The Paris Peace Conference — Contemporary Balkans' perspective

A. Pećinar

European Center for Peace and Development, United Nations Mandated University for Peace,
41, Terazije, Belgrade, 11000, Serbia

The current geopolitical conditions, in which we unquestionably feel the effects of World War I around us, impose consideration of the unstable situation in place for decades now in the area of the Balkans, provoking thus an interest in the real causes of such an event. The question arises as to why, for example, the former Yugoslavia was, and why even nowadays the unresolved questions in many areas of this region are potentially representing the most malignant conflicts on the planet? When "peacemakers" met in Paris, new nations emerged, and the old empires were dying. An insight into the process of "reconstruction" of this region as part of the diplomatic, military, economic and political processes, in this area of strategic importance for preserving the domination of the Great Powers, could be crucial for making a conclusion. Assuming that some of the most pressing problems of the modern Balkans are rooted in the region's political inheritance: the arrangements, unities, and divisions imposed by the Allies after the First World War, and in the hope that their deeper and wider understanding could contribute to the healing process in this region, as well in reinforcing human security, we would try to explain how by signing "the peace to end all peace", the seeds of future developments in this high priority "area of supply and transit" were laid.
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Introduction

Nowadays, once again, Europe and the Middle East, as the regions that have long been the areas of rival religions, ideologies, nationalisms, and ambitions, are facing historic challenges. The period of peaceful post-Cold War evolution seems over, and no one can easily predict the ways in which the aforementioned regions will evolve in the coming decade [1, p. 69–86].

The withdrawal of the UK from European institutions, the rise of extremist national leaders as well as the challenges that the assertive policies of global political actors impose, all pose new issues, seemingly without offering positive pathways toward the future. The EU neighborhood has been in the recent years transformed into an area of disorder and unpredictable future. In the Mediterranean area we are confronted with unstable political and security situations. The Palestinian-Israeli problem "dangles" as a time bomb over Middle East. The civil war in Syria is continuing. The Islamic Middle East is gripped with a radical movement which calls itself Islamic State. The spill-over effects of Jihadist Islam have been felt from Paris to Afghanistan. However, following the current trends of history,

the observer can`t ignore the gradual shift of this situation to the Balkans, which, viewed through the scope of Geostrategic and Geography of natural resources, represents a minor but significant link to this European-Near East conflict. In conditions of the increasing tensions among the leading geopolitical actors in the game of the growing conflict between East and West, the Balkans are gaining momentum again [2, p. 504–526].

From War to Peace

All kinds of wars such as the world, local, inter-state and inter-ethnic wars made a deep imprint and wounds in the memories of the people of the Balkans and people steel feel the consequences of those events [3, p. 37–38]. The recently completed celebrations of the First World War centennial have resumed once more among historians and politicians, the long lasting debate on the responsibility of this conflict. Political implications from various sides still prevent an objective approach of the question. But one is for sure. The fast deployment of a heavy military power by the German Empire, threatening in particular the British naval supremacy; the aspiration of the Austrian Double Monarchy to dominate the Balkans against the old Russian influence, the growing collapse of the Ottoman Empire on one side; on the other the colonial rivalries between Great Powers; French revanchism and Italian irredentism had spread germs of deep antagonism for decades to come. The final disappearance of the traditionalist, large and thousand year old empires too weak to sustain a world war lasting several years was a global and three-part historical process, consisting of series of diverse but essentially the same events. The process started with the elimination of the Russian Empire, where bolshevism after the war managed to keep together most of the territories. It ended with the collapse of the Turkish Empire and the emergence of a number of states in the Middle East, notably the secular Republic of Turkey [4, p. 52].

