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## The Phenomenon of Balkanization as Exemplified by the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913

### Introduction

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was another stage in the formation of specific social and political, cultural and civilizational, and economic relations in the Balkan region. Many scholars point out that it was at this time that the term “Balkanization” emerged, gaining prominence in the subsequent decades both in international relations and later also in the mass media – and through new connotations, some discrepancies emerged as to the original meaning of the term. The events taking place in the Balkan Peninsula at the time have led to a variety of interpretations by scholars towards determining the basis for the emergence of the term “Balkanization” (the term first appeared in 1918 in “The New York Times”<sup>1</sup>), as the literature indicates that it was intended to describe Russia’s policy towards the Balkan states at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while in another case a link to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is emphasised.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no significant controversy over its fundamental meaning as a political-geo-

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<sup>1</sup> K. Kassabova, *W stronę Ochrydy. Podróż przez wojnę i pokój*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2021, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> A. Dybczyński, *Balkanizacja*, [in:] *Encyklopedia politologii*, t. V: *Stosunki międzynarodowe*, red. T. Łoś-Nowak, A. Florczak, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2010, p. 63; H. Głogowska, *Balkanizacja*, [in:] *Encyklopedia politologii*, t. IV, *Mysł społeczna i ruchy polityczne współczesnego świata*, red. M. Marczevska-Rytko, E. Olszewski, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2011, p. 57.

graphical and political-legal term, the essence of which is the fragmentation of a certain region on the basis of internal disintegration tendencies within it, which are moreover characterised by a high degree of antagonism between actors in the region and which are additionally exposed to the destabilising role and influence of powers interested in the situation in a given region or having their specific geopolitical interests in it.<sup>3</sup> Initially, therefore, the term referred to and was borne out of the complex situation in the Balkan region (the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, the outbreak of the First World War, the establishment of the Kingdom of SHS and its continuation as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, up to the Yugoslav or post-Yugoslav wars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century), but from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In the 1990s, we can notice a sort of a “transfer” of the term “Balkanization” to other regions of the world, which feature similar, and sometimes identical, phenomena and processes to those of the Balkans (e.g. Middle East, post-Soviet Transcaucasia, or even the Horn of Africa). At the same time, it remains obvious that Balkanization is associated pejoratively *a priori*.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this article is to indicate the importance of the aftermath of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 in determining the definitional basis of the term “Balkanization”, in the context of the most relevant phenomena and processes that define the term. The author did this based on a retrospective analysis with elements of comparative studies. The indicated methods are intended to verify the thesis that the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 constitute the foundation for the ongoing processes collectively known as Balkanization.

The problem of Balkanization is addressed by many researchers. This contributes to the multi-aspect nature of its definition. Liridona Veliu argues that Balkanization does not have a clear definition due to the complexity and problematic nature of the situations and events that determine the essence of the phenomenon. At the same time, she notes that the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) constitute the foundation for ongoing conflicts: ethnic, cultural-identity and socio-political.<sup>5</sup> Andrej Grubačić points out a certain dichotomy of this phenomenon. Therefore, he divides it into “top-down balkanization” – shaped by historical processes, and “bottom-up balkanization” – determined by social and cultural aspects.<sup>6</sup> For Maria Todorova, Balkanization, apart from the division of

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<sup>3</sup> A. Dybczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 63; H. Głogowska, *op. cit.*, p. 57; W. Dobrzycki, *Historia stosunków międzynarodowych 1815–1945*, Scholar, Warszawa 2012, p. 710.

<sup>4</sup> E. Lewandowski, *Pejzaż etniczny Europy*, Muza, Warszawa 2005, p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> L. Veliu, *Balkanization*, [in:] *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, eds. O.P. Richmond, G. Visoka, Springer, London 2022.

<sup>6</sup> A. Grubačić, *Balkanization of Politics, Politics of Balkanization*, “Globalizations”, 2012, vol. 9(3), pp. 439–449.

large political units, has also become a synonym for a return to what is tribal, backward, primitive and barbaric.<sup>7</sup> Waldemar Paruch states that Balkanization means creating conditions for political deconcentration, destroying political structures that have been shaped for centuries. This influences the formation of a new international environment dominated by unpredictability. The complexity and intensity of political conflicts play a special role in these processes.<sup>8</sup> In turn, Danuta Gibas-Krzak states that many events and phenomena taking place in the Balkans are characterized by unpredictability to a degree unheard of in other areas of Europe.<sup>9</sup> According to Andrzej Krzak, the level of conflict in the region implied the influence of external factors and entities on shaping the political reality and strategic importance of the Balkans in international relations.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in defining the term “Balkanization”, researchers indicate that the most relevant phenomena and processes include:

- the political-geographical fragmentation of the region – resulting in a reduced capacity for the region to play an independent political role,
- fragmentation of the region resulting in the emergence of independent or quasi-independent entities (especially states) with a high degree of mutual hostility,
- political, economic as well as cultural disintegration which can lead to ethnic and cultural intolerance,
- the lack of an intra-regional entity that is able to play a major role in the region, despite having significant potential,
- the possibility of the entities (usually powers) to interfere from outside the region to destabilise the region, usually driven by the desire to pursue their own political interests.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> M. Todorova, *The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention*, “Slavic Review”, 1994, vol. 53(2), pp. 453–482.

