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## RELIGIOSITY IN SERBIA AND OTHER RELIGIOUSLY HOMOGENEOUS EUROPEAN SOCIETIES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE<sup>3</sup>

### Religioznost u Srbiji i drugim religijski homogenim evropskim društvima: komparativna perspektiva

*ABSTRACT: Using the latest European Social Survey (ESS) data, the authors of the study examined the current religious composition of Serbia, and compared the empirical data obtained in Serbia with the ones acquired in other religiously homogeneous European societies. In the first part of the study, the data obtained in the ESS research in 2018 were observed in light of the historical continuum of religion development in Serbia since the First World War. In the second part of the study, the authors applied Grace Davie's model and a comparative model to compare Serbia with nine religiously homogeneous societies where the ESS research had also been conducted in 2018. This structure of the paper accomplishes a double objective and scientific contribution. On the one hand, an insight into the current state of religiosity in Serbia is obtained, and on the other hand, a theoretical framework previously used for Western-European societies is applied to Orthodox countries (including Serbia). The authors suggest the following main hypotheses: the stabilisation of religious composition is currently underway; there is a discrepancy between religious and denominational declaration and religious practices; and the theoretical framework defined by Davie can be applied in the case of Serbia.*

**KEYWORDS:** *religiosity, church, orthopraxy, Serbia, Europe, comparison*

*APSTRAKT: Na osnovu najnovijih podataka iz Evropskog društvenog istraživanja (EDI) autori u radu istražuju savremenu religijsku strukturu Srbije, a potom iskustvene podatke dobijene u Srbiji porede sa onima koji su dobijeni u drugim verski homogenim društvima u Evropi. U prvom delu rada podaci dobijeni ESS*

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*istraživanjem iz 2018. godine posmatraju se u kontekstu istorijskog kontinuuma razvoja religioznosti u Srbiji još od I svetskog rata. U nastavku rada, primenom teorijskog modela Grejs Dejvi i uporednog metoda, autori kompariraju Srbiju sa devet verski homogenih društava u kojima je takođe 2018. godine sprovedeno ESS istraživanje. Ovako postavljena struktura rada ostvaruje dvostruki cilj i naučni doprinos: Sa jedne strane, dobićemo uvid u aktuelno stanje kada je reč o religioznosti u Srbiji, a sa druge strane, primenićemo teorijski okvir koji je ranije korišćen za zapadnoevropska društva na primer pravoslavnih zemalja (pa i Srbije). Osnovne hipoteze od kojih autori polaze na da je u Srbiji trenutno na delu stabilizacija verničke strukture, da postoji diskrepanca između religijske i konfesionalne deklaracije i religijskih praksi, kao i da i na slučaju Srbije može da se primeni teorijski okvir koji je formulisala Dejvi.*

KLJUČNE REČI: religioznost, crkva, ortopraksija, Srbija, Evropa, komparacija

## Introduction

Relatively soon after the first sociological studies of religion which were mainly theoretical and/or comparative-historical (such as the studies of Durkheim, Weber, Marx and Simmel), empirically-oriented sociologists began to include religious issues in their research (starting after the Second World War). These empirical data strongly encouraged the development of the secularization paradigm which, owing to Peter Berger and numerous other authors, was the dominant theoretical framework for studying the alleged moving of religion to the margins of society after the end of the Second World War (Berger, 1973). However, the paradigm was changed by the end of the twentieth century. Berger himself admitted to “having been wrong” and began talking about desecularization processes and return of the religious element into the social field (Berger, 1999). Today, authors predominantly abandon all these far-reaching determinants, refrain from general conclusions and focus on individual cases or some (micro- or middle-range) tendencies occurring in different regions worldwide. This theoretical change contributes to better understanding the position of religion in modern society (for more information see: Mentus and Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2020: 75).

In accordance with the above-mentioned trends in the modern sociology of religion, the authors will also narrow the paper's focus to the case of Serbia, and the comparison with certain religiously homogeneous European societies. The main aim of the paper is to throw light on the changes and continuities which have framed the contemporary religious image of Serbia (considering the complex historical context of different relationships between the state, religion, church and society in the previous and current century). Another aim is to use the theoretical guidelines provided by Grace Davie in order to compare the results of empirical research of religiosity in Serbia with the results of other religiously homogeneous European countries (thus called by Davie).

The analysis will include the indicators referring to denominational (church) identification, religious (self)identification, as well as the indicators of religious practices performed by individuals (prayer and attendance at religious services and institutions). These indicators are definitely insufficient to create a holistic view of the complex religious image both in Serbia and in the comparison with other societies, but they represent a starting point for more comprehensive sociological research. What should also be underlined are the limitations of using the quantitative methodology in sociological studies of religion which will be applied in this paper. Since religiosity represents an exceptionally complex phenomenon, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methodology should be conducted. Nevertheless, despite the necessity of deepening the research by means of qualitative methods, the quantitative sociological studies on the representative sample (such as the European Social Survey (ESS) research) still remain the “gold standard“ in the sociology of religion (Farago, 2017: xxi).

Therefore, religiosity measured by mentioned indicators will be analyzed from the diachronous and synchronous perspectives. The first part of the paper will present the development of religious dynamics in Serbia using the comparative-historical perspective (the ESS data from 2018 will be compared with the data obtained in previous sociological studies in Serbia). The second part of the paper will include the comparison of the latest data from Serbia with the data obtained in some European countries which are also religiously homogeneous. Our main hypothesis states that the external and internal religiosity are increasingly represented in Serbia, and that the regularity of carrying out religious and ritual practices is far behind the religious self-declaration, i.e. that the religious behaviour of self-declared believers is inconsistent. The second hypothesis states that the theoretical model developed by Grace Davie can be applied to the case of Serbia. Davie believes that the characteristics of religiosity differ between religiously homogeneous and heterogeneous societies. In other words, the basis for comparison is not a dogma or institutions but the share of believers belonging to the same religion. Starting from this hypothesis, we will compare Serbia (as a religiously homogeneous society) with other similar societies across Europe in order to check whether Grace Davie's theory can be applied to the case of Serbia.

