greater Romania that had acquired Transylvania and lots more; and a Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Montenegro vanished within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Albania triumphed simply by maintaining its precarious independence against Greek, Italian and Yugoslav pretensions.

More pervasively, the Balkan Wars and the First World War were not so much separate events as a continuity. Fighting in South Eastern Europe began in October 1912 and persisted until November 1918. By any reckoning this prolonged war was disastrous for the Balkan states in men and material. The fighting had spared no place in the Balkans. Romania and Serbia in particular had experienced heavy combat on their own territories. In the fighting after 1914 alone Serbia lost more than one third of its army, Romania one quarter and Bulgaria one fifth. Civilians perished throughout the Balkans from being caught up in the fighting, from privations in food, fuel and other materials caused by the fighting as well as by epidemic disease which raged throughout the region. The war displaced hundreds of thousands throughout the Balkans

Aftermath of First World war

To better understand the evolution of the Balkans, something more needs to be said about the newly emerged Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The "Serbs" element included Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Kingdom of Serbia that emerged from the war included lands previously long-held or coveted by the Serbs: Macedonia and Kosovo to the south; and Vojvodina to the north. As noted above, because of its dependence on Serbia for its existence, Montenegro quickly got absorbed. However, not all Croats were on board. Many opposed being associated with the new kingdom because of obvious Serbian domination.

The Croatian issue aside, virtually from the end of the First World, the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, being referred to informally as Yugoslavia, was already a cut-out of what would emerge after the Second World war as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The name of Yugoslavia was adopted officially only in 1929.

It didn't take long into the new Kingdom's existence, despite the idealism of having a united southern Slave entity of some sort, before nationalistic ambitions boiled over. Matters came to an explosive climax in 1928 in the kingdom's National Assembly when a Serb deputy shot up and killed several Croatian deputies. In early 1929, the king (King Alexander I) stepped in, suspended the constitution, banned political parties, assumed executive control and renamed the country

⁴ Yugo means south or southern.

Yugoslavia, presumably hoping that the name might help focus attention on the original ideal of uniting all the southern Slavs.

In a further attempt to curb separatist tendencies and mitigate nationalist passions, Alexander later relinquished his dictatorship and imposed a new constitution designed to create a centralised Yugoslavia. He also sought to abolish Yugoslavia's historic regions and in their place set up several banovinas (provinces) with non-nationalist names. The flags of Yugoslav nations were banned. Communist ideas were also banned. The effect of Alexander's dictatorship was to further alienate the non-Serbs from the idea of unity.

Moreover, none of this went down well with the likes of Italy or Germany, where Fascism and Nazism were taking hold, or Russia – now the Soviet Union - where Stalin wanted to assert a greater role in the area.

In 1934, the king was assassinated and was succeeded by his eleven-year-old son Peter II and a regency council headed by his cousin, Prince Paul.

A short diversion here that further expands insights into the situation at this time: his assassin was a Bulgarian member of a Macedonian revolutionary organisation that was intent on winning independence for Macedonia and had a long history (both before and after the assassination) of terrorism and assassinations. Although their fight was primarily against Serbs because of their occupation, there were anti-Greek elements as well. More to the point they were Bulgarian Macedonians whose obsession was a Macedonia for Bulgarians, with scant regard to ethnic Macedonians. To add more intrigue, the assassination was undertaken with complicity from the Ustaše, a Croatian fascist revolutionary organisation that would come more to the fore during the Second World War.

Through the rest of the 1930s the Balkans scene was marked by growing mistrust and intolerance amongst the Balkan entities and increased aggressiveness from the totalitarian regimes – all of which presaged an undoing of the status quo that emerged from the First World War.

Second World War

While it's easy to argue that the Second World war had its origins in the impositions put in place by the Entente at the end of the First World War, the most tangible pieces of the puzzle relating to the war in the Balkans started with the establishment by a Croatian political activist and head of the Croatian Peasants' Party of the *Banovina of Croatia* in 1939. It was set up with the support of and pressure from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as an autonomous province within Yugoslavia. It consisted of several banovinas that included all of present day Croatia as well as parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Prince Paul submitted to the fascist pressure and signed the Tripartite Pact (a military agreement between Germany, Italy and Japan) in Vienna on 25 March 1941. That immediately led to a military-led coup at home, soon followed by the invasion of Yugoslavia by German, Italian and Hungarian forces on 6 April 1941.

