

**U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Serbia-Montenegro**

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SERBIA-MONTENEGRO

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The law in both the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Serbia provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice both the Government and the legal system provide very little protection for the religious rights of minority groups.

There is no state religion, but the regime of Slobodan Milosevic gives preferential treatment, including access to state-run television for major religious events, to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The predominant faith in the FRY is Serbian Orthodoxy, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. Serbs, who are predominantly Serbian Orthodox if they follow any religion, make up approximately 63 percent of the population, according to a 1998 report. According to a 1991 census, Albanians, most of whom are Muslim but some of whom are Orthodox and Roman Catholic, then made up about 17 percent of the population. Muslim ethnic Slavs were 2 percent of the population, and Croats, who are predominantly Roman Catholic (if religious), made up 1 percent of the population. Other non-Orthodox Christians and a variety of minority religions make up a very small fraction of the FRY population.

The status of respect for religious freedom declined during the period covered by this report.

Police repression continued to be directed against ethnic and religious minorities, and police committed the most widespread and worst abuses against Kosovo's 90 percent ethnic Albanian population. Police repression also was directed against Muslims in the Sandzak region.

Since 1992 the Milosevic regime has suppressed all of his enemies in the FRY, Serb and non-Serb alike. To achieve his primary political aim of continued rule of Serbia, Milosevic has exploited efficiently ethnic, religious, and political divisions through his control of the media and the organs of state security. The regime's most serious human rights violations occurred in the attempted ethnic cleansing of the predominantly Muslim, ethnic Albanian population throughout 1998 and the first half of 1999. There is a clear distinction between ethnically and religiously motivated persecution. Ethnic cleansing was the goal of the violent persecution in Kosovo. Because non-Serbs belong to various religions, there is a high correlation between ethnic and perceived religious persecution in the FRY. Because most Kosovar Albanians are Muslim, this Serbian campaign resulted in large numbers of deaths among Muslims and major destruction of mosques and other Islamic landmarks. However, the

campaign was motivated primarily by ethnicity, not religion. Kosovar Albanians were singled out by Serb forces because they were Albanian, not because they were Muslim. Albanian Christians and Muslims received equal mistreatment from Serb forces. Members of the Albanian Orthodox Church received the same treatment as Albanian Muslims. However, non-Albanian Kosovar Muslims--Roma, Turks, and Slavs--were not targeted by Serb forces.

In Kosovo the Milosevic regime attempted to rid the province of almost its entire ethnic Albanian population, murdering thousands of ethnic Albanian citizens in addition to using extensively disappearance, torture, rape, beatings during detention, arson, and forcible deportation. Police use of arbitrary arrest and detention was concentrated primarily in Kosovo and, to a lesser degree, in Sandzak. Serbian police often apply certain laws only against ethnic minorities and used force with relative impunity. Sandzak Muslims as well as Kosovar Albanians were subjected to trumped up or exaggerated charges, ranging from unlawful possession of firearms to willfully undermining the country's territorial integrity. Serb forces also destroyed Muslim religious sites and singled out Muslim religious leaders for harassment. Also, in March 1999 Serb forces removed approximately 200 ethnic Albanians from a Catholic Church in Pec where they were seeking sanctuary and forcibly expelled them from town.

Exile is not permitted legally, and no instances of its use are known to have occurred. However, the practical effect of police repression in Kosovo and Sandzak in 1998 was to accentuate political instability, which in turn has limited economic opportunity. As a result, many ethnic Albanians and Slavic Muslims went abroad to escape persecution, although only in a few cases in 1998 could direct links to police actions be identified.

Although due process generally is respected in form, defense lawyers, particularly for Muslims, in Kosovo and Sandzak have filed numerous complaints about flagrant breaches of standard procedure which they believed undermined their clients' rights. Numerous questionable trials took place in Kosovo during the period covered by this report. However, it is not clear that religion was the motivation behind these abuses.