### **Phases of the religious situation in Serbia, or the temporal aspect of religious composition**

Society is a complex and fluid whole made by individuals or social groups, within which ethnical and confessional groups have always been important in the area of the Western Balkans. As society has been undergoing different historical phases, the position, significance and characteristics of the above-mentioned groups have adapted to it – either by establishing their continuous position in the altered political, ideological and economic social framework, or by being forced to face discontinuity, stagnation or bare survival. Their ambiguous position and social (ir)relevance asks for analysing the attachment of people to religion

and the church having in mind the temporal framework and environmental circumstances which could not be influenced by religious organizations. Although religiosity represents a phenomenon which is closely related to the individual and his/her personal relationship towards God, the institutionalized religious practices and belonging to a denomination are always contextualised into a specific social space. Therefore, sociologists perceive religiosity as not only a complex spiritual and psychological phenomenon but also a social concept. To tell the truth, sociologists are primarily interested in personal religiosity and collective attachment to religion, denomination and the church in order to better understand, examine and interpret social phenomena and actions. Religious composition and people's religiosity are not only affected by environmental circumstances. The relative religious autonomy also exists. Some even believe that a human is inherently a religious being, *homo religiosus* (John Milton Yinger, Thomas Luckmann). On the other hand, religions, religious traditions and religious organizations definitely influence social occurrences, particularly during political crises, ideological turmoil or conflicting situations in society. The sociological analysis of religiosity must not neglect or completely reject the analysis of subjective attitudes of respondents towards religion and the church. It should include the social context of individual religiosity. The above mentioned clearly highlights the methodological limitations of the sociological approach to the complex religious phenomenon and the necessity of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach.

Therefore, the temporal framework of life and activities of believers and religious organizations involves a wider social context, primarily the value-related, conceptual and ideological, affirmative, neutral or negative attitudes of the social system and collective ideas towards believers and religious organisations. Serbia is no exception. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, religions and churches have complied with changes of the social system and general affirmative or negative attitudes towards them. Generally speaking, there are several phases of the position and social (ir)relevance of religion and religiosity in Serbia from the First World War onwards. First, there were two ideal-typical patterns of the general religious situation in the mentioned time period. They are diametrically opposed in terms of conventional religiosity, attachment to religion and the church, spiritual influence and social position of religious communities and organizations, primarily the largest one – the Serbian Orthodox church. The first pattern could be named *stimulating and affirmative*. Within this pattern, religiosity and social significance of the church were positively valued; and the church had a privileged social position, respectability, national and cultural significance. Having in mind the above-mentioned importance and influence of religion and the church, the second ideal-typical pattern could be called *destimulating*, negative or even stigmatising. It marginalised religion and the church leaving them without their previous public implications (Blagojević, 2005: 157–167). The first pattern involved the period before the Second World War, i.e. it was valid before the First World War and in a slightly altered form after the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 (later

the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). However, with its specific characteristics it was also valid even after the 1990s. The second, negative general ideal-typical pattern of the attitude towards religion and the church involved the period from the end of the Second World War until the late 1980s.

If the ideal-typical-based approach to the phenomenon were disregarded and the historical-sociological approach were applied, the mentioned dynamics of the general attitude towards religion and the church would be more complex and specific. The above-mentioned ideal-typical patterns could be then divided and specified into four phases of general attitude towards religion and the church. In each of these phases, religion and the church had their specific position, social meaning, and complex and changeable attachment of people to religion and the church. These four phases are the following: pre-socialist religious traditionalism; socialist dictated atheization; religious restructuring of secularity (desecularization of Serbian society) and new religious stabilization. The aims of this paper do not allow for a wider presentation of the characteristics representing the phases of the social position of religions or people's religiosity. The paper only gives a summarised and rudimentary review of the basic characteristics on the basis of a number of empirical studies and theoretical papers (see more in: Blagojević and Bakrac 2020: 77–90).

Pre-socialist religious traditionalism in Serbia was characterized by the unproblematic pro-religious (pro-Orthodox) consensus within which religion was considered as an affirmative spiritual and social phenomenon. It was socially desirable to fulfil at least the basic religious obligations such as attending the liturgy on Sundays, christening children, getting married in the church, having a church funeral service or celebrating the patron saint's day. Until the Second World War the situation remained basically the same. Until the Second World War the Serbian Orthodox Church, as the largest religious organization in the country, was socially privileged, while Orthodoxy was the constituent of the official culture. Atheism was an unfavourable and proscribed phenomenon. In such an environment, the religious composition of Serbian society was strong; religion and the church had an obvious and unquestionable public significance; social morality referred to religious morality; and the traditional attachment to religion and the church was unproblematic.

In Serbia, as part of socialist Yugoslavia after the end of the Second World War, the beginning of the socialist regime drastically changed the attitude towards religions and churches. Not only were the social and political patterns altered radically, but also the cultural one. There was a completely new, destimulating and stigmatising general social framework faced by Orthodoxy and the Serbian Orthodox Church. This continued in the politically directed and atheized culture until the late 1980s and the end of socialist Yugoslavia. The socialist government and state used the hegemony of atheism to socially marginalise and spiritually demonopolise religions and churches while abandoning traditionalism, religiosity, and superstition which represented obstacles to building new society and promoting modernisation. Such an attitude and public opinion led to "abandoning religion and church" (Đorđević, 1984). In the area of Serbia, this resulted not only in the above-mentioned irrelevance, but also in the specific

indicators of not believing in God and other dogmatic and doctrinal postulates of religion (Orthodoxy), as well as decrease in performing religious and ritual practices and forming religious associations (Baćević, 1964; Pantić, 1974; Đorđević, 1992).

