

## *The State as a Protector of Traditional Religious Groups: the Case of the Slovak Republic*

### INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

The legal regulation of religious life in Slovakia is a unique case in Europe, one which can show the development of the relationships between the state and churches. Such an evolution demonstrates the formation of the “religious field”<sup>3</sup> within the transformation of the social and political system, mostly from state socialism to a market society.

The case of Slovakia is useful for describing the emergence of a separate “religious field” precisely because of the relatively frequent changes in the models of relations between the state and the churches, relations determined by Slovakia’s belonging to larger state formations that defined the role of religion in the state and society in different ways. Slovakia was part of the Habsburg monarchy until 1918, which, despite its various specificities, had been trying for a century or more to unify the previously different legal situations in the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the state.<sup>4</sup> Later, as part of Czechoslovakia, the Czech and Slovak parts sought a common model of regulation that would overcome some of the historical differences under the monarchy, but at the same time would be open to the realities of a republican and democratically formed state. Within the framework of the common Czechoslovak state, a single, completely new model of church policy was introduced in 1949 by the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This was based on the principle of nationalisation of the public and property functions of churches and religious groups, which came under the direct control of and dependence on the state (Law No. 217/1949), which was supplemented by direct financing of the salaries of the clergy and head administration of the recognised churches and religious societies (Law No. 218/1949).

In the period 1949–1989, this model created an egalitarian system of recognised churches that were under the control of the state authorities.<sup>5</sup> However, this system excluded from the non-autonomous religious field all religious groups not recognised by the state, which for this reason did not even exist for the state as groups of people of a common religious or ideological belief. Such examples of unrecognised churches were, for example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Unification Church.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, too, the existence of full religious freedom as a possibility of a free but collectively practised religious life cannot be said to have existed between 1949 and November 1989, even despite the constitutionally and legally guaranteed protection of individual religious rights (Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, No. 150/1948, Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, No. 160/1960). The third period of the common Czechoslovakia in the formation of relations between the state and the churches was the short period of transition from state socialism to pluralistic and liberal democracy, beginning with the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 and ending with the split-up of the federative state at the end of 1992. In fact, since 1993, the first historically independent formation of an independent religious field associated with the state independence of the Slovak Republic has

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<sup>2</sup> This study was carried out within the framework of project APVV-22-0063 “Reproductions of Religious and Worldviews Structures in Slovakia. A Hundred and Fifty Years of Change”.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Nešpor 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Tížik 2011; Tížik 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Beláňová 2016.

taken place. However, as will be shown, this process was not completely independent, but very much related to the previous systems associated with the existence of Czechoslovakia, and not only to the post-1989 period.

The process of creating a new socio-political regime (after November 1989), building a new state (since 1993) or a new identity of the state in the course of the transnational integration of the Slovak Republic can be analysed, at a distance of more than three decades, as a process of building a specifically new kind of cohesion and collective identity in a society that is constantly looking for the symbolic legitimization of its existence. The churches, especially the largest of them – the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia and the Evangelic Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans) in Slovakia – also played an important role in the creation of the character of the new state. Silvia Miháliková<sup>7</sup> has used the example of the Slovak Republic to show how periods of crisis and ruptures in the building of new political regimes are fertile ground for the reaffirmation or reconfirmation, or even the complete reconstruction, of political symbolism, public rituals and mythology that express the basic values of the community. A change in the legislative framework of social life not only suggests change, but it brings about change.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to tracing changes and ruptures, it is also possible to identify continuities and commonalities between successive systems, especially if the newly established republic is also formally the successor state of Czechoslovakia and emphasises the constitutional continuity between the two state formations.

In tracing the continuities and ruptures in the development of the legal order, one of the important areas currently often discussed is the problem of the relationship between the citizen, religion and the state. Religion has a very close relationship with law because, in addition to its ability to bind people into a community and to build deep social bonds based on the sharing of the same ideas about order, religion is also one of the fundamental sources of social values and norms, and one of the most effective tools for legitimising the social order.<sup>9</sup> Several other writers<sup>10</sup> consider churches as important public actors and as structures filling the gap between private life and the purely political sphere of the state. In the case of the analysis of changes in the nature of the state and society in Slovakia, it is important to take account of all three levels of social change: 1. the macro level of social institutions, 2. the meso-level of various public collective actors, and 3. the level of individuals' views and attitudes towards social processes and changes.

The aim of this study will be to answer three basic analytical questions, the answers to which can help us to understand the dynamics of change in state-church relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

1. What is the extent of the reproduction of fundamental structures of the religious field?
2. What are the changes in the structures of the religious field in Slovakia?
3. What is the role of the State in regulating the religious field?

## **RELATIVE STABILITY IN THE RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF SLOVAKIA**

The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally been the largest church in Slovakia. Historically Slovakia is not a Catholic country but can be considered as a religiously pluralistic society with a dominant Catholic Church. As can be seen in Table 1, there has been only one major change during the 20th century and except for the almost complete extermination of the Jewish people during World War II that is the emergence of a large group of people without any religious affiliation. In spite of this one very fundamental change, Slovakia retains approximately the same, i.e. stable, confessional structure.

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7 Miháliková 2005.

