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THE TRIBUNE OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS  
ТРИБУНА МОЛОДЫХ УЧЕНЫХ**

**THE RULE OF LAW AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION**

**STATUL DE DREPT ȘI ROLUL RELIGIEI**

**ВЕРХОВЕНСТВО ПРАВА И РОЛЬ РЕЛИГИИ**

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**ABSTRACT:**

**THE RULE OF LAW AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION**

*The article explores the role of religion as powerful factor of worldview management that form the basis of human consciousness and behaviour. The idea of God-humanity and its influence on the concept of human freedom and duties to God are examined. Contemporary challenges facing religious organisations are also discussed, including their relevance to young people and internal aspects such as leadership and finances. Particular attention is paid to the concentration of power in the hands of autocratic leaders and its impact on human rights, including the right to religious freedom. The article emphasises the need to critically analyse the complex dynamics of the relationship between religion and the state and to find a balance between religious attitudes and the promotion of human rights.*

**Keywords:** religion, society, rule of law, religious freedom, human rights, political power.

**JEL Classification:** K10; Z12

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**REZUMAT:**

**STATUL DE DREPT ȘI ROLUL RELIGIEI**

*Articolul explorează rolul religiei ca factor puternici de gestionare a viziunii asupra lumii care stau la baza conștiinței și comportamentului uman. Sunt examinate ideea de Dumnezeu-umanitate și influența acesteia asupra conceptului de libertate umană și a îndatoririlor față de Dumnezeu. De asemenea, sunt discutate provocările contemporane cu care se confruntă organizațiile religioase, inclusiv relevanța lor pentru tineri și aspecte interne precum conducerea și finanțele. O atenție deosebită este acordată concentrării puterii în mâinile liderilor autocratici și impactului acesteia asupra drepturilor omului, inclusiv asupra dreptului la libertate religioasă. Articolul subliniază necesitatea de a analiza critic dinamica complexă a relației dintre religie și stat și de a găsi un echilibru între atitudinile religioase și promovarea drepturilor omului.*

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**Cuvinte cheie:** religie, societate, stat de drept, libertate religioasă, drepturile omului, putere politică.

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РЕЗЮМЕ:

### ВЕРХОВЕНСТВО ПРАВА И РОЛЬ РЕЛИГИИ

*В статье исследуется роль религии как мощного фактора управления мировоззрением, формирующей основы человеческого сознания и поведения. Рассматривается идея богочеловечности и ее влияние на концепцию свободы человека и его обязанностей перед Богом. Также обсуждаются современные проблемы, стоящие перед религиозными организациями, в том числе их актуальность для молодежи и внутренние аспекты, такие как лидерство и финансы. Особое внимание уделяется концентрации власти в руках авторитарных лидеров и ее влиянию на права человека, включая право на свободу вероисповедания. В статье подчеркивается необходимость критического анализа сложной динамики отношений между религией и государством и поиска баланса между религиозными установками и поощрением прав человека.*

**Ключевые слова:** религия, общество, верховенство закона, свобода вероисповедания, права человека, политическая власть.

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### Introduction

The instruments of worldview control, such as religion and cults, are powerful factors shaping the perception of the world and the foundations of human consciousness. Religion, entering consciousness, is deeply rooted and affects the worldview, which is reflected in his behaviour and relations with the world around him.

Christianity, which first became the state religion in the Roman Empire in the fourth century, went through phases of internal divisions and schisms, including a period of paganism under Julian II. Over time, however, Christianity became the dominant force, organising itself into patriarchates and orthodox streams. The division into different church branches, such as the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syro-Jacovite churches, reflects the complex nature of religious history and doctrines. In the seventh century, after the Council of Chalcedon, there was a breakaway of the main branch of Christianity, which signalled deep religious divisions and the formation of different denominations and doctrines within Christianity. The conflict between the Western and Eastern churches in the eleventh century manifested itself in differences in linguistic and cultural aspects, as well as in philosophical understanding of religious values. The Western Church, committed to the Latin language and papal authority in Rome, clashed with the Eastern Church, which used the Greek language and was based on Byzantine tradition. These differences were expressed not only in the language of worship but also in cultural practices and even in political aspects, including relations with state structures.

