

## THE EASTERN QUESTION

## FERMENT IN THE BALKANS

ONLY two months after the alarm of May 1875 a further crisis appeared in the East, which confronted all the powers with a new phase of the century-old 'Eastern Question'. The main features of that complex problem have already been outlined.<sup>1</sup> The new phase began, as usual, with a rising of the Empire's subject peoples, and they were encouraged, as usual, by the rival powers of Austria and Russia. Habsburg interest in the Balkans, never absent, had been sharpened by desire to recover in south-eastern Europe prestige that had been lost in Italy and Germany, Russian interest, likewise continuous, was intensified by evidences of Austrian interest. Accordingly, risings against Turkey in Herzegovina on the Adriatic coast in July 1875, in Macedonia in September, and in Bosnia, to the north of Herzegovina, by the end of the year, all invited the attention of both Austria and Russia. By the middle of the following year full-scale revolts raged in these provinces and throughout the Bulgarian areas south of the Danube; and the Turks were engaged in suppressing them by the familiar methods of massacre and atrocity. While in Britain Gladstone denounced the pro-Turkish policy of Disraeli, a mob in Constantinople deposed the sultan Abdul-Aziz and replaced him by Murad V. When the Turkish government suspended payment of interest on its large foreign debts, it attracted the hostile attention of investors in France and Britain. The two small principalities of Serbia and Montenegro went to war against the Sultan, still nominally their suzerain, in support of the rebels in the neighbouring territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It became evident that the 'Eastern Question' was once again erupting in a way likely to embroil the whole of the Balkans. In August, 1876, Murad was in turn deposed by another palace revolution and succeeded by his crafty and unscrupulous brother, Abdul-Hamid II.

The powers of Europe reacted, at first, in characteristic manner. Russia planned to bring about the complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and so open her own path to the Balkans (see Map 8). Bismarck's anxiety was to prevent any open breach between his two partners, and so he was willing to serve as an 'honest broker' in settling the

1. See pp. 137, 243 and 340.

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Eastern Question. If the Turkish Empire, as he believed, was doomed to dissolve, then he wanted it dissolved by joint agreement of the powers. Austria wavered between anxious fears of Russian aims in the Balkans, which prompted her to back Turkey, and willingness to accept a limited and negotiated partition from which she herself could gain territories. France still nursed hopes of revenge against Germany, which were moderated only by fears that Bismarck might decide upon a preventive war to check French recovery. Although her investments in Turkey accounted for anxieties about Turkish collapse, she was averse to any direct engagement in the Eastern Question. The British government led by Disraeli gave first priority to preventing Russian expansion into the Balkans, but it was inclined to hesitate between regarding a bolstered Turkish Empire or strong national states as the best choice of buttress. Disraeli (who had recently bought for Britain from the Khedive of Egypt a large portion of the stock in the Suez Canal) favoured support for Turkey. By either means, the route to India was to be kept open; but if rearrangements of Turkey were to be made by international agreement, Disraeli was resolved to be present at the negotiations.

*Crisis in Turkey.* After the installation of Abdul-Hamid II in August 1876 the course of events passed through three crises, each in turn involving larger issues for the powers. The first came in September when the army of the new Sultan, under its unusually efficient general, Osman Pasha, inflicted upon the Serbians a reverse so severe that Serbia sought the intervention of the powers. Faced with demands from Russia, the Sultan agreed that terms of peace should be settled by an international conference to meet in Constantinople in December. There Germany mediated between Austria and Russia, and various proposals for redrawing the Balkan map were agreed upon. The Sultan, in time-honoured fashion, catered for the susceptibilities of the West by proclaiming a new liberal constitution, and then rejected these proposals of the powers. But Russia, intent on pursuing her policy of dismemberment, struck a bargain with Austria. In return for undertaking to respect the independence of Serbia and Montenegro, and offering Austria a free hand in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she gained Austrian promises that she could have a free hand in Rumania and Bulgaria. A month after Serbia had made peace with the Ottoman Empire, Russia declared war on it and precipitated a fresh crisis.

