

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book derives from the interdisciplinary symposium titled “Under Construction: The Role of Religion in Eastern Europe Today” which was held in St. Petersburg in September 2012 in the framework of the German Russian Year of Education, Science and Innovation. It was generously funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The symposium marked the second meeting of researchers and practitioners specialized in the region of Eastern Europe organized by the working group “Religion and Belief in Eastern Europe” at the Institute for East European Studies at Freie Universität Berlin.

The working group was established in fall 2011 and unites junior and senior researchers from different academic disciplines such as Cultural Studies, Economy, Law, Political Science, and Sociology. The aim of the group is to analyze the nexus and tension between religion and the state, religion and society, and religion and economy in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe. These relationships are complex, varied, and intertwined. Interdisciplinary research can contribute to understand them better.

The symposium explored the volatile role of religion – sometimes competing religions – in the heterogeneous region of Eastern Europe, mainly in Russia and the Balkans and was organized in four panels. In their panel “Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Europe: Comparing Russia and the Balkans”, Sabine Riedel and Jochen Töpfer analyzed religious communities and religious affiliations and its impact on society and policy in South Eastern Europe and Russia. From the perspective of political economy, Theodor Grigoriadis suggested in his panel “The Political Economics of Religion: How Russian Orthodoxy Affects Institutions and Policy” that Russian Orthodoxy may affect the country’s institutional settings, both the economic nature and transformation of political regimes, supporting his arguments by a political-economic model. The panel “Law, State and Religion in Europe” conducted by Burkhard Breig, Dmitri Dinze and Olga Kudrashova, compared recent discourses on religion and the freedom of religion in Germany and Russia. The panel “The Sacred and the National: Shifting Identities in Russia Today” combined approaches from Architecture, Cultural Studies, and Political Science. Beate Apelt, Julia Gerlach, Nadir Kinossian, Inga Pylypchuk and Heike Winkel interpreted the (re)emergence of religion in contemporary Russia as a process of identity building. The relationship between politics, culture, and religion merges into a new collective identity as part of the state’s ideology, visualized in the (re)surrection of state-funded monuments. Recent discourses on religion in Russia including the one on “Pussy Riot” address the amalgamation of religion and politics. This volume presents selected contributions from among those presented in St. Petersburg. The structure of the book follows the symposium.

The working group “Religion and Belief in Eastern Europe” would like to express their thanks to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for funding and to the Institute for East European Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and the Faculty for Law at State University of St. Petersburg for the support of the project. During the two workshops, several scholars and practitioners joined and contributed with their insights to the exchange: Dmitri Dintse (Agora), Theocharis Grigoriadis (Centre for European Economic Research), Nadir Kinossian (UiT—The Arctic University of Norway), Olga Kudrashova (St. Petersburg State University), Michael Minkenberg (European University Viadrina), Irina Moroza (Humboldt University), Olga Popova (University of Regensburg), Inga Pylypchuk (Die Welt, Berliner Morgenpost), and Sabine Riedel (German Institute for International und Security Affairs).

As for the working group, the following people affiliated with the Institute for East European Studies at Freie Universität Berlin engaged in the project: Beate Apelt (Political Science), Burkhard Breig (Law), John Eltringham (Cultural Studies), Julia Gerlach (Political Science), Christian Hattendorff (Economics), Blerina Hida (Economics), Jochen Töpfer (Sociology), and Heike Winkel (Cultural Studies).

This volume is an attempt to deepen the interdisciplinary study of the relationship between religion, state, and society in Eastern Europe. Next to presenting the main ideas of selected papers presented and discussed at the workshop, it aims to stimulate for further research in the field.

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