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The Rise of the Concept of a Balkan Pact and the First Balkan Conference

Balkan Paktı Fikrinin Ortaya Çıkışı ve İlk Balkan Konferansı

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Abstract

One of the most important steps towards the foundation of the Balkan Pact was the First Balkan Conference, which took place on 5th October 1930 in the Academy of Grande Salle in Athens. This conference was a direct result of a proposal by former Greek Prime Minister, Alexandros Papanastassiou at the 27th International Peace Congress in Athens and proceeded with the approval of the International Peace Bureau. The First Balkan Conference showed the Balkan countries that they could work together and provide their own security by establishing a Balkan Pact. Two points, however, must be made in this regard. First, the international press played a key role in encouraging the conference and pushing forward its agenda. Second, despite being notorious for their wariness of foreign intervention, it appeared that it was extremely difficult to unite the Balkan states without any outside influences.

Key Words: *Balkans, Balkan Conference, Balkan Union, Balkan Pact, Locarno.*

Öz

Bir Balkan Paktı kurulmasının en önemli adımlardan biri, 5 Ekim 1930 tarihinde, Atina'daki Grande Salle Akademisi'nde gerçekleşen Birinci Balkan Konferansı'dır. Bu konferans, Eski Yunan Başbakanı Alexandros Papanastassiou'nun Atina'da düzenlenen 27. Uluslararası Barış Konferansı'na yaptığı teklifin, Uluslararası Barış Bürosu tarafından onaylanmasının bir sonucudur. Birinci Balkan Konferansı, Balkan devletlerine, birlikte çalışabileceklerini ve bir Balkan Paktı imzalayarak kendi güvenliklerini sağlayabileceklerini gösterdi. Birinci Balkan Konferansı'nda, iki önemli unsur konferansı başarı ile sonuçlandırmada belirleyici olmuştur: birinci olarak uluslararası basın konferansın başarı ile sonuçlanması için cesaretlendirici ve olumlu bir rol oynamıştır; ikinci olarak da Balkan Devletleri'nin dış etkilere karşı mesafeli yaklaşımlarına rağmen herhangi bir dış etken olmadan da Balkan devletlerini birleştirmenin oldukça zor olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Balkanlar, Balkan Konferansı, Balkan Birliği, Balkan Paktı, Lokarno*

Introduction

After the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the Balkan economies had collapsed, leading to extreme poverty throughout the Balkan region. In addition there were ethnic differences within the nation states and hostility toward foreign countries. It was a difficult period with dictatorships and painful birth pangs of new nations which hungered for more and more territory.¹ After the fall of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, new states arose, and the exact frontiers between these states could not be clearly demarcated. This led to insecurity on the part of minorities living along disputed borders and this aroused hostility between Balkan countries. Victorious Balkan countries gained territory from weaker ones. Then the states that had encountered territorial losses started to demand lands from their neighbouring countries using the excuse that some of their citizens were living in those neighbouring countries.²

In these circumstances of unrest, other surrounding countries pushed the Balkan nations to establish a union and to take control of the Balkans in order to keep their territories from outright war.³ Furthermore, the League of Nations' inability to form a collective security plan for the Balkans and the League's avoidance of 'trespassing' on Balkan matters, showed the Balkan states that they *had* to combine and provide their own security. Generally, the League of Nations took pains to avoid involvement in the Balkans with the one exception of ruling that Greece had to pay 45,000 pounds to Bulgaria in order to cover its losses in the border clashes in October 1925.⁴

The Rise of the Concept of a Balkan Pact

The first attempt at establishing close links between Balkan states came from Bulgaria on 4th February 1934. Alexandre Stamboulisky had visited Belgrade and Bucharest in order to close a deal on the Macedonian Question. In these visits, he offered to establish a commission to solve this question. Stamboulisky was thinking that he could organise these countries and facilitate a solution to this problem but his offer was rejected in Belgrade and Bucharest and his attempts proved futile.⁵

According to *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, dated 25th November 1922, the concept of a Balkan Pact was beginning but this next attempt proved abortive because it did not include Turkey, and Bulgaria did not accept the terms of the Pact. According to the same source, Bulgaria rejected the Greek offer to form Alexandroupolis as a free trading zone. Bulgarian Prime Minister, Stamboulisky, had a private audience with Turkish Prime Minister, Ismet Inonu, who promised Stamboulisky that they would give Bulgaria a corridor dropping down to the Aegean Sea if Turkey returned back to its borders of 1913. Stamboulisky, making a declaration about the Greek offers, declared that the concept of a free trading zone was worse

¹ Mehmet Seyfettin Erol and Abdurrahim F. Aydın, "İki Savaş Arası Dönemde Balkanlar (1919-1939)", **Balkanlar El Kitabı**, vol. 1, Ankara, 2006, p. 642.

