

## **Letter against the Fusion of the Institute for the History of Religions with the Institute for South-East European Studies**

It saddens me to learn of the recent decision of the Romanian Academy to dissolve the Institute for the History of Religions (IHR) by merging it with the Institute for South-East European Studies (ISEES) in Bucharest. For almost two decades, the IHR has been the only academic institution in Romania devoted exclusively to studying the history of religions. Therefore, I am profoundly concerned that the planned dissolution will swiftly end the efforts of my colleagues to establish the history of religions as an independent academic discipline in the country. It's sad to see that the decision of the Academy not only disregards the significance of a field with a rich and enduring global tradition, but also risks irreversibly dismantling some vital components of Romania's own academic and cultural heritage, built by generations of religious scholars, from Moses Gaster to Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu. The long-term losses are thus profound and cannot be all foreseen.

To my mind, the integration of the IHR into the Institute for South-East European Studies would likely dilute its identity and resources. While no one can deny that the study of South-East European cultures is a vital field in its own right, it is far from being synonymous with the history of religions. These two disciplines have different methodologies and objectives that require separate institutional support to function properly. I believe that merging them into a single institutional entity would serve neither of them efficiently and would reduce the quality and scope of research in both fields. Furthermore, I am afraid that the proposed fusion will relegate the mission of the IHR to a secondary role within a broader institutional framework, which could undermine its ability to remain attractive to specialized scholars and secure international collaborations.

The proposed fusion would also have immediate and serious repercussions for Romania's academic reputation at the international level. In 2026, Bucharest is supposed to host the congress of the European Association for the History of Religions (EAHR) and the regional conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). This event is the largest scholarly gathering in the field, attracting participants from all over Europe and beyond. A merger of the IHR with any other institute would compromise its ability to organize such a complex and significant event, which will lead to both logistical challenges and reputational damage. Needless to say, the loss of the 2026 congress would not

only be detrimental to the Romanian academic community, but would also show a lack of commitment to supporting large-scale scholarly initiatives.

Unfortunately, it is difficult not to see the merger proposed by the Academy as symptomatic of a deplorable global trend: the undervaluation of the humanities in favor of disciplines considered more “pragmatic.” This perspective ignores the fundamental role of the humanities in developing critical thinking, communication, problem-solving skills, and personal development. Moreover, the marginalization of religious studies in Romania perpetuates the intellectual provincialism and isolationism that defined the country during the Communist era. Why should this happen precisely at a time when globalization requires us to be more culturally literate and historically aware than ever?

I urge the Romanian Academy to reconsider this decision, which undermines the role of the IHR as custodian of a substantial intellectual and cultural heritage. It is essential to preserve the Institute’s autonomy not only for Romanian scholarship, but also for promoting a more informed and inclusive society. The dissolution of the IHR would be a step backward, undermining decades of progress, and silence a crucial voice on the Romanian academic stage. Therefore, I firmly believe it is imperative for the Romanian Academy, public intellectuals, and society at large to recognize the unique values that this institution promotes and consequently act to safeguard its future.

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