The Christian Churches as Special Participants in European Integration

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Abstract

This article argues that Christian Churches should be regarded as special participants in European integration. The Churches embrace features of non-state actors and identity formers, and they take a unique stance as contributors to the initial stages of the integration process. In addition, Churches perform their functions within Church-State regimes - a phenomenon unknown to other actors in European integration. Overall, Christian Churches have established themselves as unique and influential participants in European integration and EU politics.

Keywords

Christianity; Churches; European Union; European integration

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND EU POLITICS HAS now become an important focus for research. A growing number of scholars are trying to decide how Churches should be seen, perceived and studied in the context of European unification (see Minkenberg 2009; Leustean 2009; Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006). This is certainly no easy task, not least due to the complex nature of the process of European integration, and the diversity of Christian Churches in Europe. An additional difficulty comes from the fact that Christian Churches are usually researched within a national context (de Vreese, Boomgaarden, Minkenberg and Vliegenthart 2009). Also, they are often perceived as regular non-state actors, embracing a specific feature or several specific features (say, as the interest-groups, lobbyists, organisations of civil society, etc.). One cannot, of course, deny that Churches are also studied as transnational actors, but this is often related to foreign policy and security analysis (see Fox 2001), where the main transnational actor taken into consideration, is Islam not Christianity (since Islam appears more politicised and more active on international arena). Therefore we need to find a more precise way of how Churches are incorporated in the process of European integration, and what we should expect from their involvement in EU politics.

The key argument, pursued in this article, is that Churches are special participants of European integration. In our view, it is not sufficient to study their role exclusively through the prism of NGOs, interest groups, lobby structures, etc. Churches stand out separately, embracing both regular and unique features, which make them distinct from other participants. This fact was noticed by Minkenberg (2009), but it is in need of further development.

This objective specifies the structure of the article. First, it is necessary to reflect on the main approaches towards the study of the role of Christian Churches. Secondly, we shall analyse how Churches perform their role as non-state actors and identity formers. Finally, we shall add other important features: their role at the initial stages of integration (historic role) and their existence within the specific Church-State regimes.

Churches in European integration: a contemporary approach

Although the number of publications on the role of Churches in European integration is growing, the pattern of agreement among scholars in this field is hardly identifiable. We can just encounter some contradictory approaches, forming the poles of perspectives. They reflect both the limited and increasing roles assigned to Churches, and the legalistic approach.

The limited role of Churches

Christian Churches (or religion in general) are at times assigned a rather limited role, with the emphasis that the impact of religion in Europe "[d]oes not change the usual rules of the game" (Foret 2009: 38). Even if the increase of the Churches' level of influence is noticed, this mainly happens, it is argued, due to the EU initiatives. The Union just looks for new methods and ways for legitimisation, which include the attempts to put citizens in the centre of the decision-making process and to improve the dialogue with civil society, including Churches. Francois Foret assumes that "[t]he European Commission proposes a strictly consultative role for churches" (Foret 2009: 39), which allegedly does not equip them with a realistic chance to influence decision-making. Consequently, a "major impact from churches on European policies and politics" is scarcely confirmed, in spite of the fact that "religious bodies have increased their presence in the supranational arena", mainly due to "interest representation" and "political mobilisation" in the European Parliament (Foret 2009: 39, 41).

Foret's perspective is partly echoed by Martin Steven, who insists that the EU is "[a]n inherently secular body with no mention of Christianity in any of its treaties or directives" (Steven 2009: 181). Still the integration process does not pass by Churches; it makes them more vulnerable to supranational institutions (via the increase of the latter's possibilities to interfere in the Churches' activities at the national level). European legislation often concerns Churches, and even if it refers to Churches indirectly (or accidentally), its influence is not necessarily marginal. Unlike Foret, Steven in his theorising does not substantially develop the idea that the role of Churches is constrained in the EU. He admits that they act, first, within some dimensions of the Church-State relations, exercising their influence on the voting behaviour and European values, and, secondly, as "[p]olitical interest groups, lobbying decision-makers on aspects of social policymaking which concern them" (Steven 2009: 183). While pointing out that no meaningful comparison can be drawn between religious lobbies in Europe and the USA, Steven does not argue that Churches "[a]re any less politically influential as a result of EU integration" (Steven 2009: 184). The problem lies in the assessment criteria, since it is very difficult, if not impossible to evaluate properly the effectiveness of interest-groups.