American society, similar to Western European society in terms of socio-economic characteristics, differs in its attitude towards religion. Opinion polls show a gradual decline in the proportion of believers and adherence to religious teachings both in the United States and around the world. Nevertheless, the level of religiosity in American society remains high compared to European countries. According to Pew Research, about 80 per cent of Americans believe in God. This reflects the high level of religiosity and is accompanied by the fact that many have their particular ideas about God that differ from canonical teachings. The modern

individual's desire for religious beliefs is manifested in the acceptance of faith with appropriate adjustments and interpretations. Young people in Europe and other societies tend to deviate from traditional religious norms and practices. This process, while it can be seen as a liberation from dogma and superstition, also involves a search for new forms of spirituality and connection to society.

### **The rule of law and the role of religion**

Due to global research because of serious issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, tensions over the South China Sea, and economic hardship, religious freedom has suffered in 61 countries, affecting more than 4.9 billion people. Conventionally, the countries can be divided into three groups:

1. Religious persecution, where state and non-state actors openly and with impunity oppress and persecute citizens, exists in 28 countries with more than half of the world's population (4.03 billion people). China and India are among the worst violators of religious freedom. The situation has deteriorated sharply in 13 African countries. These are Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, Mozambique, and Comoros.

2. Discrimination, encompassing restrictions on religious freedom and a lack of protection for victims of physical attacks, is present in 33 countries with approximately 853 million people. In 13 of these countries, the situation has worsened.

3. There are disturbing factors in individual countries that could lead to serious violations of religious freedom<sup>1</sup>.

The concentration of power in the hands of autocrats and fundamentalist leaders has led to an increase in violations of all human rights, including the right to religious freedom. As L. Reardon (2019) says, "Whether an absolute monarch or a supreme authoritarian, religious, military, fascist, or communist leader, the autocrat builds legitimacy by controlling competing centres of power within the state."<sup>2</sup> The religious community is often one of these centres of power because of its ability to mobilise the civil society that the autocrat is seeking to control.

The most prominent examples of religious intolerance and persecution are in African countries. Jihadist networks in Africa (e.g., Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo) linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State attack relatively unprotected rural areas to seize territory. They impose illegal taxes, leading to the emergence of a state within a state. Such attacks occur in both Muslim and Christian settlements, but it is more often Christians who are massacred. The attacks occur during Christian worship, and the killings are particularly brutal. As noted by clergy in Benue State, Nigeria, in some cases, victims are first shot and then their faces chopped off with machetes or other tools "so that God will not recognise them." Terrorists also target priests or nuns, kidnap or kill them, and set fire to churches and schools. One such attack can devastate an entire village, leaving surviving residents homeless and on the brink of poverty. They lose their sources of income, abandoning their fields and shops, and their children are denied education and medical care. As a result, the region loses its historic religious presence, and a new economic and political subsidised zone emerges, in need of all basic support.

According to the 2023 Religious Freedom in the World Report, Nigeria is in a dire situation of religious strife. It is home to over 200 million people and is expected to double in the next two decades. In 2022, Nigeria ranked sixth in the global terrorism index, behind Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and Syria, and 143rd out of 163 countries in the global peace index. Christianity is the predominant religion (46.2 per cent), predominantly practiced in the south, while Islam (45.8 per cent) is predominantly practiced in the north, although this does

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<sup>1</sup> RAIU, C. (2024): Libertatea religioasă între politică și politici: O analiză politică a standardelor internaționale, legislației naționale și practicii guvernamentale în pandemie. Editura Universității din București-Bucharest University Press. ISBN: 9786066669993

<sup>2</sup> REARDON, L.C. (2019): Religious regulation in autocracies. Oxford Research Encyclopedias. ISBN: 9780190228637

not mean that there are no Christians in the north and vice versa. Politically and administratively, the Muslim north is more important, with almost 95 per cent of political and military power at the federal level being in Muslim hands. Twelve of Nigeria's 36 northern states have Sharia law, while the Christian south uses the penal code. Christian girls face problems such as kidnapping, rape, and forced marriages. Muslim men can marry Christian women, but Christian men cannot marry Muslim women. Christian religious instruction is forbidden in public schools, and Islamic teachers are ubiquitous. Christians have fewer job opportunities and promotions, fewer opportunities to hold public office, and a lack of access to social security.

