

## FREEDOM TO RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND THE CRIME RATE ACROSS THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT

*Eduard Ionuț FEIER\**  
*Bogdan Nicolae MUCEA\*\**

**Abstract.** *Over time, people have focused their attention not only on faith and atheism, but also on the concept of religious tolerance. With the founding and expansion of the Islamic State, with the establishment of terrorist groups, formed and based on religious ideologies, the above-mentioned discussion has extended considerably. The information presented in this paper is meant to strengthen intercultural religious tolerance and provide support for debates on tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of faith and human security.*

**Keywords:** *religion, crime, tolerance, European Union*

The gradual abolition of border controls in the European Union has significantly facilitated not only the free movement of European citizens, but also the actions of criminals, especially since the scope of law enforcement authorities and criminal justice systems generally extend to the borders of national frontiers. Since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, the European Union has set itself the goal of creating a common area of freedom, security and justice. This goal was further developed through the 2004 Hague Program, which placed an emphasis on the following 10 priority areas: strengthening fundamental rights and citizenship, the fight against terrorism; defining a balanced approach to migration; developing an integrated management of the EU's external borders; establishing a common asylum procedure; maximizing the positive impact of immigration; the commitment to appropriate stability between privacy and security in the exchange of information; issuing a strategic concept to combat organized crime; ensuring a true European area of justice; shared responsibility and solidarity<sup>1</sup>.

The Lisbon Treaty reinforces the importance of culture "inspired by Europe's cultural, religious and humanist heritage" and is enshrined in the preamble to the Treaty on the European Union. Among the objectives of the Treaty, it is mentioned that the Union should respect the richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity and ensure that the European cultural heritage is preserved and developed. (Article three of the Treaty establishing the European Communities)

Ever since the emergence of sociology as a research domain, the study of religion and faith has been an interesting topic of discussion for thinkers. This is not surprising, since religion has been present in all known human communities. It influenced the individuals' relationship with the environments in which they carried out their activities. It also had a crucial impact on individuals' interactions with the other people they encountered, regardless of the type of relationship that were established.

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\* PhD candidate, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, E-mail: feiereduardionut@yahoo.ro

\*\* PhD candidate, University of Bucharest, E-mail: bogdanmucea@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Crime\\_statistics/ro&oldid=259837](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Crime_statistics/ro&oldid=259837), last accessed on May 20th, 2020.

Up to the present, the three classical sociologists: Marx, Durkheim and Weber have influenced sociological approaches to religion; each considered that religion has a crucial role to play in society. According to Marx, religion would justify, by the ideology he promotes, social inequality among individuals; Durkheim pointed at its cohesive role due to the religious rituals to which individuals participate; Weber focused mainly on the role played by religion in the development of capitalism and society. Despite the fact that all the aforementioned thinkers focused on religion and its role in human societies, they all perceived as "largely an illusion" both religion and "the other world that religion creates is our world, distorted through the filter of religious symbolism." (Giddens, 2010: 551)

In a work written by professor and Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot in the 19th century, entitled *The Religion of the Future*, the author shared ideas about the status of religion in the future: "The religion of the future will recognize the indisputable truth of these facts, the facts of bodily and spiritual guidance. Therefore, they will honor all persons who, through their lives, have exemplified and brought near to the understanding of their fellows the human ideal of goodness and goodwill. It will be a religion of all saints. All traditions, all the stories concerning the virtues and excellence of the human race will find a place within it. It will honor discoverers, teachers, martyrs and apostles of freedom, cleanliness and justice. It will respect and bring praise to all human beings who, through their power and meekness, will make us think of the similar qualities we worship in God." (Eliot, 1920: 23-24)

In a study entitled *Religion, Ethics and Politics*, Marcel Merle, one of the great pioneers of the study of the sociology of international relations in the 21st century, has openly affirmed the primordial role of the Church in the context of Europe. He pointed out that: "No country can afford to neglect the importance of the Churches and the balance that religious life can bring to a society of any kind. Churches have a very special importance in the European Union as a whole, and in each country, because they represent the primordial nucleus of European culture. A Europe that must take into account the common constitutional traditions, the traditions and cultural phenomena of the Member States, their national identity, as well as the principle of subsidiarity, must respect and protect the balance of Church-State relations". (Merle, 1993: 58-65)

A Europe that claims to appreciate the values that each state and nation can bring to communion has not only the duty, but also the obligation to respect and protect the position of religious institutions in its member countries. The Churches come into contact with the European Union in many areas and thus Europe is compelled to take into account their deposition, and the Churches must, in turn, respect the socio-political orientation that is being built in this era<sup>2</sup>.