8 Tížik 2005: 59–89; Tížik 2011. On Relations between the State and the Church and Slovakia during the Last Century, also Čikeš 2010 or Moravčíková 2003; Tížik 2023; Tížik 2024.

9 Tížik 2011.

10 Casanova 1994 or Plichtová 2008: 1–9.

Table 1. Confessional structure in Slovakia 1900–2021<sup>11</sup>

SLOVAKIA (IN %)	1900	1910	1921	1930	1950	1991	2001	2011	2021
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH	68.26	69.5	70.9	71.61	76.2	60.43	68.90	62.00	55.80
GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH	7.06	6.80	6.46	6.42	6.55	3.39	4.10	3.80	4.00
EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION (LUTHERANS)	14.13	13.50	12.77	12.02	12.88	6.19	6.90	5.90	5.30
REFORMED CHURCH (CALVINIST)	5.45	5.40	4.80	4.38	3.24	1.57	2.00	1.80	1.60
JEWS	5.06	4.80	4.53	4.10	0.22	0.02	0.04	0.10	–
OTHER	0.04	0.06	0.29	0.00	0.00	1.30	2.06	1.40	3.00
WITHOUT CONFESSION	0.00	0.02	0.23	1.47	0.91	9.70	13.00	13.40	23.80
NOT SPECIFIED	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	17.40	3.00	10.60	6.50

Despite the gradual Christianisation of the public space and politics (or regardless of it) after 1989,<sup>12</sup> the religious, or rather confessional, structure of Slovak society developed differently. As can be seen from Table 1, during the last thirty years there was first a slight increase in the proportion of the Slovak population that claimed affiliation to a church (especially in the case of the large so-called folk churches), but in the second decade this proportion declined again.<sup>13</sup> The increase was visible rather in small registered churches than in traditional ones.

Although the results of the survey „Generations and Faith (GaV 2024)“ in the second half of October 2024 show a stable worldview and religious structure in Slovakia, but at the same time, however, it shows that there is growing support for the opinion that the state and religion should be separated in Slovakia (Graph 1). The survey confirms the results of censuses and shows a relatively stable distribution of the population in terms of church affiliation since the political regime change in 1989.<sup>14</sup> Despite the relative stability of the religious field after 1990, however, different trends can be seen in the view of the Slovak population in relation to churches. The same survey GaV 2025 shows a growth in secularisation tendencies between 2014 (survey DOS 2014)<sup>15</sup> and 2024, with a slight increase in the proportion of people who see complete separation as the optimal model of state-church relations.

11 Source: Tížik 2011; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (ŠÚ SR) (<https://www.scitanie.sk/obyvatelia/zakladne-vysledky/struktura-obyvatelstva-podla-nabozenskeho-vyznania/SR/SK0/SR>; last access: 22 August 2025).

12 Tížik 2011.

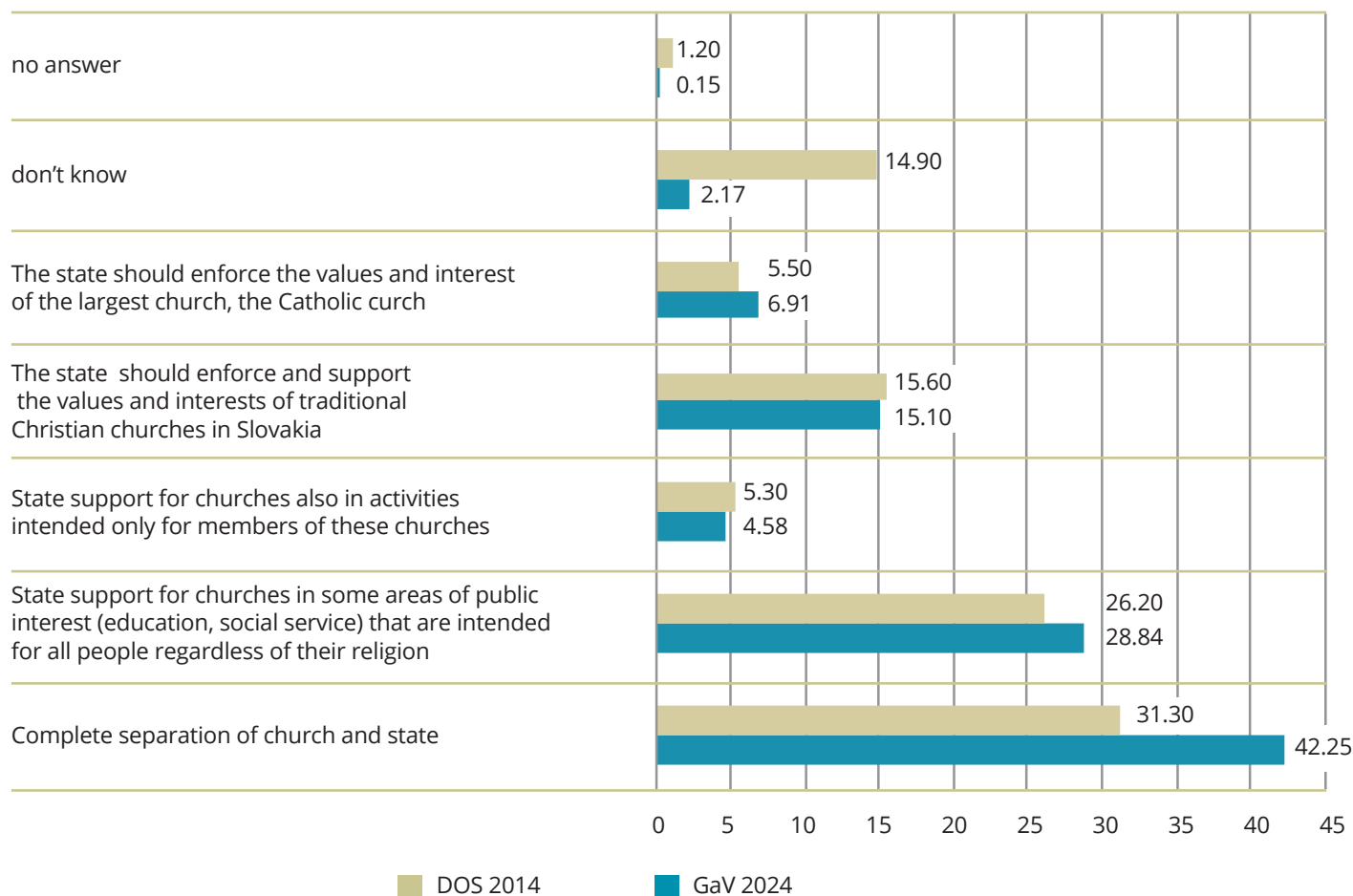
13 However, it should be noted that the survey methodology differs from one year to the next in the censuses. In 1991, the question was asked as an open-ended question, which resulted in fewer people claiming affiliation to a church or religious community and, conversely, more people not answering the question. For more detail on the methodological background to the measurement of religious affiliation in censuses and its effect on the results see Tížik 2014: 49–70.

