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Yugoslavia, Federal Republic of



International Religious Freedom Report

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Federal and Republic law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia) and the constituent Republic of Serbia generally respect this right in practice; however, under the Milosevic government—prior to October 5, 2000—there were incidents of government infringement on freedom of worship, and the federal and republic level legal systems provided little protection for the religious rights of minority groups. The Government of the Republic of Montenegro generally respects religious rights in practice. There is no state religion in the country; however, the Serbian Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment. In Kosovo, the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), charged under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 with the administration of the territory, continued to work to secure peace and foster respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion. Nonetheless, there were attacks by Albanian Muslims against Orthodox Serbs during the period covered by this report in retribution for the massive human rights abuses conducted by Yugoslav and Serbian authorities against Albanians prior to June 1999.

The status of respect for religious freedom by both the Federal and Serbian Republic Governments improved somewhat during the period covered by this report, following former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's electoral defeat by Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition on September 24, 2000. Officials of the new Government expressed a commitment to improving respect for human rights and to eliminating discrimination; however, in practice the new Government has provided preferential treatment to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The views of ethnic groups in the region historically have been influenced strongly by religion, and most instances of ethnic discrimination have at least some religious roots. There were some instances of societal discrimination against religious minorities in Serbia. In Kosovo societal tensions were particularly noticeable and caused security for Serbs and other minorities to worsen during the period covered by this report. Numerous Orthodox Churches in Kosovo were attacked, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, although the number of such attacks decreased. In Montenegro tensions between the unofficial (because it is not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul) Montenegrin Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church continued and were politicized by opposing political factions, despite the Montenegrin Government's attempts to moderate the situation.

The U.S. Government encourages the Yugoslav Government to promote ethnic and religious tolerance the country. Since diplomatic relations were reestablished in November 2000, Embassy officials have met with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities in Serbia and Montenegro and with government officials to promote respect of religious freedom and protection of human rights. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), including their efforts to protect Orthodox churches, shrines, and other religious sites to prevent any renewed outbreak of attacks on such sites.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of approximately 39,500 square miles and has a population of approximately 10,662,000. The predominant faith in the country outside of Kosovo is Serbian Orthodoxy, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. Those Serbs who profess a religion predominantly are Serbian Orthodox and make up approximately 65 percent of the population. Montenegrins, who constitute about 6 percent of the total population and live mainly in Montenegro, also primarily follow Serbian Orthodoxy. The Muslim population, composed mostly of Slavic Muslims who live predominantly in the Sandzak region bordering Serbia and Montenegro, and ethnic Albanians located primarily in Kosovo, constitutes about 19 percent of the total population. Like Serbs and Montenegrins, many Muslims in the country are not religious, and the term "Muslim" is often more a reference to ethnic identity than to religious belief. About 4 percent of the population are Roman Catholic, and consist of ethnic Hungarians who live primarily in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians, and Croats who live in Vojvodina and scattered communities in Montenegro. About 1 percent of the population is Protestant. Other minority religious groups make up another 12 percent of the population.

Missionaries from a number of different groups are present in the country, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists, Evangelical Methodists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Reform Christians).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as in the constituent republics of Serbia and Montenegro, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice; however, up to October 2000, under the Milosevic government, the Government and the legal system provided very little protection for the religious rights of minority groups in those areas under the Serbian Government's administration. There is no state religion; however, the Serbian Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment.

Although in the past the Milosevic government was allied closely with and gave preferential treatment to the Serbian Orthodox Church, a split between the two widened considerably in 2000. Since assuming office, Federal President Kostunica has increased the profile of the Serbian Orthodox Church in public life, and has made high-profile visits to major Serbian Orthodox religious sites. He also has expressed his support for introducing religious education in schools, instituting religious services into the Yugoslav army (VJ), and returning confiscated property to the Serbian Orthodox Church. State-run television broadcasts religious coverage on major Serbian Orthodox holidays. In November 2000, both the Federal and Serbian Republic level Ministries of Religious Affairs announced their support for introducing voluntary religious education in primary and secondary schools, with the support of the Serbian Orthodox, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Jewish religious communities. Some Protestant groups and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) expressed concern for these plans, fearing that non-Orthodox children would be stigmatized. During the period covered by this report, the Federal and Republic Ministries for Religious Affairs were in the process of preparing a draft law on religious education in schools for approval by the Ministry of Education, but no law was passed.

Religious groups are required to apply to the Federal Ministry for Religious Affairs in order to be recognized in the country. The Federal Ministry has denied recognition to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church as a religion on the basis that no Orthodox body has granted recognition to the organization. There were no other reports of applications that were denied during the period covered by this report.

