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Bulgaria – Yugoslavia Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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BULGARIA – YUGOSLAVIA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary, about 335 miles in length, is demarcated by pillars. Beginning from the confluence of the Timok river with the Danube at the Romanian tripoint, the boundary extends southward, primarily along mountain crests, to the Greek tripoint on Tumba mountain in the Belasitsa (Belasica) mountains.

II. GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary reflects the complex political geography that is the hallmark of international boundaries in the Balkans. Throughout history, the boundary area has been affected by internal and external influences which have given the general impression of the entire Balkan Peninsula as one of continuous turmoil. Today the main land and rail routes (e.g., the "Orient Express") from northwestern Europe via Belgrade cross the boundary area to Sofia, follow the Maritsa valley through Edirne (Adrianople), and then cross the Straits to Asia. These routes bring to mind pre-World War I international rivalries and intrigue relating to the "Berlin to Baghdad Railway" and Germany's Drang nach Osten policies.

"Stability" according to the Moscow-oriented brand of communism on the Bulgarian side and the long-established revisionist form of communism under 80-year-old Josip Broz Tito, on the Yugoslavian side, has removed many of the territorial and boundary issues as matters for disputation—at least in the overt and official sense.

Early History

Although the Greco–Romans struggled for centuries to maintain the Roman Empire's frontier on the Danube River, the entire Balkan Peninsula was occupied from the fourth century, in increasing numbers, by Goths and other Germanic tribes. The great Slavic invasions commenced in the sixth century. Crossing the Danube, the Slavs later occupied the entire Balkans in such number as to give a Slavic character to large areas of the Peninsula.

The Asian Bulgars, arriving in the area about the same time as the Slavs, gradually merged with the Slavic peoples. By 670 A.D., the Bulgars established themselves south of the Danube around Varna. While conquering, the Bulgars were absorbed by the more numerous Slavs, adopted Slavic culture and language, yet retained their own name and political organization.

Until the Turkish conquest of the Balkans in the 14th century, the fate of Bulgaria and Serbia (southern Yugoslavia), including the entire boundary area, was enmeshed in a power struggle between local Slavic and Bulgar forces on one hand and imperial Byzantine authority on the other, the latter headquartered at Constantinople.

Ottoman Period

The Ottoman Turks crossed the Dardanelles about the middle of the 14th century to commence the rapid conquest of the Balkans and defeat of the declining Byzantine Empire. Adrianople (Edirne), a key city on the land bridge captured in 1361, became the Ottoman capital. Plovdiv (Philippopolis), on the Maritsa river in Bulgaria, was taken in 1364, and Sofia in 1382. In 1389 the Serbians, aided by Bulgarian and Romanian allies, were defeated in the great Battle of Kosovo in Serbia.

Only 25 years earlier, in 1364, Stephen Dushan was crowned at his capital of Skopje (Uskub) as "Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks." The Serbian state reached its zenith at this time, with boundaries extending from the Danube to the Corinthian Gulf and from the Adriatic to Thrace. This area included all of Macedonia with the exception of the Greek city of Thessaloniki and present-day Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The defeat of the Serbs in the Plain of Kosovo marks the complete conquest of the Balkans by the Ottomans, who by that time had also conquered most of northern and eastern Greece. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 therefore confirmed the Turkish conquest of the entire Balkan area.

Rising Balkan Nationalism

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nationalist agitation for liberation increased in proportion to increasing Ottoman maladministration, decay, and corruption. In 1875 a Serbian revolt in Bosnia spread through Herzegovina, and was supported by a declaration of war on Turkey by Serbia and Montenegro on July 1, 1876. Earlier in May, revolutionaries in Bulgaria attempted to throw off the Turkish yoke, but were suppressed with great cruelty. These events led to the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–78, which saw Russian forces advancing to Chatalja, within grasp of Constantinople.¹ Britain then sent its fleet into the Straits, and Austria–Hungary also prepared to check Russian influence in the Balkans. Under these circumstances the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878) was signed. It created a greatly enlarged Bulgaria extending from the Danube to the Aegean Sea, and proclaimed the complete independence of the principalities of Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia, which included an additional slice of territory around Nish (Nis). However, Serbia and Greece protested Bulgarian gains in the Macedonian and Aegean regions where both Belgrade and Athens had territorial aspirations.

