

A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT INTO THE FATE OF THE ROMANIES

The book represents a choice of the papers reported on at the *First Komren Encounters*. The main theme of this year's conference was "*A Sociological Insight into the Fate of the Romanies*". It was discussed by nine respectable Yugoslav sociologists, two politicologists, one ethnologist and one Americanist. Many of the understandably uninformed readers would probably ask themselves, "Why are these 'Komren encounters' organized just now? Why have they chosen to talk about the Romanies?". Regarding the role we played in preparing the conference, we, as the authors of the introductory note who are at the same time the editors of the anthology, feel obliged to offer some initial explanation.

First of all, we would like to stress the fact that a group of enthusiasts led by Professor Andon Kostadinović and Professor Dragoljub B. Đorđević has been, for many years, leading a campaign for establishing some kind of gathering that would contribute to the improvement of the cultural life of the suburban settlements of Niš, primarily of Donji Komren as well as other places named in the same way (Gornji, Novi and Donji Komren Settlement). In order to start, however modestly, the whole project, it was necessary to form some organization core, that is, to create an association of citizens in accordance with the current legal procedures.

For this reason, a non-government organization "Komren Sociological Encounters" came into being last year. Though the name may appear slightly pretentious, it can be justified on the basis of the fact that a dozen of sociologists actually come from this line of settlements. Moreover, these are not only professionally-engaged sociologists, but, as Professor Kostadinović explains in his paper presented at the "Komren Encounters", also "those who have mostly completed their master's and doctor's degrees or specialisation or those who are about to complete their postgraduate studies or are at least successful high school teachers." Why should we, then, restrain ourselves from saying a few words of praise? A good number of them enjoy excellent reputation at institutes and universities; their titles range from those of teacher assistants to full-time professors. We have, of course, expected them to use their influence and acquaintance to help us with the thematic and other aspects of organizing such a non-standard manifestation.

And that is how it all happened. The "Komren Encounters" came into being with the hope of being organized every year during the Komren religious procession (*litije*), namely on the day of the traditional gathering of all the inhabitants of Donji Komren. At the beginning, the encounters were expected to be modest with a small number of participants, especially guests. Likewise, it was planned that the core of the encounters would be a small conference of sociologists discussing a particular theme but without any intention of making the whole project a purely sociological one.

What about the Romanies? Well, we have set it as a principle that in the first few years the theme would be chosen by the sociologists of Komren; the others are kindly asked to wait for their turn. That is how it happened that we chose the Romany theme this year. Namely, we used the privilege to organize the *First Komren Encounters* as a part of our engagement in

the project "SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF THE ROMANIES IN SERBIA IN THE TRANSITION PROCESSES – INTEGRATION, ASSIMILATION OR SEGREGATION?" sponsored by the *Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Foundation, grant No.: 287/1998*. In addition to the Komren Sociological Encounters, the organization of the conference was helped by two other non-government organizations, namely the Society for Good Action and the Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

The participants of the round table dealing with the "Sociological Insight into the Fate of the Romanies" are excellent connoisseurs of the Romany way of life. With a few exceptions, we have managed to gather together the elite circle of romologists. For instance, the opening paper dealing with the "Characteristics of the Romany population" was presented by Aleksandra Mitrović, ph. d., our leading romologist. Goran Bašić, as a very-well informed scientist, that is, an expert for the legal-political position of the Romanies in our country and in Europe submitted the paper on the "Political and Legal position of the Romanies in the Central and Southeast Europe." Professor Dragan Koković is the first among the culturalists especially those dealing with various ways of life; that is why he is discussing the peculiarities of the Romanies' way of life. With the same success the participants from Niš also presented their studies. Namely, Bogdan Đurović is a promising romologist discussing conservatism and authority of the Romanies in Serbia. The ethnologist Iva Trajković, the author of many papers on the Romanies, deals with the "Burial of Urban Romanies" using Niš as an example. Professor Dragoljub B. Đorđević gives his important contribution by studying the extreme aspects of the Romanies' fate. Regarding the Romanies, the marked contributions are given by Professor Dragana R. Mašović dealing with the "Romanies in Our Daily Press", Professor Miloš Marjanović dealing with the ethnic stereotypes of the Romanies and Dragan Todorović concerned with the "Gypsy Cemetery in Donji Komren". Maybe the Encounters would further enlarge the circle of the romologists with Professor Jovan Živković writing about the "Destiny of the Romanies from Kosovo" and Assistant Teacher Srđan Vukadinović dealing with the "Status of the Gypsies in Montenegro."

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The editors' intentions, beside organizing a scientific conference and an anthology of the papers dealing with the "Sociological Insight into the Fate of the Romanies" (thus meeting the requirements of the project on "SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF THE ROMANIES IN SERBIA IN THE TRANSITION PROCESSES – INTEGRATION, ASSIMILATION OR SEGREGATION?") were the following: a) to make accessible to foreign authors the most recent results achieved by the Yugoslav romologists, 2) to advance and make Yugoslav romology more modern - by making it more sociological (as the sociology of the Romanies) and by suppressing the dominating folklore, that is, the ethnological theory of the Romanies, and 3) to affirm the interculturalist theoretical and practical approach to solving the "Romanies' issue." As for how much we have succeeded in it, it is up to the scientific public and the future to decide.

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