

POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE BALKANS IN THE EARLY XX CENTURY

Radoslav Gaćinović
Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade

Summary: When they liberated themselves from Turkish occupation and broke with the remnants of the feudal system, Balkan nation states started developing rapidly. This development was initiated by new capitalist social relations, strengthening of national identity and aspiring to liberate those territories which were still under the Turkish government. The Young Turk revolution of 1908 created the unbearable conditions for non-Turkish nations within the Turkish state. The Great Powers wanted to use such discontent of the people for their personal goals launching the initiative to divide Turkey. Austro-Hungary was particularly leading in this endeavor, supported by Germany which aspired to approach Thessaloniki, the goal known as “Drang nach Osten”(German for “thrust toward the East), from the occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina via Sanjak, Kosovo and Metohija. Such a development of the situation resulted in bringing the Balkan nation states together and in the creation of new alliances. Russia, as a member of Triple Entente, was also interested in these alliances, considering that these alliances would prevent Austria-Hungary to dominate the Balkan Peninsula. The wishes and intentions of German capitalist and political circles were openly written about in German public for years, particularly their aspirations to conquer the required “living space” in the East, the source of wealth of other colonial states. The fruitful fields of Ukraine and the wealth of India were Germany’s public dream. It increased its marine fleet for that purpose and built the factories of heavy weapons and ammunition. The military was distinguished as a part of German nation much more important than ordinary citizens, since the military was the main support of better life. The Germans were proclaimed the best and the most competent nation of the whole world, the superhumans capable of making war with England, France, Russia and the entire world, since as the nation of enhanced capabilities they had the right to take whatever they needed. War preparations were completed much earlier than 1914. The war could have broken out in 1908, as well as in 1910. The war against Serbia must have been discussed at the meeting between Wilhelm and Franz Ferdinand in Konopischt in 1914, before Franz Ferdinand set off for the great maneuvers in Bosnia. By 1914 all war plans had probably been completed as well, since the Sarajevo assassination was taken as a reason for the war so ruthlessly and quickly that it was quite clear that the grief for Franz Ferdinand and the revolt that a member of “simple people” laid hand on the “consecrated Emperor” was just the dust thrown in the eyes of the whole world. The ruthlessness and forcefulness by which Serbia was attacked, the refusal of each indirect attempt to solve the dispute peacefully were very inconvenient for the defenders of Austria and Germany, which attempted in all ways possible to prove they were provoked and almost forced to start the war although they did not want it. On the other hand, England and France knew that Germany wanted to take their colonies, so they had also been prepared for the war long before it started. Bosnia and Herzegovina was caught in the middle of these conflicting interests of the great capitalist and colonial powers, a small territory on the way of Germany toward the East. The people in Bosnia and Herzegovina were resisting the invasion of the powerful enemy during occupation, but unsuccessfully.