

To what extent was
balkan nationalism
responsible for the
outbreak of the first
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The First World War was a long and tragic war that kidnapped Europe into four years of war with each other. The war left behind it an appalling saga of a raped Europe – ten million dead, millions of widows and orphans, unredeemable destruction to countries and cities, and emotionally tortured millions of minds. The question though, is who caused this atrocious circumstance in Europe? And what pulled in so many countries in a one war? One victim of the blame is Balkan Nationalism – but the real question is: To what extent is this nationalism responsible towards the inauguration of the First World War? In 1914 Europe was a melting pot of tension.

The reason for this was the fact that the “ Super Powers” of Europe were at the epitome of a power struggle. There were the “ Entente” powers of one side, with the United Kingdom (U. K), France, and Russia on one side, and the “ Central” powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, on the other side. There was a lot of stress between these nations, and although they did not go to war over it, it was visible that they saw each other as a threat to their own security. All these regions became locked on to the Balkan region in the summer of 1914 – all of a sudden the Balkans was the vogue of Europe – whatever happened there made headlines. It is due to this reason that Balkan Nationalism is blamed for the First World War.

When the word ‘ Nationalism’ is used in Balkan Nationalism, what exactly do we mean? By using the work Nationalism we refer to patriotic movements within the Balkans, such as the ‘ Black Hand. ‘ The ‘ Black Hand’ was formed in May 1911 by ten men, who were all Serbians. The main objective of the Black Hand was the creation, by means of violence, of a Greater Serbia. Its stated aim was: “ To realize the national ideal, the unification of all Serbs.

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This organization prefers terrorist action to cultural activities; it will therefore remain secret. “ 1 With aims like these, it is apparent that the Serbian nationalists were a serious threat to Europe.

This would be as the Balkans was a hotspot of European conflict, and actions like these, that could create havoc in a “ Super Power” (Austria-Hungary), would be absolutely unacceptable. It is reasonable on the side of the Austria-Hungarians’ to be concerned by such terrorist groups, that want to fuel nationalism in a empire that has so many ethnic minorities being ruled over by a one Emperor. This – the “ Black Hand” and their gang – were one of the prime reasons of why Balkan nationalism was responsible for the outbreak of World War I. Another reason why Serbian Nationalism was responsible for the outbreak of World War I, would be due to the fact that not only are groups like the “ Black Hand” promoting nationalism (and Serbian at that), but by doing so, they are encouraging the Serbs in Austria Hungary to revolt. The aim of this would be that by revolting against Austria-Hungary, the Serbians would join Serbia, to form a “ Greater” Serbia – which was the aim of the “ Black Hand. ” Therefore, one can say that Serbia’s nationalistic ambitions were very extensive.

Thus, Serbian ambitions were also to blame. Moreover, Serbia’s plan of expansion at the cost of others (in this case Austria-Hungary), was bound to promote conflict, and therefore a major full-scale conflict seemed to be inevitable anyhow. This time, as it happened to be an ally of Germany, Serbia’s nationalistic expansion plans got itself into a dilemma. Hence, Serbia’s plan to expand as a nation, at the expense of other nations – was a

reason as to why Serbian nationalism was responsible for the outbreak of war.

Additionally, there is the fact that an extremist nationalistic Serbian, Gavrilo Princip, who belonged to the “Black Hand,” assassinated the Arch-Duke of Austria in a ceremony in Sarajevo. This clearly shows how Serbian Nationalism invoked people so much, that they could dare attempt an assassination at the life of an heir to the throne. The assassination was obviously the turning point in Europe in 1914, as it provoked Austria-Hungary to react. Austria-Hungary was obviously justified to be furious at the assassination. They reasonably put forward an ultimatum, which if not accepted would have dreadful consequences for Serbia.

Likewise, there is also the reality that Serbia could have accepted the terms of the Ultimatum, and avoided conflict with a “Super Power,” which was bound to get all of Europe into war. Serbia in all likelihood knew that their rejecting the Ultimatum would lead to a major war in Europe – but decided to put their nationalism before logic. Serbia decided that it should show its people how patriotic the Government can be, and therefore did not give into to a power like Austria-Hungary. Thereby, due to all the reasons mentioned above, one can see that Austria-Hungary saw Serbia as a growing threat to their dominancy in the Balkans, as Serbia too was a growing and an influential power in that region. This tension is one of the chief reasons for the outbreak for war.

This could have been avoided if Serbia would have simply understood that their ambitious expansion plans at the cost of other nations would simply not

work, and that an influence-in-the-region race would not work with a “ Super Power” such as Austria-Hungary. One can conclude, therefore, that Serbian Nationalism was to blame for the outbreak of the First World War.