In Montenegro the Constitution specifically recognizes the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but not other faiths. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church is registered with the Government of Montenegro Ministry of Interior in Cetinje, the former capital, as an NGO. The Government of Montenegro has remained officially neutral in the dispute between followers of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Church. Political parties have used this issue in pursuit of their own agendas. Pro-Serbian parties strongly support moves for the establishment of the Serbian Orthodox Church as an official state religion, while pro-independence parties have pushed for the official recognition of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. Members of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church worship freely, and generally worship in those churches (formerly Serbian Orthodox) whose memberships have elected to align themselves with the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

In Kosovo applicable law, as defined by UNMIK regulation, incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity. Both UNMIK and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In March 2001, VJ announced its intention to introduce Serbian Orthodox chaplains into its military units. The VJ had not yet decided whether Catholic priests and Muslim imams also would be represented in the Army Chaplaincy. According to the Keston Institute, some representatives of minority religious groups and NGO's expressed concern that by favoring the majority religion the VJ is not protecting equal religious rights for all soldiers.

Under the Milosevic government, there was no progress in the restitution of property that belonged to the Jewish community prior to World War II, despite President Milosevic's past 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). Federal President Kostunica made public statements supporting the restitution of confiscated property; however, no progress was reported at the end of the period covered by this report.

When it suited its political aims, the Milosevic government did not hesitate to attack verbally the Serbian Orthodox Church, which became outspoken in its criticism of the regime during the period covered by this report. The Church openly called for Milosevic to step down in 1999 as a result of his failed national policies, and the Church demonstrated tacit support for President Kostunica during the September 2000 Federal elections.

Protestants and foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. Missionaries from a number of different groups are present in the country, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists, Evangelical Methodists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Reform Christians). However, some of these groups have complained of societal discrimination.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

From 1992 until October 2000, the Milosevic government attempted to suppress all of its enemies in the country, Serb and non-Serb alike. To achieve his political ends, Milosevic exploited ethnic, religious, and political divisions through his control of the media and the organs of state security. The focus of this suppression was primarily along ethnic lines, and in general encompassed religion only as a component of ethnicity.

Prior to their expulsion from Kosovo in June 1999, Serbian Interior Ministry troops, police, and paramilitary formations committed widespread and severe abuses against Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population. The regime attempted to rid the province of almost its entire ethnic Albanian population, killing thousands of ethnic Albanians and forcing nearly one million to become refugees. This ethnic cleansing was distinct from religiously motivated violence; however, because most Kosovar Albanians are Muslim, the Serbian campaign also resulted in deliberate destruction of mosques and other Islamic landmarks.

For similar reasons, under the Milosevic government, police repression continued against ethnic and religious minorities elsewhere in Serbia. There were reports of harassment of Bosniak Muslims by Serb authorities in the Sandzak region along the border between Serbia and Montenegro. In August 2000, the police arrested members of the moderate Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP) who were distributing party leaflets for the September Federal elections. Their campaign materials were confiscated and the members were released a few hours later. Under the new Government, reports of police repression of Bosniak Muslims in the Sandzak have ceased.

In Kosovo the withdrawal of Serbian troops in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population. One of the most serious challenges facing the international community in its administration of Kosovo has been to stop attacks on Orthodox churches and shrines and on the Orthodox population of Kosovo (see Section III).

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Under the new democratically-elected Government, much of the repression of ethnic and religious minorities that occurred under Milosevic ceased, and respect for religious freedom improved. Reports of police abuses against Bosniak Muslims in the Sandzak region have ceased. The number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, decreased significantly during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Ethnicity and religion are intertwined closely throughout the country. In many cases it is difficult to clearly identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. However, the incidents of discrimination and harassment of religious minorities that occurred during the period covered by this report appear to have been based primarily on ethnicity rather than religion.

The Keston Institute reported that on September 26, 2000, a group of 13 young men attacked two Romani women and one Romani man, all members of a Romani Pentacostal church in Leskovac, with sticks, bats, and chains. The attack took place 2 days after three young men interrupted the church's evening services and threatened the congregation, throwing firecrackers and shouting that they would force the Roma to leave

town. The church reported the incidents to the local police, who advised them to file charges against the men. No further information concerning the case was available, and no further incidents were reported by the end of the period covered by this report.

Societal harassment of the Catholic minority in Vojvodina, largely consisting of ethnic Hungarians and Croats, was reported. In early 2000, Catholic churches frequented by the Croat minority were attacked; however, there were no reports of this type of activity during the period covered by this report. Ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina, most of whom are at least nominally Catholic, as well as Catholic Croats allege discrimination in employment. In April 2000, unidentified assailants disrupted a debate on religion organized by the Catholic Church in Novi Sad. The police intervened and restored order.

Bosniak Muslims in the Sandzak region allege discrimination in housing, employment, health care, commerce, and education.

A number of anti-Semitic incidents occurred during the period covered by this report. Early in 2001, there were reports of anti-Semitic leaflets circulated in Kikinda. On February 13 and 14, 2001, stickers with swastikas and anti-Semitic messages were placed on the entrance of the Jewish Community of Belgrade, on the gate of the synagogue, and on the fence of the Jewish cemetery. A similar incident had occurred earlier during the winter. Jewish community members believe the perpetrators were members of a radical nationalist group. President Kostunica publicly condemned the acts. Also in February 2001, a memorial plate hung at the site of a former synagogue in Zrenjanin was broken. The incident was reported to the police but the perpetrators were not found. On May 8, 2001, in Subotica in Vojvodina, unknown assailants attacked and beat a Jewish community leader for the second time (a similar attack had occurred 3 weeks earlier). The victim was a lawyer who represented opposition members during the Milosevic government. A police investigation was initiated. Members of the Jewish community also charged that the "Palma" television station has aired programs with guests who openly expressed anti-Semitic ideas. For example, Dragos Valajic, a Serb nationalist, spoke of the "Jewish conspiracy" on one program.