Religious restructuring of secularity could be perceived as early as in the late 1908s. It was manifested in the early 1990s owing to the war conflicts at national and confessional sore spots such as the area of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and – by the end of the century – Kosovo. At first, the elements of the desecularization of social life were noticed in the identity of social and confessional groups. Later, they were identified in religious practices and the consensus regarding the public role of religion and the church in the national homogenization and mobilization, cultural self-importance and their role as resources of protection and resistance in unfavourable, conflicting or tragic personal and collective circumstances. Religious restructuring was detected on the basis of data from numerous empirical sociological research and studies of public opinion. It led to the increase in the pro-religious self-identification, mostly in the previously atheized young generations, the radical decrease of the population's pro-atheist attitude, more prevalent believing in God and believing in other dogmatic postulates of religion, particularly those distant from eschatology. The traditional attitude towards religion and the church (christening, church wedding, funeral service, saint patron's day, celebration of religious holy days), which resisted marginalisation during socialism, now represents the main feature of most religious behaviours. When compared to the previous period, some rituals of the current attitude towards religion and church (liturgy, prayer, fasting) indicate revitalisation.

In the last twenty years, the religious situation in Serbia could be defined as relatively stable when compared to the 1990s. Although the external dimension of religiosity is rather indubitable, religious and ritual practices (churchliness) and religious associations show their inner limitations and ambivalence. The research conducted in the first and second decades of this century (World Values Survey, 2001; European Values Study, 2008; Jablanov Maksimović, (ed.). 2011) indicate that the religious composition was stabilised and that the attachment to religion and the church witnessed certain limitations related to the so-called dissolution of religious beliefs and the irregular religious practices of inconsistent self-declared believers.

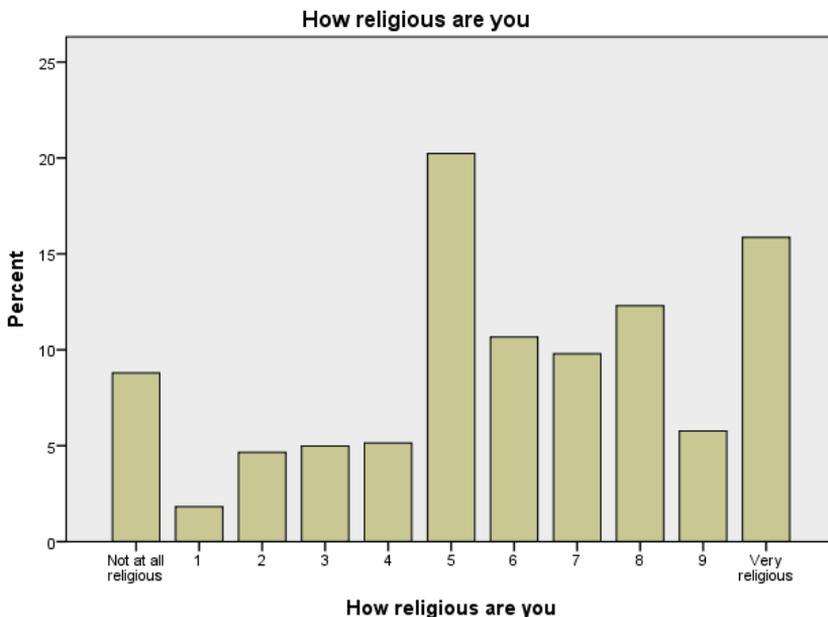
### **(Non)religious Serbia today**

In the ESS research, religiosity is measured by three indicators: religious self-identification, indicators of churchliness, i.e. frequency of going to church and frequency of prayer. There are numerous ways and dimensions which can help operationalise the complex phenomenon of religiosity (belief in various doctrinal elements, knowledge about the particular dogma, practices, belonging to a community, religious experience, etc. [Cohen et al., 2017; Kuburić, 2016]). However, the ESS selected these three dimensions of religiosity (the most

frequently used ones). “The ESS provides better coverage of religion than most general purpose surveys, covering the three main areas of affiliation (current or past identification), practice (attendance at religious services, prayer, organisational participation and support) and belief (self-rated religiosity, importance of religion). While the questions on how religious the respondent is and how important religion is to him/her do not measure beliefs directly, it seems likely that there is a strong association between these variables and strength of religious belief” (McAndrew and Voas, 2011: 10).

Religiosity and religious affiliation can be considered at (the minimum of) two levels. The first is the intrinsic determination of individual degree of religiosity, while the other is belonging to a denomination (or church). These are the two most frequently used indicators in sociological research on religiosity. Although their usefulness in different societies can be disputable, they certainly represent the starting point for further and more meticulous sociological studies. When it comes to the data on the level of personal religiosity, the situation in Serbia in the late 2010s (see more in: Jablanov Maksimović, 2011) was the following: the largest number of the respondents (one fifth) selected the medium (moderate) degree of religiosity (category 5 on the 0–10 scale). Graph 1 clearly shows that there was a larger number of people gathered closer to the “very religious” part of the scale than to the opposite part of the scale including those not religious at all. The total number of those who positioned at the scale of religiosity from 5 to 10 amounted to 74.7%, while there were only 8.8% of the respondents who reported not being religious at all.

Graph 1. Self-rated religiosity in Serbia in 2018, ESS data



Cases weighted by Post-stratification weight including design weight

The obtained data do not differ significantly from those from 2010 and 2011. Religiosity was not measured in the identical manner (the ESS offers a 0–10 scale, while the 2010/2011 research offered different responses which were not ranked), so the comparison is approximate (see more in: Jablanov Maksimović, 2011). Nevertheless, it can be concluded that religious self-identification did not undergo significant changes almost ten years later. In the 2010/2011 research, the total of 77.9% of the respondents reported being religious, while 10.7% of the respondents defined themselves as not religious (Blagojević 2015: 135). Another study from 2011 (Gallup International) confirmed the finding that 77% of the population regarded themselves as religious (Vukomanović, 2013: 323). It should be underlined that this data has a limited explanatory power since it does not answer the question whether somebody belongs to a religious community, whether they perform religious practices or use the religious discourse in everyday life (Vukomanović, 2013: 323). Nevertheless, this is the main question the respondents are asked in order to obtain the identifier of their personal religiosity (McAndrew and Voas, 2011: 4).