Although the law includes restrictions on searches, officials often ignored them. In Kosovo and Sandzak, Serbian police systematically subjected ethnic Albanians and Slavic Muslims to random searches of their homes, vehicles, shops, and offices, asserting that they were searching for weapons. Serbian security forces systematically destroyed entire villages in Kosovo by burning and shelling houses, contaminating water wells, and killing livestock.

The Milosevic regime also continues to restrict the right of Kosovar Albanians and Sandzak Muslims to travel by holding up issuance or renewal of passports for an unusually long period of time and reserves the option of prosecuting individuals charged previously with violating exit visa requirements. In 1999 Serbian authorities confiscated passports and other identity papers of Kosovar Albanians, systematically destroyed voter registers and other aspects of Kosovo's civil registry, and removed license plates from departing vehicles as part of a policy to prevent ethnic Albanians from returning to Kosovo.

Prior to the conflict, the Albanian Catholic population also experienced difficulties with the country's Serbs. The Vatican reported in May 1999 that Serb forces had killed approximately 200 ethnic Alba-

nians in a Roman Catholic Albanian community in Kosovo, noting that Serb forces previously had not carried out mass killings in Catholic communities.

The regime subjected religious communities in Kosovo to harassment. For example, in 1998 a Roman Catholic parish in Klina had the money, property, and permission (including that of the Supreme Court of Serbia) to build a church for its 6,000-member parish. However, the local chapter of Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia continually has blocked its construction. Other Catholic and Muslim communities in the province had similar experiences. For example, Muslims in Montenegro complain that they have not been permitted to build new mosques or to renovate old ones.

After NATO began its bombing campaign, there were reports that the Jewish population was leaving Serbia. With the assistance of Americans and Hungarians, approximately 250 Jews left Serbia for Hungary from provinces such as Nis and Novi Sad. The exodus was due in part to the bombing, as well as fears of anti-Semitism. The Jewish population has expressed concern about ultra-nationalist political figures and their anti-Semitic teachings.

When it suits its political aims, the Milosevic regime does not hesitate to attack the Serbian Orthodox Church, which recently has been more outspoken in its criticism of the Milosevic regime. The Church has called for Milosevic to step down as a result of his campaign of ethnic cleansing. Ultranationalist Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Vojislav Seselj accused Orthodox Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren of pursuing a political agenda. (Bishop Artemije has been one of the most prominent Serbian voices calling for reconciliation with the ethnic Albanians and opposing Milosevic's policies.) As a result of its criticism of government policies, in the summer and fall of 1998 the Government closed Serbian Orthodox churches and denied the Church permission to build new churches or renovate old ones.

In late 1998, the Serbian Minister for Religious Affairs, Milovan Radovanovic, announced his Ministry's intention to restrict the activity of "destructive and totalitarian religious sects, diverse psycho-organizations, commercial cults, and other organizations with asocial influence on the society and the family."

In regions of Vojvodina where large numbers of Serb refugees have been relocated, local authorities unlawfully seized property owned by Croats. Vojvodina Croats reported no progress during the period covered by this report on their demand for separate curriculums in the schools or programs in the media in the Croatian language.

The Milosevic regime did not fulfill its promise to the Serbian Orthodox Church to introduce religious education in public schools.

The Serbian Government made no progress in the restitution of property that belonged to the Jewish community prior to World War II, despite President Milosevic's promises to resolve the disputes. The Orthodox and Catholic Churches have had similar difficulties with the restitution of their property confiscated by the Communist regime (1944-89).

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

In June 1999, Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren was trying to win the release of a Serbian Orthodox priest abducted by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). According to the Mother Superior of the Devic convent, the KLA was detaining nine nuns until the arrival of French Kosovo Implementation Force (KFOR) troops in June 1999.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Religion and ethnicity in the FRY are so closely intertwined as to be inseparable. Serious discrimination against, and harassment of, ethnic minorities was common in Kosovo, and the conflict raised ethnic tensions elsewhere in the country with implications for religious intolerance. In the Sandzak region, Serb authorities have harassed the Slavic Muslim minority. Increased societal violence against the Catholic minority in Vojvodina, largely consisting of ethnic Hungarians and Croats, also was reported. Furthermore, Catholic churches frequented by the Croat minority have been attacked, although there have been few reports of this type of activity within the period covered by this report.

