

The Danube River as it flows through the Transylvanian Alps in the heart of the Balkans. "For hundreds of years," wrote Graf Helmuth von Moltke in 1836, "the Danube has divided civilized and barbaric peoples, but today it brings them together." Plans for some sort of "Balkan Federation" were repeatedly proposed (and forgotten) during the 19th century. In the 1980s, cooperative ventures in the region center once more on the Danube.

The Balkans

Forbidding mountains. Gypsies. The Sarajevo assassination. Tito. Peasants dancing *horos*. Bulgarian hit-men. In the American mind, the Balkans appear as a series of disconnected images. And perhaps for good reason: The region's history is complicated and confusing. The Balkan republics were detached from ailing empires during the past 150 years. The experience proved unsettling. Ethnic and religious animosities, centuries old, divide the peoples of the peninsula. Only fitfully have their countries been free of outside interference. They worry about that. "I think there is a large danger that the great powers will intervene again in the Balkans," Belgrade University historian Branko Petranović recently observed, "because the Mediterranean is valuable to them, and we are between the [East and West] blocs." Yet, since the end of World War II, the Balkans have enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace. Here, David Binder looks at the Balkan states, at their history, and at their current predicaments.

by David Binder

"Balkan" is a Turkish word for mountain, and it denotes today a range of peaks extending across Bulgaria from the Yugoslav border to the Black Sea. During the late 18th century, northern European geographers labored under the mistaken impression that, geologically, the Balkan chain encompassed *all* of the mountains that stretch along the wide peninsula formed by the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean, and Black Seas. The term "Balkan Peninsula" (*die Balkanhalbinsel*) was coined by Johann August Zeune in 1808. As the 19th century wore on, and new political entities were imposed upon this contested ground, Zeune's usage became popular. It was subsequently pared down to "the Balkans."

It is convenient shorthand but a term of limited value, and different scholars have defined the Balkans in various ways. It is customary to include what are now Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, which together take up a Texas-sized chunk of the peninsula. But four other countries—Greece, Hun-

gary, Turkey, and the Soviet Union—also occupy portions of the Balkan peninsula. Down through the ages, Greeks, Hungarians, Turks, and Russians have had much to say about the fate of the Balkan peoples on their doorsteps.

In any event, “the Balkans” is not a phrase one hears the peoples of the Balkans using frequently to describe their region. For different reasons, it does not sit well with most of them.

The “Powderkeg”

To an Albanian, the term ignores his nation’s origins in ancient Illyria—the birthplace of Diocletian, who ruled the Roman Empire for 21 years—and lumps Albanians together with relative newcomers to the peninsula such as the South Slavs.

To the Romanians, the word seems to belie their claim to a direct link with the Roman legions who occupied ancient Dacia between the first and third centuries A.D. The Romans left behind a largely Latinate tongue of which the Romanians—who speak of themselves frequently as a “Latin island in a sea of Slavs”—are inordinately proud. The fact that more than one-quarter of the words in their language are Slavic in origin is only grudgingly acknowledged.

To a Greek, the usage neglects the memory of classical Athens and the Golden Age of Pericles. It disregards Greece’s historic involvement in the Mediterranean, its whole maritime tradition.

To the Hungarians, who did not hesitate to extend their rule in centuries past over (Balkan) Slovenia and on into (Balkan) Croatia, the Vojvodina, and the Banat, the coinage is an unspeakable insult to their Central Europeanness, their claims to be a *Kulturvolk* along with the Austrians and Germans.

That leaves only the various peoples of Yugoslavia, not loving one another, torn by a history of lurches to the West and to the East, and somewhat embarrassed at having been the ones whose turbulent politics gave rise during the 19th century to clichés such as the “Balkan powderkeg”; and the Bulgars, an Asiatic tribe Slavified by the people they overran, who have looked to Berlin or Moscow for rescue from foreign oppression and for restoration of the Macedonian lands held under two Bul-

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In the Balkans, political boundaries rarely correspond to ethnic, religious, or linguistic divisions. As a result, every Balkan country (except, perhaps, Albania) is to some degree a multinational state. Over the years, each has voiced claims to part of a neighbor's territory.

garian empires, one expiring ignominiously during the 11th century, the other during the 14th.

Neither the Bulgarians nor the Yugoslavs care much for "the Balkans" either.

The term has not been entirely shunned, however. From time to time, proposals have surfaced for some sort of economic or political "Balkan cooperation." A regional Inter-Balkan Conference was held in Athens in 1976, and more recently both Athens and Sofia have called for creation of a Balkan "nuclear free zone," which would have a practical effect only in Greece, where the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has deployed nuclear weapons. But the truly serious attempts since the mid-19th century to establish formal linkages among the Balkan countries have all met with failure, the short-lived Balkan Entente during the 1930s being one case in point. It is almost as if the name "Balkan" were itself enough to doom any regional initiative.

Yet geography, if nothing else, has given a certain historical unity to the Balkans, dictated their evolution, compelled their people to share a past, a present, and a future.

I THE LIVING PAST

In few other places on earth have the contour and lay of the land proved so decisive to the fortunes of those who would live upon it as they have in the Balkans.

There is, to begin with, the Danube, coursing ever stronger from the center of Europe in Germany, through Austria, along the border of Czechoslovakia, beginning its great reverse-S curve through Hungary and into Yugoslavia, serving as part of the Yugoslav border with Romania, continuing as the boundary between Romania and Bulgaria, and, finally, plunging through Romania until it touches the southwestern tip of the Soviet Union and pours into the Black Sea. The Danube, navigable today all the way to Ulm in West Germany, has served since pre-Christian times as a great natural highway, "beckoning invaders and settlers and merchants," in the words of one historian, "and linking the peninsula with Central Europe to the west and the Russian steppes to the east."

