

RELIGION IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN SOCIETIES: Its Social Role and People's Expectations

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyses the public role of religion in post-communist Central Europe by researching perceptions and expectations of people concerning different aspects of the social role of religion. The paper argues that the social significance of religion should be analysed from the point of view of its ability to fulfil different social functions and social expectations connected with it. Based on the data from the Aufbruch research project and partly from the International Social Survey Project, religious portraits of 13 post-communist countries are presented. A more in-depth analysis is done for four countries (Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia), since in these countries the differences in the general level of religiosity vary significantly, ranging from highly religious (Croatia) to highly secularized (Czech Republic). The findings show that social expectations about the public role of religion differ due to a social field in which religion is/can be engaged and that people's expectations about the public and social role of religion do not always match the general level of religiosity in a specific society.

KEYWORDS: religion, public role, social role, expectations, Central Europe

RELIGION AS A PUBLIC ACTOR IN POST-COMMUNISM

Religion was an important part of the social changes connected with the fall of the Berlin Wall.¹ As an anti-religious political stance was one of the main aspects of communist regimes, social and political processes had a substantial religious tint (Tomka 1979, 1991; Zrinščak 2004), a fact that had become widely recognised with the fall of communism. Such a prominent social role of religion has continued to be visible in the post-communist period. The majority

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of Central and Eastern Europe countries were marked by a religious revitalization at the individual and societal level, particularly during the 1990s, although its degree and extent differed between countries. Aspects of the public role of religion have been widely discussed in the countries in which religious involvement in politics was strengthened by war circumstances and/or by the processes of dismantling old states and building new ones (e.g., Pace 2004; Velikonja 2003; Vrcan 1994). However, it could be argued that the issue of the (new) public role of religion has become a prominent theme in the sociology of religion in the post-communist region. Thus, the issues of social positions of traditional and new religions, of religious rights and freedom, and of interconnection between the religious and the national, between religion and politics, and between religion and the development of democracy, and so on have each been addressed in numerous studies (Borowik 1997; Borowik 2006; Cifrić 2000; Hornsby-Smith 1997; Marinović Jerolimov, Zrinščak and Borowik 2004; Tomka 1995; Tomka and Zulehner 1999; etc.).

However, it seems that another perspective has become dominant in recent years: the presumption that, after 20 years of post-communist transition, the European pattern of the secularization process has slowly (but significantly) found its way into the majority of Central and Eastern European countries (Müller 2009; Pickel 2009). There has been an argument pointing to contextual secularization, which means that secularization is neither linear nor causal and that it depends on a number of contextual factors, which are strikingly different among countries (Pickel 2011; Pickel and Sammet 2012). This is also formulated as a “differentiated theory of secularization that allows for secularization at different levels, at different times and at different speeds...” (Pickel, Pollack and Müller 2012, 252). Nevertheless, the secularization thesis, even the contextual or differentiated one, continues to question the social significance of religion, an issue that is at the core of current debates in the sociology of religion.

There are two related remarks that can be made here. Firstly, as already underlined, religion was an important social and political institution in communist times. While the Church had no access to the officially controlled public sphere, it was an integral part of the everyday lives of the majority of people. Moreover, with the Church being a politically marginalized institution, though at the same time the only institution that was not totally controlled by politics and which had a clear oppositional stand, everything connected with religion and the Church had political features. Therefore, the so-called new public role of religion was in post-communism has been only partly new – that is, in the sense that new social circumstances occurred that had an influence on the aspects of the public role of religion, but not in the sense that religion assumed a significant social and political role that it had not had in the past. Secondly, the public role of religion in post-communism could be considered a part of a more global reconfiguration of the religious-social nexus, a fact that has theoretical and methodological consequences. Controversies about the role of religion in post-communism are not markedly different from similar processes and debates elsewhere. A global review suggests that there are numerous variations between secular and sacred and that there is a need “to achieve a fresh perspective, notably on the religious as it relates to the political” (Martin 2011, 20), and that contradictory tendencies that exist in the world today “have to appear in the same unity of analysis” (Beyer 2011, 21).

In light the above considerations, this paper aims to pay closer attention to the public role of religion in post-communism, with particular regard to the perceptions and expectations of people about different aspects of the social role of religion. We argue that social significance of religion should be analysed not only by observing revitalizing or declining religious trends, but also from the point of view of the ability of religion to fulfil different social functions.

Our starting theoretical position in that respect is the fact that countries of Central and Eastern Europe underwent complex changes after WWII, including modernization. The modernization process was a peculiar one (partial or deviant) as it did not involve political freedom; however, its other aspects were in place, such as industrialization, urbanization, deruralization,