The Russo-Turkish War of April 1877 quickly brought in other Balkan states. Rumania joined Russia in May, Serbia reverted to war against Turkey in December, and Bulgarian irregulars supported Russia. Montenegro remained at war with Turkey, as she had been since June 1876. By the beginning of 1878 Russian forces had taken Sofia and were



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advancing on Constantinople. The Turks asked for an armistice, and made peace in the Treaty of San Stefano in March. They undertook to recognize the independence of Rumania, Serbia, Montenegro, and a greatly enlarged Bulgaria; to cede to Rumania the area of Dobruja south of the delta of the Danube, and to Russia a few towns in the Caucasus; to destroy the Danube fortifications and pay a war indemnity; and to carry out reform of the administration in Bosnia and other areas. The treaty aroused all the inevitable jealousies and disappointments. Rumania, Serbia, and Greece resented the rise of Bulgaria. Austria and Britain feared that Russia would dominate the new Slav state of Bulgaria in the heart of the Balkans. They pressed Russia to submit the settlement to a congress of the powers, and again it was Bismarck, ruler of the most disinterested power but with an overriding interest in reconciling his two partners of the *Dreikaiserbund*, who was the obvious choice as 'honest broker'. Accordingly, the congress met in Berlin in June 1878 attended by Russia, Turkey, Austria, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany.

*The Congress of Berlin, 1878.* The Congress of Berlin, third episode in this phase of the Eastern Question, was significant more for its effects on the alignments of the great powers than for its efforts to 'settle' the fate of Turkey. Rumania, enhanced by addition of part of the Dobruja, and Serbia and Montenegro, less handsomely augmented, were all reaffirmed in their independence as sovereign states. Russia was allowed to take, as she had stipulated at San Stefano, the few Turkish towns and to reclaim from Rumania Bessarabia, which she had forfeited in 1856. But the projected state of Bulgaria was cut back in size, by exclusion of Rumelia and Macedonia. Bulgaria, thus reduced, was declared to be 'an autonomous and tributary Principality under the Suzerainty of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan', and was to have 'a Christian Government and a national militia'. Rumelia and Macedonia were restored to more

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direct Turkish rule, the former being confusingly described as 'an autonomous province of the Turkish Empire'. Austria was allowed to occupy and administer Bosnia and Herzegovina. Britain appropriated the island of Cyprus, and France was placated by being promised a free hand in Turkey's North African territory of Tunisia. Only Germany and Italy left the congress without territorial gains. It became abundantly clear that the 'concert of Europe', as now conducted, sacrificed the nationalist aspirations of all Balkan peoples to the avarice and rivalries of the great powers. It was more than ever certain that the Balkan volcano would erupt again in the near future. That Turkey's 'friends' should thus despoil her of territory so much more than her 'enemies' was a warning she was to remember; and as soon as the Sultan had duly torn up the new constitution, he set about reorganizing his army with the help of German military experts. If Germany thereby gained a new and useful ally for the future, the immediate effect of the crisis was to leave the international scene less favourable to Bismarck's plans. His ally Russia now nursed a profound grievance, not only against his other ally Austria, but against Germany herself. The *Dreikaiserbund* had been badly strained at Berlin, and France had been shown that she might yet make an ally out of Russia. For Bismarck the main lesson was that Austria-Hungary now held the key position in his diplomacy. The forces of insurgent nationalism in the Balkans necessarily involved Austria; she could not countenance the progress of movements which were bound to have disruptive effects within her own territories, and which at the same time opened the Balkans to Russian influence. To keep Austria-Hungary as his foremost ally, Bismarck henceforward had to concern himself more continuously with the Eastern Question - and any overt backing of either of his partners must inevitably alienate the other.