² Halil Akman, **Paylaşılmalı Balkanlar**, İstanbul, 2006, p. 250.

³ **Republican Archive of the Turkish Republic (CA)**, no. 030.10/251.695.15, p. 11.

⁴ Mustafa Türkeş, "The Balkan Pact and Its Immediate Implications for the Balkan States 1930-34", **Middle Eastern Studies**, vol. 30, sayı. 1, London, 1994, p. 129.

⁵ Oral Sander, **Balkan Gelişmeleri ve Türkiye (1945-1965)**, Ankara, 1969, p. 7.

than “...a plane’s right-of-way...” and declared that Bulgaria would not be connected with Greece, Rumania and Yugoslavia in any Middle Eastern matters.⁶

Negotiations took place at the League of Nations in October 1925 to prevent border disputes between Greece and Bulgaria. The negotiations took a turn for the worst and several other countries, including Greece, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Turkey, were brought into the negotiations in order to avoid disaster. At the meeting, it was agreed that all parties would make efforts to establish a Balkan Pact, not only for the prevention of border disputes but also to eliminate future issues.⁷

The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Admiral Alexandros Hatzikyriakos, specified that the cost of a Greek invasion into Bulgarian territories was a trifling matter, and that Greece had no aggressive intentions. He declared that a League of Nations-controlled Balkan Pact between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania and Greece could be the utmost guarantee of peace in Balkans. Nonetheless, he expressed that Turkey could also be involved in the pact.⁸ Hatzikyriakos sent a letter to the Secretary General of the League of Nations, Eric Drummond, intimating that Greece wanted to be a party to the Balkan Security Pact.⁹ He met with British and French representatives and told them that he was ambivalent about signing the Balkan Pact, and he supported Neville Chamberlain’s opinion that the Balkan states could solve their disputes with arbitration.¹⁰

After Greece’s request to the League of Nations, the news about a possible Balkan Security Pact started to appear in newspapers. In a report entitled “Balkan Pact Project,” *The Times* reported that the Rumbold Commission had gone to Belgrade and would stay there for two days. The semi-official Belgrade newspaper, *Vreme*, reported that a Balkan Security Pact should only concern the Balkan states and that Greece was accused of consorting with foreigners and bringing the unwanted League of Nations into the matter. Furthermore, it indicated that a Balkan pact could be a solution to all the political and economic problems between the Balkan states, and that it could establish a legal and stable regime in the Balkans.¹¹

In the same newspaper it was reported that the Greek Prime Minister, General Theodoros Pangalos, had said that a conference would shortly take place in order to conclude a Balkan Pact which was so important to show to the whole World that peace could come into existence in the Balkans.¹² The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Loukas Kanakaris-Roufos, had gone to Rome and made his first contact with Salvatore Contarini, the Italian Secretary General of Foreign Affairs. In their talks, they had discussed their relations with Albania and the possibility of establishing a Balkan Pact. Both countries agreed to the existence of an independent Albania and had a further exchange of ideas on their future relations with that country. On the subject of a Balkan Pact, Rousfos stated that Greece would join the Pact only

⁶ Henry Wales, “Bulgar-Greek Demands Wreck Balkan Entente”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Nov. 1922, p. 2.

⁷ “Greeks Shell Bulgar Towns”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Oct. 1925, p. 1.

⁸ Larry Rue, “Greek Leader Urges Balkan Security Pact”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 Nov. 1925, p. 26.

⁹ “Greek Support for Balkan Pact”, *The Times*, 05 Nov. 1925, p. 13.

¹⁰ “Greece and Balkan Arbitration”, *The Times*, 06 Nov. 1925, p. 13.

¹¹ “Balkan Pact Project”, *The Times*, 28 Nov 1925, p. 11.

