

THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES (1934–2014)



The history of the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts has seen two distinct phases but linked by one underlying idea: fostering scholarly interpretation of the past of the region and encouraging the Balkan nations to learn more about and get to better know one another. Within a span of eighty years the Institute was inactive for more than a quarter century: from 1941, when it was closed down at the order of the Nazi German occupying authorities, until 1969. In the first phase of its work the Institute was subsidized by King Alexander I Karadjordjević of Yugoslavia, in the second by the Republic of Serbia through the Serbian Academy of Sciences as its most prestigious scientific institution. Since the pre-war Institute was seen as a royalist establishment by the new communist regime, its post-war successor was given a somewhat more up-to-date name to highlight the scholarly dimension of balkanology, a field of study that brings together various disciplines of humanities and social sciences.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting that the name of the new Institute (*Balkanološki institut*) in French and English was the same as the name of the old Institute (*Balkanski institut*). To indicate continuity between the two institutions which share the same mission and more or less the same concept, the new Institute has retained the already widely known logo of the old one. It has been a continuity discretely suggested, and implicitly confirmed by the scholarly orientation of the new Institute for Balkan Studies. Today, eighty years since the founding of the original Institute, the continuity becomes quite obvious if one compares the themes studied, the titles of monographs, edited volumes and conference publications or the contents of the Institute's journal. The former *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* has been re-

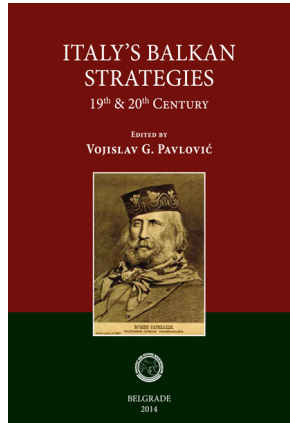
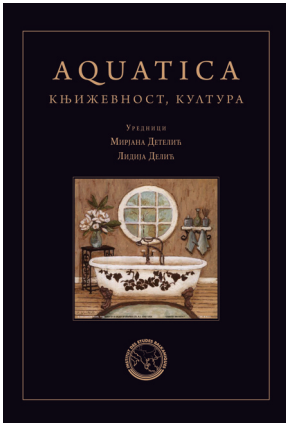
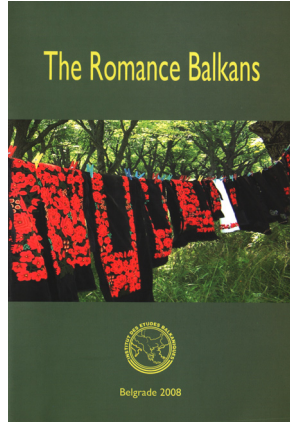
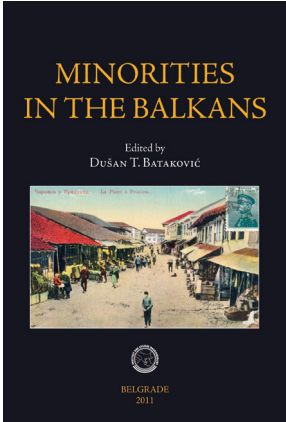
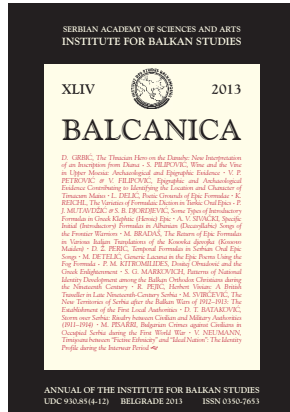
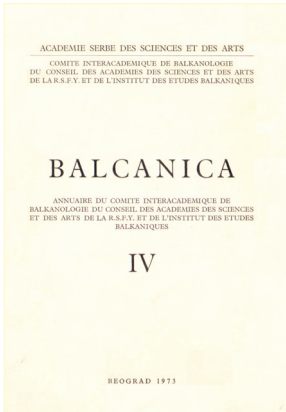
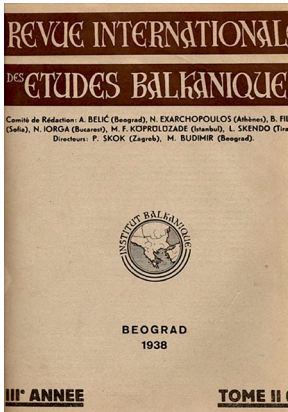
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<sup>1</sup> Cf. more in Ratko Parežanin, *Za Balkansko jedinstvo* (München: Iskra, 1979); Le memorial de l'Institut des Etudes balkaniques, *Balkanica XXX–XXXI* (1999–2000), with bibliographies of both Institutes; Ivan Obradović, "Balkanski institut", *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 3 (2010), 43–62.

