

Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, there are three dominant religions: Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Islam. Protestant denominations are present in all of the countries of Eastern Europe. Nations on this side of the continent are divided by their religious ethnicity, which means that sometimes it is difficult for other minority religions to organize. In recent years more efforts have been made by the international community for tolerance, inclusion, and cooperation between all religions. In this presentation we will show some of the progress made as far as religious freedom is concerned.

Driton Krasniqi has served for two mandates in the position of the president of the Kosova Protestant Evangelical Church (KPEC). As a representative of the Kosova Protestant Evangelical Church, he has made significant contributions to peace-building and inter-faith dialogue in Kosovo and beyond. He obtained a degree in Biblical Studies from the International Bible Training Institute (UK) and a Master of Theology (MTh) from the University of Wales in Bangor, where he wrote his dissertation on the history of Protestantism in Kosovo since the 18th century. Currently he's enrolled in doctorate studies (DMin) with the School of Antioch in Ames, Iowa, USA. Krasniqi served as pastor of the Fellowship of the Lord's People Church in Prishtina, Kosova from 1997 to 2007. He has been in leadership or advisory roles for several charities, including the Kosovar-Finnish partnership House of Hope Foundation, the international NGO World Vision International, and the Kosova NGO coalition, etc. Currently he's working as the national director of Scripture Union Kosova. Some of the international publications include articles and researches in relation to the Protestantism among Albanians in particular and Eastern Europe in general. He's married to Halide Krasniqi and they have three children.

I. Introduction

As a matter of definition, when referring to Eastern Europe we are thinking primarily of the former communist block which includes both Eastern and South Eastern European countries.

In spite of the communist rulership, the former Eastern Communist Block varied from country to country. Although religion was banned in all such countries, still some countries could practice faith, i.e. the former Yugoslavia where in some other countries dictatorship was severe: see for instance Albania and Romania.

Another important fact for our study is the spread of religion, prior to the replacement with a new religion – Communism. Poland was Roman Catholic, Romania was Eastern Orthodox whereas Albania was Muslim. While in Poland the Catholic Church was allowed to operate into some semi-legality grey zone, in Albania religion was completely banned by Enver Hoxha's regime.

In the 90's, with the fall of Communism, the entire hemisphere started opening up toward religion. The national religions revived. Protestant groups also spread fast, but never managed to reach a threshold of an "established religion".

II. Democratic Institutions and Religious Demographics

- A. There is no one dominant religion for the entire Eastern Europe. However, there is a dominant religion in each individual country in Eastern Europe.

- B. Toward democratic legislation and religious equality

- C. Poland, Hungary Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria are quicker to adopt laws that encourage religious freedom. The former Yugoslavia is late due to the conflict

- D. Major religions and separation of church and state.

III. Religious Freedom for All

- A. International Religious Freedom Reports

- B. Legislation

- C. Support of the international community to the Eastern European Countries