The social and demographic structure of religious people in Serbia does not differ significantly from the 2010/2011 structure. However, this structure is different from the situation in the early 1980s when the variables such as gender, place of residence and education were extremely statistically significant for the differences in religiosity. In the regional research conducted in the early 1980s (in the predominantly Orthodox region of Niš), women were considerably more religious than men (Đorđević, 1984), while in 2010/2011 men and women reported being equally very religious. The ESS data from 2018 showed a similar situation: 18.7% of the most religious respondents were women, while 12.9% were men.<sup>4</sup> When it comes to education, in the 1980s the least educated respondents were the most religious, while in 2010/2011 religiosity was almost evenly distributed along the education scale. Considering the year of 2018, religiosity was still relatively evenly distributed, with less educated respondents being more inclined to the scale part with more expressed religiosity and more educated groups showing a different tendency. Today education is not a very significant variable for differences in religiosity (for instance, the group of the least religious respondents includes 6.9% of the least educated and 12.8% of the most educated). However, the group including the most religious shows a different result – 12% of the most religious respondents do not have elementary education, and only 3.2% of the most religious respondents have the highest level of education. When it comes to the size of the place of residence, the situation is similar. In large cities, almost the same percentage of the respondents selected both ends of the religiosity scale: 13.7% of the respondents from large cities stated being very religious, while 10% of the respondents stated not being religious at all. However, if only rural areas are considered, the situation is significantly

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4 If the sum values from 5 to 10 (from moderately religious to very religious) are observed, it can be seen that they include 69.9% of men and 79.2% of women. There is still a difference between women and men regarding religiosity, but gender is not such a strong predictor as it was 40 years ago.

different: almost 20.6% of those living in the villages reported being extremely religious, while there were only 5.6% of non-religious respondents in rural areas.

It can be concluded that an image of a typically religious person in Serbia predominant in the 1980s (a woman of lower education living in rural areas [Đorđević, 1984]) was altered and that in both 2010/2011 and 2018 there was a dispersion of the obtained values across different categories. In other words, the religious image of Serbia today is far more complex and each segment should be examined separately and meticulously.

When it comes to belonging to a denomination or church, the situation in Serbia in 2018 was approximately the same as in 2010/2011. However, we will see that there was an increase in the number of those stating that they belonged to the Serbian Orthodox Church (Graph 2).

Graph 2. Denomination belonging to in 2018, ESS data



Among those who reported belonging to some of religious communities, a large number (90%) belonged to the Serbian Orthodox Church, 5% belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, 2.1% were Muslims and 1.1% were Protestants. In the Census of population conducted in 2011 at the territory of the Republic of Serbia, 84.6% of the respondents reported belonging to the Serbian Orthodox

Church (Census of Population, 2013: 14), while in the 2010/2011 research this percentage was slightly lower and amounted to 78.6% (Blagojević, 2015: 136). In other words, although the majority of population shows a continuity of reporting themselves as belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the ESS data from 2018 show a somewhat sharper image in comparison to the previously observed period. The data on believers who reported belonging to other (minority) religious communities in Serbia were similar to the comparisons of the years of 2018 and 2010, or 2011.<sup>5</sup>

Determining self-rated religiosity is a more sensitive indicator than belonging to a denomination or church since it involves introspection and reflection (Lebedev, Blagojević and Pokaninova, 2020). One can regard oneself as a religious person without belonging to any of the main religious communities. On the other hand, an individual can report being a Roman Catholic or an Orthodox without perceiving himself/herself as a religious person (or at least not very religious). Although the data on the intrinsic (self)rated religiosity provide an insight into someone's personal feeling of religiosity, belonging to a denomination represents a very significant indicator in these regions. Belonging to a denomination shows the degree of people's attachment to the church and religion, but also to tradition and the national and ethnic identity (Blagojević, 2015: 136; Vukomanović, 2013: 329). The latest ESS data confirm that belonging to a church is still a significant identifier in Serbia, and that the percentage of those self-identified as belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church remains very high (even slightly higher than 10 years ago). This information supports the debates about the revitalisation of the religious identity in Serbia and retraditionalisation, and about various ideological and political (in)compatibilities in the twenty-first century. However, this paper will not deal with this issue since it requires a study on its own.

The second indicator of religiosity refers to churchliness, i.e. the attachment of individuals to the institution of church and religious rituals. The ESS team decided to measure churchliness according to the frequency of church attendance excluding special occasions (such as weddings, christenings, funerals, etc.). It should be mentioned that this indicator is considerably Christianocentric since Christianity (although not all its varieties) cherishes the ideal of gathering inside the church, which is not the case in some other religions. However, for the needs of analysing the religious image of Serbia, it can be supposed that this indicator will "work". In the case of Serbia, this indicator should have been used in empirical research on religiosity particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the socialist system ended and conflicts began across the geographical and confessional area of ex-Yugoslavia (Vukomanović, 2013: 326). However, we will see that even today this indicator is significant for the sociological understanding of religiosity. Contrasted to the data related to religious self-identification and belonging to a denomination, the data related to the indicator of churchliness show somewhat different results when compared to 2010/2011 (Table 1).

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5 The only slightly greater change is reflected in the data regarding the number of the Muslim population. The Census showed that there were 3.1% of them (Census of Population, 2013: 14), while according to the most recent ESS data there are only 2.1% of them.

Table 1. Frequency of church attendance  
in the period 2010/2011 and 2018

Frequency of church attendance (excluding special occasions)	2010/2011 <sup>6</sup>	2018
More than once a week	4.1%	2%
Once a week	8.7%	5.2%
At least once a month	16.2%	13.4%
Only on special occasions	The question was not asked	43.1%
Very rarely (only a few times a year)	50.9%	22.4%
Never or almost never	20%	12.2%

The data obtained in 2010/2011 and 2018 are not completely comparable since the 2010/2011 research did not include special occasions as a separate analytical category. However, the number of those who attend church only on special occasions (or very rarely) generally increases, while the number of regular churchgoers decreases. These data require an additional explanation. Serbia is often interpreted within the theoretical framework of “belonging without believing” constructed by Grace Davie (Davie, 2015a). Thus, on the basis of the 2018 ESS data it can be concluded that the categories of “belonging” increase (seen in the number of those stating to belong to the SOC and in the fact that an increased number of people go to church for collective events such as weddings or christenings). However, the category of “believing” is not represented to the same degree. Unfortunately, the ESS data do not show the level of accepting different religious dogmas, but they reveal the rising number of religious respondents reflected in the religious self-identification. Therefore, the conclusion that Serbia is a society of “belonging without believing” is not denied but it is relativised – although belonging is highly represented, there is an increased number of those who consider themselves believers. However, Grace Davie’s hypothesis is additionally confirmed by the falling number of regular churchgoers.

