

Dear readers,

*this year's RASCEE issue includes the outcome of two ISORECEA conferences. It is conceived as the second part of a thematic series of articles based on the outcome of the 14th conference of the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA), which was held in April 2021 in Olomouc, Czech Republic, combined with the articles based on the outcome of the 15th conference of the ISORECEA held in in April 2022 in Warsaw, Poland, both organized in an online format.*

*By combining the outputs of the two conferences, two mutually compatible thematic lines have been brought together, forming a compact issue of our journal. The first conference entitled "Religion on the Periphery" focused on exploring various peripheral areas of religious phenomena. The second conference – "Drifting apart or Consolidating? Religious and Secular Organisations in Political Constellations" dealt with the role of religion in recent political, economic, and social processes and the consequences of the changing constellations of religious and secular actors. By combining the outputs from the two conferences, we could offer thematically more diverse papers.*

*However, we begin this year's issue with the sad news of the death of our distinguished colleague Péter Török, who was one of the founders of the ISORECEA as well as the first editor-in-chief of our journal RASCEE.*

*We are very grateful to the current President of the ISORECEA, Gergely Rosta, who was also a long-time friend of Péter Török, for remembering our respected colleague and friend in the obituary that opens this year's issue.*

*As an introductory study, we offer Siniša Zrinščak's text "Religion and Politics: Challenges for the Social Scientific Study of Religion". This paper, based on a review of the background literature, highlights how political science and sociology incorporate religion into their theories and research. Particular emphasis is placed on how both disciplines theorize the relationship between religion and politics. The author also discusses some key concepts such as "politicization" and "religionization" and provides a brief overview of the academic study of religion in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism as an example of how the radically changed social and political context has been reflected in the study of religion. The paper shows how the new way of communicating political messages creates complex and contradictory references to religion. Although the literature captures this process by interpreting religion as a marker of cultural identity, the author argues that it should not be separated from the role of secular actors in imposing cultural traits on some religions or political traits on others.*

*As the second contribution we have included Tomáš Bubík's study "The Czech Struggle for and against Religion in Public Space: The Case of Re-erecting of Marian Column in Prague from the Perspective of the Media". In this article, the author explores the labelling of Czech society as religiously indifferent. As the focus of the analysis, he chose the public space in Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic. The most significant case of iconoclasm in modern Czech history was consequently chosen as the litmus test for evaluating the level of religious indifference the demolition (1918) and re-erection*

(2020) of the Marian Column on the Old Town Square in Prague. The problem of Czech indifferentism is studied by analyzing media narratives concerning the Marian Column in Prague.

This study on the intersection of religion and politics connected with national identity in the Czech Republic is followed by a third text, also focusing on the relationship between politics and religion. The study "A Comparison of the State-favored Religions in Turkey and Hungary" by the authors Fadime Yilmaz and András Máté-Tóth is based on a comparison of the situation in Turkey and Hungary. This comparative study aims to present the use of Ninian Smart's concept of dimensions of religion in analyzing the possibilities of realizing a radical separation of religion and politics in both countries.

The final study is also a comparative analysis, but this time focusing on a new form of religious life in Europe (both Western and Central), which is the spread of Buddhism. Zuzana Bártoová's study "Between Strangeness and an Alternative Buddhist lifestyle: An Expression of Religious Non-conformity in Consumer Culture" geographically returns readers to the Czech Republic but also France, countries in which she compares the similarities and differences between those who have become Buddhists. She focuses on the social perception of religious engagement and its self-presentation in consumer culture. Drawing on three years of comparative ethnographic research on the Buddhist lifestyle in five different organizations in France and the Czech Republic, she focuses on such aspects as the social pressures to adopt a conformist lifestyle because of their often individualized and activity-centred character. She also shows that Buddhist practitioners' self-presentation of their engagement is in line with alternative lifestyle discourses since it challenges different social practices, forms of sociability, ethics, and other values and many aspects typical of consumer culture.

This year's RASCEE issue also includes three book reviews of recent publications in the field of the academic study of religion focused not only on the regions of Central and Eastern Europe but also on present-day phenomena globally.

In 2022, by the time of the ISORECEA conference, the strict anti-pandemic measures associated with COVID-19 had been phased out in most countries, giving us all hope for continued in-person meetings at conferences of the ISORECEA and also other associations for the academic and sociological study of religion.

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