

# RELIGIOSITY IN SLOVAKIA – WHITE PAPER

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## 1. Historical overview

Slovakia counts among many Eastern and Central European countries in which Religious Studies, i. e. an academic approach to the study of religion was established relatively late. The reason for this was not merely the unfavourable ideological milieu under the Communist regime (1948–1989), but also the rather complicated history of Slovakia over the past two centuries and the associated process of emergence of a modern Slovak nation (see, for instance, Kirschbaum, 1995).

### *1.1. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until 1918*

From the 11<sup>th</sup> century until 1918, “Slovaks” lived mainly in the part of the Hungarian realm politically referred to as Upper Hungary due to its geographical position. Stretching from the Early Middle Ages to the High Modern Era, the Slovak region lived under what in many aspects resembles true political and cultural hegemony (Holec, 2007). We do not dispose of relevant documents from this era about the religiosity of Upper Hungary; nevertheless, relevant data on religiosity can be obtained from one of the oldest official lexicons of settlements from 1773 (*Lexicon universorum regni Hungariae...*) (Šprocha, Tišliar, 2009: 8; Majo, Kusendová, 2015: 4). In February 1867, the monarchy of the Danube region was split into two parts: Austria and Hungary. This was the result and success of Hungarian ethno-national movements, but for Slovaks this political act resulted in the era of forced Hungarianisation (Holec, 2007). The legal act from 1867 concerning ethnic issues of the newly constituted state anticipated a single unique nation – the Hungarian one. Based on this premise, the Hungarian language became the only official language. Yet, it was allowed to use the languages of ethnic minorities in primary and secondary education, in administration, during court hearings, and in religious life. Religiosity was not the focus of any of administrative or “scientific” search until the first censuses appeared in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the *Atlas of Religiosity of Slovakia* (Majo, Kusendová, 2015: 9-21) and the cartographic compilation of data concerning confessional belonging (based on censuses from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the last census in the Hungarian state in 1910), we

can follow the dynamics of religious life in Slovakia (in terms of “confessional religiosity”) (see TABLE 1).

**TABLE 1 Data on religious affiliation according to Censuses 1857–1910**

	Census 1857	Census 18691	Census 1880	Census 1890	Census 1900	Census 1910
Total number of inhabitants (million)	2.47	2.46	2.4	2.57	2.7	2.92
Catholic Church (million)	65.1% 1.6	65.6% 1.6	66.3% 1.6	67.2% 1.7	68.3% 1.9	69.9% > 2.0
Lutheran Evangelical Church	15.5% 382,000	15.9% 391,000	15.3% 377,000	14.8% 382,000	14.2% 394,000	13.5% 395,000
Greek Catholic Church	7.3% 182,000	7.6% 186,000	7.1% 175,000	7.1% 183,000	7.1% 197,000	6.8% 197,000
Reformed Church	6.5% 161,000	5.5% 134,000	5.5% 134,000	5.4% 140,000	5.3% 148,000	5.2% 153,000
Jews	5.5% 136,000	5.5% 134,000	5.7% 140,000	5.4% 138,000	5.0% 140,000	4.8% 139,000
Other confessions	0.1% 554	0.1% 400	0.1% 1,700	0.1% 766	0.1% > 1,000	0.1% > 2,000
NONES	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	-

Compiled by T. Podolinská, based on *Atlas of Religiosity of Slovakia* (Majo, Kusendová 2015: 8-19)

The first modern census also covering the territory of present-day Slovakia in 1857 showed that despite of the new act that made all confessions in Hungary equal with the Catholic Church (1848), more than 65% of its inhabitants claimed this confession, thus making Slovakia predominantly a Catholic region. Catholics were dominant in almost all regions of nowadays Slovakia (except for the Uh and Zemplín regions in the eastern part of Slovakia and towns like

<sup>1</sup> The Census (at the level of villages) was published after the revision of L. Sebök in 2005, but some of the data from the Abov region is incomplete (Majo, Kusendová, 2015: 11).

Modra – in 1857, 57% of citizens declared to be Lutherans). Strong Jewish communities could be found in Nitra (32%), Trenčín (27%) and Bratislava (14%) (Majo, Kusendová 2015: 35).

Until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the proportion of believers affiliated to the Catholic Church increased by 17%. The strongest citadels of Catholicism were in the Trenčín region (more than 87%) (Ibidem: 36-37). Lutherans faced stagnation in terms of numbers. The Greek Catholic Church reported an internal increase of 5%. The strongest influence of this confession was observed in the Zemplín (41%), Uh (40%) and Šariš (31%) regions (Ibidem: 37). The Reformed Church increased rapidly in the given period with an 11% increase of believers. The Orthodox Church counted only 1,000 individuals; nevertheless, there was an important growth trend.

### ***1.2. Religiosity, Church and State (1918–1989)***

The birth of the Czechoslovak Republic was not only the success of ethno-national ambitions and more than 60 years of political fight, but it was also an important break-point in terms of the postulation of religious freedom and the new order of negotiations between the Church and the State. Not surprisingly, because of the strong visibility of the conservative Catholic Church on the side of the Habsburgs dynasty under the former regime, many political parties included into their electoral programme the separation of Church and State. The first draft of the new constitution included such a paragraph. Yet, due to the complicated and different situation on the Slovak and Czech sides, the requirement for Church and State separation in the first republic of Czechs and Slovaks was not included in the text of the new Constitution, as approved in 1920 (Hubenák, 2007). Religious issues were so complicated to negotiate that finally there was no single paragraph concerning or moderating Church and State relations. The key Article 124 of the Constitution made all confessions equal under the law. Article 121 of the Constitution guaranteed not only religious freedom but also the freedom to have no church affiliation or confession, which means the freedom of one's religiosity or irreligiosity. According to the Census in 1921, there were 725,000 people without confession in Czechoslovakia.

In 1926, the Congruation Act was passed (Act No. 122/1926). This act distinguished between the so-called *congruated* and *subsidised* churches and religious communities. Within the territory of the Czech Republic and Moravia, only the Catholic Church (all three rites) and the Orthodox churches were "congruated". In Slovakia and Ruthenia, the Catholic Church (all three rites), the Lutheran Evangelical Church, the Reformed Church, the Orthodox Church and the

Jewish religious communities were “reciped” (“recognized”). The minimum “congruas” (i.r. state contributions) were 9,000 Czechoslovak crowns per year. In sum, “recognised churches” received 130–150 million Czechoslovak crowns per year from the state; two thirds of this sum were granted to the Catholic Church (Hubenák, 2007). The negotiations between the newly constituted republic and the Vatican were launched in 1920. In 1928, the document *Modus Vivendi* was initialled.

**TABLE 2 Data on religious affiliation according to Censuses 1921-1950**

	Census 1921	Census 1930	Census 1940 <sup>2</sup>	Census 1950
<b>Total number of inhabitants (million)</b>	> 3.0	3.3	2.6	3.4
Catholic Church	71.0%	71.8%	74.1%	76.2%
<b>(million)</b>	2.1	2.3	1.9	2.6
Lutheran Evangelical Church	12.8%	12.1%	14.3%	12.9%
	383,000	400,000	388,000	443,000
Greek Catholic Church	6.4%	6.4%	6.9%	6.6%
	190,000	211,000	183,000	225,000
Reformed Church	4.7%	4.3%	0,5%	3.2%
	140,000	141,000	12,000	111,000
Jews	4.5%	4.1%	3.2%	0.2%
	135,000	135,000	86,000	>7,000
Orthodox Church			0.3%	0.2%
				<8,000
<b>Other confession</b>	0.6%	1.5%	0.2%	0.3%
	17,000	48,000		
NONES	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
	<7,000	16,000		>9,000
<b>Sin data/no answer</b>				0.1%

Compiled by T. Podolinská, based on the *Atlas of Religiosity of Slovakia* (Majo, Kusendová 2015: 20-27).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the Vienna Arbitration, the total number of inhabitants decreased dramatically. There were approximately 901,000 people within the territory occupied by Hungary (70% of them were affiliated to the Catholic Church, followed by the Reformed Church, Greek Catholics, Jews and Lutherans. (Ibidem: 25)

As far as the religious situation in the Czechoslovak Republic is concerned, the atmosphere and the public discourse were very different. The importance of the Catholic Church in the Czech part of the Republic visibly and notably decreased. The Slovak part faced a completely opposite trend – the Catholic Church reported an almost 25% internal increase in the number of believers with a 72% share in the general population. In some regions of Slovakia, the proportion of Catholic believers exceeded 90% (Kysucké Nové Mesto 99%). In 1930, the least Catholic region of Slovakia was the Medzilaborce district (9%) (Majo, Kusendová, 2015: 37). As for nationality, 76% of Catholic believers declared Slovak ethnicity, 17% the Hungarian one and only 5% declared German ethnicity in 1930 (Ibidem).

In 1921, Czechoslovakia had 13.5 millions of inhabitants; 724 thousand of them declared to be “without confession” (hereinafter referred to as “*nones*”). In the Czech part, it was 5.32%, whereas in Slovakia only 0.23%. In 1931, the total population reached 14.7 million inhabitants, 854 thousand of them being *nones*. The distribution of *nones* was remarkably different: 5.8% in the Czech part, and only 0.51% in the Slovak one. After 1945, the situation changed dramatically; 2.9 million Czech Germans were evicted and Czechoslovakia lost Ruthenia. As a consequence, the total number of inhabitants fell to 12.7 million; 766 thousand of them were “*nones*”.

Between 1940 and 1950, the religious development of the Catholic Church was positive and stable. In terms of the number of believers, the proportion of Catholics in the population of Slovakia reached 74% (Majo, Kusendová 2015: 38). There was a 10% internal increase of believers in the Catholic Church in Slovakia in 1930–1950. As far as Lutherans are concerned, only 3% of them resided outside the new borders after the Vienna arbitration. The proportion of Lutherans in Slovak population increased to 15% (Ibidem: 39). The Greek Catholic Church reported a 7% increase in the share of the Slovak population (1940 to 1930). In 1950, before its abolition, it faced a 6% internal increase and its share in the Slovak population reached 6.6%. The strongest Greek Catholic districts were Medzilaborce (86%) and Svidník (83%).