There are the mountains, from the Julian Alps of Slovenia down to the northwest-southeast ridges of the Dinaric Alps. Farther to the east are the Transylvanian Alps, curving north in the center of Romania to greet the Carpathians. Straddling the Greek-Albanian frontier, the Pindus Mountains rise to 8,650 feet, the more dramatic for their proximity to the Ionian Sea. The rugged terrain of much of the Balkans presents vistas of breathtaking beauty. However, as historian Fernand Braudel observed in *The Mediterranean* (1949), "In the mountains, civilization is never very stable."

Below the peaks are high pastures and verdant valleys, inviting to herders of sheep and goats since time immemorial. Other stretches consist of mile after mile of bone-white, chalky limestone—the bleak *karst* of the Dalmatian coast, pitted here and there by deep, water-carved depressions where a handful of cattle may graze. Vast plains run alongside the principal rivers: the Danube, of course, but also the Sava, the Drava, the Tisza, the Morava, the Vardar, the Prut, the Siret, the Maritsa. Alluvial soils make some of these lowlands rich producers of grains. Other flatlands, such as the Bărăgan region northeast of Bucharest, have a steppe-like quality and, in inclement weather, when cold winds blow off the sister steppes of Russia, a visitor may feel the breath of Siberia.

For millennia, the Balkans have served as both land bridge

and buffer between East and West, and since the earliest times the traffic has moved in both directions, along the great river valleys that slice through the mountains. The high ridges that divide and "Balkanize" the peoples of the peninsula are cut by passes that provide access to the Aegean and Adriatic and Black Seas, to the Pannonian Plain and the Dardanelles and the Ukraine, and between any one of these points and any other.

Today, one of the chief routes for narcotics smuggled in from the Middle East crosses from Turkey into Bulgaria and then goes over the Dragoman Pass to Yugoslavia, and from there on up into northern Europe. The drugs, mostly heroin, are typically moved in customs-sealed trucks whose manifests may describe the contents as fruits, vegetables, meats, or machinery.

The route is precisely the one used by the Turks as they marched on Vienna during the 16th century and by the Crusaders as they journeyed to the Holy Land during the 11th. It was the route employed by the Roman Emperor Constantine (ca. A.D. 280–337), that eminent son of the Balkans, when he journeyed between his native Niš (in Serbia) and Constantinople, the imperial capital he founded on the Bosphorus. Later he would say



"Mowers Resting," by Romania's painter Camil Ressu (1880–1962). Most people in the Balkans before World War II lived in peasant societies. "Land meant more to the peasant than money in the bank," one writer observed. "It meant more than food on the table; it meant life itself."

that his favorite city in the empire—and he had seen most of them, from London to Palmyra—was not Constantinople (which would dominate Balkan life for centuries) but Sardica, modern Sofia, on the other side of the Dragoman Pass from Niš.

So it is with the other major land routes of the region. Modern thoroughfares follow centuries-old caravan trails, which followed Roman roads, which followed rivers and other gashes in the terrain, routes taken by primitive peoples who could neither read nor write but understood well enough how to travel.

The Balkan peninsula is unusually vulnerable, its perimeter pitted by scores of natural harbors, the waters beyond flecked with islands ripe for occupation, the interior easily penetrated along one of a dozen natural corridors. It was penetrated very early—at least 40,000 years ago, so far as scholars have been able to tell. Sculptures of that age, with a distinctly Asian cast, have been unearthed by archaeologists along the Danube near the Iron Gates rapids. Carved stone house gods of more recent vintage, similar to others found in Asia Minor, have been unearthed in Kosovo, Yugoslavia.

Ancestral Lands

By roughly 1,000 B.C., at the beginning of the Iron Age, a large portion of the western Balkans was inhabited by an apparently indigenous people called the Illyrians. Their presence was known to the Greeks, who had already developed a relatively advanced civilization, founded city-states on the Aegean, and fanned out across the Mediterranean and along the Balkan coasts.

Contemporary with the Illyrians but inhabiting the southeastern Balkans were the Thracians, who gave us the god Dionysus and were mentioned by Herodotus both for their peculiarly savage style of fighting and for their political instability. Their cousins to the north, in Transylvania, called themselves Dacians. To the northeast, above the marshy Danube delta, lived the Scythians, who were probably of Iranian origin. Illyria and Thrace were subjugated by the Romans in the second century B.C., but not until A.D. 106 did the Emperor Trajan succeed in conquering the Dacians and thereby push the empire's frontier to the Danube. That achievement is celebrated in marble bas-relief on Trajan's column in Rome.

The relevance to our own time of all this activity may seem obscure, and yet the distant past remains oddly pertinent to the politics of the Balkans today.

In the case of Albania, for example, the Stalinist government of Enver Hoxha has lately been invoking "scientific" au-

thority to assert an unbroken connection between the Albanians of today and the Illyrians of the dawn of history. The link, says Hoxha, justifies Albania's claims to "ancestral" lands lying well beyond its present frontiers, in the Yugoslav republics of Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia (where 1.7 million Albanians live today), not to mention the northwestern corner of Greece.

In Romania, the Dacian connection has been cited with increasing stridency by the government of Nicolae Ceaușescu to counter Hungary's more recent claim to Transylvania as well as to assert Romanian rights to Bukovina and Moldavia, portions of which were seized by the Russians during World War II.

Slavs, Bulgars, and Turks

The Balkans have not, for the most part, been a melting pot. Each of the many groups that have arrived over the centuries has generally found a cul-de-sac or two to call its own. Imperial Rome, for example, lives on in the blood of the Vlachs. Presumed to be descendants of Roman colonists who settled in the Balkans two millennia ago, the Vlachs are for the most part nomadic shepherders and cattle traders who speak a Latinate language and are scattered throughout the uplands of Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania. (The Vlach "capital," Samarina, is located in Greece.) During World War II, Mussolini attempted, without much success, to recruit Greek Vlachs into a special legion. Today, despite assimilationist pressures, the Vlachs everywhere retain a strong sense of identity.

