

# Indicators of a Second Wave of Religiosity in Central Eastern Europe

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines religion's public role in Central Europe by investigating people's expectations and perceptions regarding distinct facets of religion. The paper analyses factors related to the first wave and the second wave of religiosity along different lines such as church and government policies, the roles of churches in strengthening democracy, etc. According to the Aufbruch data research project and partially from the ISSP (International Social Survey Project), religious depiction of some post-communist countries are brought to the table. A deeper analysis is undertaken for 6 countries (Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Poland), considering that in the countries previously listed, the distinction in the general level of religiosity differ remarkably, in order of the extremely religious country (Croatia) to the extremely non-religious country (Czech Republic). The discoveries from the various indicators shows that there is a good reason to believe in a possible second wave or different form and kind of religiosity compared to the times of the transition or the mid-1990s in contemporary times.

**KEYWORDS:** religiosity, politics, election, trust, Central Eastern Europe

## Introduction

In the empirical part of this paper, religion related survey data collected in the Central Eastern European (CEE) region's countries was analyzed. The goal of the secondary analysis was to get an accurate picture of the processes related to religion in the countries and in the region as a whole. Factors related to a first wave and a second wave of religiosity were identified.

The World Bank Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data based on purchasing power parity (PPP) on the long run from the years 1990, 1999 and 2008 were studied. The first (1997) and second rounds (2007) of the Aufbruch—New Departures

international comparative survey research<sup>1</sup> was analyzed to look for such indicators in the different countries. The European Value Studies data from 1990, 1999 and 2008 (Halman et al. 2007) was also analyzed to contrast the findings based on the *Aufbruch* data (Lambert 1998, p. 1). We were trying to draw some general conclusions related to the situation of religiosity in Central Eastern Europe, and also to the examples of the different countries. The respondents to the surveys were divided into two groups: people who believe in God and claim to belong to a church, and the all respondent's category, which includes them alongside all the other people living in the same country. We were looking for traces of major differences between the two subgroups. The mean differences in all the tables were calculated to show the exact number indicating the difference between the subgroups. Color was also used to indicate either a positive or negative preference over the different categories. The blue numbers were used to indicate higher agreement levels, the red numbers are lower on each question. Green numbers indicate a tie.

### **GDP Per Capita, Purchasing Power Parity in Central Eastern European Countries**

Generally, based on the GDP data of the analyzed countries between 1990 and 2008, we can say that a steady economic growth was experienced in CEE. The Czech Republic had the highest gross GDP rate on PPP in 2008, and it has doubled since 1990. The World Bank started to record GDP data for Croatia after gaining its independence. From 1999 to 2008, the Croatian GDP on PPP has doubled as well. The Slovakian GDP almost tripled from 1990 to 2008. The growth rate was very similar for Romania as well, if we compare 1990 to 2008. There is a difference in the very small interim growth of the GDP value from 1990 to 1999. The growth of the Hungarian GDP is comparable to the average growth of the GDP of the analyzed countries. Poland also tripled its GDP on PPP from 1990 to 2008. We can conclude that the economies of the countries grew rapidly, on a very similar rate. As economy and religion are highly correlated, we can pronounce that economic changes—mostly growth could be the basis of the religious changes. The economic profile of the countries and the entire region showed the picture of a

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<sup>1</sup>The data referred to is taken from the study “*Aufbruch/New Departures*” organized and processed by Paul M. Zulehner, Vienna University and Miklós Tomka of Hungarian Center of Religious Research. The qualitative part of the research was lead by András Máté-Tóth of the University of Szeged. The first wave of the study (1997) was extensively communicated (Tomka and Zulehner 1999, 2000 and in the German series “*God after Communism*”). Some initial findings of the analysis of the 2007 survey have been published (Zulehner, Tomka 2008, Zulehner, Tomka, Naletova 2008). The results of “*Aufbruch/New Departures*” is consistent with other international comparative studies like the European Values Study—World Values Study (Halman, et al. 2007) and the International Social Survey (ISSP).

generally low level of GDP on PPP in 1990. The situation improved by 1999, but the real growth came from 1999 to 2008. This could also possibly indicate major social changes after this time. Society tends to change with the economic system's development, so this is a good ground to begin our research.