mass education, and employment of women. Modernization, together with the political enforcement of atheism, contributed to the functional differentiation at the societal level. Though revitalization has been one important aspect of the post-communist social development, both public debates about the social and political role of religion and the Church—in particular, debates about whether religion is or should be influencing different public life spheres—and a number of studies showed that at least significant parts of the post-communist population reject totally or partly the idea of the religion's influence on other social spheres. In that sense, Dobbelaere's model of different levels of (de)secularization is applicable (Dobbelaere 1999, 2002). At the societal level, secularization is a consequence of the functional differentiation that causes that each social subsystem (polity, economy, science...) to function according to its own medium, values, and norms (Dobbelaere, 1999, 230–231). Therefore, they are autonomous from religiously prescribed rules. Meso level (or organizational) secularization refers to the changes that pluralisation brought at the religious market and, consequently, describes the adaptation of religions to the social processes, whether it is about adaptation, rejections, or other forms of organizational changes in religion. The individual level refers to individualization of religion (i.e. ways in which religion is used and lived in the private sphere). Thus, trends of unbelief, *bricolage*, decline in Church religiosity, or other forms of subjective religiosity should be analysed at this level. Dobbelaere made very clear that secularization is not a mechanical, straightforward, evolutionary process, and that there is an open question about how each level influences others. One key open question is the nature of what he calls a compartmentalization index, an index based on secularization-in-mind—that is, what people think about interference of religion to other sub-systems (Dobbelaere 2002, 169). In addition, an important fact is that actors can bring significant differences in how secularization evolves in different countries (Dobbelaere 2002, 181-187).

In this regard, the post-communist case is of great interest, as extraordinary social circumstances have brought reconfiguration of actors at the societal level and changes in religiosity at the individual level. Thus, there are questions that remain unanswered: What do people, believers and non-believers, the religious or non-religious, expect from religion? What do they expect from religion/religious actors at the individual and societal levels? How do they perceive the role of religion in different parts of everyday life? It is doubtful whether the relation between the Church commitment and compartmentalization is strongly negatively related, as has been the case in a number of Western European societies (Dobbelaere 2002, 170). On the other hand, in another words, it can be asked that, if a person attends Church services on a regular basis and prays often, does he or she have a greater expectation from religion's public position, or can a secular person not interested in religion have some expectations from religion on a societal level? Another question is whether usual socio-demographic indicators of secularization (age, urbanization, and level of education) operate in the same direction in relation to the role of religion in society in different post-communist countries.

To sum up, this paper makes a step towards complementing a study of the public role of religion with people's expectations about the social functions of religion. In general, we explore attitudes and perceptions of people regarding engagement of Churches and religious communities in the public sphere, and whether those attitudes and perceptions are related with some basic socio-religious and socio-demographic characteristics. Since attitudes and perceptions reveal what people think about the social role of religion, and what they expect from religion, we use the term *expectations* in the analysis of questions elaborated in more details the next section. Specifically, we have explored what people think about the general social role of religion (for instance, whether they find that Church provides an adequate response in specific social fields), about the socio-political role of religion in democracy (for instance, whether they find that Church is an important actor in democratic development, the relation between religion and politics), and the role of religion in regard to various social institutions, particularly welfare ones (such as whether people think that Church should have more or fewer specific institutions). The latter aspect is a rarely explored one. In that context, the term religion is un-

derstood in a broader sense (i.e., in the sense of Church-related religion). This is, in the present authors' opinions, justified by the fact that expectations from religion at the societal level can be grasped only through the role of Church or any other religious communities. Consequently, individual religiosity is here viewed through indicators of religious self-identification and prayer.

Thus, the paper follows the argument by one of its authors that studying of the public role of religion, and in particular of the Church–state relations, should be complemented with study of the social functions of the Church as the basis for understanding the differences in normative and actual social position of the Church in different countries (Zrinščak 2011). Similarly, Tomka argued that the issue of Church as a public actor has been neglected in the sociology of religion in post-communism and that “the social function and capacity of religion and of religious institution are basic frameworks of the interpretation of actual religious situation” (Tomka 2007, 107).

The paper is divided into five parts. After this short theoretical discussion, the research design is explained. In order to contribute to the analysis of the social role of religion in post-communism, the third section introduces basic religious profiles of thirteen Central and Eastern European countries. Based on these profiles, four countries are selected for further analysis: Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, countries with profoundly different religious situations in which, consequently, people's expectations about religion can vary significantly. The fourth section is devoted to a more detailed analysis of the role of religion and people's expectations concerning this role. The last section summarizes the results and offers some general remarks based on the analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The analysis presented in the paper is based on the data coming from the Aufbruch research project and from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Both surveys are cross-national and longitudinal studies based on quantitative research methods. There were two waves of the Aufbruch research project, in 1997 and 2007. The first wave covered ten countries (Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, and East Germany), while, in 2007, four more countries were included (Moldova, Belarus, Serbia, and Bulgaria). The project had a quantitative and qualitative approach, with the research goal being to explore religiosity, value orientations, and the position of religions in post-socialist countries in Central and Southeast Europe². The International Social Survey Program is a continuous research project with more than forty countries included. The 2008 module was devoted to religion, with the aim being to explore religious change, impact of religion on socio-political attitudes and behaviours, religious pluralism, and conflict, etc.³ The analysis done in this paper is based on the 2007 Aufbruch and the 2008 ISSP data.

Dependent Variables

For the purpose of the analysis, the social role of religion was explored; consequently, various variables were used to indicate perceptions/expectations about the social engagement of religion.

As an indicator of *a general social role of religion*, ten variables from two Aufbruch research questions were used. The first question concerned the belief that the Catholic Church can respond to moral problems and needs of individuals, problems of family life, questions about the meaning of life, and to actual social problems in a given country. The second question concerned the adequacy of big Christian Churches to deal with unemployment, abortion, extra-

²Tomka and Zulehner (2008).

