

Chapter 7

Balkans / Southeastern Europe

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Conceptual Precursors

For most of history the status of the Balkans as a peninsula remained indistinct. According to circumstances it bore different names—Hellenic, Byzantine, or Illyrian peninsula; Romania (for the Eastern Roman empire); and Rumeli (as an administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire)—but these were neither geographical notions nor even well-defined in terms of borders, especially to the north. “Turkey in Europe,” “European Turkey,” and *la Turquie d’Europe* began to be used by the Ottomans and in Western Europe in the sixteenth century and became standard around the mid-eighteenth century. It included the Romanian Principalities, despite their different administrative status, and was occasionally subsumed under the then-emerging *Europe orientale*. The gradual disintegration of the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of “the Eastern Question” strengthened the political connotations of the term “Turkey-in-Europe,” which remained dominant until the late 1870s. The few integrative studies of the region, such as Ami Boué’s renowned “La Turquie d’Europe” (1840), where the term Southeastern Europe was also used, helped standardize this appellation. Greek texts, on the other hand, often featured another imported name, “Graicia,” for the area.

The geographical notions of the “Balkan Peninsula” (or “the Balkans”) and “Southeastern Europe” were relatively late occurrences of nonlocal origin. The former term (*Balkanhalbinsel*) is a misnomer coined in 1808 by the Prussian geographer Johan August Zeune, who, following the classical and humanist tradition, wrongly believed that the Balkan (Haemus) mountain range was *Catena Mundi*, crossing the whole peninsula and separating it from the continent. For quite some time, this term was used in parallel with Turkey-in-Europe/European Turkey.

During that period, the terms “Southeastern Europe” and “European South-East” were also used, although more rarely (Drace-Francis 2003). They were first employed in linguistics and geology, but the area covered in each case differed considerably. Johann Georg von Hahn, an Austrian diplomat, philologist, and Albanologist referred, in 1861, to “Southeastern European peninsula” (*Südosthalbinsel*) as the most appropriate name for the region. German geographer Theobald Fischer (1893) established the term “Southeastern Europe” in *Länderkunde*, while attributing its coinage to Hahn. Interestingly, some Russian scholars at the time also spoke about “Southeast-European countries” (as they did again after World War II), thus aligning themselves with the viewpoint of the continental center. Since the early nineteenth century, these regional terms have coexisted and partly overlapped with the alternative cultural space of “Slavic Europe” or the “Slavic world,” while the study of European Turkey was overshadowed by the much more developed “Slavistics.”

Emergence of the Balkans as a Political Concept

The secession of the European provinces from the Ottoman Empire, especially after the 1870s, expanded the number of references to “the Balkans” and the “Balkan peninsula” in scholarly, political, and popular parlance. Concurrently, the external and the internal regional terminology began to bifurcate. External usages of “the Balkans” and “Southeastern Europe” became largely synonymous, with identical orientaling connotations. In the Austrian and German nomenclature, references to *der Balkan* and *Südost Europa* intermingled and coexisted with the “Danubian space” (*Donauraum*) as primarily an economic unit centered on the “Danubian Monarchy” (Austro-Hungary).

The intertwining of scholarly and political terminology in the last third of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century was accompanied by two complementary developments: the final phase of the Eastern Question (now also called “the Balkan Question”) and the institutionalization of the study of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe. Although it reached its peak in the interwar period, *Südostforschung* goes back precisely to the period prior to and during World War I and relates to the emergence, among Austro-Hungarian and German financial and diplomatic circles, of the concept of Southeastern Europe as an adjacent area open up for grabs. The *Meyers großes Konversations-Lexikon* of 1908, which contained an entry for “Balkan” but recommended the use of “Southeast-European Peninsula,” explained the region’s particular importance for European politics by referring to its “intermediary location between Asia and Europe,” which made it one of the most important transition zones for the Levantine trade. The German interest in the region

built, in fact, on a preexistent notion of *Mittleuropa*, formulated in the 1840s, where the vision of a strong Central Europe already implicated the Balkan Peninsula as a German sphere of interest (Meyer 1955). The French academic approach to *les Balkans* was shaped mainly by fears of this “pan-German” economic and political thrust in the area, which also explains the French preoccupation with the South Slavs, whom they portrayed as the moral, political, and racial opposite to the Germans (see, e.g., Léger 1869). The Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople (1894–1914) was a typical Orientalist enterprise intended to support, in the words of the Byzantinist Fyodor Uspenski, “Russia’s part in the Eastern question [which] was bequeathed to her by history” and to participate actively “in the settlement of matters connected with the Byzantine heritage” (Uspenski 1914, xii).

The military struggles for national unification, which culminated in the Balkan wars (1912–13), greatly contributed to the stabilization of the Balkans as a political concept standing for an ethnically unsettled, explosive region threatening the European peace. At the turn of the century, this unsavory representation was diffused through numerous studies on Macedonia (and “the Macedonian Question”) featuring it as the “miniature of the Balkans.” How this image—supplemented with the predicaments of “Europeanization”—molded the (Orientalist) western public discourse of the Balkans has by now been abundantly surveyed (Todorova 1997). By the eve of World War I, the full convergence of geography and politics at the level of terminology was in place.