However, the disasters frequently cause strong demand of long and stable period of peace in order to overcome the ruins of war. Although the peacemakers` beliefs that their actions would produce a just and a long-lasting settlement, directly or indirectly had marked the Balkans` reality, namely, this region could, in a way be viewed as a diminished model of the contemporary world and the developments that have been shaping it in the past [5, p. 112]. The treaties of Versailles, Saint Germain, Trianon and Sévres as well as the aforementioned end of four continental empires upon which the European balance of power had laid for a century very soon had opened the way to a second conflict, after a truce seriously troubled by the aggressive impact of dictatorships and devastating economic crisis as a consequence of political instability [4, p. 52].

Till nowadays the stability of this part of Europe remains an unfinished business in spite of remarkable progress over the last decades. Controversies of the economic and financial globalization, disintegrative processes in the times of great integration, increasingly pronounced regionalization, desecularisation as a reaction to ideological secularism, the growth of nationalism and particularism in the period of proclaimed internationalism are just some of the reasons for an historical insight to be made. The analysis of constitution of "artificial", "unsustainable states" in this area of strategic importance for preserving the domination of the Great Powers and in its` reconstruction, representing the part of diplomatic, military, economic and political processes almost century ago, could be useful tool and may somewhat clarify contemporary events at the same geopolitical points [6, p. 46–60].

The Paris Peace Conference

1919 was one of the great years of world history, even if it was not one of historical dates like 1789 or 1945. The First World War had just ended, the world order had collapsed. Although the old world was in ruins, new, great hopes were emerging: the Bolsheviks in Russia had formulated a new magic word: the right to self-determination. New states have been created and many have become democracies. The world had its great opportunity in the beginning of 1919. On 18th of January the Great Peace Conference had begun. President Wilson wanted to create the League of Nations, a new mechanism for eternal peace. Liberation and emancipation movements sent delegations. All these hopes were headed to Paris. However, the Swedish author P. O. Enquist pose very important question referring to then: "If everything had started so well, how it could have ended so badly?" [7].

Reconstruction of the Balkans

Versailles was the first of five peace treaties signed with the defeated Central Powers in various Parisian suburbs during the peace conference of 1919–20: Treaty of St Germain (with Austria, signed in September 1919); Neuilly (Bulgaria, November 1919); Trianon (Hungary, June 1920); and Sèvres (the Ottoman empire, August 1920). The Balkans changed significantly with Austria, Hungary and Turkey the main losers. The major winner was Yugoslavia (technically, until 1929, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In 1914 Serbia had 33,900 square miles and 4,600,000 people; Yugoslavia by 1921 had 101,250 square miles and a population of 13,635,000. Greece increased from 42,000 square miles and 4,800,000 people in 1914 to (at least temporarily) 60,000 square miles and 7,500,000 inhabitants by 1921. Romania more than doubled its pre-war size and population from 53,661 square miles and 7,500,000 people to 113,941 square miles and 16,000,000 people. Bulgaria, whose hopes of territorial gain (however unrealistic for a defeated power) were disappointed, emerged with 45,000 square miles of territory and a population of 5,200,000 compared to 47,750 square miles and 5,500,000 people in 1914. Its loss of Western Thrace to Greece deprived it of access to the Aegean and, proportionate to its size and wealth, it faced the highest reparations bill of all the Central Powers [8, p. 19–41]. The settlement consolidated the Balkans but fragmented the Eastern Europe[1].

Reparations

The subject of reparations, as the particularly controversial area of the settlements caused delay at the Paris Peace, offering a rich source for opponents seeking hypocrisy and double-dealing [9, p. 185–197]. Yet applying the principle of self-determination ran it very close, as the need to achieve economic viability, defensible frontiers, administrative convenience and efficient communications encountered the ethnic "hotch-potch" of eastern and central Europe. Both subjects raised expectations that were impossible

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[1] Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary, together with the Soviet Union, filled the political vacuum left by the collapsed empires. Hungary, which lost two-thirds of its pre-war territory and 58 percent of its population, suffered the heaviest deprivations of any of the defeated powers, losing a third of its Magyar people. Austria reluctantly became an independent state, its population of 8 million mostly in or near Vienna, a city deprived of its raison d'être as the imperial governmental, financial and banking centre.

to satisfy. Inter-allied debts and reparations contributed to the financial and economic tangles of the 1920s that culminated in the Great Depression after Wall Street crashed in October 1929 [10].