14 Tížik 2025.

15 The results and dataset are available from the Slovak Archive of Social Data (SASD): [https://sasd.sav.sk/en/data\\_katalog\\_abs.php?id=sasd\\_2014003](https://sasd.sav.sk/en/data_katalog_abs.php?id=sasd_2014003) (last access: 22 August 2025).

**Graph 1: Attitudes towards state-church relations 2014–2024**

“WHAT SHOULD THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE LOOK LIKE?”



Similarly, the survey shows a growing tendency among the Slovak public towards the idea of a financial separation between the churches and the state in the form of self-financing by the churches, i.e. without using the tax allocation model. The willingness to support tax assimilation is relatively low, as is the practice of direct financial support for churches by the Slovak population.<sup>16</sup>

The public’s view of the relationship between the state and the churches is fundamentally in contrast with the actual development of that relationship. This contradiction raises a more fundamental question about the nature and extent of the influence of formal institutions, in this case laws and churches as formalised religious institutions, on the pattern of society-wide change.

### STATE POLICY TOWARDS RELIGION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1918–1992)

As indicated in the introduction, during the existence of Czechoslovakia, whose constitutional tradition the present Slovak Republic follows, there have been several phases and forms of relations between the state and the churches. Common to all of them was the guaranteeing of the legality of the largest traditional churches, but they differed in relation to small or new religious groups. In general, three distinct phases can be distinguished in this area:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Tížik 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Tížik 2023.

### **1. Centralised democratic Czechoslovakia 1918–1948.**

Churches were independent public bodies with the support of the state. The state both enabled and encouraged the religious pluralisation of society by recognising a number of new religious actors. At the same time, it was a period of attempts to unify different legal heritages: Slovakia with the tradition of a liberal Hungarian religious policy and the Czech lands with the Austrian tradition of state-church links (for example family law).

### **2. State socialist Czechoslovakia (1948–1989).**

Within this period there were two partly distinct phases:

a) Centralised Czechoslovakia (1948–1968)

b) Federative Czechoslovakia (1969–1989) with relatively autonomous national authorities overseeing the activities of churches, but under a single legislation.

There were basic features common to both of these phases: State control over the church, etatisation of property but financing the salaries and church administration.

### **3. A democratic federation (1989–1992)**

This period can be considered as the beginning of the existence of the “religious field”, which is related to the removal of state control over religious life and the adoption of legislation guaranteeing religious liberty. Even after this radical political change and the change in the status of churches in the state, the new religious field began to take shape on the basis of a significant continuity in legal relations with the period of state socialism. This continuity manifested itself in four forms:<sup>18</sup>

1. Two legislatively bonded but politically autonomous religious fields – Czech and Slovak – continued from the period of federalisation of the state in 1969.
2. Churches were within the competence of national authorities; the Ministries of Culture of the Czech Republic and of the Slovak Republic, which was a model inherited from the time of the socialist federation. In some cases, the practice persisted that non-traditional religious groups remained outside of any registration and registration with the state, while several took advantage of the newly created possibilities to register as a civil association and thus be part of the registration of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech or Slovak Republic.
3. The economic autonomy of churches was established by preserving the financing of churches from the state budget (salaries for the clergy) from 1949. The state distributes funds but does not interfere with or control their use.
4. The granting of legal status (recognition by the state) to all those churches that were recognised by the state as of 1 January 1990.