The array of political conceptualizations of the region in the nineteenth century is rounded off by the various (con)federalist projects which emerged out of liberal-democratic and socialist plans for national liberation free of great-power interference and for coping with the impossibility of creating ethnically homogeneous states. In the 1860s and early 1870s, the Bulgarian liberal Lyuben Karavelov saw the federation as the small Balkan nations’ only alternative to succumbing to the new “yoke” of the European powers and to the claims drawn from historic right ad absurdum. The Swiss confederation was for him, as for many liberals, the perfect model, ensuring the Balkan nations’ unification, cultural autonomy, and democratic (republican) self-rule (Ormandzhiev 1947, 27–43). Svetozar Marković was a populist-socialist and the earliest champion of the Balkan federation in Serbia; his plan for a Federal Republic of Free Nations of Southeastern Europe was modeled on the traditional south Slavonic community, the *zadruga*, which was to constitute the nucleus of the political reshaping of the entire peninsula. In his vision, the Balkan federation would be made of such self-ruling communities with free will, not nationality, as a guiding principle that would ensure bypassing the stage of capitalist development (Marković 1872). These plans originated,

and remained, at the fringes of political life. Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century federalist idea did provide a concept of the region and of its political rearrangement that the by far better-organized social-democratic and communist movements would prove eager to capitalize on after the Great War.

Southeastern Europe and the Balkans as Cultural-Historical Concepts

Parallel to the stabilization of the Balkans as a political concept, the turn of the century also saw the emergence of a local, cultural-historical concept of the region. This was spurred by the rise of comparatist methodologies in a number of old and new disciplines and by political contingencies: the ultimate dismantling of “Turkey-in-Europe,” which ushered in the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1908) and the two Balkan wars.

Awareness of and research into Balkan linguistic community (Jernej Kopitar, Franz Miklosich) and folklore/ethnography were the first areas where the concept of a Balkan historical commonality was seriously deliberated. The so-called Balkan linguistic area (or “linguistic league,” *Sprachbund*) was one of its prominent outcomes, as it proved to be “the first area of contact-induced language change to be identified as such” and *the* model prototype for language contact, interaction, and convergence (Friedman 2006, 657–72). Indeed, it was by linguists that the term “Balkanism” was first introduced to indicate the opposite of fragmentation: a lexical and, more indicatively, grammatical feature shared among the unrelated or only distantly related languages of the Balkans. (Linguistic “balkanization” thus implies the very opposite of political “balkanization.”) Similarly, regional ethnographers and literary historians such as the Bulgarian Ivan Shishmanov (1965–1966) and the Romanian Ioan Bogdan (1905) substantiated the notion of the Balkans as an area of cultural osmosis based on longstanding cultural interaction and exchange.

The scholar who contributed most to the cultural-historical definition of the region before World War I was Nicolae Iorga, the founder of the Institute for the Study of Southeastern Europe in Bucharest in 1914. The scope and underlying contents of Iorga’s notion of Southeastern Europe were in outspoken opposition to “the Balkans” and the “Balkan Peninsula”—a geographical term that he deemed “inaccurate [and] unjustified; there exists no element on which it can lean.” The region of Southeastern Europe, on the other hand, according to Iorga, included the area from the Carpathians to the Aegean, thus incorporating the Romanians with the once-Romanized inhabitants (the *Vlachs*) to the south of the Danube—that is, in “the Balkans” proper. In anthropogeographical terms the region thus named was said to be the opposite of Eastern Europe, which Iorga considered identical with

the “Eurasian world.” Beneath its diversity and ethnic fragmentation there lurked a historical, ethnographic, and civilizational “synthesis of a completely particular character common to the whole South–East of Europe.” This specificity, drawing upon the great Thraco–Illyrian–Roman tradition and epitomized by Byzantium, was taken over by the Ottoman Empire and constituted the heritage that all the Southeast–European peoples shared. Iorga thus pitted the Balkans and Southeastern Europe against each other, so that they began to function as counter–concepts in the Koselleckian sense (Iorga 1935a; 1940; and 1999, 122–25, 135–37).

Characteristic of these cultural–historical conceptualizations was the combination of national and regional registers and agendas. Both Iorga and Jovan Cvijić, famed as the founder of Balkan geology, geography, and anthropogeography, forcefully exemplified this entwinement by repositioning the national through the regional. While Iorga’s historical notion of Southeastern Europe endorsed the unity of the Romanians from Transylvania in the north to Macedonia and Greece in the south, his cultural notion of Southeastern Europe underscored their place as the real transmitters of the Byzantine tradition after Byzantium had ceased to exist politically (Iorga 1935b). Combining geomorphological, geophysical, geopolitical, and ethnopsychological analyses, Cvijić, for his part, lent scholarly standing to the inherent diversity of the “Balkan peninsula,” which thus became constitutive of the region. But while this ontological fragmentation ensured the impossibility of a unitary concept of the Balkans, mobility and migration, or what Cvijić called metanastatic movements, acted as a powerful vehicle of intraregional “penetration and connection,” effectively subverting the centrifugal tendencies. Metanastatic movements were what ultimately defined the prevailing civilizational and ethnodemographic profile of the region. Hardly surprisingly, the Serbs stood out as the most populous and dynamic force behind these movements—the vibrant Balkan metanastatic population par excellence and the natural unifiers of the greater part of the Balkan Peninsula (Cvijić 1918).

The Heyday of Political Balkanisms

The period between the two world wars saw the peak of supranational scheming focused on the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, both inside and outside of the region. One can witness an interesting differentiation and parallelism of concepts. On the one hand, references to Southeastern Europe grew not only in German scholarship but also in the official French and British nomenclature. In the 1920s, the practitioners of Southeast–European studies in the Weimar Republic were recommending *Südosteuropa* as a “neutral, non–political and non–ideological concept,” even if this did not prevent them from appeal-

ing, in an as-yet-liberal vocabulary, for adherence to Friedrich List's "valuable pointers [for economic expansion] toward Southeastern Europe" (Maul 1929, 299; Mitrović 1977, 16).