National Self-Determination

The hope that national self-determination would create a secure and contented Eastern Europe in place of the former multinational empires was soon dashed. The French predicted that German revisionism would begin here and the region's instability and bitterness helped to poison post-war international relations. All the new states were dissatisfied with their frontiers, whilst the ethnic kaleidoscope resulting from centuries of wars, migrations and inter-marriage meant that none was a truly national entity, each containing minorities that were resented and feared. The peacemakers did establish a system of protection for these minorities, partly to encourage their assimilation and partly to avoid their supplying neighboring kin-states with an excuse to disrupt the new order. Self-determination had implications far beyond Europe [11, p. 99–119].

Versailles and Yugoslavia

The Treaty of Versailles was the first major international document signed by official representatives of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Therefore, it represents ipso facto recognition of the new state by the Paris Peace Conference and by the main powers (with the exception of the United States, which had recognised Yugoslavia already in February 1919). If Yugoslavia was born on 1st December 1918, its baptism took place on 28th June 1919[2]. As for the Yugoslavs, although they at last secured recognition by the major powers, theirs was still a country with disputed frontiers. The succeeding treaties with neighboring Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary would therefore be arguably more significant for the young state. Yet, even those treaties did not bring an end to Yugoslavia's struggle for borders[3]. The greatest challenge was posed by two wartime allies: Italy and Romania [12, p. 146]. An agreement with Romania over the Banat region was eventually reached[4], but Italy would contest borders with Yugoslavia throughout the interwar period, despite the signing of the Rapallo Treaty, ratified by the Yugoslavs in November 1920 and by the Italians in February 1921. According to terms of the Treaty, Italy received Istria and

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[2] Well known, oft-repeated error is that the Versailles Treaty created Yugoslavia (and Czechoslovakia). The Powers indirectly helped the creation of Yugoslavia and other Habsburg successor states by defeating and ultimately destroying Austria-Hungary. They did not oppose the unification of a Yugoslavia, which to them seemed a logical union of ethnically closely related peoples. The impetus for the union, however, came from within.

[3] The territories of Banat, Bačka and Baranja came under military control by the Kingdom of Serbia and political control by local South Slavs. The Great People's Assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci, and other Slavs from Banat, Bačka and Baranja declared union of this region with Serbia on 25 November 1918. The ceasefire line had the character of a temporary international border until the treaty. Croatian-populated territories in modern Međumurje remained under Hungarian control after the ceasefire agreement of Belgrade from 13 November 1918. After the military victory of Croatian forces led by Slavko Kvaternik in Međumurje against Hungarian forces, this region voted in the Great Assembly of 9 January 1919 for separation from Hungary and entry into Yugoslavia [12, p. 100–121].

[4] The central parts of Banat were later assigned to Romania, respecting the wishes of Romanians from this area, which, on 1 December 1918, were present in the National Assembly of Romanians in Alba Iulia, which voted for union with the Kingdom of Romania [12, p. 159].

Yugoslavia most of Dalmatia. The port of Fiume/Rijeka, occupied by Gabriele d' Annunzio's men since September 1919, was to be a free state [13, p. 21–25]. The Powers however refused officially to recognize the new state, largely because of the Yugoslav-Italian territorial dispute in the eastern Adriatic; instead they referred to its delegation in Paris as the delegation of the Kingdom of Serbia. The Italians claimed Istria and Dalmatia on historic and "legal" grounds[5] [14, p. 6].

The Powers also reserved a seat in Paris for Montenegro, another wartime ally -thus effectively refusing to recognize the Serb-Montenegrin unification, which preceded the unification of Yugoslavia [15, p. 186]. Montenegro and Serbia had united on 18th November 1918, but the unification was contested by the exiled King Nicholas and his supporters. Although Belgrade undoubtedly interfered in events in Montenegro, there was a strong pro-Serbian feeling in the country and those in favor of a union with Serbia prevailed. The leader of the unionists came to Paris, but as a member of the Serb-Croat-Slovene delegation. Despite Italy's support, Nicholas's pleas fell on deaf ears in Allied capitals.