³For more information: <http://www.issp.org/>

marital status, same-sex relations, growing social differences, and politics of the government. The answers to these questions were dichotomous: 1 = yes, 2 = no.

Three questions were used as indicators of *the socio-political role of religion in a democracy*. The first one comes from the Aufbruch research, where respondents had to express their level of agreement with the following statement: “For strengthening democracy it is important to assure that churches would have a role to play”. The second and the third questions come from the ISSP research, where respondents were asked about the influence of religious leaders on people’s votes and the government. A five-point, Likert-type scale was used (strongly agree = 5, strongly disagree = 1).

Three questions were used to assess *the engagement of religion in specific social institution* and financial models linked to this engagement (from the Aufbruch research). The first one was as follows: “During recent years, churches and religious communities have opened various institutions. Would you say that churches and religious communities still have too little or already have too many of the following institutions?” The following institutions were listed – kindergartens, schools, retirement homes, hospitals, unions, and media⁴, while answers were either still too little (= 1) or already too many (= 2). The second question concerned financing of these institutions established by church/religious communities. The answers were: the costs of these institutions should be fully paid by believers (= 1); they should be fully paid by the state (= 2); partially: one part should be paid/subsidized by the state, the other part by church/religious community (= 3); the church/religious community should support itself from its own resources (= 4); these institutions should be financed through contributors of those individuals who actually use these institutions (= 5).

The questions used in these two surveys have revealed many aspects of the social role of religion. In this respect, the Aufbruch data are very interesting, especially since other large-scale comparative researches do not pay much attention to different aspects of the social role of religion. Still, it should be underlined that our analysis was restricted by the types of questions we had at our disposal.

Independent Variables

With the purpose of exploring a religious landscape in Central and Eastern Europe, the indicators of religious self-identification, religious practice (Church attendance and praying), and believing in God were used.⁵ Since the paper aims to analyse the differences in social expectations from the role of religion, socio-demographic variables—age, level of education, and residential status—were also used. Two socio-demographic variables were recorded into three groups. For the age variable, the first group is aged 18–39, the second 40–59, and the third 60 and over. For the education variable, the first group consists of respondents with elementary school education or below, the second with high school education, and the third with college, university degrees, or higher.

RELIGIOSITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: A BASIC PROFILE

Since this paper aims to research the position of religion in the public sphere from the standpoint of people’s expectations from religion, some basic data on religiosity (i.e. about religious self-identification, religious service attendance and praying, and belief in God) are going to be presented first with the aim of exploring the differences among 13 Central and Eastern Europe countries.

⁴Since the distribution of answers for kindergartens and schools and retirement homes and hospitals is equal, they were averaged out at educational institutions and social and health care institutions.

⁵The scale of answers for religious self-identification, religious practice (Church attendance and praying), and believing in God are presented in Table 1. In Table 9, the scale of answers for religious self-identification and Church practice differ since they come from the ISSP Module Religion 2008, which had different categories than those used in the Aufbruch research.

In the appendix (Table 1), percentages of answers are presented with respect to religious self-identification, attendance of religious services in Church (apart from weddings, burial ceremonies, and baptisms), frequency of praying, and belief in God. The results suggest there are big variations within and between the analysed countries. Basic religious orientation is markedly present: in eleven countries out of thirteen, more than 50% of respondents say they are either very religious or religious to some extent. By contrast, the vast majority of those who declare they are absolutely non-religious are from the Czech Republic (44.6%), a substantive minority from Hungary (21.7%), and even a very visible minority from Slovenia (15.4%). However, the absolutely non-religious are almost non-existent in Romania, Poland, and Moldova.

The data on religious service make the picture a bit fuzzy. According to this indicator, Poland is the most religious and the Czech Republic the least religious country. In Poland alone, more than two-thirds of respondents attend religious services regularly (weekly or monthly), while in the Czech Republic over 60% never go to Church, which is in line with the indicator about self-identification. In all other countries, the levels of Church attendance are not in accordance with religious self-identification, as Church attendance has much lower values.

The results on the frequency of praying as one of the indicators of religiosity are more in line with the indicators of religious self-identification. The Romanian respondents pray most frequently out of all respondents from Central and Eastern Europe (81.5% pray on weekly basis), while 66.8% of Czechs do not pray at all. Over 50% of people from Poland (as much as 66%), Moldova, Croatia and Slovakia pray at least once a week.

The indicator connected with believing in God confirms high variations in the religious landscape of post-communist countries. With the exception of Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, in all other countries at least two thirds of people claim they believe in God. In several countries, this belief is rather widespread, making it almost impossible to find an atheist. On the other hand, only one third of people believe in God in the Czech Republic. Interestingly, in all countries the level of belief in God is higher than the number of those declaring themselves as being religious.

In order to find a more consistent pattern of religiosity, a ranking system of all countries was introduced based on religious indicators presented in Table 1. Table 2 presents ranked mean values for each of the indicators of religiosity, while for the belief in God the countries are ranked according to the percentages of "yes" answers.