¹² “The New Regime in Greece- Gen. Pangalos’s Policy”, *The Times*, 11 Jan. 1926, p. 13.

if Yugoslavia gave up her demands on Thessaloniki and Contarini fell in with his views. In the afternoon, the Greek Minister was admitted to the presence of the King, and later he met with Mussolini. After the negotiations, the Italian press published further articles stating that the Balkan Pact would include Greece, Yugoslavia and Italy and would try to stop German expansionism.¹³

In *The Times* dated 12th March 1926, it was stated that the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs had gone to Rome and met Mussolini and in the meeting both countries were seen to be in unison on their policies regarding the Balkans. When French, Italian, Czechoslovakian, Yugoslavian, Rumanian and Austrian representatives assembled in order to evaluate the Locarno Pact between Central and Southern European states, they categorically stated the importance of a Balkan Pact.¹⁴

Yugoslavia and Poland agreed on a text of Friendship and Arbitration in accordance with the regulations of the League of Nations on the 19th August 1926. Yugoslavia and Poland had been planning to sign an agreement for a long time, but they had to postpone because of Russian influence. *Samouprava* reported that this agreement was an additional guarantee to frontiers that had already been demarcated by the Neuilly Agreement. This agreement was a springboard for the Balkan Security Pact. After the agreement was signed, *Vreme* stated that a Locarno spirit also existed in all the Balkan countries, and that these countries could also sign an agreement in accordance with their common interests.¹⁵

In July 1923, a convention between representatives of the Balkan countries was organised by the Yugoslavian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Momcilo Nincic, in cooperation with Rumania, Turkey and Greece but it did not really start until a few years later. Still, the very act of having an official representative of Turkey, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rustu, going to Belgrade, suggests that Yugoslavia agreed on the initialisation of the Balkan Pact.¹⁶ Turkey began to support a Balkan-Locarno concept which could provide the Balkans with long-term security. This concept was first proposed to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion G. Duca, by the Turkish Ambassador in Belgrade, Huseyin Ragip, in 1926. However, this attempt was not successful by reason of the poor relations between Yugoslavia and Greece.¹⁷

In the Turkish newspaper, *Ikdam*, on the 21st December 1926, it was announced that a Locarno-type process within the Balkans could be successful if it was initiated under the leadership of Rumania and thus peace and tranquility could begin in the Balkans. Yugoslavia became apprehensive of Italy's intentions because of the Italian 'sham' battles and declared that Balkan-Locarno concept might be a defensive-alliance to provide security and hold Balkan territories.¹⁸

¹³ "Greek Ministers in Rome- Italy and a Balkan Pact", *The Times*, 05 Mar. 1926, p. 13.

¹⁴ "Clouds Over Europe", *The Times*, 12 Mar. 1926, p. 15.

¹⁵ "Balkan Peace Moves- Yugoslav Treaty with Poland", *The Times*, 20 Aug. 1926, p. 10.

¹⁶ Dan Berindei, "Nicolae Titulescu Et La Turquie d'Atatürk", *International Conference on Atatürk and Modern Turkey on 22–23 October 1998*, Ankara, 1999, p. 424.

¹⁷ Ismail Soysal, "Balkan Paktı (1934–1941)", *Yusuf Hikmet Bayur'a Armağan*, Ankara, 1985, p. 142.

¹⁸ Eliza Campus, *The Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance*, Bucharest, 1978, p. 27.

According to *The Times* dated 10th February 1927, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andreas Michalakopoulos, would negotiate Balkan matters with foreign representatives of the Balkan countries at a meeting of the League of Nations to be held in Geneva. The paper also reported that the Albanian representative in Athens had visited Michalakopoulos and had given him a territorial guarantee agreement similar to the Italian-Albanian Agreement. Michalakopoulos had stated that he would handle it with strict gravity. According to Greece's Belgrade representative, Albania had previously offered this proposal to the Yugoslavian government.¹⁹

In March 1927, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Rustu officially started Balkan Pact negotiations. According to the Rumanian Ambassador in Ankara, Rustu was a confidential supporter of a Balkan Pact between Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey. He was adamant upon two points: the pact must not be under the effect of any one great power and secondly, it must not be hostile towards any power.²⁰

