

XX. SOUTHEAST EUROPE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

From the Congress of Vienna (1815) to the beginning of World War I (1914) southeast Europe was the scene of significant political change. The most prominent element was the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire invited intervention and aggression on the part of Austria and Russia. Other European powers, fearful of a disturbance in the balance of power and the rise of nationalism, had cause for concern also. Repeatedly, Great Britain, France, and then Germany moved to counteract their competitors and promote their own interests. Initially the great powers were as concerned about nationalism in Eastern Europe as they were when it appeared in Poland, Italy, Germany, or Hungary.

The Ottoman Empire was faced with nationalist independence movements from within, such as in Serbia, Greece, Wallachia, and Moldavia as well as dismemberment by the Europeans. Russia, for instance, had established itself as a power along the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea. The Crimean War (1853–1856) saw the French, British, Austrians, and Italians supporting Turkey against Russia. The Western European powers wanted to see the Black Sea a neutral area free of warships. Also, Russia was to be discouraged from activity in the Romanian Principalities. Austria, of course, had its own interests in the Balkans. Many parties had plans for the region.

Specifically, Russia had an interest in Moldavia and Wallachia. In addition to territorial claims, Russia hoped for access to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus. Austria was particularly interested in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Romanians, Serbs, Transylvanians, Greeks, and Bulgars all sought independence and their own national state.

Such territorial aspirations were as much an issue with the Turks as with the Austrians. Serbs hoped for the revival of a large state extending west to the Adriatic. Romanians had interests in Bessarabia and Transylvania. Transylvanians, on the other hand, might seek independence from *or* union with Hungary. Bulgaria was temporarily awarded large territories south of the capital, Sofia, in the settlement of San Stefano in 1878. Various claims on territory went back to the pre-Ottoman Empire era. Some ties were based on language or religion or common animosity directed at another party. In the long run the great powers dominated, parcelled out lands, and drew borders in their own interests.

The British wanted stability in Eastern Europe. They did not want Russia or Austria to expand there and they, therefore, often supported Turkey. They were, of course, very much interested in Turkish power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Egypt and the Suez Canal were vital links to their interests in the Far East. The British occupied the island of Cyprus in 1878. Crete, the other large island in the eastern Mediterranean, was granted autonomy from Turkey and was eventually transferred to Greece (1913). In the western Mediterranean the French joined in when the opportunity presented itself in Algeria and Tunisia. The Italians followed with claims to Libya.

Ultimately, Turkey's European territories would gain independence or be absorbed by Russia or Austria. Turkey held only a small corner of southeast Europe including Istanbul after World War I. Greece obtained its independence through successful revolution in 1830. Over the course of the nineteenth century Thessaly, Macedonia, and Epirus, to the north of Greece, were added as well. Serbia gained autonomy early in the century and became an independent kingdom in 1878. Bulgaria, which extended westward from the shores of the Black Sea, was given principality status in 1878 and independence in 1908. Bosnia-Herzegovina was first administered by Austria and then annexed in 1908. Romania was made up of the two autonomous provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia. These provinces were semi-independent as early as 1829. They were united and made into a fully independent kingdom by 1878.

By the eve of World War I the Ottoman Empire was no longer a power in Europe. A number of new political entities had emerged which quarreled and fought over their various national territorial claims in Macedonia, Transylvania, and elsewhere. In the First Balkan War (1912), Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and Montenegrans lined up against Turkey over Macedonia and Albania. In a second war the Greeks, Serbs, Romanians, and Turks allied against Bulgaria. An independent Albania was supported by the Western powers to limit Serbian expansion to the Adriatic. Austria proved very apprehensive over traditional Russian support of the Serbs. In 1914 the whole complex of claims, counterclaims, and meddling boiled over into a world war.

EXERCISE 20
SOUTHEAST EUROPE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