Meanwhile "the Balkans," and the popular discourse of Balkanism, continued to inform Western understandings and dominate in journalism, travelogues, and political literature. Indeed, the aftermath of World War I signaled the emergence of the word "Balkanization"—an evocative conceptual hypostasis, which in the following decades underwent wide diffusion in various professional parlances. Initially used as a political term denoting the fragmentation of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires into small independent states in the manner of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, it was soon charged with the fully negative connotations of political instability, nationalist enmity, international menace, and great power machinations. The post-World War II period saw the complete decontextualization and deterritorialization of the term, whereby the "Balkan" was "snatched from its ontological base and recreated as an abstract demon" (Todorova 1997, 32–37).

Against this backdrop it is striking to witness the systematic efforts at rehabilitating "the Balkans" and its veritable renaissance in the local regional context during the interwar years. This revaluation was central to and underlay several parallel international and supranational undertakings: the communist project for Balkan federation, the liberal one for Balkan union and the new "science of Balkanology." It was animated by various artistic and intellectual currents, noteworthy among which are the avant-gardist movements of the 1920s and the various autochthonist, antiliberal visions of the 1930s.

The concept of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe was an "active" one in the pre-World War I socialist and interwar communist discourses. The Balkan social democrats and communists were not interested in drawing a straightforward cartography of the region (and they used the terms "Balkans" and "Southeastern Europe" interchangeably). But they did conceive of it as a unified space, characterized by distinctive socioeconomic circumstances, convergent social dynamics, and a relatively autonomous political trajectory. A common articulating feature of the region in their view was its socioeconomic "backwardness" (a term applied to agricultural countries, which are industrially undeveloped and incapable of political resistance). A legacy of the antiquated feudal-bureaucratic regime of the Ottoman Empire, this backwardness was perpetuated after these countries' independence by the imposition of a relationship of dependence to the European capitalist economic system. This process of becoming "colonies of foreign capitalism" involved the political sphere as well: through defining state borders and sowing discord between the Balkan states, the European powers exercised political control over the Balkan space and maintained its political dependency. The resultant

division of the area into small, weak, and inefficient political entities, plagued by mutual enmity and insecurity, ensured the reproduction of semicolonial patterns of domination. The unity of the region, and the distinct meaning that communist discourse attributed to the term “Balkans,” was thus rendered by a series of perversities: agrarian backwardness and exacerbated rural problems, underindustrialization, the semicolonial status of the state and economy, acute national tensions, and political impotence vis-à-vis the European powers. The unified space of the Balkans, in other words, ensued from its integration into the world capitalist system (Resolution 1910, 64–66; Kolarov 1924: 78–79; Hatzopoulos 2008, 69–80).

For both socialist and communist analyses, this concept of the region was functional in that it underpinned their plans for erecting a Balkan democratic federation on the ruins of what they perceived to be “artificial” nation-states. But while the socialists spoke of “rapprochement among the Balkan peoples and their union in a federation of independent States,” whose frontiers should be determined by plebiscites, and of “the Balkans for the Balkan peoples,” for the communists the idea of federation was inherently associated with the primary goal of organizing a communist revolution on a regional scale, whereby the designations “Balkans,” “Balkan revolution,” and “Balkan Socialist Soviet Republic” were consistently linked (Stavrianos 1944, 204–13, 303–6). The success of the revolution hinged on the Balkan communists’ ability to capitalize on the national question—in the ploys of the Comintern, national fragmentation and national conflicts in the region were strong destabilizing elements in the service of social revolution.

In many ways, the movement for a Balkan Union—the so-called Balkan Conference of 1930–34, initiated by liberal-minded politicians and intellectuals—presents a contrasting case in that it was concerned mainly with institutional innovation and drew on expert knowledge rather than ideology (Papanastassiou 1934; Kerner and Howard 1936; Geshkoff 1940). It rested on a concept of the Balkans as a space defined by a “community of interests and of civilization,” vowing to create a new Balkan self-identification which would turn the Western notion around. It vied to put the term “Balkan” at the heart of political discussion, so that “the Balkans would become a concept that shaped political thinking, a concept that was central to the drafting of policy proposals” (Hatzopoulos 2008, 100). The liberal understanding of the region involved a broad array of cross-national projects and institutions aimed at guaranteeing regional peace and security, nonintervention by the European powers, economic “denationalization,” “moral agreement” and “Balkan consciousness,” as well as freedom and prosperity for the Balkan people. The oft-resurfacing slogan, “The Balkans for the Balkan people,” admittedly encapsulated this ambitious but basically defensive vision, where

regional economic and intellectual collaboration (partly implemented) was seen as the most promising field of action preparing the ground for political unification.

The Balkan Conference and the liberal outlook informing it were premised on the conviction that progress lay in the economic and political unification of the region and the gradual superseding of existing state borders. It confirmed the salience of the independent, free nationalities as the main bearers of the process toward union while, at the same time, subverting the nation-state system. However, the Balkan Pact, signed in 1934 by Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, contained few of the ideals of the visionaries of Balkan unity: it was a conventional alliance on behalf of existing state borders against Bulgarian revisionism. Despite its unimpressive ending, the liberal project of the 1930s went further than any other in envisioning a particular concrete plan for the Balkans as a political region.

The Rehabilitation of “the Balkans” and the Emergence of the “New Southeastern Europe”

The political designs for a Balkan union had direct bearing on the institutionalization of regional studies. The 1930s was the period when the “new science of Balkanology” took shape, which aimed at orienting national academic research “toward the study of a Balkan organism that had constituted one whole since the most distant times” (Budimir and Skok 1934). Balkanology was meant to deal with the general, the syncretic—the “Balkan reality,” the “Balkan man,” the “Balkan organism”—not the nationally specific, and strove for a regional “synthesis drawing on the elements of Balkan interdependence and unity” (Papacostea 1938, vi). The founder of the Bucharest-based Institute for Balkan Studies and Research, Victor Papacostea (1938; 1943; 1996), considered the adoption of the very idea of the nation-state (one that was “created in the West and for the West”) to have had catastrophic consequences in the Balkans—a region that, unlike Western Europe, was marked by a unity of economic geography, by “the same community of culture and civilization born by long coexistence.” Papacostea talked of a “Balkan nationality” and “Balkan society” as well as a “homo balcanicus,” and of nationality as being precarious and uncertain, “in reality a notion, not ethnic, but mostly political and cultural.” Hence his appeal for a confederation of the Balkan states to be named *Balcama*, a term once used by Mazzini.