A legalistic perspective

Benoit Challand approaches the Churches-EU theme with more legalistic criteria, trying to identify the presence of religion in the EU legislation. The analysis of nine fundamental treaties of the European Communities and the European Union, leads him to conclusion that "[t]he question of religion is *not* a central topic at all in legal terms for Europe itself". In these documents the theme of religion appears only 15 times (in 755 pages). In almost all cases (14) it refers to the text of the European Constitution, including the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which mentions religious freedom and non-discrimination on the basis of religion (Challand 2009: 69). This allows Challand to argue that "[t]he collocation of Europe and religion is only a very recent construction" (Challand 2009: 66), and the increasing interest of the EU towards religion can be ascribed to pragmatic

reasons, where the desire to separate itself from Islamic neighbours (*i.e.* Turkey) plays a prominent role. The opinion of Valery Giscard d'Estaing (that Europe will lose its soul if it accepts a Muslim country) is a testimony to that (Challand 2009: 70).

However, the presence of religion in EU legislation does not need to always come in obvious and explicit forms. Keith Jenkins specifies that EU secondary legislation "[d]irectly refers to and impacts on religion in many areas of law, including non-discrimination, labour law, data protection, culture, media law, animal welfare, cooperation, finances, customs, and economic law" (Jenkins 2005: 77-78). For example, issues relating to the economic competence of the Union acquire a religious dimension when they refer to the export of cultural goods, the statistics on income and living conditions in different institutions, including monasteries, etc. (Doe 2009: 149). Norman Doe even develops the concept of a "European 'common law' on religion", which includes eight fundamental principles (value of religion, subsidiarity in matters of religion, the principle of cooperation (dialogue with religion), religious freedom, the autonomy of religious associations, religious equality (non-discrimination), the principle of special protection of religion, and the principle of religious privilege) (Doe 2009). The religious organisations are also exempt from some regulations of non-discrimination directive, since they are allowed to introduce requirements for religion or beliefs of prospective employees (Doe 2009: 152-153). Doe (2009: 157) concludes that:

> [a]n examination of its laws and other regulatory instruments reveals the posture of the EU in terms of its own church-Union relations. The details of its laws indicate that the Union shares characteristics most in common with the so-called cooperationist model of church-state relations, though the language of separation is also employed; however, the Union is not a state-church system.

An increasing role

Contrary to the negative approaches, Lucian Leustean observes the increase of the level of importance of religious issues in the EU, even though the "[c]ontacts between European institutions and religious communities have officially been made relatively late in the life of the European Community" (Leustean 2009: 167). The turning point appeared at the Treaty of Maastricht, with the prominent role of the Jacques Delors initiative on the cooperation between Churches and the EU, known as the "Soul for Europe project" (see Silvestri 2009 for more detail). At present, according to Leustean, the Commission is open for dialogue with the religious communities, with the likelihood that the benefits from this dialogue will be mutual. He observes that

> [o]n the one hand, religious communities are gaining legitimacy and are becoming more assertive in influencing the agenda of European institutions, particularly on transnational issues. On the other hand, religious communities encourage the European Union to become a world player, rather than to remain a regional one (Leustean 2009: 174).

Thus, there are three main sets of ideas, emanating from various approaches of scholars who analyse the role of Churches in European integration. First, the presence of religion is confirmed by EU legislation. Secondly, Churches exercise their influence in different formats, including the ones of the interest groups and lobbyists. Finally, the role of Churches becomes more visible and important after the Treaty of Maastricht, and the cooperation between Churches and EU institutions is beneficial to both sides. These ideas, reflecting certain aspects of the Churches' activities, do not provide a comprehensive vision of the Churches' involvement in European integration. In our view, they also do not fully reflect the Churches' character. Therefore we need to identify their unique, special and multifold role in the process of European integration, which mirrors the nature and

specific features of Christian Churches. This brings the issue of Churches as non-state actors on the first point in our agenda.

Churches as non-state actors

There is adequate literature, where Churches are studied as non-state actors in different formats—interest groups, lobby groups, pressure groups, NGOs, etc. (see Djupe 2009; Warhurst 2008). Noting that in different cases various features of Churches are revealed, we need to see how these specific features are uncovered in the course of European integration. This poses a key question: to what extent religion is relevant to European society. Indeed, if its role has largely diminished (as suggested by some scholars—see Voas 2009), than the role of Churches will be reduced to the minimum. On the other hand, the greater role of religion presupposes the higher importance of Churches.

Religion in politics and society

We need to sketch first how religion can in principle be incorporated in politics and society. In our context we mean European society, and, speaking about religion, we denote Christianity, since Christians are in the overwhelming majority in the EU. Normally, we encounter the two opposite approaches, with religion being deliberately ignored (suppressed) or adequately recognised (promoted).