The settlement reached at the Congress of Berlin had the remarkable outcome that it left each power dissatisfied and more anxious than before. It was a defeat for Russian prestige. Britain had sent a fleet through the Dardanelles in 1878 as a reminder of her interests in Turkey, and the crumbling of Turkey now left Russia face-to-face with Britain in the Near-East. Austria-Hungary, too, had patently failed if her real interest lay in keeping the Ottoman Empire strong; as also had Disraeli, despite his boast of 'peace with honour' and the acquisition of Cyprus. In general Britain, however, had asserted and reinforced her naval supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean and the Straits, and France had opened new doors for her diplomacy of recovery and her future policy of colonialism. Territorial gains, such as Russia's recovery of Bessarabia and Austria's occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were of little profit if the legacy of inflamed, frustrated Balkan nationalism was to



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continue to embroil all the powers in future crises and wars. International tension was increased, not eased, by the events of these years. The new balance of power, now clearly centred on Germany, was destined to preserve the peace for another whole generation. But it was doomed to be a most uneasy and unstable peace, subject to recurrent crises and threats of war. The next general European congress met forty years later not in Berlin but in Paris – and at it were to be no representatives of the *Dreikaiserbund*.

*Bulgaria.* The new storm centre of the Eastern Question had been indicated clearly enough in 1878: it was Bulgaria. There hardy peasants had seen their new enlarged state truncated as soon as it had been set up. They looked favourably upon their Russian protectors only until it was clear that Alexander intended to fill all public offices with Russians and to impose on Bulgaria a constitution designed to produce a deadlock that Russia could exploit. In 1879 they elected as king Alexander of Battenberg, a nephew of the Tsarina and a gallant, well-meaning young man who, if he did not speak Bulgar, was sufficiently German by birth and training to be hostile to Russia. In 1881 he first gained personal power by suspending the constitution and so freeing himself from the hostility of the Bulgarian parliament (*Sobranje*), with its nationalist and anti-Russian majority. Two years later, when he resolved to resist further Russian domination, he restored the constitution and played off nationalists and parliament against the Russians. These symptoms of independence won British support, and British policy began to see in a strong Bulgaria a more reliable barrier to Russia than a disintegrating Ottoman Empire. This marked an important turn in international affairs. It made possible a synthesis of the policies of both political parties in Britain, for it meant supporting Balkan nationalism (which the Liberals favoured) in order to withstand Russian pressure (which the Conservatives had always advocated).

This shift of policy proved important in 1885. Eastern Rumelia, the south-eastern strip of Bulgaria which had been taken away in 1878 and declared 'an autonomous province of the Turkish Empire', demanded reunion with Bulgaria under Prince Alexander. The union was achieved by a *coup* in the Rumelian capital, which was approved of by Alexander and the *Sobranje*. This defiance of both Turkey and Russia would have precipitated another war had not Britain restrained Turkey from protesting against her loss of suzerainty over Rumelia. Alexander III (who had succeeded to the tsardom in 1881) hesitated to coerce Bulgaria, which Russia had presented to Europe as her protégé. The crisis was caused once again by the mutual jealousies of the Balkan nations themselves. Serbia, always jealous of Bulgaria's rise and guided by her irre-

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sponsible King Milan, suddenly declared war on Bulgaria in November 1885. Despite the Serbians' advantages of experience, training, and tactical surprise, they were hurled back in defeat after a desperate three-day battle. Austria, as protector of Serbia, intervened to force an armistice on Bulgaria, and in 1886 peace was signed.