Based on the ranking of the countries in Table 2, four groups of countries can be derived. The group with the most religious countries includes Poland, Romania, Moldova, and Croatia, which are all ranked first according to all of the indicators. The group comprising religious countries that are in principle ranked in the middle of the scale includes Ukraine, Slovakia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Lithuania. The group with less religious countries includes Slovenia and Hungary, which, with one exception, appear to be at the bottom of the scale. The fourth "group" consists in fact of only one country: the Czech Republic, as the most secularized according to all of the indicators. Though the grouping of countries seems to be sound, we are aware of the lack of a consistent criterion of division within each of the indicators, which, consequently, leads to a subjective division. However, in developing the ranking system, we have also relied on the indicator of religious belonging, which is not presented in Table 1, but is in accordance with other indicators from the same table. The *Aufbruch* data show that, in the countries included in the first group, around 90% or more of the respondents declare religious belonging, which makes this group different from the second one, in which, with the exception of Lithuania, religious belonging varies between around 70% and 80%.

In order to continue with a more in-depth analysis, one country from each of these four groups was chosen: Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, respectively. Comparison of these four countries is suitable due to the mutual communist history and experience of living in federative states in the 20th century (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), but also

Religious Self-Identification (mean)	Church Practice (mean)	Prayer (mean)	Beliving in God
Romania	Poland	Romania	Poland
Poland	Romania	Poland	Romania
Croatia	Croatia	Moldova	Moldova
Moldova	Moldova	Croatia	Croatia
Serbia	Slovakia	Slovakia	Ukraine
Lithuania	Lithuania	Ukraine	Slovakia
Slovakia	Bulgaria	Serbia	Belarus
Belarus	Ukraine	Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ukraine	Slovenia	Belarus	Serbia
Bulgaria	Belarus	Lithuania	Lithuania
Hungary	Serbia	Hungary	Slovenia
Slovenia	Hungary	Slovenia	Hungary
Czech Republic	Czech Republic	Czech Republic	Czech Republic
Most Religious	Religious	Less Religious	Secular

Table 2: Ranking of the countries according to religiosity. Source: Aufbruch 2007

because of the Catholic background in all of them. However, the main goal was to see if and how the differences in the social role of religion according to people's views were connected with the differences in religiosity in various countries.

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF RELIGION

The General Social Role

A sociological perspective observes religions in their social action, which is framed in terms of their guiding principles. In other words, sociology tries to explore and understand the socio-cultural imprint of religion(s) on society. However, the question is how these guiding principles shape a very concrete social practice. In order to asses that, some of the questions from the Aufbruch research project were used, which can be perceived as indicators of a general role of religion in society with a view to exploring the attitudes on this role, presented in Tables 3 and 4.

The highest expectations from the Catholic Church in all four countries are connected with the question about the meaning of life. To a lesser extent, the Catholic Church is expected to respond to moral problems and needs of individuals, and even less to the problems of family life. The action upon actual social problems in respective countries is seen as the least response that religion is least able to provide. There is an evident connection between the general level of religiosity explored in the previous section of the paper and the belief in the responses of Church from Table 3. In all four aspects, the belief in the ability of the Church to respond is lower in less religious countries than in more religious ones, although there are important differences in relation to different issues.

In respect of various social issues (Table 4), the respondents have a different opinion about the appropriateness of big Christian Churches to deal with them. One of the most accepted issues that Churches are believed to be able to deal with are growing social differences, followed by unemployment. This was expected, as these are the most pressing social issues connected with the transition from communism to a market economy. These answers suggest a widespread distrust in political institutions – that are unable to resolve social problems people

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
Moral problems and needs of individuals	56.3	47.9	45.6	40.5
Problems of family life	55.1	52.5	42.1	34.5
Questions about meaning of life	64.5	66.8	53.4	50.3
Actual social problems in our country	37.2	35.4	31	26.5

Table 3: Believing that the Catholic Church can respond to the (only yes answers) %

Source: Aufbruch 2007

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
Unemployment	58	56.4	36.4	47.2
Abortion	48.8	51.6	31.5	30.3
Extramarital relations	50.7	57.5	32.7	36.2
Same-sex relations	52.1	53	32.2	30.7
Growing social differences	70.3	63.8	49	52.9
Politics of the government	30.1	36	19.5	33

Table 4: Appropriateness of big Christian Churches to deal with (only yes answers) %

Source: Aufbruch 2007

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
	β			
Age	.030	.050	.134***	.037
Education	.016	.027	.067	.060*
Residential status	-.021	.034	.005*	-.040
Religious self-identification	-.278***	-.206***	-.191***	-.238***
Church practice	-.218***	-.308***	-.132**	-.246***
Prayer	-.120**	-.123**	-.237***	-.117*
R	.547	.600	.553	.564
R ²	.299	.360	.305	.318

Table 5: General social role of religion index (linear regression)

Source: Aufbruch 2007 | ***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

	For strengthening democracy, it is important to assure that churches would have a role to play		
	(fully) disagree	neither disagree nor agree	(fully) agree
Croatia	38.1	26.1	35.8
Slovakia	33.3	31.3	35.4
Slovenia	58.6	24.3	17.0
Czech Republic	52.7	26.2	21.1

Table 6: For strengthening democracy, it is important to assure that churches would have a role to play

Source: Aufbruch 2007

face in their everyday life—, but also a high expectation from religious institutions to resolve these problems. This kind of expectation is highest in Croatia, as the most religious out of the four countries, and the lowest in Slovenia (and not in the Czech Republic, though it is the most secularized country!). On the other hand, the lowest expectation is connected with the ability of the Church to deal with politics of government. Although people do not trust much in the ability of political institutions, they do not think it appropriate that the Church deals with politics. Abortion, extramarital relations, and same-sex relations are often addressed by big Christian Churches. In that respect, acceptance is also present, though in different degrees. The Czech and Slovakian respondents think that it is more appropriate for the Church to deal with extramarital relations than with abortion and same-sex relations. In Croatia slightly, over 50% of respondents consider that the Church can adequately deal with the issues of same-sex relations and extramarital-relations, while this is not the case with abortion (48.8% think that Church can appropriately deal with this topic).