named *Balcanica*, again to avoid being ideologically objected to for continuing traditions of the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, something the Titoist regime would not have allowed. Since the interwar Institute was perceived as a personal project of King Alexander, whose vision was the vision of a pacified Balkans steadily advancing through a team effort in an atmosphere of reconciliation and cooperation, it was necessary that the new Institute should have no association, at least not an obvious one, with the old Institute. As we have seen, this association was discreetly suggested nonetheless, and readily decipherable by those who knew about the interwar Institute and its work. So it happened that all unsold copies of the interwar Institute's publications were stored in the successor Institute and, in the following years, carefully distributed to interested scholarly institutions in the region and in the world wherever the past of the Balkans was studied.

King Alexander I of Yugoslavia gladly accepted the proposal by the journalist Ratko Parežanin of founding an institute for Balkan studies and became its main sponsor, setting aside as much as 400,000 dinars, a handsome sum at the time. Namely, a need was felt to challenge the widespread stereotypes about the Balkans as a "powder keg" in the backwoods of civilized Europe and draw attention to regional values and achievements which were little known or thought little of in the western world. The idea of starting the Institute essentially revived the old nineteenth-century slogan "Balkans to the Balkan peoples" and coincided with King Alexander's own political programme of concluding a Balkan pact and establishing lasting peace in the Balkans. But the King was assassinated in Marseilles in October 1934, at the very beginning of his visit to France, by a conspiracy of Croat and Bulgarian nationalists abetted by Hungarian revisionists and sponsored by Mussolini.

The assassination of King Alexander and the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, the first victims of fascism on the European international scene, marked the beginning of undermining every effort at intra-Balkan rapprochement and cultural unity which the Balkan Institute was to promote. Its founders, Ratko Parežanin and Svetozar Spanačević, did not throw in the towel though. It is not quite clear whether the financial support of the Court continued or not, but the Institute operated and was receiving a certain government subsidy as an institution of strategic significance. It should be noted that there is no evidence to suggest that authorities interfered in the editorial policy of the Institute, and the contents of the Institute's journal and books seem to confirm that they did not. The published issues of the *Revue internationale des études balkaniques*, jointly edited by Milan Budimir, a classical philologist and Professor at the University of Belgrade, and Petar Skok, a Romance philologist and Professor at the University of Zagreb, both scholars of international renown, show a journal of



independent scholarly profile with contributors from all Balkan and European countries selected for their widely recognized scholarly achievement. Intended for foreign rather than domestic publics, it was mostly published in French with a few contributions in German and English by the most distinguished balkanologists of the period, from archaeologists and historians to linguists and ethnologists to specialists in folklore studies, anthropology and political geography. The editors selected topics of broader interest to the Balkan and European readers and, in addition to original research studies, occasionally published review articles on some events from national history which were not duly covered by the available literature in world languages.

In the years between the assassination of King Alexander and the invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, the Institute depended on government funding and, according to the available sources, Parežanin managed to secure government purchase not only of the journal but also of the representative edited volume *Book on the Balkans* in Serbian and other monographs mostly intended for foreign publics. According to Parežanin himself, to cover the costs of printing and honoraria, they needed to sell at least six hundred copies of the *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* out of a press run ranging between 1,300 and 1,600. On the other hand, the subscribers came from all Balkan countries except Albania, and the direct sale of the Institute's journal and other publications in foreign languages was assisted by the legations of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. There are some indications that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia made donations to the Institute and that it was exempted from some taxes. Such incentives helped the editors and authors to retain most of their independence despite the logistic and financial support provided by the government.

Apart from the *Revue internationale des études balkaniques*, which was intended for a specialist readership, the Institute's particularly worthy publication was the 800-page two-volume *Book on the Balkans* in Serbian printed in as many as 3,000 copies. It contained seventy odd articles, some reprinted from the journal, others, more general in nature and written in a style accessible to a broader public, the aim of which was to provide an overview of scientific developments and overall cultural circumstances in the Balkans. The *Book on the Balkans* was widely distributed on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education with a view to raising the high school and university students' awareness of belonging to the Balkan community and of common values shared by the Balkan nations, and to overcoming prejudices and stereotypes the Balkan nations harboured about one another.

The Institute published some exceptionally important editions in Serbian, and in a large press run, such as *Borba za nezavisnost* [The Struggle for Independence] by Vladimir Ćorović, a Serbian polyhistor, and *Jugoslovenska misao* [The Yugoslav Idea] by Ferdo Šišić, a leading Croat historian.

