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THE BALKAN PROBLEM

As you can see from the map below, Turkey ruled most of the Balkans at the start of this century. Turkey had once been a great empire, the Ottoman Empire, but now was weak; people called it 'the sick man of Europe'. As the 'sick man' weakened, it began to lose control of the Balkan peoples who often rebelled against Turkish rule.

The powerful countries surrounding the Balkans – Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy and even Germany – were all interested in what was going on there. They realised that they could take advantage of Turkey's weakness to grab land and increase their influence in the area.

Why were these countries so interested in the Balkans?

The Russians had been hoping for many years to get ports on the Mediterranean Sea. This would make trade easier and, in time of war, her warships could not be 'bottled up' in the Black Sea. So Russia was looking for an opportunity to take coastal land away from Turkey.

Austria-Hungary also wanted ports on the Mediterranean. But the Austrians had another and more important reason for wanting the Balkans. As

you know, Austria-Hungary was a 'patchwork empire' of many nationalities. One of these was the Slav people. The Slavs wanted to break away from Austrian rule and form their own nation. Just across the border a nation of Slavs already existed – Serbia. The Serbians often stirred up trouble in Austria-Hungary by encouraging their fellow Slavs to rebel against their Austrian rulers. The Austrians therefore wanted to get control of Serbia and any other troublesome Slav areas before such a rebellion could start.

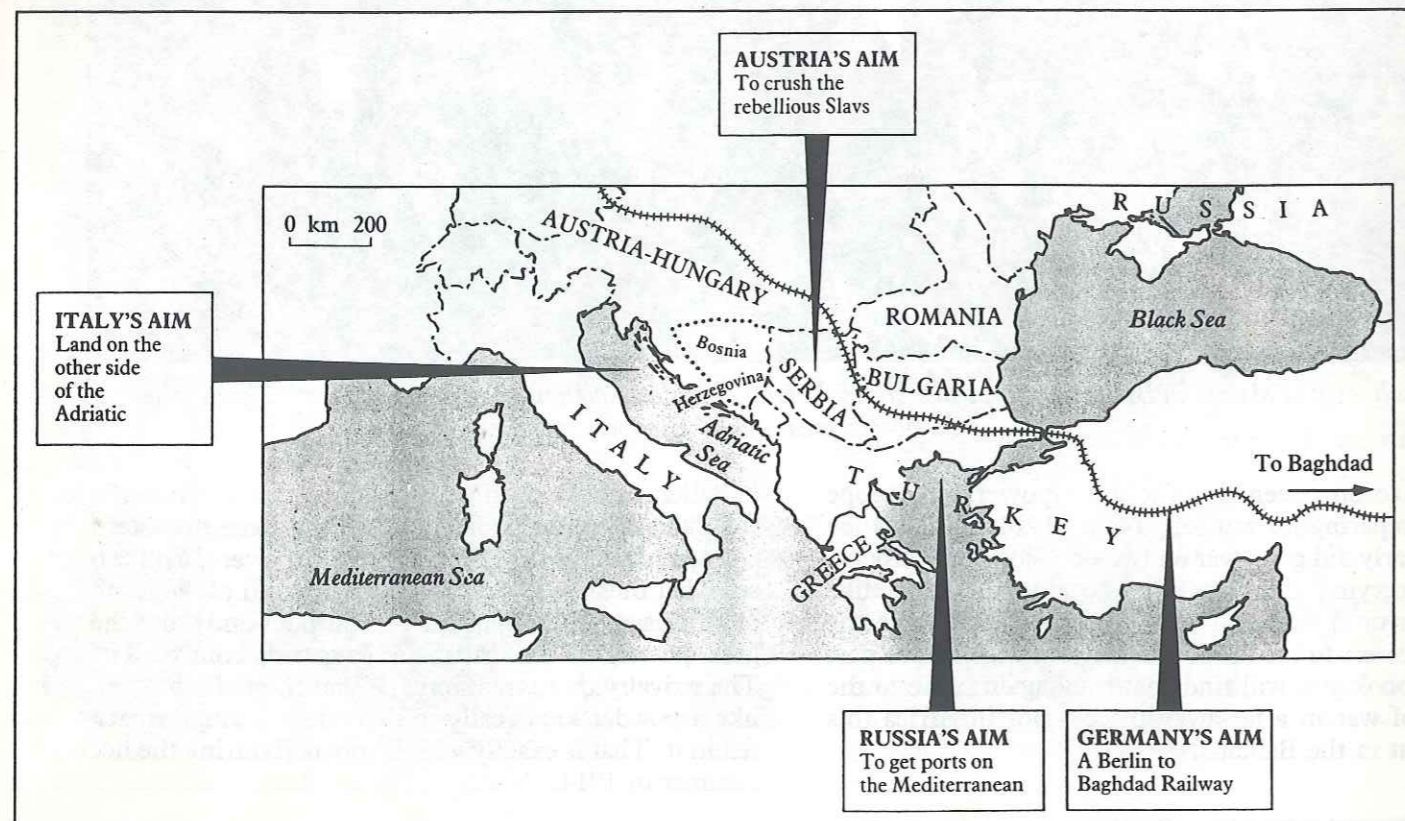
Germany had a different interest in the Balkans. Kaiser Wilhelm wanted to build a railway from Berlin to Baghdad in Persia where there were rich oilfields. The route of this 4000-kilometre railway would have to go through the centre of the Balkans.

