

# Ottomans into Europeans

*State and Institution Building  
in South-East Europe*

*Edited by*

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HURST & COMPANY, LONDON

First published in the United Kingdom in 2010 by  
C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.,  
41 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3PL  
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Printed in India

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A Cataloguing-in-Publication data record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-84904-074-7

[www.hurstpub.co.uk](http://www.hurstpub.co.uk)

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## FOREWORD

Regions are conventional constructs, made to fit the needs of scholars and diplomats. Using different criteria, one can build different "regions". The exercise is legitimate only as long as borders from one set of criteria do not elide into those of another. When some of the currently active historians of the region began their involvement in the field, the grey zone known as "the Balkans" used to comprise only five countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece (Turkey was sometimes included). Nowadays there are eleven, the supplementary ones being Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. But some scholars dispute their placement in the Balkans. Romania has long claimed to be misplaced, as the Balkan Mountains are not even close to its territory and its language is Latin-based. By emphasizing their Habsburg past and their Catholicism, Croatia and Slovenia have also done their best to escape being marked as Balkan. Greece is content to regard the "Balkan" label as something positive, and Bulgaria endures it with stoicism. Twentieth century studies of nationalism and nation building in the region have seen a growing custom of using the term "Balkan" as a negative, albeit poorly defined, attribute in relation to ethnic diversity, mass violence, and intricate wars. The legitimacy of such definitions has come under attack,<sup>1</sup> but they still prevail in journalistic writing and bestselling travel books.

Nation-states have been, no doubt, the primary movers and shakers in this region's history and politics since the nineteenth century. Yet the complex relationship between state institutions and society in South-East Europe remains an understudied subject. There are various reasons for that. One is the relative scarcity of comparative work from the region as opposed to "national

<sup>1</sup> Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.