Both books made use of illustrative examples to show that the Balkans in the past had usually been a pawn in the conflicts of great powers with little room for making decisions about its own future, and suggested that it had only been the creation of the common Yugoslav state that made it possible to overcome much of earlier particularisms and lay a sound basis for faster progress in all areas. The Institute also published pamphlets on other Balkan countries, for instance, Turkey; namely, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had maintained friendly relations with Atatürk's Turkey since King Alexander's times. Not even such publications had a political dimension to them; they brought statistical overviews of the economic, cultural and scientific progress made in particular areas and their purpose was mainly informative.

Envisioned to be the central publication devoted to contemporary issues, the *Economic Encyclopaedia of the Balkans* under the editorship of Svetozar Spanačević was an ambitious project thwarted by the 1941 Nazi attack on Yugoslavia.

After the invasion of Axis powers and the ensuing dismemberment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the operation of the Institute was banned by a Gestapo order of 27 August 1941, and its archives, publications and a library of 15,000 books were handed over to the German Institute in Belgrade for safekeeping. A particularly painful thorn in the side of the German occupying authorities was a history of Belgrade published by the Institute shortly before the war, at first in Serbian and then in English and French. In 1940 the German Legation in Belgrade had judged it as emphatically anti-German because it lauded the Serbian First World War victories over the Austro-Hungarian and German invaders. On the eve of the war, Yugoslav authorities were compelled to comply with the demarche of Nazi Germany: the edition was withdrawn and the remaining copies burnt. Thus the first Institute for Balkan Studies, which enjoyed the reputation of one of the best scientific institutions in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was extinguished on account of Serbia's struggle for freedom.

From the founding in 1962 of the AIESEE, a Balkan-wide association for South-East European studies based in Bucharest under the auspices of UNESCO, there was an encouragement to establish an institute for Balkan studies in Yugoslavia. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art took the decision to establish the Institute for Balkan Studies (*Balkanološki institut SANU*) in May 1967 and the Institute began operation in July 1969. At its head was the historian Vasa Čubrilović (1897–2000), Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, and its first members were archaeologist Nikola Tasić, historian Dimitrije Djordjević, ethnologist Dragoslav Antonijević, medievalist Dragoljub Dragojlović, historian Klime Džambazovski, historian Dušan Lukač, art historian Verena Han, legal scholar Djurica Krstić, Hellenic philologist Miodrag Stojanović,

historian Petar Milosavljević. In the following decades attracted a number of contributors to the journal *Balcanica* and other publications from the country (Hazim Šabanović, Hasan Kaleshi, Milenko Filipović, Milutin Garašanin, Dragoslav Srejšević, Dimitrije Bogdanović, Alojz Benac, Bogdan Brukner, Fanula Papazoglu, Milorad Ekmečić, Andrej Mitrović, Dragoljub R. Živojinović, Bogumil Hrabak, Milka Ivić, Aleksandar Matkovski etc) and abroad (Ivan Dujčev, Nikolaj Todorov, S. A. Nikitin, V. Karasiev, Wayne Vucinich, Dimitrije Djordjević, a founding member of the Institute and subsequently Professor at the UC Santa Barbara, Richard Plaschka, Robert A. Kann, Vladimir Dedijer, Nicolae Ciachir, Gabriela Schubert, Aleksandar Fol, Ioannis Papadrianos and many others).

The founding documents of the Institute specified its scholarly priorities: "To use scholarly methods in researching, studying and resolving issues in the area of balkanology, notably in archaeology, history, linguistics, ethnology, sociology, literary and art history, economics and law, which pertain to at least two Balkan nations or one Balkan and one non-Balkan nation". The need was also emphasized to intensify cooperation with related institutions in the Balkans and the world. High in the list of priorities was organization of scholarly conferences devoted to Balkan-wide topics in the cited disciplines.

The first issue of the journal *Balcanica* was released in 1970, showing the orientation of the Institute towards multidisciplinary and comparative study of the Balkans from the paleo-Balkan, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods to the age of national revolutions and emergence of independent Balkan states. The first scholarly conference, organized in 1971, was devoted to *Customary law and self-government in the Balkans and south-east Europe*. The journal published on a regular yearly basis assembled a wide circle of distinguished contributors from Europe and the USA, bringing articles in Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) and several foreign languages (English, French, German, Russian), while its Reviews section provided an authoritative critical overview of the current literature in the field of Balkan studies. The Institute published a series of monographs and conference publications, cooperated with all regional Balkan studies centres (Thessaloniki, Sofia, Bucharest) except for Albania, where the Stalinist regime of Enver Hoxha refused all communication with Belgrade for political reasons.