Like most of Europe, Yugoslavia would remain unstable throughout the interwar period. The international predicament was relatively benign when compared with problems at home. Unrest in Kosovo and Macedonia and alienation among many Montenegrins and Croats for the way Yugoslavia had been united, not to mention the social-economic consequences of the war, would have posed a major challenge to states far longer established than the newly formed Serb-Croat-Slovene kingdom. Yet, by the early to mid-1920s the country seemed to have overcome most of the initial problems, some of which briefly threatened its existence [16, p. 9–10]. The reasons for the disagreements within the delegation and between Pašić and Trumbić should not be sought in some old Serb-Croat animosity. In addition to their mutually competing visions of a united Yugoslavia and of a clash of two strong personalities, differences emerged partly due to another conflict of ideologies: the nationality principle vs Realpolitik. The contest between the Wilsonian principles and traditional diplomacy was of course symptomatic of the whole Conference. The mixed messages from the principal allies contributed to divisions among the Yugoslavs. In any case compromises between the principle of nationality and old diplomacy had to be made and were made: among the Yugoslavs and among the Allies [17, p. 59–142].

If the Versailles Treaty had its beneficiaries and its losers, so did the Yugoslav settlement: the clear victors at the time were the South Slavs, not only Serbs as is usually assumed, while the main losers were those large ethnic minorities that found themselves in a new, in many respects alien country: ethnic Albanians, Hungarians, Germans and Italians, as well as Macedonian Slavs, whom no one recognized as such at the time! The Yugoslavs saw Yugoslavia as the fulfillment of their long struggle for national liberation and unification, while the non-Yugoslavs saw the South Slav state as an imposition by the victors of the First World War. Losers at Versailles continued to look for a change of the borders and of the terms imposed. In the second half of the 1930s, many Serbs, too, would begin

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[5] The latter claim was based on a secret treaty, signed in London in 1915, whereby the Allies (then including Tsarist Russia) promised these territories, largely populated by Slavs, but with a significant Italian minority, to Italy in exchange for Rome entering the war on their side. Serbia, although an ally, was not only not consulted — the treaty was kept a secret from its government because it was certain to oppose it in strongest terms. Indeed, at the Peace Conference, the Yugoslav delegation refused to accept the London Treaty and demanded the right to self-determination for the Yugoslavs living in Istria and Dalmatia [12, p. 155–159].

to question their wisdom in 'creating' Yugoslavia. Following the Axis destruction of the country in 1941, a complex set of ideological, ethnic, liberation and collaborationist wars broke out on the territory of the first former Yugoslavia. By 1945, some 1 million people had died, half of them Serbs; among the South Slavs, proportionally Montenegrins and Bosnian Muslims suffered even heavier casualties, and Croats suffered almost as much. Yet, a Yugoslavia re-emerged, this time as a communist-governed federation [18].

Did this treaty it in fact sow the seeds of destruction which germinated crisis after crisis and eventually pushed Europe into the abyss of a new war and was it foredoomed to failure? All these questions apply to Yugoslavia, and have been raised especially since the Yugoslav federation broke up violently in the early 1990s, at the end of another international order established after a world war. The ultimate failure of the Yugoslav project, which external stability depended on the stability of the international order created in Paris in 1919–20, does not mean that it was doomed from the very start. Yugoslavia was formed and existed in arguably the most violent of centuries. That it survived through most of it, suggests it was a worthwhile project. And, who knows, it may yet return one day, in another guise, within the EU framework.