## **FOUNDATIONS OF AN INDEPENDENT RELIGIOUS FIELD IN A FEDERATIVE SYSTEM**

The differences between the two parts of the federative state were already evident during the revolutionary period in November 1989. In the Czech Republic the church played an important role as an actor of revolutionary change. Some members of clergy were at the forefront of protests, with public prayers in Prague on the Letná Plain. In Slovakia, there existed a strong civic element in protests. Protests did not include similar religious rituals and ceremonies, nor did they involve priests<sup>19</sup> as in the Czech lands, but rather only lay people from the so-called underground church. Among the twelve main demands of the civil public in the document Programme Declaration of the Public against Violence and the Coordination Committee of Slovak University Students of 25 November 1989 was also a demand for the “clear separation of the church from the state”.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Krapfl 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Tížik 2011.

The new legislation, gradually adopted between 1989 and 1992, was mainly concerned with the following basic principles:

- a. the abolition of state control over religion and the churches;
- b. the restoration of the legality of religious orders (especially Catholic orders) from the pre-1949 period;
- c. the creation of the status of recognised churches by a separate law;
- d. maintaining financial support for recognised churches (retaining the 1949 principle);
- e. declaration of the religious neutrality of the state in the 1992 Constitution of the Slovak Republic.<sup>21</sup>

The ambitions and aspirations of the new public actor that religion had become were supported by the many interventions and contributions of intellectuals and scholars who naturalised religion as an essential element of democratic society and created the conditions for the specific position of religion and the churches in society as useful and democratising actors.<sup>22</sup> The legislation created a new kind of education in the education system: it allowed for the establishment of private and religious schools of all levels alongside state (public) schools.

Two laws in particular were crucial in defining the principles (*doxa*<sup>23</sup>) that became the basis for the operation of the new field, namely the 1991 Law on Freedom of Religion and the Status of Churches<sup>24</sup> and the 1992 Law on the Registration of Churches.<sup>25</sup> The former created the *doxa* of the newly emerging field based on the principles of the largest Christian churches. The emerging model could be described as the church-Christianisation model of the religious field. The Church Registration Act created a system of both normal (i.e. registered or recognised) churches and religious societies and unregistered (unrecognised) religious groups.

A differentiating principle of the two types of religious groups was their inclusion on the agenda of two different ministries. The registered and state-recognised ones came under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, while all other unrecognised ones came under that of the Ministry of the Interior. Only the registered churches became part of the field in which the struggle for a forming *doxa* was taking place. Registered churches have a specific legislative status as legal entities with a specific position in the legal system of the Slovak Republic, with practical implications for their internal functioning, but also greater opportunities in relation to other institutions: tax breaks, financial support from the state, and the possibility to be present in the media and perform legal acts of marriage, and so on. Unregistered groups can only be civil associations with no religious activity and no specific status in the system of religious groups. By the wording of the Registration Act, they have in practice found themselves outside the religious field, and by the wording of the Citizens' Association Act,<sup>26</sup> which explicitly forbids civil associations from carrying out religious activities, unregistered churches and religious groups have been pushed out of the symbolic space of normality and legality in Slovak society.

During this period, a model of two categories of recognised churches emerged, with some (the majority) being financially subsidised by the state, while others are not. At the same time, there are significant differences in the approach of Czech and Slovak laws towards religious groups. While the Czech legislation supports and makes easier the pluralisation of the religious field, the Slovak one precludes the possibility for new actors to become a state-recognised religious group.

The adoption of the Constitutional Law of the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic No. 23/1991, which introduced the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms as the

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21 Constitution of the Slovak Republic from 3 September 1992 (including amendments: 244/1998 Coll., 9/1999 Coll.). In: Electronic collection of acts, [www.zbierka.sk](http://www.zbierka.sk) (last access: 10 December 2018).

22 Tížik 2011: 168–178.

23 As described by P. Bourdieu, for example in Bourdieu 1990.

24 Zákon o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení cirkví a náboženských spoločností 308/1991 Zb.

25 Zákon o registrácii cirkví a náboženských spoločností 192/1992 Zb.

26 Zákon o združovaní občanov č. 83/1990 Zb.

constitutional law of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, became important in the first period of the formation of the religious field in Czechoslovakia. It includes a declaration guaranteeing “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” as well as the right to change religion or belief or to remain without religion. Hradecký draws attention to the seemingly minor, but in its consequences fundamental, significance of the use of the word “faith” in the text of the document as opposed to the original word “belief”, used in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 3 September 1953. The use of the more narrowly understood term in post-revolutionary Czechoslovakia was also reflected in other guarantees, which specifically address only the protection of religious beliefs and give rights (including in the field of education) only to religious groups.<sup>27</sup>

These real and symbolic acts and legal norms have created a specific understanding of religion that is no longer associated with a broadly defined protection and promotion of a plurality of world-views, but instead there has been a restriction of the understanding of religion on a theistic basis, expressed in terms of an organised association in the form of a church or a religious community (although the distinction between the two concepts is nowhere legally defined).