The South Slavic peoples, who together constitute the majority of the population of the Balkan region today, arrived on the scene long after the Romans, probably not until the sixth century A.D. in any sizable numbers. While there is general agreement that the original home of the South (or *Yugo*) Slavs lay somewhere west of the Dniester River in what is now the Ukraine, there is also a consensus among scholars that a number of distinct Slavic tribes were involved, and that they came by different routes and at different times.

The Serbs, for example, are unquestionably cousins in blood and tongue to the Western Slavs now settled in the upper Elbe valley of East Germany, who call themselves Sorbs. Some Slovene historians, including Bogo Grafenauer of Ljubljana University, believe that the Slovenes arrived by way of Czechoslovakia. The Bulgars were originally a Hun people from the edge of Mongolia who crossed the Danube in the seventh century A.D. and were gradually absorbed by indigenous Slavs.

The last of the Balkan peoples to migrate to the region were



Turkish troops lead away Christian captives. The Turks completed their conquest of the Balkans in the 16th century. Among those who opposed them: Romania's Vlad the Impaler (inset), inspiration for Count Dracula, and "a man of diseased and abnormal tendencies."

the Turks, who first infiltrated the peninsula during the 14th century, a hundred years before they seized Constantinople in 1453. Today, more than 500,000 Muslim Turks inhabit Bulgaria. Another 200,000 can be found in Yugoslavia, and 120,000 live in Greece. While their Ottoman ancestors came as rulers and administrators, now, except in a few places such as Yugoslavia's Novi Pazar (the former Turkish district separating Serbia and Montenegro), the Turks of the Balkans are the poorest of the poor.

The ethnic diversity of the Balkan peninsula is reflected in religious divisions. In the Balkans as elsewhere, religious conviction often followed on the heels of conquest, the fortunes of one faith or another varying with the vicissitudes of empire. The Church of Rome, for example, first extended its reach over the Balkans during the reign of Constantine. It subsequently lost its monopoly but retained a grip on Dalmatia by way of Venice and on Slovenia and Croatia by way of Vienna and Budapest—and there today one finds strongholds of the Roman Catholic Church. Constantinople, closer by river, road, and temperament, found sympathy in Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and even Albania,

and it was in these regions, not to mention Greece, that the (Eastern) Orthodox Church gained adherents.

One notable quality of the Orthodox faith was that it left room for national expression, beginning in the ninth century with the creation of the Cyrillic alphabet, which made possible a liturgy in Slavic languages (rather than Greek). This alphabet permitted, even encouraged, the ultimate development of native Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Romanian Orthodox churches, all of which fostered the evolution of corresponding nation-states.

"The Crack of Doom"

Islam, spread by the Ottoman Turks, was fiercely rejected by many in the Balkans but welcomed by some. A curious example of the latter comes from the Bosnian Slavs who, by the time of the Turkish conquest during the 15th century, had adopted an austere, Manichaeian-related Christian faith called Bogomilism, which held (among other things) that the physical world was a creation of the devil. Viewed as heretical by both the Byzantine and Roman churches, the Bogomils were threatened by twin crusades. In the end, they welcomed the Muslim Turks almost as liberators and willingly converted to Islam, becoming Slavic Muslims. Roughly 40 percent of Yugoslav Bosnians today retain the Islamic faith adopted by their forefathers.

Indeed, Yugoslavia's Communist leaders found themselves confronted in 1983 with a fundamentalist Muslim revival in Bosnia that resulted in at least 12 citizens being tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison on charges of hostile propaganda and sedition. Something of a religious awakening is, in fact, occurring all across the Balkans these days (except in Albania, which banned all forms of worship in 1967), not only among Muslims but among Catholics and Orthodoxians as well.

To awaken religious sentiment in the Balkans is usually to inflame old, and sometimes not-so-old, wounds. During the course of World War II, a number of scores were settled. Upset that they had become (thanks to territorial adjustments made in 1918) a minority in their native Vojvodina, Hungarian Catholics in Yugoslavia set thousands of Orthodox Serbs upon Danube ice floes to freeze to death in 1942. Croatian *Ustaše* (Fascists), under Hitler's protection, slashed the throats, gouged out the eyes, and otherwise disposed of hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. Serbs retaliated in kind against Catholic Croats, and so on.

Anti-Semitism was widespread in the Balkans (though



Bogomil graves in Yugoslavia. Such forlorn monuments in forests and mountains are almost all that remains of the once powerful Christian sect. Embraced by Bosnia's nobility after the 12th century, Bogomilism developed into a national movement that endured for three centuries.

some countries, notably Greece and Bulgaria, were relatively free of it). Most Balkan states cooperated with the Nazis to some degree in rounding up the Jews for deportation to the death camps.* All told, roughly 350,000 Jews from the Balkan region lost their lives during the war. The postwar immigration of the survivors to Israel and elsewhere deprived the Balkan states of some of their richest heritages. Historically, the Balkan Jews had provided a link not only to Venice and Toledo but also to Prague, Vienna, and Frankfurt, a link to certain centers of learning and culture that would otherwise have been weak.

To have lived through Balkan history is to have been exposed in equal measures to beauty and terror. While the details of each national history may vary, the basic pattern is common to all: episodic invasion, ethnic and religious discord, foreign interference. This cycle in turn has bred a distinct sense of fatalism in the people of the region. "The crack of doom is coming soon," runs one Gypsy verse. "Let it come, it doesn't matter."

*The situation was complex. For example, while Bulgaria did not kill or send to the camps any Bulgarian Jews, the Bulgarian government did yield up some 11,000 "foreign" Jews—Jews from Thrace and Macedonia who were under Bulgarian authority. The government in Bucharest was responsible for the deaths of 250,000 Jews, though it spared those from Old Romania. The Yugoslav Partisans welcomed Jews to their ranks. Tito himself was coached in Marxism during a prison term by a prominent Jewish Communist, Moša Pijade.