Although questions presented in Tables 3 and 4 have different wording, they are both aimed at capturing people's expectations concerning religion with regard to various social aspects. That is why we have decided to construct an index, since the scale of answers is the same for both questions.⁶ This index is analysed as the general social role of religion index and is treated as a criteria variable in the regression analysis. Predicting variables are socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, and residential status) and religiosity variables (religious self-identification, Church practice, and frequency of prayer).

In respect of socio-demographic predictors, there are differences among the Croatian, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Czech respondents. Croatian and Slovakian respondents do not differ with regard to socio-demographic variations, while there is a higher level of probability that, in Slovenia, the elderly and those living in rural places would expect more from the social engagement of religion. In the Czech Republic, the same is true only of those who are less educated. Religiosity is the strongest predictor in all four countries. Those who identify themselves as more religious and those who practice their religion more often tend to have higher expectations about the social engagement of religion. It should also be noted that variance explained in the regression model in all four countries is rather high for this kind of analysis.

The Socio-Political Role of Religion in Democracy

The relation between religion and democracy is a hotly debated topic, and opinions differ, ranging from congruence between religion and democracy to major discrepancy between them (e.g., Göle 2010; Sandel 1996; Stepan 2002 etc.). The previous section confirmed that the public has the lowest expectations about the engagement of religion with the politics of the government. Similar discrepancy in attitudes/expectations about the engagement of religion has been detected recently in another analysis, which has, based on the same Aufbruch data, argued that people distinguish socio-cultural and socio-political roles of religion (Ančić 2011). Bearing this in mind, the aforementioned three indicators were used as measuring expectations about the political role of religion in democratic societies.

Percentages pertaining to the question about the importance of assuring the role of Church in strengthening democracy are presented in Table 6. Comparison among the countries has revealed a clear pattern. On one side, there are Croatia and Slovakia as more religious countries; on the other, there are Slovenia and the Czech Republic as less religious or even secular countries. Irrespective of that, it is interesting to note that Croatian respondents are split in their opinions: 38.1% (fully) disagree with the statement compared to 35.8% who (fully) agree. Similar (dis)approval is present in Slovakia. Although religiosity in these two countries is higher than in the other two, the level of religiosity only partially explains (dis)approval of

⁶Reliability analysis for the scale shows that Cronbach's α for all four countries is 0.882. For Croatia it is 0.861, for Slovakia 0.899, for Slovenia 0.889, while for the Czech Republic it is 0.854. Although the values of Cronbach's α are different in all four countries, it is obvious that the validity of those variables allows us to construct an index.

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
	β			
Age	.067*	.012	.100***	.065*
Education	-.004	-.007	-.030	-.026
Residential status	.080**	.078**	.067**	-.026
Religious self-identification	-.172***	-.247***	-.207***	-.277***
Church practice	-.236***	-.248***	-.335***	-.236***
Prayer	-.142**	-.087	-.067	-.100*
R	.521	.554	.624	.595
R ²	.272	.307	.389	.354

Table 7: For strengthening democracy, it is important to assure that churches would have a role to play (linear regression)

Source: Aufbruch 2007 | ***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
Religious leaders should not influence people's votes	84.6	74.3	82.7	73.7
Religious leaders should not influence government	80.5	70.2	82.5	69.4

Table 8: Influence of religious leaders on people's votes and government (only answers (strongly) agree) %

Source: ISSP 2008

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
	Religious leaders should not influence people's vote				Religious leaders should not influence government			
	β							
Age	-.021	.001	-.005	-.014	-.011	-.029	-.022	-.030
Education	-.052	.002	-.025	-.036	.029	-.013	-.017	-.022
Residential status	-.002	.075*	-.033	-.045	.031	.078*	-.013	-.036
Religious self-identification	-.107*	-.206***	-.084	-.100*	-.088*	-.212***	-.090	-.105*
Church practice	-.026	-.060	.004	-.134**	-.118**	-.122*	.000	-.181
Prayer	-.018	.096	-.038	.001	.000	.094	-.088	-.022***
R	.156	.208	.117	.219	.189	.267	.166	.278
R ²	.024	.043	.014	.048	.036	.071	.028	.077

Table 9: Influence of religious leaders on people's voting and government (linear regression)

Source: ISSP 2008 | ***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

the role of the Church in democracy, contrasting to the perceptions of its role in the previously analysed social issues.

Table 7 presents the results from the linear regression analysis with socio-demographic and religiosity indicators.