I. MAKING THE MAP

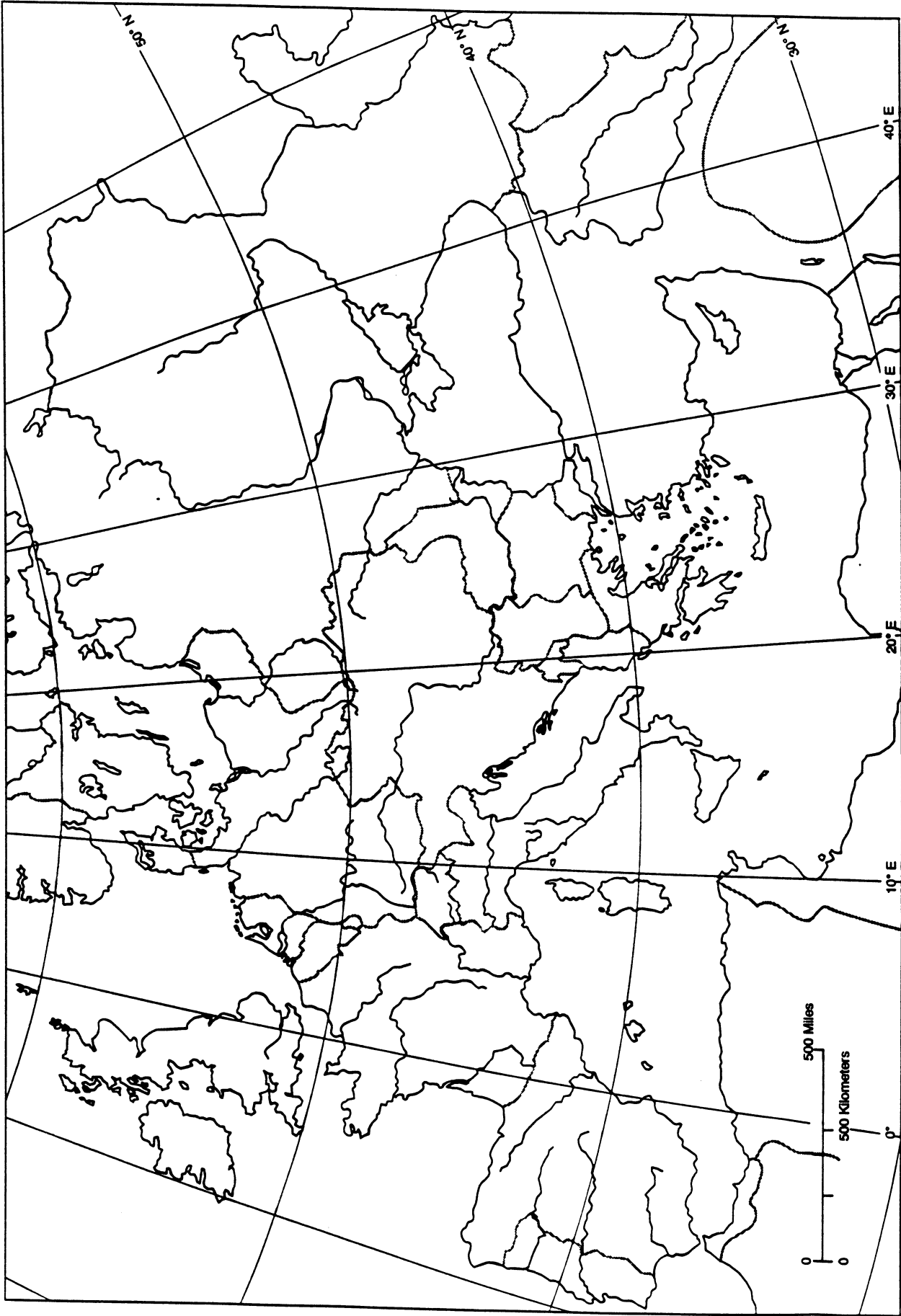
1. Locate and label the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Adriatic Sea, the Sea of Azov, the Sea of Marmara, the Dardanelles, the Bosphorus, the Crimean Peninsula.
2. Locate and label the Danube River, the Prut River, the Dniester River.
3. Locate and label Crete, Cyprus, Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Russia.
4. Locate and label Arabia, Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, Transylvania, Greece, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Hungary.
5. Show in red the area of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Show in blue the area of Russia. Show in green the territory of the Ottoman Empire as of 1914.
6. Locate with a black dot and label Istanbul, Athens, Sofia, Bucharest, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Tirana, Budapest, Vienna, Moscow.
(Duplicate the blank map to complete 4–6.)

II. READING THE MAP

1. The Black Sea is connected to the Mediterranean by the _____.
2. In the nineteenth century the European territories of the Ottoman Empire were bordered by _____ and _____.
3. The eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire extended as far as the _____ and _____ rivers.
4. The two tributary principalities of the Ottoman Empire subject to Russian invasion in the early nineteenth century were _____ and _____.
5. The first European province of the Ottoman Empire to gain its independence was _____, located at the _____ tip of the continent.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE MAP

1. Why were some European powers willing to support the Ottoman Empire?
2. Name the modern country north of the Danube River which included Wallachia and Moldavia.
3. What two European powers were the major competitors in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire?
4. Why were the Russians so interested in the Bosphorus?
5. Name the two new states which emerged from Turkish rule to be the administrative responsibility of Austria.
6. What three independent states emerged in the Balkans after the Russo-Turkish War of 1878?



Exercise 20: Europe at War: World War I, 1914-1919