The Great Powers, especially Great Britain, fearing the alarming growth of Russian influence in the Balkans, forced Russia to reconsider "San Stefano." The ensuing Congress of Berlin in 1878 restored Macedonia, i.e., much of the boundary area, to Turkey, and recognized Serbia as independent. While the Powers at the Congress of Berlin limited the expansive proportions that Russia desired ceded to Bulgaria in the Treaty of San Stefano, the Treaty of Berlin (July 13, 1878) established a compact state of Bulgaria extending easterly from the Timok river between the Balkan mountains and the Danube river. Bulgaria's autonomous status under the Ottoman Sultan remained.

¹ See International Boundary Study No. 56, Bulgaria–Greece, October 1, 1965, p. 4.

The Balkan and World Wars

Political and territorial change quickened in the years preceding World War I. Within Ottoman Turkey, there was increasing demand for governmental reform. In Bulgaria, Serbia, and other Balkan provinces, the growing forces of nationalism and independence, accelerated by increasing European power rivalries, were leading toward warfare. In October 1908 Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand, taking advantage of the young Turk revolution and Austro–Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina which rendered the Turkish Porte temporarily powerless, proclaimed himself Tsar of independent Bulgaria. The intensity of Balkan intrigue and Great Power competition heightened immediately.

During the summer of 1912 a secret treaty between Bulgaria and Serbia, followed by similar agreements with Greece and Montenegro, committed the Balkan allies to drive Turkey out of the Balkans. These arrangements were made while Turkey was at war (1911–12) with Italy (then a member of the Triple Alliance).

The territory which Bulgaria and Serbia expected to conquer from Turkey was to be divided according to the secret arrangements contained in the Serbo–Bulgarian Treaty of Alliance of March 13, 1912, as follows: To Serbia was assigned "all the territory north of the Shar Range, to Bulgaria all the territory east of the Rhodope Mountains and the Struma River." Bulgaria desired that an autonomous Macedonia be created. However, in the event that autonomy proved impracticable, a line was drawn from the point "where the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Turkish frontiers met north of Egri Palanka to the northeastern shore of Lake Okhrida, leaving Kratova, Veles (Koprulu), Monastir, Okhrida to Bulgaria, and the districts of Kumonova, Skopje (Uskub), Kirchevo, Dibra and Struga..." on the Serbian side.

In October, while disorder and agitation increased throughout the Bulgaria–Serbia (Yugoslavia) boundary area, especially in Macedonia, the Balkan allies presented joint demands to the Sultan for reforms in Macedonia. These, as the allies had anticipated, were unacceptable to the Turks, who construed them as an ultimatum. Montenegro declared war on October 8. Turkey declared war on Serbia and Bulgaria on October 17, 1912. Greece entered the war on October 18, 1912. All this marked the beginning of the First Balkan War.

Shortly thereafter the Serbians captured Pristina, Kumanovo, Skopje, Prizen, and Monastir, and reached the Adriatic coast where they occupied Alessio (Lesh) and Durazzo (Durrës), now in Albania². The Bulgarian Army was the most successful. Mustapha Pasha (Svilengrad) and Kirk Kilisee (Kirkklareli) in eastern Thrace were captured. In March Adrianople (Edirne), a major stronghold, was taken, full access to the Aegean Sea was gained, and the Turkish Army was pushed back to the Chatalja line within 25 miles of Constantinople.³ The Greek Army overran Thessaly and Epirus, captured Salonika (Thessaloniki) and Janina (not far from the Albanian border), and also acquired Crete, Samos, and other islands.⁴

² See International Boundary Study No. 116, Albania–Yugoslavia Boundary, October 8, 1971.

³ See International Boundary Study No. 56, Bulgaria–Greece Boundary, p. 5., Oct. 1, 1965.

⁴ See International Boundary Study No. 113, Albania–Greece Boundary, August 18, 1971.

The extraordinary occurrence of Balkan countries sinking their differences to drive Turkey out of the Balkans, however, was short-lived. Their success in the First Balkan War quickly exposed their separate and conflicting ambitions in the Bulgaria–Serbia as well as other Balkan boundary areas. For example, Salonika (Thessaloniki) was claimed by Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece. Bulgaria's claims, included in the earlier secret agreements, were quickly frustrated by the Serbs and the Greeks who, alarmed by Bulgarian successes, turned against their former ally. In the boundary area, and while the Bulgarians conquered Thrace and pushed the Turkish Armies to within 25 miles of Constantinople, Serbia advanced beyond the line allotted to it, occupying the main part of the Vardar valley. The Greeks took southern Macedonia and Salonika. Because the Great Powers decided that Serbia must abandon the northern Albanian territory in favor of an autonomous Albania, Serbia demanded a greater share of Macedonia.