Political consequences of Trianon Treaty or "Hungarian Trauma"

Officially, this treaty was intended to be a confirmation of the right of self-determination for nations and of the concept of nation-states replacing the old multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although the treaty addressed some nationality issues, it also sparked some new ones. The minority ethnic groups of the pre-war kingdom were the major beneficiaries. The Allies had explicitly committed themselves to the causes of the minority peoples of Austria-Hungary late in World War I. The Allies assumed without question that the minority ethnic groups of the pre-war kingdom wanted to leave Hungary. The Romanians joined their ethnic brethren in Romania[6], while the Slovaks, Serbs and Croats helped establish nation-states of their own (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia). However, these new or enlarged countries also absorbed large slices of territory with a majority of ethnic Hungarians or Hungarian speaking population. As a result, as many as a third of Hungarian language-speakers found themselves outside the borders of the post-Trianon Hungary. While the territories that were now outside Hungary's borders had non-Hungarian majorities overall, there also existed some sizeable areas with a majority of Hungarians, largely near the newly defined borders. Over the last century, concerns have occasionally been raised about the treatment of these ethnic Hungarian communities in the neighbouring states [19].

Another reason why the victorious Allies decided to dissolve the Central-European great power, Austria-Hungary, a strong German supporter and fast developing region, was to prevent Germany from acquiring substantial influence in the future [16, p. 14]. The Western powers' main priority was to prevent a resurgence of the German Reich and they therefore decided that her allies in the region, Austria and Hungary, should be "contained" by a ring of states friendly to the Allies, each of which would be bigger than either Austria

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[6] According to the Treaty of Trianon, part of Transylvania south of the Mureş river and east of the Someş river came under the control of Romania (cease-fire agreement of Belgrade signed on 13th November 1918). On 1st December 1918, the National Assembly of Romanians in Transylvania declared union with the Kingdom of Romania [12, p. 159].

or Hungary. Compared to the Habsburg Kingdom of Hungary, post-Trianon Hungary had 60 % less population and its political and economic footprint in the region was significantly reduced. Hungary lost connection to strategic military and economic infrastructure due to the concentric layout of the railway and road network, which the borders bisected. In addition, the structure of its economy collapsed, because it had relied on other parts of the pre-war Kingdom. The country also lost access to the Mediterranean and to the important sea port of Rijeka (Fiume), and became landlocked, which had a negative effect on sea trading and strategic naval operations. Furthermore, many trading routes that went through the newly defined borders from various parts of the pre-war kingdom were abandoned. The outcome of the Treaty of Trianon is to this day remembered in Hungary as the Trianon trauma. Hungarian irredentism fuelled not only the post-war kingdom's revisionist foreign policy but was also a source of regional tension after the Cold War [20, p. 103–104].

The Treaty of Saint Germain and dissolution of Austria-Hungary

The treaty of Saint Germain declared that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was to be dissolved. The new Republic of Austria recognized the independence of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. The treaty included 'war reparations' of large sums of money, directed towards the Allies. The adjacent Bukovina in the east passed to the Kingdom of Romania. The main part of the former Kingdom of Dalmatia, the Duchy of Carniola and Lower Styria with the Carinthian Meža Valley and Jezersko was ceded to the Yugoslav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, contrary to what was stipulated by the 1915 London Pact. Also Bosnia and Herzegovina was given to it [21; 12, p. 38–42].

The Treaty of Neuilly and "Second Bulgarian Catastrophe"

The Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine which was signed on 27th November 1919 required Bulgaria to cede various territories, after Bulgaria had been one of the Central Powers defeated in World War I. The treaty required Bulgaria: to cede Western Thrace to the Entente (which awarded it to Greece at the San Remo conference) thereby cutting off Bulgaria's direct outlet to the Aegean Sea. A population exchange (not compulsory) followed between Bulgaria and Greece, to cede a further area of 2,563 km^2 on its western border with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), to return Dobruja, which according to the Treaty of Bucharest was partially ceded to Bulgaria and partially to the Central Powers (who later, on 25th September 1918, transferred this joint condominium to Bulgaria), to Romania, thus restoring the border set by the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), to reduce its army to 20,000 men, to pay reparations of £100 million, to recognize the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In Bulgaria, the results of the treaty are popularly known as the Second National Catastrophe. Bulgaria subsequently regained South Dobruja as a result of the Treaty of Craiova. During World War II, together with Nazi Germany, it temporarily reoccupied most of the other territories ceded under the treaty [20, p. 105–106].