II

A CLASH OF EMPIRES

From a contemporary perspective, the history of the Balkan states must be viewed, to use a phrase employed by historian Robert Lee Wolff, as "interrupted history." No country in the Balkans was permitted to evolve on its own terms. Ruled during most of the past five centuries by either the Austro-Hungarian emperor or the Ottoman sultan, the people of the Balkans came relatively late to the concept of nationhood.

"Interrupted history." To Slovenes, the phrase captures the fact that they held onto independence for less than a hundred years, ending in the ninth century, only to acquire (partial) statehood again as one constituent part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes of South Slavia after an interruption of more than a thousand years. The Bulgars, as noted above, twice had a brief fling at empire, but the Turks in 1398 overran the last of sovereign Bulgaria. It took the Bulgarians 500 years and the help of Russia to regain their independence.

The Croats, led by King Tomislav, achieved independence during the 10th century but soon fell under the sway of Hungary, remaining so until 1918 when they were incorporated into the South Slav Kingdom. The more romantic Croats still hanker after a separate Croatian state, for which the most radical are prepared to fight with guns and bombs. During the early 1970s, Croatian nationalists in exile conducted a terror campaign against Yugoslav diplomats and twice hijacked commercial airliners (including a TWA flight from New York to Chicago).

The Serbs established an independent state in the 12th century and something of a Balkan empire in the 14th only to lose on the field of battle to another expanding empire, that of the Turks. The Greeks, who had erected a powerful state in the fifth century B.C., subsequently came under the domination of a series of foreigners until they achieved independence from the Turks in 1829. Romania, whatever its pretensions to noble origins, acquired full autonomy only in 1861 (with the union of the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia), and formal independence in 1878. Albania, the youngest of the lot, although its inhabitants were arguably the first of the Balkan peoples, had sovereignty conferred upon it by Europe's Great Powers in 1912.

It is ironic that just when other countries were curbing the powers of royalty, the new Balkan states in the 19th century saw fit to revive the institution. "Monarchies got stronger here at a time when they were supposed to be getting weaker," observes

historian Ljubo Boban. As Turkish power began to wane and various Ottoman territories acquired autonomy, the burdens of rule often passed to prominent local families—the Obrenović family in Serbia, for example, and the Petrović family in Montenegro. (Montenegro's King Nicholas I, blessed with six beautiful daughters who married into other royal families, was known as the "Father-in-Law of Europe.") Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece all had to import their first kings, who were selected with the approval of the Great Powers. Ultimately World War II would destroy all but one of the Balkan monarchies. The last of the neighborhood's kings to go was Constantine of Greece, who fled into exile after the Greek colonels seized power in 1967.

Striking East

Some of these Balkan monarchs were able men, some wily and adventurous, some tragically ineffective. Conspiracies were frequent and more than one monarch was forced to abdicate at gunpoint. But Bismarck once advised a young German prince, who was considering whether to accept the Romanian crown, to take the job, commenting: "If you fail, you will at any rate have a pleasant reminiscence for the rest of your life."

Whatever the political ups-and-downs in Balkan capitals, life for most of the peninsula's population changed little. By late 19th-century northern European standards, conditions remained primitive. Cities were small, railroads few. The principal occupation was agriculture, and peasants throughout the Balkans lived on the land as they had for centuries, largely uninterested in events outside their village. Meanwhile, in the mountains and in city cafés, nationalist revolutionaries from Bosnia to Bulgaria to Macedonia plotted armed uprisings. Guerrilla clashes and even skirmishes between regular army units were frequent along a half-dozen frontiers.

The fighting took its toll on the populace. One American journalist, John L. C. Booth, described the aftermath of an engagement in 1904 between Macedonian insurgents and Ottoman troops: "Men and women looked tired—dead tired and sick of life, and well they might be. Their village, Belitza, had been rushed by the Turkish soldiers . . . and such of the village folk as could get away made a rush for the hills—nearly all women, carrying their children and helping the old men. As they ran, the blackguards fired into them; some dropped, others sprang forward, hard hit, to fall in the awful scramble up the hillside. Looking back, they saw the smoke rise over their homes. . . ."

In our century, the Balkans have been the seedbed of three



National frontiers shifted frequently between the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) and World War I. The map depicts the situation in 1909. Balkan rulers, clockwise from upper left, included: Emperor Franz Josef; King Carol I; Tsar Ferdinand I; Sultan Mehmed V; King Nicholas I; King Peter I.

major wars: the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 and, of course, World War I, sparked by the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, on June 28, 1914.* Following that first global catastrophe, scholars and literary figures, among them Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, and Rebecca West, combed the region in substantial numbers on the not implausible assumption that yet another major conflict could commence in the Balkans. "It appeared to me inevitable that another war must follow," West wrote, recalling the 1934 assassination, in Marseilles, of King Alexander of Yugoslavia.

*In the First Balkan War, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece together pried Macedonia away from Turkey. Discord arose over division of the spoils. When Bulgaria invaded Serb- and Greek-occupied sectors of Macedonia, its forces were repulsed. In the Second Balkan War, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro were joined by Romania and Turkey.

The Second World War, as it turned out, started someplace else, but it came to the Balkans soon enough. Hitler's dreams of expansion lay principally to the east and west of his Germanic fortress, and it was in those directions—toward Poland in September 1939 and France in May 1940—that he struck most forcibly. But the Nazis moved early to secure a crucial supply of petroleum, through their Romanian clients, from the bountiful Ploiești oil fields at the foot of the Transylvanian Alps. Hitler himself contemplated a flanking move in 1941 that would have carried his armies across a prostrate Balkan peninsula into neutral Turkey and on toward Baku, in the Soviet Union's vital oil-producing region on the Caspian Sea. In the end, the Wehrmacht, joined by 15 Romanian divisions, took a different route, across the Ukraine. Even so, they nearly made it to Baku.