Bulgaria now held Eastern Rumelia, and had asserted her power in the Balkans. Yet later that year Alexander was forced to abdicate, and six months afterward another German prince, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg, replaced him on the Bulgarian throne. This prince was a descendant of Louis Philippe of France and was related to Queen Victoria of England. He was therefore regarded by Russia as virtually a candidate of the western powers, but again the Tsar had to accept virtual defeat and restrain himself from intervening. What stabilized Ferdinand on his new throne was partly his own astuteness and patience, partly the backing of the most influential man in the country, Stambulov, who held sway for the next eight years. The son of an innkeeper and an ardent patriot, Stambulov carried out enlightened reforms and public works by strong-arm ruthless methods. He improved agriculture and encouraged industry, built roads and railways and schools, and gave Bulgaria more efficient administration than she had known before. But he silenced opponents by imprisonment and terror, and eventually overplayed his hand. In 1894 Ferdinand made him resign and two years later signed a pact with Russia. Thereafter Bulgaria remained on terms of friendly independence with Russia, and consolidated both her economic progress and her means of national defence.

Internationally, the Bulgarian crisis of the 1880s contributed to the further shifting of power relationships in Europe. In December 1887 Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Italy made an agreement about the Near East. They agreed to keep the peace and the *status quo*, ensuring freedom of the Straits, Turkish authority in Asia Minor, and her nominal suzerainty over Bulgaria. The pact was directed entirely against Russian expansion towards Constantinople, and marked the hardening of British policy towards Russia. But after swallowing her reverses over Bulgaria, Russia lost some of her former interest in the Balkans. Though still anxious for security in the Black Sea, she came to pursue other interests in central Asia and the Far East. The prizes offered there were bigger and easier to come by than in the Balkans where Russia had little investment or trade. With a government in Bulgaria after 1894 that was friendly to Russia, she pinned new hopes in the Trans-Siberian railway - then being built with French loans - and the control that it might bring her over China. This easing of Russian pressure in the Near East gave Austria-Hungary some reassurance. So long as King Milan ruled Serbia,

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Austria-Hungary had a reliable and economically dependent satellite of her own in the Balkans. In 1889 Milan abdicated, his popularity undermined by his defeat at Bulgarian hands in 1885. His son and successor, Alexander, in 1894 overthrew the liberal constitution which Milan had introduced the year before his abdication, and revived the old autocratic system of 1869. His high-handed rule lasted another nine years, then in 1903 Alexander and his unpopular queen were assassinated. The rebels called to the throne Prince Peter Karageorgevic, the elderly representative of the royal family which had been exiled since 1858. He ruled Serbia as a constitutional monarch, won recognition from both Austria and Russia, and established the little state among the group of tough, aggressive Balkan kingdoms which were to engage in such violent battles after 1912.

Germany, too, was content enough with the situation that resulted from the Bulgarian crisis. In June 1887 Bismarck made a 'Reinsurance Treaty' with Russia, whereby each promised to remain neutral in any war in which the other became involved, with two exceptions. Russia need not stay neutral if Germany attacked France; Germany need not stay neutral if Russia attacked Austria-Hungary. Bismarck also renewed promises of diplomatic support for Russia in Bulgaria and at the Straits. Since 1879 he had been in defensive alliance with Austria-Hungary, and in 1888 he published the text of this treaty in order to show that it was purely defensive. Austria, Hungary, and the German generals were by then pressing upon him the desirability of a preventive war against Russia. As anxious as ever to preserve peace by manipulation of the balance of power, he firmly refused. 'I shall not give my consent,' he declared, 'for a prophylactic war against Russia.' But that Germany would, in the last resort, stand by Austria left Russia more anxious to find another ally, which could only be France. The new German Emperor, William II, who succeeded to the throne in 1888, favoured close alliance with Austria-Hungary and Britain, and outright hostility towards Russia. His profound disagreements with the policies of the old Chancellor led to the resignation of Bismarck in 1890. Henceforth every thread in the tangled skein of diplomacy which Bismarck had woven felt the violent tugs and stresses imposed on it by the new Emperor and his imperialistic advisers. Germany, like Russia, became more fully engaged in overseas and colonial ambitions. But Russia made her alliance with France in 1893.<sup>1</sup>