<sup>8</sup> W. Paruch, J. Chmura, *Kiedy etnos stał się demosem: uwarunkowania historyczne głównego podziału socjopolitycznego w państwach postjugosłowiańskich*, [in:] *Systemy polityczne państw bałkańskich*, red. T. Bichta, M. Podolak, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2012, p. 15; W. Paruch, *Polityka zdeterminowana przez historię w regionie bałkańskim: status geopolityczny, tożsamość historyczna i procesy narodotwórcze*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do studiów wschodnioeuropejskich*, t. 1: *Balkany: Przeszłość – terażniejszość – przyszłość*, red. M. Podolak, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2013, pp. 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> D. Gibas-Krzak, *Geopolityka Bałkanów*, PWN, Warszawa 2021, p. 423.

<sup>10</sup> A. Krzak, *Charakterystyka wojskowo-geograficzna Półwyspu Bałkańskiego jako teatru działań wojennych w XX wieku*, [in:] *Bałkańska szachownica. Geopolityczne i geostrategiczne studia o Bałkanach w XX i XXI wieku*, red. D. Gibas-Krzak, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2019.

<sup>11</sup> E.J. Osmańczyk, *Encyklopedia spraw międzynarodowych i ONZ*, PWN, Warszawa 1974, pp. 71–72; Idem, *Encyklopedia ONZ i stosunków międzynarodowych*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1982, p. 51; A. Dybczyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64; H. Głogowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–59; W. Dobrzycki, *op. cit.*, p. 710.

Most of the conflicts that took place in the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries generated the above-mentioned phenomena and processes, more or less determining the Balkan reality through the prism of their post-conflict occurrence. Of course, each of the conflicts had its own specific conditions and took place in a specific political situation, but in each of them one can find that *casus belli*, so characteristic of the Balkan region, repeatedly supplemented by *ius ad bellum*. The conflict known as the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 also had these characteristics, but special attention should be drawn to the fact that its causes, course and effects “filled in the content” of the term “Balkanization”, which was constructed in that period. The First Balkan War of 1912, was a conflict between the Balkan League (Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Serbia) and Turkey.<sup>12</sup> The primary objective outlined by the Allies, was to oust the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan Peninsula after centuries of domination and to reduce the importance and influence of Austria-Hungary. The Second Balkan War of 1913, on the other hand, was caused by dissatisfaction (primarily with Bulgaria) with the proposed treaty regulations, resulting from the consequences of the earlier conflict. There were such significant differences in positions between the previous allies – especially between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria – that another conflict arose, with Romania and Turkey, which had been defeated in the first war, also becoming involved. Of course, actors from outside the region, i.e. the European powers of the time, also played an important role (mainly on a diplomatic level) in both conflicts.

The most important task, therefore, is to analyse the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 and the aftermath of these conflicts in terms of the phenomena and processes most relevant to Balkanization at the time, which are its basic assumptions. The author of this article has divided them into three groups, combining some of them to show the links between them and the interdependencies.

The warfare of both Balkan Wars took place mainly in: Thrace, Macedonia, but also Epirus, the Aegean basin, Kosovo and Metohija, as well as in the lands from which the Albanian state was formed from 1912. These areas, despite the political changes in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the increasing destabilisation of the Ottoman Empire, were still part of the Turkish state in 1912. The Balkan League allies, in concluding successive treaties of alliance among themselves, were particularly meticulous in setting out their expectations of territorial gains once Turkey had been defeated and ousted from these areas.

Turkey, defeated in a short period, asked for an armistice, which was granted on 3 December 1912. The signed armistice was to last until 3 February 1913, the obvious question for the parties to the conflict, and the European powers of the

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<sup>12</sup> The specifics of this alliance will be presented later in the article.

time, remained the continuation of hostilities after this date, which, as expected, occurred in early February 1913. Istanbul used this period to reorganise the army and both offensive and defensive plans, while political changes in the state resulting from the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution were factors in favour of the continuation of hostilities. Also on the side of the Balkan League, the predominant desire was to continue fighting in order to completely capture the last bastions of Turkish resistance and presence in the Balkans as well as the implementation by each state of its own objectives and expectations of territorial gains. For the Serbs, the priority was to gain access to the Adriatic (most preferably the port of Durrës) through Albanian lands and Kosovo/Metohija and Sandžak Novo-Pazarsk. For the Montenegrins, it was important to capture the area of the city of Shkodra and, together with the Serbs, Sandžak. Greece showed interest in Epirus and the Aegean islands. Bulgaria's priority was to occupy Thrace with Adrianople, and with the successes on the front there were even dreams for Bulgarian Tsar Ferdinand I of Istanbul. The hard-line stance of the superpowers (Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy) aimed at a final solution to the problem of Albanian statehood in the form of an independent state (more on which later in this article), verified the coalition partners' plans for part of the Albanian lands. Due to the above, the question of Macedonian lands (historically) was of particular interest, focusing the aspirations of Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece in obtaining the greatest possible territorial gains in the area. It was the issue relating to Macedonia, and in fact the disputes and controversies surrounding it, that played a prominent role in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.<sup>13</sup> When hostilities were suspended on 3 December 1912, the conflict had already assumed such importance for the political situation not only in the region, but also on a pan-European scale, that diplomatic steps were needed to resolve the most important problems that the conflict had generated. From 16 December 1912, two conferences began to meet simultaneously in London: the Conference of European Powers – which lasted until August 1913 (the first meeting on 17 December 1912 raised the issues of Albanian autonomy and related Serbian aspirations with access to the Adriatic, as well as the problem of the Aegean islands<sup>14</sup>) and a peace conference of the delegates of the parties to the conflict (to settle, among other things, the disputes between the former allies of the Balkan League over the division of the areas conquered in Turkey) – broken off at the