Guarantees of freedom of religion and respect for conscience and faith are inevitably found in the constitutions of liberal democratic societies and in international and regional human rights instruments. Article 18 of the 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" states that: "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right implies the freedom to change one's religion or belief as well as the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or collectively, both in public and in private, through education, practice, worship and the performance of rites"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://orthodoxero.typepad.com/bor/raportul\\_dintre\\_culte\\_si\\_stat\\_in\\_uniunea\\_europeana/](http://orthodoxero.typepad.com/bor/raportul_dintre_culte_si_stat_in_uniunea_europeana/), last accessed on May 20, 2020

<sup>3</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948, available at <http://legislatie.resurse->

Crime has been highlighted in multiple ways at all social levels, and yet the phenomenon can be further spread as the process of globalization intensifies. (Jidovu, 2013: 35)

The approach to crime can be done in various forms, from the effects produced to the causes underlying the perpetuation of criminal behavior. This study represents an attempt to establish a causal link between religious affiliation and crime, because all legally accepted religions promote the love of the neighbor and of humanity. It could be assumed therefore that people who embrace a certain religion are less willing to develop delinquent behavior due to the constraint that religious faith exerts on the conscience of the individual. (Mucea, 2016: 508)

The EU institutions, national authorities, the media, politicians, organizations and the public use crime statistics. No international regulations cover general crime statistics. Each state establishes its own criminal law and defines the offenses, legal proceedings, legal consequences, as well as the requirements for official crime statistics. Therefore, national crime statistics are often not fully comparable among states. Despite their different criminal laws, it can also be said that there are many similarities between European countries. This, combined with the public and political interest, was the context for compiling EU crime statistics. Over the last decade, the EU institutions, national authorities and the UN have cooperated to improve European crime statistics. A major improvement in quality is the use of a common classification of crimes to compare crime figures among countries<sup>4</sup>.

The Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Belgium are among the countries with the highest number of crimes. Romania ranks 10th in Europe with 1.25 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. The European Union (EU) police recorded approximately 660,000 car thefts in 2017, which means that there was a decrease of 1.9% compared to 2015. Car theft decreased by 36% between 2008 and 2017, with downward trends in most EU Member States. Taking into account the size of the population, the figures for 2016 were the highest in Luxembourg, Italy, Sweden, Greece and France, with over 200 car thefts recorded per 100,000 people. Seventeen countries had less than 100 thefts per 100,000 people, the lowest being in Slovakia, Estonia, Croatia, Romania and Denmark<sup>5</sup>.

At the European level, according to police data, robberies fell by 24% between 2012 and 2017, to around 396,000 in 2017. Belgium, Spain, France, Portugal, England and Wales had the highest number of robberies recorded by the police (relative to the size of the population: over 100 per 100,000 people), while the figure was below 20 for Romania, the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Slovenia. Seventeen European countries had less than 100 thefts per 100,000 people, the fewest being in Slovakia, Estonia, Croatia, Romania and Denmark, according to Eurostat. Police recorded 1,334,000 burglaries from homes in 2017, which means that there was a decrease of about 1% compared to 2016. In other several EU member states a downward trend was recorded. However, Germany marked an increase by 5% in this respect, and France by 1%. In 2017, the number of burglaries registered by the police per 100,000 people varied considerably among the states of the European Union. Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg, France,

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[pentrudemocratie.org/legea/declaratia-universala-a-drepturilor-omului.php](http://pentrudemocratie.org/legea/declaratia-universala-a-drepturilor-omului.php), last accessed on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime\\_statistics/ro#de\\_omoruri\\_.C3.AEn\\_UE\\_.C3.AEn\\_2017](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime_statistics/ro#de_omoruri_.C3.AEn_UE_.C3.AEn_2017), last accessed on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.analizeeconomice.ro/2019/04/la-capitolul-infractionalitate-romania.html>, last accessed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

England, Wales and Italy had more than 300 burglaries per 100,000 people in 2016, while in Finland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Poland they were under 100. Finally, another statistic, namely the Global Peace Index, places Romania on the 24th place in the top of the safest countries in the world and on the 17th place in the top of the safest European countries<sup>6</sup>.