*Armenians and Greeks.* During the 1890s two further crises arose out of the intractable 'Eastern Question', both concerning Turkish rule over her subject peoples. In 1894 Constantinople was confronted with

1. See p. 527.



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another revolt, this time among the two million Christian Armenians who lived in the mountainous regions to the north of the city and around the south-eastern coasts of the Black Sea. In the settlement of Berlin the powers had exacted a promise that these people, partly peasants and partly well-to-do men of business and trade, would be better treated and given 'security against the Circassians and Kurds' who were wont to oppress them. From 1890 onwards the Armenians, convinced not unreasonably that such reforms would never be carried out unless they invoked support from foreign powers, agitated in western states for the grant of national independence. Abdul-Hamid II, reassured by German support and resolved to tolerate no further rising of Balkan nationalities, launched his fanatical Moslem Kurds and other Turkish troops against the Armenians in a series of massacres and atrocities which horrified the powers. Despite loud protests in France and England, the refusal of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany to take any action left the Sultan to complete his work with impunity. This defiance of the West by the allegedly 'sick man of Europe' was taken as evidence of his reliance upon German support. When the German Emperor visited Constantinople a few years later, he successfully negotiated the Berlin-Baghdad railway project, and Germany gained valuable openings for economic expansion into the Ottoman Empire.

If the newest of the Balkan nationalist movements thus failed tragically, the oldest was prompted to stake its fortunes on open war against Constantinople, and it was to prove more successful. Greece nursed grievances against the Berlin settlement because it had not granted her larger portions of Thessaly and Epirus, to the north. By negotiation with Turkey she gained Thessaly in 1881. In 1896 the island of Crete, which although close to the southern tip of Greece had been left under Turkish rule, broke into open revolt. It had suffered the miseries of a prolonged civil war between Christian majority and Moslem minority, which had been encouraged by the wily Turk. In 1897 the King of Greece yielded to great nationalist clamour and sent a small force to Crete. This gesture was followed by skirmishes on the Greek-Turkish frontier, which forced the Sultan to declare war. The unprepared and ill-equipped Greeks were driven back in a series of decisive defeats and within a month they had to ask for an armistice. The great powers intervened to force Turkey to grant one. Although Greece had to pay a heavy war indemnity and cede a few strategic villages to Turkey, international pressure saved her from further losses. If Greece did not gain Crete, Turkey virtually lost it. Britain, France, Italy, and Russia joined in making the Sultan grant autonomy to the island and withdraw Turkish troops from it. Again, the power which won a war lost the peace; and



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Prince George of Greece was appointed governor by the four protecting powers, even if he acted nominally 'under the suzerainty of the Sultan'.

By 1908 it was obvious enough that the Ottoman Empire had crumbled irretrievably. From its Balkan territories had now been carved no fewer than five independent national states - Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Rumania, and Bulgaria; and former parts of its possessions, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dobruja and Crete, were administered by foreign powers. Every stage in its disintegration had reverberated throughout Europe, enlisting powerful liberal sympathies for oppressed nationalities and embroiling the great powers in dangerous diplomatic crises. Every chancellery in Europe was heartily sick of the sick man of Europe. But he was an unconscionable time in dying, and he still held the vitally strategic area around Constantinople and the Straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, as well as the central Balkan area of Macedonia. The tale, plainly, was not yet finished. In North Africa, too, the European powers had been engaged in stripping the Sultan of his Mediterranean territories of Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt.<sup>1</sup> This was the general situation when, in 1908, there took place the 'Young Turk' revolution which overthrew Abdul-Hamid II and in its aftermath tempted Turkey's neighbours into still more looting raids.