Acts of Defiance

Nor should one neglect the other European partner in the Axis, Benito Mussolini, who had already brought war to the Balkans more than four months before the Nazi invasion of Poland. Il Duce's troops crossed the Adriatic and overran King Zog's Albania in April 1939. The operation took scarcely a week, during which time a son was born to the Albanian monarch. "How long will he be an heir to the Albanian throne?" Italy's foreign minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, asked sarcastically on hearing the news. Zog fled the next day to Greece with his Hungarian wife and infant prince. The boy, named for Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, lives today in Paris. He is a weapons dealer and aspires still to his father's crown.

As the conflict went on, the march of the Axis powers through southeastern Europe was impeded by two acts of defiance in the Balkans. The first was that of the Greeks, who said No ("*Ochi!*") to Mussolini's attempted occupation in 1940 of "certain strategic points on Greek territory." Greek soldiers, moving swiftly through their familiar mountains, halted the Fascist advance along the valley floors and then chased the best of Italy's soldiery back into Albania.

The second act of defiance was the coup of patriotic Yugoslav army officers at the end of March 1941, in protest against a humiliating pact—amounting to subjugation—that the Belgrade leadership under Premier Dragiša Cvetković had just signed under duress with the Axis powers. Led by Air Force General Dušan Simović, the officers rejected the infamous Tripartite Agreement and thereby knowingly provided a pretext for invasion by all of Yugoslavia's foes.

Historians have since concluded that the April 1941 Axis sweep through Yugoslavia and Greece not only diverted Hitler from any possible thrust into Turkey but, more importantly, delayed Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, by two critical months, perhaps sparing Moscow from capture in the winter of 1941–42. After the war, German generals and historians confirmed that the Yugoslav resistance, eventually led by Josip Broz Tito, tied down 20 German and Italian divisions at a time when those troops were desperately needed on the eastern and western fronts.

For more than a decade after V-E Day, Western military strategists, diplomats, politicians, and assorted academics continued to view the Balkan region with the special interest reserved for a special case. One reason for this, of course, was that Russia's Red Army had "liberated" the Balkans in 1944 and helped install Communist regimes in Belgrade, Tiranë, Sofia, and Bucharest. The transformation of the Balkan states, through collectivization and industrialization, was begun. Russia now dominated peninsular affairs as no single power had done since the height of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

Spurning the Soviets

Another reason was the 1946–49 civil war in Greece. That bloody conflict, which cost the lives of 5,219 civilians, 14,356 soldiers and police, and some 50,000 insurgents, remains one of the least understood episodes of the immediate postwar era. To Britain and the United States, the emergence of a Communist-led military force, ELAS (the Greek acronym for National Popular Liberation Army), in Greece could only be the work of Stalin when, in fact, its supplies came mainly from Tito's Communists in Yugoslavia. To be sure, when the Greek civil war began, Tito was an ally of Stalin. But, like the Serbian empire builders seven centuries earlier, Tito and his aides (especially the Macedonians among them) were attracted by the idea of playing a dominant role in the affairs of the lower Balkan peninsula.

With Britain bled white by World War II, the United States stepped in to take over its ally's affairs in the Mediterranean and Adriatic. Washington channeled money, military advisers, and materiel to the shaky government in Athens, shouldering a burden that the British had once elected to assume; a burden deriving from the cynical counting house chit drawn up by Churchill and Stalin in Moscow in October 1944. Under that gentleman's agreement, the British and the Russians were to have a fifty-fifty "interest" in Yugoslavia, the British would retain a "90 percent

Награда
од
100.000
Рейхсмарка у злату!



In 1941, the Nazis offered a reward of 100,000 Reichsmarks for capture of Yugoslav Partisan leader Josip Broz Tito. Tito's guerrillas eliminated rival factions and led the resistance against the Axis occupation.

interest" in Greece, and the Soviets a "90 percent interest" in Romania.

Out of Truman's support for Greek government forces against the Communists in 1947–48 came the U.S. commitment to support Turkey and creation of what was later to become the southern "flank" of NATO. But something else happened in 1948 that would cast the Balkans into an even larger spotlight: Tito stood up to Soviet efforts to penetrate the Yugoslav secret police and spurned Russian demands for the formation of a variety of joint economic enterprises. Yugoslavia's postwar leaders were, as historian Barbara Jelavich has noted, "supremely self-confident, even arrogant," and immoderately proud of the Partisans' wartime exploits (which Stalin took pains to belittle). They were not about to stand idly by as the Soviets reduced their nation to satellite status. Tito's break with Stalin instantly opened a fissure in the international communist movement that has been widening to this day.

Many factors contributed to the popularity of Tito's action—memories of the crude behavior of Soviet troops as they passed through Belgrade during the war; Moscow's overbearing propaganda efforts; the Russians' air of superiority. "We were to keep to our muddy roads," one young Yugoslav recalled, "walk

on them in our peasant *opanke* [sandals], and step aside when the Russian engineers rode past in their motorcars just as the Serbs used to do when the Turks rode by on mules."

Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform, trade agreements with other Communist nations were cancelled, and Tito and his associates were denounced as (among other things) "dogs tied to American leashes, gnawing imperialist bones." But Tito stood his ground, with consequences that bear directly on the geopolitical situation of the Balkans today.

The Apple of Discord

For one thing, the breach in the Communist bloc cut loose tiny, backward Albania from what had been Tito's paternal, almost colonial domination, pushing it further into the arms of Moscow. Albania's leaders eventually forsook the Kremlin's embrace in 1961—Enver Hoxha deemed Khrushchev too "soft"—only to bind themselves for another 15 years to Mao's faraway China, and finally to seek solace in hermetic isolation.

Belgrade's break with Moscow also allowed Bulgaria to extricate itself from federation talks with Yugoslavia and to reassert its old claims to Macedonia, especially those parts of the region that had been reconstituted, thanks to Partisan successes on the battlefield, as the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. The Yugoslavs have always argued that the Macedonians are a distinct ethnic group and complain about the treatment accorded Macedonians in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians, by contrast, regard "Macedonian" and "Bulgarian" as synonymous terms and resent the division of one people between two political entities.* The truth is actually somewhere in between, but the Macedonian issue, that old "apple of discord" in the Balkans, continues to sour relations between Belgrade and Sofia.