Interwar Balkanology was explicit in its political foundations and objectives: both its “pan-regional” agenda and the several institutional venues supporting it made no secret of their immediate political goal—the conclusion of a Balkan Pact. For none of those scholars did the “Balkan idea” imply obliteration

ation of the national, yet neither did any of them reduce it to the sum total of its constitutive nation-states. More radically than Iorga, interwar Balkanologists “redeemed” the region by pushing it to fill in the symbolic space that was conventionally occupied by the nation and transferring the autochthonist national imagination and discourse onto the region. They embarked on vindicating the “strong and irreducible Balkan individuality,” which they saw as a token for the region’s “historic function” of safeguarding humanism, heroism and “unity in variations” (Budimir and Skok 1934).

Balkanology was just one attempt among others at devising a missionary discourse centered on the humanistic rejuvenation of the West. Ideals for “the balkanization of Europe” were encapsulated in various vitalist imageries of the Balkans, such as Vladimir Dvorniković’s (1939) “epic man” or “the Balkan Barbarogenius,” a mythic hero of the most influential Yugoslav avant-garde movement *Zenit*, invoking a resurrected Balkan ethos and authentic existence capable of generating a new European culture in the face of Western degeneration (Golubović and Subotić 2008). Extraregional, especially German scholarship focused on the Byzantine heritage and Slavic studies, took part in this construction of a peculiar Balkan world and Balkan man, endowed with “heroic life-forms” and proper cultural consciousness, as a way “to retrieve the Balkans for Europe” (Thierfelder 1941; Gesemann 1943). Drawing on an earlier tradition of positing the “East” as a counter-concept to the “rotten West” and defying the popular reading of “balkanization,” the interwar notion of Balkanness endeavored to indigenize and devour the historical teleology and the cultural authority of Europeanness. In the longer run, though, it helped stabilize one of the distinctions of the region as the last site in Europe where archaic modes of life could be observed in their pure form, and where the premodern and the modern existed side by side for an unusually long period of time.

A striking feature of all this was the complete reversal which the valence of the term “Balkans”—and of being Balkan—underwent within a large sphere of converging scholarly and political discourses in the 1930s, to the extent that Papacostea, who, like Iorga, deeply disagreed with such a regional denomination, saw himself compelled to surrender to the impossibility of replacing it. The movement toward “Balkan Conference” and Balkan Pact,” as well as the founding of “Balkan institutes” to conduct “Balkan researches,” converged on the slogan “The Balkans for the Balkan peoples,” which, as a contemporary observer noted, “aimed to create a new political concept of the Balkans by the Balkan countries themselves” and “an autonomous organization of a part of Southeastern Europe” (Ronneberger 1943: 75–76). The Balkan idea of the 1930s was an emancipatory one: it was a response to the awareness of frail state sovereignty, which led to an attempt at transposing sovereignty onto

the region as a way of offsetting the impotence of small statehood in the geopolitical ambiance of the 1930s. But it was also an attempt to counteract the “non-European” character of the Balkans and assert its primordial cultural creativity, revolutionary energy, and civilizational potential. It was “the Balkans,” not “Southeastern Europe,” that could lay claim to a special culture and a special legacy. As it happened, the politics of culture made itself manifest in both autochthonist and regionalist directions.

Self-assertive “Balkan” perspectives were buttressed by the positive Balkanism of certain Western academic circles, as in France, who were growing increasingly apprehensive of the German and Italian drive in the area. While relegating the Balkans geopolitically to the “small-nation area” of Central Europe, the French geographer Jacques Ancel (1926; 1933) spoke about a “unity of Balkan civilization” defined by similar, pastoral and agrarian, ways of life and about a common “psychology of the Balkan peoples” nurtured by geographical links, common customs, and historical fate. He also advocated a pan-Balkan union based on these societies’ rural-democratic and anti-urban leanings and on their will for economic and political rebuilding. Such soft orientalist conceptualizations, featuring a symbiosis of youthful nationhood, underdevelopment, traditional (as opposed to law-based) democracy, and potential for future growth, were not an exception at the time. They were supplemented by numerous studies by Western linguists, Byzantinists, and art and economic historians of particular “Balkan commonalities,” many of them published in the periodicals of the newly launched trans-Balkan institutions such as *Revue internationale des études balkaniques*, *Balkanica*, and *Les Balkans*.

The German contribution to the research on and conceptualization of the Balkans and Southeastern Europe was substantial, as it had been with Eastern Europe and Central Europe. Since the late nineteenth century, the practitioners of *Südostforschung* (research on the Southeast), especially those active after World War I, like Fritz Valjavec, Georg Stadtmüller, Otto Maull, Franz Ronneberger, Josef Matl, and Gerhard Gesemann, had been the most powerful external generators of conceptual innovation, even if their impact on internal spatial constructions proved to be limited. Drawing upon the historiographical traditions in the vein of *Volksgeschichte*, German Southeast-European historiography underwent a boom. The intensive promotion of *Südostforschung* continued during the period of National Socialism, when it was institutionalized, buoyed by the growing affinity of ideas and politics between the regime and most of those engaged in the field. The long-term German geopolitical and economic interest in the area was now couched in the Greater-German view of history and *Volkstumsideologie*, while *Südosteuropaforschung* evolved into a “warring science” increasingly entangled with Nazi racial policy and expansionism (Beer 2004, 14–15). During the 1930s,

the German understanding of the region became closely associated with the concept of *Ergänzungswirtschaft*—a supplementary economic area of the Third Reich, thus a natural component of the German *Lebensraum* (Mitrović 1977). The proponents of this concept disagreed as to the geographical scope and political content of *Südosteuropa*, but concurred in that it constituted, in the words of one economic authority, “a single large area in the political and economic sense of the word,” whose main attributes were “countries that are prevalently exporters of raw materials; their population predominantly agrarian with low levels of education and little organizational ability” (Gross 1937, 224). The theory postulated the inseparability of Southeastern Europe and Germany based on geographical (*Donaupraum*), historical, spiritual, political, and ethnic affinities and, above all, economic complementarity.

