

# Eastern Question

The Eastern Question entered a new and startling phase from 1908-1914.  
Discuss.

## Answer

The eastern question refers to the political and territorial debate that emerged in the late 19th century and ~~early~~ <sup>continued</sup> till 20<sup>th</sup> century. It revolved around the fate of Balkans and disintegrations of the Ottoman empire. All the great European power approached the issue with the lense of self-interest and wanted to secure maximum territorial gains. The wishes of the people of Balkans were completely disregarded and often ignored in this content. The period of 1908-1914 is known as transformative phase of eastern question. During this time, the events & such



as Young Turk revolution, Bulgarian independence, Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria, the Balkan wars, WWI completely changed the territorial and political landscape of Balkans region.

## 2- Eastern Question - An Overview:

Historian Erich J Zürcher has described Eastern Question as:

“The Question of how to ~~can~~ satisfy the competing Balkan nationalism and the imperialist ambitions of great powers without destroying the Ottoman Empire, or if this destruction is inevitable (about which majority of statesmen are convinced), to dismember it without upsetting the balance of power and causing a general war.”

(By Erich J Zürcher)



### 3- The Transformative Phase of Eastern Question (1908-1914)

From 1908 - 1914, following key events occurred that significantly transformed the Eastern Question.

#### a. Young Turk Revolution:

Young Turks were a coalition of several reformist groups that began revolution against the authoritarian government of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The Young Turks were from the progressive societies, who were not only politicians but also the scientist, artists, students, dissatisfied soldiers and intellectuals. The revolution was based on pan-ottoman identity. The revolutionaries forced Abdul Hamid II to restore the constitutional government and implement the political and administrative reforms to modernize the empire. While in power, Young Turks



promoted industrialization, modernization of education systems, provided education for the women, improved town planning, communication system and secularized the legal system. These administrative reforms led to the centralization of power and face significant challenges such as nationalist movement in various regions such as Balkans, Arab territories, sought greater autonomy or independence. Young Turks also made a mistake for allying with Germany which led Turks to break neutrality and enter world war I (1914-1918) on the side of Central Powers.

## • Belgian Independence:

The Young Turk Revolution significantly weakened the Ottoman government and fueled the nationalist aspirants and territorial disputes among other



ethnicities specially in the Balkans. It galvanized the long term <sup>Bulgarian</sup> desire of independence which were under the Ottoman control since the fourteenth century. Already the treaty of San Stefano, which ended the Russo-Turks War 1877-1878, which established a large Bulgarian state under nominal Ottoman suzerainty. However, the increased tension in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of 20th century which led Bulgaria to declare its complete independence from Ottomans on October 5, 1908. This also inspired the other Balkan nations such as Serbia and Greece, which pursue to in their national movements to and seek independence from Ottoman rule that contributed to increase more complexities in resolving Eastern Question.



## c- Austrian Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Under the treaty of Berlin signed in 1878, Austria-Hungary was allowed to oversee and govern the region of Bosnia. The international division b/w Ottoman empire allowed Austria-Hungary to annex Bosnia and its territory. Serbia, Ottoman empire and Russia condemned this annexation. The annexation heightened the existing tension in the Balkans and showed the inability of Ottoman Empire to resist the territorial encroachment of European power in its area.

## d Formation of Balkan League

Balkan League was formed in 1912, with the support of Russia. It was a military coalition between Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria aimed



to decrease the influence of  
Ottoman Empire in the  
Balkan region, asserting their  
independence and securing maximum  
territorial shares at the  
expense of Ottoman Empire.

The League was able to  
gather a force of 750,000  
soldiers. In the coming  
months, the League was openly  
declared the war against  
the Ottoman Empire which  
came to be known as  
First Balkan War.

### e- Balkan Wars:

The Balkan war refers to a  
series of conflicts ~~between~~ that took  
place in the Balkan region from 1912 to  
1913 between the members of Balkan  
League and the Ottoman Empire. All  
these countries were part of

Ottoman Empire. ~~At~~ At the beginning  
of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman  
Empire was weak (regarded as  
the sick man of Europe), therefore  
Balkan states  
Bulgaria tried to acquire



maximum lands from it. Serbia wanted to fill power vacume left by Ottoman Empire to create Great Serbia with Russian Support. The first Balkan war was ended with the victory of Balkan League and they successfully acquired most of the remaining territory of Turks in Europe. German and Britain governments arranged a peace talk in London to distribute territories among winning states.

The second Balkan war was fought by Bulgaria against Serbia, Greece, Romania and Turkey. Bulgaria was dissatisfied with its territorial gains from the peace settlements and it blamed Serbia for that. Bulgaria hoped for Macedonia, but most of it has been given to Serbia. Bulgaria, therefore, attacked but then plan misfired, when Greece, Romania and Turkey rallied to support Serbia. The Bulgarians



were defeated and by the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) they fortified their most of gains from the first war.

## f- The Outbreak of World War I

On June 1914, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo, which was under the control of Serbia at that time. Because the assassin was a Serbian, Austria gave an ultimatum to Serbia to end all anti-Austrian activities.

Serbia invited Austria to settle dispute through an international conference which the latter rejected. Austria declared war against Serbia on July 28, 1914, which set off a chain reaction within the alliance system. As a result, nearly all nations of Europe were soon drawn into war which can be known as



## World War II.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Eastern Question referred to as the political and territorial debate over the control of Balkan region following the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. The weakening of the Ottoman empire led different nations in Balkans to assert independence. In this regard, they were given support by the enemies of Ottomans such as Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From 1908 - 1914, the Eastern question entered a startling phase as events such as Young Turks revolution, Bulgarian Independence, Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria, Balkan League, Balkan wars and the World War I completely altered the political and territorial map of Balkans.