Territories ceded to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

Four minor regions (historiographically referred to by Bulgarians as the Western Outlands) had been part of Bulgaria from its inception as a principality in 1878, except for the region around Strumitsa, which became part of Bulgaria in 1912. Bulgaria was internationally recognized as an independent country in 1908 and controlled these territories until 1919 when they were ceded to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Treaty of Neuilly. The cession of the region was partly a compensation for the occupation of the southern and eastern part of Serbia by Bulgarian troops between 1915 and 1918, and was partly motivated by strategic reasons. The old political boundary between Bulgaria and Serbia followed a chain of high mountain ridges, whereas the new one gave significant military and strategic advantages to the Serbs: it dangerously exposed the Bulgarian capital of Sofia and significantly reduced the military threat to eastern Serbia in case of a Bulgarian invasion [22, p. 280–290].

Territories ceded by the treaty to the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes cover an area of 1,545 km^2 in what is now Serbia and 1,028 km^2 in what is now the Republic of North Macedonia.

Greece vs. Turkey (Sèvres and Lausanne)

The peacemakers neglected the abject Ottomans throughout 1919, only drafting the terms of Sèvres in London and San Remo in the spring of 1920, by which time conditions were much altered. Sèvres recognised an independent state of Armenia, imposed strict military restrictions on Turkey, established international control over the Straits and awarded spheres of influence in Anatolia to Italy and France, whilst Greece was given most of Thrace and the opportunity to govern Izmir for five years before a plebiscite decided its fate. The Sultan signed under duress but Kemal's revolt was growing and in 1921 his forces halted the Greeks at the Battle of Sakarya. He then drove them back with increasing speed in 1922, culminating in a massacre at Izmir on 9th September 1922 and a stand-off with a small British force at Chanak, where war was averted by a combination of luck and good sense. From 20th of November 1922 to 4th of February 1923 and again from 19th of April until 24th of July 1923 there were negotiations at Lausanne between Kemal's representatives and the Allies, for whom the British Foreign Secretary, George Curzon (1859–1925), and later the High Commissioner at Constantinople, Sir Horace Rumbold (1869–1941), armed with little else except the secret intelligence gleaned from decoded Turkish communications, played a weak hand well. The new treaty returned Eastern Thrace, Anatolia, Izmir and some of the Aegean islands to Turkey, all the financial and extraterritorial privileges previously enjoyed by the powers were scrapped and there was no mention of Armenia, whose independence Turkey had effectively destroyed in December 1920 [20, p. 105–106].

The Treaty of Lausanne proved to be the longest-lasting of the post-war settlements, and it retains its validity and its relevance for understanding contemporary Greek-Turkish Relations and Turkish Diplomacy. It laid the foundation of peace in the region by settling outstanding territorial question and establishing a new status quo after a decade of warfare. Greece faced massive population exchange and resettlement, abandoned large property compensation claims at a significant cost to itself. Since 1923 Greek-Turkish re-