Ethnic and religious minorities in Kosovo, Vojvodina, and the Sandzak region face discrimination in housing and employment. In Sandzak Slavic Muslims face severe discrimination in health care, commerce, and education. There were credible reports that ethnic Albanians and Muslims in Serbia continued to be driven from their homes or fired from their jobs on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Other ethnic minorities, including ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina who are predominantly Catholic (if religious), also allege discrimination.

Although there were few reported instances of religious persecution in the Republic of Montenegro, there were numerous acts of societal violence against ethnic minorities in Kosovo and Serbia, especially in the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, as well as the Sandzak region. Primarily, Serbs have shown intolerance towards predominantly Muslim ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and towards the Slavic Muslims in the region of Sandzak. Acts of violence also have been reported against Serbian Orthodox figures and sites, particularly in Kosovo after the end of the 1999 NATO air campaign, reportedly committed by ethnic Albanians. Persecution stems both from religious intolerance and ethnic prejudice, since religion and ethnicity are largely inseparable in the FRY.

Following the Kosovo conflict and the return of the Kosovar Albanian refugees to the province in June 1999, reports of revenge attacks on Serbian Orthodox clergy and property increased. The Serbian Orthodox Patriarch has reported that more than two dozen Orthodox churches and monasteries were damaged or destroyed during the summer of 1999, presumably by ethnic Albanians. Serbian Orthodox monasteries reportedly were attacked by ethnic Albanians, including the destruction of religious relics and the painting of KLA graffiti on religious buildings. In addition, a Serbian monk and a Serbian nun reportedly were kidnaped from monasteries in Kosovo in the summer of 1999. The Serbian Orthodox Bishop in Kosovo, fearing for his safety, briefly fled the province in June 1999 and then returned shortly afterward. In the summer of 1999 after the conflict in Kosovo ended, the Orthodox Church in Prizren, which was providing shelter to 167 displaced Serbs and Roma, received threats that it would be attacked. There are also reports of alleged KLA attacks on Serbian civilians, in-

cluding the murder of three ethnic Serb men in Belo Polje and two elderly Serbs in Prizren in June 1999. In a recent report, Human Rights Watch has documented 40 killings of Serbs, as well as 30 cases of beatings or abductions since the end of the conflict in Kosovo. However, these abuses appear to be motivated primarily by ethnicity rather than religion.

In Montenegro, prompted at least in part by increasing political independence, an autocephalic Orthodox Church was established in the late 1980s. The Church, which has not been recognized by any existing Orthodox community either within or outside the country, has claimed holdings of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. The Serbian Orthodox Church remains the most significant faith in Montenegro and has rejected the property claims. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church currently holds services in secular buildings or outdoors. Although there is no official contact between the competing Churches, authorities have balanced the two Churches without provoking conflict. The two were able to celebrate traditional outdoor Christmas services in the traditional capital of Cetinje without incident in January 1999. Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are officially registered religions in Montenegro. However, their followers report that their efforts to build and renovate church buildings have been impaired by persons they believe to be loyal to the local Serbian Orthodox Church.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in the FRY. Members of the staff of the U.S. Embassy met regularly with representatives of various faiths until the Embassy closed in March 1999. The rupture of relations severely limited the U.S. Government's ability to engage directly with religious representatives. However, in the summer of 1999, at Gracanica, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Bishop Artemije, a leading anti-Milosevic official of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who expressed concern about the safety of the Serbs still living in Kosovo. As a result of the conflict, the United Nations is establishing an international administration in Kosovo, aimed at securing the peace, facilitating refugee return and reconstruction, laying the foundations for democratic self-government in the province, and fostering respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion. In Montenegro the U.S. Government has provided significant support to the reform-oriented republic government, which also seeks to ensure respect for human rights, including religious freedom.

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