

Dear readers,

this, already the 17th issue of RASCEE is very rich in scope and content. We open the issue with two obituaries of prominent sociologists who have left us this year and who, through their work, have also influenced a large number of sociologists and researchers in the field of the scientific study of religion in Central and Eastern Europe. The first obituary is devoted to the Belgian sociologist of religion Karel Dobbelaere, who is commemorated by Siniša Zrinščak. The second is a recollection by Enzo Pace of the Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti.

At the core of this year's issue are six studies from across Central and Eastern Europe. The first two articles are directly related to the 16th conference of the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA) *Religious Diversity and Social Cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, which took place in Tirana (Albania) from April 25–27, 2024. We are particularly pleased to present Sara Heidl's paper *Religion as a Spectrum: Introducing Religionesque Experiences*, which was awarded the Miklós Tomka Award 2024 and was also presented at the ISORECEA conference in Tirana. Heidl's work is a qualitative study that focuses on religion as an experience and introduces the term „religionesque“ as an umbrella term for the different concepts and categories of lived religious and spiritual individual experiences. This approach is a step in the direction of bridging the interpretive and methodological problems encountered in empirical research that struggles to „capture“ the grey area of various idiosyncratic experiences in the realm of religion, non-religion, and spirituality.

We are also pleased that this issue of RASCEE includes the article by Dávid Kollár, which won second place in the competition and was also presented at the conference. In his study *Social Status and Religiosity in Hungary*, Dávid Kollár used quantitative method to investigate the relationship between the type of religiosity and the position in Hungarian society. The author comes to the conclusion that there is a significant correlation between social status and different clusters of religiosity. In particular, the upper class showed an affinity for more external, less binding forms of religiosity, while skilled workers with higher status showed a greater devotion to inner Christian values.

This year we have not suffered from any lack of interest in publications in our journal and have been fortunate to receive four more interesting studies that have passed the peer-review process. The first two are from the Baltic region. The first is a study by Triin Tark, *The Nationalist Instrumentalization of Religion in Secularizing Societies: The Struggle against the Private Theological-Philosophical Luther Academy in Estonia in the Early 1930s*. Tark analyzed Estonian newspapers reporting on the fall of the Luther Academy from the autumn of 1931 to 1933, in particular the controversy in Estonia in the early 1930s over the German-language Private Theological-Philosophical Luther Academy as an example of the nationalist instrumentalization of religion in secularizing societies. Another Baltic study, *Performing Female Identity in a Minority Religion: Female Leadership in the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church without Female Ordination* by Morta Vidūnaitė, analyzes how Lithuanian Lutheran women often take on multiple leadership roles in different areas of church life. Vidūnaitė shows that women live out their Lutheran minority and female identity through various leadership roles in this religious minority organization where women are not ordained.

The fifth published text by Željko Pavić is entitled *Religion and the Increase of Socio-Political Polarization in Croatian Society*. Using data from the European Values Study, the author examined polarization trends between 1999 and 2018 and the links between religiosity, political orientation and attitudes towards some morally controversial issues (homosexuality and abortion) in Croatia. Pavić concludes that socio-political polarization has increased significantly, which can be linked to (non-) religiosity.

The last of the articles published in this issue is the first study by a Georgian author to appear in RASCEE. The text *On the Phenomenon of Mosakdre (Co-Regent) in the Church of Georgia* by Gocha Barnovi analyzes the way the status of *locum tenens* functions in the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church and its canon law and argues that the perception of the phenomenon of mosakdre (co-regent) in the Orthodox Church of Georgia is not in accordance with the sacred canons and tradition in the process of electing bishops.

This year we also bring readers three brief book reviews reflecting on religious life and its research in Central and Eastern Europe. We are pleased to be able to provide space for this academic genre as well and to stimulate mutual information among researchers.

On behalf of the editorial team, we must apologise to the readers of our journal and to the authors of previously published studies for this year's technical problems with the use of DOIs for previously published articles. Owing to several updates of the editorial system, the journal's website was disabled several times and we spent more than half a year looking for a solution to the problems with the website's functionality and fixing the broken links to DOIs in published articles. Fortunately, we were able to solve the situation by October and we hope that we will not face such problems in the future. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Editorial Board for their support and our colleagues in Zagreb who spent a lot of time solving the problem.

We would also very much like to thank the long-serving book reviews editor, Olaf Müller, for his very professional work, his long-standing commitment to the journal, and his friendly and collegial support of the editors-in-chief. Olaf Müller became a member of the Editorial Board of the RASCEE by decision of the ISORECEA Executive Board from mid- 2024. At the same time, we would like to welcome Dinka Marinović Jerolimov, one of the founding figures and former President of ISORECEA, to the position of Reviews Editor. This year's book reviews are still being prepared by Olaf Muller, who worked on them in his dual role this year as a member of the editorial board and a books review editor.

The RASCEE journal was also approached with an offer to publish information about a documentary film in which many ISORECEA members participate “Some kind of liberating effect” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6IRpf_pBaY). The magazine does not yet have any specific section for film or non-book reviews. So far, the only non-reviewed article type other than the editorial has been the obituary to our colleague *Péter Török and to other prominent scholars in this year's issue*. Therefore, with the approval of the Editorial Board, we have created the possibility of also publishing in the journal various informative and non-reviewed texts that reflect current developments in the field of academic research on religion in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. We are open to publishing conference reports or profiles of key personalities relating to the focus of our journal.

The last news this year and in this issue is information about the editorial team. After years of searching for a suitable person for the position of Technical Editor, we have finally found support in the person of María Pinal Villanueva, who is currently working at the University of Belgrade. On behalf of the entire editorial team and the Editorial Board, we would like to welcome you, María, on board of our journal!

We wish all our readers an interesting read and a broadening of their knowledge about the current situation in the field of religious studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

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