During the existence of the Federation, no new church was recognised by the state after the adoption of this law. In the Czech Republic, 19 churches and religious societies (including the new registered group the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) were thus transferred to the new legal framework by adoption from previous system, i.e. on the basis of “traditionalism”; in Slovakia, there were 14 religious groups.

This general law was specified in 1992 by national laws which created frameworks for the possible registration of new churches or religious societies and which indicate a divergence in the approach to potential new actors in the religious field in both parts of the federation. In Slovakia, a much more restrictive law was adopted by the Slovak National Council at the same time and without any exceptions. (Law No. 192/1992) According to this law, 20 000 adults permanently residing in the territory of the Slovak Republic were required to declare their membership in order to register (which is four times more in proportion to the population compared with the Czech Republic).

The Federal Law on Religious Freedom and the national registration laws created the boundaries of what can be described as a state-recognised religious field, i.e., a precisely defined number of actors who become bearers of the legal designation of religion and who enter into relationships with each other and with the state in a number of legally defined areas. After a short period of building religious freedom, it created the basis for a system of limited religious pluralism. On the one hand, it allowed those affected by the law to benefit from the still applicable 1949 law on the financing of churches; on the other hand, it involved a number of additional rights that were defined only for recognised religious actors.

Recognised churches were also affected by laws allowing religious groups to enter the education and family law systems even in the first period of the formation of the religious field. Proof of the state’s friendliness towards recognised churches (but only towards them) was also the adoption of Law No. 234/1992 amending Law No. 94/1963 on the family (as amended by Law No. 132/1982), which replaced the previously existing and established form of compulsory civil marriage with an optional form based on the choice of either civil or religious marriage, both of which became legally equivalent.<sup>28</sup>

Although this period is connected with the existence of the federative Czechoslovakia, it laid the foundations of the state’s relations to religion, on which the independent Slovak Republic was built and later developed.

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27 Hradecký 2020: 119.

28 Čepíková 2001: 115.

## CREATING A CATHOLIC – EVANGELICAL ASYMMETRIC DUALISM

In Slovakia, after the establishment of the independent state, there was a legislative hegemonisation of the official religious field by the traditional actors, when the new registrations were not the result of legislation aimed at opening up, but rather just the use of the ambiguous formulations of the 1992 law, i.e. from the period before the complete closure of the religious field. A total of three major legislative amendments has taken place to date, two of which tighten the conditions for the recognition of religious groups by the state.

The first legislative amendment was the Law (No. 394/2000), which clarified the definition of a church by emphasising that it is an association of people with a religious faith and by adding the possibility for recognised churches to sign contracts with the state. In so doing, the law excluded non-religious groups from the possibility of registering as a church, although there is no definition of what constitutes a religion in the law. However, the law also contained another new element: it created the possibility for the state to enter into mutual cooperation agreements with churches. In so doing, the law changed the previously universalist understanding of the equality of churches recognised by the state to a selective one, where different groups could have different agreements (in content and kind) with the state.

However, two pieces of legislation were more fundamental to limiting the possibility of registration. In 2007 (Law No. 201/2007) it was reformulated when the original non-binding registration was redefined in relation to membership and the content and form of information about members was more precisely defined. Prior to the entry into force of this form of the law, two religious groups managed to register in 2007 – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Baha'i Fellowship. The New Apostolic Church, registered by the Ministry of Culture in 2001, was registered retroactively, still under the pre-1992 legal status. The representatives of the New Apostolic Church argued that they had obtained permission to operate in Slovakia (Bratislava) in the summer of 1989 and that this had been recognised by the Slovak Republic.

Despite the unprecedentedly strict conditions for registration in the Slovak Republic in the European context, these conditions were further tightened in 2017 (Law No. 39/2017) by increasing the requisite number of members of the registering church up to 50 000 members, citizens of the Slovak Republic. Even before this latest tightening of the law, problems arose in the practical exercise of their religion for some unregistered religious groups, based on non-Christian religious traditions. Deák cites as an example the interest of members of some Hindu-inspired religious groups in Slovakia in registering, even without financial subsidy.<sup>29</sup> Letvajová, in turn, recalls the restrictions of the municipal government in Bratislava, which refused to allow the construction of an Islamic mosque, but also mentions other restrictions on Muslims in Slovakia, who complain about the impossibility of legally observing their own rites when burying the dead or when marrying according to Islamic rules.<sup>30</sup>

A more fundamental change in the legal situation and in the ways of dealing with the relations between the state and the churches was related to the preparation of specific treaties of an international type between the state and the Catholic Church, represented by the Holy See as a subject of international law. In Slovakia, when a new anti-Mečiar government coalition came to power in 1998, negotiations got underway and in a very short time (in 2000) the Basic Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See was prepared and signed.

Only shortly before the actual adoption of the Basic Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See (No. 326/2001) by the Slovak National Council in November 2000 and its signing by the Slovak President in December of the same year, a small amendment (No. 394/2000) to Act No. 308/1991 on freedom of religion was adopted, which introduced the possibility of concluding individual contracts between churches and the state. This changed the previous provision of the law as universally applicable to all churches and allowed for specific relations between the state and individual churches.

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<sup>29</sup> Deák 2010: 89.