Other proponents of interwar *Südostforschung* sought to vindicate Southeastern Europe as a positive political term designating a geopolitical area whose coherence and wellbeing required the organizational power of the Reich. Southeastern Europe, Franz Ronneberger wrote, was a German concept with its origin in the political reconfiguration produced by World War I, which formed an integral part of the notions of *Mitteleuropa* and *Zwischeneuropa*, while the Balkans was a “primarily historical concept” (1943). Characteristic of this area, incorporating the Slovaks, Magyars, Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, Croats, and Slovenes, was the absence of a nationality with a numeric preponderance big enough to create a stable political center and exert a pull on the other nationalities. For this reason, the “organizing factors” operative in this region had always been “powers external to Southeastern Europe”—the Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Ottomans—whose dominance had left deep imprints on the economic profile and social structure of the region.” The inference drawn from all this was that “this space does not and cannot have a proper political life. The economic aspect is in no way the only one that requires the complementarity of another space. . . . Therefore, the political concept of Southeastern Europe should be thought of not as a term for an insulated Southeastern Europe, but only as one [designating] a part of the whole Central European living space.” The Balkans could still be an appealing concept signifying certain “pure, unadulterated values”; it was the new political notion of Southeastern Europe, however, that could bring the region back to (“new”) Europe (Ronneberger 1943). Southeastern Europe in this vision became entirely “Central European,” whereas the “the Balkans” became redundant.

It would be misleading, however, to deduce that all German conceptualizations, some of them executed with considerable erudition and dexterity, were simply contingent geopolitical constructions. For Fritz Valjavec (1941; 1942), the Balkans was neither geographical and territorial nor political, but

a historical space: its relative internal cohesion was cultural-morphological, resting mainly on the Byzantine and the Ottoman historical layers. Since their secession from the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan states were undergoing a process of fast and sweeping Europeanization, which implied “cultural ‘de-Byzantinization’ and ‘de-Balkanization.’” State-promoted nationalism had further undermined the “common Balkan traits” bequeathed by the previous political unity. Under the growing sway of the West and nationalism, the Balkans were becoming ever more “Southeast-European” in the sense of acquiring sociopolitical and cultural elements common for the whole European Southeast (Valjavec 1943, 1–4, 6–7). By contrast, and despite the need for a single concept capable of embracing the successors to the Ottoman and the Habsburg empires, Valjavec admitted the lack of an “at least to some extent unitary research area and unitary concept of Southeastern Europe” (*einheitlichen Südosteuropabegriff*). For him, Southeast-European studies were a methodical “complexio oppositorum” (bringing together a wide range of simultaneously applied disciplinary methods), where Southeastern Europe served above all as a “working concept” (*Arbeitsbegriff*); its “spatial-territorial boundaries remain fluid,” involving also extensive “intermediate and transitory” peripheral zones (Valjavec 1941, 15, 28, 32; 1943, 6). Some years later, Georg Stadtmüller (1950, 14) would note in a similar vein in his *History of Southeastern Europe*, “We should nonetheless be wary of the dangerous and misleading notion, that [the term Southeastern Europe] implies a peculiar unity of the space thus denoted. The space of Southeastern Europe is rather marked by internal diversity and differentiation as no other part of Europe is.” Taking seriously the underlying geopolitical stakes, one should at the same time recognize that Valjavec’s vision of historical spaces as intellectual construction and heuristic tool (*Arbeitsbegriff*) is remarkably modern. He neatly distinguished between the historical, and thus transient, reality of the Balkans as the Byzantine-Ottoman legacy and the “working concept” of Southeastern Europe, and underscored the variability of boundaries in time and space. In this he made explicit the connection between regional (re)conceptualization and political changes in not only spatial, but also, and mainly, social terms: it was through industrialization, migration, and the politics of national homogenization that the Balkans was being divested of its Byzantine-Ottoman “Balkan” attributes to become part of a bigger “European” whole. In Valjavec’s spatial conceptualization, therefore, diachronic dynamics and historical change occupied the central place.

Significantly, scholars from the region remained unmoved by the argument: they cursorily referred to it only to reconfirm their attachment to the notion of a persistent and organic “physical, anthropogeographical, historical and economic unity” of the Balkans in contrast to the “artificial” geopolitical

concept of Southeastern Europe. It was the former notion, as we can see, that inspired the variety of local political and intellectual projects on the region between the wars.

Southeastern Europe after World War II

Compared to the preceding decades, the late 1940s and the 1950s showed little enthusiasm for “the Balkans.” Earlier divisions and “Europe” itself were outclassed by the new political, economic, and cultural schism between the socialist and the nonsocialist world. For a brief while, between 1945 and 1947, the idea of a Balkan confederation between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania, and possibly Hungary and Greece, was revived on the initiative of Josip Broz Tito, the all-powerful leader of the communist-led liberation front in Yugoslavia. That proved to be the swan song of Balkan federalism, as Moscow refused to accept Belgrade’s independent actions, while Sofia and Tirana were reluctant to sacrifice their independence for the sake of a federation centering on Belgrade. Attempts at reviving the idea in a new form were made by the Romanian and the Bulgarian governments in the late 1950s with appeals for peaceful coexistence and general disarmament in the region, but they also came to nothing. Even so, by the end of the 1960s, most of the countries in the region had reached a geopolitical *modus vivendi* through bilateral treaties on trade, tourism, and cultural and scientific collaboration (Iacob 2015, 24–26).