Finally, Yugoslavia's sudden isolation forced Tito to secure his borders, in the process withdrawing support from the Greek Communist insurgents and ensuring their collapse, and to settle his claims against Italy involving the status of Trieste and its environs. Yugoslavia's subsequent success in maintaining its independence and gaining friends far from its frontiers has enabled the country to radiate its milder, more Western-oriented form of communism. It is partly thanks to Yugoslavia that neighboring Hungary and Romania can today conduct themselves in (differing) ways that make them more tolerable to Western governments than the re-

*The Yugoslavs have accused Bulgaria of "statistical genocide" as far as Macedonians are concerned. In the 1946 census, Sofia reported the existence of 169,544 Macedonians in Bulgaria. That figure fell to 8,750 in 1965 and to zero in 1976.

gimes in, say, Czechoslovakia or East Germany.

The focus of international attention on the Balkans was very sharp in 1948 and for several decades thereafter. Suddenly, the East-West demarcation line had shifted without a bullet being fired or a penny spent by the West. Only two years earlier, Winston Churchill in his famous Fulton, Missouri, speech had spoken of an iron curtain stretching from Stettin (Szczecin) in the north to Trieste in the south. Already the curtain had been moved east, to the Drava, the Danube, and the Pirin Mountains.

But it was still drawn. The great divide between East and West still ran through the Balkans the way it had during the eighth century after Charlemagne and Constantinople's Empress Irene failed to negotiate a marriage.

III LOOKING AHEAD

If the Balkan peninsula was contested ground for some 3,000 years, it does not seem so today. While neither the West nor the Soviet Union is disengaged from the region, strategic rivalries over the Balkans no longer loom large. With the exception of a flurry of headlines about alleged Bulgarian complicity (which I do not believe) in Mehmet Ali Agca's attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981, American newspaper and newsmagazine stories about the region have been rare since the death of Tito in 1980.

At first glance, one might even remark that the Balkans have again been Balkanized, that the "bloc" of Balkan states dominated by Moscow has split up once more into national fragments operating at cross purposes. Twenty years ago, the Balkan scholar John C. Campbell asked: "Will the Communist empire absorb the Balkans, or will the Balkans absorb and 'Balkanize' communism?" There is yet no definitive answer, but the Balkan states do seem intent on going separate ways.

Bulgaria remains in most respects Moscow's devoted retainer and willing surrogate. (Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov once remarked that his regime's "political watch is exact to the second with the watch of the Soviet Union.") But Bulgaria has learned all the same to cultivate its own little garden and has become a mildly prosperous exporter of grain, fruit, wine, and tobacco—it has a license to manufacture Winston cigarettes—not to mention industrial machinery and some light weapons. The Bulgarians do not share the Soviets' fear of foreigners. Hoping to lure new tourists to their inexpensive Black

Sea beach resorts, the Bulgarians have launched an aggressive advertising campaign in the West.

Romania, also allied to the Soviet Union, has nevertheless maintained an independent foreign policy for the past 20 years. At the same time, it has gone broke, partly because it is no longer self-sufficient in oil, and partly because of a Stalinesque policy of neglecting agriculture in favor of heavy industry. (Having once fed the Turkish empire, Romania must now import grain.) Meanwhile, President Nicolae Ceaușescu has made himself the object of an official cult of personality and rules his fief as sternly as any 19th-century Balkan despot.

Albania, emerging from the mists of history and promoting aggressive nationalism in a manner most Balkan states abandoned during the 19th century, is held in virtual solitary confinement by Enver Hoxha, despite a few recent signs that the

THE CENTRAL BALKANS IN BRIEF

YUGOSLAVIA
(Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija)
Collective Presidency (nine-member council, rotating presidency)
Current head of state: Mika Spiljak
Area: 98,766 square miles
Population: 22.5 million (1981 est.)
Ethnic Composition: 40% Serbian, 22% Croatian, 8% Slovene, 6% Macedonian, 6% Albanian;
Remainder: Hungarian, Turkish
GNP: \$52.4 billion (1979); \$2,370 per capita
Currency: 100 para = 1 Yugoslav dinar = U.S. \$.01

BULGARIA
(Narodna Republika Bŭlgariya)
President: Todor Zhivkov
Area: 42,823 square miles
Population: 8.9 million (1981 est.)
Ethnic Composition: 85.3% Bulgarian, 6.2% Turkish;
Remainder: Gypsy, Macedonian, Armenian, Russian
GNP: \$32.5 billion (1979); \$3,630 per capita
Currency: 100 stotinki = 1 lev = U.S. \$1.02

ROMANIA
(Republica Socialistă România)
President: Nicolae Ceaușescu
Area: 91,699 square miles
Population: 22.4 million (1981 est.)
Ethnic Composition: 88.1% Romanian, 7.9% Hungarian;
Remainder: German, Ukranian, Serbian, Jewish, Tartar, Russian, Bulgarian, Croatian
GNP: \$46.3 billion (1979); \$2,100 per capita
Currency: 100 bani = 1 leu = U.S. \$.22

ALBANIA
(Republika Popullore Socialiste e Shqipërisë)
First Secretary of the Albanian Labor Party Central Committee: Enver Hoxha
Area: 11,096 square miles
Population: 2.8 million (1981 est.)
Ethnic Composition: 96% Albanian;
Remainder: Greek, Vlach, Gypsy, Bulgarian
GNP: \$1.9 billion (1979); \$740 per capita
Currency: 100 qindars = 1 new lek = U.S. \$.15

country is beginning to open up.* Thousands of beehive bunkers dot the Albanian landscape, concrete talismans against invasion. When an earthquake struck the country in 1980, Tiranë refused all offers of foreign assistance. Albania's traditional place as the poorest country in Europe seems, for the moment, secure.