*The Young Turks.* This revolution, as already suggested,<sup>2</sup> was analogous to the revolutionary movement of Russia in 1904-5. The Young Turks were Ottoman patriots, ardent supporters of the process of westernization which Abdul-Hamid II had tried to exclude from his dominions. Events in Russia after 1904 had repercussions in Turkey. They added to the preoccupations of Russia and still further freed the Balkans from Russian pressure; and at the same time many of the younger generation of Turkish noble families were inspired by ideas similar to those held by the liberal intelligentsia of Russia. They had come to realize that successful action against the Sultan lay not in isolated acts of terrorism but in the winning over of part of his armed forces to their cause. Their aim was to revive the abortive liberal constitution of 1876, which the Sultan had unceremoniously discarded as soon as the moment of danger was past. Their 'Committee of Union and Progress' carried out intensive propaganda against the 'Red Sultan', and by July 1908 won over the ill-paid and discontented Third Army Corps stationed at Salonica. Aided by the Second Army Corps, they proclaimed the constitution revived and marched on Constantinople. Abdul-Hamid, faced with so formidable a military revolt, overnight converted himself

1. See p. 466.

2. See p. 362.

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into a full-dress constitutional monarch. He ordered the calling of a national parliament on universal male suffrage and stopped all censorship of the Press. The abruptness and completeness of his volte-face took everyone by surprise, and amid universal rejoicing the Young Turks seized all offices, and elections were held. It seemed, for a time, that Balkan nationalism had come full circle, and to the nationalist zeal of subject peoples had suddenly been added the paradox of an Ottoman nationalism ready to embrace Greeks, Rumanians, Bulgars, and Serbs as brothers.

Power lay now in the hands of the managing committee of the Young Turks, led by Enver Bey. The new assembly lacked any political experience and was used as a rubber stamp for Young Turk measures. Abdul bided his time, mobilizing against the new régime all the forces of conservatism and all who were disappointed with the amateurishness and selfishness of the new rulers. By April 1909 he was strong enough to head a counter-revolution, which retook Constantinople and overthrew the government. But at Salonica the Committee of Union and Progress rallied the army once more, and retook the capital after five hours of ferocious fighting. This time they made the parliament depose Abdul-Hamid in favour of his younger brother, Mohammed V, and the dreaded 'Red Sultan' retired with most of his harem to a comfortable villa in Salonica. Mohammed was the ideal figurehead for Young Turkish rule, reconciling the formalities of legitimist succession with a passive acquiescence in whatever his ministers required. The extent to which the Young Turks were to disappoint liberal and nationalist hopes, and to prove no less brutal and tyrannical toward subject nationalities than their predecessor, soon became apparent. But more important for international relations were the immediate consequences of their weakness.

The first was that Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which she had hitherto administered under the terms of the Treaty of Berlin. This naturally inflamed Serbian nationalist sentiment against her, since these provinces included a million Serbs, and turned Serbia from a semi-client state into a relentless enemy. Ferdinand of Bulgaria at the same time threw off the suzerainty of the Sultan and proclaimed his kingdom completely independent. Both actions were breaches of the Treaty of Berlin and might be expected to evoke strong reactions from the powers which had taken part in that settlement. But they were not the first, and only Russia showed a lively interest in trying to summon another conference of the powers where she probably hoped to get agreement to the free passage of Russian warships through the Straits as compensation for Austria's gains. Britain and France were lukewarm; Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany, was opposed to any such conference.



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None was held. Instead, Turkey was compensated in money for her losses - by Austria-Hungary on her own behalf and by Russia on behalf of Bulgaria, with whom Russia made secret pacts in 1902 and again in 1909. From the whole crisis Bulgaria emerged more closely tied to Russia, Serbia more violently hostile to Austria and therefore by reaction more likely to look to Russia for future support. Once again the acquisition of territory proved a less substantial gain than the winning of reliable allies, and Austria-Hungary was considerably weakened by the new alignments. The pressure that Germany put upon Russia to recognize Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a pressure amounting to virtual threat of war, left Bismarck's League of Three Emperors in ruins. Austria-Hungary and Germany were now bound more closely together, but Russia was finally thrown into the rival camp of France.

