

# THE BALKANS

A RELIGIOUS BACKYARD OF EUROPE

edited by Mient Jan Faber

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Longo Editore Ravenna

## Contents

page	7	Introduction <i>by Mient Jan Faber</i>
	9	Foreword <i>by Mihail, Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia</i>
		TESTIMONIES
	11	Father Stefan Sandžakovski <i>The ecclesiastic attitude towards ethnic reductionism or whether the Orthodox church is nationalistic?</i>
	17	Father Jovan Takovski <i>The Orthodox ecclesiastic attitude towards politics and the social dimensions of the church ethos</i>
		PART ONE – States, nations, minorities
	25	Håkan Wiberg <i>Divided nations and divided states</i>
	53	Martyn Rady <i>International instruments for the protection of minorities</i>
	61	Mark Wheeler <i>East-European revolutions of 1989-1991</i>
	67	Mihajlo Minoski <i>The Balkan policy of the great European powers and the political changes in the region</i>
	83	Robert M. Hayden <i>The use of national stereotypes in the wars in Yugoslavia</i>

- page 101 Stefano Bianchini  
*Between history and politics: minorities, nations and ethnic groups in Eastern Europe*
- PART TWO – Religion and state-nationalism
- 115 Marija Taševa  
*Islamisation and its contemporary consequences*
- 127 Nikolas K. Gvosdev  
*Orthodoxy and a pluralist democracy*
- 139 Kyril Haramiev  
*The legacy of government manipulation of the churches in the post-Communist Balkans: the case of Bulgaria*
- 147 Peter Palmer  
*Religions and nationalism in Yugoslavia: a tentative comparison between the Catholic church and the other communities*
- PART THREE – Church communities
- 163 Marko Orsolić  
*Seven centuries of Franciscan presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- 181 David Steele  
*Configuration of the small religious communities in former Yugoslavia*
- PART FOUR – Youth education and women
- 197 Alison Closs  
*Education for tolerance and other aspects of adulthood: could school-age education in ex-Yugoslavia improve its contribution?*
- 213 Wendy Bracewell  
*Women in the transition to democracy in South-Eastern Europe*
- PART FIVE – European perspectives
- 221 Mient Jan Faber  
*Thinking in the Peace Movement between 1800 and 2000*
- 247 Mary Kaldor  
*Cosmopolitanism versus nationalism: the new divide?*
- 265 LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

## INTRODUCTION

This book would never have been published without the perseverance of both students and lecturers to organise (for the second time) a Summer School for Interreligious Dialogue and Understanding (SIDU-2) in former Yugoslavia, in the middle of an ongoing war. The majority of students and lecturers are from this troublesome region which is noticeable in the sometimes passionate way they have prepared their papers. Writing about history, religion, nation, democracy and civil society cannot be done in a purely abstract way. Without falling into the trap of post-modernist thinking, this book is a unique collection of views and analyses of academics who do realise very well that they are all part of special historical circumstances, influencing their own lives as well as their minds.

This is not a book filled with political and military observations, about the ongoing Balkan war. The contributions go beyond the level of fruitless attempts to define who is right, who is wrong, or what to do next. The underlying concepts, notions and emotions are revealed and described, and also put in a broader (European) context and given a future perspective. By doing so this book can be of great value for today and tomorrow and – what corresponds with the authors' intentions – become an integral part of the curriculum of various study programs at academic institutions.

The Balkan war has confronted us with a clash of religions. Not only a clash between institutional religions, but most of all a clash between a civic religion and an ethnic religion. The public debate has still hardly grasped this phenomenon. This book provides lots of stimuli for this highly necessary debate.

*The Hague, September 1995*

*Mient Jan Faber (ed.)*

**EUROPE  
BALKANS**  
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK



Università di Bologna

COSTITUITO ALLA FINE DEL 1993 CON IL SOSTEGNO FINANZIARIO DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA (PROGRAMMA HUMAN CAPITAL AND MOBILITY), IL NETWORK INTERNAZIONALE "EUROPE AND THE BALKANS" SI AVVALE DELLA COOPERAZIONE DI ALCUNI FRA I PIÙ NOTI STUDIOSI DELL'EUROPA E DEGLI STATI UNITI. IL NETWORK NASCE COME INIZIATIVA UNIVERSITARIA E CON L'AMBIZIONE DI SVILUPPARE CONVERGENZA STRETTA FRA RICERCA SCIENTIFICA ED ESIGENZE DI INFORMAZIONE QUOTIDIANA NELLA NOSTRA SOCIETÀ.

Although often evoked by international public opinion or policy-makers, the role of religion in the Balkans, particularly related to the recent Yugoslav secession war, has rarely been considered the focus of a systematic analysis. People interested in the topic generally received superficial information, often conditioned by stereotypes, distorted images and biased perceptions. This book is one of the first attempts to offer to the reader a radically different approach. Prominent scholars from the Balkans, from Western Europe and North America intensely debate the perceptions of history, religion, culture and nation in the Balkans with a wide perspective. Nationalism and religion, the role of the Church communities as well as the general framework offered by the collapse of communism are analyzed here in their influence on everyday life, at school, in the media and in politics. The chapters of this book represent the final elaboration of the drafts discussed during the two Summer Schools for Interconfessional Dialogue and Understanding (SIDU) held in 1994 and 1995 in the Balkan war zone. Students from all over the Balkans, joined by friends from other parts of Europe, took part in a series of lectures devoted to the role and impact of irrational factors in the most recent war in the Balkans. In particular, the ways and the methods for a new interreligious dialogue were considered in order to create a new atmosphere in the relations among the members of the different religious communities as a contribution and a pre-requisite for a peaceful future in this region, a religious backyard of Europe. The uniqueness of this approach can be read on every page of this book, which nobody with a serious interest in the topic should fail to read.

L002204

L. 30.000

ISBN 88-8063-091-1



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