The Axis Powers occupied Yugoslavia and split it up. The Independent State of Croatia was established as a Nazi puppet state, ruled by the fascist ultranationalist militia, the Ustaše that came into existence as a result of Croatian nationalistic reactions to Serbia's control of Yugoslavia but was relatively limited in its activities until 1941. German troops occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, which

was ceded to the Puppet state of Croatia, as well as part of Serbia and Slovenia, while other parts of the country were occupied by Bulgaria, Hungary, and Italy.

From 1941–45, the Croatian Ustaše regime became notorious for mass murder, expulsions and forced conversions to Catholicism. They established concentration camps to prosecute their atrocities aimed at non-Croats in the expanded puppet Croatia, meaning mostly Serbs but including Jews, Roma and Bosnian Muslims. The most notorious of the camps was Jasenovac, which became known as the Auschwitz of the Balkans.

From the time of the Axis invasion, Yugoslav resistance forces consisted of two factions: the communist-led, pan-Yugoslav oriented Partisans and the pro-Serbian royalist Chetniks, with the former, whose leader was Josip Broz Tito, receiving Allied recognition only at the Tehran conference in 1943.

The Partisans initiated a guerrilla campaign that developed into the largest resistance army in occupied Western and Central Europe. The Chetniks were initially supported by the exiled royal government and the Allies, but they soon focused increasingly on combating the Partisans rather than the occupying Axis forces. By the end of the war, the Chetnik movement transformed into a collaborationist Serb nationalist militia completely dependent on Axis supplies. They also collaborated with the Ustaše against the common enemy of the Partisans. The highly mobile Partisans, however, carried on their guerrilla warfare with great success.

The Yugoslav Partisans were able to expel the Axis forces from Serbia in 1944 and the rest of Yugoslavia in 1945. By this time, Marshal Josip Broz Tito was in control and was determined to lead an independent communist state. He had the support of Moscow and London.

Aftermath of the Second World War

Following the defeat of the Independent State of Croatia at the end of the war, a large number of Ustaše and civilians attempted to flee in the direction of Austria hoping to surrender to British forces and to be given refuge. Although Germany had surrendered, Axis forces in Yugoslavia refused to surrender. The Croatian Armed Forces were especially reluctant to surrender to the Partisans who were now calling the shots. When one of the columns of fleeing Croatian Armed Forces intermingled with Croatian civilians as they approached the town of Bleiberg in Austria, the British refused to accept their surrender and directed them to surrender to the Partisans. They were interned by British forces and then returned to the Partisans. A large number of these persons were killed in what has come to be called the Bleiberg Repatriations or the Bleiberg Massacre.

One might observe that the lead-in to the post-Second World War Yugoslavia, in addition to the long history of animosities, mistrust, betrayals, hatred etc. that had existed amongst all the Balkan entities, was also heralded by the atrocities inflicted by the Croat Ustaše on the Serbs at Jasenovac and the Serb Partisans on the Croats stemming from the Bleiberg Repatriations.

The Balkan Conundrum⁵

From my cursory delving into Balkan history – and I'm by no means an historian⁶ – I've come to believe the only observation one can make with any degree of confidence or certainty is that it's totally impossible to come up with a story about Balkan history that everyone can accept. No matter

⁵ This section was written separately from what precedes it, so there might seem to be some overlap and repetition. Be forgiving.

⁶ I think I said that before.

how carefully or objectively one might seek to word it, there'll always be someone who will disagree and more than likely find it ill-informed and downright offensive!

For much of the story there can be no agreed facts. There are only perceptions spawned by ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Anything that might reasonably be regarded as factual in other situations will inevitably be seen in a Balkan context as no more than one side's viewpoint.

Attempts to understand and present a story are made all the more insurmountable by disagreements over ethnic origins, complications from common ethnicities crossing political and religious boundaries, deeply entrenched prejudices based on differing perceptions of history and, in some cases, inflated or misguided convictions of political heritage, roles and legacies.