The change of the border had a dramatic effect on the Reformed Church. Ten years after 1938, the number of the Reformed decreased by 91% to 0.5% with a total number of believers of 13,000. Trebišov and Michalovce, and Bratislava with 1,000 believers remained the strongest districts. The most dramatic change, however, was observed among Jews. Due to the Vienna arbitrations and deportations, there was a 95% decline (1950 against 1940). In 1950, only 7,500 Jews lived in Slovakia compared to 87,000 in 1940. 89% of settlements in Slovakia were

without a Jewish population. The Orthodox Church faced a 18% internal decline. In 1950, their total number increased and reached 8,000 believers residing mostly in the Eastern part of Slovakia (Majo, Kusendová 2015: 39).

During the first phase of the creation of the post-war republic, at the times of the coalition government of the National Front, the representatives of the Catholic Church perceived the Church and State relations positively and wished it to continue in the future. For example, on 15 November 1945, led by Archbishop Josef Beran, they claimed to be a part of the “building of our State” in the Czech part of the republic. “The Church is willing to collaborate in the construction of the Republic”. On 13 May 1946, the diplomatic contacts between the Vatican and the Czechoslovak Republic were restored. Internunciatus Xáber Rither, known for his negative attitudes towards fascism and Nazism, returned as the representative of the Holy See. Dr. Josef Beran, who was detained by the secret police during the Protectorate period and deported to Dachau, was appointed as the new archbishop.

The situation in Slovakia was different for many reasons. After World War II was over, the tensions in the relations between the Church and the Czechoslovak State culminated in Slovakia. Back during the Uprising (1944), there were many cases of open confrontation between insurgents and Church representatives. Because of its support provided to the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party, the Catholic Church was also blamed for supporting fascism.

The Slovak National Council (SNC), which had not Catholic representatives, nationalised all schools in Slovakia through its Fifth Regulation, from child care centres and shelters to universities. This regulation entered into effect on 06 September 1944, i.e. less than a week after the SNC came out from the underground in the areas controlled by partisans. The SNC re-approved this resolution on 16 May 1945.<sup>3</sup>

Before the elections in May 1946, the Slovak Catholics concluded an agreement with the predominantly Protestant-oriented leadership of the Democratic Party. This party won 62% of the votes in the elections, while the Communists less than 30%.

The situation in Slovakia radically changed after the Communists came to power in February 1948. At the beginning, the leading Communist functionaries sought to bring the Catholic

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<sup>3</sup> The protests by Slovak bishops against this decision resulted in the arrestation and imprisonment of, for example, Bishop Ján Vojtaššák.

Church under their control through an agreement with the bishops or to obtain the co-operation of a part of them. On the outside, the government was willing to negotiate, but actually the state authorities constantly restricted the Church activities. For example, the National Front's Action Committee (NFAC) issued a declaration on the freedom of religion and, at the same time, it appointed a church secretary for each action committee. In March 1948, most Catholic magazines were halted, which was justified by the lack of paper. This was shortly followed by the regulation ordering the removal of crosses from schools and the lay off all teachers who were members of religious orders. The teaching of religion at secondary schools was cancelled. The Church was also affected by Act No. 44/1948 Coll. on Land Reform and Government Regulation No. 1/1948 Coll. on the Revised First Land Reform under which the Church lost all its agricultural assets. Even more damage was caused by Act No. 95/1948 on the Single School of 21 April 1948 which curtailed the activities of church schools. After the May elections, the Bishops' Assembly hoped to save church schools, provided that the bishops showed their loyalty to the new President of the Republic, Klement Gottwald. The Archbishop of Prague, Dr. Josef Beran, held a Te Deum ceremony in the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague on 14 June 1948 in honour of the President in the presence of the CSR Government.

The next period of 1949–50 was crucial when it comes to the future of the Church in Czechoslovakia. This period laid the fundamentals of the state control of Churches. This was followed by a series of significant interventions against the Church, such as cancellation of Christian magazines and nationalisation of publishing houses. In the Declaration of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of 25 April 1949, the Church was clearly defined as an “enemy” which must be brought under the legal control of the state apparatus. This Declaration also demanded the “separation of the Church from Rome” and the creation of a “national Church”. On 10 June 1949, the “Catholic Action” was founded under the leadership of priest Jozef Plojhar. Only 67 priests and an unidentified number of lay persons participated at the founding congress. The Bishops' Assembly condemned its establishment by a pastoral letter which was expected to be read in all churches on Sunday, 19 June. This “action” was officially condemned by the Vatican's excommunication decree on 20 June 1949.

### **1950–1989**

The census of 31 March 1950, at the very beginning of the socialist era in Slovakia, was for a long period of time the last one to collect answers concerning confession. According to this census, Czechoslovakia had 12,338,450 of inhabitants, of which 3,442,317 lived in the Slovak

part of the republic. The Catholic Church claimed 74.42 % of affiliates in the Czech part of the country and 76.2% in Slovakia.

In the next year 1951, according to the report from the Ministry of the Interior, the Czechoslovak Republic had 9 million Catholics; 400,000 Evangelicals (Lutherans); 100,000 Calvinists; 10,000 Adventists; 8,000 Methodists; 8,000 members of the Unity of Brethren; 2,000 Unitarians; 8,000 Baptists; 900,000 members of the Czechoslovak Church; and 250,000 members of the Orthodox Church. The Greek-Catholic Church was cancelled in Czechoslovakia on 28 April 1950.

By Government Regulation No. 112/1950 of 14 July, the Communist government abolished all diocesan seminars and religious theological universities, and founded the only theological university in Slovakia – the *Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology of Cyril and Methodius in Bratislava* under the supervision of the State Authority for Church Matters. The number of seminarists declined by 90%.

The next period was characterised by arrests of leading church representatives. On 02–15 January, the State Court in Bratislava sentenced the 74-year-old bishop Ján Vojtaššák to 24 years in prison and a fine of 500,000 crowns; and the 66-year old bishop Dr. Michal Buzalka and 63-year bishop Pavel Gojdič, OSBM, were given a life sentence. This political atmosphere resulted in the leaving of Vatican diplomats and many church representatives abroad.

On 23 July 1960, a new Constitution was adopted, calling the country the *Czechoslovak Socialist Republic*. According to the 1961 census, the population of Czechoslovakia was 13,745,577 as of 01 March. Slovakia had 4,174,046 inhabitants, of which 3,560,000 claimed the Slovak ethnicity (519,000 the Hungarian one).

## **2. The Post-Communist Era and the Recent Trends in Religiosity in Slovakia**

The socialist period did not favour the collection, analysis and publishing of data about religious affinity, and this topic became a taboo for several decades after the 1950 census. Historical data about churches was partly published in the *Atlas of Czechoslovak History* in the form of a map of the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical of Augsburg Confession, Reformed Christian and Jewish Church administration in 1848. The revised version of this atlas concerning the Slovak territory was published in the *Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia* of 1990 and the major part of it was produced back during the socialist period. The data on the religious

structure of the population in a comprehensive cartographic form remained unpublished until the end of the millennium.

In 2000, the team of authors led by geographer Štefan Poláčik published a unique *Atlas of Churches, Religious Communities and Religiosity in Slovakia* (Ecumenical Atlas). Besides a basic description of the registered churches and religious communities, the atlas contains maps of the territorial administration and data about the numbers and proportions according to the 1991 census. A new national atlas – *The Atlas of the Landscape of the Slovak Republic* – was published at the beginning of the new millennium, in 2002. The chapter on the population includes maps of the confessional structure of the population of towns and municipalities in 1991 and districts in 1880. In addition, the atlas shows the results of the 2001 census and data on the religious structure of the population per districts. The tradition of publishing religious atlases continued in 2005 with the *Atlas of the Catholic Church in Slovakia* under the guidance of Viliam Judák and Štefan Poláčik. Besides detailed information on the life of both Catholic Churches in Slovakia, as depicted on maps, the atlas also contains basic maps on other more numerous churches and religious communities according to the census conducted in 2001. The so-far last comprehensive work among religious maps is the mono-confessional *Historical Atlas of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia*, published in 2011 under the guidance of Dagmar Kusendová and Mojmir Benža. The authors of the *Demographic Atlas of the Slovak Republic* from 2014, which mainly reflects the data obtained from the 2011 census, present the basic results concerning the most numerous churches, religious communities and the population claiming no confession. (Majo, Kusendová, 2015: 6-7).

According to of the representative international survey *European Values Study* (EVS) conducted also in Slovakia in 1991 and 1999, there was a rapid rise in the number of believers in Slovakia in the first decade after the fall of Communism, from around 63.5% in the early 1990s to around 76% in the late 1990s (EVS 1991, 1999).<sup>4</sup> This “religious turn” can be interpreted as a result of the specific post-Communist climate. The old institutional framework was completely dismantled, including all its ‘securities’. The civil society was in its “embryonic” state with the virtual absence of an intermediary layer of NGOs; the nuclear family and values were in a deep crisis. The other very important limitation was economic: it was a period of extreme material

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard, however, it is necessary to comment on the data from 1991; the number of believers was slightly undercounted because a different method of measurement was employed.

hardships after the downfall of the planned economy of socialism. Not surprisingly, the period of “inflated expectations” and of the “freedom of self” was followed by the period of “normative confusion”. Getting through these turbulent times, people were searching for their lost “security” and a new “protective umbrella”. Under these conditions, the historically attested tradition of religion and a credible institutional representative as embodied by traditional church became the “major option”. Our case showed one more important trend. In Slovakia, the traditional Church adopted the position of a “Communist martyr” and (at least in the first post-Communist decade) profited very much from the social capital of this position. In addition, the Church privatised the role of the “housekeeper” of the national tradition.

