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June 2025, Krushevo, Macedonia**

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Third World Conference of Religious Dialogue and Cooperation, 23 – 27 June 2025, Krushevo, Macedonia

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From 23 to 27 June 2025, the Third World Conference of Religious Dialogue and Cooperation was held in Krushevo (North Macedonia) with the subtitle “Religion and the Contemporary Phase of Globalization: Possibilities and Challenges.” The organizers from the Centre for Intercultural Studies and Research of the Faculty of Philosophy at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje aimed to put the social-religious dynamics related to globalization into a global perspective, inviting scholars of religious studies from all over the world. Zoran Matevski, chairman of the scientific organizing committee of the conference, emphasized that only a global-level approach would give scholars a sufficient comparative perspective. A total of 70 speakers had registered, representing all continents, although, as expected, there were more participants from Macedonia and neighboring countries. However, even in their case, the generalizations were often global; for example, Ratko Duev and his colleagues looked at interreligious and interethnic relations in the Balkans but analyzed their impact on global security.

The conference was divided into nine working sessions. Several problem areas related to globalization were examined, such as tensions in relation to migration and multiculturalism and the phenomena of fundamentalism and religious persecution, although positive social changes and forms of cooperation triggered by globalization were also discussed. Besides major world religions with a long history, there was discussion of less-organized, modern spiritual movements, such as the New Age subculture in Bulgaria, and recently evolving phenomena, including the monetization of New Pentecostal religiosity in rural South Africa, and religion-bound public attitudes toward Korean Chinese migrant workers. A separate thematic block was dedicated to the topics of sacred eroticism. For example, Massimo Introvigne, Camelia Marin and Rosita Šorite illustrated how an



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anthropologist or sociologist of religion can be a valuable expert in related court cases or in situations of media-inflated panic. Another thematic session focused on the practices of Qigong and the notion of Chi-energy. For instance, Jason Cherng shared his vision of a related conscience culture, seeing it as a global civilizational opportunity for multilateral collaboration. However, the presenters also described how in several countries (such as Taiwan or China) such practices have faced decades-long persecution.

There were some more theoretical, historically-oriented approaches that still showed a connection to contemporary crises. For example, Ivica Kelam scrutinized the religious roots of the current ecological crisis on the example of Lynn White's critique of Western Christianity. Meanwhile, the conference offered also forward-looking presentations that proposed practical tools for predicting and mitigating religious tensions, such as the paper by Željko Pavić focusing on predictors of religious (in)tolerance in Croatian society. Boban Mitevski, while talking about his experience with chaplainship in North Macedonian prisons, highlighted the hands-on role of religion-related institutions in crime and recidivism prevention, and Vladimir Trajkovski pointed to the ways in which religious communities can pursue the religious inclusion of people with special needs. Gerard Kester pondered more philosophically on how religions can make a decisive difference towards promoting global peace and justice.

Additionally, the importance of spatial thinking and related mental mapping in the context of various crises was discussed. Drawing on her experience from the HERA-CHANSE project CHRYSES, Reet Hiimäe emphasized the importance of religiously-informed mental maps in shaping responses to environmental health crises, noting the factors that have brought along interfaith cooperation in a number of previous major crises. Hiimäe stressed that more systematical research is needed to critically assess such post-disaster relief work done by faith and interfaith-based organizations and related spatial thinking (e.g., the dynamics of neighborhood help networks) in order to be better prepared for future crises, while acknowledging, supporting, and developing such cooperation on administrative-governmental levels. On the example of Australian indigenous groups, Daniel Kisliakov emphasized how flexible consideration of the ethno-cultural aspect of reality is inevitable in reaching societal religious understanding, ethnocultural integration, and communicative justice that is especially relevant to pluralistic societies.

The conference organizers deserve recognition for preparing a rich cultural program that was relevant to the theme of the conference: in addition to providing glimpses of local museums and galleries (such as the world's second largest tobacco museum, or the Nikola Martinoski Gallery), folk dances, traditional music performances, and gastronomy, it also included excursions to local churches and monasteries (such as the church of Saint Jovan, the monastery of Saint Spas and



the nunnery Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary) to engage in direct dialogue with the local communities.

On the basis of the discussions at the conference, the organizers and participants jointly put together the Krushevo Declaration 2025, in which they pointed out the urgent need to systematically address the topic of religious dialogue at the highest academic level, but also the need to reach stakeholders and the broader public with their research results. Next year's world conference has already been planned for the coming summer, so this international discussion platform will continue and presumably expand further – it would also be worthwhile inviting journalists working in the field of religion-related topics.