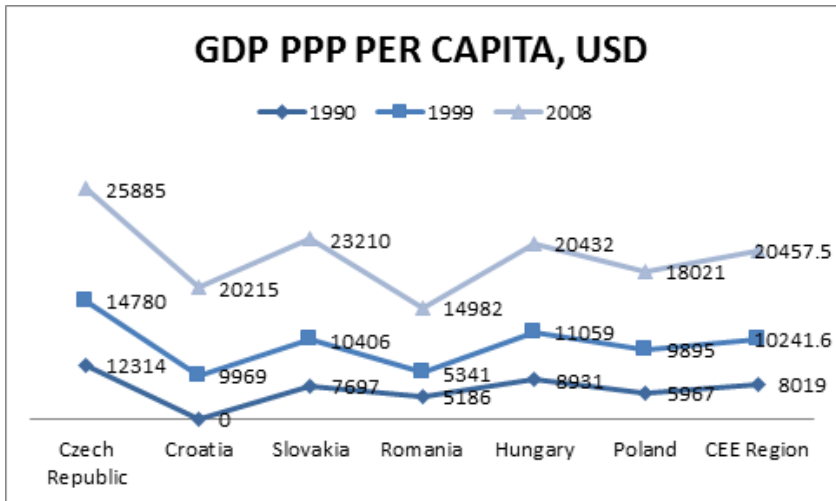


Figure 1—GDP growth on PPP, 1990 to 2008. Source: World Bank public data; [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

### Age When Finished Studies

This is a very important variable to demonstrate the difference between the God-believing and church-belonging subsample and the general sample, and can also be telling about differences occurring with the passage of time. The data as contained in Table I, suggested that there was a major difference in the age of finishing studies in 1990 between the religious subsample and the entire sample. In 1990, we could see that except for Romania, people who were religious finished their schooling at an earlier average age. If we take the Czech Republic, we can see a greater than 2 years difference on the mean for the general sample. The religious subsample had an average age of 16.02 to finish their studies, while the general population finished studies at 18.09 on average. The difference was even higher in Slovakia, 2.24 years. Romania was the only country where the religious subsample had a higher average, but with just a slight difference compared to the other differential values: 0.17. Hungary had a difference of 1.53 years on average, Poland had a difference of 0.64 years on average and the entire region had 1.5 years difference on average in 1990. This finding supports the fact that state socialist regimes were oppressive, and religious people didn't have the same chances under

state socialism as the general population. Romania's difference might be coming from the important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian state socialist system. This can be considered the starting point of the new democracy's religious life, and lead to 1999, when the situation changed greatly.

**Table I**—Average age when finished school

At what age have you finished your studies?								
Average age								
EVS		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1990	16,02	–	15,6	18,6	15,3	17,3	16,8
All respondents	1990	18,09	20,2	17,84	18,43	16,83	17,94	18,3
<b>Difference 1</b>		-2,07	–	-2,24	0,17	-1,53	-0,64	-1,5
Believes in God, belongs to church	1999	18,01	19,28	18,15	18,79	18,16	20,23	18,9
All respondents	1999	16,46	–	16,31	18,91	16,29	17,47	16,9
<b>Difference 2</b>		1,55	–	1,84	-0,12	1,87	2,76	2
Believes in God, belongs to church	2008	18,24	20,48	18,1	18,52	17,43	18,05	18,4
All respondents	2008	19,19	19,7	18,47	18,93	18,65	20,32	19,1
<b>Difference 3</b>		-0,95	0,78	-0,37	-0,41	-1,22	-2,27	-0,7

Source: own analysis, European Values Study, 1990, 1999, 2008

In 1999, the religious subsamples of the populations of the CEE countries finished their studies 2 years later on average than the general population. The only exception was Romania, where this difference was on favor of the general society, but with a very small difference of 0.12. In all other countries, the difference was in favor of the religious subsample, and the smallest difference was 1.55 years. This clearly indicated, that since 1990, things had changed greatly. The new situation favored religious people, as a lot more people became attached to the church and declared a belief in god. This period of time was a very important period, as the change since the year of transition could be seen very easily. People became attached, and those people who were attached and believing were finishing school later, which generally could be perceived as an indicator of success later in life. Higher qualifications generally lead to better jobs, a better economic situation and more chances to be successful in the long run. In 1990, the religious subsample had fewer chances than the general population, but the situation changed by 1999 in favor of it.