The concept of “traditional” religion that has its historical merits and privileges became a common device for structuring the religious policy and the legal debate. This turbulent development and the flexible strategy of the Roman Catholic Church resulted (at least) in a “numeral” re-birth of traditional Catholicism in Slovakia. As a consequence, Slovakia (together with Poland) is frequently referred to as one of the most traditional ‘citadels’ of Catholicism in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

According to the interim analysis of the first and second waves of EVS (1991, 1999), the first post-Communist decade was indeed a decade of religious turn in Slovakia. Religious faith was strengthened along with the church-attendance rate and general confidence in the Church (Krivý, 2001: 14). In 1991, ‘prevailing confidence’ in Church was reported by 49% of Slovak respondents. In 1999, there was a 16% increase and the number reached 64.8% (EVS 1991, 1999). Nevertheless, hand in hand with these pro-Church attitudes, people began to declare the opinion that the Church should focus more/(merely) on religious and spiritual issues. Hence, religious influence was endorsed ‘only’ in those cases where it was kept within the pressure limits and did not interfere directly into the sphere of politics. Tolerance towards the co-existence of people of various religions or without religion was higher, as it was in the early 1990s (Ibidem).

Based on the figures from the latest surveys we can follow the religious dynamics of the second post-Communist decade in comparison with the first one. Both EVS 2008 and ISSP 2008 results indicate that the perceptions of the Church’s responses to spiritual, moral and family issues in Slovakia as adequate exceed the European average. In 2004, the national survey *Collective Identities in Contemporary Slovakia* revealed that 34% of respondents

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, for a clarification of the context see Part 4 of the study.

explicitly support the weakening of the power of the Roman Catholic Church in public space and negatively perceive the rising influence of the Church. Among higher-educated respondents, this figure reached up to 45.8% (Krivý, 2004: 37, 67). In the same survey, 72.6% of respondents agreed with the statement that “Christian values should be interpreted in a more modern way than the Church in Slovakia used to do”.

If we follow the dynamic of religiosity in Slovakia through the lenses of the last three censuses, the religious situation seems to be very stable, almost untouched by the dramatic political or economic changes in society during the transition era (**TABLE 3**).

**TABLE 3 Data on religious affiliation according to Censuses 1991-2011**

	Census 1991	Census 2001	Census 2011
<b>Total number of inhabitants (million)</b>	5.2	5.35	5.39
Catholic Church <b>(million)</b>	60.4% 3.1	68.9% 3.7	62% 3.3
Lutheran Evangelical Church	6.2% 326,000	6.9% 372,000	5.9% 316,000
Greek Catholic Church	3.4% 178,000	4.1% 219,000	3.8% 206,000
Reformed Church	1.6% 82,000	2.0% 107,000	1.8% 98,000
Orthodox Church	0.7% 34,000	0.9% 50,000	0.9% 49,000
<b>Other confessions</b>	0.6% 30,000	1.1% 50,000	1.5% 79,000
NONES	9.8% 515,000	13.0% 697,000	1.4% 725,000
Sin data/ no answer	17.4% 917,000	3% 160,000	10.6% 571,000

Compiled by T. Podolinská, based on the *Atlas of Religiosity of Slovakia* (Majo, Kusendová 2015 28-33).

For a better understanding of the present state of religiosity in Slovakia, it is important to describe the political and historical context of the changes, mostly after 1989. We can subsequently launch a deeper investigation of the various types of religiosity in Slovakia.

The situation in which the Slovak Republic found itself in 1993 can be characterised as a struggle with three traditions. The first problem was the way we deal with and find an attitude towards the period of the last 40 years of the state-socialism (Communist regime) which declared itself as a materialist order. The fall of the rule of the Communist party was one of the issues for the legitimisation of the new order. As a result, the official rhetoric of the new Slovak Republic rejected continuity with this era (Tížik, 2007). The second problem in the discussions about the character of the new state was the separation of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, i.e. rupture with the common Czechoslovak traditions and self-definition outside the heritage of the united federative republic and against the Czech Republic became prevailing. The third important factor in the search for legitimacy of the new state and new regime was the very specific temporality of Slovak citizens. Historian Ľ. Lipták called it “new temporality” (Lipták, 2002). According to his hypothesis, the generation that reached the retirement age in 1993 experienced throughout their lives five political regimes, revolutions, territorial, state and political changes or economic systems. Of the five regimes that this generation experienced, only two can be considered democratic.

Not only in the European context, at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century Slovakia can be considered as a part of moderately religious countries – countries with a high level of declarative religiosity and an average level of church attendance – together with the United States and Spain (Tížik 2012). The 25-year period of transformation of the relationship between religion and the state in Slovakia since 1989 can be divided into five phases (Tížik, 2015).

The first period refers to the years of the common Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (1990–1992). This period can be called the period of the creation of an independent religious field in Slovakia (religious field as defined by Bourdieu, 1971), during which religious freedom was one of the most crucial issues. But it was still in the frame of common Czechoslovakia with some small specific differences between Czechs and Slovaks due to the federal character of the Czechoslovakia. In addition, religious freedom and the economic and legal independence of religion from the state were guaranteed.

The second phase (1993–2000) is characterised by the creation of state authorities in the new Slovak Republic. The social importance of religion in the symbolic character of the state increased, and the basic rules of the religious field were strengthened. The religious field as a symbolic space of the State was Christianised, and Christianity became a nation-forming and state-forming principle. In this phase, the positions of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches became dominant.

The third phase (2000–2004) began with the adoption of the Basic Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See in 2000. Roman Catholicism, as the *doxa* of the religious field, was strengthened, and the presence of dominant actors of the religious field in terms of power was stabilised.

The fourth phase (2004–2009) was marked by Slovakia's accession to the European Union in 2004, bringing about a halt to the increasing influence and power of the Catholic Church in the field of power and within the symbolic space in Slovakia. This was manifested openly in 2005 through a governmental crisis, which resulted in early elections. This crisis related to disputes over issues promoted by the Catholic Church, which was seeking a treaty with the Holy See on the Right to Conscientious Objection, meant to guarantee the right of public actors not to engage in activities that run counter to the teachings of the Church. On the one hand, this highlighted the presence of the Catholic Church within the power segments of the state; on the other hand, it also demonstrated the Church's inability to enforce an agreement unilaterally advantageous to it against the interests of the state, which protected its existing (restricted) monopoly over symbolic violence and respected several international obligations toward the European Union and other international actors.

The fifth and latest well-defined phase began with the introduction of the common euro currency in 2009. This phase overlaps with the advent of the economic and financial crisis, which has made Europe-wide issues less important and has strengthened nation states as actors in international politics. In terms of relations between the State and religion in Slovakia, this period has witnessed the enforcement of religious institutions as important public actors in multiple spheres of political life in the country. In 2012, there were certain indications suggesting the potential beginning of a new, sixth phase in the relations between the State and Churches, as the largest Churches have begun to be integrated in the power field in new ways. For example, some parts of the Churches, including of the Catholic Church, became a part of

the Eurosceptic camp and supported the initiatives to leave the European Union in summer of 2016.

All these changes in Church and State relations took place in a society whose religious structure can be considered stable, with a long history and in which the majority of the population pertained to the Catholic Church alongside a significant minority of non-Catholic Churches.

The newly emerging state placed increased symbolic importance on religion, and specifically on the Christian religion as a source of symbolic capital and constituent power. Apart from that, the two dominant actors, the Catholic and Lutheran Churches, were granted special privilege within the religious field through a number of measures that led to the formation of *the Catholic-Lutheran asymmetrical dualism*, with the Catholic Church serving as the dominant actor of the two within the emerging field of power (Tížik, 2011: 339). Still, all registered churches in Slovakia (there were 15 in 1993 and 18 in 2016) were part of the religious field, and the core included all those churches that received state subsidies and participated in discussions regarding the conditions for this subsidy (this included 12 of the 15 registered churches in 1993).

### ***2.1. Data on religiosity***

Various data can be used in the investigation of religiosity:

#### *a) Censuses*

Data from censuses help understand the changes in the religious structure of Slovakia for more than 100 years. For the moment, there is missing data on religious affiliation from censuses conducted in 1940, 1960, 1970 and 1980. But in general, it can show the general trend in religious changes in Slovakia. More information on Slovakia's religious structure based on census data is in tables 1, 2, 3.

#### *b) Surveys*

Except for the census data there is already available, plenty of surveys in some way related to the measurement of religiosity have been carried out. The first survey in Slovakia was conducted in 1998 and the last one in 2016. Most of them are freely accessible on-line through the Slovak Archive of Social Data (SASD): [www.sasd.sav.sk](http://www.sasd.sav.sk).

There are various kinds of surveys useful for understanding religiosity in Slovakia:

National surveys (carried out only in Slovakia):

1. World View Attitudes in Slovakia 1968 (SPOS 1968)
2. Equality and Minorities in Slovakia 2008
3. Democracy and Citizens in Slovakia (DOS 2014)

International comparative surveys (most of them comparable within V4 countries):

1. European Values Study – EVS (1991, 1999, 2008, 2017)
2. World Values Survey – WVS (1990, 1998, 2017 together with EVS)
3. International Social Survey Programme – ISSP (Religion 1998, 2008 and also National Identity 1995, 2003, 2015, Citizenship and others)
4. European Social Survey – ESS
5. Aufbruch 1997, 2007<sup>6</sup>

For a basic overview of religious changes in Slovakia, the comparison between the year 1968 and 2014 can be useful. The survey on religiosity conducted in 1968 was the first one in the history of Slovakia, and the survey of 2014 replicated all the questions used in 1968, which offers a unique comparison for the purposes of an analysis of the changes in religiosity.

## ***2.2. Changes in Religiosity in Slovakia***

For further characteristics, a comparison of the data from two surveys will be used as a case study of the dynamics of religiosity in Slovakia. The surveys carried out in 1968 (SPOS 1968) and 2014 (DOS 2014) can help to deeper describe the multi-dimensional character of religiosity and show the basic tendencies in the religious change. Three basic dimensions of religiosity can be distinguished, used in most surveys (not only in SPOS 1968 and DOS 2014): 1. religious affiliation (to or without religion), 2. religious practice (church attendance, frequency of prayer, reading of religious books, pilgrimages, etc.), 3. religious beliefs (belief in God, in church teaching, spiritual entities, etc.).