Initial Confrontations



Today the most visible and confronting evidence of Balkan history can be found in two forms. One is the extent of destruction of buildings, villages, towns, homes, mosques and churches that is encountered as you travel through the countryside and towns of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly Sarajevo but also including Vukovar in Croatia. These scenes

silently but dramatically capture the suffering and dislocation so pointlessly inflicted on innocent and defenceless people. The other is the public memorials that commemorate events and places where grave injustices and crimes in war were perpetrated relating to both World War II and the Yugoslav/Balkan Wars. High on this list are the memorials at Bleiberg in Austria, Tezno in Slovenia, Jasenovac and Vukovar in Croatia, and Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo itself is such a monument.

Although it's virtually impossible to understand the Balkan situation without understanding the deep animosities that underlie it, it's virtually impossible to make sense of the animosities in any event. So we might as well start at the end with little more than an acceptance that the Balkans has ended up over centuries of history as a highly volatile mix of components.

Yugoslavia, People's and Socialist Republics

Yugoslavia is not a bad place to start in this section if only because it's probably the most familiar identifiable entity from that part of the world; at least to those of us who have lived a proportion of life across the years of the Cold War.

The place of Yugoslavia in Balkan history isn't straight forward. To start with Yugoslavia took on various guises and extended nomenclatures over the years from shortly after the First World War until its final erasure from maps in 2006.

The Yugoslavia of interest in this section emerged after World War II as the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and was later renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was a federation of six component states: (short form names⁷) Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia, with Kosovo and Vojvodina being autonomous provinces within Serbia.⁸ It survived for all the Cold War years as a relatively benign Communist state that kept the USSR more out of its affairs than any of the other



Communist satellite states of the Cold War succeeded in doing. So much so that it co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement which played an influential role by staying out of both the NATO and Warsaw Pact camps.

All that worked, more or less, so long as the strong hand of its president, Marshal Josip Broz Tito, who emerged from World War II as the unifying and controlling power, was at the helm. Although a Croat by origin, his Yugoslavia was founded on the Serb Yugoslav Partisans of World War II, which he had led; and its large and well-equipped military was essentially Serbian. But Tito was a fiercely motivated Communist driven by a vision for Yugoslavia that transcended nationalities; and, uncompromisingly committed to a Communist (i.e., one party) state. Nevertheless, as part of keeping the lid on ethnic tensions, he was forced along the way to make some constitutional concessions to mitigate concerns about Serbian dominance, most significantly creating the two autonomous provinces within Serbia.

With his death in 1980, the one-man presidency became a nine-person presidium: a representative from each of the republics and the two autonomous provinces plus the head of the Yugoslav Communist Party. It became increasingly difficult to keep Serbia at bay or ethnic tensions under control. Trouble started to bubble from 1981 and came to a head in the context of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s.

It was a messy and acrimonious break-up. Serbia had constantly seen itself – not always unjustifiably – as the dominant power and wasn't about to cede that perceived status. The upshot of that situation was the outbreak of wars successively in many of the constituent states of Yugoslavia.

⁷ Each constituent state was called the Socialist Republic of...[Slovenia] etc

⁸ The Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo and the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

These wars get referred to as the Yugoslav Wars or the Balkan Wars; and continued through the 1990s.

Balkan/Yugoslav Wars during 1990s

The NATO-imposed resolution of the war in Kosovo in 1999 brought the Yugoslav Wars to an uneasy conclusion. It must have been hoped the new century might be the start of a new Balkan era. Sixteen years in and the conclusion remains uneasy.

But let's return to the death of Tito which marked the start of an earlier new Balkan era: the unstoppable rising temperature in the Yugoslav Thermomix that would soon blow open its lid.

However, before getting to that point in time, let's look at what was fast taking shape in Kosovo.

Kosovo

The first signs of instability within the Thermomix came almost immediately after Tito's death with widespread protests by Albanians (the majority ethnic group) in Kosovo in support of greater autonomy for Kosovo within Yugoslavia to the point of being a separate constituent state in its own right as opposed to its then status as an autonomous province within Serbia. The central Yugoslav authorities declared a state of emergency that led to rioting in Kosovo that, in turn, led to heavy-handed suppression followed by political repression by Yugoslav forces (predominantly Serbian). The underlying fear on the part of Yugoslavia and especially Serbia was that the majority Albanian population would take control and perhaps have Kosovo, that had been considered as far back as the 13th and 14th centuries a political and spiritual centre of the medieval Serbian Kingdom, become part of a greater Albania.