<sup>30</sup> Letvajová 2010: 118–119.

Although the Basic Treaty chiefly provided for the already existing rights of the Catholic Church, its character as an international treaty gave the Catholic Church in Slovakia specific protection and its binding force is higher than the validity of the laws issued by the National Council of the Slovak Republic. For a short period of time, this treaty gave the privilege to the largest Church in Slovakia of being the only one to have such a specific treaty. But its consequences for the Church's position were more significant.

First of all, it override the principles of a religiously neutral state in several areas. For example:

1. the state gave contractual preference to one of the many registered churches,
2. in contrast to the treaties adopted with other churches, it gave this one a specific and essentially unchangeable content by its international character,
3. the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic gave it a specific and essentially unchangeable content. Thereby shifting a statehood which had been built on Christian references to a Catholic one, especially by incorporating ten Catholic holidays into the system of free days in the Slovak Republic, by the commitment of the Church to teach the citizens of the Slovak Republic in accordance with the principles of Catholic doctrine, and by guaranteeing the possibility of exercising conscientious objection in accordance with the faith principles of the Catholic Church,
4. the state upon itself the obligation to finance Catholic education in Slovakia.

This basic covenant also included a commitment to adopt four other sub-covenants with a specific focus on several areas of the Catholic Church's activity:

1. in the armed forces,
2. in education,
3. on conscientious objection, and
4. on the financing of the Catholic Church.

At the same time, however, the form and, to a large extent, the content of the Basic Treaty became a model for a similar treaty with some of the non-Catholic registered churches, which, however, as churches that are not subject to international law could only sign presidential-type treaties. After the Basic Treaty, two of the four planned sub-treaties were signed between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See. The first was the Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See on the Spiritual Service of Catholic Believers in the Armed Forces and Armed Corps of the Slovak Republic (No. 648/2002), signed on 21 August 2002. The other treaty was the Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See on Catholic Education and Training (No. 394/2004). Treaties on conscientious objection and funding have not yet been adopted. On the basis of the Treaty on the Spiritual Ministry to the Catholic Believers in the Armed Forces and Corps of the Slovak Republic, another Catholic diocese was created, headed by its Ordinary (Bishop), whose appointment is the exclusive right of the Holy See, despite the fact that it is part of the Slovak Armed Forces, and it appoints military, prison and police chaplains to systematised, i.e. state-funded, posts in these branches of the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Justice.

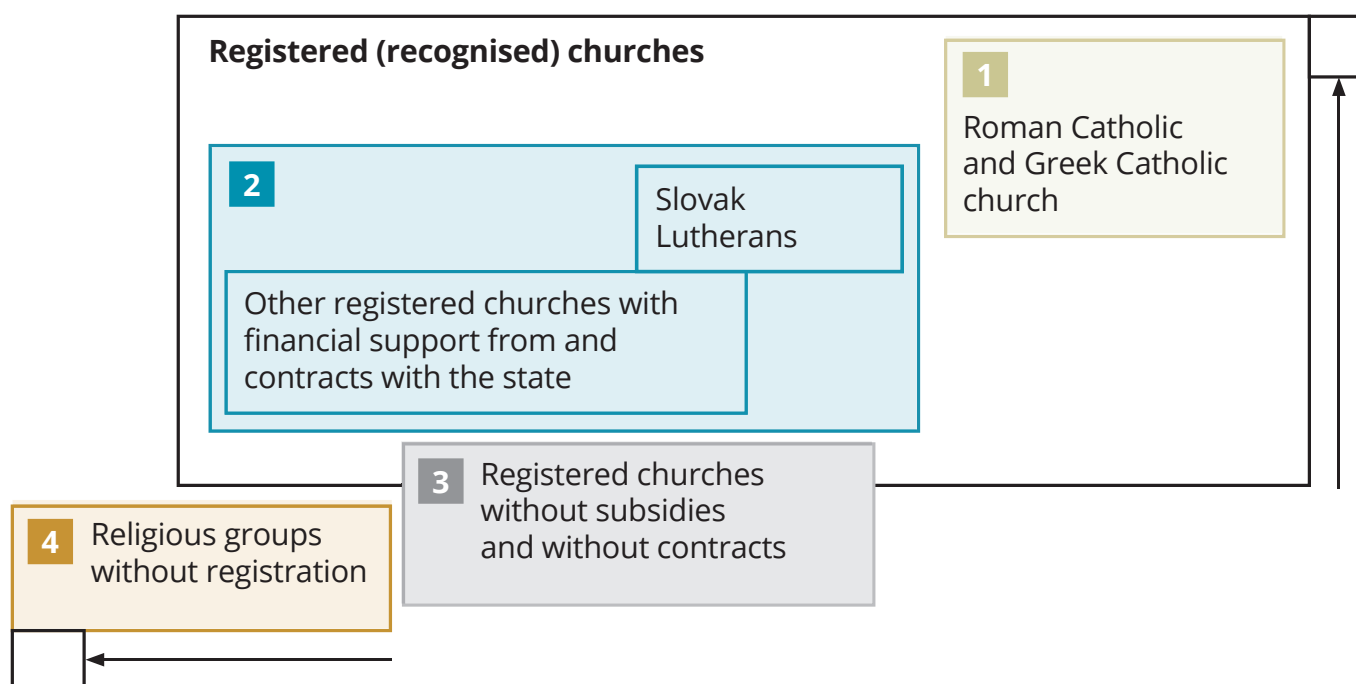
The possibility to enter into a special contract with the state created by the 2000 law was used by 11 other churches two years after the Catholic Church. However, since they do not have international personality, they concluded a treaty with the Slovak Republic in the form of a presidential treaty (No. 250/2002). An important difference from the Basic Treaty in this treaty is, for example, that they jointly refer to the common heading "registered churches", thus putting themselves in the position of spokespersons and advocates for the interests not only of the signatory churches, but, as it were, of all the churches registered up to then and probably also later. The enumeration of the rights of the signatory churches is essentially the same as in the case of the Basic Treaty, with the proviso that the actual terms of regulation are to be specified in various other lower-level regulations. An example is the right to religious education in state schools in the Slovak Republic: although this right is listed in the treaty in the same way as in the Basic Treaty, specific implementing regulations guarantee it only in defined cases, i.e. with a certain minimum number of registered children. Thus, in a country with many religious mino-