<sup>13</sup> M. Tanty, *Rosja wobec wojen bałkańskich 1912–1913*, PWN, Warszawa 1970, pp. 80–81; A. Dudek, *Turcja i wojny bałkańskie*, [in:] *Historia polityczna świata XX wieku 1901–1945*, red. M. Bankowicz, Wyd. UJ, Kraków 2004, pp. 50–51; B. Jelavich, *Historia Bałkanów*, t. II: *Wiek XX*, Wyd. UJ, Kraków 2005, pp. 111–113; R. Rabka, *Balkany 1912–1913*, Bellona, Warszawa 2010, pp. 192–193; W. Dobrzycki, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>14</sup> M. Tanty, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

very beginning of the deliberations and resumed in May 1913 under somewhat different political circumstances compared to December 1912.<sup>15</sup>

The social and political situation in Turkey (coup) has changed. Then, in the absence of a consensus of positions between the Balkan League and Turkey regarding the territorial changes and the delimitation of new borders, war activities resumed on 3 February 1913. Albania's initially proposed autonomy, on the other hand, was heading towards, and eventually evolved into a neutral and independent state entity. Territorial claims by the hitherto neutral Romania against Bulgaria appeared, which included Dobrudja. Above all, the divergent positions of the existing allies (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia), fuelled mainly by Russia and Austria-Hungary, in resolving the problem of, among other things, the Macedonian lands, as well as the further cooperation of the anti-Turkish coalition, became increasingly clear. As a result, previous alliance agreements between members of the Balkan League were contested by the parties, ultimately situating Bulgaria in opposition to Greece and Serbia.<sup>16</sup>

The continuation of war activities from 3 February onwards brought further defeats for the Turkish army, which led to the intervention of the European powers to stop hostilities and bring at least partial stability to the region. The peace negotiations resumed at the beginning of May 1913 and led to the signing of a peace treaty with Turkey in London on 30 May.<sup>17</sup> Turkey lost its strategic strongholds in the Balkan region, and was eventually forced to recognise the line drawn between the towns of Medea on the Black Sea and Enez on the Aegean as the border of the Turkish state in the Balkans. Areas located to the west of the Medea and Enez line, that until 1912 had been Turkish territory, became an arena of rivalry between the existing allies: Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and to a lesser extent Montenegro. The important point was that the implementation of these plans must have led to conflicting interests among the existing allies. The problem of taking over the majority of Albanian lands, was losing momentum in the face of the Albanian state to be created, despite the reluctance of the Balkan allies to this project, and, at the same time, resulted in Athens, Belgrade and Sofia seeking a kind of compensation in other post-Albanian areas. The issues regarding Epirus, Kosovo and Metohija, or Sanjak of Novi Pazar were important for either Greece or Serbia and Montenegro. The Macedonian and Thracian lands were left and the control of which, to a greater or lesser extent, was envisaged

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> A. Krzak, *Wojny Bałkańskie 1912–1913*, Wyd. im. Stanisława Podobińskiego Akademii im. Jana Długosza, Częstochowa 2017, pp. 214–217.

<sup>17</sup> M. Tanty, *op. cit.*, p. 86.



by the plans of each of the Balkan League parties. At the cessation of hostilities, Bulgaria controlled areas in Thrace and eastern Macedonia. Greece in southern Macedonia, while Serbia in central and western Macedonia. In addition, the demarcation line between Bulgarian and Serbian troops, which was still established during the hostilities in Macedonian lands, was temporary, so it was another flashpoint, in this case, in Serbian-Bulgarian relations.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars point out that out of the provisions of the London Agreement relating to the division of Macedonia, Bulgaria was the most dissatisfied with the received areas of these lands. In arguing its territorial claims in Macedonia and Thrace, the Bulgarian side raised the issue of the Bulgarian army's greatest contribution to defeating Turkey – particularly on the Thracian front. For each of the existing coalition partners, the balance of power between them remained the most important issue in the territorial division. The Bulgarian-Greek-Serbian rivalry in Macedonia, and the partly Bulgarian-Greek rivalry in Thrace, began while the war activities were still in progress. The pursuit of the political goals of each kingdom became the primary objective, using nationalist elements, which, in turn, evoked and restored old mutual prejudices not only against each other, but also against the indigenous peoples of the disputed lands – often combined with the belittling of their subjectivity. It should be noted that already in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs attempted to dominate Macedonian lands, not only politically but also culturally, with varying degrees of success.