Many Christian students are forced to change their names in order to access vocational courses<sup>1</sup>. Armed groups (Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Fulani militias) have been attacking Christian religious communities living in northern and middle Nigeria, which has led to massive internal displacement of Christians, resulting in entire regions being depopulated. A recent report from the Diocese of Makurdi in Benue State discusses the fact that in one year (2022) in the diocese alone, the Fulani attacked 93 villages and killed 325 farmers. Currently, out of nearly six million inhabitants, two million are IDPs, most of whom are Christian farmers.

The Report also notes an increase in violence committed by Islamist jihadists in the Sahel and Somalia. According to the 2023 study by the African Centre for Strategic Studies, this "represents 77 per cent of the total reported violent crimes in Africa in 2022".<sup>2</sup>

The number of civilian casualties rose from "4,307 in 2021 to 7,220 in 2022", an increase of 68 per cent. The flourishing of radicalisation and violent extremism in Southern Sahara Africa can be attributed to several social factors, including poverty, corruption, weak governance, illiteracy, youth unemployment, lack of access to resources, separatist movements and long-standing inter-communal conflicts between herders and farmers over land rights (exacerbated by the impact of climate change), which all combine to fuel conflict and support armed violence. Jihadist movements offer their solution to the problems through their ideology, economic opportunities (weapons and money) and the promise of an end to corruption.<sup>3</sup>

In Burkina Faso, jihadist groups control more than 40 per cent of the country, and the death toll is rising, some 3,600 in 2022 alone. This has forced more than 1.9 million people to flee their homes.<sup>4</sup>

Jihadist groups first attacked Mali in 2012, at which time they seized control of the north of the country. A new front has opened up in central Mali, accompanied by massive human rights abuses. Catholic clergy say armed groups near Mopti have banned alcohol and pork, and forced women of all faiths to wear headscarves. Christian communities near Diji reported the imposition of Sharia law and the compulsion to study the Koran and Islamic prayers.<sup>5</sup> The Lake Chad Basin, at the intersection of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, remains the third-most deadly region in Africa, "including 20 per cent of all deaths linked to Islamist militants." Boko Haram and ISIS jihadists continue to target military and civilians, forcing more than a million people from their homes, while food shortages following missed harvests have affected more

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<sup>1</sup> Nigeria at the crossroads, Aid to the Church in Need International. [online]. Available at: [https://kirche-in-not.ch/files/2023/News\\_02-2023/20230223\\_-\\_Fastenkampagne\\_Nigeria/Dossier\\_Country\\_Report\\_2023\\_Nigeria\\_FINAL\\_baja.pdf](https://kirche-in-not.ch/files/2023/News_02-2023/20230223_-_Fastenkampagne_Nigeria/Dossier_Country_Report_2023_Nigeria_FINAL_baja.pdf) [Accessed 3 July 2024]

<sup>2</sup> Fatalities from Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Surge by Nearly 50 Percent. Africa Center for Strategic Studies (a think tank of the US Department of Defence), 6 February 2023. [online]. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/fatalities-from-militant-islamist-violence-in-africa-surge-by-nearly-50-percent> [Accessed 3 July 2024]

<sup>3</sup> WANEP. The Current Dynamics and Challenges of Violent Extremism in Western Africa. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, 2018. [online]. Available at: [www.caert.org/dz/Research/WANEP.pdf](http://www.caert.org/dz/Research/WANEP.pdf) [Accessed 3 July 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Burkina Faso: Horror-stricken after massacre. ACN International, 15 June 2021. [online]. Available at: <https://acninternational.org/burkina-faso-horror-stricken-after-massacre> [Accessed 3 January 2023]

<sup>5</sup> US State Dept., "Mali", 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, 2 June 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mali> [Accessed 5 July 2024]

than 5.3 million people.<sup>1</sup> Northern Cameroon has also been attacked by Boko Haram and ISIS, with the Christian community particularly affected. The jihadists abduct "large numbers of citizens, including Christian women and girls, sexually abuse them, and force them to marry Muslim men."<sup>2</sup>

Niger was also affected by attacks by jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State, as well as Boko Haram from Nigeria. Violent crime increased by 43 per cent in 2022. Along the borders with Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Libya, food supplies have become problematic. This is due to the displacement of large populations. In Somalia, al-Shabab controls large swathes of territory, imposing its interpretation of Islam and Sharia law on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This includes a ban on all forms of media, entertainment, smoking, and any behaviour considered un-Islamic, such as shaving the beard. The small number of non-Muslim believers are mostly Christian converts from Islam. Conversion is seen as treason against family and society; a person even suspected of conversion may face harassment, threats, or even murder.<sup>3</sup>