As a result, Bulgaria attacked the Serbian and Greek armies in the boundary area (Macedonia) in June 1913. Thereupon began the short but intense Second Balkan War, in which Serbia and Greece were joined by Turkey, Montenegro, and Romania against Bulgaria. With Bulgaria fighting on all fronts, Adrianople (Edirne) was easily recaptured. Bulgaria quickly accepted an armistice in July and signed a Treaty of Peace at Bucharest (August 10, 1913) with its former allies of the earlier First Balkan War.

Territorial changes as a result of the Treaty of Bucharest favored Serbia's claims for a greater share of Macedonia at the expense of Bulgaria. Thus, only a small "corner" of Macedonia in the middle Struma valley, the upper Mesta river, and a westward jutting salient in the Strumitsa (Strumica) valley were left to Bulgaria as the Bulgarian–Serbian boundary.

The near elimination of Turkey from the Balkans opened a Pandora's Box. One obvious outcome was the deep bitterness and the intense desire for vengeance manifest by the Balkan states, especially Bulgaria. Serbia now had united about one-third of the south Slavs (Yugo-Slavs). The plan to include the remaining south Slavs in a Serb-dominated Yugoslav state meant direct conflict with the interests of its neighbors. In addition to the Ottoman Empire, the Austro–Hungarian Empire had been challenged, as had the powerful German Empire with its interest in the Balkans as an avenue from "Berlin to Baghdad," and beyond. Consequently, the assassination on June 28, 1914 (the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, 1389), of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo served as the occasion, not the cause, of World War I.

The thwarting of Bulgaria's ambitions in the boundary area led it to side readily with the German Empire and its interests. Siding with the losers in World War I, however, resulted in Bulgaria's losing that portion of Macedonia in the Strumica valley which it had retained in 1913, thus excluding it entirely from the Vardar valley. For Serbia, its siding with the Allied winners, in addition to the territorial gains in the boundary, served to pull together the varied Slavic elements long considered irreconcilable and led to the formation of the Yugoslav state.

The Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary, as it is today, was defined by the Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers, and Bulgaria signed at Neuilly-sur-Seine on November 27, 1919. Actual demarcation was performed by an International Boundary

Commission in 1920–22.

Again, during World War II Bulgaria sided with Germany. During the early Axis conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece, Bulgaria whetted irredentist memories of San Stefano by occupying and administering large portions of Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia west and south of the present boundary. Final Allied victory, with the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, restored Bulgaria's boundaries with Yugoslavia (and Greece) to those established in 1919.

III. ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary was delimited in accordance with Article 27 of the Treaty of Peace between Allied and Associated Powers and Bulgaria, signed at Neuilly-sur-Seine on November 27, 1919. Actual demarcation on the ground was completed by the International Boundary Commission (1920–22) composed of representatives from the Kingdom of Bulgaria; the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; Japan; Italy; Great Britain; and France.

The entire boundary, about 335 miles in length, comprised of about 320 miles on land and about 15 miles in rivers, is demarcated by boundary pillars that are numbered and are intervisible. The boundary follows, with some exceptions, mountain crests which essentially form the major water divides (watershed) between the Vardar and Struma rivers. Exceptions to the watershed principle are a consequence of Bulgaria's defeat in the Second Balkan War when small areas east of the Timok river, in the vicinity of Tsaribrod, Bozica, Bosilegrad and Strumitsa, were taken from Bulgaria.

Article 27 of the Treaty of Neuilly sur Seine defines the boundary as follows:

FRONTIERS OF BULGARIA

1. With the Serb–Croat–Slovene State:

From the confluence of the Timok and the Danube, which is the point common to the three frontiers of Bulgaria, Roumania and the Serb–Croat–Slovene State, southwards to a point to be selected on the course of the Timok near point 38 west of Bregovo,

the course of the Timok upstream;

thence south-westward to the point east of Vlk. Izvor, where the old frontier between Serbia and Bulgaria meets the river Bezdanica,

a line to be fixed on the ground passing through points 274 and 367, following generally the watershed between the basins of the Timok on the north-west and the Delejna and Topolovitsa on the south-east, leaving to the Serb–Croat–Slovene State Kojilovo, Sipikovo and Halovo with the road connecting the two latter places, and to Bulgaria Bregovo, Rakitnica and Kosovo;

thence southwards to point 1720, about 12 kilometers west-south-west of Berkovitsa,

the old frontier between Bulgaria and Serbia;

thence south-eastwards for about 1-1/2 kilometres to point 1929 (Srebrena gl.), a line to be fixed on the crest of the Kom Balkan;

thence south-south-westwards to point 1109, on the Vidlic Gora south of Vlkovija,

a line to be fixed on the ground passing through points 1602 and 1344, passing east of Grn. Krivodol and crossing the river Komstica about 1-1/2 kilometres above Dl. Krivodol;

thence to a point on the Tsaribrod–Sofiya road immediately west of its junction with the road to Kalotina.

