

THE SECOND BALKAN EVANGELICAL CONFERENCE

By Branko Bjelajac

The Second Balkan Evangelical Conference (BEC) under the title: Hope for the Balkans, was held from September 11-13, 1998 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The representatives came from the following countries: Albania (4 participants), Bulgaria (500), Croatia (4), Greece (38), Macedonia (31), Romania (17) and Yugoslavia (120). Bosnia, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia and Hungary sent their representatives; also present were various missions active in the Balkan region (65), and many guests.

BEC was organized by the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance and the Coordinative Council of the Balkan Evangelical Alliances, founded in 1996 during the First BEC held in Belgrade, Serbia/Yugoslavia.

The official representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Prof. Constantin Zlatev) and the Roman-Catholic Church (Monsignore Hristo Proikov) greeted the conference. The Government and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria sent their written greetings. Other official Bulgarian institutions sent their representatives.

Dr. Nikolai Nedelchev, the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance commented: "Among Evangelicals in Bulgaria and all other countries which are participating in BEC, this event is seen as a step toward greater unity, and because this is a working conference, BEC is developing a better partnership. We want to see how we can help each other and use the knowledge and the materials of other countries and share it with each other."

The conference held three plenary sessions and twelve workshops. Main speakers were: Rev. Ch. Kulitchev, President of the Reformed Church in Bulgaria and President of the EA of Bulgaria, Stuart MacAllister, General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance, Dr. Thomas Wang, Intl. President of AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, and Dr. Peter Kuzmic, Chairman of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The importance of such meetings was noticed when Eugen Begu, General Secretary of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance in greeting the BEC told the participants that they gladly forgive everything and that they are ready to work alongside other Christians. Later on, Dr. Peter Kuzmic, who is also the President of the Evangelical Alliance of Croatia invited Rev. Lazar Stojsic, President of the Evangelical Alliance of Serbia to come on stage. Their public embrace was warmly received by conference representatives as a sign of better cooperation and understanding for the future, a new tone for the Balkans.

The Conference approved the following Declaration in conclusion and agreed to accept the invitation of the Greek Evangelical Alliance to hold the Third BEC in Athens, Greece in the year 2000.

DECLARATION of the Second Balkan Evangelical Conference

We, the participants of the Second Balkan Evangelical Conference, led by the Holy Spirit, challenge all evangelical Christians:

* To not only keep the faith, brought to the Balkans by the apostles, but also to pass it on to our fellow citizens who need to be saved. We are convinced that the command of Jesus Christ, "Go and make disciples of all nations," is also binding for us as evangelical Christians in the Balkan countries.

* To proclaim through word and deed Christian values and ethics, as well as to resist all kinds of crime, violence, corruption and immorality, in order for us to truly be salt and light among our fellow citizens.

* To pray for economic well-being in our countries, especially in those Balkan countries where economic ruin has reached catastrophic proportions.

* To fulfill our responsibility to show mercy, as we encourage all believers to engage in selfless charity, realizing that "we are created to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

* To be peacemakers and, through our unity as believers, to contribute to establishing peace in the Balkans. We think that human life is God's greatest gift and so we strongly resist all kinds of military conflict and religious or ethnic intolerance. The Balkan Peninsula is our home and we will not stop praying for it to be a place of peace and justice, warmed by the flame of Christ's love.

* To continue to trust God and believe in His perfect plan for the Balkans. In His Word He has promised all those that lead righteous lives; "You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by; life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning; you will be secure, because THERE IS HOPE." (Job 11:16-18)

Together let us build the Kingdom of God on Earth and wait for the glorious appearance of God's Only Begotten Son and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! As part of the universal church of Christ let us pray with the Holy Spirit: Come, Lord Jesus! With hope let us remain faithful to the ministry to which he has called us, so that in the end we will receive the crown of righteousness!