The spatial classifications after World War II along the East–West axis did away with the Balkans/Southeastern Europe as a separate (geo)political or economic area. For the scholars in the region, the relocation of its bigger part into Eastern Europe signified a political act with far-reaching military and economic consequences and totally restructured the terms of international affiliation. In terms of the actual spatial categories they were operating with, however, its impact was far less straightforward. At no point did the concept of Eastern Europe become a focus of self-identification or a powerful frame of reference. For some time after the war, the quasipolitical notion of “Slavdom” as a counter-concept to the imperialist West and the “Teutonic drive” gained currency and lingered on in subsequent years, but with diminishing appeal. “Europe” (if not at all times “the West”) soon recuperated its status as a measuring rod, whether to demonstrate identity or differentiation, for the historical modernization and civilizational profile of these societies. The core of the Marxist social-science vocabulary related to “feudalism,” “capitalism,” “nationalism,” social “classes,” and “stages of economic development” remained palpably Euro- (or Western-) centric. This, on the other hand, rarely led regional scholars to lump Russia and the Balkans in a single category.

In terms of geopolitical affiliation in this period, we can roughly distinguish between three categories of states: NATO members Greece and Turkey; Communist Romania and Bulgaria; non-aligned Yugoslavia and maverick Albania. In terms of symbolic-cultural imageries and spatial self-identifications, however, discrete national viewpoints tended to override such groupings.

It is therefore significant that despite their different, at times contradictory, objectives, all these countries partook in the Southeastern European academic project. Research on Southeastern Europe resumed in the 1960s in an atmosphere of political détente between the two blocs. What distinguished this period was the strong drive toward state-sponsored academic institutionalization of the field in all Balkan countries across the Iron Curtain. An “International Association of Southeast-European Studies” (AIE-SEE) was formed in Bucharest in 1963 under the auspices of UNESCO, briefly followed by the (re)establishment of national institutes for Southeast-European/Balkan Studies in Romania (1963), Bulgaria (1964), Yugoslavia (1969), and Greece (already opened in 1953 as a branch of the Society for Macedonian Studies) and of specialized chairs in the major universities. Starting in 1966, International Congresses of Southeast-European Studies were convened every four years. This proliferation of regionalist organizations and the consolidation of Southeast-European studies as an autonomous field were fueled by agendas of political and cultural diplomacy that were different for the different countries involved. To the extent one can speak of a common ideology, it was the aspiration to highlight the universal contribution of the individual Balkan nations through the mediation of the Southeast-European cultural-historical heritage. For some countries vying for a more independent role in the two-bloc constellation, like Romania, Yugoslavia, and Albania, it was also a means to boost their state sovereignty and mediating function.

The conceptualization of the Balkans that crystallized through this institutional web and scholarly exchange drew entirely, in a theoretical and methodological sense, on the premises formulated by the interwar generation of regionalists. At its core lay the ontological binomes of diversity and unity, individuality and synthesis. Diversity and individuality (or originality) were said to revoke homogeneity and were epitomized by the Balkan nations, each one of which, in the words of Tudor Vianu, out of the common fund, “selects, interprets and creates new meanings in accordance with its own particular conditions and with a view to its own genius.” The Balkan unity and civilizational synthesis were European in their cultural morphology, yet neither Western nor Eastern but endowed with “the special vocation of facilitating the mutual understanding between the East and the West” (Vianu 1962, 11–14) The emancipatory potential of such a notion unfolded on two levels: it

displayed the originality of the regional national cultures and turned around the established image of the Balkans as alien to Europe. A cluster of additional antinomies came to underscore the unique relationship between particularism and integration: “oscillating movements from synthesis to differentiation,” “affinity vs. homogeneity,” “permanent interdependence of national history and regional history,” interlocking local, regional and global circles, etc. (Vianu 1962; Zakythinos 1972; Berza 1975). This was a convenient formula in several ways: it provided a venue for high international visibility of the national while purportedly eschewing parochialism; it sought to assert a modicum of sovereignty in a hegemonic world as well as a distinctive Balkan Europeanness; it granted access to cultural universalism and to a specific modern mission transcending the Iron Curtain; it also allowed operating on different registers depending on circumstances and audiences: particularistic (nationalistic) and regionalist (universalistic).

Actual research behind this self-assertive regionalist ideology was even more equivocal. In some disciplinary fields, such as history, the bulk of studies were only nominally Southeast-European, in that they concerned groups and states located in the area but whose commonalities were rarely tested. Cross-national relations and exchanges were usually dealt with on a bilateral basis, with the individual national historiographies tending to stress particular aspects of the “common Balkanness/Southeast-Europeaness” where they could claim a special contribution for the respective nation. Moreover, the comparative regional approach, to the extent it was employed, did not affect the writing of national history, which remained a self-contained, didactic, and parochial field. The advances in social and economic history in the rest of Europe and the imposition of Marxist methodology in large parts of the region failed to yield a socioeconomic “synthesis” of the area—a strange absence, considering both the burgeoning neo-Marxist comparatist approaches in the 1960s–1970s and the strong preoccupation with the economic unity of the region before the war. As before, “softer” disciplinary fields and subfields like linguistics, ethnography, cultural and literary history, classical archaeology, and history of ideas fared better in terms of integrative visions and regionalist research, and communication in these areas with fruitful developments outside of the region (for example, history of mentalities, social anthropology, Byzantine studies) was more productive in rendering some elements of a Balkan cultural-historical ontology. From the mid-1970s, however, nationalist discourses in all of these states were growing increasingly radicalized, self-centered, and xenophobic (Verdery 1991; Elenkov 2008; Stefanov 2011). The mythopoetic vision of the Balkans, harking back to interwar Balkanology, was declining precisely at the time when that of Central Europe was on the rise (see chapter 8 in this volume).