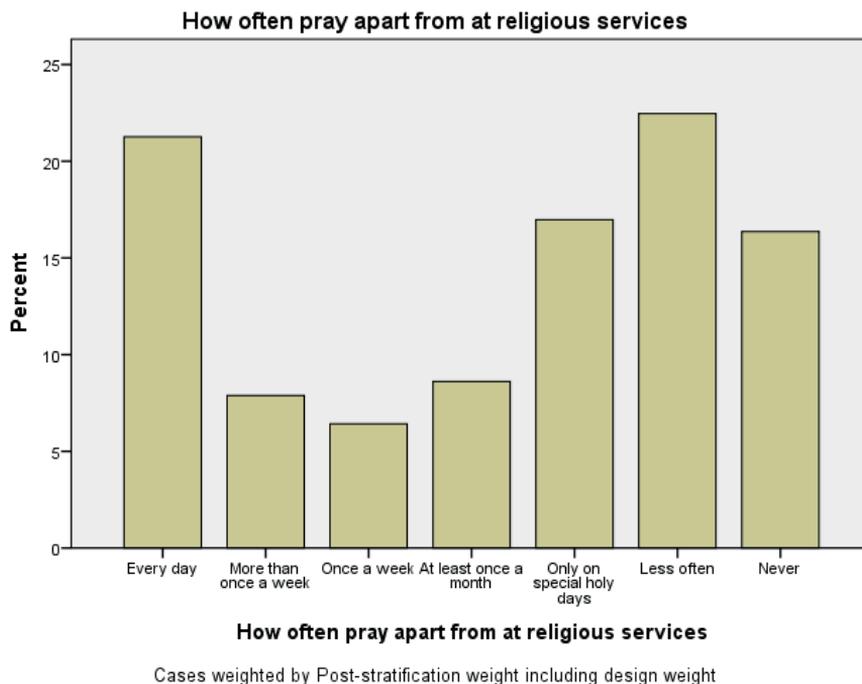
The following years will show the direction of these tendencies, which will allow for more comprehensive conclusions. In addition, the analysis of religiosity in Serbia should involve indicators related to believing in certain dogmatic concepts such as God, Judgement Day, heaven, hell, and alike, as well as the indicators related to the knowledge of history, canonical studies and scriptures of the largest global religions (in Serbia, this primarily refers to the knowledge of Christian history, dogma and practices).

Finally, the analysis includes another indicator which supports the hypothesis that we cannot decidedly state that there is “no believing”: the indicator of the frequency of prayer. This indicator was selected because prayer is more universal than other religious practices and it can be adapted to different religious. Prayer, both individual and collective, represents an important segment of almost all world religions, particularly those existing in the area of Europe. This is a strong argument in favour of comparative studies dealing with this indicator in different countries (Billiet, p. 367).

<sup>6</sup> Blagojević, 2015: 140.

The data obtained in the 2018 research do not deviate much from those obtained in 2010/2011, which emphasizes the consolidation of prayer as an important religious practice in Serbia. It is interesting that this differs in other Orthodox countries (which will be shown further in the paper). However, it should be highlighted that one in five inhabitants of Serbia prays every day (21.3%), and that as many as 35.6% pray once a week, more than once a week or even every day (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Frequency of prayer in Serbia in 2018, ESS data



At the end of this paper section, two important observations regarding the research on religiosity in Serbia should be emphasized again. First, although the praxeological dimension is very important, church attendance and prayer are not the only (and perhaps not the most significant) indicators of religiosity in Serbia. For instance, patron saint's days are also significant indicators of religiosity (particularly the traditional and collective ones), but the authors are not currently able to examine the prevalence of this practice. The situation is similar when it comes to burning of *badnjak* (an oak branch), fasting, etc. Second, the complete study of the "believing" indicator should include the questions regarding believing in various mythological and dogmatic elements (such as heaven, hell, Judgement Day, life after death, resurrection, and of course God)<sup>7</sup>, which the 2018 ESS research did not include. As mentioned above, a

<sup>7</sup> The 2010 research showed that a majority of believers believed in almost all mentioned dogmatic concepts (for instance, as many as 63.2% of the respondents believed in God). In

similar situation can be perceived regarding the knowledge of religious history, canonical scriptures and importance of specific religious concepts.

Having in mind the changes brought by the development of information technologies and proliferation of various social network uses, the authors believe that some future studies should examine the so-called *cyber religiosity* in Serbia (Banić-Grubišić, 2012). Furthermore, belonging to new religious movements or alternative religiosity should be thoroughly studied (Barker, 2004). In other words, the ESS data offer only a partial insight into religiosity in Serbia today, but they still represent an important starting point for further and more thorough sociological research on religiosity in Serbia. In addition, the latest data can help us monitor the changes or continuity of the religious landscape in Serbia (which is one of the basic aims of the complete ESS project). However, the most important point of the paper is to confirm the basic hypothesis stating that on the basis of the ESS data from 2018 it can be concluded that the religious structure has been stabilised, as well as that there is a pronounced dissolution between religious beliefs and identification on the one hand, and the lack of religious practices on the other hand.

### (Non)religious Europe and Serbia (*Religiously homogeneous societies in Europe – a comparative perspective*)

No one can argue the fact that the history of Europe is closely related to religion and the church and the changeable attitude of the state towards religion and the church as public institutions. Furthermore, as a universal religion, Christianity has affected the formation of homogeneous common social values, which has not prevented the formation of three different Christian traditions (churches) in Europe. This definitely has an impact on the current confessional and religious image of Europe. The confessional and religious image of Europe certainly is not monolithic due to diverse historical heritage, confessional (in) homogeneity and specific social history of European countries. Therefore, the generalisation of the religious situation in Europe represents a methodological error. Instead of the uniform approach, *the approach of differentiation* should be applied. Differentiation was applied by British author Grace Davie when she analysed the religious profile of Europe using the empirical material of the European Values Survey (EVS) in 1990. She made a confessional division of European countries into: *Catholic* (Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain), *multi-confessional countries* (Great Britain, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, West German) and *Lutheran* countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). In this context, she observed two important indicators of conventional religiosity: frequency of church attendance and degree of religious belief in: God, soul, afterlife, resurrection of the dead (Davie, 2005b: 25–26). *Ergo*,

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other words, the thesis stating that there is “no believing” in Serbia was relativised as early as in 2010 (Blagojević, 2015: 138), so it can be supposed that the same data would be obtained in 2018.