The situation that arose in the region after Turkey's surrender caused a definite deterioration in mutual relations between the Balkan League allies. Greece, Serbia and Montenegro were clearly opposed to the possibility of Bulgarian domination, perceiving Sofia as the most dangerous competitor, whose plans and actions increasingly diverged not only from previous treaty arrangements, but also from the current political and social goals of the countries mentioned. The failure of the Bulgarian-Serbian negotiations, and the significant rapprochement of positions between Greece and Serbia, appeared to herald another conflict in the Balkans. On 29 June 1913, Bulgarian troops (without a declaration of war) attacked Serbia and Greece, triggering the Second Balkan War, which many scholars refer to as the war between allies.<sup>19</sup> At that time, the lack of political realism of Tsar Ferdinand I and part of the officer corps and, as some sources

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<sup>18</sup> A. Krzak, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>19</sup> M. Tanty, *op. cit.*, p. 93; M. Dymarski, „Miękkie podbrzusze Europy” – *Balkany w nowoczesnych stosunkach międzynarodowych*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do studiów wschodnioeuropejskich*, t. 1: *Balkany: Przeszłość – teraźniejszość – przyszłość*, red. M. Podolak, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2013, p. 359; A. Krzak, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

indicate, representatives of the Bulgarian government became apparent.<sup>20</sup> Bulgaria's attitude and actions towards its still recent allies, its unsuccessful search for support in St Petersburg or Vienna, have all led to a kind of isolation of Bulgaria in the international arena. As a result, a stranded Bulgaria found itself at war not only with Serbia and Greece, but also with Montenegro, Romania and later even with Turkey, which wanted to regain at least part of the Thracian lands. In this situation, after only three weeks of fighting, Bulgarian defeat was inevitable, while Sofia was forced to make further concessions and finally enter peace talks.<sup>21</sup> They began on 30 July 1913 in Bucharest, with the participation of representatives of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Romania, but without the participation of Turkey and with only symbolic involvement of the superpowers. The treaty finally ending the Second Balkan War was signed on 10 August, while separate treaties between the various participants in the war between allies, were concluded until March 1914.<sup>22</sup>

The two Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 brought not only the end of centuries of Turkish domination in the Balkans and Bulgaria's defeat and isolation in the region. Their effects also manifested themselves in events, certain mechanisms and processes that proved almost fundamental to the Balkan reality, but just as importantly, completed the pattern of the phenomenon known as "Balkanization".

### Political and geographical fragmentation of the region and the lack of a leading intra-regional entity

The outcome of both Balkan Wars resulted in significant territorial changes in the Balkan Peninsula. The political boundaries of the various states in the region changed, most often as a result of treaty compromises, the provisions of which often differed far from the plans and expectations of most of the parties involved in the two conflicts. The balance of territorial changes was as follows:

a) Bulgaria was forced to hand over the previously occupied territories of Macedonia (called: Vardar and Aegean) and parts of eastern Thrace, and lost southern Dobrudja.<sup>23</sup> It maintained only a small degree of access to the Aegean

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<sup>20</sup> B. Jelavich, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the meantime (15 July or 17 July 1913), due to unfavourable developments on the fronts for Bulgaria, as well as its weak position in the eventual truce arrangements, the government of Stoyan Danev collapsed.

<sup>22</sup> The last was the treaty between Serbia and Turkey signed in Istanbul on 14 March 1914.

<sup>23</sup> Since the Balkan Wars, the division of historical Macedonia into three parts has been widely accepted: Vardar (roughly the area of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or today's Re-



Sea between the mouths of the Marica and Mesta rivers, with the fishing port Alexandroupoli<sup>24</sup> and the Struma River valley.

b) Montenegro gained a part of Novi Pazar and the northern part of Metohija, but failed to achieve its goal of occupying the areas around Shkodra.

c) Greece gained the southern part of Macedonia (Aegean) with Thessaloniki, part of Epirus with the city of Janina, and part of western Thrace with the port of Kavala, at the expense of Bulgaria.<sup>25</sup> By a decision of the powers in February 1914, Greece also gained most of the Aegean islands and Crete.<sup>26</sup>

d) Taking advantage of Bulgaria's disastrous position during the Inter-Soviet War, Romania obtained the southern part of Dobrudja at Bulgaria's expense.

e) Serbia gained most of Vardar Macedonia, part of Novi Pazar, Kosovo including southern part of Metohija. However, the idea of seizing a large part of Albanian lands and gaining access to the Adriatic Sea failed for the Serbs.

f) Turkey suffered the greatest territorial losses as a result of both Balkan Wars, not only to the Balkan League but also to the emerging Albanian state. It eventually retained (under the Bulgarian-Turkish peace treaty of September 1913) part of Thrace with Edirne and Lüleburgaz at Bulgaria's expense, thanks to a revision of the London peace arrangements (Midia – Enos line).

As a result of both Balkan Wars, the states that formed the Balkan League at the beginning of the conflict realised their primary objective, i.e. the end of Turkish domination in the Balkan region after several centuries. Of the areas under Turkish rule in 1912, Bulgaria gained 21,000 km<sup>2</sup> (17% increase in territory), Montenegro 11,000 km<sup>2</sup> (65%), Greece 55,000 km<sup>2</sup> (91%), Serbia 39,000 km<sup>2</sup> (80%), while newly emerging Albania gained 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and Turkey retained possession of 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> in eastern Thrace.<sup>27</sup> These territorial changes have resulted in a significant political and geographical fragmentation of the region. In the area dominated by the Ottoman Empire and forming a part of its territory, new borders began to be drawn by the Balkan states. Despite the enlargement of

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public of North Macedonia) Aegean (part of today's Greece) and Pirin (part of today's Bulgaria). In addition, some sources still indicate Mala Prespa (in Albania) and Gora (in Kosovo).

