Why were the Balkans a problem area before 1914?

L/O – To explain the importance of the decline of Ottoman power and the importance of the Balkans to different countries.
Trouble in the Balkans

In the early twentieth century, the **Balkans** was a very unstable area of Europe. The area had traditionally been controlled by the **Ottoman (Turkish) Empire**.

However by the start of the twentieth century, the **Ottoman Empire** had weakened to such an extent that dissatisfied ethnic groups in the Balkans, such as the Serbs, were seeking **independence**.
The Ottomans

• Since the 17\(^{th}\) century, much of south-east Europe (the Balkans) had been part of the Ottoman Empire however by the 19\(^{th}\) century, Ottoman military power was in decline.

• In 1832, Greece won its independence and this marked a gradual weakening of power as other countries within the empire, such as Serbia and Bulgaria, also achieved independence.
Austria-Hungary

• Austria-Hungary was a large scattered empire that controlled over **11 different nationalities**.

• The Austrians were Germans and the Hungarians were **Magyars**, but they also ruled over millions of ‘**Slav**’ subjects, such as **Czechs, Serbs, Bosnians and Croats**.
The main aim of the Habsburg emperor, Franz Joseph, was to stop the growth of nationalism. This was a belief that different nationalities should rule themselves and it threatened to break up the empire.
Austria-Hungary

- Since Serbia had gained its independence from the Ottomans in 1878, it had always been a problem for Austria-Hungary.

- Several million Serbs lived in Southern Austria and were keen to unite with Serbia.

- Franz Joseph thought it might be better to conquer Serbia to stop the threat as the Czechs and Croats also wanted independence.
Russia

- Russia was determined to establish pro-Russian governments in the Balkans which would allow their ports to be used to transport Russian goods in the Mediterranean.

- When the Bulgarians rose up against the Ottomans in 1876, Russia saw this as an opportunity to gain influence in the Balkans so they sent troops to fight on the side of the rebels.
**Russia**

- The Russian disguised their selfish aims by claiming they were just protecting Christians in the area, who were members of the Russian Orthodox Church, from the oppressive Muslim Ottomans.

- Russians were also Slavs so were keen to promote Slav nationalism and thus help the Slav people in the region to win their freedom from the Ottomans. If this freedom threatened the Austro-Hungarians – then even better!
5 The expansion of the Slavs to c.700

- expansion of Slavs
- western limit of Slav expansion in 8th century AD
- Sorbs: Slav people
- AVARS: non-Slav people

Legend:
- Red arrows: expansion of Slavs
- Black dotted line: western limit of Slav expansion in 8th century AD
Reasons why the Balkans were a problem area:

1. The Ottoman were trying to keep their empire in Europe.

2. The Slav people were trying to set up independent countries.

3. Austria-Hungary was trying to stop these Slav countries being set up.

4. Russia was trying to encourage the Slavs to ensure it had a secure access to the Mediterranean.

5. Britain and France wanted to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean to protect their own trade.
The Bosnian Crisis 1908

• In 1908, there was a revolution in Turkey. An army group called ‘the Young Turks’ took over from the Sultan and begun to modernise their country.

• Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina in September 1908 to prevent any Ottoman attempts to recover the territory. Bosnia-H contained a lot of Serbian Slavs. This angered both Serbia and Russia. War between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, supported by Russia, seemed imminent.
The Bosnian Crisis 1908

With war seemingly close, it was only Germany’s support for Austria that stopped a European war. The Russians were not prepared to take on both Austria-Hungary and Germany at the same time.

However, the results were significant. The crisis sparked greater nationalism in Serbia, and prompted Russia to start modernizing its armed forces.

The next time Russia got involved in the Balkans, it would not back down so easily.
The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913

The 1912–13 Balkan Wars were a series of small-scale conflicts resulting from the disintegration of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Serbia wanted to use the power vacuum left by the Ottomans to create a “Greater Serbia”.

In the First Balkan War (1912), a number of Balkan nations united (under Russian influence) to form the Balkans League and managed to expel the Turks from the region. Austria-Hungary was afraid of Serbia becoming too powerful. They interfered at the peace talks, resulting in Serbia gaining less territory than they thought they deserved.
The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913

The Second Balkan War (1913) followed almost immediately when Bulgaria demanded more land. He made war on Serbia and Greece but was defeated.

The Serbs managed to win a lot of territory for themselves and now became the dominant power in the Balkans.
The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913

Victory led to increasing Serbian nationalism. This was directed especially against Austria-Hungary which was seen as the main obstacle to the dream of a united Slavic nation.

In addition, Austria-Hungary became extremely worried about the growing power of Serbia. They were determined to crush the Serbs at the next opportunity.

Which do you think was more important in raising tensions, the Bosnian Crisis or the Balkan Wars?
Increasing Tension

Read each question and click on the answer of your choice. Each time you get a question right, the tension in Europe will increase. You need to get all the questions right first time to raise the tension to its 1914 level.

Press start to begin.
Rate each of these factors according to how much you think they increased political tension in Europe. Drag the bars of the graph to the required heights. Press start to begin.