Both surveys (SPOS 1968 and DOS 2014) also investigated the attitudes of respondents towards other religious beliefs and towards the relation of religion and churches in the public space.

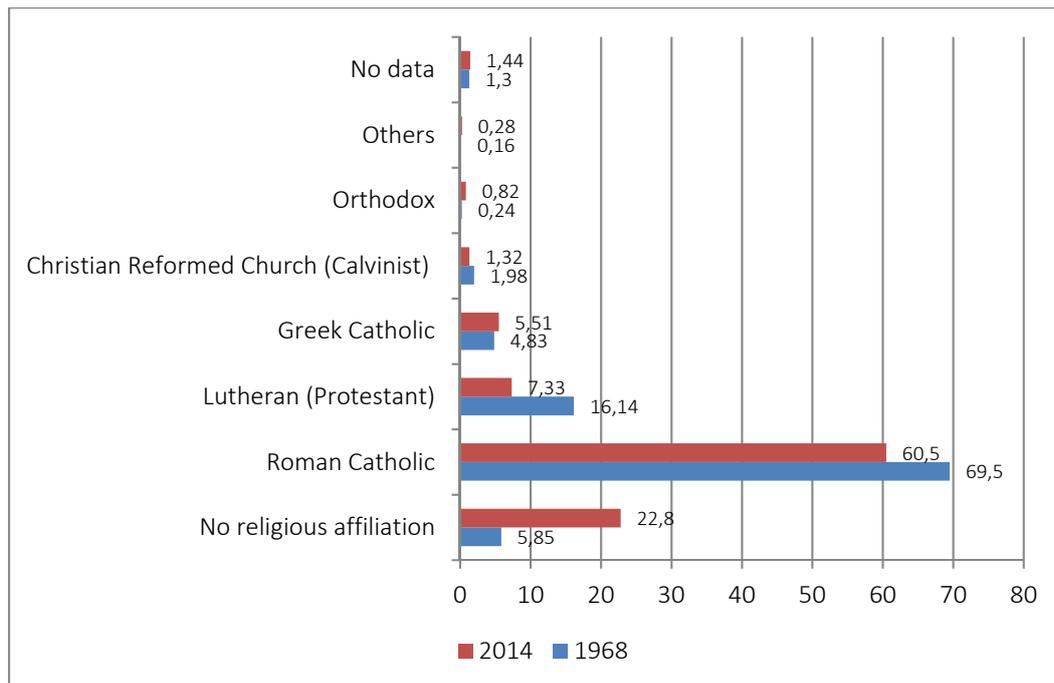
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<sup>6</sup> The results from all participating countries are available on-line at their specific web pages.

## Religious affiliation in Slovakia

The survey data show similar tendencies as the data from censuses. A kind of stability of religious landscape in the last half of the century can be observed, with a growing group of people without religious affiliation and a more significant decline in the number of people affiliated with Protestant churches.

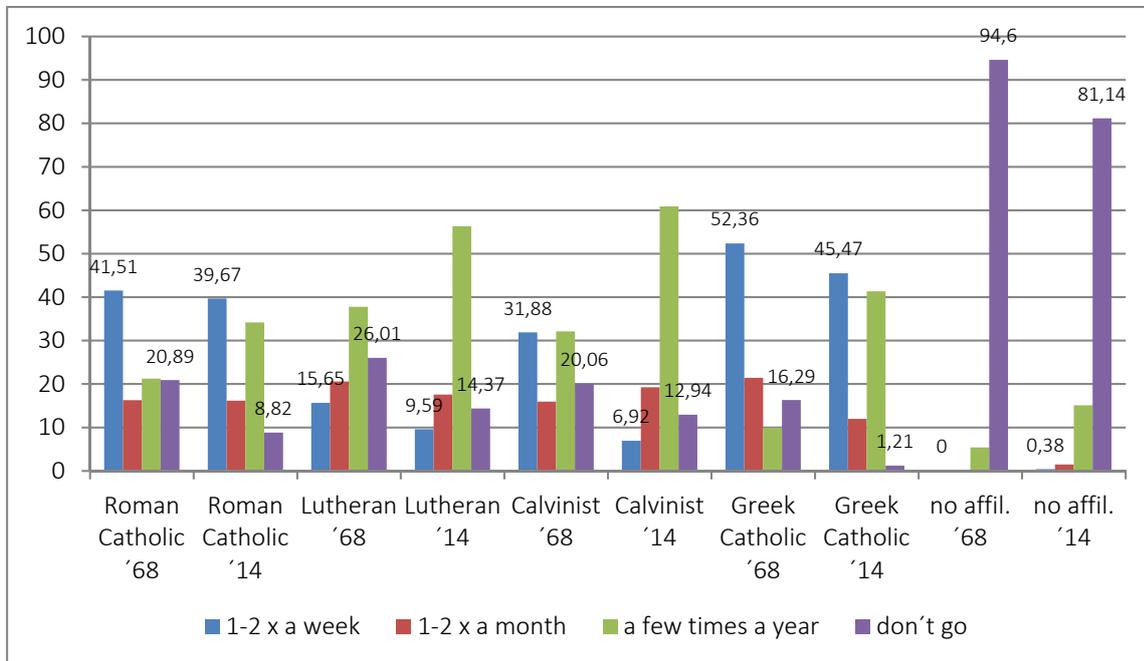
**Fig. 1 What is your religious affiliation? (in %)**



Compiled by M. Tížik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

*Religious practices*

**Fig. 2. How often do you take part in religious ceremonies (such as mass or other church services)?**

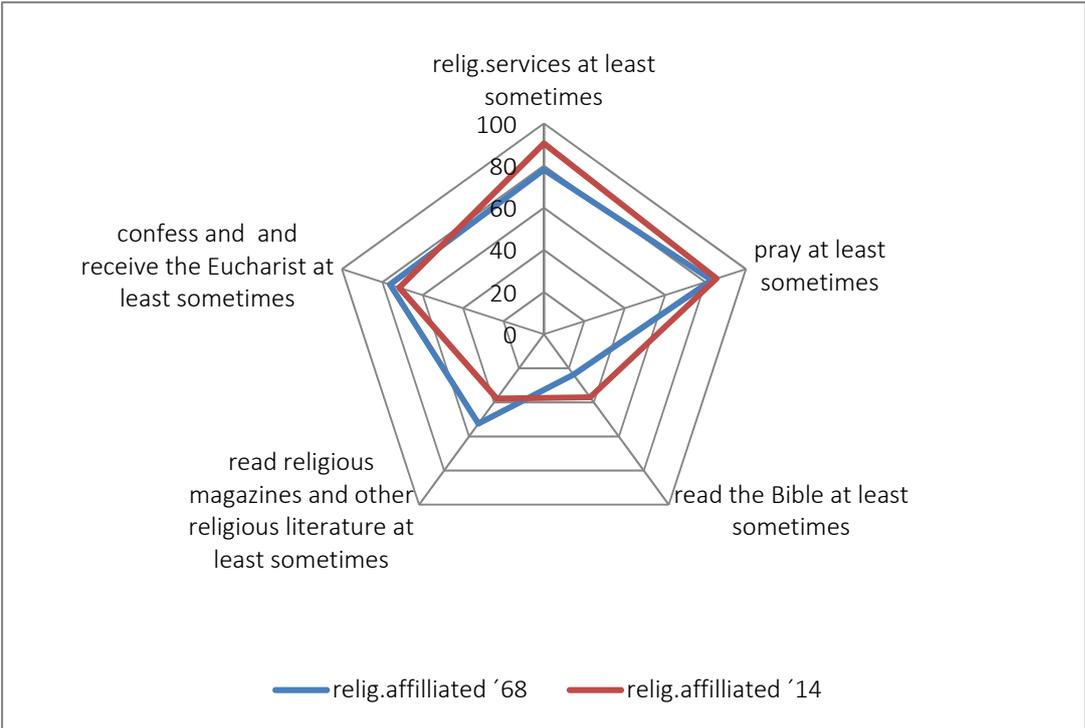


Compiled by M. Tížik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

From Fig. 2 it is evident that there was significant decrease in regular church attendance mostly among Protestant churches (Lutherans and Calvinists); at the same time, there was a decline in the number of non-affiliated people who never go to church. The half-century comparison shows that it is still the members of the Greek Catholic Church who attend religious ceremonies most frequently.

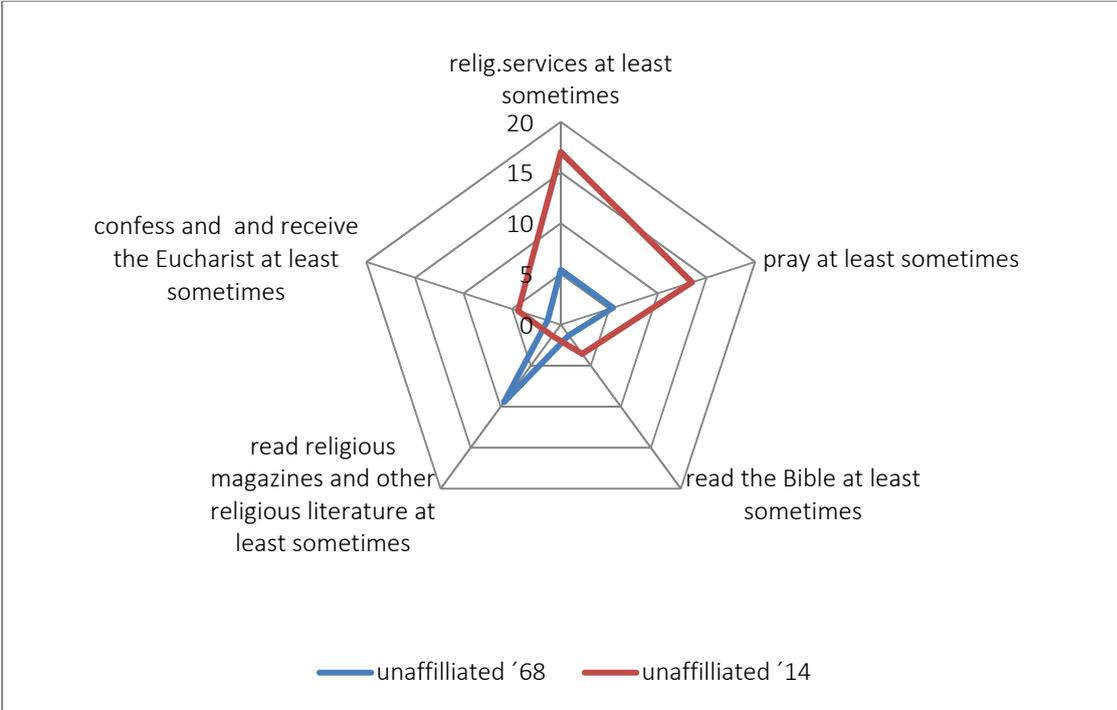
When comparing various religious practices (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4), some tendencies are evident. Among persons who declared affiliation to religion an increase in church going and in reading the Bible can be observed. Among those who declared not be affiliated to any religion there is a significant increase in church going and other practices, except of reading religious magazines or newspapers.