Yugoslavia, meanwhile, three years after Tito's departure, is undergoing an economic crisis that also reflects an underlying political crisis. The country's leadership—a collective presidency—is trying to maintain Titoism without Tito, and having a difficult go of it. It is faced with a bureaucracy that, on the one hand, wants to protect the privileges it has gained with political and economic decentralization, but on the other cannot quite let go of the conservative, centralist bias common to socialist planners. Belgrade's leaders are worried that pressure from Yugoslavia's constituent republics may turn Tito's "different road to socialism" into six or eight different roads.

Getting Together

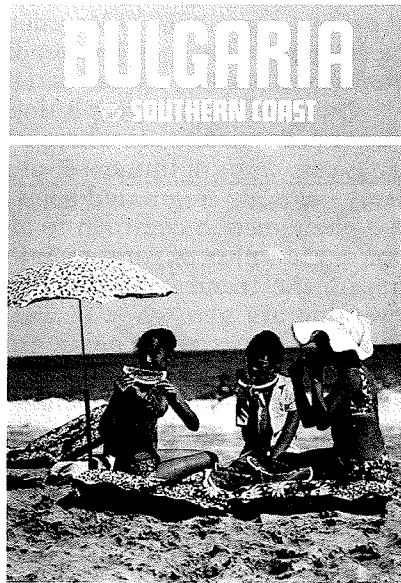
Next door is Greece. For a time a NATO stalwart, and now the newest member of the European Economic Community (admitted in 1981), Greece has, under Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, pursued the sort of political adventurism that Aristophanes caricatured in *The Clouds*. Papandreou played host to Yasir Arafat in September 1982 when the PLO was already in decline and a few months later devalued the drachma without notifying his Common Market partners. At this writing, Greece is virtually on a war footing with fellow NATO member Turkey over the future of Cyprus.

To outsiders, the Balkan states today seem preoccupied with their own, sometimes petty, concerns. Modernization and communism have not made the peoples of the peninsula or their governments appreciably more homogeneous or buried ancient feuds. Balkan federation, logical as it appears from a glance at the map, is as inconceivable now as it was a century ago.

Yet the fact remains that, in the 1980s, a variety of intra-Balkan projects are underway, gradually making the countries of the region more involved with one another than they have ever been in modern times. This activity goes far beyond the rit-

*Trade agreements with Yugoslavia, Romania, and China were renewed in the autumn of 1983. On November 7, ferry service was resumed between the Albanian port of Durrës and Italy's Trieste. Loyal party cadres may avail themselves of a special (censored) version of Italian TV, purged of "decadent capitalist and revisionist influences." Some Albanian students have also been allowed to study in Vienna, Rome, Stockholm, and other western European cities.

Tourism is an expanding industry throughout the Balkans. This poster touts Bulgaria's Black Sea "riviera," long favored by vacationing Russians and East Europeans.



ual exchange of folk-dance troupes. The new ventures include making cars and mining coal. They include hydroelectric stations such as the two at Djerdap on the Danube built jointly by the Romanians and Yugoslavs and the one under construction by Bulgaria and Romania downstream at Belene. There is the Bar-Shkodër railway line soon to be completed between Yugoslavia and Albania, despite a burning official animosity between both countries, that will free Tiranë from dependence on truck freight and potentially open it up to greater commerce with northern Europe. (Yugoslavia is Albania's No. 1 trade partner, with a total volume of \$112 million planned in 1984.)

Less formally, there is a great deal of human movement in the Balkans. The flow of refugees to relatively free and independent Yugoslavia from neighboring Communist countries numbered more than 3,000 people in 1982. There also exists a substantial amount of what Europeans have traditionally called "small-border traffic"—citizens of frontier communities crossing over into a neighboring country without a visa. Thousands of crossings, tolerated by the authorities, occur every day. Some border crossings, such as the annual meeting between Yugoslav Macedonians and their Bulgarian counterparts, are ceremonial occasions hallowed by tradition. Despite the official animosity between Belgrade and Sofia, which intensified

last autumn owing to military maneuvers and revived nationalist politics, some 100,000 Macedonians assembled in September in the Bulgarian town of Kjustendil. They consumed fried meats, drank plum brandy, danced and sang, without incident.

The movement of people does not occur only across national frontiers. Regardless of where one travels in the Balkans today, one is conscious of immense internal mobility, even in the relatively "closed," regulated societies in Romania and Bulgaria. One phenomenon common to almost all of the states in the region is the influx of rural men into the cities. In the case of Romania, the trend began to alarm officialdom in Bucharest several years ago when it was discovered that many of the country's farms were being run not only by women but by elderly women. The cities, meanwhile, are bursting with jobless workers, including doctors and dentists who could easily find patients, good wages, and even subsidized housing by moving to an outlying town.

Squeezing Serbia

Making predictions about the future of the Balkan peninsula has been a risky business from the start. This has not stopped natives and strangers alike from indulging in futurology and penning assessments that, in hindsight, seem bizarre. Still, it may be possible simply to register some of the current developments and speculate on where they might lead.

Jaka Stular, editor of Slovenia's daily *Delo*, reflected recently on the not-so-distant past when the Balkans were a playground for imperial powers. "Now," he concluded, "is the time of the small imperialisms." He gave as one example the new demands by Sofia for a Greater Bulgaria (which I have noted) and by Tiranë for a Greater Albania, both at Yugoslavia's expense.