The second international consequence of the Young Turk revolution was that in 1911 Italy seized Libya. Within Italy had grown up a nationalist and colonial party, resolved to assert Italy's claim alongside that of France for colonial possessions in North Africa. In the 1880s France had taken Tunisia; Tripolitania was the corresponding strip of coastline south of Italy, and France had long before conceded Italy's claim to it. The Italians occupied the Turkish island of Rhodes and the Dodecanese archipelago, and bombarded the forts on the Dardanelles. In Libya the Turkish troops withdrew to oases in the interior and refused to make peace. Italy found it expensive to keep both her army and fleet mobilized, and was unprepared for so stubborn a resistance. The war dragged on and might have turned against her had not the outbreak of another war in the Balkans compelled the Turks to cede Tripoli and make peace. Italy acquired little glory from the war, but yet another part of the Ottoman Empire had fallen away.

*The Balkan Wars, 1912-13.* The Balkan War of 1912 was a third consequence of the Turkish revolution. Nothing but experience of Young Turkish rule could have caused Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgars to unite into the common front of the Balkan League. The war was the crescendo of Balkan nationalism, forced into a common cause by Turkish intransigence and focused by the complex problems of Macedonia. Even the congress of Berlin had not tried to tackle the Macedonian question. This hill country lying between Greece, Albania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, with its port of Salonica on the Aegean Sea, contained national minorities of all its neighbours. Mutual hatreds, combined with Turkish oppression and tactics of 'divide and rule', kept the land a prey to every form of banditry and misery. As soon as the more zealously nationalist government of Turkey tried to introduce into the territory such typically western institutions as a common law, a national language,

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and compulsory military service, it inevitably aroused fierce resentment: resentment among Greeks who cherished their separate law courts, among Arabs and Slavs of all kinds for whom distinctive language was the symbol of nationality, and among every minority which feared that its enlisted troops would be used against national liberties. It was impossible for Turkey to become a nation without surrendering its power over other nationalities, and this the Young Turks refused to do. In this sense, Balkan wars were inevitable, and Macedonia was the predestined bone of contention.

On 8 October 1912 Montenegro declared war on Turkey, and within a week Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia did the same. By the end of the month they had defeated every Turkish army in Europe, and now the Turks held only Adrianople, Scutari, and Janina. This rapid collapse took all the powers by surprise, and the clear victory of Balkan nationalism was a disaster for Austria-Hungary. The disintegration of one old dynastic Empire now brought comparable tensions in a neighbour wherein lived restless national minorities of some of these victorious Balkan states. But Austria-Hungary was in no position to prevent the collapse. Likewise Russia, dragged back against her inclinations to concern about the Balkans, was averse to taking any preventive action. The victory of the Balkan League produced a strange volte-face on the part of each power. Austria-Hungary assumed the unfamiliar role of sponsor of subject peoples by championing the cause of Albanian independence in order to check Serbian encroachment on the Adriatic. Russia took a firm stand against her former satellite, Bulgaria, to prevent it from seizing Constantinople.

The Eastern Question had lost none of its old capacity for producing the strangest somersaults in the policies of the powers. It now had the most surprising effect of bringing Russia and Austria-Hungary closer together, each to resist a Balkan state's advances; and of making Germany seek cooperation with France and Britain in order to keep Russia out of Constantinople. But France, now led by the vigorously anti-German Raymond Poincaré, refused to jeopardize the Franco-Russian alliance; and Britain was prepared to resist only in a general conference of the powers. The crisis was prevented from running its full course by the failure of the Bulgarians to take Adrianople or to press on to Constantinople; and in December the Balkan League had to make an armistice with Turkey. A conference of ambassadors of the powers met in London under the chairmanship of the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey. It could not undo the results of the war, but it could register them and carry out the Austrian demand, to which Russia agreed, that Albania should also become an independent state. Thus



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the conference carried still further the triumphs of Balkan nationalism: a reversal of the process at Berlin in 1878. In April 1913 the powers even acted in concert to impose their joint decisions – if only against the smallest but the most aggressive of all Balkan states, Montenegro. The powers had allocated Scutari to Albania but it was seized by Montenegro. A western naval demonstration forced her to withdraw. In May 1913 the Treaty of London ended the war and established Albania, though that country's internal condition remained far from settled for decades to come.