Davie believes that the degree of religious homogeneity or the heterogeneity, is the basis for comparison societies.

Analysing the results of the mentioned study, Davie concluded that the degree of secularization in Western Europe was unquestionable, particularly regarding the beliefs closely related to the institutional framework. Davie states that when it comes to religious beliefs Christianity in Europe is not a pale and lifeless image in human minds. Christian values still underlie people's values and their identity. Consequently, she came up with the famous phrase "believing without belonging" primarily bearing in mind the situation in Great Britain (Davie, 1994). The conclusion about the deeply secularised Europe is somewhat relativised if the religious situation in Europe is considered even more widely by including the aspect of identification or moral beliefs or the non-institutionalised, not established religion and new forms of personal religion (privatisation of religion).<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the information about orthopraxy confirms the validity of Grace Davie's statement about *unchurched* Europe. In Lutheran countries, church attendance is particularly rare. The back side of unchurchliness is the statement that non-institutionalised forms of religion are increasingly present and less visible to the public sphere, which confirms that religion has not completely disappeared from the life of people. In Europe and in the most developed countries in the world, religion has become the choice, depending on preferences and lifestyles, and not the religious determiner obtained at birth (Beck, 2010; Bauman, and Obirek, 2016). It would be interesting to examine whether and to which extent the process of privatisation of religion has developed so far in the predominantly conventional Orthodox religiosity which is a comprehensive and unique religious framework in Serbia. However, the data analysed in this paper are not sufficient for this examination, so this subject will not be further developed.

Applying the theoretical guidelines offered by Grace Davie, the data obtained in the ESS research in Serbia will be compared with other religiously homogeneous societies in Europe. As mentioned above, Davie formulated the hypothesis stating that the valid basis for comparing different dimensions of religiosity is the religious homogeneity (or heterogeneity) of society. Therefore, we should compare the societies which are religiously homogeneous, or compare the so-called multi-religious societies. Since Serbia belongs to the corpus of religiously homogeneous societies (with 90% of the respondents stating they belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church), the data obtained in the 2018 research were compared with the ESS data obtained in 2018 in several countries which are also not heterogeneous. The countries were selected according to the degree of homogeneity (the minimum of 70% of the respondents were required to report belonging to the same religion which was dominant in that country) and according to the fact that the ESS research in this country was conducted in the same cycle as in Serbia (in 2018). The selection included three predominantly

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8 As famous anthropologist Mary Douglas said, in western societies religion was not weak due to the philosophical inconsistency but due to the deritualisation of the religious and social life, distancing from the religious calendar, and life and annual growth cycles of people (see more in: Трпеч, 2012: 13).

Orthodox countries (Russia,<sup>9</sup> Montenegro and Bulgaria), three Roman Catholic countries (Italy, France and Croatia) and three Protestant countries (Denmark, Sweden and Finland). The authors decided to compare Serbia with these nine countries<sup>10</sup> due to the limited space, but the comparative analysis might include other European countries, too. In addition, the focus was on the comparison with Orthodox countries (in accordance with the theoretical logic of Davie).

All nine countries fulfil the mentioned criteria. In these countries, the ESS research was conducted in the same cycle and all of them are religiously homogeneous: 93.2% of the respondents in Finland reported being Protestants, while this percentage amounted to 74.5% in Sweden and 89.5% in Denmark. In Italy 91.8% of the respondents stated they belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, while this number was 93.4% in Croatia and 75.9% in France. Finally, there were 86.9% of Orthodox believers in Russia, 70.9% in Montenegro and 81% in Bulgaria. In the following text the three indicators mentioned in the previous part of the paper (religious self-identification, churchliness and frequency of prayer) will be analysed, with the focus on the comparative analysis. The analysis will begin with the self-rated religiosity. Table 2 shows the data obtained as the response to the question “How religious are you (on the 0–10 scale)?”. The authors compared the data about those inclined to higher religiosity (the respondents positioned from 5 to 10, or from the medium to higher degree of religiosity) and those who circled only number 5 (moderate religiosity).

Table 2. Percentage of moderately religious and religious respondents, ESS data from 2018

Country	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Italy	France	Croatia	Russia	Montenegro	Bulgaria	Serbia
Percentage of moderately religious respondents	11.9	13.9	10.8	13	11.9	16.5	19.6	19.9	21.1	20.2
Percentage of religious respondents	58.4	44.3	32.1	70.9	59	67	51.4	64	49.1	74.7

The data in Table 2 are rather uneven. Although in most of the countries more than half of the respondents were positioned on the more religious end of the scale, in Sweden only a third of the respondents responded in this way. In other words, although the great majority of the respondents in the analysed

9 The authors made an exception. Namely, all countries except Russia participated in the ESS research cycle in 2018. Since Russia is the largest Orthodox country and since there are similarities between the religious images of Serbia and Russia (see more in: Blagojević, 2015), the authors decided to make the exception and use the data obtained in the ESS research in Russia in 2016. Although the authors believe that the data would not be much different in 2018 (since Russia did not undergo any significant political, cultural, economic or religious changes in the meantime), this methodological remark and limitation should be taken into account when analysing the data.