Ethnic tensions continued well into the 1980s with many accusations of Albanian acts of genocide against the Serbian population. While police records discounted these they were given air time in Serbia thus setting off a series of actions that kept Kosovo a dangerous ethnic cauldron throughout the 1980s.

Emerging Atmosphere in Yugoslavia

Concurrently with the fast simmering situation in Kosovo, the emerging power tussles in the central government of Yugoslavia, whose capital was Belgrade – also the capital of the Socialist Republic of Serbia – set the premise for the changes that would permeate through the Balkans.

As something of an aside, it has to be remembered that Yugoslavia was a one-party – Communist Party – State. As with all the Communist countries, the Communist Party wields more political power than the institutions of State such as the president or prime minister, although the party boss might well end up assuming the presidency. This situation was replicated in the constituent republics and autonomous provinces.

The festering sore that began to weep more openly was Serb resentment over the autonomy granted to the two provinces within Serbia that, in effect, diluted Serbian power in the decision-making of the central Yugoslav presidium; and, indeed, Serbia's ability to prosecute its nationalist interests in those provinces. This latter element had become particularly evident with Kosovo.

In the mid-1980s the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts produced a memorandum that strongly argued that Serbia and Serbs through Yugoslavia were being discriminated against by the way Yugoslavia was organized and being managed. While the memo was overtly condemned by both the Yugoslav and Serbian governments, it basically came to underpin the ambitions and motives of subsequent Serb leaders.

In response to the rise of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo, the Yugoslav Communist Party leadership began moving towards more centralised Serbian control over the provinces.

Enter Slobodan Milošević. From 1986, he emerged through Communist Party ranks within Serbia becoming party chief and later president of Serbia. From early in his rise to power, he took a markedly pro-Serbian approach to the situation in Kosovo and through a series of populist moves and manipulation reduced Kosovo's special autonomous status within Serbia and, with support from more traditionally Serb-aligned republics (Montenegro and Macedonia), he gained control of the supposedly collegiate Yugoslav presidency.

This rise in Serbian nationalism and the increasing prospect of greater Serbian control over all of Yugoslavia, which Milošević's presence heralded, further fuelled deep misgivings particularly in Slovenia and Croatia about Serbian intentions and the prospects for their own latent ambitions for more autonomy.

During 1990 across Yugoslavia, the first multi-party elections took place. This was the start of the break-up of the Yugoslav entity as separatist parties won the elections at the expense of the communists, except in Serbia and Montenegro, where they were won by Milošević and his allies. From 1991, one republic after another proclaimed independence leaving only Serbia and Montenegro as a federated rump of the former Yugoslavia; and a tinder box of unaddressed ethnic issues mainly but not exclusively centred on central Serbian strategic objectives and Serbian minorities outside Serbia.

Slovenia

By the late 1980s Slovenia was experiencing demands for democratisation and more Slovenian independence. The Communist government yielded and constitutional amendments were passed to introduce parliamentary democracy to Slovenia. By 1990, the name of Slovenia had been changed to get rid of the "Socialist" tag and the country's first democratic election took place bringing to power the non-Communist opposition.

On 25 June 1991, Slovenia declared itself independent. On 27 June The Yugoslav Army (Serbian) invaded Slovenia to prevent its separation from Yugoslavia. What followed was Slovenia's version of *ten days that shook the world* – Slovenia's world.

After ten days of fighting, a truce was signed, the Yugoslav Army departed, Slovenia's independence was recognised internationally and it became a member of the United Nations.

While that sounds all very straightforward, it did involve ten days of bloodshed with loss of life on both sides. The Slovenian War of Independence marked the start of the Yugoslav Wars.

Croatia

Croatia and Slovenia had had a common interest in resisting Centralised Yugoslav (=Serbian) domination. Croatia declared its independence from Yugoslavia at the same time as Slovenia in 1991, although agreed to postpone its implementation for some months.