Indeed, in liberal secular circles the need for the strict separation of religion and politics is normally postulated. The "privatization of religion" is viewed as the "central functional conditions for liberal democracy" (Minkenberg 2007: 890). Hilarion Alfeyev even writes about the desire of the "modern humanism" to put religion in a ghetto, to exclude it from society and to minimise its influence on the people, especially on youth (Alfeyev 2006). Thorleif Pettersson (2007: 233) points out that a "privatised religion" is excluded from public and political issues:

> [s]ome assume that the differentiation between religious and secular institutions have led to a privatized religion which has remained relevant to personal and private matters. Religion is assumed to have been transformed and to have become increasingly assigned to the home—family life, love, and intimacy—and to have become a matter of individual and private taste (see *e.g.* Turner 1991, 2000). Such a privatized religion does not concern itself with public and political matters.

On the other hand, the privatisation of religion is viewed as a negative phenomenon, which is not compatible with the principles of democratic state. Michael Minkenberg argues that "[t]he democratic state must guarantee the free exercise of religion in the private realm and the opportunities for religious communities to promote their values in public (Stepan 2000: 39). From this follows that all religious communities must have the right to form political parties […] It also follows that this principle is compatible with all kinds of institutional Church-State relationship" (Minkenberg 2007: 891). We could, in principle, expect the dominance of the first approach in highly secularised societies, where Churches are indeed put under pressure to leave the political/public space. This is applicable to some EU member states, but cannot be extended to the whole EU. We assume that the secularisation trend in the Union is not as great as to allow the dominance of anti-religious ideologies and the pushing of Churches to the private area.

Secularisation in the EU

It is not uncommon to hear that Europe is going through a process of rapid secularisation. As Loek Halman and Veerle Draulans (2006: 263) state, "[t]he sharply declining levels of church attendance in Europe are often regarded as evidence that this part of the world is being secularized". Franz Hollinger, Max Haller and Adriana Valle-Hollinger (2007: 133) argue that "[i]n Europe religious institutions have lost much of their former influence and religious practice and belief have both declined in the course of the twentieth century". David Voas claims that religion in Europe is in decline, with the appearing of the phenomenon of "fuzzy fidelity", when people can keep loyalty to tradition, without being regular church-goers (Voas 2009: 161,167).

Interestingly, the "death of religion" was a sort of "conventional wisdom" of social sciences in most of the 20th century (Inglehart and Norris 2004: 3). Hans Knippenberg (2006: 261) writes about "a dramatic decline of religiosity" in all aspects, including the belief, Church membership and Church attendance, with the traditional Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches as the main victims. Europe has been regarded as a model of the secularisation process, which implies that the presence of religion diminishes in everyday life and the sacred "[e]ventually becomes socially and politically marginal" (Haynes 2010: 3). Although the secularisation hypothesis remains popular, we do not see substantial evidence that Europe (or the EU) is turning into a kind of atheistic superstate. In fact, the diversity of the EU member states and the complexity of the process of secularisation do not allow to indicate any trend applicable to the EU at large. Halman and Draulans (2006: 264) agree that "Secularization may well be a European phenomenon, but this does not imply that Europe is homogeneously secular". Indeed, the countries of Western Europe diverge considerably in religious matters, with religious participation higher in the Southern Catholic parts and lower in Northern Protestant (Pettersson 2006: 232). Jonathan Fox mentions two different concepts of secularisation (when people become less religious, and when the influence of religion declines, due to the moving of religion from the public to the private domain), but he admits that there is no agreement that this process is happening (Fox 2001: 56). We can hardly find a European society where Christianity has become a purely private matter and Churches are completely deprived of any voice or have totally lost the ability to exert an influence. Even in France, traditionally regarded as one of the most secularised countries in the EU, political leaders have begun to speak openly about the increasing importance of religion. In spite of some secularisation developments, we cannot claim that religion has been banished from the political sphere (Knippenberg 2006: 254). Moreover, even if religion moves to the private sphere, "[i]t continues to influence policy because many modern ideologies that influence policymaking have religious origins […] Such influence is often indirect but nonetheless important" (Fox 2001: 65). Fox reminds us that religion influences people's views, "their perception of events and their actions" (Fox 2001: 59), including, of course, the views of the policy-makers.