Ethnicity and religion also are closely intertwined in Kosovo. Muslim Kosovars generally are not religious. Kosovar Serbs identify themselves with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the conflict, some Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, but most have since withdrawn from public life as secular Serb leaders have stepped forward. Societal violence against Serbs continued to decrease steadily during the course of the period covered by this report, although this positive trend was marred periodically by surges of ethnically motivated violence, such as the February 2001 bombing of a bus carrying Kosovar Serbs coming from Nis, which killed 10 persons. While these incidents were ethnically, not religiously, motivated, security concerns had a chilling effect on the Serb community and their freedom of movement, which also affected their freedom to worship. Serb families with relatives living in both Kosovo and Serbia are restricted by security concerns from traveling to join them for religious holidays or ceremonies, including weddings and funerals.

In July 2000, the now-defunct daily Dita published an article, with photographs, alleging that Orthodox priests committed war crimes. The Serbian Orthodox Church denied that the photographs depicted any known priests. Two ethnic Albanians were arrested for subsequently attacking and injuring a priest and two seminarians in a drive-by shooting. One suspect was sentenced in absentia; the other was acquitted.

Attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, continued during the period covered by this report, although these incidents decreased significantly. On September 1, 2000, the Orthodox church in Musnikovo, near Prizren, was damaged and desecrated. On December 22, 2000, unknown assailants threw a hand grenade at the only functioning Serbian Orthodox church in Pristina, breaking windows and causing other damage. On February 7, 2001, unknown assailants planted a bomb in an Orthodox church in the village of Gornji Livoc, destroying it. The Keston Institute reported that local police prevented a similar church attack in Gornja Kufca/Kusce. On February 8, 2001, unknown assailants reportedly fired shots at the Draganac monastery. Also in February 2001, ethnic Albanians attacked the last remaining Serb village in the Dukagjin Valley (Rahovac/Orahovac). Mortar rounds fell in fields near the houses and next to an Orthodox cemetery.

In light of societal violence in Kosovo against properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, UNMIK authorities took extra steps to protect religious sites and to ensure that members of all religious groups could worship safely. KFOR deployed security contingents at religious sites throughout the province to protect them from further destruction, such as that which had occurred immediately after KFOR's intervention in June 1999. KFOR remains solely responsible for guarding all Serbian Orthodox patrimonial sites, although it has proposed to UNMIK that this function gradually be handed over to the indigenous Kosovo Police Service.

Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious leaders have tried to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres.

There were few reported instances of abuses based on religion in the Republic of Montenegro. Relations between religious communities generally are peaceful in Montenegro. Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox communities coexist within the same communities and often use the same municipally owned properties to

conduct worship services. However, during the period covered by this report, tensions continued to rise between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the self-proclaimed Montenegrin Orthodox Church. There were a few incidents of violence between the supporters of these two competing Orthodox churches. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church has claimed holdings of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. The Serbian Orthodox Church remains the predominant faith in Montenegro and has rejected the property claims.

Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are officially registered religions in Montenegro. However, their followers report that their efforts to build and renovate churches have been impaired by persons they believe to be loyal to the local Serbian Orthodox Church. A local NGO reported that unknown assailants burned a Seventh-Day Adventist church in Niksic at the end of 2000. The perpetrators were not found.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in the country. The absence of diplomatic relations before November 2000 limited severely the U.S. Government's ability to engage directly with religious representatives except in Kosovo, where U.S. Office officials have maintained close contacts with religious leaders. Since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, Embassy officials have met with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities and with officials of the new Government to promote respect of religious freedom and protection of human rights. The Secretary of State removed the formal identification of the Milosevic government in Serbia—identified in 1999 and 2000 as a "particularly severe violator" of religious freedom—in January 2001 after Vojislav Kostunica was elected president.

In July 2000, the U.S. Government sponsored a conference at Airlie House that brought together Kosovar Albanian and Serb civil society and political leaders to discuss reconciliation, tolerance and a joint vision for Kosovo's future. Orthodox religious leaders participated in the Airlie House process. In December 2000, the U.S. funded a Democracy Commission grant to Radio KIM (Radio Caglavica), based at Gracanica Monastery. Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije's clerical staff runs the station, and it broadcasts news, music, interviews, and cultural programs. Bishop Artemije visited Washington D.C. in February 2001 and met with Secretary of State Colin Powell, who repeated the strong messages in support of ethnic tolerance that Secretary Albright delivered last year. U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and have guarded religious sites. The U.S. is involved actively in UNMIK, the interim administration mission in Kosovo, which is aimed at securing 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 seeks to ensure respect for human rights, including religious freedom and has provided significant support and assistance to the republic government.

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