It should be noted that murder, rape and robbery are completely forbidden in all cultures of the world, except in wartime crimes against the enemy. (Giddens, 2010: 748-793)

Homicide is considered to be the intentional killing of an individual through murder, euthanasia, infanticide, or culpable homicide, excluding death from motor vehicle accidents, abortions, or assisted suicide. (Clarke, 2013:1-4)

It shouldn't be overlooked that crime statistics (available so far) are influenced by the diversity of legal systems in each country and at the same time (Rotariu, 2013: 13), the crime rate is considered to be higher, as the data recorded are those received from the police, and in many cases victims, for various reasons, do not report crimes against them to the police. (Clarke, 2013: 1-4)

To comparing the crime statistics across countries "should focus" on trends over time rather than on comparisons between countries. (Rotariu, 2013: 13) In this regard, by deepening the analysis of the data in a longitudinal manner, an attempt is made to establish the trends that the three countries analyzed had in terms of registered delinquencies.

A causal link cannot be established between the religious affiliation of a people and the tendency toward criminal behavior, even if we are tempted to believe that, to some extent, the constraint or spiritual freedom that religion has on the individual could influence delinquent behavior. So far, researchers have not been able to fully establish the reasons and causes that determine criminal behavior, but the socialization and educational level of individuals, financial situation and standard of living, but also the position in society are considered to be much more significant in determining criminal behavior than belief or unbelief in a deity. (Mucea, 2016:510)

Therefore, emphasis should be placed not only on the behavior of the various religious groups, but on the equality and religious freedom of each individual, thus promoting religious tolerance among the population within a state, but also between immigrants and different religion from that state. (*Ibidem*)

The discussion on religious tolerance gained even more importance with the wave of immigrants in Europe. Attempts are being made to find answers to questions concerning human security. These questions are on the minds of all who are thinking: how can migrants from the Middle East integrate into the European Community? The difficulty of integration is not necessarily given by their nationality, but by their religious affiliation. And the differences and cultural values between the migrant population and that Europe's stable situation is quite significant. This cultural difference (religious) is not a purely theoretical one, the cases of immigrant aggression against women in Germany have been very well known and intensely publicized, and their source comes largely due to cultural differences supported by Muslim beliefs. (Mucea, 2016: 511)

The problem worsens with the presentation and media coverage of these cases of violence or crime (especially robberies), and the population forms a preconceived perception of Muslim people, especially since attacks are frequently reported in the media terrorists carried out by Muslim extremists. (*Ibidem*).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.analizeeconomice.ro/2019/04/1a-capitolul-infractionalitate-romania.html>, last accessed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Acceptance of cultural and cultural diversity is still a challenge for the world's population, and this phenomenon has returned to the discussion throughout Europe and beyond, with waves of migrants heading for the continent due to the war with the expansion of terrorist groups around religious fundamentalism, and these organizations, such as the Islamic State, pose a threat to human security. This paper does not propose social intervention policies, but it tries to accept religious diversity by promoting tolerance at European level and in Romania in particular. Thus, in the present study it was tried demonstrating that a Muslim people, such as the Turkish people, do not have a higher homicide or robbery rate than a Christian people, such as the Romanian people. (Idem, 2016: 512)

Even if from the point of view of religious cultural diversity, tolerance is the key to coexistence between peoples, behavior of criminal origin, or whether it is robbery or murder, must not be tolerated, regardless of the causes underlying the perpetuation of this behavior or the beliefs, religious or not, that lead people to adopt such behavior. It is also not demonstrated that belonging to a particular religion or cult, legally accepted, is a determining factor in criminal behavior, behavior which can lead to a decrease in human security. (Ibidem).

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