**Fig. 3 Comparison of basic religious practices of persons affiliated to religion**



Compiled by M. Tížik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

**Fig. 4 Comparison of basic religious practices of persons not affiliated to religion**

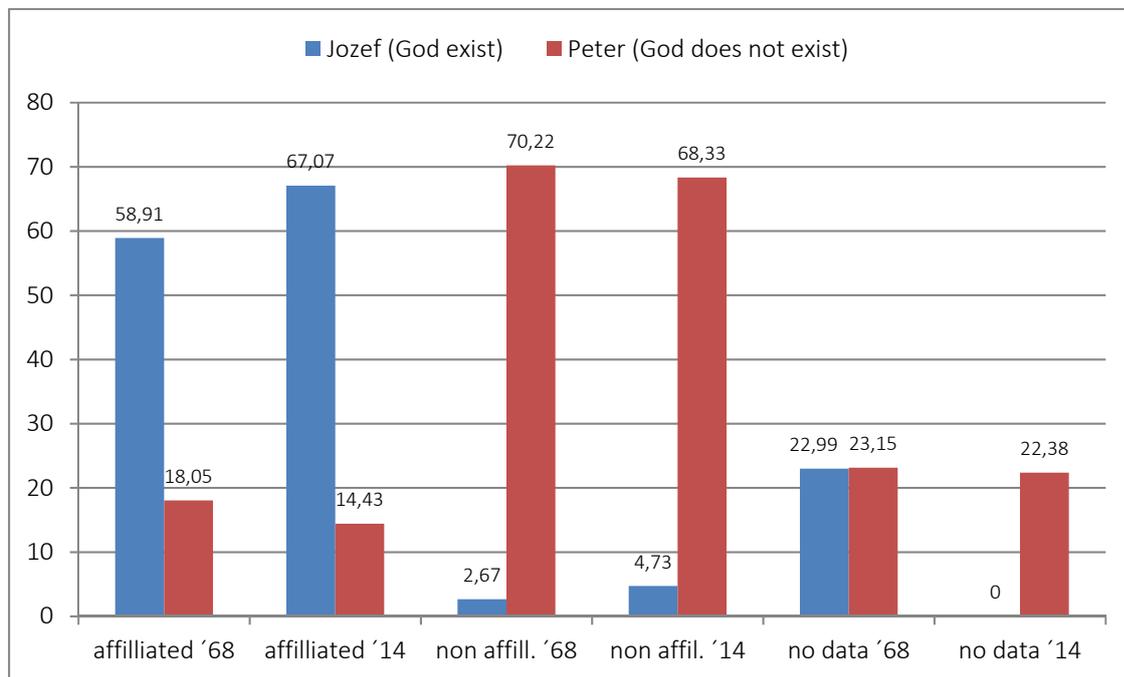


Compiled by M. Tížik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

## Religious beliefs

“Imagine this situation: Two young people, Peter and Joseph, discuss the world today. Peter says that God does not exist, because if God existed, he would not allow things that have occurred and are occurring in the world today. Joseph disagrees with Peter and says that God exists and that people will account for their deeds before God. Peter: God does not exist, because he wouldn't allow what is happening to take place. Joseph: God exists and people will account for their deeds before God.”

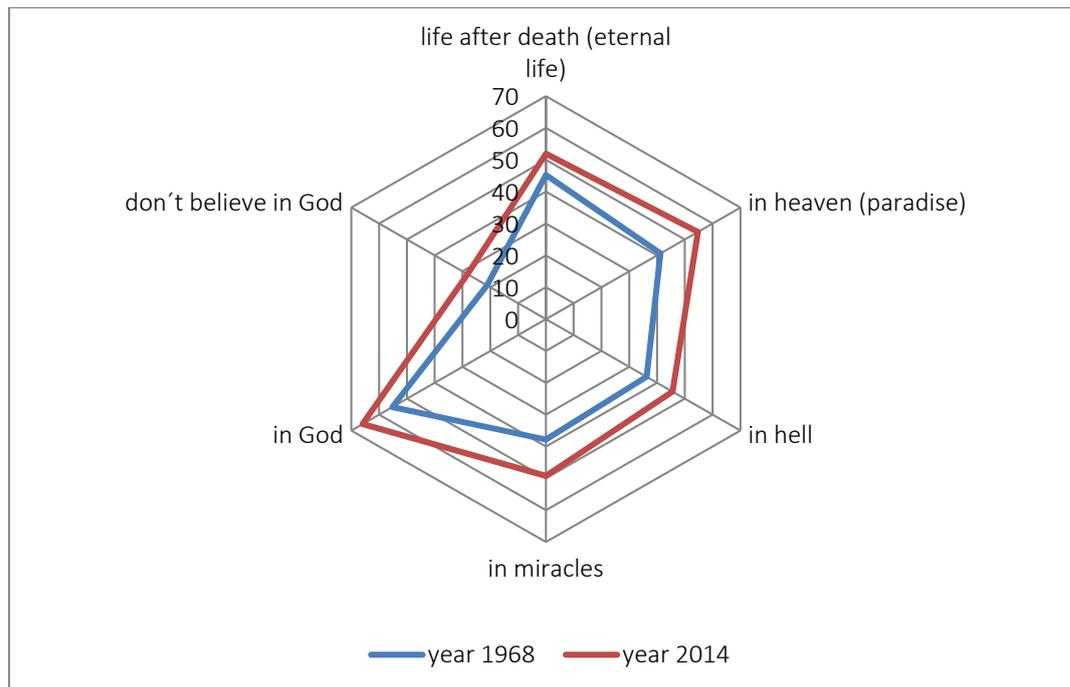
**Fig. 5 Belief in the existence of God**



Compiled by M. Tížik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

The increase in religious beliefs in a traditional way also confirms additional data from the surveys conducted in 1968 and 2014. Although there was a decrease in the number of people who declared to be affiliated to church (and, at the same time, an increase in the number of respondents who don't believe in God), there was an increase of people who declared belief in traditional Christian principles.

**Fig. 6 Comparison of basic religious beliefs in 1968 and 2014**



Compiled by M. Tižik 2017, SPOS 1968, DOS 2014.

*Juraj Majo*

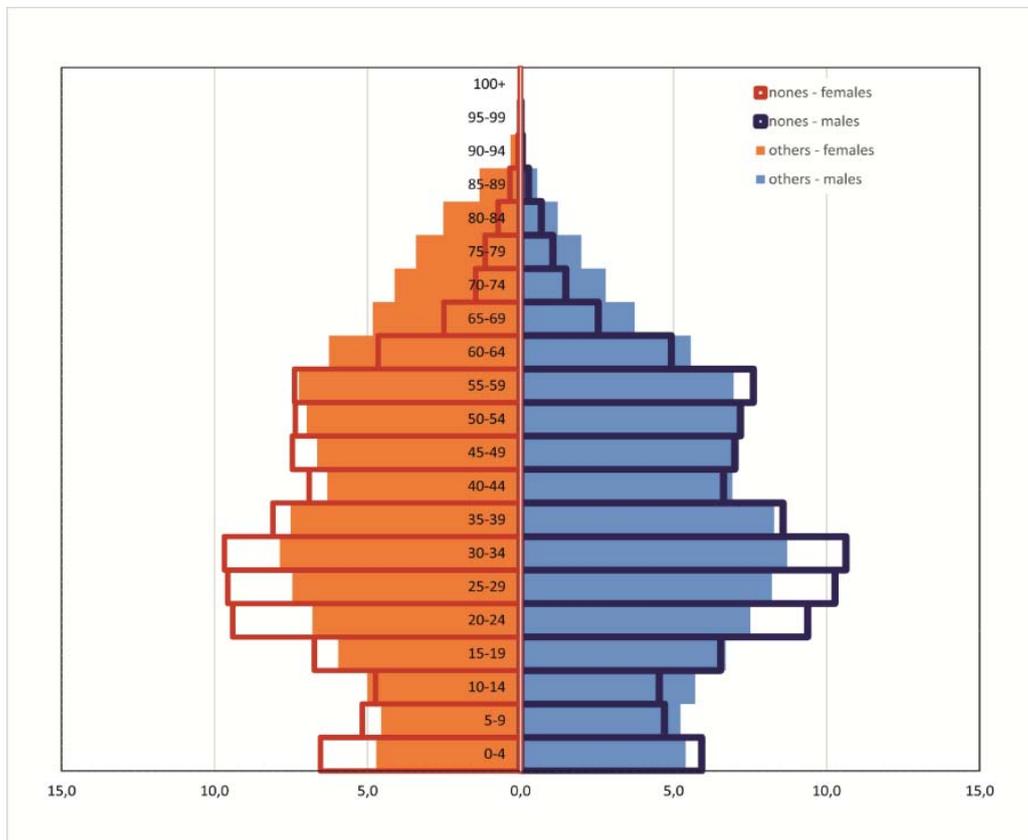
### **3. Some Demographic Aspects of the Non-Affiliated Population in Slovakia**

Increasing proportions of religious non-affiliation characterise not only Slovakia (it is the second most numerous segment of the population), but the majority of Western societies face the same trend, although the periods over which these increases have occurred and the speed in which they happen do vary. Consequently, some nations now have larger unaffiliated groups and others much smaller ones. The recent survey revealed that, in areas where unaffiliated groups are larger, the religious “nones” have become more distinct from the actively religious in their attitudes and behaviour. In contexts of advanced secularisation, the gap is greater between the actively religious and the non-religious when it comes to their views of family life and reproduction and the unaffiliated are more liberal in their attitudes and less religious in their private life. Based on the analysing data from over 200 North American, European, and Oceanic country sub-regions included in the 2008 International Social Survey Programme, with hierarchical linear models, the sociologists of religion find that, in areas where the unaffiliated form a larger proportion of the population, the differences between the actively religious and

the unaffiliated in family values and personal religiosity tend to be greater (Wilkins-Laflamme 2016).