Italy hoped to gain a strip of land on the other side of the Adriatic Sea so that she had control of the Adriatic.

So four powerful countries were keeping a careful watch on the Balkans, waiting for a chance to take land and gain influence there. The chance they were waiting for came suddenly in 1908.

In that year, a revolution by a group known as the 'Young Turks' caused chaos everywhere in Turkey.

The Balkan States in 1900



The ruler of Bulgaria (which was half-owned by Turkey) crowned himself King and declared his country independent. The people on the island of Crete broke away from Turkish rule and united with Greece.

But it was Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary who took most advantage of this chaos in the Balkans. He seized the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Turkey and made them part of his empire.

This was a fatal mistake, however. Most of the people living in these two provinces were Serbs and King Peter of Serbia naturally claimed that they should belong to him. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina disliked the Austrians and wanted to join Serbia. Franz Joseph had taken over a people who hated him and at the same time had made an enemy of Serbia.

The problem of the Balkans had taken a severe turn for the worse.

Work section

A. Study this French cartoon drawn in 1908 and give answers to the questions beneath.



- a) Who is the man on the left of the cartoon meant to be?
b) What is he doing?
- a) Who do you think the man in the centre of the cartoon is?
b) Why is he putting a large crown on his head?
- a) Who do you think the figure on the right is meant to be?
b) Why has the cartoonist made him look unhappy?

B. What do you think each of the following thought about Austria's take-over of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908?

- Tsar Nicholas of Russia.
 - Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany.
 - King Victor Emmanuel of Italy.
- Give reasons for your answers.

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THE BALKAN WARS

After the Young Turk revolution in 1908 Turkey grew more and more weak. In 1911, Italy made war on the Turks, beating them easily, and this made them weaker still. The Balkan countries now saw a chance to drive the Turks completely out of Europe. The Kings of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and little Montenegro joined together in the **Balkan League** and in 1912 their armies attacked Turkey.

This **First Balkan War** was cruel and costly. Nearly half a million soldiers on each side fought hard and fast, and there were many atrocities. But the armies of the League proved the stronger and after just fifty

days of fighting, Turkey surrendered. At a peace conference held in London, the Turks gave up their remaining land in the Balkans and this was shared out among the four victors. In addition, a new country named Albania was created.

This was not the end of the story, however, because the four kings of the Balkan League soon began to quarrel about their shares of the land. King Ferdinand of Bulgaria wanted more land than he had been given and in 1913 he made war on Serbia and Greece in an attempt to get it.



King Peter of Serbia

Highly intelligent and well educated, he had done much to improve conditions in his country.

Army = 200,000



King Nicholas of Montenegro

A fighter and a poet. His daughter was King Peter's wife.

Army = 40,000

The Balkan League



King Ferdinand of Bulgaria

Known as 'Foxy Ferdinand', he was cunning, clever and ambitious.

Army = 300,000



King George of Greece

One of the most able and successful kings in Europe.

Army = 80,000



Turkish soldiers marching in the Balkans in 1912. Can you tell what type of unit they belonged to?

The **Second Balkan War** was a disaster for Ferdinand. Both Turkey and Romania joined in the fighting so that he found himself under attack from four sides. As a result, the Bulgarian army lost 50,000 men as well as some of the land they had gained just a year before.

The country which came out best from the two Balkan Wars was Serbia. King Peter had doubled the size of his country and his people had become more

proud and aggressive. Unhappily, this made the Balkan problem even worse. The Serbs living in Bosnia and Herzegovina became restless and wanted more than ever before to belong to Serbia. The Austrians became even more worried that these people would rebel, while Ferdinand of Bulgaria grew to hate Serbia and was set on getting revenge.

The Balkans were now seething with hatred, resentment and unrest.

Work section

Compare this map of the Balkans after the Balkan Wars with the map on the opposite page. Then read the following comments which might have been made by the Balkan kings in 1913. Say which king would have made each comment.

1. 'My country has doubled in size as a result of the wars, but we still don't have any sea ports.'
2. 'I had the biggest army and we did most of the fighting, but I've been given less land than Serbia. It isn't fair.'
3. 'My country has only been given a small mountainous area next door to Serbia. It's so small it's hardly worth having.'
4. 'I'm delighted. My people are at last free of Turkish rule. We now have our own country.'
5. 'I'm quite satisfied. My country has gained extra coastland on both the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.'