rities, this right is not enforceable in the case of small and scattered minorities, or in larger cities where non-Catholic religious minorities do not have enough children in each school and are scattered over several schools.

This 2002 agreement was followed by the agreements on religious education (No. 395/2004) and on the pastoral ministry to their believers in the Armed Forces and Armed Corps of the Slovak Republic (No. 270/2005), which also followed the principles of the sub-agreements between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See, but were signed later and entered into force two years later than the agreements of the Catholic Church.

As a result of the adoption of these treaties, a hierarchy of churches and religious groups in the broadest sense was established in Slovakia. The adoption of the Basic Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See in 2000 became the core of the new structure of the religious field, while subsequent treaties with other religious groups and sub-treaties have only consolidated this structure (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The religious field in Slovakia after 2000<sup>31</sup>



The Basic Treaty with the Holy See (and the two subsequent sub-treaties) also confirmed the privileged position of the Catholic Church by becoming a model for a similar treaty signed by the state with the majority of registered churches in Slovakia in 2002. The aforementioned subsequent series of treaties seemingly strengthened the non-Catholic principle in the religious field, but at the same time confirmed the Catholic principle in its dominance. The formal treaties with non-Catholic registered churches show that this is a carry-over of the model of the Fundamental Covenant signed with the Holy See (Vatican), thus confirming that the Catholic Church has become the source of *doxa* in the religious field.

In addition, the importance of religious actors in the symbolic world was also reflected in the growth of the volume of funds from the budget of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic earmarked for churches and religious groups. In the period 1999–2010 there was a 2.37-fold increase in the volume of funds, despite the economic crisis after 2009 and the resulting reduction in state spending on the public sector. There has also been an increase in the number of churches

<sup>31</sup> The symbols + expresses the amount of symbolic privilege and - expresses the degree of distance from the field of power. Source: Tížik 2023.

and religious organisations supported since 2005. Among them there are a number of entities which are not independent churches but are organisations of existing churches, especially Catholic churches (charities and religious orders).<sup>32</sup>

The situation in the years 2000–2012 in the Slovak Republic shows a gradual departure from the emphasis on the principles of religious and worldview freedom and neutrality of the state, and a trend towards a model of state restriction of the growth of religious and worldview pluralism.

## **CHRISTIANISATION OF POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE**

The fifth phase is the period since the spring of 2012, when the Catholic – Evangelical asymmetric dualism in the religious field was empowered and the influence of the churches in the internal political life of the Slovak Republic was further deepened (interference in the pre-election campaign, efforts to establish a historical research centre linked to the agenda of the Catholic Church, etc.). In May 2012, at the instigation of members of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic from several political parties, mainly those affiliated with the Catholic Church, an initiative was launched to establish an ecumenical chapel in the premises of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic.<sup>33</sup> The deputies started to organise prayers and joint religious lunches in the premises of the National Assembly. In 2012, there was also a symbolic struggle between the government and the churches to keep or abolish some of the religious holidays, which concerned mainly the Catholic and Evangelical churches. The government failed to implement its plan, partly because of the protection of Catholic holidays by international treaty and the reluctance of the Evangelical Church to agree to the abolition of Good Friday, which is, however, a holiday also recognised by the Catholic Church.<sup>34</sup>

The symbolic and legal privileging of Christian (especially Catholic and Evangelical Church) actors by the state at its inception and their incorporation into the symbolic character of the state has been steadily reinforced throughout the two decades. Their inclusion in the Council for Solidarity and Development, initiated by the government emerging from the spring 2012 elections, became an explicit expression of their proximity to power.<sup>35</sup> Of all the registered churches, only representatives of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Slovakia appeared on the Council, alongside employers' associations, trade unions and pensioners' representatives. The government thus elevated them to the status of representatives of religion as an important integrative and social actor in society and representatives of churches and religious communities in Slovakia. Similarly, at the beginning of 2019, the Catholic Church (and subsequently the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Slovakia, which represents most of the other non-Catholic churches in Slovakia, requested a similar status) was included in the draft amendment to the law as being among the subjects of public and state administration and self-government commenting on all draft laws submitted by the government to the parliament.<sup>36</sup>

## **INCREASED STATE FUNDING TO REGISTERED CHURCHES**

Probably the most explicit manifestation of the state's favouritism towards traditional religious actors is the financial support that the state gives, both directly and indirectly, to a large number of registered churches. This support has persisted even after the return of state-owned properties to the churches and exists in a modified form in the new law on church financing adopted in 2019. The new funding system also follows a law adopted in 1949, at the time of the Communist Party's rise to power in Czechoslovakia.