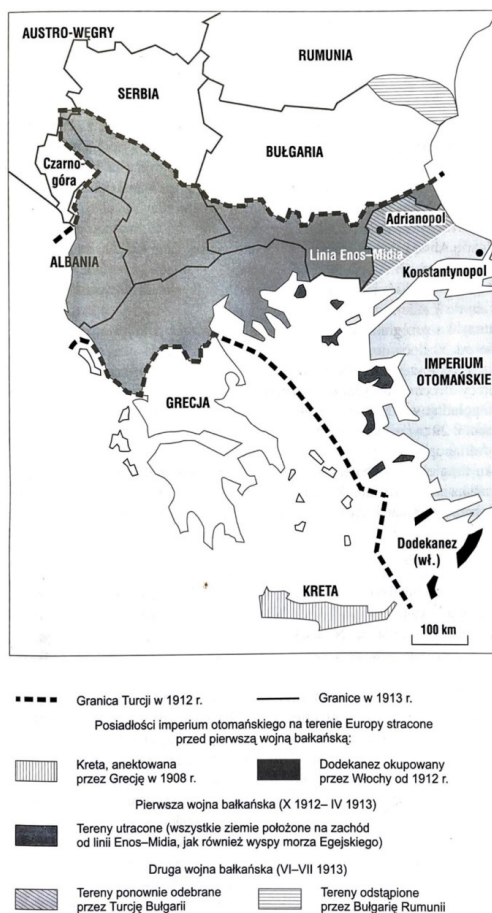
<sup>24</sup> Covering approx. 130 km.

<sup>25</sup> Until the Balkan Wars, the most important Ottoman stronghold in this part of the Balkans.

<sup>26</sup> Disputes between Turkey and Greece over the *de facto* status of the Aegean islands, have emerged with varying degrees of intensity throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, causing tensions in mutual Greek-Turkish relations and sometimes international incidents. In 2022, the issues of demilitarisation and island sovereignty, coupled with threats against Greece, reappeared in speeches by, among others, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (in May 2022), or President Recep Erdoğan (in early September 2022).

<sup>27</sup> R. Rabka, *Macedonia – Epir – Albania 1912–1913*, Bellona, Warszawa 2016, p. 238; A. Krzak, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

the territory of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, none of these countries has achieved a position guaranteeing a leadership role in the entire region. For most countries in the region, a prestigious position was gained for Serbia, but this fact had the main effect of increasing tensions in Belgrade's relations with Vienna, which have not been the best for a longer period.<sup>28</sup>



Map 1. Territorial division of the Balkan region after the Balkan Wars 1912–1913

Source: W. Dobrzycki, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>28</sup> In particular, since the annexation by Austria-Hungary in 1908 of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Political, economic and cultural fragmentation and disintegration of the region leading to ethnic and cultural tensions

It is an important fact that the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, represent a certain caesura in the process of completing the first stage of the emergence and consolidation of nation-states in the Balkan region. The states forming the Balkan League entered the warfare as fully independent ones, but with varying degrees of internal stability. The Balkan region's distinctive programmes of political concentration determined each state's pursuit of them, antagonising interactions even between previous coalition partners. *Greater Serbia*, *Megali Idea* or *Great Bulgaria* could only be achieved under confrontational conditions, with a particular focus on territorial gains. The problem of the division of Macedonian lands or Serbian aspirations for access to the Adriatic were the best confirmation of this. The goals and ideas embodied in these programmes almost ruled out conflict-free coexistence between the many various political actors in the region. The aftermath of the acts of warfare, as well as the treaty provisions afterwards, led to the establishment of a new political order in the Balkans, and this in turn contributed to a further increase in the level of mutual hostility between the Balkan states. The problem of centuries of Turkish political domination in the region, as well as the separation of Balkan possessions from Turkey, has been resolved to a certain extent, although the Ottoman legacy, especially in its cultural dimension, has become permanently inscribed in the space of social relations, implying at the same time the emergence of new reasons for the escalation of mutual hostility between the Balkan states.

When an anti-Turkish uprising broke out on Albanian soil in April 1912, it heralded another problem for the Balkan states of the time that could significantly affect the political situation in the region. Turkey's subsequent loss of control over Macedonia meant that it also lost control over Albanian lands. There was a kind of political vacuum, which on the one hand the neighbouring states were interested in, and on the other the ambitions of the Albanians aimed at the implementation of the *Greater Albania* programme,<sup>29</sup> which meant the

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<sup>29</sup> From the establishment of the Albanian state to the present moment, the programme has not been implemented, although its assumptions were (it is worth noting that the communist dictator Enver Hoxha (1908–1985), despite his nationalist views, did not question the delimited borders of the Albanian state) and are still raised in the political life of Albanians. A case in point is the TV appearance on 7 April 2015 of Edi Rama, who has been serving as Prime Minister of Albania since 2013 (his third term in 2022). In a speech to the Klan Kosova TV station, he made it clear that the reunification of Albania and Kosovo is inevitable, regardless of whether both entities successfully complete the EU accession process.

