

Preface

The idea for the current volume emerged in a working group on migration of the Via Egnatia Foundation (www.viaegnatiafoundation.eu).¹ This working group was established during a conference the Foundation held in Bitola in February 2009. One of the purposes of the Foundation is to promote communication and understanding between the countries belonging to the ‘catchment area’ of the Via Egnatia—that is, Albania, the (former Yugoslav) Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. In this book the term ‘Southern Balkans’ refers to these five countries.

In the early nineteenth century the Southern Balkans was still part of the Ottoman Empire. This started to change when the small Greek state was founded in 1830. Almost 50 years later the region saw the birth of another new nation state—Bulgaria (1878). In the period up to the Balkan Wars both states gained new territory, but the Ottomans still controlled a broad corridor from the Albanian coast on the west to Istanbul in the east (Fig. 1). This corridor or belt—consisting mainly of Albania, Macedonia and Thrace—might be called the Via Egnatia region since the Via Egnatia runs straight through it from Dürres in the west to Istanbul in the east. The countries of the Via Egnatia region share a memory of a fairly recent Ottoman past involving at least part of their national territories. It can be considered a distinctive region especially in terms of the population movements during and following the Balkan Wars (1912–1913).

¹ For the results of the conference see Via Egnatia Foundation (ed.) (2010), *Via Egnatia Revisited: Common Past, Common Future*. Skopje: Kolektiv.



Fig. 1 The Ottoman Empire in the Balkans before the First Balkan War (1912)

As social scientists and others have remarked, the history of the region—both the narrower Via Egnatia region and the Southern Balkans as a whole—has resulted in conflicting interpretations of the past and the present which are often the product of narrow national(ist) frameworks. The linguistic diversity of the region also makes it difficult to widen one's horizons and take other national perspectives into account. Researchers from outside the region confront these problems as well. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, both communication and mutual understanding have slowly started to improve. The increasing internationalization of the social sciences and the associated increase in the use of English in scientific publications in past decades has also contributed to these positive developments.

This book contains three maps. The first two black-and-white maps were made by Vasilis Soliopoulos who did this with dedication and without remuneration. We thank him for his excellent contribution to this book. The third map is in colour and is placed at the end of the book. We have included this well-known map by Carl Sax to give the reader a strong impression of the ethnic complexity of the Southern Balkans—a complexity with tremendous consequences for the character and volume of intra-regional migration.

Migration in the Southern Balkans

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