There has been an increase in attacks in Mozambique by ISIS-aligned insurgents, a group called Alhu Sunna wa Jama, known locally as al-Shabab (no relation to al-Shabab in Somalia, affiliated with al-Qaeda) and internationally known as IS-Moz. According to a report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, IS-Moz has "at least 1,000 fighters" attempting to take over Cabo Delgado to establish an "Islamist regime".<sup>4</sup>

In 2022, violent attacks against both Christian and Muslim civilians increased by 29 per cent. Militant killings, abductions, looting and destruction of property accounted for 66 per cent of all violent crimes and displaced more than one million people.<sup>5</sup> The situation in the Great Lakes region on the borders of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda is characterised by competition for mineral resources, resulting in violence and numerous human rights violations. Some 120-armed groups are active in the region, especially in the north and east of the country. Jihadists (ADF - ISIL's affiliate in Africa) terrorise the population and oppose religious leaders, threaten Christian populations and attack churches. Between April and June 2022, the UN recorded nearly 1,000 civilian casualties and 700,000 internally displaced persons.<sup>6</sup>

The conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region is not religiously motivated, but Eritrean and Ethiopian troops have attacked both churches and mosques. Violence against religious communities included an attack on Muslims during the funeral of a prominent local sheikh in Gondar in April 2022. Perhaps the worst manifestation of the conflict was the killing of some 800 people at the Church of Our Lady, Mary of Zion in Axum.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Eritrea, the regime controlled by unelected President Isaias Afwerki emphasises "martyrdom for the

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<sup>1</sup> Chad Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 (March 2022), OCHA, 14 Mar 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/tchad-plan-de-rponse-humanitaire-2022-mars-2022> [Accessed 1 July 2024]

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon. US Department of State, 2 June 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon> [Accessed 2 July 2024]

<sup>3</sup> ACI Africa, Inside Christianity in Somalia Where Most Catholics are Foreign Nationals, 2nd July 2021. [online]. Available at: <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3785/inside-christianity-in-somalia-where-most-catholics-are-foreign-nationals> [Accessed 3 July 2024]

<sup>4</sup> The Islamist insurgency in Mozambique, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), August 2021. [online]. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2021/the-islamist-insurgency-in-mozambique> [Accessed 4 July 2024]

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF Mozambique Humanitarian Situation Report No. 12, (End Year) Jan - Dec 2022. UNICEF, 3 February 2023. [online]. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/unicef-mozambique-humanitarian-situation-report-no-12-end-year-jan-dec-2022> [Accessed 2 July 2024]

<sup>6</sup> UN: Well-Armed M23 Rebels Resurgent in DRC. VOA, 29 June 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-well-armed-m23-rebels-resurgent-in-drc/6638775.html> [Accessed 5 July 2024]

<sup>7</sup> Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity. Amnesty International, 26 February 2021. [online]. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civiliansmay-amount-to-crime-against-humanity> [Accessed 2 July 2024]

nation" and encourages citizens to live by these principles. It is a dictatorship in which most human rights, including religious freedom, are absent.<sup>1</sup>

In East and Southeast Asia, the countries on the Indian peninsula that also have the most severe restrictions on religious activity are China, India, Nepal, North Korea, Vietnam, and Myanmar.<sup>2</sup>

India, the largest democratic country with a population equivalently vast as China (1.4 billion), faces restrictions on religious freedom, especially for Christians and Muslims. The current "Foreign Exchange Act" restricts access to foreign funding for local religious organisations, which has led to the suspension of social assistance to the poorest. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supports the country's Hindu identity and restricts the rights of citizens to change religious affiliation. Anti-conversion laws passed in several states, including Karnataka and Uttarakhand, continue to be used to repress religious minorities.<sup>3</sup>

Similar restrictions are seen in Nepal, which also enacts laws prohibiting proselytising and supports the Hindu national party, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP).<sup>4</sup> In North Korea, the Sonbun system categorises citizens according to their loyalty to the state, which entails "severe persecution" of religious believers.<sup>5</sup> In Vietnam, Hmong and Montagnard Christians are discriminated against. Christians in Laos are attacked by mobs and also face demands from authorities to renounce their faith. In Myanmar, a military coup on February 1, 2021, was accompanied by the destruction of at least 132 churches and other religious buildings. Restrictions on religious freedom have increased; there has been a significant increase in anti-Muslim aggression and violence, and the genocide of Rohingya continues. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist nationalist organisations have become increasingly large, extremist, and influential, posing a threat to the country's overall national identity.<sup>6</sup> In Thailand, despite many attempts at resolution, conflicts continue in the southern provinces over Islamic separatism.

