

Balkan Futures in 2014

Marc Herzog | British Institute at Ankara | www.balkan.bsa.ac.uk

Balkan Futures is a three-year research programme concentrating on themes of inter-regional development and cooperation in the Balkans, with a more specific focus on Greece and Turkey, examining their roles and interests in a region where these two countries have historically played a major part in shaping social and collective identities. The programme is run jointly with the British School at Athens (BSA) with the collaboration of l'École française d'Athènes (EfA); it is funded by the British Academy, and the London School of Economics is an affiliated partner.

2014 has proven to be a very busy and active time for the Balkan Futures research programme, which will have seen two multi-day, high-profile workshops having taken place by the end of the year. Here I will outline the events and developments within Balkan Futures in 2014, focusing on the workshops, before Özge Dilaver, the Balkan Futures Research Fellow, presents a brief summary of the progress of her research project.

In early March this year, the second Balkan Futures workshop, 'The state in the Balkans: public service institutions, their role and development', took place in Athens. Its focus was an examination of the nature and role of states and other public agencies across the Balkan region, including, *inter alia*, public institutions that deliver healthcare, education and welfare services, as well as state-economy relations. In that sense, it had a historical concern with how public expectations and perceptions of the role of the state have changed over the course of time. By tracing historically dependent processes and evolutionary paths, the workshop investigated how contemporary institutions and structures in the realm of public and welfare services emerged, developed and gained (or not) legitimacy and public acceptance.

The workshop kicked off at the residence of the British Ambassador to Greece, a stately building once inhabited by Greece's early 20th-century prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos. The British Ambassador to Greece, John Kittmer, gave an opening speech which was followed by an open discussion on the historical nature and development of the state in southeastern Europe between two veteran political historians and scientists of Greek academia, Professor Paschalis Kitromilides and Professor Thanos Veremis. The rest of the workshop, with over 20 participants, was held at the BSA, with a reception at the EfA on the last day. The involvement of several scholars focusing on Turkey and the presence of two participants from the first Ankara-based workshop of the Balkan Futures series provided a strong and coherent sense of continuity. The subsequent publication will be co-edited by Özge and Daniel Knight.

The third and final Balkan Futures workshop, 'Contemporary mobility and changing stereotypes in the Balkans', will take place in early December this year and will address the problems of collective selfhood and otherness in the contemporary Balkan region. Contributors will tackle issues relating to the regional reformulation of images and stereotypes of neighbouring nations and of the 'West' since the opening of national borders in the 1990s. In that sense, some of the questions in this discussion will reflect on how traditional images have been overcome, modified or reaffirmed and how new encounters and transnational currents of migration from the Balkans to Europe have modified the image of Europe.

As an essential component of the Balkan Futures research programme, Özge Dilaver, the Balkan Futures Research Fellow, sums up the progress of her project in 2014:

The 'Between – IT' project aims to study important characteristics of the trade flows and economic mobility between Istanbul and Thessaloniki, focusing on the socio-economic contexts and geographical patterns of these interactions. The second year of the project has seen the completion of the fieldwork component, which has involved conducting interviews to gather the perspectives and experiences of people travelling on buses between Istanbul and Thessaloniki. The resulting data have been analysed and the simulation models of the two cities have been improved so as to geographically represent their major production centres. The analysis of the fieldwork data has yielded two contributions to the existing literature on borders and liminality. The first describes the everyday experiences of the Turkish-Greek border in a way that demonstrates that borders are complex entities that are deeply embedded in historical, cultural and geographical contexts. The second contribution, which is still being developed, explores the state of liminality that many travellers on the cross-border bus between Thessaloniki and Istanbul encounter through their experiences at either side of the border.