### 3.1. Nones in Slovakia – Age composition

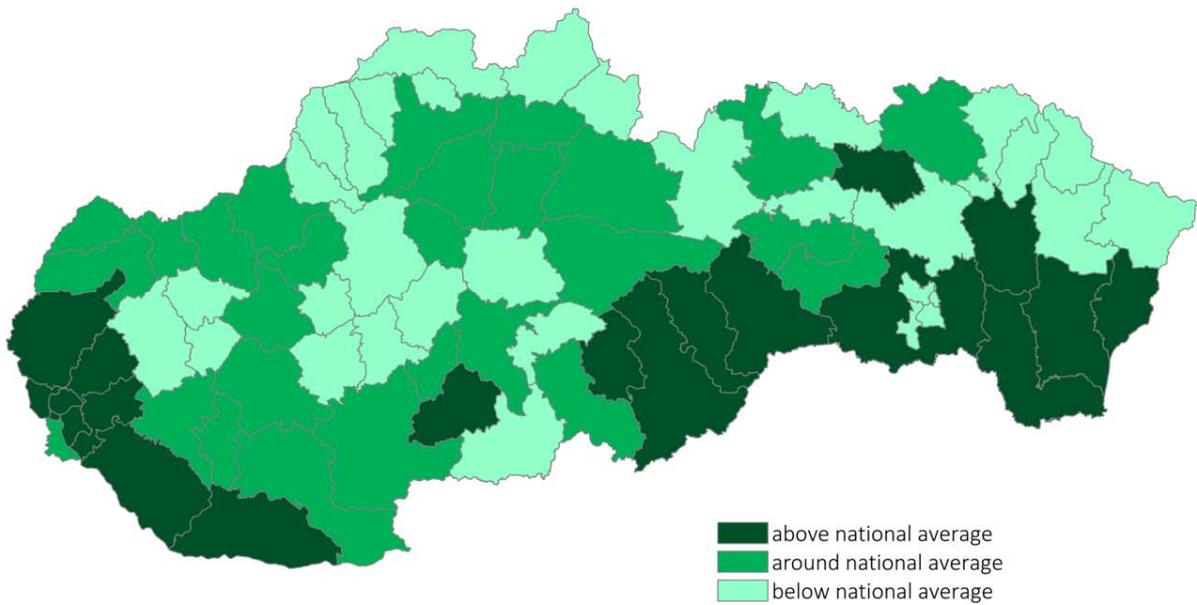
**Fig. 7 Age pyramid of the population of *nones* in Slovakia and the rest of the population**



Source: Census 2011, compiled by J. Majo 2017.

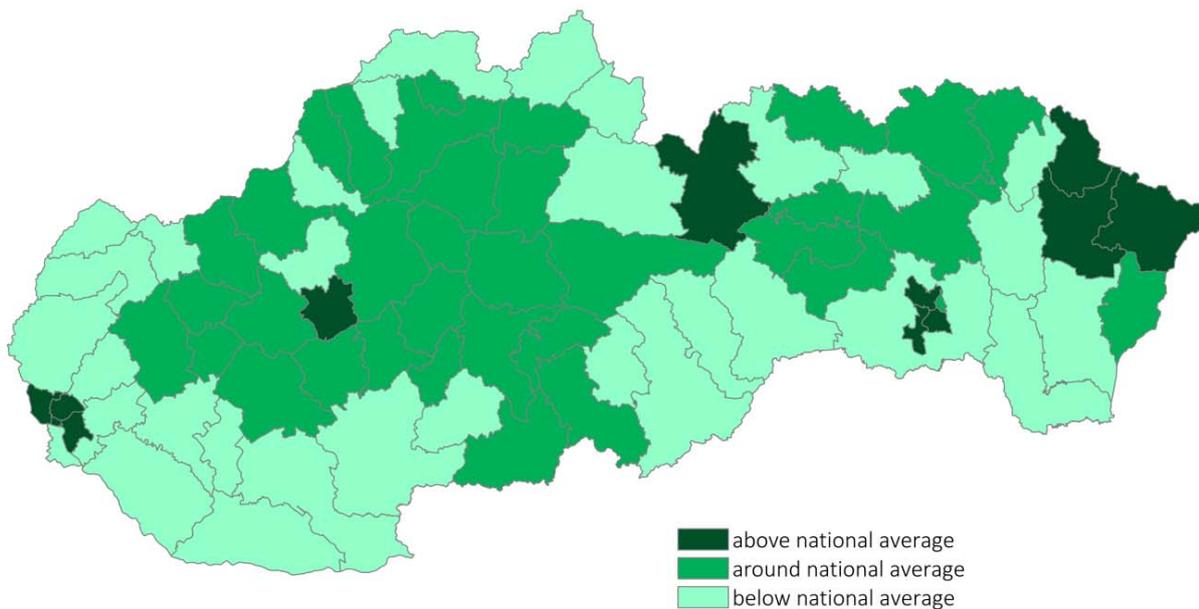
Due to the lack of data on religious affiliation for several decades, we can carry out thorough demographic analyses only of the period starting in 1991 or 2001. The data collected in censuses provide quite a solid source of information, although not fully exhaustive. One of the most interesting comparisons is the age breakdown of nones compared against the rest of the population. The proportion of those aged 0-14 in the population of nones is only 2% higher than in the whole population. It is interesting that in many – mostly rural – areas, the proportion is even lower (in many Eastern Slovakian districts, the proportion of 0-14 years old in the population of nones was more than 30% smaller in 2001). Only in the Bratislava City and adjacent districts, the population of nones was, generally speaking, younger than the entire population. The best way of depicting the age characteristics of society is by using the age pyramid method. In general, the population of nones and other population are not notably

**Fig. 9 Proportion of *nones* 0-14 in districts of Slovakia in 2011**



Source: Census 2011; compiled by J. Majo 2017.

**Fig. 8 Proportion of *nones* 60+ in districts of Slovakia in 2011**



Source: Census 2011; compiled by J. Majo 2017.

of individual age groups or generations. The first notable difference is in the smaller proportion of nones aged 60+. The divergence is especially visible among women. The research outcomes of Dana Hamplová (2011) proved that, in Czech society, religious women prevail in all age categories (307), and we presume that this tendency is similar in Slovakian society, as well. If we take the spatial approach into account, we can see that the majority of “aged” nones live in districts covering the biggest cities (Bratislava in the west, and Košice in the east), and in north-eastern regions. These eastern Slovakian regions are regions with a strong Orthodox and Greek Catholic background and, historically, regions with strong left-parties (especially Communists) electorate (see, for example, Krivý, Feglová, Balko 1996). If we compare the proportion of 60+ among nones against the proportion of 60+ in the rest of the population, this proportion is always lower (-64 %), but in eastern Slovakia it is somehow “less” lower (North-Eastern Slovakia has around -25 – -30 %). It is not clear how to identify this group. One of the hypotheses could be the cohort of those who reacted to the forced introduction of the Orthodox Church in dismissed Greek Catholic Church parishes. Barnovský, Pešek (1997, 249) in his description of the groups of former Greek Catholic believers and their reaction to its dismissal identified the “indifferent” as the largest group. These were full of uncertainty in the time of dismissal, had little information and interest and, after all, it was those with a lower level of religious experience. One of the reactions and strategies of the members of this group could have been their withdrawal from church life. Another salient difference in the age structure is vivid among the generation of the 20-35 years old. These individuals were born on the verge of the existence of the old regime, and this generation seems to be influenced mainly by secular worldviews (needs to be verified, if it is due to Socialism and their parents mostly living in it, or general societal trends towards secularisation as they work elsewhere in Europe). The proportion of this generation at the level of nones is 27% higher than the proportion of similar generations in the rest of the population. A very high proportion of young nones is mostly in western Slovakian districts (Bratislava I, Komárno, Myjava, Nové Mesto nad Váhom), where the ratio is almost 50% higher.