Similar trends have been noted in other countries, including Austria, France, and the Scandinavian countries, where anti-Semitic attacks are also on the rise. Extremist Islam has been on the rise in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power. Governments in neighbouring countries are tightening measures to combat radicalization. Uzbekistan has tightened controls on religious rhetoric. Measures have been introduced to install video cameras in places of worship, and state clerics have been appointed to monitor sermons. In Tajikistan, prosecution of persons suspected of belonging to banned Muslim extremist groups has been tightened, and the Criminal Code has been supplemented with articles for unauthorised religious education. In the Balkans, ethnicity and religion are often linked; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most citizens identify themselves as Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, or Muslim Bosniaks. In 2021, the European Commission handed down eight convictions and dealt with 70 hate speech

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<sup>1</sup> BTI Transformation Index, Eritrea Country Report 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ERI> [Accessed 3 July 2024]

<sup>2</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual Report 2022, China chapter. [online]. Available at: <https://www.uscirtf.gov/annual-reports?country=36> [Accessed 6 July 2024]

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of India. Human Rights Watch, 31 March 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/31/human-rights-watch-submission-universal-periodic-review-india> [Accessed 3 July 2024]

<sup>4</sup> 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nepal, US Department of State. [online]. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/> [Accessed 2 July 2024]

<sup>5</sup> HOLLAND, M. (2016): Religious Persecution in North Korea. In: Peterson Institute for International Economics. [online]. Available at: <https://www.piie.com/blogs/north-korea-witness-transformation/religious-persecution-north-korea> [Accessed 6 July 2024]

<sup>6</sup> THANGIAH, S. (2018): Study: New Buddhist Extremism and the Challenges to Ethno-Religious Coexistence in Sri Lanka. In: Minor matters. [online]. Available at: <https://www.minormatters.org/en/blog/studynew-buddhist-extremism-and-the-challenges-to-ethno-religiouscoexistence-in-sri-lanka> [Accessed 6 July 2024]

complaints with 11 judgements, eight of which resulted in sentences. The Press and Online Media Council received 1,073 complaints of hate speech on social networks.<sup>1</sup>

In Cyprus, ethno-religious tensions are maintained through religious education: Greek Cypriot schools emphasise the Greek Orthodox tradition and Turkish schools emphasise the Sunni tradition.<sup>2</sup> Finland faced difficulties due to the unclear definition of the term "hate speech". In the years 2020-2021, 2,567 incidents on this topic were recorded, an outstanding statistic for a country with a population of just over 5.5 million.<sup>3</sup> Some of these cases raise questions about the freedom of religious expression on moral and cultural issues. The harassment of Finnish MP Päivi Räsänen for quoting the Bible was a prime example of such situations.<sup>4</sup> Abortion was an important topic of discussion. In Sweden, two midwives lost a case in the European Court of Human Rights after they were denied tenure because of their conscientious objections to abortion. In the UK, legislation on buffer zones around abortion clinics has been tightened, prohibiting peaceful protests, counselling on pavements or silent prayer.

The OSCE carefully records all cases of offences based on religious intolerance. The armed conflict in Ukraine did not terminate the Russian Federation's membership in the OSCE, but a decision by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Council of Europe revoked its status as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights. OSCE countries have witnessed incidents of hate speech, including attacks on individuals, threats on social media, and attacks on religious buildings. Muslim women have been subjected to insults and violence because of their dress.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusions:

Based on a review of the current situation regarding violations of religious freedom and tolerance, it is possible to note the main trends. Globally, the maintenance and consolidation of power in the hands of autocrats and fundamentalist leaders has led to an increase in violations of all human rights, including religious freedom. Various factors, such as terrorist attacks and destruction of religious symbols (Turkey, Syria), selective manipulation (Nigeria, Iraq), mass surveillance (China), anti-conversion laws, and financial restrictions (Southeast Asia and the Middle East), have increased the oppression of religious communities.