creation of an Albanian state that also united the Balkan lands inhabited by the Albanians in: Epirus, Kosovo and Macedonia.<sup>30</sup> The proclamation of independence of November 1912 gained final recognition in July 1913 at the London Conference of Ambassadors, which from December 1912 onwards attempted to resolve on a diplomatic level the aftermath of the successive stages of the Balkan Wars.<sup>31</sup> In the case of Albania, the provisions of this conference resulted in the establishment of the International Control Commission, which later adopted the Organic Statute defining the nature of the Albanian state formation process.<sup>32</sup> The involvement of the European powers (especially Austria-Hungary and Italy) in Albanian statehood was in conflict with the aspirations and plans for the division of these lands between Greece, Serbia and also Montenegro, whose armies occupied during the First Balkan War the territory on which the Albanian state was to be established, assuming that they would annex it after the end of hostilities, which would represent (especially in the case of Greece and Serbia) a significant step towards the realisation of programmes of political concentration (*Megali Idea*, *Great Serbia*). In view of the situation, the full implementation of the above-mentioned programmes became impossible, resulting in an increased degree of mutual hostility, initiated during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, but implying political tensions throughout the following decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. the issue of Northern Epirus in Albanian-Greek relations), up to the present day (e.g. the issue of Kosovo in Albanian-Serbian relations).<sup>33</sup> In the case of the Kosovo conflict, it should be pointed out that it is characterised by a multiplicity of forms, and oriented towards the implementation of two (Albanian and Serbian) state-building concepts that are mutually exclusive.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the settlements of the two Balkan Wars, Macedonian lands provided a space for the confrontation of Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian and, to some extent also Albanian programmes, as a result of the emerging Albanian statehood. Earlier, they had also played a unique role for the political transformations in Turkey, as it was in Macedonia that the Young Turkish Revolution began in July 1908, which was of fundamental importance for the further fate of Turkish statehood.

<sup>30</sup> W. Paruch, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–103.

<sup>31</sup> L. Bazyłow, *Historia powszechna 1789–1918*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1995, p. 867.

<sup>32</sup> M. Waldenberg, *Rozbicie Jugosławii. Jugosłowiańskie lustro międzynarodowej polityki*, Scholar, Warszawa 2005, p. 234.

<sup>33</sup> M. Rekś, *Mity narodowe i ich rola w kreowaniu polityki na przykładzie państw byłej Jugosławii*, Wyd. UŁ, Łódź 2013, p. 200.

<sup>34</sup> K. Pawłowski, *Konflikt serbsko-albański w Kosowie w latach 1999–2014. Charakterystyka, uwarunkowania i formy konfliktu społecznego*, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2016, pp. 38–39.

Macedonia, similarly to Albania and Thrace under Ottoman rule, was the Balkan province with the greatest economic and social backwardness compared to other areas in the region. The fact that the communities living in Macedonia were characterised by considerable ethnic and religious diversity certainly played a key role in the specific events in Macedonia. The lack of a clearly defined Macedonian nationality at the time (despite the fact that the awakening of a Macedonian identity appeared as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first programmes for the unification of Macedonian lands appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), fostered the activities of various associations, groups, secret unions and typical partisan militias of a frequently terrorist nature, which led to the situation in Macedonia, especially between 1903 and 1913, took on a highly conflict character.<sup>35</sup>

For example, to this day, attempts by researchers to assess the nature and methods of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (*Vatreshna Makedonska-Revolutsionerna Organizatsiya*, VMRO), which was founded in 1893 in the city of Štip, and one of its leaders, Goce Delchev (1872–1903), are inconclusive and give rise to numerous disputes and controversies.<sup>36</sup> The organisation focused its activities against the Turks and later the Serbs and the Greeks. It also split into two factions: one pro-Bulgarian and one seeking Macedonian autonomy.<sup>37</sup> However, the fact that the Macedonian lands became a sort of a flashpoint in relations between the Balkan states, leading to mutual ethnic hatred, cruelty and terror, was determined not only by the actions of the VMRO, but also by the Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian partisan militias known as *komitadji*, the Greek *antartes*, and to a lesser extent the Albanian ones. The activities of the above-mentioned groups caused extreme anarchy in the Macedonian lands, at the same time making the Macedonian issue during the Balkan Wars one of the most significant problems of the internal politics of Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. For the people of Macedonia at the time, this meant primarily political and cultural repression. The actions of the parties to the conflict were multifaceted, as they involved education, religion, language issues, leading directly to a tyranny of identity.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> L. Moroz-Grzelak, *Macedońska pamięć historyczna. Imaginarium pomnikowe*, [in:] *Bałkany Zachodnie między przeszłością a przyszłością*, red. P. Chmielewski, S.L. Szczesio, Wyd. UŁ, Łódź 2013, p. 382; W. Paruch, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> It is located in the eastern part of the present-day Republic of North Macedonia.

<sup>37</sup> J. Pajewski, *Historia powszechna 1871–1918*, PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> M. Todorova, *Bałkany wyobrażone*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2008, p. 235; R.D. Kaplan, *Bałkańskie upiory. Podróż przez historię*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2015, pp. 105–137; K. Kassabova, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–127.

The period of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, and the reality shaped by their aftermath, led to an increasing degree of mutual hostility not only on a political level (between the Balkan states), but also on an ethnic and cultural level. The extermination of the population, often combined with forced resettlement, epidemic threats, loss of property and livelihoods, caused significant changes in the ethnic make-up, which implied further conflicts, present in the region in the subsequent decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Economic, political and, above all, cultural disintegration became a characteristic process in this period, introducing a state of permanent cultural and ethnic intolerance, with which the Balkans as a region are confronted almost constantly.

#### Interference of entities from outside the region in its destabilization

The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 were also one element of the rivalry between the European powers of the time for influence in the region. Of course, Russia and Austria-Hungary were particularly involved, but the constellation of alliances and geo-strategic and political arrangements in Europe, which had been in place for several decades, also forced Berlin, London, Paris and, to a certain extent, Rome to take an interest in the geopolitical and social and political changes in the Balkans as a result of the war. Many scholars point out that the Balkan Wars also created, to some extent, the conditions that led to the outbreak of the World War in 1914.

