



## CALL TO FELLOWS

### Balkan Summer School on Religion and Public Life The Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

July 26<sup>th</sup> –August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015

The 2015 Balkan Summer School on Religion and Public Life (BSSRPL) will be devoted to the theme *Conversion and the Boundaries of Community*. As with previous schools, it proceeds from the idea that religion and other forms of collective belonging are central for the life of both individuals and society, and that our religious communities are often those to which we devote our greatest loyalties. In our diverse but increasingly interconnected world, we need to find ways to live together in a world populated by people with very different political ideas, moral beliefs and communal loyalties.

The goal of the Summer School is to provide a laboratory for the practical pedagogy of tolerance and living with difference in a global society. Its focus is on religion as providing the fundamental terms of moral community and its aim is to produce new practices and understandings for living together in a world populated by “differences”.

The Balkan Summer School takes up this very real challenge and tries to critically define differences, especially communal and religious differences between people as the starting point of a publically shared life. Its basic aim is to help participants realize their prejudices and question their taken-for-granted assumptions of the other through the construction of a safe social space of exploration and interaction that includes an innovative mixture of academic teaching, experiential field experience (practicums) and affective engagement with the challenges of “living together differently”.

For centuries, the Balkans have been characterized by a diverse and complex mixture of religions, nations and ethnicities; of orthodoxies and heterodoxies, normative and subaltern beliefs, practices and ways of life. Within this mix, the issue of conversion has often been the touchstone of social tensions, violence and division – within and between ethnic, communities, and even families. The narratives of “forced conversion” have played a strong role in defining the identities of post-Ottoman nation-states in the Balkans. Contemporary conversions (to the so-called New Religious Movements, to and from Islam and



Orthodoxy) as well as the phenomenon (in the Balkans and elsewhere) of the “Sunnification” of Islam all make conversion as contested a move today as in the past.

Our 2015 summer school will explore the issue of conversion, (both religious and non-religious), in the Balkans and elsewhere. We will explore conversion in its legal, social, and religious aspects, as well as its place within families, as an aspect of gender identity and as a form of accommodating the power differentials in a given society. Inquiry into different forms of conversion as lived practice in the area of the Rhodope Mountains and the Thracian plain around the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv will serve as the sharp lens of our inquiry. Ultimately, however we shall be focusing on the experience of our own boundaries, preconceptions, lived practices, prejudices and preconceptions – to better appreciate how to live with difference rather than deny, trivialize or abrogate it.

Drawing on over twelve years experience of *CEDAR-Communities Engaging with Difference and Religion* ([www.CEDARnetwork.org](http://www.CEDARnetwork.org)) the BSSRPL seeks to bring together fellows from different walks of life and different religious and confessional communities, (as well as those who define themselves as members of no such communities and have no religious identities) to explore these themes together, in conditions of mutual respect and recognition. We look forward to an enriching mix of post-graduate students, professors, NGO leaders, journalists, religious leaders, policy analysts, and teachers from the area of the Balkans, Europe and beyond to join us for the two weeks of the school.

The BSSRPL combines more traditional academic lectures with field-work, practical, experiential learning and more affectively orientated forms of group learning; in a innovative approach to learning that goes far beyond the purely cognitive.

The successful candidates will be expected to fund their own transportation to Sofia, Bulgaria. The BSSRPL maintains a needs-based tuition policy and bursaries are available.

Please join us this summer in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Application forms can be downloaded and further information attained at:  
<http://logos.uni-plovdiv.net/en/web/logos.etn/bssrpl>