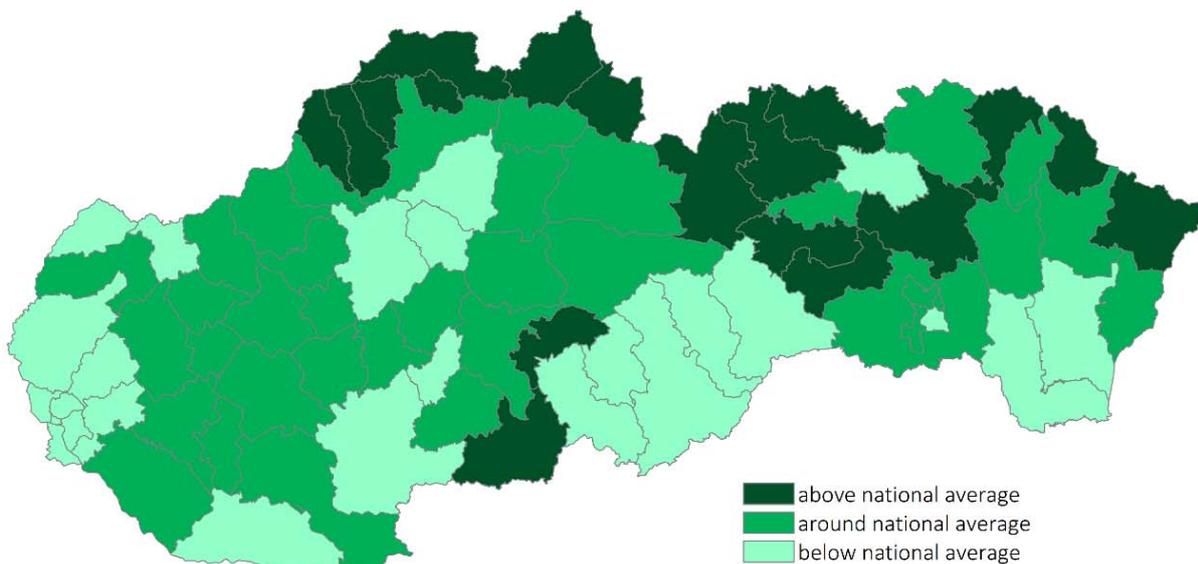
Most of the nones are therefore grouped in productive age groups. It is then slightly surprising that nones are not much dominant in the age group 0-14 (only 3% higher than in the other population). We have here a set of 43 districts out of 80 where the proportion of nones among the youngest generation is even smaller than in the rest. These are, for example, regions in north-eastern Slovakia (Medzilaborce) which, on one hand, had a proportion of old nones above

Slovakian average, but the proportion of nones among youngsters is 56% smaller. The highest divergence is mainly in the districts of Bratislava City (the proportion is 60% higher).

### 3.2. Attained education

There is a general belief that nones or even atheists are found among people with the highest education (Keysar, 2017: 44-45) and, on the other hand, religious people are more likely to have no formal education. However, educational attainment in correlation with religion in the US

**Fig. 10 Nones with university education in Slovakia in 2011 (%)**



Source: Census 2011; compiled by J. Majo 2017.

did not prove, for example, that nones have the highest level (Kosmin, Keysar 2006: 152-153). Here, the survey results proved certain positive correlations between congregational attachment and the level of education (283). The findings for Slovakian society can be easily explained by several adjacent variables – such as rural/urban dichotomy and different concentration of nones in such regions, different age distribution within those sub-populations, employment, and so on. Then, the distribution of the most educated people has similar spatial patterns to those who declare themselves as nones. It is also the case of Slovakia – the proportion of nones with a university degree is almost 100 % higher than in the rest of the population and, as expected, the proportion of individuals with elementary education is 44% smaller than in the rest of the population. It is interesting that the biggest gap between two sub-populations is not in the most secular regions (such as urban and suburban areas of Bratislava and Košice cities), but in

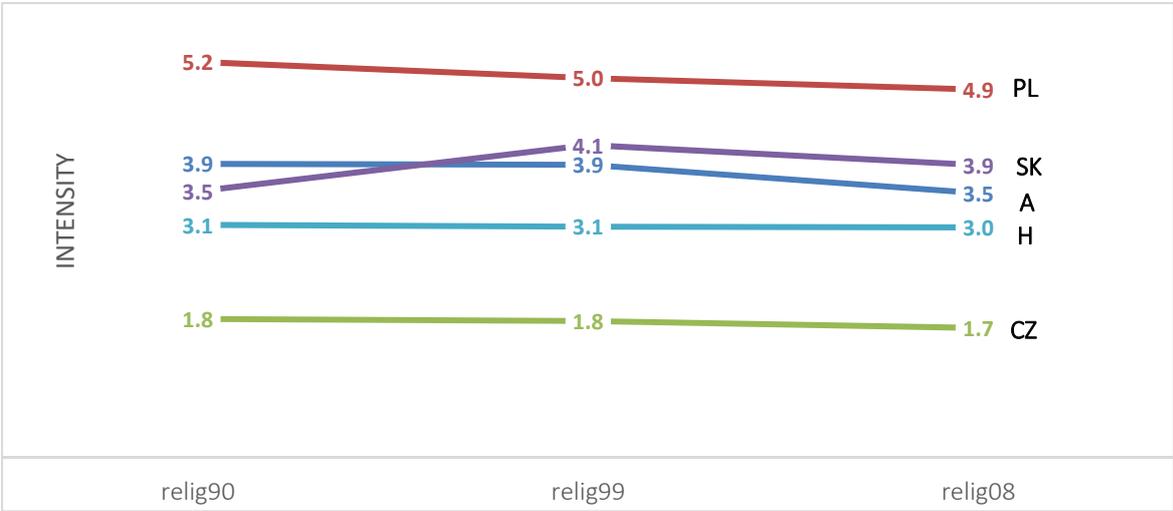
regions where the number of nones is not very high (especially in mostly rural and Catholic regions in northern Slovakia). The proportion of university educated nones is almost 200% higher in this case. In addition, two of the five districts of Bratislava City with quite a new immigration profile mostly in large housing estates have an even smaller proportion of university educated nones than the rest of the population. In general, these regions have a very high share of university degree individuals, but this might mean that either the young educated generations are anchored in any of the denominations to a larger extent than their parents, or that there is just a higher proportion of those who did not declare anything (either their non-confessionalism, or their religious affiliation).

Tatiana Podolinská

**4. Slovakia – the Comparative Perspective**

At the very end, for the purposes of the contextualisation of the data from censuses, surveys, and cartographic and demographic researches conducted in connection with religiosity in Slovakia during the last decades, we will briefly introduce a comparative perspective of religiosity of Slovakia in the framework of the representative surveys carried out in Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria and Poland (EVS 1990, 1999, 2008). On the basis of these international comparative researches, we have made an analysis of the extent of religiosity through three *dimensions* – belief, membership, and practising (see Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna 2013). The analyses showed that, among the analysed countries, **Slovakia** is the **only** country where **religiosity became stronger** when comparing the years 1991 and 2008 (**Fig. 11**).

**Fig. 11 Level of religiosity, PL, SK, A, H, CZ (EVS 1990, 1999, 2008)**



Source: Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna 2013: 213, compiled by Vladimír Krivý in 2013.

In Poland and Austria, religiosity considerably weakened in the given period, and in Hungary and the Czech Republic it declined slightly. Yet, all these trends developed at significantly different *levels of religiosity*. Poland is a country with by far the highest level of religiosity, while the Czech Republic is known for its low degree of religiosity. The third group of countries, the “group in the middle“, is represented by Slovakia, Austria and Hungary. The closest country to Slovakia in terms of the average level of religiosity is Austria, followed by Hungary. Following the same criterion, the farthest country is the Czech Republic.

During the past almost 20 years, the share of fully religious people (people with the highest level of religiosity) decreased in three countries: there was a dramatic decline in Poland, and a slight decrease in Austria and Hungary. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, these shares were identical at the beginning and at the end of the given period – though in a different way in both countries. The shares of fully secular people and people with a very low degree of religiosity are the highest in the Czech Republic, followed by Hungary and Slovakia (**TABLE 4**)

**TABLE 4 Level of religiosity**

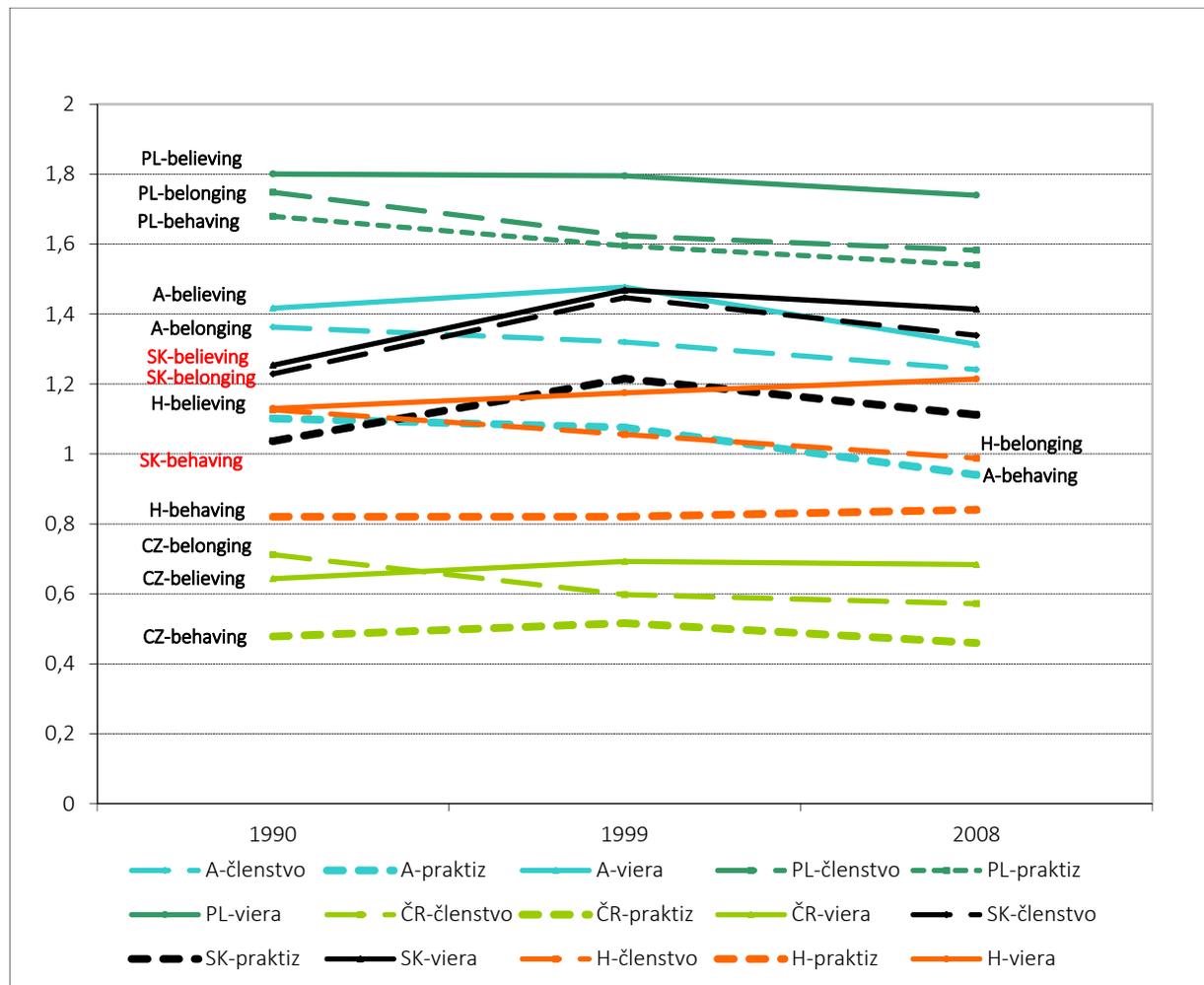
COUNTRY	LEVEL / INTENSITY OF RELIGIOSITY in		
	1991	1999	2008
Poland (PL)	5.2	5.0	4.9
Slovakia (SK)	3.5	4.1	3.9
Austria (A)	3.9	3.9	3.5
Hungary (H)	3.1	3.1	3.0
Czech Rep. (CZ)	1.8	1.8	1.7

Source: Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna 2013, compiled by Tatiana Podolinská in 2017 on the basis of calculations of Vladimír Krivý in 2013.

