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# **RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY**

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## Notes on Contributors

**Bojan Aleksov** obtained a BA and MA in history from the University of Belgrade and the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. He is Humboldt Research Fellow at the Osteuropa Institut at the Free University in Berlin, and is also working for a doctorate at the CEU researching the relationship between religion and nationalism and the influence of modernisation on religious institutions and popular religiosity in Central Europe and the Balkans. He is the author of two books in Serbian, and his most recent articles include: 'Marian apparitions and the Yugoslav crisis' in *Southeast European Politics*, 6, 1, 2004; 'Nationalism in construction: the memorial Church of St Sava on Vračar Hill in Belgrade' in *Balkanologie*, 7, 2, 2003; and 'Die Interpretation des religiösen Bekenntniswechsels bei der Herausbildung des serbischen Nationalbewusstseins' in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, 4, 2002.

**Davorin Peterlin** is director of Keston Institute and a research fellow at Regent's Park College, Oxford. He gained a first degree in English and Polish language and literature at the University of Zagreb, an MA in biblical studies at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, and a PhD in New Testament at Aberdeen University. He has published in scholarly journals in Croatian and English including *The European Journal of Theology*, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, *Religion and Society* and *The Tyndale Bulletin*. His current research interests include the sociology of the New Testament, the use of the Bible in several Slavic-speaking European countries, and the history of Baptists in Russia and the Balkans.

**Barbara Potrata** is a research fellow in the sociology of complementary and alternative medicine at the School of Healthcare at Leeds University, UK. She completed her doctoral thesis '*Work of the Self*': *Spiritual Economy of New Age Practitioners in Post-Socialist Slovenia* in 2002 at the Department of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University, UK, and spent the next year as a 40th Anniversary Senior Research Fellow at Harvard University, USA, working on a research study of healing modalities used by women treated for breast cancer. Her interests include New Age, contemporary spiritualities, (post)socialism, complementary and alternative medicine, medical sociology and anthropology, and the sociology and anthropology of religious economies.

**Tatjana Rakar** is a researcher and a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her main interests are nonprofit organisations, the role of the church in social service provision, the development of private and denominational education and changes in the welfare systems of postsocialist countries. She has been involved in several projects on the nonprofit sector and social policy research.

## Editorial

Two articles in this issue of *RSS* deal with the regeneration of religious education in formerly communist Eastern Europe. Tatjana Rakar looks at the provision of religious education by the Catholic Church in Slovenia, and Bojan Aleksov at the introduction of religious education into state schools in Serbia.

In both countries, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the reintroduction of religious education has been heavily influenced by political considerations. In Serbia its introduction into state schools did not begin until after the fall of Milošević in October 2000. Milošević had made many concessions to the Serbian Orthodox Church in the context of his programme of Serbian nationalism, but as a communist with an instinctive opposition to pluralism he had rejected all initiatives seeking the introduction of religious education into state schools.

Since the end of communism Slovenia has been ruled almost continually by socialist governments. This may well have something to do with the fact that over the communist period the ideological application of socialism in Slovenia was probably milder than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. The predominance of left-wing governments is one of the reasons why the regeneration of Catholic religious educational establishments has been slow.

Rakar argues that Slovenian education policy still manifests monopolistic characteristics, arising out of the belief that quality and equal opportunities in education are best guaranteed by a comprehensive network of state schools. Meanwhile, Rakar notes, Slovenia is now the only country in Central and Eastern Europe which provides no confessional religious subject in state schools. An optional nonconfessional subject on religion and ethics has been introduced, but the Catholic Church has been assigned no exclusive competence in this area. This is currently one of the most disputed issues in relations between the government and the church in Slovenia.

In another area entirely it is interesting to note the enduring influence of the communist period on current religious developments in Central and Eastern Europe, and how the communist legacy often gives those developments a distinctive character not only in the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe but in those formerly communist countries as compared with western countries. On the basis of her extensive fieldwork among New Agers in Slovenia, Barbara Potrata argues that

the interest in New Age in postsocialist countries is not a coincidence. Whereas in many aspects similar to the western New Age, the reasons for the popularity of this phenomenon in postsocialism, I believe, can be better understood only when New Age is seen as a constant dialogue with, and opposition to, socialism and postsocialism.

She argues that like the 'socialist project' in Eastern Europe, New Age is millenarian in nature, and shared many values with socialism; nevertheless New Age stood against

socialism in many respects; most obviously in the rejection of atheism, but also for example in the belief that societal change would be effected through the individual rather than the collective and through evolutionary rather than revolutionary means.

Potrata notes one interesting difference between New Age in the West and New Age in socialist Slovenia, arising out of the dysfunctional formal economy of the latter, marked as it was by constant systemic shortages.

When looking for goods and services which were hard to obtain, people had to use their initiative as entrepreneurial and atomised individuals. This had important consequences for New Age understandings of gender. Whereas in the West, New Age ... celebrate[s] values which are culturally identified as 'feminine' ... , Slovenian New Agers curiously celebrated (and continue to celebrate) what are culturally defined as 'masculine' values: individualism, power and empowerment, self-confidence and assertiveness, determination and strength, perseverance in the face of adversity and entrepreneurial behaviour.

In the postsocialist period New Age again finds itself in an environment that is in some ways congenial, but it again finds itself offering an alternative social vision, this time maintaining some of the values represented by socialism, notably in a resistance to the social atomisation promoted by the market economy by an emphasis on reciprocity, sociality and egalitarianism among New Agers, and in a continuing belief in an eventual millenarian utopia.

The articles in this issue of *RSS* thus demonstrate in different ways the continuing importance of an understanding of the role of the communist past in Central and Eastern Europe in the shaping of current religious developments.