lations have been through phases of confrontation as well as détente and cooperation On numerous occasions between 1954 and 1999 Greece and Turkey were on the verge of the conflict as a result of tensions over Cyprus, culminating in the 1974 invasion and continuing occupation of Cyprus. Other crisis points included the 1955 pogrom in Istanbul against the protected Greek minority, and Turkey`s coordinated challenge in the Aegean over mineral rights, the delimitation of continental shelf, the extent of Greek territorial waters and air space, the militarization of the certain Greek Aegean Islands and in aftermath the Imia crisis in 1996, Turkey`s challenge of Greece`s sovereignty in grey areas involving numerous Greek islands in the Aegean. These issues were further complicated by command and control structures and areas of responsibility in NATO-`s southeastern flank, the Greek-Turkish arm race, the expansion of the Turkey`s high technology defense industry, Turkey`s interference in the affairs of the Muslim minority of the Greece, the decimation of the protected Greek minority in Istanbul. Imbros, Tenedos and restrictions placed by Turkey on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and Greece` s support of Kurdish minority rights, which culminated in the 1998-99 Ochalan affair. The closing of the 20th century opened new page in Greco-Turkish relations. No one should underestimate the difficulties in the road ahead and necessity of continuation of new Greco-Turkish Dialogue [23, p. vii–xi].

100 years later — Fear instead of Hope

Historians are always reluctant to draw lessons from history, and with good reason. History has been so often abused to support outrageous policies, to promote extravagant claims to territory or to explain away bad decisions. Nevertheless history, can offer us instructive analogies.

If the great conference in Paris at the end of the First World War has been drawing attention recently, it is largely because of our concern with our own world. During the Cold War, the events of that earlier war and the peace settlements which came at its end were remote. They seemed to have no relevance to the great struggle which locked East against West. What did it matter how Yugoslavia or Iraq came into existence? Since the end of the Cold War, such questions have become important again. We have also realized that sometimes it is necessary to understand the historical roots of the issues with which we are dealing. Countries and peoples, like individuals, have memories and they have experiences, which shape the ways they act towards each other, shape how they react to the present and approach the future. Of course we also need to understand economics, social structures, geography, or value systems. But if we ignore history, we deprive ourselves of a useful tool [24].

A hundred years later we still live in a world strongly influenced by the Versailles Treaty and other conferences after the First World War. In this situation, intellectual discussion on the issues of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 is more important than ever before. The answer to the question — how and why the Allies drew lines on an empty map that remade the geography and politics of the Balkans could offer useful comprehension in order to develop mutual understanding and positive alternative policies in this high priority area.

The Balkans' security after the end of Cold war Alliances

The dramatic changes that have taken place in international relations in the last decade of the 20th century had a particularly strong impact on the area of the Balkans[7], underlining numerous retrograde processes, as well as the processes of their political, economic and value reconfiguration and geopolitical reengineering in the European area. The post-conflict socialization of most countries in the region, accompanied by the enormous challenges of transition, has opened up areas of integration into the modern forms of political, economic and social life of the European continent. The European orientation of countries in this region, which, after the collapse of the socialist concept of social organization, decided to build and enhance the values of democracy in economic and social stability and security, significantly reduced the danger of re-radicalization of relations in the region, giving impetus to the processes leading to its long-term stabilization. European and Euro-Atlantic integrative processes have created frameworks for the improvement of regional security, which is increasingly based on the promotion of cooperation and joint concerted activities in the field of security, politics, economics and other areas aimed at preserving stability and preventing crises in the region. However, the inherited problems from the past, the historical contradictions and the consequences of the conflict of nations in this region still affect the security situation, conditioning its pronounced security sensitivity. Namely, there is a significant number of ambivalent processes and suppressed sources of instability in the Balkans, which can be a threat to the interests of the stabilization and development of these countries, and a strong impetus to its destabilization [25, p. 19–21].

The geopolitical and geo-strategic position of the Balkans, which in all its` historical epochs was the basis for overlapping the interests of the great powers in the region, which was often crucial for violating its fragile stability and increasing ethnic, religious and political animosities, and violence and destruction in those areas, also represents a factor that strongly influences the direction and character of relations between the countries of the region. The historic resource to a significant extent explains why the two largest world conflicts that brought about radical changes in political and economic map of the planet bear immediate connection with this region. But here we should pose the question-What is it that sets the pattern for the long lasting interest of the major geopolitical players in this "peripheral" European region?