The situation in Croatia, however, was more complicated than in Slovenia. There were large pockets of ethnic Serbs living in Croatia who opposed Croatian independence and wanted Serbian areas to stay associated with Serbia; or, preferably, have an expanded Serbian state within the Yugoslav federation that absorbed or annexed large chunks of both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where there were ethnic Serb majorities or significant minorities.

As happened in Serbia, the Yugoslav army invaded and sought to occupy Croatia in an attempt to thwart any move to independence. That didn't work out but the Yugoslav/Serb forces proclaimed a new state within Croatia called Serbian Krajina. It wasn't until 1995 that Croatia won back all its territory achieving both independence and preservation of its original borders.

Croatia's war of independence inflicted significant damage in terms of its economy, huge numbers of displaced persons (including Serbs), tens of thousands killed, destruction of homes and even whole towns (the remains of Vukovar stand untouched today much like the A-Bomb Dome of Hiroshima) and bombardment of World Heritage sites such as Dubrovnik.

The aftermath included war crimes trials, genocide accusations, uneasy truces and lawsuits both ways.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina was third out of the blocks in the race for independence from the by now seriously faltering Yugoslavia. But its situation was even more complex than Croatia's.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was made up from three ethnic groups, each one represented fairly substantially: Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims, who saw themselves and were seen by others as a distinct ethnic group) 43%, Serbs (mostly identified as 'Bosnian Serbs') 31% and Croats 17%.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's first multiparty elections in November 1990 resulted in a power sharing arrangement involving all three ethnic groups. However, throughout 1991 "behind the scenes" manipulations were taking place: Croat and Serb leaders talked of splitting Bosnia and Herzegovina between them; several Serb Autonomous Oblasts (think shires) were set up on B/H territory; the Yugoslav Government deployed military personnel and equipment into various places within B/H, which were met with protests and local fighting.

At this time, to further complicate the situation, the central Yugoslav powers were at war with Croatia (see previous section above), much of which was conducted through and on B/H territory.

In October 1991 the B/H Parliament proposed independence from the increasingly Serb-oriented Yugoslavia. The Serbs in Bosnia walked out, set up their own Assembly which established the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SRBH). (By later in 1992, this would morph into the Republika Srpska.) The Croat party proclaimed the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia as a "political, cultural, economic, and territorial whole" on B/H territory.

In March 1992 B/H declared its independence. This prompted the SRBH to attack targets in B/H. Serb members of the Yugoslav army joined the forces of the SRBH which was well armed by the Yugoslav forces. The SRBH soon controlled most of B/H territory. What followed throughout 1992-1995 were indiscriminate attacks on and destruction of Bosniak towns, villages, houses, apartments etc. Civilians were interned under inhumane conditions or killed by the thousands. Mass rapes took place. (In October 1991, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić had boasted Sarajevo would be destroyed and the Muslims would be annihilated.)

While initially Bosniaks and Croats cooperated against a common enemy – the Serbs, tensions developed and by 1993 armed conflict was taking place between them. This started in central Bosnia (roughly the middle of B/H) and spread into Herzegovina (the bottom right or SE corner of B/H).

In March 1994 an accord was struck setting up the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina combining the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia and the territory controlled by the Republic of B/H, which brought an end to the conflict between Bosniaks and Croats in B/H.

It took the massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995 to trigger a determined NATO intervention that eventually brought fighting to an end with the Dayton agreement of December 1995 which established the basic structure for today's Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Montenegro

As a long-standing ally of Serbia – and in the past somewhat dependent on it for its existence – Montenegro wasn't in a hurry to jump ship from the crumbling Yugoslavia as were its follow-republics.

By 1992 the two republics of Serbia and Montenegro agreed that the old Yugoslavia should live on and with this in mind had banded together to form a federation which they called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While the new federal republic sought to be the legal successor of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that wasn't accepted by the international community.

Not surprisingly the formation of the new federation wasn't without its share of intrigue. At various stages of the process Serb rebel-held territories in Croatia wanted in and efforts were made to include Bosnia and Herzegovina. Neither came to pass.

Equally not surprisingly, the new federation was dominated by Serbia and particularly Slobodan Milošević as president of Serbia and later president of the new federal republic. With the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, pretensions of succeeding the old socialist republic were abandoned and the new republic sought recognition in its own right.