In March 1928, at what was the beginning of the Balkan Pact process, the Greek and Rumanian foreign ministers, Michalakopoulos and Nicolae Titulescu, agreed on a Nonaggression and Arbitration agreement for 10 years which was ratified by the Security Council of the League of Nations.²¹

Some specific attempts such as the Locarno Agreement, the Kellogg Pact, the Litvinov Protocol, the foundation of Little Pact and especially the 1929 World Economic Crisis galvanised Turkey and Greece into action to develop the foundations of a Balkan Pact. Besides, 'revisionist' and 'anti-revisionist' groupings of states in the region were making the foundation of a Balkan Pact increasingly necessary.²² Finally, at the time of the International Peace Congress held in Athens between the 6th and 10th October 1929, the former Greek Prime Minister, Alexandros Papanastassiou, offered to establish a committee composed of representatives from all Balkan states. All the delegates at the Congress were of one mind on strengthening peace and the necessity of holding a further conference in order to improve neighbourly relations. The Congress agreed to Papanastassiou's offer on 9th October 1929 with pleasure.²³

On 12th May 1930, the International Peace Bureau invited the foreign ministers of six Balkan countries to the conference resulting from Papanastassiou's offer. However, to avoid the impression that their attendance was being coerced, the foreign ministers rejected the notion of participating in the conference themselves and opted to send nonofficial

¹⁹ "Balkan Peace Pacts- Albanian Proposals in Athens and Belgrade", *The Times*, 19 Feb. 1927, p. 11.

²⁰ Campus, *The Little Entente*, p. 27.

²¹ "For Balkan Peace- Greco-Rumanian Peace Signed", *The Times*, 23 Mar. 1928, p. 13.

²² In this context, 'revisionist' refers to those states that advocated geographical redistribution of territory as a condition of diplomatic adjustments in the Balkans while 'anti-revisionist' states advocated maintaining the geopolitical status quo. Osman Akandere, "20-26 Ekim 1931 Tarihlerinde İstanbul'da Toplanan İkinci Balkan Konferansı ve Sonuçları", *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 14 (2003), p. 251; *Atatürk'ün Milli Dış Politikası*, Ankara, 1992, vol. 2, p. 252-253.

²³ Gheorghe Sbarna, "Les Conférences des Balkans - une nouvelle manière de penser et d'agir en matière de politique, pour une fédération régionale européenne (1930-1931)", *Vlahian Journal of Historical Studies*, vol. 3-4 (2005), p. 38-39; *CA*, no. 030.10/226.523.13, p. 2.

representatives.²⁴ Thus did the Balkan conference period and the first steps on the way to the Balkan Pact begin. The key phrase of the people who wanted peace became “Balkans for the Balkanizes.”²⁵

The Organisation Process of the First Balkan Conference

At the International Peace Congress it was agreed that a committee would be founded in order to put the idea of a Balkan Conference into practice. The Balkans had experienced three disastrous wars in an eighteen-year period. Both the victorious states and the defeated ones had sustained great damage. By reason of this damage and in order not to be exposed to the threats of German expansionism, the Balkan states accepted the need to participate in this committee.²⁶

The committee was assigned by the International Peace Bureau to set a draft programme of the first conference in January 1930. It was sent to the ministers of foreign affairs of six Balkan countries (Albania, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Rumania). As noted above, the governments of these countries had decided that they would send nonofficial representatives to the conference, but declared that they would be obligated to comply with decisions of the conference.²⁷

At the meeting of the International Peace Bureau in Athens, it was agreed that the first conference would be held on 5th October 1930 in Athens with the participation of the six Balkan countries.²⁸ Even before the conference, a host of decisions had already been made concerning the accordance and cooperation of the Balkan states. Political representatives of municipalities; important commerce, industry and agriculture organizations; university professors and other academics; representatives of the press; women’s organizations and peace associations had been invited to the conference. Representatives from the League of Nations, the International Employees Bureau, the Union of Parliaments, the International Association of Commerce and the International Peace Bureau were also invited.²⁹

After the World Economic Crisis of 1929, Turkey and Greece were galvanised into action to ease their relationships and signed a convention in June 1929 in Ankara. After this convention, they were held up as an example for all Balkan countries to encourage them to solve their problems with other Balkan countries before the conference convened.³⁰

The organisational committee of the conference had to face up to many problems. Bulgaria wanted the conference to negotiate the status of her citizens in Greece and

²⁴ Joseph W. Winn, “Nicholas Murray Butler, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Search for Reconciliation In Europe, 1919– 1933”, **Peace & Change**, vol. 31, no. 4 (2006), p. 575.

