

# The Balkan Countries

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The history of the Balkan countries is one of conquest and conflict.
2. The cultures of the Balkan countries are shaped by the many ethnic groups who live there.
3. Civil War and weak economies are major challenges to the region today.

### The Big Idea

Life in the Balkans reflects the region's troubled past and its varied ethnic makeup.

### Key Terms

ethnic cleansing, p. 492

### TAKING NOTES

Draw a chart like the one below. As you read, take notes about the histories, cultures, and current issues of the Balkan countries.

History		
Culture		
Issues		

## If YOU lived there...

As part of your summer vacation, you are hiking across the Balkan Peninsula. As you hike through villages in the rugged mountains, you are amazed at the different churches you see. There are small Roman Catholic churches, huge Orthodox churches with onion-shaped domes, and Muslim mosques with tall minarets.

### Why are there so many types of churches here?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** The Balkan countries are possibly the most diverse area in Europe. In addition to practicing many religions, the people there speak many languages and have different customs. At times, the area's diversity has led to serious problems.

## History

Like the rest of Eastern Europe, the Balkan Peninsula has been conquered and ruled by many different groups. The presence of these many groups continues to shape life in the area today.

### Early History

By the 600s BC the ancient Greeks had founded colonies on the northern Black Sea coast. The area they settled is now part of Bulgaria and Romania. Later, the Romans conquered most of the area from the Adriatic Sea to the Danube River.

When the Roman Empire divided into west and east in the late AD 300s, the Balkan Peninsula became part of the Eastern, or Byzantine, Empire. Under Byzantine rule, many people of the Balkans became Orthodox Christians. More than 1,000 years later, Muslim Ottoman Turks conquered the Byzantine Empire. Under the Ottomans, many people became Muslims.

The Ottomans ruled the Balkan Peninsula until the 1800s. At that time, the people of the region rose up and drove the Ottomans out. They then created their own kingdoms.

## World War I and After

Trouble between the Balkan kingdoms and their neighbors led to World War I. In the late 1800s the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which lay north of the Balkans, took over part of the peninsula. In protest, a man from Serbia shot the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, sparking the war.

After World War I, the Balkans changed dramatically. Europe's leaders divided the peninsula into new countries. Among these new countries was Yugoslavia, which combined many formerly independent countries under one government.

The nation of Yugoslavia lasted until the 1990s. The country eventually broke up, however, because of conflict between ethnic and religious groups.

**READING CHECK** Summarizing How did World War I affect the Balkan Peninsula?

## Culture

Culturally, the Balkans are the most diverse area of Europe. This diversity is reflected in the large number of religions practiced and languages spoken there.

## Religion

Most of the people of the Balkans, like most Europeans, are Christian. However, three types of Christianity are practiced in the area. Most Balkan Christians belong to the Orthodox Church. In the western part of the peninsula, there are many Roman Catholics. In addition, many countries also have large Protestant communities.

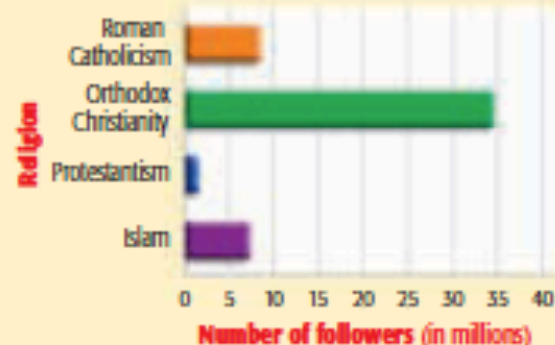
Christianity is not the only religion in the Balkans. Because of the Ottomans' long rule, Islam is also common. In fact, Albania is the only country in Europe in which most people are Muslims.

## Religion in the Balkans

Buildings from many religions can be found around the Balkans. This Orthodox church is in Bulgaria.



### Major Religions in the Balkans



**Analyzing Graphs** What is the largest religion in the Balkans?

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## Language

People in the Balkans speak languages from three major groups. Most languages in the region belong to the Slavic family and are related to Russian. In Romania, though, people speak a language that developed from Latin. It is more closely related to French, Italian, and Spanish than to Slavic languages. In addition, some people in Romania speak Germanic languages.