Terrorist networks in Africa have moved from seizing territory to creating isolated communities in rural areas with mineral resources, using illegal taxes and trade to form parallel power structures. Insecurity and a lack of government control led to rebellions and military coups (two in Mali and one in Burkina Faso).

Polar trends within Muslim societies: disenfranchised, impoverished, and disillusioned youth are increasingly attracted to Islamist terrorist and criminal networks (Africa), while at the same time, recent polls, especially in Iran, have shown that an increasing number of Muslims identify themselves as "not religious."

Persecution of Muslims has increased, including by other Muslims. China continues to persecute Uighurs; Muslims in India and Myanmar face discrimination and harassment. Cases of internal persecution between Sunnis and Shiites (Hazaras in Afghanistan), between national

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission. Commission Staff Working Document: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Report," 12th October 2022, SWD(2022) 336 final pp. 32-34. (173-174). [online]. Available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2022_en) [Accessed 6 July 2024]

<sup>2</sup> LATIF, D. (2022): Dilemmas of Religious Education, Freedom of Religion and Education in Cyprus. In: Religions, vol. 13 no p. 96. ISSN: 2077-1444

<sup>3</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Hate Crime Reporting – Finland. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. [online]. Available at: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/finland> [Accessed 2 July 2024]

<sup>4</sup> Euronews. Finland's Former Interior Minister Acquitted of Inciting Anti-LGBT Hate Speech, 30 March 2022. [online]. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2022/03/30/finland-s-former-interior-minister-acquitted-of-inciting-anti-lgbt-hate-speech> [Accessed 1 July 2024]

<sup>5</sup> OSCE. Compendere i crimini d'odio contro i musulmani. [online]. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/9/495232.pdf> [Accessed 1 July 2024]

and "foreign" Islamic interpretations, and between dominant and so-called "deviant" forms of Islam (Ahmadis in Pakistan) are more frequent.

There has been an increase in aggression against the Jewish community in Western countries following the quarantine measures associated with COVID-19. The number of anti-Semitic crimes reported in OSCE countries increased from 582 in 2019 to 1,367 in 2021.

Kidnappings and sexual violence, including sexual enslavement and forced religious conversion, continued with continued vigour and went largely unpunished (West Africa, Pakistan). Poverty and increased armed conflict fueled kidnapping and trafficking. In dozens of countries, women and girls from religious minorities were particularly affected by this form of violence.

In some cases, religious communities, to maintain their political, religious, and social status, have overestimated the number of believers by providing false religious data in official child registration or by postponing the census indefinitely (Lebanon, India, Malaysia).

Increased scrutiny, including mass surveillance, has affected religious groups. In the West, social media has been used to marginalise and persecute religious groups.

In the West, a 'culture of cancellation', including 'forced speech', can threaten the loss of employment opportunities for people who hold different views for religious reasons.

Legislation making it more difficult or even outright prohibited to change religion (from majority to minority) is proliferating, and reconversion initiatives offering economic benefits to those who join or return to the majority religion are being supported (Asia, North Africa).

Attacks on religious leaders and Church personnel in Latin America by organised criminal groups have increased. Religious leaders who defend migrants and disadvantaged communities have been subjected to harassment, including kidnapping and murder.

Religious associations have always been the subject of discussions and questions, especially in the context of their influence on society and politics. It is important to note that despite common good intentions, there are often disagreements and even conflicts between religious denominations, which raises the question of the essence and purpose of religion in modern society.

Contemporary religion and its interaction with society is a complex and evolving dynamic that requires in-depth analysis and understanding on the part of both the academic community and society at large.

There is a long debate about why religious organisations are subject to political power and the motives behind their actions. Historical examples show that changes in the political environment are often reflected in the positions of churches and other religious organisations, which may indicate their instability and dependence on external factors.

One of the key topics is the issue of religious freedom, which is guaranteed by the state but not always respected by the church. There is criticism of restrictions and the imposition of faith by religious institutions, which raises the question of the role and influence of the church on the freedom of personal choice and self-expression.

All of these issues and arguments highlight the complex dynamics of the relationship between religion and the state. They also highlight the need to critically analyse and understand the role of religion in contemporary society and to seek a balance between religious attitudes and the safeguarding of freedom and human rights.

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