There is a difference according to the residential status in Croatia, Slovakia, and Slovenia, as respondents living in urban places are less supportive of the role of the Church in strengthening democracy, while this is true only of younger respondents in the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Religiosity is a significant predictor in all four countries. Those respondents who are more religious are also more in favour of the statement that it is important to assure that the Church has a role to play. There are two exceptions in that regard. The frequency of praying, as one of the indicators of religiosity, does not correlate with this statement in Slovenia and Slovakia. In addition, the expectation about assuring the position of religion in the process of strengthening democracy does not say much about that type of position. Thus, the question is to what extent religion can be engaged in the field of politics?

The results indicated in Table 8 stand in contrast to previous data. A significant majority of respondents in all four countries are opposed to the influence of religious leaders on people's votes and the government. If one would look at these results not knowing much about the religiosity in these four countries, one could possibly come to a conclusion that these countries are highly secularized, with Croatia the most secularized among them. There is a firm refusal of the idea that religious leaders should influence the voting and government, irrespective of the high level of religiosity and high level of the public presence of religion, such as in the case of Croatia. It is obvious that the data about the general level of religiosity do not have any predictive power of explaining the relation between religion and politics, at least not in Central European countries. Although there is much more to politics than people's votes or the work of government, the expectations about the engagement of religion in the field of politics do not match the broader socio-religious structure of the four analysed societies.

The data shown in Table 9 suggest that socio-demographic differences appear to be present only in Slovakia, where urban respondents are more opposed to religion influencing politics. Religiosity as a predictor in the regression model shows its significance in Croatia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, while, in Slovenia, none of the three indicators of religiosity is correlated with this attitude. Concerning attitude on religious leaders influencing people's vote in Croatia and Slovakia, only those who identify themselves as being more religious accept that idea, while in the Czech Republic it is the case also with those who attend Church regularly. Similar acceptance is visible with the idea of religious leaders influencing government, which is more characteristic for Croatian, Slovakian, and Slovenian regular churchgoers and self-identified religious persons, while in the Czech Republic this is only the case with the latter. Although religiosity seems to be a significant predictor, the variance explained in this model (pseudo R²) is significantly lower than in the regression models on the social role of religion. Therefore, as already concluded based on the data presented in Table 8, the link between religiosity and the expectations about the influence of religion on politics is very weak.

Engagement of Religion and Specific Social Institutions

From the above-noted differences, it may be concluded that a general social role and socio-political role do not explain a particular role in different social fields, particularly the welfare one. Therefore, in Table 10 the analysis is extended with opinions on specific institutions and with people's readiness to participate with their own financial contributions.

The expectation about religious communities establishing various social institutions varies in these four countries, revealing quite differentiated perception of the engagement of religion. Several things should be underlined here. First, the highest expectations concern the involvement of religion in the establishment of educational (kindergartens and schools) and social and health care institutions (retirement homes and hospitals). Over 85% of respondents think

<i>During recent years, churches and religious communities have opened various institutions. Would you say that churches and religious communities still have too little or already have too many of the following institutions? %</i>				
	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
	Still to little			
Unions	62.6	44.6	37.0	48.8
Media	50.6	58.1	28.2	62.7
Educational institutions	84.7	65.0	54.3	74.6
Social and health service institutions	90.7	85.7	70.6	86.5
<i>What is your opinion? %</i>				
The costs of these institutions should be fully paid by believers	4.9	6.9	13.4	17.5
They should be fully paid by the state	10.9	13.8	6.3	4.9
Partially: one part should be paid/subsidized by the state, the other part by church/religious community	52.8	41.6	32.9	35.6
The church/religious community should support itself from its own resources	22.4	25.2	36.7	25.1
These institutions should be financed through contributions of those individuals who actually use these institutions	9.0	12.5	10.6	16.9
<i>If it would be necessary for supporting of your religious community, would you be ready to pay a regular contribution to the church/religious community of church taxes? %</i>				
No	54.4	46.5	67.5	60.6
Yes	41.9	49.0	27.7	15.5
I do not belong to any religious community	3.7	4.4	4.9	23.9

Table 10: Religion and social institutions—expectations and readiness to take part in financing them

Source: Aufbruch 2007

Church and religious communities have too few social and health care institutions in Croatia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Only in Croatia did the majority of people (over 50%) expect more institutions in all of the listed fields to be established by the Church. Interestingly, the expectations here also do not follow general religious differences between these countries, since in the Czech Republic respondents expect more religious media than in the other three countries and also have higher expectations than people from Slovenia and Slovakia concerning unions, educational, social and health care institutions. Slovenes have the lowest level of expectations among the four countries concerning unions, and especially the media, as over 70% say that the Church and religious communities already have too many media institutions.

The results regarding the question about financing these institutions is also only to some extent in accordance with a general religious profile of a country. In Croatia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, the majority would approve a model in which state and religious communities share the costs pertaining to these institutions. Only in Slovenia did the majority think institutions should be financed by religious communities. After that, people were asked if they would be ready to pay a regular contribution of Church taxes to the Church/religious community if it was necessary to support their religious community. The majority of people from Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia said they were not ready to make financial contributions; only in Slovakia did the majority of respondents say they were willing to do so. Once again, Slovenian people turned out to be less inclined towards religion in this respect than people in the Czech Republic were.

	Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Czech Republic
	Odds ratio			
Age	-.010*	.010	.009	-.016
Education	.019	.284	.011	.143
Residential status	.288	.569**	-.377	-.117
Religious self-identification	-.504***	-.782***	-1.026***	-.466**
Church practice	-.222**	-.437***	-.162	-.488***
Prayer	-.273***	-.105	-.240**	-.331**
Cox & Snell R2	.204	.317	.313	.321
Nagelkerke R2	.274	.423	.447	.503

Table 11: Readiness to pay regular contribution to church/religious community (logistic regression)

Source: Aufbruch 2007 | *** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 11 shows that in all four countries, those who are more religious are also more willing to contribute financially to their religious community. However, there are some differences that are not in line with the country ranking according to the general level of religiosity (Table 2). The odds ratio from logistic regression shows that the Slovenian religious respondents are less willing to contribute financially than the Czech religious respondents are. Some of the socio-demographic predictors are only significant in Croatia and Slovakia, indicating that younger Croatian respondents and Slovak urban respondents are less ready to support their religious communities financially.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Being for decades one of the dominant approaches in the sociology of religion, secularization theory questions the social significance of religion, arguing predominantly about its diminishing social relevance and influence in line with the declining religiosity. However, and as underlined in the first section of the paper, this is not a straightforward process, and there is no simple relationship between different social levels. Besides, social and cultural particularities together with the influence of actors can make a significant difference in the interplay of social and religious changes in different countries (Dobbelaere 2002). However, there are many other approaches to analysing social and religious changes from partly or completely different perspectives, which can be very roughly grouped into (1) those which pay attention to the (re?)emergence of the public role of religions, (2) those which are focused on non-traditional ways of religiosity (from new religious movements through research on spirituality to a focus on lived religion and individual religious experience in everyday life), and (3) those who try to trace the role of religion and religious institutions in different social and individual arenas (such as in education, welfare institutions, prisons, etc.). This confirms the complexity of social life in contemporary societies, which, consequently, has different impacts on the role of religion in different social subsystems. As also elaborated in the first section of this paper, sociological discussions in the post-communist region have been only partly different from the discussions elsewhere. Post-communist discussions have been particularly focused on the role of religion and Church as significant actors in the post-communist social order. Although the religious situation varies considerably among the countries, the issues of rising religiosity and the strong influence of Church in the public sphere, and possible consequences of such influence, have been at the core of debate (Pickel and Sammet 2012). At the same time, relying both on dominant social trends (such as rapid modernization of post-communist countries) and the aforementioned differences among the countries, there is an attempt to track secularizing tendencies. The approach used in this paper has been somewhat different. The present authors do not question numerous studies that have contributed to an understanding of religion or religious changes in post-communism from a variety of approaches. On the contrary,

the paper aims to complement them by shifting the focus to the role of religion in different social areas and, in particular, to people's opinions and expectations about the role of religion in everyday life.

In order to sketch its variety and complexity, the religious landscape of Central and Eastern European countries was described first with the use of basic sociological indicators for 13 countries. These were ranked, based on which four countries were selected as representative for further analysis (Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic), a choice that was justified by subsequent results. The social role of religion was analysed from three angles. Firstly, the general social role was observed. This was attempted to be captured through the questions about the possibility of the Church to provide responses in different areas of social and individual life (moral problems, family life, meaning of life, and actual social problems) and the appropriateness of the Church to deal with different issues, such as unemployment, abortion, extramarital relations, same-sex marriages, etc.

Secondly, the socio-political role of religion in democracy was looked at, which was approached through the questions on the role of the Church in strengthening democracy and on the influence of religious leaders on people's votes and the government.

Thirdly, religious engagement in specific social fields was observed – particularly, the possibility of establishing Church-owned institutions (unions, media, educational and welfare institutions), and their financing. All of these variables were further explored in the regression analysis by adding socio-demographic and religious indicators.

A number of interesting results were obtained. As the results were discussed in the previous section, here they will be only briefly summarized.

Firstly, the majority of people in the four Central European countries are of the opinion that there is a place for a public role of religion and the Church. They stated that religion can and should be engaged in various social issues. Religion is even considered, though there are differences in this respect, to be important for the strengthening of democracy.

Secondly, the place of religion and the Church is not only connected with the "natural" religious role, such as giving answers to the meaning of life, or offering moral advice in relation to abortion, extramarital relation, and same-sex marriages. It is also connected with those issues that are at the heart of what can be labelled as a successful, yet slow and painful, transition from communism to democracy and market economy. This is a process that brought major disappointment with the way in which the new social order has been put in place, and a process that produced a significant number of "losers of transition" (EBRD, 2007). Therefore, although the ability of religion to be engaged in resolving social problems is not regarded as high (Table 3), the respondents do expect it to discuss unemployment and growing social differences.

Thirdly, the social engagement of religion does not mean it should assume a political role. Moreover, in all countries (including those more religious), the significant majority of respondents oppose the political role and any explicit influence on people's votes and on the government. This can, of course, provoke an interesting debate about what the social and the political are; however, elaborating on this is not within the remit of the present paper.

Fourthly, the Church can be publicly present by establishing different social institutions, such as the media, educational, social or health service institutions. Church-owned health and social service institutions are welcomed by the significant majority of respondents in all countries.

