

Hall, Dorota

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The 9th ISORECEA Conference “Twenty Years After: Secularization and Desecularization in Central and Eastern Europe”

DOROTA HALL

The 2010 conference of the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA), held 16-18 December 2010 in Brno, Czech Republic, was the ninth event of this kind organized since the beginning of the 1990s, when scholars from Central and Eastern Europe had started to closely cooperate and share their views on the religious change after the fall of communism. The change was closely connected to the political and social transformation, at the same time, however, it seemed to reflect broader tendencies in the realm of religion and religiosity/spirituality identifiable in many cultural contexts. Not surprisingly, twenty years after the turning point in the Central and Eastern European history, there was a need among scholars to discuss local developments and their intertwinement with global trends, some of them being engraved in the concepts of secularization and desecularization, which nevertheless are still open to the debate. Hence the title of the conference and its main focus on academic explanations related to the contemporary situation of religion and their relevance to what is at work in the Central and Eastern European region.

The conference gathered 62 scholars, mainly from various countries of Europe. Participants presented nearly 50 papers during a dozen of parallel sessions which enabled for vivid discussions among those involved in studying particular aspects of religiosity. The discussed issues varied from theoretical aspects of studying and conceptualizing religion, through the connections between religion and state policies or between religion and various trends faced by contemporary societies, e.g. in the realm of identity construction, to exemplary cases for how religious phenomena, such as new religious movements, function in different social settings. Three keynote speakers gave their lectures at plenary sessions: David Voas (University of Manchester), Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (University of Leipzig) and Olaf Müller (University of Münster). Presentations by Voas and Müller drew on wide population surveys and shed light on the fall in religiosity in

contemporary European societies, followed by the casual loyalty to tradition (Voas), and the applicability of concepts of secularization and individualization, as well as the supply-side model of religious economies, to the recent situation of religion in Central and Eastern Europe (Müller). Professor Wohlrab-Sahr, in turn, based her considerations on interviews conducted with East German families and considered the ways in which they internalized anti-religious ideological claims made by the communist state.

Participants of the conference obtained two books with their conference package. They were *Religions in Contact* (ed. I. Doležalová, B. Horyna and D. Papoušek, Brno: Czech Society for the Study of Religions 1996) and recently published *New Religious Movements and Conflict in Selected Countries of Central Europe* (ed. D. Hall and R. Smoczyński, Warsaw: IFiS Publishers 2010). Additionally, those who participated in the 2008 ISORECEA conference organized in Krakow were given a book collecting proceedings from this conference: *Religions and Identities in Transition* (ed. I. Borowik and M. Zawiła, Krakow: Nomos 2010).

At the end of the event, the ISORECEA General Assembly took place. The Assembly accepted reports by ISORECEA officers, elected members of the Board and voted minor changes in conference and membership fees. To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Association, President Siniša Zrinščak honored three founders of ISORECEA with Certificates of Appreciation: Eileen Barker, Irena Borowik and Miklós Tomka (posthumously).

The conference was successfully organized by the Czech Association for the Study of Religions and Departments of Sociology and the Study of Religions of Masaryk University. It was dedicated in memory to Miklós Tomka, the co-founder of the ISORECEA and its President in the years 2001-2006, who unexpectedly died on 25 November 2010. He was a leading figure of contemporary sociology of religion in Central and Eastern Europe. Participants of the conference, many of them remembering him not only as their collaborator, but also as a master, shared their memories during a special session devoted to him and his work.