In each of these five countries, the inter-dimensional differences (belief, membership, practising) diverged in the period 1991–2008. The general pattern is the following: *belief as the strongest dimension*, membership in the middle, and practising as the weakest dimension. While all three dimensions weakened in Poland and Austria in the given period, Slovakia saw an

opposite tendency – the strengthening of all three dimensions. **Overall, religiosity increased with regard to the belief dimension in three countries, declined with regard to the membership dimension in four countries, and also declined with regard to the practising dimension in three countries (Fig. 12).**

**Fig. 12 Dimensions of religiosity: believing, practising, behaving**

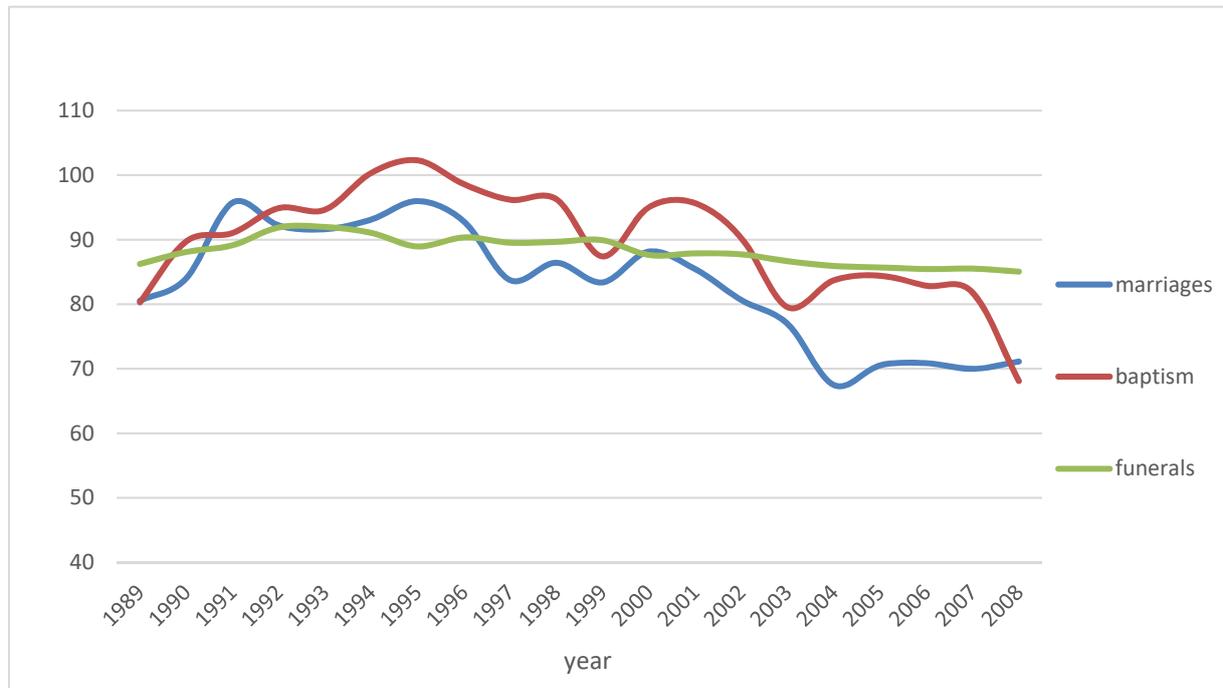


Source: Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna 2013: 217, compiled by Vladimír Krivý in 2013.

*Practising* turned to be clearly the *weakest point of religiosity*. In all five countries, private (individual) practising of religiosity is present to a much greater extent than public (collective) practising. Poland is an exception in this respect, as the level of public practising in this country is larger than the occurrence of private practising in all four other countries. Overall, the phenomenon of smaller practising can lead to stronger religiosity based on belief and private practising in future generations, but it can also continue weakening private practising and belief as such.

As far as religious *rituals* are concerned, the norm has become increasingly accepted among young people and less and less accepted among older people throughout the past almost 20 years. In general, inter-generational convergence in the acceptance of baptism, church marriage and church funeral has been observed (Fig. 13).

**Fig. 13. Religious rituals 1989–2008 (as % proportion to annual number of births, deaths and marriages)**



Source: Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna 2013: 235, compiled by Vladimír Krivý in 2013.

Finally, the proportion of the consumption of non-Christian ideas and so-called alternative spirituality with regard to the level of religiosity was surveyed. In Slovakia, non-Christian and non-conformist ideas (corresponding to “alternative spirituality” to a certain extent) are more frequent among people with a higher degree of religiosity. Instead of seeking an “alternative” to traditional religiosity, we can rather speak about the acceptance of an “alternative” in the framework of traditional religiosity. At the level of the individual, this can be considered de-traditionalisation or even individualisation of (personal) religiosity.

## Conclusions

The societal, political and international changes during more than 20 years of the Slovak Republic suggest several basic conclusions. Religion can in some situations be an important component for the mobilisation of collective identity. As the effect of the integration of religion in the symbolical character of the State, there has been an increase in the spreading of traditional Christian beliefs. In this sense, religion serves as a kind of compensatory legitimating tool in cases where few other symbolic sources of national identity are available in collective memory or in the principles of institutional functioning. Nevertheless, even while religion helps preserve the homogeneity of society in “critical” situations, this does not manifest itself in increased religious affiliation. There is a certain increase in the activity of the Slovak population only in some basic religious practices.

In the case of the Slovak Republic, the State’s symbolic and legal privileging of Christian actors, particularly the Catholic Church and partly also the Lutheran Church, and the integration of these actors into the symbolical character of the State, have increased throughout the last two decades. The representatives of the Catholic Church have become important actors of political and public debates. In addition, the Catholic Church has become a hegemonic leader in establishing the basic principles of regulation and functioning of religious life in Slovakia. The strengthening of their economic positions and the symbolic favouring of traditional Churches are strong factors that enable the reproduction of the principles of dominant Churches but also of the field of power, which dates back to the formation of the Slovak Republic.

However, the “traditional” religiosity landscape in Slovakia has also faced a rapid increase in the number of non-affiliated persons and persons not willing to respond the questions concerning their religiosity over the past decades. The population of the *nones* in the Slovak Republic has many specificities, although the differences compared to the rest of the population are not significantly different, as one would have expected. The age profile follows the general trends in society with the highest percentage among the productive age group, especially around the age of 30 and younger. The age groups around 30 are very strong in the western part of the country and in Bratislava. On the other hand, older age groups are present slightly above the national average in eastern Slovakia, and mostly rural districts possibly reflect its past evolution. Attained education seems to be specific mainly through the higher proportion of college/university degree holders among nones, and the small proportion of

individuals with elementary school education. The concentration of nones with higher education is significantly higher in the regions with low imprints of secularisation.

Alongside the process of “visible secularisation“ of the Slovak society, we are experiencing the process of transformation and adaptation of traditional Christianity. Current Christianity in Slovakia is a multi-coloured mixture of traditional, post-traditional and non-traditional religiosity. Nevertheless, when comparing the overall level of religiosity in Slovakia with its neighbours (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Austria), Slovakia pertains to the “group in the middle”, represented by Slovakia, Austria and Hungary. The closest country to Slovakia in terms of the average level of religiosity is Austria, followed by Hungary. Following the same criterion, the farthest country is the Czech Republic. Among them, Slovakia is the only country where overall religiosity increased (1991–2008) in all dimensions of religiosity – believing, belonging and practising.

*Practising* turned out to be clearly the *weakest point of religiosity*. Private (individual) practising of religiosity is present to a much greater extent than public (collective) practising in Slovakia. Overall, the phenomenon of smaller practising can lead to stronger religiosity based on belief and private practising in future generations, but it can also continue weakening private practising and belief as such.

In Slovakia, non-Christian and non-conformist ideas (corresponding to “alternative spirituality” to a certain degree) are more frequent among people with a higher degree of religiosity. Instead of seeking an “alternative” to traditional religiosity, we can rather speak about the acceptance of the “alternative” in the framework of traditional religiosity. At the level of the individual, this can be considered de-traditionalisation or even individualisation of (personal) religiosity.

In general, we can conclude that churches and other religious or faith-based institutions in Slovakia should be aware of the multi-coloured landscape of modern believers and modify the dialogue according to the specificities of the respective strata of believers. In this regard, the flexible and non-orthodox approach of “non-traditional” churches is sometimes more fitting the needs of post-traditional and non-traditional believers. Two ways are possible in this respect: 1) to develop a kind of an experiment and promote an intensive dialogue on the “margins” of “orthodoxy” and “normativity” (sometimes called post-Christianity), or 2) to guard the door and get rid of all “free passengers” (even more orthodox Christianity).

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