10 Also, the authors endeavoured to include the countries which Serbia borders with, so the sample included Montenegro, Croatia and Bulgaria.

countries stated they belonged to some of the religions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant), the degree of personal religiosity differed depending on the country. Moreover, it is striking that Serbia recorded the greatest degree of personal religiosity (as said, these findings should be taken with caution (see [Vukomanović, 2013: 323])). If the countries are grouped according to the dominant religion, it can be seen that Protestant countries are less religious than Orthodox ones, as well as Roman Catholic ones which show the highest scores of religiosity based on the indicator of self-rated religiosity, including Orthodox Serbia in this group. Also, when it comes to moderate religiosity (value 5 on the scale of intrinsic religiosity), it can be noticed that Orthodox countries have the highest and very similar scores (Serbia 20.2%, Montenegro 19.9%, Russia 19.6%, Bulgaria 21.1%), Catholic countries are in the middle (Italy 13%, Croatia 16.5%, France 14.7%), while Protestant (Scandinavian) countries have the lowest scores of moderate religiosity (Finland 11.9%, Sweden 10.8%, Denmark 13.9%). The percentage of the most religious respondents (those who circled 10 on the 0–10 scale) provided a slightly different situation. The data on the most religious respondents are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of the most religious respondents, ESS data from 2018

Country	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Italy	France	Croatia	Russia	Montenegro	Bulgaria	Serbia
Percentage of religious respondents	2.8	2.4	1.8	8.6	11.6	16.2	2.5	10.9	3.4	15.9

The respondents in Croatia provided the largest percentage of self-rated religiosity. Serbia, Montenegro and Finland provided results similar to the Croatian ones, while in other countries a small percentage of the respondents considered themselves very religious. Although the indicator of self-rated religiosity is an inevitable part of every sociological study on religiosity and has the explanatory value, it should be underlined that it should be taken cautiously since it does not provide much information about believing in specific dogmas and it does not offer an insight in the praxeological dimension of religiosity. People can rate themselves as very religious while attending church very rarely and not believing in some constituent elements of the (Christian) dogma such as heaven or hell, which considerably deviates from the sociological image of a devoted believer. However, self-rating on the scale of religiosity remains the initial indicator which should definitely be further analysed.

Now we will consider church religiosity, i.e. the praxeological or institutional dimension of religiosity. Here the situation is more balanced than in the case of intrinsic religiosity. Table 4 provides the data on the percentage of respondents who reported going to church once a week or more than once a week (cumulative percentage), as well as the data on the respondents who reported going to church only on special occasions or very rarely.

Table 4. Frequency of church attendance, ESS data from 2018

Country	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Italy	France	Croatia	Russia	Montenegro	Bulgaria	Serbia
Percentage of respondents going to church once or more than once a week	1.7	1.2	1.4	5.1	3.1	5	2.6	5.2	3.5	7.2
Percentage of respondents going to church only on special occasions	21.4	26	14	23.1	16.6	27.8	27.2	34.7	42.4	43.1
Percentage of respondents going to church very rarely	37.2	27.4	33.4	17	17.	18.9%	27.6	18.3	22.4	22.4
Percentage of respondents who never go to church	30.7	37.1	41.9	20.7	52.5	20.6	28.6	14.1	19.8	12.2

Regarding the respondents who go to religious institutions on a regular basis, the results are considerably well-balanced: in all the analysed countries a small number of respondents go to church frequently. This percentage is approximately 5% (or lower), with the exception of Serbia where this percentage is slightly higher than in other countries (7.2%). However, even Serbia has a small number of respondents who go to church on a regular basis. These data confirm the previously mentioned observation and hypotheses stating that church religiosity is undergoing a crisis (see in: Blagojević, 2015: 33), and that religiosity today is more related to identity and individuality while not being highly institutionalised. This is supported by the data on those who attend church only on special occasions or even more rarely. It is interesting that a high percentage of respondents who go to church only on special occasions predominantly live in Orthodox countries (Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Russia). This underlines the importance of collective rituals for the Orthodox Church and its believers. In addition, it should be mentioned that the number of the respondents who reported going to church rarely is rather balanced, while the percentage of those who stated never going to church varies considerably depending on the country. In Montenegro only 15% of the respondents stated that they never went to church, while in France as many as 52.5% of the respondents reported the same. This finding is not surprising having in mind the lay and secular heritage in France, however, one detected discrepancy should be highlighted: almost 60% of the French consider themselves religious, while more than a half of the respondents never go to church. If Orthodox countries are excluded (although not a particularly high degree of churchliness is recorded in these countries, either), it can be said that the conclusion of Grace Davie that Christian Europe is unchurched was reconfirmed in 2018 (Davie, 2005b: 25).

Finally, the data on the frequency of prayer in the ten analysed countries are given below. As it was already mentioned, prayer is one of the most important rituals in most world religions and a significant indicator of religiosity. The question “How often do you pray?” does not state the exact prayer (its content), or whether it is created according to the canonical rules or individualised. Nevertheless, the prevalence of prayer shows the importance of this religious practice for an individual. As it can be seen in Table 5, with the exception of Croatia, prayer is not a regularly repeated practice in the analysed countries, but it is more frequently represented than the regular church attendance. Also, the situation varies across the countries.

Table 5. Frequency of prayer, ESS data from 2018

Country	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Italy	France	Croatia	Russia	Montenegro	Bulgaria	Serbia
Percentage of respondents praying every day	16.3	8.6	9.8	22.2	14.4	35.7	9.8	17.6	9	21.3
Percentage of respondents praying at least once a week (or more than once a week and every day)	26.2	14.1	16.7	23.1	23.2	51.5	19.4	33.6	21	35.6

With the exception of Croatia which differs considerably from other countries regarding this indicator, a relatively small percentage of the respondents in the remaining nine countries reported praying regularly. Approximately one third of the respondents in Serbia and Montenegro stated they often prayed, while an even lower percentage of the respondents reported practising praying in other countries. The respondents in Denmark prayed least regularly (only 8.6% prayed on a daily basis). It can be concluded that prayer is not a widely represented religious practice. Although prayer is one of the most significant rituals in most world religions, it is not the case in all countries. Prayer is the least represented in Protestant countries, which again shows that the process of secularization has started expanding most rapidly in Scandinavian (Protestant) countries.

