

Network Conference "Religious Identities in (Central and Eastern) Europe"

University of Passau, May 20 - 22 2026



Group photo of all participants *Source: University of Passau*

At the second network conference funded by PICAIS, established scholars and early-career researchers from numerous European countries gathered once again in Passau from 20 to 22 May 2026 to continue developing current projects and ideas in the fields of memory, identity, and religion. The group of 20 researchers was joined by representatives of the University of Passau's research funding department as well as doctoral students from the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague.

Organised by Sandra Huebenthal, Benedikt J. Collinet (Chair of Exegesis and Biblical Theology), and Thomas Wünsch (Chair of the History of Eastern Europe and its Cultures), the conference aimed both to present new research on identity and religion and to continue collaborative work initiated during the previous year's meeting. Ongoing initiatives include joint efforts to develop a Master's programme in the Caucasus region as well as work on an internationally oriented PhD programme in Passau that incorporates study visits abroad. In the field of research, several project proposals were discussed, and participants were also introduced to a practical report from the area of digital humanities, where colleagues from Pilsen and Passau cooperated. As in 2025, the programme once again included "open spaces"

designed to encourage informal discussion and networking. One important outcome of the conference was the decision to organise a further meeting in 2027, which will focus in part on securing external funding to ensure the long-term sustainability of the network.

The structure of the conference evolved organically into a chronological thread that invited participants on a multifaceted intellectual journey across Europe. Throughout the discussions, it became particularly clear how important it is to understand the different ways European societies engage with their socialist pasts, where historical wounds remain unresolved, and how the interaction of religion, politics, and culture shapes processes of coming to terms with the past, resilience, and the obstruction of possible solutions. The traditional conference format was complemented by interactive elements, including a poster exhibition introducing the participants, their institutions, and their projects, thereby fostering further networking and collaboration. In addition, five open spaces provided opportunities for focused discussions on specific projects and emerging networks.

Networks extending from Georgia to Belgium and from Ireland to Bulgaria demonstrate the crucial role of Central Europe as a meeting point for theological, humanities, and cultural studies research that transcends national borders. In this sense, the conference also contributes to sustainable peacebuilding through intercultural and international collaboration.

Further impressions and additional information can be found on the website of the Department of Catholic Theology at the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies, University of Passau (<https://www.ktf.uni-passau.de/en/translate-to-englisch-netzwerk-religioese-identitaeten>).

Benedikt J. Collinet und Sandra Huebenthal