The rivalry between Russia and Austria-Hungary for influence in the Balkans, took various forms, but a special role must be given to the diplomatic game played by St Petersburg and Vienna. In 1897, an agreement was concluded, the main idea of which was to maintain the status quo in the Balkans. This did not mean, however, that Russia's policy rejected the idea of a historical mission in the Balkans and of taking control of the Turkish Black Sea straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles).<sup>39</sup> The breakthrough event, at the same time ending the agreement of 1897, was the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1908. In the unscrupulous art of diplomacy, two unparalleled political players of Europe at the time – Austrian Foreign Minister Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal (1854–1912) and Russian Foreign Minister Aleksandr Petrovich Ivolsky (1856–1919) – competed. Both gradually pursued their objectives, clearly defining the priorities of both countries' policies towards the Balkans. At a meeting in the Moravian town of Buchlau (September 1908), the diplomats agreed that Russia would support Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in return for Vienna's help in getting St Petersburg to take control of the straits and open them to

<sup>39</sup> I. Kershaw, *Do piekła i z powrotem. Europa 1914–1949*, Znak, Kraków 2016, p. 51.



Russian warships. The timing of these provisions remained to be an issue. In the end, Aehrenthal outsmarted Izvolsky, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina became a reality on 6 October 1908, to the surprise of Russia and Izvolsky himself, while the issue of the straits did not unfold as planned and expected by the Russian minister, playing no role around the crisis that followed the annexation.<sup>40</sup> The Bosnian crisis stirred up a great deal of controversy in Europe forcing the superpowers to take a stand, but above all it fundamentally affected the dramatic deterioration of political relations between Austria-Hungary and Germany and Russia, Serbia and France. From the moment of those events, Austria-Hungary, supported in its actions by Berlin, has become Russia's main rival in its Balkan policy, while for Serbia it has become a threat to the implementation of Serbian national interests and its programme of political concentration.<sup>41</sup>

According to some scholars, the genesis of the First Balkan War can be traced back to the aftermath of the Bosnian crisis of 1908, especially taking into account the diplomatic defeat of Russia in those events. Russian diplomacy tried adopting various methods to bring the positions of the Balkan states closer together with little success (until 1912), in order to implement its own retaliatory plans against Vienna and Berlin, for, as the Russian officer Yuri Nikiforovich Danilov (1866–1937) put it: "(...) the battle route to Constantinople runs through Vienna and Berlin."<sup>42</sup> A humiliated Izvolsky was dismissed from his ministerial post and sent to the post of ambassador in Paris. Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov (1860–1927) became his deputy. Inspired by Izvolsky's desire to retaliate against the Habsburg monarchy, he and Nikolai Hartwig (1857–1914), who had served as Russian ambassador in Belgrade since 1909, took on the task of forming a coalition of Balkan states. The goal of Russian intentions was to form a front against Austria-Hungary, but not all parties to the later treaty agreements considered such a goal to be in line with their policy direction. For Serbia, as well as Montenegro, the Habsburg monarchy was the main obstacle and rival to political projects in the region, while for Bulgaria and Greece the main enemy was the Ottoman Empire. Upon an initiative of representatives of Russian diplomacy, the Balkan states mentioned above concluded further agreements; however, based on the Memoirs by Sazonov, published after the First World War, it should be noted that the Russian side made the greatest contribution primarily to the creation of the first of a series of treaty

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<sup>40</sup> M. Tanty, *Bosfor i Dardanele w polityce mocarstw*, PWN, Warszawa, pp. 278–280.

<sup>41</sup> B. Jelavich, *Historia Bałkanów*, t. II..., p. 110; P. Ham, *1914. Rok końca świata*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2015, pp. 163–171.

<sup>42</sup> B. Simms, *Taniec mocarstw. Walka o dominację w Europie od XV do XXI wieku*, Wyd. poznańskie, Poznań 2015, p. 327.

agreements – between its Balkan protégés: Bulgaria and Serbia.<sup>43</sup> Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece and Serbia entered into bilateral treaties and alliance agreements between March 1912 and October 1912, forming a kind of coalition whose parties were not linked by a common alliance – often referred to in the literature as “the League”, or “the Balkan Entente”.<sup>44</sup> The negative reaction of the European powers to the actions of Russian diplomacy, anticipating another political crisis related to events in the Balkan region, resulted in a gradual containment by St Petersburg of the Balkan coalition’s inclination to provoke a conflict in which the powers would be forced to become involved. The “Balkan Four’s” aspirations for war with Turkey that were out of Russian control, became a reality, and determined the failure of Russian diplomacy’s plans against Austria-Hungary. Thus, in trying to withdraw from the political game it had initiated so far, “Russian diplomacy played two roles simultaneously: the instigator and peacemaker.”<sup>45</sup> Such Russian actions caused agitation primarily in Belgrade, while they did not change the anti-Turkish plans of the Balkan allies – leading to the outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912.