What happens after 1999 is a clear indicator of the second wave of religiosity after the transition. The figures changed greatly by 2008. The overall difference in favor of the general population over the religious subsample is 0.7 year in Central and Eastern Europe. The only country showing the opposite trend was Croatia, but, according to our view, its historical and political situation could justify its difference. We found the largest difference in Poland, 2.27 years. The second is Hungary with 1.22 and the Czech Republic with 0.95 years. These findings support our theory that there is a new way of thinking on religion and a new model of religiosity in these countries. The fundamental differences caused by the state socialist period had disappeared by 1999. In the mid- and late '90s, we could see a strong religious commitment on behalf of many people in the CEE societies, which contributed to the higher figure. The data from 2008 showed a totally different thing, however. The religious subsamples were finishing school at an earlier age, on average, even though the differences were smaller than in 1990 and 1999. This is a very telling indicator of a latent change in the religious field in the region's countries.

### Feeling of Obligation to Participate in the National Elections

Data about intent to participate in the national elections from 2007, from the Aufbruch dataset, is captured for some countries in Table II. The difference between the religious subsample and the entire sample is apparent, even if it is not high. Religious people tend to feel more obliged to vote in the national elections than the general population. We found the highest difference in the Czech Republic: 0.19 on average.

**Table II**—Participation in national elections

<b>I feel obliged to participate in the national elections</b>								
5 = Full Agreement								
<i>AUFBRUCH</i>		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	2007	3,82	3,93	3,82	–	–	–	4,06
All respondents	2007	3,63	3,86	3,74	–	–	–	3,93
<b>Difference</b>		<b>0,19</b>	<b>0,07</b>	<b>0,08</b>				<b>0,13</b>

Source: own editing, Aufbruch 2007

Comparisons between all countries and periods of time could not be made because of the lack of available data. Still, the higher general political activity of the religious subsample could be verified by this for 2007.

### Citizen of One's Country vs Any Other Country

The religious subsample tends to be more proud of their own country on average in general. In the 1997 wave of Aufbruch, Croatia had the highest difference, 0.34 between its general sample and the religious subsample. The average difference in the means in the Central Eastern European countries was 0.9 in 1997 but also in 2007. The average approval rating of this question is very similar for the general population and the religious subsample for 1997 and 2007. Even if the general averages are similar, there had been major changes. Pride in citizenship grew in Slovakia and Romania in both subsamples, and decreased in Croatia, Hungary and Poland to a similar extent. This analysis, as captured in Table III, clearly suggest that different processes are going on in the countries of CEE, and there can be differences in the stages if we compare country by country.

**Table III**—Citizenship in own country

<b>I would rather be a citizen of my own country than any other country in the World</b>								
5 = Full Agreement								
<i>AUFBRUCH</i>		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1997	4,13	4,3	3,94	3,81	4,39	4,37	4,16
All respondents	1997	4,05	3,96	3,86	3,76	4,22	4,33	4,07
<b>Difference 1</b>		<b>0,08</b>	<b>0,34</b>	<b>0,08</b>	<b>0,05</b>	<b>0,17</b>	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,09</b>
Believes in God, belongs to church	2007	4,22	4,08	4,15	4,21	4,06	4,21	4,17
All respondents	2007	4,05	3,96	4,07	4,19	3,9	4,18	4,08
<b>Difference 2</b>		<b>0,17</b>	<b>-0,12</b>	<b>0,08</b>	<b>0,02</b>	<b>0,16</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,09</b>

Source: own editing, Aufbruch 1997, 2007

### Support of the Own Country

The support of the own country, 'even if it is wrong,' is generally stronger among the religious subsample in 1997 and 2007 as documented in Table IV. Religious people tend to support without questioning. The tendency became even stronger by 2007, because the average of religious people in agreement with this category grew by 0.19. We must state however that the average of the general population grew to the same level as well. The difference between the religious subsample and the entire sample is the same in 1997 and 2007 on the CEE level.