In January 1979 the head of the Institute became Radovan Samardžić (1922–1994), a distinguished historian, Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, widely recognized expert for the period of Ottoman dominance in the Balkans and the Mediterranean dimension of Balkan studies. Under his directorship the Institute continued its series of monographic publications and conferences, expanding its network of connections to almost all centres

for Balkan studies in the world, from Russia (USSR), Germany and Austria to Italy, France and the USA. During his tenure as Director, Samardžić edited ten issues of *Balcanica* and twenty monographs, and organized and played host to several international conferences, including the very successful Congress of the AIESEE in 1984 in Belgrade which brought together several hundred participants. The publications of the Institute which met with a particularly positive response were *La culture urbaine des Balkans* and *Migrations in the Balkans*, while its particularly productive cooperation was with the Thessaloniki-based institute of the same name (IMHA), with which several bilateral conferences were held and five volumes of conference proceedings on Serbo-Greek relation over the centuries published (1976, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1987).

In the difficult times of the break-up of the Titoist Yugoslavia and on the eve of the civil war among its peoples, in 1990, the head of the Institute became Nikola Tasić, a distinguished archaeologist, one of the founding members of the Institute and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Despite all difficulties, the Institute under his directorship did it best to maintain its scholarly connections and cooperation, even after June 1992 when the harsh international sanctions imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) even involved a ban on scientific and academic cooperation and exchange of publications. Owing to personal connections and friendships some publications did manage to find their way to Belgrade from the West, while colleagues from Greece and some other countries in the European East, from Russia to Romania, continued to send their journals and other publications, demonstrating disagreement with the first ever international embargo on scientific cooperation in European history. Steering the Institute wisely, Nikola Tasić succeeded in preserving vital channels of international communication and cooperation, and *Balcanica* almost regularly had foreign contributors, while Institute members were guest lecturers abroad and occasionally contributed to foreign journals. Under the directorship of Nikola Tasić, ten regular issues of *Balcanica*, a commemorative issue devoted to the Institute (2000) and thirty-five monographs were published, several conferences were organized, and five Institute members represented the Institute at the AIESEE Congress in Thessaloniki in 1994. An extensive history of Belgrade was published in 1994. In 1996 a conference of directors and representatives of the institutes for Balkan studies from the region (Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey) was held in Belgrade under the auspices of the Institute for Balkan Studies to discuss the attained level of cooperation and set directions for future cooperation.

After democratic changes in Serbia and the FR Yugoslavia in October 2000, regular international cooperation and exchange of publications

has been gradually restored. Nikola Tasić remained in post until his election as Director of the National Museum. He was succeeded as Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies by Ljubinko Radenković, a distinguished ethnologist and folklorist. Under his directorship the operation of the Institute was reorganized in conformity with a new legislation on scientific research. In 2005 D. T. Bataković, a historian, member of the Institute and lecturer at the University of Belgrade, was elected Director of the Institute and remained in office until 2007, when he was appointed to a diplomatic post, but remained the editor of *Balcanica* even while serving as Ambassador to Canada and France. As Director, he sought to enhance the visibility of the Institute in the international scholarly community and make the work of domestic scholars more readily accessible to foreign publics: a modern website of the Institute in Serbian and English ([www.balkaninstitut.com](http://www.balkaninstitut.com)); the annual *Balcanica* published in English and French; more monographs published in foreign languages. Towards the end of 2007 Nikola Tasić was re-elected to the post of Director and, continuing the productive trend of international cooperation, remained in office until early 2013. Since 2005 *Balcanica* has improved its national and international rating, attracting new distinguished contributors from France, the USA, Greece, Russia and other centres. Re-elected as Director of the Institute upon his return to Serbia, D. T. Bataković has been in office since February 2013.

Today the Institute for Balkan Studies has a staff of thirty-six researchers, the largest since its foundation, working on six Balkan-oriented interdisciplinary projects that assemble historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians, linguists, legal scholars and folklorists. Each project team includes outside members coming for the most part from the Faculties of Philosophy and Philology of the University of Belgrade as well as foreign scholars from several Balkan and European centres. The Institute is actively engaged in several bilateral and regional projects (Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, France) and a few European programmes of digitization of written European cultural heritage (ENArC).

Under the earlier statutes and the new Law on the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts of 2010, the Institute for Balkan Studies operates under the auspices of the Department of Historical Sciences of the Academy. This is the reason why most contributions to this issue which commemorates the eightieth anniversary of the Institute come from Serbia's distinguished scholars, mostly Academy members, and senior research fellows of the Institute.

*Editor-in-Chief*