As for external conceptualizations, the first twenty years of the work of the Moscow-based Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies (1968) were dominated by country-based research (*stranovedcheskie issledovania*). The Balkans as a discrete historical space was largely subsumed under two other overarching geographies: the (South) Slavic world and the socialist “Central and South-eastern Europe.” Paramount among the comparative-historical themes purportedly delineating a “Central and Southeast European region”—typically in collective works bringing together several national cases—were the “ethnogenesis and ethnic history,” “transition from feudalism to capitalism,” nation formation, the building of socialism, and “the formation of Marxist aesthetics and the theory of socialist realism” (*Conférence internationale* 1984: 95–109). Parallel to these, a series of monographs or collective works appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, examining Russia’s political and military involvement in “the Balkan Question.” Next to the traditional fields of ethnography and linguistics, the studies devoted to Russia’s Balkan policy rendered the most consistent vision of the Balkans as an entity in the Soviet scholarly literature after the war, different from “Central and Southeastern Europe” or the “Slavs.”

The Anglo-American scholarly literature was perhaps most strongly affected by the overriding East-West political divide, which led to radical re-shuffling of the map of the region, leaving Greece and Turkey out of it. The area became subsumed in another term and another scholarly paradigm—“Eastern Europe,” construed as conterminous with the “Soviet/Communist Bloc” (see chapter 9 in this volume). Historical geographies often conceived of Eastern Europe as the eight satellite states of the Soviet Union, subdivided by certain socioeconomic criteria into northern Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and the GDR) and southern Eastern Europe (e.g., the Balkans—Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia), while its unity was made to rest on the historical struggle between nationalism and imperialism and on economic backwardness (Turnock 1989, 316). East Central (along with Southeastern) Europe was a parallel notion, said to be limited by “the eastern linguistic frontier of German- and Italian-speaking peoples on the west, and the political borders of Russia/the USSR on the east.”¹ Admittedly, the concept of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe did not die out altogether. In British and especially American usage during the 1950s and 1960s, it implied a “sensitive spot in the complex of relations with the Soviet Union,” and was frequently marketed as a “prototype” for the developing countries in Asia and Africa (Wolff 1956, 3–9; Warriner 1965). In social and economic analyses, at the same time, the region was presented as an intrinsic part of Eastern Europe.

The French postwar notions of the region were similar, taking into account, however, that France witnessed a veritable meltdown of interest in the area—a meltdown that was barely reversed during the 1970s–1980s. Writing

in 1965, geographer André Blanc surmised that “the Balkans is more of a problem than a region.” Too complex and variegated, underdeveloped, with archaic social structures and estranged nations, physically part of Europe yet culturally not fully European, it could perhaps hope for a better future. What distinguished the French approaches was the consistent exclusion of Romania (and less consistently of Greece and European Turkey) from the map of the region, assigning it either to Central (or “Danubian”) Europe or to a separate category. When, in the beginning of the 1970s, an attempt was made at reinvigorating interest in the Balkans, it was effectuated under the auspices of the “Center for the Study of Civilizations in Central and Southeastern Europe.”

Émigré scholars, especially in the United States, continued to deploy the Balkans and, more rarely, Southeastern Europe as a cultural-historical or “civilizational” (in the *Annales* sense) notion, usually including Greece and the Ottoman Empire but rarely Turkey. In the 1970s–1980s it was underpinned by discussions of *longue-durée* socioeconomic trends and the predicaments of modernization in the light of the neo-Marxist center-periphery and “world-economy” paradigms, family patterns, and political trajectories typically associated with the “peculiarities” of nation-building. A critical strain in the “history of ideas,” on the other hand, chose to cast the regional variants of nationalism, authoritarianism, fascism, and communism in an East European, rather than Balkan or Central European, frame.

In West Germany and Austria, where *Südosteuropaforschung* survived institutionally and in personnel, Southeastern Europe not only endured as a cultural-historical concept but provoked discussions over its changed understanding in the new circumstances after the war. During the late 1950s and 1960s, prewar leaders of the school, such as Fritz Valjavec (1957) and Franz Ronneberger (1963), continued to plead for the “strict separation of Southeastern from Eastern Europe in geographical, historical and cultural sense” (Valjavec 1957, 72). Faced with the challenge of the rising *Osteuropaforschung* and stepping on the sociological and ethnological advances of the interwar *Volksbodenforschung*, the proponents of Southeastern Europe studies attempted to go beyond the “working concept” approach and frame a distinct, structurally unitary space capable of vindicating and sustaining an autonomous research field. The actual discoverers of such structural similarities were said to be the practitioners of the young social sciences, such as economy, sociology, and political science, including those whose work in the 1930s subscribed to the *Ergänzungswirtschaft* theory, such as Giselher Wirsing and Hermann Gross. For Mathias Bernath (1973, 142), however, what legitimated Southeastern Europe as a “unit of events” (*Geschehenseinheit*), transcending its historical in-betweenness and consequent inner diversity, were not individual elements and factors per se, but “the peculiar fusion which these ele-

ments had produced.” The concept of Southeastern Europe thus conceived was, in his view, a “neutral, non-political and non-ideological concept which, moreover, eliminated the inherited historical-political dichotomy between the Danubian Monarchy and the Ottoman Balkans that had become redundant” (142). As for the term Balkans, it could remain applicable, as Valjavec had suggested, only as a “spatial designation for certain cultural-morphological interrelationships between individual Southeast-European countries” (Bernath 1973, 142).