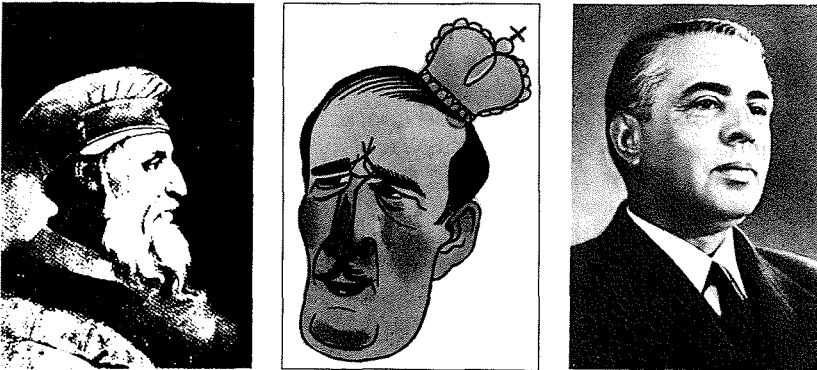
Yugoslavia today has to cope with an explosion of irredentist passion among the nearly two million Albanians in the country, manifested in strikes and riots and encouraged by Albania. To give more ground—the Serbs are already far outnumbered in the Kosovo region, the heart of medieval Serbia, by a growing (77.7 percent) Albanian majority—would be to encourage separatists in other Yugoslav republics, especially in Croatia. For all the persistent remnants of what one Belgrade skeptic terms "democratic Stalinism," the Yugoslav government is in fact attempting to address its nationality problem in a more or less democratic fashion. It has to, because the competing pressures from the country's ethnic republics require it. Something like what we would call "pluralism" is the order of the day.

Still, the prospects are troubling. From the perspective of dominant Serbia, which is feeling squeezed into insignificance by ethnic Albanians from the south and ethnic Hungarians from the north, comes the following observation of a man born in the heartland of the Serbs, in Cačak: "To give the Albanians a republic would perhaps quiet some of them, but it would encourage others. It would be giving a finger to people who want your whole arm."

Albania worries Yugoslavs not only because of the new Albanian nationalism but also because, at 75, Enver Hoxha's days on earth are numbered. Just as foreign policy specialists in Washington debated during the late 1970s what would happen "after Tito," their counterparts in Belgrade today ponder the Albanian future "after Hoxha."

Belgrade's trade- and railroad-building policies are designed to create communities of interest between the two nations that will survive the current period of hostility and make better relations possible in the future. After all, Albania cannot change its geography either. Perhaps, in years to come, Yugoslavia and Albania may find ways to become good neighbors. Certainly Albania needs a friend, as those who will succeed Enver Hoxha probably realize already.

Romania also disturbs the Yugoslavs because they see there, in some respects, a mirror image of themselves, albeit a distorted image. The two nations are of similar size in territory



Eminent Albanians: national hero Skanderbeg (left), who fended off the Turks for 50 years during the 15th century; Ahmed Zogu (center), the Muslim bey who reigned as King Zog from 1928 to 1939; and Enver Hoxha (right), Albania's Communist party boss and Prime Minister since 1944.

and population and are both rich in (different) resources. Both seek to be independent of the Soviets. Both have large ethnic minorities—Hungarians and Germans in the case of Romania. Like Yugoslavia, Romania is in the midst of a severe economic crisis, brought on, in the words of one Bucharest economist, by “25 years of misguided policies.”

Yugoslavs may look with disdain on the repressive regime of Romania’s President Ceaușescu, and they do, but they are also grateful to have a friendly Romania as a neighbor. Ceaușescu finds Yugoslavia’s independent streak congenial. But his successor may lack the means to be a maverick, particularly if economic conditions continue to worsen on the near side of what the Romanians call *Dunărea Noastră*, “our Danube.”

What Next?

Bulgaria remains a puzzle. Governed by a regime that seems still bent on proving that Bulgars can be pro-Russian—instead of pro-German as they were in two world wars—Bulgaria has been something of an economic success story. Its per capita income is the highest of any country on the peninsula except Greece. Even some of the neighboring Yugoslav Macedonians, conditioned by education and propaganda to think otherwise, have begun to look with envy across the Pirin Mountains.

The big change for Bulgaria in recent years has been a rapprochement not only with Turkey (whose leaders take a solicitous interest in the welfare of Bulgaria’s ethnic Turks) but also with Greece. Considering that Greek-Bulgarian animosities date back to the 11th century (when Basil the Bulgar-Slayer blinded 14,000 Bulgarians whom he had captured in battle) and were reinvigorated in two 20th-century world wars, this development verges on the astounding. Not only has commerce burgeoned, but visits have been exchanged by Presidents Todor Zhivkov and Constantine Karamanlis. Older Americans may sometimes shake their heads when they consider that Germany and Japan, their bitter wartime foes, have become peacetime U.S. allies. The changes in the Balkans are, on their own scale, no less wondrous.

Yet, while the Greeks have made up with the Bulgarians, they have snubbed Belgrade so often that it has drawn top-level protests—from Yugoslav Communist party leader Aleksandar Grlickov, among others. Most recently, in 1982, Athens angered Belgrade by encouraging some 1,000 Greek students enrolled at the University in Skopje to withdraw and take up

studies in Greece. The fact that Greece's land lines of communication and transport run up to Western Europe through Yugoslavia has thus far not prompted restraint on the part of the present Greek government.

What is one to make of all of this? Talk to historians of the Balkans such as Ljubo Boban at Zagreb or Bogo Grafenauer at Ljubljana or Cristian Popiștineanu at Bucharest and you will be told that virtually everything that is happening today has happened once before, in one form or another. There exists a certain kind of continuity.

Except, perhaps, in one respect. For the moment, it would appear that the 75 million or so people who inhabit the peninsula, for all the spites and hatreds deriving from their pasts, prefer to live in peace with one another. The relative strength and independence of modern Yugoslavia has much to do with this state of affairs. Not only has Belgrade more or less successfully incorporated some of the more fractious Balkan ethnic groups into a federal system, but by virtue of its size and position Yugoslavia has also acted as a buffer between East and West.

The Balkan peninsula has experienced one generation of peace and is now embarked on a second. Harmony is another matter, but harmony is seldom found anywhere on this earth, and peace is not a bad substitute.