Some languages of the Balkans are not related to these groups. For example, Albanian is unlike any other language in the world. In addition, a group called the Roma have a language of their own.

**READING CHECK** Drawing Conclusions Why is Balkan culture so diverse?

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

implications  
consequences

## The Balkans Today

The countries of the Balkan Peninsula, like most of Eastern Europe, were once run by Communist governments. Weak economic planning has left most of them poor and struggling to improve their economies. This area is still the poorest in Europe today.

Relations among religious and ethnic groups have had serious **implications** for the Balkans. When Yugoslavia broke apart, violence broke out among groups in some of the newly formed countries. Members of the largest religious or ethnic group in each country tried to get rid of all other groups who lived there. They threatened those who refused to leave with punishments or death. This kind of effort to remove all members of a group from a country or region is called **ethnic cleansing**.

The violence in the former Yugoslavia was so terrible that other countries stepped in to put an end to it. In 1995 countries around the world sent troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina to help bring an end to the fighting. When the fighting between groups was finally over, nine countries shared the Balkan Peninsula:

**Albania** The poorest country in Europe, Albania has struggled since the end of the Soviet period. High unemployment and crime rates have prevented the country's economy from improving.

**Macedonia** Once a part of Yugoslavia, Macedonia broke away in 1991. It was the first country to do so peacefully.

**Slovenia** Slovenia also broke from Yugoslavia in 1991. In 2004 it became the first Balkan country to join the EU.

**Croatia** When Croatia broke away from Yugoslavia, fighting broke out within the country. Ethnic Croats and Serbs fought over land for many years. In the end, many Serbs left Croatia, and peace was restored.

## FOCUS ON CULTURE

### The Roma

The Roma are a nomadic people. For centuries, they have roamed from place to place in horse-drawn wagons, working as blacksmiths, animal trainers, and musicians. Although Roma live all over the world, the largest concentration of them is in southeastern Europe.

For centuries, many other Europeans did not trust the Roma. They were suspicious of the Roma's nomadic lifestyle and could not understand their language. As a result, many Roma have been subject to prejudice and discrimination.

**Summarizing** What is traditional Roma life like?





## Mostar

Fighting between ethnic groups left the city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina in ruins. After the war, the people of Mostar had to rebuild their city.

**ANALYZING VISUALS** What does this photo suggest about life in Mostar today?

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** Since the end of ethnic and religious violence, peace has returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The people there are working to rebuild.

**Serbia** Serbia is the largest nation to emerge from the former Yugoslavia. Like other Balkan countries, the country of Serbia has seen fighting among ethnic groups.

**Montenegro** The mountainous country of Montenegro separated peacefully from Serbia in June 2006.

**Romania** The largest of the Balkan states, Romania today is working to recover from years of bad government. Poor leaders

have left its government and economy in ruins.

**Bulgaria** Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria has changed dramatically. People there are working to develop a capitalist economy based on industry and tourism.

**READING CHECK** **Generalizing** What issues does the Balkan region face today?

### FOCUS ON READING

What solutions are Bulgaria's leaders seeking to their economic problems?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** The Soviet Union had a huge effect on Eastern Europe. Next, you will read about the Soviet Union and Russia.

## Section 4 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- a. Describe** What was Yugoslavia? When did it break apart?

**b. Explain** What role did the Balkan countries play in starting World War I?
- a. Identify** What are the four most common religions in the Balkans?

**b. Analyze** Why are so many different languages spoken in the Balkans?
- a. Define** What is **ethnic cleansing**?

**b. Elaborate** Why do you think other countries sent troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina? How has the country changed since the war ended?

### Critical Thinking

- Summarizing** Draw a chart like this one. Use your notes to write a sentence about how each topic listed in the left column affected life in the Balkans after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

The Balkans Today

Soviet influence	
Ethnic diversity	
Religion	

### FOCUS ON VIEWING

- Choosing a Country** Now that you have studied all of Eastern Europe, choose your topic. What information and pictures will you include?

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**Online Quiz**  
 KEYWORD: S17 HP19