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32 Tížik 2011: 405–407.

33 Poslanci sa budú v parlamente pravidelne modliť. 2012; also, Bude v parlamente kaplnka? 2012.

34 Zrušiť štátny sviatok je ťažšie ako sa zdalo. 2012.

35 Rada solidarity a rozvoja SR. <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/rada-solidarity-a-rozvoja-sr/> (last access: 20 March 2019).

36 Levický Archleb D.: Pripomienkovanie zákonov za pomoci biskupov? Nový návrh legislatívy s nimi počíta. *Noviny.sk* 23 January 2019 (<https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/407194-pripomienkovanie-zakonov-za-pomoci-biskupov-novy-navrh-legislativy-s-nimi-pocita>; last access: 20 March 2019).

In 2019, a new Act on the Financial Support of Churches and Religious Communities (No. 370/2019 Coll.) was adopted. The content of this law ended the discussions on the financial separation of the state and churches and disconnected the issue of state funding of churches from the issue of restitution of church property. The principles of the new law fundamentally opened up the possibilities for the churches to dispose of their financial subsidies in comparison with the previously valid law of 1949. The new law maintained the model of direct financial contributions to those registered churches that request it, except for those that were already receiving a contribution as of the year of the law's adoption. However, due to the very strict registration law, it is effectively impossible to register a new religious group.

The second difference from the original law is the calculation of the amount to be allocated to specific churches. In the old model, the amounts for the churches were calculated on the basis of the sum of the salaries for the clergy and the costs of running the churches' administration (including other unspecified costs of providing for the needs of the clergy), so an important principle was the number of paid clergy in a given church. In the new model, the main distinguishing criterion for calculating the amount of the contribution is tradition, i.e. the amount of the endowment in 2019.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, unlike the previous law, the state no longer earmarks funding for churches. Churches can reduce the number of clergies without any consequences on the budget they receive; theoretically it does not even have to be used for clergy salaries. Churches have to submit an account to the Ministry of Culture on the use of the allocated funds. The law also allows for the possibility of reducing or increasing the total amount paid to churches and religious groups in the case of a decrease or increase in the number of registrants (although the law speaks of believers) in the census compared to the previous census. The law contains within it a hegemonic concept whereby the funding of all smaller churches is dependent to a large extent on the situation of the Catholic Church, whether the number of registrants increases or decreases.<sup>38</sup>

From the beginning of 2025, the methodology for calculating the state funding to registered churches changed. The new modified model further favours churches over other publicly funded actors. According to the Ministry of Culture, the aim of the amendment is to increase solidarity with smaller churches and to ensure better predictability and transparency in financing. Since the adoption of the new law in 2019, the amount of the state's contribution has been adjusted according to the inflation rate in the Slovak economy and the level of pay increases of employees in the performance of work in the public interest. These indicators are replaced only by the rate of increase of the minimum wage. According to Ministry of Culture this is a significant simplification of the calculation and provides greater predictability of the financial impact on the state budget, as this indicator is known annually already from the middle of the budget period. A further ten per cent increase in the total contribution will be distributed to churches according to the number of their believers according to the new law. In 2025, the state's contribution increased by 4.6 million euros, i.e. to a total of almost 64 million euros. In 2026 and the following year it will be close to 70 million and 79 million euros respectively. The amount of the state contribution is also influenced by the number of worshippers as determined by the official census.<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

As the analysis shows, we can identify five basic phases of the formation of the religious field in Slovakia over the last three decades, during which the character of the state has changed from a relatively religiously neutral stance to a model with a strong Christianising character. Parallel to the growing importance of churches in the state, there has also been a growing Christianisation of the political scene in Slovakia and its intertwining with religious content. However, the strengthening

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37 Tížik 2023.

38 Ibid.

39 Tížik 2025.

of the religious character of the state and politics is not accompanied by a growing religiosity. On the contrary. On the one hand, after a slight increase in people claiming and practising a religion at the turn of the millennium, this trend has reversed and there is a slight decrease in the proportion of such people in the population. At the same time, however, we also see a tendency towards the secularisation of the consciousness of believers and of religious practices in Slovak society.

Three basic conclusions can be drawn from the analysis:

Firstly, legal preservation of the status quo in Slovakia maintained the principles of favouritism of the biggest traditional actors by the state – churches legally operating since the period of state socialism.

Secondly, in Slovakia – until 2019 – the principle of identical rights for a narrow range of legal religious groups has been more strictly observed (partly so after 2019).

Thirdly, Slovakia is maintaining a strict cooperation model with the biggest of the churches (the Catholic church) as dominant.

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