

INTRODUCTION

This edition of the Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies focuses on discussion and ongoing research presented to an academic community of scholars in Balkan and Baltic Studies at a conference held on 9-11 June 2020 in Riga, Latvia, organized by the International Society of Balkan and Baltic Studies. This annual conference was hosted by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia and was jointly supported by the Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian Academies of Sciences, the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies; the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, the Estonian Literary Museum and the Lithuanian Institute of History. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was held over Zoom. In spite of the physical distance that had to be maintained, however, academic discussions were vibrant and fruitful, resulting in this joint edition of the Yearbook. Scholars from various countries and academic schools presented their research on spirituality, religion, identity and culture in the Baltic and Balkan regions and analysed the dynamics of religious and national transformations. The conference also examined the impact of globalization on religious communities and spiritual processes, and touched on aspects of social and cultural transformations in the modern era and their challenges. This necessitated a focus on migration, transnationalism, secularization and the search for the new spiritual means and models. Our academic community also analysed developments regarding the place of belonging and transformations of the historical memories of religious communities in the Baltic and Balkan regions.

The research presented at the conference covered not only global processes and the dynamics of specifically European processes, it also provided insights

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into situations of what Michael Herzfeld has called ‘cultural intimacy’ and the place of belonging. The researchers and experts in Baltic and Balkan studies assembled at the conference were able to provide new answers to very traditional questions: How is history being interpreted and re-written? What is the situation regarding ethnic and religious communities? What changes and conflicts are currently underway in the religious landscapes of both regions? What new dimensions in spirituality are emerging?

We are honoured to present this research in this new edition of the YBBS, no. 4.

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