The course of the two Balkan Wars, and the changes in the geopolitical reality of the time generated by this conflict, caused continuous interest and interference from the superpowers. The peace conferences in London or Bucharest were initiated by the European powers, with more or less of their involvement. Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Russia, Britain and Italy, linked by networks of alliance and treaty (the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente), sought to influence the parties to the conflict or arbitrarily decide on territorial changes and state-forming processes. An example is the issue of Albanian statehood, which intensified during the Balkan Wars. The emerging Albanian state, thwarted Serbia’s hopes of gaining permanent access to the Adriatic coast, as well as Montenegro’s claim to the city of Shkodra. Russia, supporting Serbia, opposed against the creation of the Albanian state, while the enemies of Serbian domination in the region – Austria-Hungary and Italy – supported the process of Albanian formation, with Germany and Britain initially being neutral. Various concepts of this statehood clashed in the politics of the powers, from autonomy within the Ottoman Empire (in 1912) to full independence (July 1913) under the protection of the powers. The scale of the phenomenon of superpower participation in the formation of Albanian statehood was significant. It was through their decision (with the numerous controversies mentioned earlier in

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<sup>43</sup> H. Batowski, *Podstawy sojuszu bałkańskiego 1912 r. Studium z historii dyplomatycznej 1806–1912*, nakł. Polskiego Towarzystwa dla Badań Europy Wschodniej i Bliskiego Wschodu, Kraków 1939, p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> M. Tanty, *Bałkany...*, p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> Ch. Clark, *Lunacycy. Jak Europa poszła na wojnę w roku 1914*, Dialog, Warszawa 2017, p. 289.

the article) that the boundaries of the new state were set, and they also formed the International Control Commission (made up of representatives of the powers), which drafted the constitution. The Western powers (including the USA) also appointed a head of state, namely the Prussian officer Wilhelm zu Wied (1876–1945), whose brief stay in Albania coincided with an intense political and social crisis in the country, triggered by Albanian political factions, interference from the International Control Commission and competition for influence in the country between the Habsburg monarchy and Italy. The head of state assumed “only” the title of prince, which indicated his dependence on Western powers, leaving Albania after six months of attempted rule (March–September 1914).<sup>46</sup>

The reality that took shape in the Balkans about the time of the Balkan Wars was conducive to the interference of actors from outside the region in its destabilisation. In pursuit of their own political interests and in fulfilment of their alliance obligations, the European powers undertook a series of measures to which the states and communities of the region had to submit. Already in the genesis of this conflict, one can see the intense efforts of the diplomats of the European political powers of the time, motivating Athens, Belgrade or Sofia to undertake such an activity that would destabilise the entire region, creating conditions that would enable the region to be used in the projected plans of geopolitical competition. Existing mutual antagonisms between the Balkan states, territorial claims, issues of ethnic conflict, or the desire to pursue their own agendas of political concentration provided a functional tool aimed at taking control of the Balkans for their own political ends. The case of Albania demonstrates that actors from outside the region also exerted influence on Balkan state-building processes. It should also be noted that the 1912–1913 warfare in the Balkans, was used as a kind of testing ground for the armaments concerns of the time and the military staffs of the superpowers.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, and their aftermath, contributed to the full formulation of the term Balkanization significantly. The political, social and economic changes to which they have led have implied the emergence of the phenomena and processes at its core. For the Balkan region, they meant further

<sup>46</sup> B. Jelavich, *Historia Bałkanów*, t. II..., pp. 114–117; J. Joll, G. Martel, *Przyczyny wybuchu pierwszej wojny światowej*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2008, pp. 100–103; E. Hobsbawm, *Wiek imperium 1875–1914*, Wyd. Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2015, pp. 486–487.

<sup>47</sup> I.F.W. Beckett, *Pierwsza wojna światowa 1914–1918*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2009, p. 39.

destabilisation, fragmentation and a further lack of empowerment in the political relations of Europe at the time. Antagonised by the events of the war and its aftermath, the Balkan nations and ethnic groups, perpetuated pre-existing divisions and even created new ones. For many states in the region, there was a need to define their position and status in the pan-European system in the face of the configuration of pacts and alliances taking shape in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The views of many scholars that the Balkan Wars were the next stage of the political crisis in international relations that led to the outbreak of the First World War must be considered correct. The term Balkanization has since become a clear term for international opinion, as well as a functional term for phenomena and processes that show significant similarities in other regions of the world.

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**Abstract:** Balkanization is defined as a political-geographical and political-legal term describing the complex specificity of the Balkan region. In particular, researchers point to the five most relevant phenomena and processes, the existence of which determines a holistic description of the concept. The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 (their course and aftermath) led to significant political, social and economic changes in the Balkans, which implied: political-geographical fragmentation of the region as well as its separation and disintegration in political, cultural, economic dimensions. It should therefore be pointed out that they have had a significant impact in fully defining the definitional basis of the term “Balkanization”.

**Keywords:** Balkanization; Balkan region; Balkan Wars; Balkan League; European diplomacy

### Zjawisko bałkanizacji na przykładzie wojen bałkańskich 1912–1913

**Streszczenie:** Bałkanizacja definiowana jest jako termin polityczno-geograficzny oraz polityczno-prawny określający złożoną specyfikę regionu bałkańskiego. Badacze wskazują przede wszystkim na pięć najistotniejszych zjawisk i procesów, których zaistnienie warunkuje holistyczny opis tego pojęcia. Wojny bałkańskie 1912–1913 – ich przebieg oraz skutki – doprowadziły do istotnych zmian politycznych, społecznych i ekonomicznych na Bałkanach, które implikowały: polityczno-geograficzne rozdrobnienie regionu, jego fragmentaryzację oraz dezintegrację w wymiarach: politycznym, kulturowym, gospodarczym. Należy zatem wskazać, że wywarły znaczący wpływ dla pełnego określenia podstaw definicyjnych terminu „bałkanizacja”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** bałkanizacja; region bałkański; wojny bałkańskie; Liga Bałkańska; dyplomacja europejska