The Balkan League immediately broke up, because Serbia had occupied and kept most of Macedonia although the Serbs and Bulgarians captured Adrianople; and the Greeks had similarly taken Salonica and claimed larger stretches of the Aegean coast. Bulgaria, at the end of June 1913, simultaneously attacked Serbia and Greece, her former allies. This second Balkan War – on the more familiar historical pattern of a conflict between Balkan states – gave the Turks under Enver Bey an opportunity to recover Adrianople and brought in Rumania against Bulgaria in the hope of taking the remainder of the Dobruja which had not been transferred to her in 1878. Against such odds the Bulgarians were helpless and in the Treaty of Bucharest, which they signed with Greece, Serbia, and Rumania in August, they paid a price to everyone. Greece kept southern Macedonia; Serbia, northern Macedonia; and Rumania, the southern Dobruja. Turkey kept Adrianople, which in the Treaty of London had been given to Bulgaria. In this way all four states defied the great powers and ignored the Treaty of London. The powers were hamstrung by their own mutual fears, for they knew that a wider war would mean Germany and Austria-Hungary ranged on one side, at least France and Russia on the other. That they had come so near the brink of war over the Balkan disputes of 1912–13 made them more than ever conscious of the dangers to which the system of alliances now exposed them.<sup>1</sup> But the hour for repentance was very late.

The Balkan wars left the international scene more enigmatic than before. No belligerent believed that the decisions about territory would last. Serbia and Montenegro now regarded war against Austria-Hungary, to liberate the Serbs in Bosnia, as inevitable. Bulgaria nursed plans for revenge against her rapacious neighbours, and looked to Turkey and Austria-Hungary as possible allies. Russia, her interest in the Balkans renewed by the evident collapse of Turkey, tended now to side with Serbia and Rumania against Bulgaria. Each state, its appetite whetted by gains or its spirit embittered by losses, remained more warlike than ever. The defiance of the great powers and the contempt for treaties alike

1. See p. 540.

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deprived them of any expectations of gain or security by any means other than war. For the first time in a generation the never easy relations of the Balkan nations had relapsed into full-scale wars, and these wars had still produced no definitive or accepted settlement. Any resumption of war in this region was more likely to involve even bigger stakes, for neither Austria-Hungary nor Russia could contemplate, without their participation, the final eclipse of Turkey in Europe.

## INSURGENT NATIONALISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

For internal reasons both Russia and Austria-Hungary in these decades were sensitive to whatever happened in the Balkans. This was not merely because both governments pursued foreign policies that intersected in the Balkans, and were concerned with the balance of power in the Adriatic, Aegean, and Black Seas. It was also because the very fabric of these Empires rested upon a denial of the forces of nationalism and political independence which were fermenting so violently in the Balkan peninsula. Whether, at any moment, Austria backed or opposed Serbia, whether Russia backed or opposed Bulgaria, depended upon fine calculations of policy which took into account both the international scene and the internal condition of insurgent nationalities. It would be wrong to think of the rivalries of Austria-Hungary and Russia in this region as a battle only for spheres of influence or only for points of strategic defence. They involved both these considerations, but they also involved a domestic necessity to hold together somehow their own polyglot and multi-national territories.

The importance of insurgent nationalities along the western fringes of the tsarist Empire has already been indicated.<sup>1</sup> Poles and Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Finns, continued to exert a strong centrifugal pull on the Empire after 1870; and the more the régime looked eastward for its expansion, the more these peoples felt that they belonged to the West. . . .