**Table IV**—Support one's country

<b>One should support one's country, even if it is in the wrong</b>								
5 = Full Agreement								
<i>AUFBRUCH</i>		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1997	3,52	3,01	3,05	3,19	2,96	4,3	3,38
All respondents	1997	3,34	2,92	3,02	3,16	2,9	4,28	3,27
<b>Difference 1</b>		<b>0,18</b>	<b>0,09</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,06</b>	<b>0,02</b>	<b>0,11</b>
Believes in God, belongs to church	2007	3,63	3,15	3,2	4,01	3,2	3,41	3,57
All respondents	2007	3,53	3,07	3,17	4	3,02	3,4	3,46
<b>Difference 2</b>		<b>0,1</b>	<b>0,8</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,01</b>	<b>0,18</b>	<b>0,01</b>	<b>0,11</b>

Source: own editing, Aufbruch 1997, 2007

### Churches Role in Strengthening Democracy

According to the opinion of the religious subsamples of the different countries, as contained in our data (see Table V) and also by Branko Ančić, and Siniša Zrinščak (2012), we can say that churches have a role to play in strengthening democracy. If we look at the CEE average, we can conclude that religious people have a higher average. The average value of the religious subsample for the CEE region grew from 3.33 to 3.62, the growth was 0.29 in their case. The entire sample grew from 3.08 to 3.26, which means a growth of 0.18. The difference grew between religious and the entire sample from 1997 to 2007.

**Table V**—Churches' role in strengthening democracy

<b>For strengthening democracy it is important to assure that churches would have a role to play</b>								
5 = Full Agreement								
<i>AUFBRUCH</i>		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1997	3,41	3,08	3,39	3,56	3,66	3,09	3,33
All respondents	1997	2,75	–	2,92	3,49	3,24	2,98	3,08
<b>Difference 1</b>		<b>0,66</b>	–	<b>0,47</b>	<b>0,07</b>	<b>0,42</b>	<b>0,11</b>	<b>0,25</b>
Believes in God, belongs to church	2007	3,63	3,2	3,25	4,05	3,45	3,4	3,62
All respondents	2007	2,59	–	3,1	4,02	2,97	3,35	3,26
<b>Difference 2</b>		<b>1,04</b>	–	<b>0,15</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,48</b>	<b>0,05</b>	<b>0,36</b>

Source: own editing, Aufbruch 1997, 2007

If we look at the individual countries, the value increased from 1997 to 2007 in Romania, Poland and among the religious subsample in the Czech Republic. It decreased in Slovakia and Hungary.

### Trust in the Church

The general tendency over countries and time shows that religious people have a higher trust in the Church as an institution than the entire sample (Müller 2009). In 1990, the highest level of trust among believers was in Poland, but in 1999 and 2008 Romania took the lead in trusting the church. The lowest level of trust among believers could be found in the Czech Republic in 1990 and 1999, and in Croatia in 2008. If we look at the entire sample, we find the highest level of trust distributed the same way as among believers. The lowest level of trust among the entire population was in the Czech Republic. If we look at the general tendency, there is a constant decrease in trusting the church in the CEE countries among the religious sample. The entire sample's average for CEE is about exactly the same value in all three years. The difference between the religious sample and the entire sample has been decreasing since 1990, as the trust level of the religious sample was in a constant decrease. If we remove Romania and Croatia from the analysis, we can find a very strong indicator of a possible second wave of religiosity, as the trust in the church has been steadily decreasing among the religious population.