²⁵ Lubenoff, “Die völkerrechtliche Lage auf dem Balkan (Der Balkanpakt- Pacte d'Entente balkanique)”, **Völkerrecht, Berichte und Urkunden**, vol. 4 (1934), p. 320.

²⁶ “Balkans Speed Plans To Avoid Wars In Future”, **Chicago Daily Tribune**, 20 Oct. 1930, p. 20.

²⁷ Sbarna, “Les Conférences des Balkans”, p. 39.

²⁸ Ali Sarıkoyuncu, “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Donemi’nde Turk- Bulgar Siyasi İlişkileri (1920– 1938)”, **XX. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Türk-Bulgar Askeri ve Siyasi İlişkileri**, Ankara, 2005, p. 152.

²⁹ Sbarna, “Les Conférences des Balkans”, p. 39-40.

³⁰ Dilek Barlas, “Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye’nin Balkan Politikası”, **Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası**, Ankara, 2000, p. 278.

Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia declared that if the conference negotiated this issue, she would not send any representatives. Another problem was whether Turkey should be invited to the conference.³¹ Eventually, Greece invited Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania and Albania to the conference on 14th June 1930 by letter. Ismet Pasha gave an affirmative reply to the invitation and congratulated Greece on their organisation and declared that Turkey would be among the conference participants.³²

The organisational committee had met in September 1930 in Thessaloniki and had made arrangements for the conference to be held in Athens in the same year. A conference programme was prepared to include a wide variety of proposals. The wheat harvesting problem between Rumania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and the tobacco problem between Turkey and Greece were in the programme. The most sensitive proposal was the founding of a special commission to prepare a draft Balkan Pact. This commission had its first meeting in October 1930 in Thessaloniki and prepared a draft Balkan Pact which was proposed and approved in the second conference in Istanbul.³³

The Aim of the Conference

The aim of the First Balkan Conference was to provide continuous peace in the Balkans. The general programme of the conference was prepared to provide solutions for any problems and for setting up neutral partnerships. It was expected that the conference would allow the Balkan states to become closer to each other and to form a union.³⁴ Another aim of the conference was to secure self-sufficiency for the Balkans to remedy the economic crisis. It was not expected that the conference should make political decisions but should give prominence to the concept of a Balkan Union. The Balkans had been fragmented since the Balkan Wars and could not break free from the legacy of these wars. There were especially doubts between the Serbians and Greeks and the conference aimed to abrogate these differences.³⁵

It was important to assemble a conference in the Balkans to form a union because in this region people from different cultures had a centuries-long tradition of having religious differences, national disputes and other hostile feelings. A union in the Balkans could be a good example to the rest of the World. However, at the first conference, instead of solving the larger problems between the Balkan states, it was decided to negotiate on second rate issues.³⁶

Before the conference met, a Macedonian member of the Bulgarian committee called for negotiation of the Minority Question but the Yugoslavian committee had declared that they

³¹ “Balkans Speed Plans To Avoid Wars In Future”, **Chicago Daily Tribune**, 20 Oct. 1930, p. 20.

³² Bünyamin Akgün, **Türk Basınında Türkiye ve Balkan Devletleri İlişkileri (1923-1945)**, University of Dumlupınar Master Thesis, Kütahya, 2007, p. 208.

³³ M. A. Caloyanni, “The Balkan Union, the Balkan Conferences, and the Balkan Pact”, **Transactions of the Grotius Society**, vol. 18 (1932), p. 103.

³⁴ Sbarna, “Les Conférences des Balkans”, p. 39.

³⁵ Bogdan Raditsa, “Venizelos and the Struggle around the Balkan Pact”, **Balkan Studies**, vol. 6, no. 1 (1965), p. 125.