The union was a fairly loose one. Serbia and Montenegro were united only in certain realms, such as defence. The two constituent republics functioned separately throughout the period of the federal republic and continued to operate under separate economic policies.

By 2006 it all came to a peaceful end with both constituent republics declaring independence. Thus in 2006 the name of Yugoslavia disappeared from the map.

Macedonia

Most of Macedonia's historic traumas preceded the post-Yugoslavia era. A lot of them were touched on much earlier in this document. In the context of the breakup of Yugoslavia, Macedonia's progression to independence was relatively benign. A few very minor changes to its border with Yugoslavia were agreed upon to resolve problems with the demarcation line between the two countries.

It declared its independence in 1991. It became a member of the United Nations in 1993, but, as a result of an ongoing dispute with Greece over the use of the name Macedonia, was admitted under the provisional description the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (abbreviated as FYROM), a term that is also used by international organizations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and NATO.

Macedonia was seriously destabilised by the Kosovo War in 1999, when an estimated 360,000 ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo took refuge in the country. Although they departed shortly after the war, Albanian nationalists on both sides of the border took up arms soon after in pursuit of autonomy or independence for the Albanian-populated areas of Macedonia.

A conflict took place between the government and ethnic Albanian insurgents, mostly in the north and west of the country, between February and August 2001. The war ended with the intervention of a NATO ceasefire monitoring force. Under the terms of the Ohrid Agreement, the government agreed to devolve greater political power and cultural recognition to the Albanian minority. The

Albanian side agreed to abandon separatist demands and to recognise all Macedonian institutions fully. In addition, according to this accord, the Albanian insurgents were to disarm and hand over their weapons to a NATO force.

Kosovo

Kosovo was not a separate republic within the old Yugoslavia of the same status as the republics covered above. It shared with Vojvodina a distinct status of an “autonomous province” within Serbia. While at one stage it did enjoy some reasonable degree of autonomy, constitutional changes in the old Yugoslavia resulted in *de facto* Serbian control of it.

Kosovo remained part of Serbia during the breakup of Yugoslavia, so transitioned with Serbia into the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the federation of Serbia and Montenegro).

I touched on early rumblings in Kosovo at the start of this chapter. The continuation of those rumblings included the formation in 1992 of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its campaign beginning in 1995 when it launched attacks targeting Serbian law enforcement in Kosovo.

In 1998, KLA attacks targeting Yugoslav authorities in Kosovo resulted in an increased presence of Serb paramilitaries and regular forces who subsequently began pursuing a campaign of retribution targeting KLA sympathisers and political opponents in a drive which killed 1,500 to 2,000 civilians and KLA combatants.

After attempts at a diplomatic solution failed, NATO intervened, justifying the campaign in Kosovo as a “humanitarian war”. This precipitated a mass expulsion of Kosovar Albanians as the Yugoslav forces continued to fight.

The war ended in 1999 with a military intervention of NATO, which forced the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to withdraw its troops from Kosovo, which became a UN protectorate. In 2008 Kosovo's Parliament declared independence. It has since gained wide-spread diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state. Serbia refuses to recognise Kosovo as a state although it has accepted the legitimacy of Kosovo institutions.

The constituent peoples of Kosovo are Kosovo Albanians, who make up the majority of the population, and Kosovo Serbs.

Albania

Albania was never part of Yugoslavia. It was a separate independent state but from the Second World War was a secretive and repressive Communist state under the control of Enver Hoxha until his death in 1985.

It wasn't too long into his successor's reign before the Communist world started to collapse, Albania along with it.

The dissolution of the old Socialist Republic took place in 1991 coinciding with the breakup of the old Yugoslavia. A new Republic of Albania was established.

Conclusion

So what is the solution to the Balkan Conundrum? That's probably a question best put to the Oracle of Delphi to provide a typically Delphic response, i.e., one that is conveniently opaque enough to be open to an interpretation favoured by the reader.

For my part, I can go no further than paraphrase what I said earlier, namely, that at the core of the conundrum are deeply entrenched prejudices based on differing perceptions of history and, in some cases, inflated or misguided convictions of political heritage, roles and legacies.