**Table VI**—Trust in the Church

Trust in the Church								
1 = Has a great deal of trust								
EVS		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1990	1,94	–	1,91	1,79	1,77	1,66	1,8
All respondents	1990	2,99	–	2,48	1,95	2,39	1,73	2,43
<b>Difference 1</b>		1,05	–	0,57	,16	0,62	0,07	0,63
Believes in God, belongs to church	1999	2,2	2,11	1,74	1,63	2,02	1,98	1,91
All respondents	1999	3,12	2,27	2,15	1,72	2,65	2,06	2,4
<b>Difference 2</b>		0,92	0,16	0,41	0,09	0,63	0,08	0,49
Believes in God, belongs to church	2008	2,06	2,19	1,87	1,55	2,08	2,13	1,96
All respondents	2008	3,17	2,39	2,26	1,61	2,7	2,22	2,41
<b>Difference 3</b>		1,11	0,2	0,39	0,06	0,62	0,09	0,45

Source: own editing, EVS, 1990, 1999, 2008



## Churches and Government Politics

The tendency is clear that in the religious subsample and in the entire sample as well as the study by Roger East, and Jolyon Pontin (2016), there is an increase in the approval rating of supporting the churches dealing with politics of the government. Poland is a very interesting case in this analysis, as there is a tie in 1997 and in 2007 among the religious subsample and the entire sample in deciding if the churches should deal with politics. The tendency is increasing support here as well, as the value rose from 1.19 in 1997 to 1.27 in 2007. In all other cases, religious people are generally more supportive of the church dealing with politics, and there is a unanimous increase in all countries with time. This is a clear indicator of a possible different thinking about the role of the church in the Central Eastern European region. Support for the church to deal with politics is on the increase among these societies, and it means that the church was able to reposition its role in the political dimension.

**Table VII**—Churches and government politics

Is it appropriate if the big Christian Churches deal with politics of the government?								
Average of 1=No and 2=Yes, 1 is disapproval, 2 is approval								
<i>AUFBRUCH</i>		Czech Republic	Croatia	Slovakia	Romania	Hungary	Poland	CEE Region
Believes in God, belongs to church	1997	1,36	1,21	1,27	1,29	1,45	1,19	1,28
All respondents	1997	1,26	1,2	1,23	1,28	–	1,19	1,25
<b>Difference 1</b>		<b>0,1</b>	<b>0,01</b>	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,01</b>	–	<b>0</b>	<b>0,03</b>
Believes in God, belongs to church	2007	1,54	1,31	1,42	1,39	1,4	1,27	1,37
All respondents	2007	1,33	1,28	1,34	1,38	–	1,27	1,33
<b>Difference 2</b>		<b>0,21</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>0,08</b>	<b>0,01</b>	–	<b>0</b>	<b>0,04</b>

Source: own editing, Aufbruch 1997, 2007

## Conclusions and Pathways of Further Research

If we look at the different data presented in the analysis, we should realize that substantial changes are taking place in the CEE region. From the starting point of 1990, through the mid-1990s to the end of the 2000s, we find substantial changes on the regional level and on the level of individual countries as well. There are important changes that can be observed: the position of 1990 was inevitably changed in all relations, as it was a transitional starting point of this new democratic period in the former Soviet Bloc. If we look at the mid-1990s,

we can generally experience an increase in the practice of religion, and a religious upheaval, as much other scientific literature had already suggested it. And if we extend our analysis to the end of the first decade of the new millennium, we see a region with a very different regional religious profile. The questions regarding the active practice of religion and approval and trust of the churches action are clearly in a decrease (Aufbruch 2007, p.9). We don't find the religious activities and mass-religiosity of the mid-1990s anymore. On the other hand, we can find a more secure, more stable place of the church in the lives of our societies. Some countries are in transition: Romania and Croatia are experiencing very strong, even societal level changes. In other countries, such as Hungary and the Czech Republic, the decrease of religiosity and trust seems to be a major tendency. If we assess all the different indicators we have found, we can say, that there is a good reason to believe in a possible second wave or different form and kind of religiosity compared to the times of the transition or the mid-1990s in contemporary times.

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