³⁶ Cüneyt Göreci, **Türk Basınında “İkinci Balkan Antantı” (1952–1955)**, University of Marmara Master Thesis, Istanbul, 2004, p. 16.

would not attend the conference if this call was taken on board. In these circumstances, the conference itself came into doubt and the Bulgarian Government exchanged the Macedonian member for another member who wished to follow a constructive policy and the problem frustrating the conference was solved.³⁷

The Opening of the Conference

First Balkan Conference was opened under the chairmanship of former Greek Prime Minister Papanastassiou in Athens at the Plenary Assembly Lounge of the Greek Parliament. Present were the Albanian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Turkish, Greek and Yugoslavian committees.³⁸ Turkey and Greece seemed to be the leaders in terms of the quality of their delegates because the other Balkan states chose to be represented by delegates who were low-level politicians. Except for a few brilliant experts, the Yugoslavian committee was the weakest among them. There was no expert on the committee who could negotiate on politics and Yugoslavian cultural feelings. The whole committee had been assigned by the Yugoslavian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was personally against the Balkan Union movement.³⁹

The conference was comprised of 10 Albanian, 11 Bulgarian, 30 Greek, 30 Rumanian, 10 Turkish and 7 Yugoslavian representatives. They were all accompanied by their missions in Athens.⁴⁰ The Turkish delegate was under the leadership of the Secondary Head of the Turkish National Assembly, Hasan Hüsnü plus Yakup Kadri, Rusen Esref, Reshit Saffet and Zeki Mesut. On 22nd September 1930, the Turkish emissary, Vasfi Rashit, was assigned to participate in the conference.⁴¹ The Turkish delegate went to Athens on 2nd October 1930.⁴² Also, to comply with a demand of the International Peace Bureau, Mustapha Kemal assigned the Head of the Law Faculty of Istanbul University, Tahir (Taner), to the delegation on 1st October 1930.⁴³

The conference began with the inaugural speech of Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. In his speech, Venizelos gave utterance to his pleasure about the uniting of the Balkan states with the aim of becoming closer. He stated that there were some difficulties in the way of Balkan unification but with cordial cooperation, these problems could be surmounted and he also highlighted that the aim of Balkan unification would be worth the trouble.⁴⁴

³⁷ CA, no. 030.10/226.523.13, p. 2.

³⁸ Akandere, "20-26 Ekim 1931 Tarihlerinde...", p. 254.

³⁹ Raditsa, "Venizelos and the Struggle around the Balkan Pact", p. 125.

⁴⁰ "The Balkan Conference in Athens", **The Times**, 06 Oct. 1930, p. 13.

⁴¹ CA, no. 030.18/01.02.14.69.20, p. 1.

⁴² Akgun, **Türk Basınında Türkiye**, p. 208.

⁴³ CA, no. 030.18/14.62.12, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Esra Sarıkoyuncu Değerli, "Atatürk Dönemi Türk-Yunan Siyasi İlişkileri", **Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi**, no. 15 (2006), p. 251.

The Conference Agenda

The agenda of the First Balkan Conference aimed to negotiate on all the general principles of Balkan unification, the political criteria of all the Balkan communities, the reform of history teaching, methods of student/teacher exchanges, every single detail on economic approximation and the future possibilities of accordance and political cooperation.⁴⁵ The most important subject on the agenda was the preparation of a Balkan Locarno. The Minority Question, which had been suggested by Bulgaria, was another important issue on the agenda.⁴⁶

The Head-of-Conference Assembly consisted of a president, five vice-presidents and six secretaries. The Chairman allowed experts from all the countries to participate in plenary meetings. Six sub-commissions negotiated the agenda of the conference. These commissions were the harmonisation committee, the political approximation board, the intellectual committee, the economy committee, the construction board and the social policy committee.

It was acknowledged that the only way to move forward with negotiations on the most important subjects on the conference agenda was in maintaining a spirit of peace and harmony, which would arise after overcoming conflict and ending disagreement. Therefore, a tolerant ambience had to prevail among the Balkan states. The conference did concede to the demands of the Bulgarian and Albanian delegates to negotiate the Minority Question.⁴⁷ Tension occurred between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria because of Bulgaria bringing up the Minority Question so frequently. This tension grew out of the claims of Bulgaria that Yugoslavia's Macedonian populace was Bulgarian while Yugoslavia claimed that all populations within her borders were previously Serbian and thereafter Yugoslavian.⁴⁸ In addition, Yugoslavia stated that that the Balkans should be owned by Balkanizes and that they should 'freeze out' other great powers and criticised Albania because of the widespread Italian influences in that country. Therefore, Albania supported Bulgaria against Yugoslavia in the negotiation of the Minority Question. Rumania, Turkey and Greece were supporting the current *status quo* but were generally positive towards the conference. With this positive attitude, Greece offered Bulgaria an outlet to the Aegean Sea from Western Thrace and even to give her a free trade zone in Thessaloniki Harbour if Bulgaria was not able to construct a harbor.⁴⁹

Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, in his statement to Bulgarian journalists who were in Athens to attend to the conference, said that the Greek Government would act to decrease the difficulties faced by the Bulgarian minority in Greek Macedonia by progressive stages and, if demanded, would give them a right to set up their own schools. Furthermore, he stated that they would give an outlet to Bulgaria if she demanded, and that they could set up a free trade zone like the Yugoslavian free zone. This Venizelos's statement effectively restarted Bulgarian-Greek negotiations, but Bulgarian-Yugoslavian antipathy continued.⁵⁰

Despite all the tensions, the slogan of the conference "Balkans for Balkanizes" continued to set the tone. Leon Makkas from the Greek Parliament proposed that an arbitration

⁴⁵ Sbarna, "Les Conférences des Balkans", p. 40.

⁴⁶ "The Balkan Conference", **The Times**, 07 Oct. 1930, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Sbarna, "Les Conférences des Balkans", p. 40-42.

⁴⁸ Esra Sarıkoyuncu Değerli, "Balkan Pact and Turkey", **Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi (The Journal of International Social Research)**, vol. 2, no. 6 (2009), p. 141.

⁴⁹ Değerli, "Atatürk Dönemi Türk-Yunan Siyasi İlişkileri", p. 251.

⁵⁰ "Greco-Bulgarian Relations- M. Venizelos's Offer", **The Times**, 13 Oct. 1930, p. 11.

foundation should be formed and be mandatory for all Balkan states. Arbitration issues would be negotiated in a centre established by these states and the foreign ministers of these states would meet three times a year. War would be detached from national policies and sanctions would be applied to aggressive countries as determined by the Central Balkan Office.⁵¹

Notable Decisions Taken at the Conference

The most important result of the conference was the decision for further mutual negotiation on any problems between Balkan states without the intervention of any great power.⁵² It was decided to solve conflicts peacefully, to prepare a Balkan Pact consisting of mutual aid against any attack and to found a permanent association which would provide an agreement between the Balkan states in terms of economy, culture, politics and social traditions.⁵³ With great efforts from Turkey and Greece, the Balkan states' ministers of foreign affairs decided to meet annually to negotiate Balkan matters.⁵⁴

A committee under the joint-chairmanship of Head of the Rumanian Delegation, Stefan Cicio Pop, and the Dean of the Thessaloniki Faculty of Law, Jean Spiropoulos, met to prepare a draft Balkan Pact which would advocate harmony and would be hostile to war.⁵⁵

All the participants agreed on trading decisions and were able to agree with each other in lieu of the industrialised states.⁵⁶ Furthermore, participant countries successfully negotiated making student exchanges, the establishment of a Balkan Institute and the foundation of a Balkan Press Service.⁵⁷ After the conference, in December 1930, the Association of Balkan journalists was founded.⁵⁸ It was decided that the next conference would be held in Istanbul in 1931.⁵⁹

The Importance of the Conference

The first Balkan conference was a huge success. After this conference it was seen that all the Balkan states could meet around a table, and moreover, they could be assured about forming a Balkan union.⁶⁰ This conference was a symbol of how the Balkan states sought a novel method of agreement. It also demonstrated to the Balkan states the necessity of good communication in order to attain true Balkan cooperation.⁶¹

The real success of the conference was the conference's enthusiastic reception by the Balkan people. Subsequent conferences removed all lingering doubts about the possibility of

⁵¹ "Balkans Speed Plans To Avoid Wars In Future", **Chicago Daily Tribune**, 20 Oct. 1930, p. 20.

⁵² Akandere, "20-26 Ekim 1931 Tarihlerinde...", p. 254.

⁵³ Hikmet Öksüz, "Atatürk Döneminde Balkan Politikası", **Türkler**, vol. 16 (2002), p. 631.