The “Rise and Fall” of the Balkans after 1989

The Yugoslav succession wars in the 1990s once again made “the Balkans” a powerful symbolic concept by rekindling, both outside and inside the region, the Balkan imagery characteristic of pre-World War II western representations. This period saw a veritable boom of publications on the region searching for the roots of the Yugoslav wars, which reanimated discussions of the Balkan *Sonderweg* and the region’s “otherness” to the European project due to its predicament of endemic violence and incessant conflict. Both popular media and academic sociopolitical analyses of the region centered around the category of nationalism as the quintessential feature of an unchangeable Balkan condition predicated upon its dissociation from sociopolitical developments in the rest of Europe.

Resistance to this mode of representation, and concomitant attempts at “normalizing” the Balkans, became noticeable from the late 1990s and took different directions. One was the rebaptizing of the region as Southeastern Europe, a purportedly new and neutral notion doing away with the politically incorrect connotations—as well as the past—of “the Balkans.” This bid for reconstituting the area was originally made by several EU-led political initiatives, such as the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe set up in 1999, with the avowed double intention to effect “international crisis management” and enunciate the region’s European credentials: “the use of the term ‘Southeastern Europe’ . . . would imply recognition of the fact that the region already is part of Europe, that its problems are European and that any viable solution has to be a European solution involving both the deepening and the widening of the Union” (Bokova 2002, 32–33). “Stability” and “security” were the catchwords informing this new meaning of Southeastern Europe. Both entailed “de-Balkanization”—that is, radical Europeanization of the region through the massive introduction of European norms assumed to be alien to the region.

Another, academically more resonant direction was the critical reformulation of the Balkans as a discursive concept inspired by Saidian Orientalism. Central to this is the notion of mental mapping, where the Balkans appears,

not as a historical region, but as an imagined space and simplified representation in the western mind, drawing on a hierarchical relationship between the West and the Balkans and performing crucial functions in discourses of collective identity. The Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) has been justly credited with having compellingly forged this Orientalist (or rather Balkanist) critique of the concept of the Balkans, thus problematizing the regional terminology itself. Yet her position is less unequivocal than commonly assumed, in that she sees the Balkans as possessing not just "imaginary" but also "ontological" aspects, which she defines in terms of continuity and perception of the Ottoman legacy.

Constructivist conceptualizations of the Balkans were countered by so-called structural ones. The German historian Holm Sundhaussen (1999) saw *Europa balcanica*, as he called it, as an "analytical category" defined by a cluster of characteristics (*Merkmalcluster*) which, in their specific combination and high correspondence over time and space, have distinguished the region from the Byzantine era to the present day. He identified two of these—the Byzantine-Orthodox and the Ottoman-Islamic heritage—as decisive for bringing about the political, economic and intellectual structures that had set the Balkans on a distinct path of development in comparison with other European regions. Only the countries sharing this heritage (the post-Yugoslav space, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey), not the wider Southeastern Europe (comprising also Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Moldavia), constitute, according to this view, a "historical region."

From a broader perspective, constructivist versus structural conceptualizations fed into the discussion of the definition of historical regions that gathered momentum in the wake of the spatial and transnational turns in the human and social sciences beginning in the 1980s. In its frame the definition of Southeastern Europe—the prevailing regional *nomen* since the 1990s—becomes unstable, informed by neither objective criteria nor essentialist characteristics, but exposed to contestation, "its boundaries seen as intellectual constructs, provisional, open to question and overlapping"—an approach that evokes Valjavec's notion of Southeastern Europe as a "working concept" and heuristic frame (Bracewell and Drace-Francis 1999, 61). Meanwhile, however, the quest for the specificity and scope of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe as a real (as opposed to invented) space has continued. A number of studies since the 1990s have sought to rethink the unity of the region in terms of total history in a Braudelian key (Traian Stoianovich), a specific linguistic and ethnocultural *mixtum compositum* (Victor Friedman, Raymond Detrez, Klaus Roth), a historical-anthropological zone (Karl Kaser), or common mental structures and normative categories of a "Balkan model of the world" (Tat'jana Civ'jan). All in all, despite certain important poststructuralist ad-

vances drawing on the spatial turn, the debate between Southeast-Europeanists and (post)structuralist theorists still goes on.

In the interim, with the “securitization” of the region and Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession into the EU (2007), both the political relevance of the concept and scholarly interest in the Balkans/Southeastern Europe decreased drastically. A number of spatial alternatives popped up based on new European fault lines or purported reassessments of historical interconnections. In EU cartography the region of the Western Balkans came into being, lumping together the countries undergoing a process of “Europeanization” as preparation for their joining the Union (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo, and occasionally also Moldova!). Stefan Troebst advocated a “circum-Pontic” regional concept—the Balkans–Black Sea–Caucasus (Troebst 2006); Karl Kaser coined the notion of “Eurasia Minor,” incorporating the historical space between the Danube and the Tigris Rivers (Kaser 2011); while French geographers came up with the concept of *Europe médiane*, which included Hungary and Romania but excluded “Balkan Europe” (ex-Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, and Bulgaria) (Carroué and Oth 1997).

Against this backdrop it is curious to witness the ongoing, ostensibly spontaneous Balkan interpellations on the level of popular culture. High-cultural and subcultural production—music, dance, film, fiction—has (re)discovered a reservoir of shared notions, mentality, and aesthetics and come to unabashedly expose a sense of Balkanness all the way from Istanbul through Greece and Bulgaria to ex-Yugoslavia. The political Balkans seems, for all intents and purposes, to be gone; the cultural Balkans is still with us.

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Notes

1. See the foreword to each of the eleven volumes of the series “A History of East Central Europe,” edited by Peter Sugar and Donald Treadgold (Seattle: University of Washington Press).

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