

# Introduction

After twelve years of meetings, field research, discussions, three conferences, series of seminars and lectures, three books, and numerous articles on the Balkans and the Baltic region in the united Europe we decided to merge the earlier publications and start with an annual journal, *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, a scholarly journal published annually by the International Society for Balkan and Baltic Studies, with support by our home institutions.

The annual journal, *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, aims to promote and encourage research, and to provide a forum for those working in the field of ethnology, folkloristics, religiosity, and other traditional domains in the humanities and social sciences.

The key topic for this issue is the situation in the field of religion in the modern world. As has been predicted by Bronisław Malinowski, religion will still play a defining role for human civilization in the years to come. This topic has become especially relevant in recent years (and decades), when we have been observing a number of large-scale religious processes in Europe, and also on a global scale. On the one hand, for the post-Socialist countries, it has been a period of boisterous flourishing and extensive freedom in terms of religion. The opening of the borders and the freedom of religious expression, which replaced atheism, have both revived traditional religious confessions and allowed some new religious movements to penetrate the conservative national religious space. However, at the same time, religion has turned into one of the main arguments of xenophobia, racism, and ethnic and religious intolerance. Such stereotypes as “an Arab—a Muslim—a terrorist” are engraved in the minds of modern Europeans. In combination with large-scale migration processes in Europe, related to the arrival of migrants from Asian and North African

countries that are either poor or at war, they give rise to social fears as well as ethnic and religious tension. At the same time, similarly severe problems can be observed within the framework of Christianity, where political contrapositions affect the religious situation in the post-Socialist countries. For example, the problem of the belonging of churches to one or another patriarchate in the independent states of the former USSR and Yugoslavia is also becoming a major issue in Ukraine. Moscow and Constantinople (the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Constantinople) are fighting for the souls of people of faith, engaging themselves in the existing contraposition, which all the more divides the already counterposed nations and states.

The first part of this edition is dedicated to the problems pertaining to religion and religious traditions. It starts with an article by Solveiga Krumina-Konkova, who presents research on religion and everything religious in the context of the new post-liberal situation. Other articles also deal with the diversity of the current religious situation. Traditional cults and their transformation in the modern world (Milena Lyubenova), worshipping practices and monuments (Robert Parkin), neo-paganism as a basis for the modern national identity (Ekaterina Anastasova), and new religious movements (Svetoslava Toncheva) and their monuments (Mare Kõiva) occupy a major place in the modern European identity, reflecting the search for the new and “uncompromised” framework for self-identification. Religion is still one of the most conservative social and cultural phenomena of the modern world. The preservation of traditional religious commitment, which makes a particular faith group stand out from the macro-society, continues to remain an important feature within the modern religious landscape (Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužulienė). At the same time, the interest towards everything magical continues not only to be actualised, but also to create the new “magical” literature (folk fakes according to A. L. Toporkov). Tatiana Minniyakhmetova discusses the issues pertaining to the Balto-Slavic space that exist in magical books.

The second part of the edition deals with the problems covered by the topic of *Cities, Cultures, and Migrations*. The issues related to the city, free time, multicultural space, and migration institutions occupy a major place in the European research area. Žilvytis Šaknys and Irma Šidiškienė present research on the topics of friendship, professional contacts, and free time, comparing the situations in Bulgaria and Latvia. Guzel Stolyarova discusses the ethnic characteristics of the behaviour of the Tajiks in the multinational

city of Kazan (Tatarstan). Mariyanka Borisova writes about national cultural heritage, supported and developed by Bulgarian educational institutions abroad.

The present issue presents diverse research carried out by both young and well-established scientists, who study the areas of the Balkans, the Baltic States, and, on a wider scale, Europe and Russia. This collection of different topics, methodologies, and approaches represents the current state and urgent issues of European science. We hope that this edition will be interesting and useful for a wider audience.

Ekaterina Anastasova, Mare Kõiva, Žilvytis Šaknys