The first and most important thing is the geographic location as a) main bridgehead to the eastern parts of Europe that had been traditionally controlled by Russia, b) as a "hinterland" for Central and East Europe, c) as a border zone of Europe in relation to the Near and Middle East, d) as a convenient maneuvering ground towards North Africa [26, p. 246].

Modern international processes have not diminished geopolitical and geostrategic significance of the region, whose dynamics is conditioned by numerous social, political, economic, cultural and military factors. The processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integrations, the ever-growing contours of the multipolar international order and the emergence of new global actors in world politics and the proximity to the energy resources of the rich but unstable Arab-Persian and Caspian basins certainly represent the most

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[7] After the 1990's armed conflicts and the establishment of nation-states, the threat of new clashes had not disappeared, this arises from new iconographies and the effects of national pride. Among them we could mention the four Balkan Wars between 1991 and 1999 and the conflicts between Greece and Turkey.

important factors that will affect the political processes and development of Southeast Europe in the decade to come [27, p. 10].

In addition to all these prerequisites, today there also exist some fundamentally new ones that are directly related to the following three circumstances: a) the forth industrial revolution with all the accompanying it social and economic, political and ethno-cultural changes, b) the collapse of "Yalta Universe" and more and more alarming lack of a relatively sustainable system of regional and world security, c) the objectively intensifying processes of globalization. All this became particularly apparent on the Balkans [26, p. 247].

Conclusions or History Models the Pillars of the Balkans

During the 20th century the Balkans was constantly shaking the world with its unpredictability, conflicts and tragedies. From the Slaughter of the Knezes on the eve of the First Serbian Uprising, through the violent suppression of the Krusevo Republic in 1903, disputes over Macedonia between Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece during the Balkan Wars, as well as the First and Second World Wars, to the ethnic conflicts during the 1990`s the Balkans created a very unfavorable image of itself where the term Balkanization came to be used to describe processes of inter-ethnic divisions and wars. It seems that the Balkans was once again faced with its destiny, while the hypothesis of Fukuyama that history would end in the Balkans, proved to be incorrect, because the history was not only actualized but also accelerated its pace and began to reproduce itself so much that an ordinary Balkan citizen was unable to consume it at one time and by force. The forgotten social communities started waking up, the history conquered geography and politics and political national elites were once again faced with dilemma what is the area that should be occupied by Greater Serbia, Greater Croatia, Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo? [3, p. 145].

It can reasonably be argued that European and global security challenges, such as the processes of further strengthening the EU's power of serious fragmentation and the impairment of its internal cohesion, the difficulties in overcoming the economic crisis, as well as the issues with historical backgrounds, such as Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Romania (Transylvania & Moldavia), permanent Bulgarian dilemma, relations between North Macedonia and Greece, hostilities between Greece and Turkey all in conjunction with the European Union, will be at the core of strategic and security trends to the region of the Balkans through ought the fore coming period.

The problems faced within the Balkans are well known and very often debated within the scientific circles, but today there is a new challenge faced by the international community- it is crucial to find the solution to its crisis. Today, under the aforementioned conditions, each country is preoccupied with the protection of its own national interests [28, p. 177].

The Paris Peace Conference operated in a context when national self-determination was something that was a very powerful force. The Paris Peace Conference was only partly about making peace settlements and about making a better world; it was also the focus of the hopes and expectations of nations trying to reconstitute themselves. Nowadays, when we are facing historical challenges, the Balkans, once again, have a need of reconstitution. May the multiethnic concept work for the stabilization of the post-conflict, transitory and ethnically diverse countries of the region? As the ethnic conflict managers from among the domestic elites and international community estimated, the future oriented dimen-

sion of reconciliation would be crucial for the immediate stabilization of an interethnic conflict situation, so we need to succeed in multiethnic state building, even when there are uneasy interethnic antagonism [29, p. 195].

Maybe if those intentions are fulfilled what has begun well will come to pass well?

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Author's information:

Aleksandra Pećinar — PhD, Adviser on Geostrategic Issues in South-East Europe; a.pecinar@gmail.com