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ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS IN THE BALKANS

The Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (YSSSR), founded in Niš in 1993, has as its members or full-time or temporary associates about 200 scientists (mostly sociologists, but also philosophers, theologians, psychologists, historians, law scientists, politicologists,...) from Serbia and Montenegro. Like other similar foreign associations with a long tradition, this society has also developed a wide spectrum of activities. Among others, it organizes study projects, workshops and promotions of new books. It has launched the edition "Religion and Society" with more than ten books by domestic and foreign authors published so far. It also publishes the "YSSR Annual" (5 volumes). The Society has established good relations with the Ministry of Religions of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, of the Republic of Serbia and of the Republic of Montenegro. All the above-mentioned activities have been excellently received by the scientific, professional and wider cultural public.

The acme of the Yugoslav Society's activity is the organization of annual international conferences. So far four of these conferences were held, namely, "Religion -War - Peace" (Niš, 1994), "Religion ad Development" (Niš, 1995), "Church, Nation and Religion" (Palić, 1996) and "Ethnic, Religious and Confessional Relations in the Balkans" (Niška Banja, 1997). The fourth Conference, a short report of which is given here, was especially successful regarding the number of foreign and domestic participants as well as the quality of the presented papers. There were 74 papers on the general Conference topic "Ethnic, Religious and Confessional Relations in the Balkans", including those of the sociologists, philosophers and theologians from the USA (John Vladimir Stevens), Canada (Srđan Gligorić), Great Britain (Eileen Barker), Austria (Branislava Stankov), Slovenia (Sergej Flere), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ivan Cvitković), Russia (Jury Zuev), Macedonia (Slave Nikolovski Katin, Georgi Tonoski, Nijazi Limanoski) and Bulgaria (Georgi Fotev, Nonka Bogomilova Todorova, Lybomir Mikov, Tatyana Kmetova, Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov). In our opinion, the greatest attention was paid to the papers of Eileen Barker, Georgi Fotev and Nonka Bogomilova Todorova, among foreign participants.

Since the Conference Proceedings have already been published in Serbian in the Niš University journal "Teme" ("Themes"), as well as in the "YSSR Annual", the Society journal, we are now presenting the remaining papers, primarily of foreign participants and

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a few from our country, namely, those papers that we find interesting for English-speaking readers. Still, in order to present the readers with an overall view of the Conference achievements, we would like to remind them that, in addition to the papers in this issue of the journal "Facta Universitatis", it is necessary to keep in mind the already-published papers in the above-mentioned publications.

Finally, it should be stressed that all the Conference participants, in their papers, dealt with the most general aspects of the geostrategic and geopolitical problems of the Balkans as well as with the general issues of the relationships between religion, nation and politics, with a special emphasis on the problems of the Orthodox Churches, Bogomilism and Balkan Studies. It was indicated that the Balkan region, having a rather tragic fate throughout its history, represents a fertile field for exploring all fundamental tendencies. Not only the conflicts of interests but the conflicts of great cultures, civilizations and religions have left their mark upon its fate; now it is up to the scientists to describe "the symptoms of liability to conflict" and offer possible means for their elimination. The general message of the Conference is: "Do not expect that the scientists-researchers become social 'physicians', but it is normal to hope that those who make decisions about all the main interests of the Balkan societies and peoples will also take into consideration the well-founded analyses derived from science."

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