⁵⁴ Değerli, "Balkan Pact and Turkey", p. 141.

⁵⁵ Türkeş, "The Balkan Pact...", p. 131.

⁵⁶ Barlas, "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye'nin Balkan Politikası", p. 278.

⁵⁷ Değerli, "Atatürk Dönemi Türk-Yunan Siyasi İlişkileri", p. 252.

⁵⁸ Sbarna, "Les Conférences des Balkans", p. 48.

⁵⁹ Akandere, "20-26 Ekim 1931 Tarihlerinde...", p. 254.

⁶⁰ CA, no. 030.10/226.523.13, p. 5.

⁶¹ Campus, **The Little Entente**, p. 38.

Balkan cooperation and there was a real ‘feel-good factor’ regarding the Balkan Pact.⁶² Furthermore, by avoiding the participation of great powers in the conference, it was much easier to secure decisions from the Balkan states that were normally resentful of any foreign intervention while solving their mutual problems.⁶³

One of the most striking characteristics of the conference was the wealth of languages spoken. Only the Yugoslavians and Bulgarians could understand each other, all the other delegates were using French and German. Actually, this was a great obstacle for understanding in that there was not a common language,⁶⁴ negotiations and analysis had to be made in French.⁶⁵ The ‘feel-good factor’ came into being after the conference. The English Minister of Foreign Affairs, Arthur Henderson, made an offer to support Greece and Bulgaria in finding a solution to existing problems. His proposal consisted of the mutual acceptance of the need for agreement, and that the primary parties should first identify their most important problems and negotiate on these. This proposal and the declaration of Greek Prime Minister Venizelos to Bulgarian journalists initiated successful negotiations between Greece and Bulgaria to solve their problems.⁶⁶

Conclusion

From the beginning of the 1920s, Balkan cooperation and the concept of a Balkan Security Pact were launched by the Balkan states. Due to existing problems and a lack of trust between the Balkan states, these concepts were originally taken with a grain of salt. Revisionist states seemed the largest threats to this notion. In this context, the process of the Balkan Pact, which was signed on 9th February 1934 in Athens, by Greece, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Turkey at the First Balkan Conference assumes a great importance. The Balkan states saw that they could solve their mutual problems with communication and, if they provided optimum conditions, a Balkan Union could be founded. On the other hand, the future attitudes of the Balkan states about allegiances in the Balkan Union were formed in this conference. In a cordial atmosphere, Bulgaria and Albania brought up the Minority Question, and this showed that these two states fell outside the range of a potential Balkan Pact.

After Balkan cooperation and widespread support for a Balkan Security Pact were aroused, the Balkan Union became strongly anti-revisionist. The reason for this was to obstruct aggressive attitudes of the revisionist Balkan states and to create an alliance system against Italian expansionism. At the very beginning of the Balkan Pact, Turkey was not included. Having seen that a Balkan Union was impossible without Turkey, the Balkan Pact concept was duly expanded, and Turkey became involved. Wishing to secure her territories, Turkey took this concept truly to heart and helped to improve it.

The First Balkan conference and the initial Balkan Pact showed the Balkan states that it was possible to fully realise Balkan union. In spite of its success, a *de facto* Balkan Pact draft

⁶² Raditsa, “Venizelos and the Struggle around the Balkan Pact”, p. 126.

⁶³ Değerli, “Balkan Pact and Turkey”, p. 141.

⁶⁴ Raditsa, “Venizelos and the Struggle around the Balkan Pact”, p. 126.

⁶⁵ Sbarra, “Les Conférences des Balkans”, p. 40.

⁶⁶ “Greco-Bulgarian Relations- Mr. Henderson’s Proposal”, **The Times**, 09 Feb. 1931, p. 11.

could not be prepared at the conference. Nonetheless, a commission was assigned to prepare a draft Balkan Pact and this commission presented the draft to the second conference.

From the beginning, the Balkan Pact concept was closely followed by the Press. The Press especially supported the decision to convene a conference. In addition, the process of the Balkan Pact was of great interest to the larger, surrounding military powers such as Germany. Even though the Balkan States are notorious for their wariness of foreign intervention, it has been shown that it would not have been possible to unite the Balkan states without any outside influences.

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