

András Máté-Tóth and Kinga Povedák (editors)

Religion as Securitization in Central and Eastern Europe

Religion and International Security series

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Reviewed by Jarmo Gombos, University of Szeged, Hungary

András Máté-Tóth, the founder of the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Szeged, Hungary, who is well known for his love of interdisciplinary research, co-authored and co-edited *Religion as Securitization in Central and Eastern Europe* with research fellow and assistant professor Kinga Povedák. The book focuses on how religion as securitization has affected Central and Eastern European (CEE) Societies with thirteen contributors, who are deliberately from the CEE area, have different backgrounds but are familiar with researching religion. Having only authors who are citizens of the area under discussion has its benefits and its drawbacks, but it is a valid choice. The editors are quite right when they acknowledge that the chapters on Ukraine are more pro-Ukraine than is customary in academic papers. While the editors mention that the war justifies the two chapters on Ukraine, there are three on Hungary, making it perhaps slightly overrepresented. The book introduces securitization in various states and societies in the CEE from 1882 to the present day, using different methods including a novel one in this field, giving the reader a good insight into the topic.

Máté-Tóth and Povedák introduce the motivations and the contents in the introduction in a fair way, discussing the origins of the application of securitization theory in the social sciences and the scope and limitations of the book, referring to several authors who have published studies applying it, but I feel that perhaps as the theory originated from the area of international relations, they could have introduced the theory itself in more depth in the introduction. Despite this reservation I feel they have done a good job in explaining why Máté-Tóth felt the need for this perspective, justifying both the applied theory and having contributors from the CEE.

The authors of the first chapter are Réka Szilágyi, associate professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary and Gabriella Judit Kengyel, senior lecturer at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary. They deal with victimhood, analyzing socio-political discourses and in acts of securitization by religious groups and find that applying securitization theory is a good method for describing and understanding socio-political processes in the CEE area and argue that more in-depth research should be conducted involving national security specialists and political scientists.

The second chapter is written by András Máté-Tóth, one of the editors. His chapter analyses how the communication and rhetorics of the churches in Hungary changed after the fall of the socialist party state, where religion and churches were disadvantaged. Neither the churches, nor the political parties nor the state had experience in cooperating and communicating in a democratic system. He approaches the question from multiple angles and concludes inter alia that the churches in Hungary applied successful communication after the regime change and become significant actors, enabling a better fulfilment of their mission.

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, assistant professor at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, is the author of the third chapter about the integration and political cohesion of Russian and Latvian-speaking citizens in Latvia. She explains how the loyalties of the Russian-speaking population are working and that strengthening Orthodox identity may pose a danger to the state of Latvia.

Egdūnas Račius is a professor at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania. His chapter deals with Muslim churchification and securitization in South-Eastern Europe. He defines churchification and shows two historic and one contemporary example with the aim of presenting how churchification led to securitization.

In the fifth chapter, Viktor Yelenskyi, head of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience, presents the struggle between Ukraine and Russia in the securitization of the Orthodox Church, taking into consideration international norms and human rights. He concludes that the measures taken by the government of Ukraine were an attempt to eliminate threats and Russia's attack on 24 February 2022 changed the situation radically.

Silviu Rogobete, professor at the West University of Timisoara, Romania, and Serghei Pricopiuc, PhD student at the same university, examine in their chapter the instrumentalization of Eastern Orthodoxy by the political sphere in the post-Soviet era and show how important the Russian Orthodox Church is to the government of Russia's security policy and how it enjoys a privileged position thanks to political instrumentalization, and how the church moved to openly support the war against Ukraine.

In the seventh chapter authored by Michaela Grančayová, PhD, Aliaksei Kazharski, researcher and lecturer at the Charles University, Czechia, and Clarissa Tabosa, lecturer at the Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, the contributors compare the securitization of social progressivism in Slovakia and Poland. They find that even the conservative clergy in Poland and Slovakia are at odds with far-right politicians when the discourse of the former includes humanizing portrayal of migrants. In neither country is the clergy homogenous in their attitude towards sexual minorities and conservative clergy try to deter reformists from using securitization.

In the eighth chapter, Kinga Povedák, a research fellow at the HUN-REN "Convivence" Religious Pluralism Research Group and associate professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary, examines various forms of securitization of religious communities in socialist Hungary with the help of diverse sources, from police reports to Christian pop music. She also draws attention to the importance of understanding nuances when interpreting securitized music, not to project one's own feelings and fears, as the socialist agents did.

In the ninth and final chapter Srđan M. Jovanović, associate professor of Nankai University, Tianjin, China, examines the securitizing practices of the politically active Serbian Orthodox Church, utilizing Operational Code Analysis (OPCODE), a novel method in this field. He presents the history and the particularities of this method, then for the analysis poses five philosophical and five instrumental questions. He concludes that the Serbian Orthodox Church produced text in a securitizing manner. He also finds OPCODE can and should be used for analyzing issues like securitizing practice and encourages researchers to apply it.

Overall, *Religion as Securitization in Central and Eastern Europe* addresses important issues with the help of securitization theory, applying different methods, including a new one in this field. I recommend the book to those doing religious research as well as to other social scientists, especially those who are researching politics and international relations in the CEE-area.