If the three (or four) indicators are compared, great differences in their presence can be noticed. On the one hand, in all countries the respondents' ratings of their religiosity were much higher than their practices showed. For instance, as many as 70.9% of the respondents in Italy consider themselves religious, while 50.1% go to church only on special occasions (or less frequently) and only 22.2% of the respondents pray every day. A similar tendency can be noticed in all countries: the respondents tend to define themselves as religious, while their practices show the different thing – both the praying practices and any practices related to church (with the exception of Croatia which shows a rather balanced relationship between identification and practice). Some other authors have similar conclusion, which was defined by Davie as “Christian Europe though unchurched” (Davie, 2005b: 25). It should also be highlighted

that the belonging to a denomination is the most prevalent indicator in all the analysed countries. The percentages decrease as the indicators become more specific. In Italy, as many as 91.8% of the respondents consider themselves to belong to the Roman Catholic church, which is a considerably larger percentage than the percentage of those who pray regularly or go to church more frequently than only on special occasions.

Belonging to a church remains a significant segment of the modern identity of European societies. However, regarding other indicators no uniform conclusions can be made. Some countries witness religious eclecticism called “do-it-yourself religiosity” by Ulrich Beck (Beck, 2010: 49), while other countries involve more conventional models of religiosity. Interestingly, the situation is not the same in the countries which predominantly have the respondents of the same religion. For instance, the respondents in Croatia go to church and pray much more frequently than the respondents in France or Italy. In Serbia, the situation is similar: the respondents in Serbia reported being considerably more religious than the respondents in Russia, Montenegro and Bulgaria, which is confirmed by their practices. On the other hand, Protestant (Scandinavian) countries showed a considerably higher mutual uniformity and similarities than other analysed countries (they had the lowest scores for all religiosity dimensions, which is in accordance with some previous findings) (Hamilton, 2001: 194).

Therefore, this paper reconfirms that universalist conclusions should be made with utmost care. The final conclusion regarding religiosity in a country should be made taking into account historical processes and phases which churches have gone through in these societies, as well as the current social trends and challenges (political, economic, cultural). In addition, the representation of all these dimensions of religiosity in different social categories should be examined (in different classes, gender, age categories, etc.). If only the young (aged 16 to 29) were considered, the ESS data from 2014 and 2016 showed that religiosity mainly decreased. As many as 91% of young Czechs stated not being religious at all, similarly to 80% of young Estonians and 75% of young Swedes (Bullivant, 2018: 6). This paper does not allow for this kind of analysis but it is certainly sociologically relevant and necessary.

Although comparative studies are very important for observing general trends and deviations from these, when it comes to religiosity each country is a case study on its own and should be observed and examined in this way. Thus, one should be careful when making final conclusions about macro-process such as secularization or desecularization, even within the area of Europe (not to mention wider areas). Our research confirmed the stance that examining religiosity requires the middle or even micro-range analysis position (as stated by Grace Davie [Davie, 2005b]). Of course, this does not suggest that the comparison is not socially relevant. At any rate, the above mentioned research on the young people shows that although the number of the young who consider themselves religious decreases, only 17% of the young in Poland (aged 16 to 29) reported not being religious. This is significantly different from the Czech Republic or Finland (Bullivant, 2018: 6).

In this paper, the data showed that Scandinavian countries could be observed as a separate whole (the least religious countries), that Orthodox countries expressed greater churchliness than other countries, while other dimensions showed heterogeneity in their prevalence. In other words, we should repeat the methodological (and consequently theoretical) observation that the response to the question whether and to what degree religion is significant can be obtained by abandoning the analysis of global trends and applying the analysis on the level of the case study. "Instead, analyses must focus on individual examples of both societies and religions. *Ergo*, many studies have shown that secularization has indeed taken roots in some societies, while in other communities this has not been the case. Because of that, the micro or middle-range position is the only one that is adequate for understanding the complex role of religion in contemporary society" (Mentus i Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2002: 75).

## Conclusion

The data obtained in the 2018 ESS research in Serbia indicate that for all the examined indicators (religious self-identification, belonging to a church, churchliness and frequency of prayer) the stabilisation of the religious composition can be observed, as well as the discrepancy between the religious and denominational identification on the one hand, and church practices on the other hand. The data from 2018 do not considerably differ from those obtained almost 10 years before in other studies, so the religious image of Serbia can be regarded as stable. Having in mind all the phases of religiosity in Serbia (pre-socialist religious traditionalism, socialist dictated atheisation, religious restructuring of secularity (desecularization of Serbian society) and new religious stabilisation), it can be concluded that the ESS data show that Serbia might be in the fourth phase and that there is a dissonance between declaration and practices. Therefore, our main hypotheses have been confirmed.

Extremely interesting and diverse data were obtained applying the theoretical framework created by Grace Davie and the comparative method (in the second part of the paper). It came to light that Serbia could be analysed in the context of religiously homogeneous countries (which was one of the paper's aims), but that the analysis should be performed with great attention. It can be said that our hypothesis has been partially confirmed. Protestant countries showed a lower degree of religiosity than Catholic and Orthodox countries, although Lutheran countries also expressed a high level of religious and denominational belonging. In all the analysed countries, there is a discrepancy between religious and denominational declaration and religious practices, including primarily institutional practices but also praying (except in the case of Croatia). Church religiosity is low in all the analysed countries, but it is slightly higher in predominantly Orthodox countries. This confirms the thesis of Grace Davie that Europe is unchurched, but also underlines the significance of this religious institution in Orthodox countries. Lutheran countries showed greater similarities than other groups of countries, and Orthodox countries expressed a higher level of churchliness.

Quantitative studies are indubitably extremely valuable for sociology of religion. However, in order to obtain a deeper insight into different segments of the individual perception of experiences, practices and beliefs, the quantitative data should be triangulated by qualitative ones. Although sociological studies have a very significant role in examining this phenomenon, multidisciplinary approach to studying religiosity is greatly appreciated. In addition, the indicators of religiosity should be expanded and triangulated by those referring to believing in different constituent elements of the world religions and knowledge about them. The corpus of religiosity indicators should also involve the issues related to everyday life and lifestyle, use of religious discourse on a regular basis or descriptions of various religious experiences. Finally, the authors believe that religiosity should be examined through non-traditional or unconventional forms of religiosity, such as belonging to some of alternative/new religious movements, eclectic (do-it-yourself) religiosity, cyber religiosity, etc.

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