Editorial Note

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The Albanian national question is arguably the last major ethnic issue facing Europe today. This volume examines the origins and progress of that issue through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. While the Albanian question had attracted some attention during the nineteenth century, it first became a significant European diplomatic issue at the London Conference of Ambassadors (1912-1913). The Conference remains one of the key milestones in the history of the Albanian national question, Balkan history, and in the history of modern European diplomacy in general. The consequences of the decisions of the Conference still have an impact today, fully one century later. The geopolitical maneuvering at the Conference created an entirely new Balkan political map, creating new states, while at the same time dividing ethnic groups.

The Conference was convened in December 1912 in an attempt to bring the First Balkan War to an end and prevent the conflict from directly involving the Great Powers of Europe, some of whom had client states in the Balkans. Despite the Second Balkan War which saw the Balkan states turn on each other, the armies of the Balkan League had repeatedly defeated their Ottoman opponents, and therefore one of the central issues under consideration at the Conference was the division of the remaining Ottoman provinces in Europe. While there were many complex questions under consideration, none was more vexing than the Albanian national question. Although the Powers had originally hoped that Albanian lands would remain a part of the Ottoman Empire, once Balkan armies had driven most Ottoman troops from the western Balkans, the geographical connection was severed and Albanian lands were set adrift. The Conference was forced to contend with competing interests, including the demands of Albanian patriots who had declared Albania's independence on 28 November, 1912.

Following the negotiation of a plethora of deals and counter-deals accompanied by occasional saber rattling, the Conference agreed to extent international recognition to the new Albanian state, but as a result of concessions to those who coveted Albanian lands, left fully half of all Albanians outside of the new state. In order to prevent Russia's access in the Mediterranean Sea, a key goal of the western Great Powers, Kosovo was sacrificed for Durrës, and Ulqin and Çamëria for Vlora. Serbia, Greece and Montenegro received considerable Albanian inhabited lands, creating a new problem in Europe: a divided Albanian nation, or the Albanian national question.

In an effort to objectively analyze the Conference of Ambassadors on its hundredth anniversary the South East European University organized an interdisciplinary international scientific conference held in Skopje Macedonia on 21 November, 2013. More than thirty researchers and diplomats from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, participated in the meeting. The conference proceedings volume which follows, published by SEEU, consists of selected papers which evaluate the geopolitical impact of the London Conference of Ambassadors in the immediate post Conference period and throughout the following century (1913-2013). It is hoped that this volume will provide some enlightenment for the casual reader and some small service to those who deal with the Albanian national question at the policy level.

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