a line to be fixed on the ground passing east of Mozgos, west of Staninci, east of Brebevnica and through point 738 north-east of Lipinci;

thence west-south-westwards to a point to be selected on the course of the river Lukavica about 1,100 metres north-east of Slivnica.

a line to be fixed on the ground;

thence southwards to the confluence, west of Visan, of the Lukavica with the stream on which D1. Nevlja is situated,
the course of the Lukavica upstream;

thence south-westwards to the confluence of a stream with the Jablanica, west of Vrabca,

a line to be fixed on the ground passing through point 879 and cutting the road from Trn to Tsaribrod immediately south of the junction of this road with the direct road from Trn to Pirot;

thence northwards to the confluence of the Jablanica and the Jerma (Trnska), the course of the Jablanica;

thence westwards to a point to be selected on the old frontier at the salient near-Descani Kladenac.

a line to be fixed on the ground following the crest of the Ruj Planina and passing through points 1199, 1466, and 1706.

Thence south-westwards to point 1516 (Golema Rudina) about 17 kilometres west of Trn.

the old Serb–Bulgarian frontier;

thence southwards to a point to be selected on the river Jerma (Trnska) east of Strezimirovci.

a line to be fixed on the ground;

thence southwards to the river Dragovishtitsa immediately below the confluence of rivers near point 672,

a line to be fixed on the ground passing west of Dzincovci, through points 1112 and 1329, following the watershed between the basins of the rivers Bozicka and Meljanska and passing through points 1731, 1671, 1730 and 1058;

thence south-westwards to the old Serb–Bulgarian frontier at point 1333, about 10 kilometres north-west of the point where the road from Kriva (Egri)–Palanka to Kyustendil cuts this frontier,

a line to be fixed on the ground following the watershed between the Dragovishtitsa on the north-west and the Lomnica and Sovolstica on the south-east;

thence south-eastwards to point 1445 on the Males Planina south-west of Dobrilaka,

the old Serb–Bulgarian frontier;

thence south-south-westwards to Tumba (point 1253) on the Belashitza Planina, the point of junction of the three frontiers of Greece, Bulgaria and the Serb–Croat–Slovene State,

a line to be fixed on the ground passing through point 1600 on the Ograjden Planina, passing east of Stinek and Badilen, west of Bajkovo, citting the Strumitsa about 3 kilometres east of point 177, and passing east of Gabrinovo.

IV. SUMMARY

The Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary, about 335 miles in length, is demarcated by boundary pillars that are numbered and are intervisible.

Following World War II, Communist guerrilla warfare in Greece resulted in a considerable number of boundary violations along the Bulgaria–Yugoslavia frontiers. Later intra-Communist rivalries challenged Yugoslavian revisionism and independence, which produced numerous boundary violations and other disputes. Reforms by the Yugoslavian Government to allow more power to the local republics found expression in a revival of linguistic, religious, and ethnic disputes. On the Bulgarian side, the "Macedonian Question" has had ventings usually in connection with the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878). One would be surprised if on the 100th Anniversary of "San Stefano" familiar tensions and noises would not reemerge. However, there are no overt official disputes relating to the alignment of the Bulgaria–Yugoslavia boundary.

At present, and especially in recent years, the potentials for disputation have been kept

submerged. Moderation and cooperation have prevailed particularly on such economic matters as the establishment in August of joint electric power grid arrangements. But, after Tito, the crystal ball is smoky.

Location of the boundary pillars are shown in Sheets 1–29, 1:25,000 scale, of the International Boundary Commission, 1920–22. Other large-scale representations giving reliable details and locations of the boundary pillars may be found, if available, in Bulgarian or Yugoslavian official sources. A reasonably accurate representation of the boundary on a medium scale is found on Army Map Service 1:250,000-scale sheets of Series M-501. A small-scale depiction of the boundary is found on Army Map Service 1:1,000,000 scale, Series 1301.

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