Fifthly, as was expected, there are major differences among the countries in relation to different issues. However, the level of religiosity does not account for all the differences. In relation to the general social role and to the links between Church and democracy, religiosity is a strong predictor: greater religiosity equals greater support. Still, this is only partly true for

an explicit religious-political nexus (as there is a sizeable opposition to such a role in all countries), and is not true in relation to establishing and financing of Church-owned institutions.

The Czech case is of particular interest here, as, despite the comparatively very low level of religiosity, the majority of people think there are too few Church-owned social institutions; this would usually not be expected in a highly secularized country. The Croatian case also underlines that greater religiosity and opposition to some aspect of the public role of Church can exist in parallel. Thus, the fact that there is a discrepancy between the presence and expectancy of religion's rhetoric in the public sphere and the acceptance of religious teachings by citizens (Carter 1993) should be researched more systematically in the future.

In some aspects, the analysis confirmed what had been already discussed for Western European countries: a strong opposition to the religious influence on government policy or on public office, but a space to be engaged in various social issues, thus affirming a possibility for religion to be a spiritual, ethical, and cultural resource (Lambert 1998, 231). The same was also partly noted for a number of post-communist countries (Pollack and Pickel 2009). In one of the rare analyses of social expectations about the public role of the Church in post-communism, Tomka (2007, 113-114) underlines that it is not the majority, but, rather, big social groups that advocate the competence and public appearance of the Church, that the Church's teaching and declarations have social legitimacy, and that the position of the Church on social issues attracts greater acceptance than attitudes linked to private morality do. Therefore, our analysis demonstrates further that the functional differentiation does not necessarily mean that there is no (at least partial) influence of religion on other social subsystems (except for politics), and that there is no straightforward relation between religiosity at the societal and individual level and attitudes toward the religion's social role. Nevertheless, the paper demonstrates also the need for more in-depth analysis in that respect. This also constitutes an impetus to continue with what would be observed as a kind of alternative approach to the study on the social significance of religion. Hence, the analysis has, for example, found that "it is clear that the majority of churches of Europe, though diminished in terms of numbers, are still important players in the lives of many Europeans (an argument for persistence) and that their role in the delivery of welfare is growing rather than declining" (Bäckström and Davie 2011, 70).

We believe this paper contributes to the analyses of the public role of religion, in particular by underlying the need to differentiate among different social levels and different social fields, and warns against a simple conclusion about the role of religion in a particular society based on the general level of religiosity. Nevertheless, it has a number of shortcomings. Two of them are worth mentioning. First, our analysis was restricted by the survey questions we had at our disposal. In this respect, the *Aufbruch* data offer more possibilities of understanding the social role of religion than other comparative researches (such as the EVS, WVS, ISSP, and others). However, the way some questions were formulated and their meaning leave a room for further discussions. Secondly, the analysis remains explorative in its nature. In particular, we did not extend it by looking deeper at country specificities, which might shed further light on some of the answers.

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APPENDIX

%	Religious self-identification			Church attendance					Praying					God	
	Religious	Neither, nor	Non-religious	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Rarely	never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Rarely	Never	I do believe in
Romania	83.6	12.9	3.5	27.6	25.7	25.5	16.9	4.2	65.5	16	6.1	2.8	7.4	2.3	97.9
Moldova	77.1	15.6	7.2	12.2	18.7	32.1	31	6	41.1	17.6	8.2	8	19.4	5.7	96.3
Poland	76.5	15.6	7.8	52.5	21.9	15	5.9	4.7	42.3	23.4	10.6	9.6	8	6	95.4
Croatia	74	12.2	13.8	23.3	17.2	26.7	15.3	17.5	35.7	15.3	11	9.7	12.6	15.7	91.6
Slovakia	65.9	18.2	15.8	25.4	21.9	7.3	17.9	27.4	32.3	17.9	7.3	8.4	17.7	16.3	87.2
Bulgaria	52.2	28.6	19.3	6.6	17.9	44.9	18.8	11.8	16	14.7	13.4	19.6	19.2	17.1	83.1
Serbia	68.2	21.4	10.4	6.6	11.9	39.5	24.1	17.8	21.9	13.9	10.9	15.6	20.3	17.4	80.6
Ukraine	64	16.1	19.7	13.6	13.4	31.9	24.7	16.4	29.3	14.5	9.7	14.6	9	23	79.1
Lithuania	64.4	23.5	12	8.3	20.8	36.5	20.9	13.5	12.3	7.3	13.5	19.4	18.8	28.6	76.1
Belarus	62.2	17.8	20	8.6	10.4	39	24.5	17.5	17.6	13.3	10.6	15	12.4	31	75.2
Hungary	52.4	19	28.7	9.9	8.8	18.5	27.9	34.9	18.7	11	5.7	6.6	21.2	36.8	62.8
Slovenia	46.8	21.6	31.5	16.3	12.1	20.8	26.3	24.5	13.6	12.6	6.7	11.3	17.9	38	55.2
Czech Republic	23	11.4	65.6	6.4	4.4	8.9	17.4	62.9	9.5	5.1	3.5	4.5	10.5	66.8	33.4

Table 1: Religious self-identification, church practice, praying, and belief in God in Central and Eastern Europe (%)