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Editors' Introduction

The collapse of communism across the Eastern half of Europe in the years 1989–1991 has had diverse consequences for the entire region and, indeed, for Europe as a whole. Among other things, 12 formerly communist states are now members of NATO, while 10 are also members of the European Union. In the religious sphere, the end of the communist organizational monopoly has led to a new freedom of religion, although, in Russia, the Orthodox Church pushed through a restrictive bill in 1997, which made it more difficult for its newly arrived competitors from Western churches to proselytize.

The legacy of communism has included a weakening of traditional churches in some countries (especially the Czech Republic, eastern Germany, and Albania), controversies about clerical collaboration with communist authorities (especially in eastern Germany, Romania, and Poland), a temporary fracturing of the dominant church in Bulgaria and Ukraine at the time the post-communist transition began, and a reinforcement of the nexus between nationalism and religion (especially in Romania, Poland, and Russia, but also in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the War of Yugoslav Succession likewise had its impact). In addition, one may note that communism effected a shift in values, having an impact on the nature of religiosity.

This special issue of *Politics and Religion* is devoted to post-communist Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and brings together the work of nine scholars. The issue opens with a contribution by Robia Charles, who shows that high levels of trust in religious institutions may coexist with low levels of religiosity as measured by participation in liturgy, prayer, and fasting. Taking Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as her cases, she documents the disjunction between religiosity and trust in religious institutions, demonstrating that people look to churches for more than just doctrines and rituals, seeing their religious institutions also as the conscience of the nation.

Although much has changed in terms of church-state relations in Poland, Irena Borowik's article for this issue argues that attitudes about religion in Polish society have hardly changed since 1989. In the endeavor to explain the stability of this factor in a time otherwise characterized

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by massive political, economic, and social transformation, she explores five alternative hypotheses, stressing, in turn, historical continuity, the civic (extra-religious) role of Catholicism in Poland, the lack of social security, decades of effective socialization, and the possibility that religiosity retains elements of continuity only on the surface, while, below the surface, there is increasing diversity of belief. She concludes by giving stress to the last of these hypotheses, noting that the high levels of declared religiosity, as recorded in surveys, may conceal a lack of real religious faith.

In the third article for this issue, Elena Lisovskaya and Vyacheslav Karpov explore how the desecularization of Russia's schools has fueled tensions between Orthodox and Muslim believers. The restoration of religious education to state schools has been a sensitive issue, they show but note that this has come on the initiative of elites rather than in response to grassroots pressure. Indeed, 15 years after the end of official Soviet atheism, only about 10% of Russians attend religious services at least once a month. They also argue that, where separate classes in Orthodox and Islamic religion are offered, the separation of students into Christian and Muslim classes is associated with high levels of xenophobia and ethnic prejudice. Lack of information is part of the problem, as reflected in the fact that almost half of all Russians view Islam as a militant faith.

Inter-faith relations are also the subject of Angela Ilić's article, which focuses on the role of religious communities in preserving Hungarian ethnic identity in Vojvodina. Specifically, religious instruction for Hungarian churches in Vojvodina is given in Hungarian, thus giving students an opportunity also to develop their ability in Hungarian language; otherwise, in the state schools, instruction is in Serbian. However, the number of classes taught in Hungarian has been steadily declining over the past two decades. Citing the 2002 census, she reports that, at that time, there were about 293,000 Hungarians in the Republic of Serbia, out of a total population of 7.5 million.

Laman Tasch provides a comparative analysis, contrasting the situation of national and religious minorities in Russia and Turkey. Russia is home to more than 180 nationality groups, while Turkey records the presence of between 20 and 50 distinct nationalities. Tasch recounts how some elementary schools in Russia introduced a class on "the Fundamentals of Orthodox culture" in 2006 and how 10 scholars sent a letter of protest to President Vladimir Putin, alleging that this was incompatible with the principle of church-state separation. This class figured, however, as one symptom of a growing tendency in Russia to identify

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the Russian nation with the Orthodox Church. There is a parallel situation in Turkey, where the government favors Sunni Islam and actually shows more toleration for non-Muslims than for Muslims who are not Sunni.

Robert Goeckel's contribution to this issue takes us back to communist times, specifically to the late Khrushchev era, when the Soviet regime was conducting a tough anti-religious campaign marked, among other things, by the closure of church facilities. Most of the work conducted on this era up to now has focused on the treatment of the Russian Orthodox Church, but Goeckel, basing himself on extensive research in archives in Tallinn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), and Moscow, focuses specifically on how the anti-religious campaign impacted the non-Orthodox churches of the three Baltic republics. He uncovers many hitherto unknown details and argues that "the impact of confessional differences, new foreign relations, and the interplay among local/republic/central officials on the implementation of this policy distinguishes the Baltic case from other ones."

The last article in this issue, contributed by Gerd Inger Ringdal and Kristen Ringdal looks at certain psychological dimensions of religiosity, raising the question, "Does religiosity protect against war-related distress?" In an effort to answer this question, they examine data collected in Bosnia-Herzegovina in late 2003 within the framework of the South-East European Social Survey Project. After assessing responses from 3,313 respondents, they conclude that religiosity did not serve, in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to buffer or moderate the effects of war on war-related distress, because, while religious beliefs offered some comfort, religious participation actually served to increase war-related distress.

Finally, this issue is rounded out by a set of thematically related reviews assembled by book review editors Laura Olson and Andrew Murphy. Included are reviews of literature focusing on post-Soviet societies, as well as on Bulgaria, Romania, and the case of Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović.

Sabrina P. Ramet
Ted G. Jelen
(co-editors)

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