Rodney Stark assumes that the secularisation doctrine is not applicable to the EU as a whole, especially if it refers to the level of religiosity. According to him, "[t]here has been *no demonstrable long-term decline in European religious participation*" (Stark 1999: 254, emphasis in the original). Participation has changed from time to time, but it was low in western and northern parts of Europe many centuries before the 21st century (Stark 1999: 254). With the undermining of the secularisation doctrine, there is no reason to expect that Churches will be hidden in a ghetto or locked into a "private space". Even in more secularised societies Churches can find their way to exert an influence and the chance not to be fully excluded from the public space. Jürgen Habermas (2008: 20) offers the following explanation:

> I am thinking here of the fact that churches and religious organisations are increasingly assuming the role of "communities of interpretation" in the public arena of secular societies. They can attain influence on public opinion and will formation by making relevant contributions to key issues, irrespective of whether their arguments are convincing or objectionable. … Be it the dispute over the legalization of abortion or voluntary euthanasia, on the bioethical issues of reproductive medicine, questions of animal protection or climate change—on these and similar questions the divisive premises are so opaque that it is by no means settled from the outset which party can draw on the more convincing moral intuitions.

Therefore nothing prevents us from discussing in more detail how Churches are incorporated in EU politics as non-state actors. This is especially meaningful, because religious actors are sometimes regarded, together with transnational NGOs and business corporations, as "[o]ne of the most important players (Badie, Smouts 1999; Josselin, Wallace 2001)" (Centre for European Studies 2009: 25).

The role of Churches as non-state actors

First, we need to mention that all three confessions (Catholic and Orthodox more, Protestant less) are well represented at the EU level (see Leustean 2009). The Christian organisations in Brussels play a twofold role: they inform their leaders about the main developments in the EU, and try to influence the decision-making process (Jansen 2000). In the latter case, they seem to be operating like other organisations of civil society, but this similarity is not as great as one might suppose. One of the differences, highlighted by Thomas Jansen, is related to the scope of the areas of work. On the one hand, the organisations, which represent economic, social and cultural sectors, are more worried about specific EU policies, within the competence of one of the Directorate-Generals. On the other hand, the concerns of Churches and religious communities "[a]re more general and based on the ethical and moral aspects of European unification and European policy", therefore their dialogue with the European Commission is aimed more at the meaning, spiritual direction and ethical dimension of European integration and related policies (Jansen 2000: 104). Consequently, the European Commission values Churches as, in the first instance, those partners which may assist "[w]hen it comes to weighing up the ethical dimension of the process of European unification and giving it meaning and identity" (Jansen 2000: 104).

Having said that, we do not need to assume that the role of Churches is limited to some broad and ethically-based issues. At times Churches need to be more specific and even to defend their interests or the interests, originating from their moral and social doctrines (especially if the EU elaborates legislation related to these doctrines). According to Jenkins, this requires Churches "[t]o behave much more like the traditional industrial lobby groups which surround the European Institutions, becoming closely involved with the detail of the legislation rather than acting as advocates for broad general principles" (Jenkins 2005: 81). Therefore Churches need to establish contacts with the MEPs and relevant divisions of the European Commission, and to organise lobbying of their governments. They need sometimes to persuade other actors that the decisions, supported by Churches, reflect some general concerns, but not the Churches' interests only.

The methods of Churches

The methods that may be in use by Churches are similar to the regular methods of non-state actors. First, this can be direct or indirect lobbying, used with the help of different organizations or individuals. The second method includes political mobilization, especially among parishioners, and more active influence on the formation of public opinion. Robyn

Driskell, Elizabeth Embry and Larry Lyon indicate that "Clergy and religious leaders can send messages politically mobilizing church members (Guth *et al.* 2003) and organizational skills learned in the church can extend to subsequent political participation" (Driskell *et al.* 2008: 296). David Martin outlines three ways of how Churches become actors in the public sphere: mobilising political parties, acting as pressure groups and using their resources in order to contribute to the solving of social problems (Summary 2003).

Mobilisation is a particularly strong method in countries where the trust in the Church is significant, and where either the masses can be mobilised easily, or influential political groups are willing to act in accordance with the Church recommendations or requests. The mobilisation of the masses is useful to form strong public opinion, with which the government, claiming to be democratic, cannot deal formally. Surely, the public opinion is a changeable thing, as especially demonstrated in the referenda on important EU issues, but even these changeable instruments can be efficient in forcing governments to make decisions which are not possible otherwise. As Zsolt Enyedi (2003: 228) sums up,

> [i]n spite of the high risks involved, churches often engage in political and partisan struggles. One likely explanation, often overlooked by rational choice approaches, is that churches have other goals than that of preserving their 'market position' or increasing their 'market share'. Often these other goals are strictly political. Clergymen are also political beings, with secular political preferences. In the democratic era, the ability of churches to put pressure on the state depends to a large extent on how skilled they are in mobilising public opinion.

Christof Mandry explains that the Churches (or, better to say, the governing bodies of the Churches) possess adequate resources to operate and to shape public political debate. "The decisive question, however, is how far they succeed in activating allies and influencing neutral third persons", which, in its turn, brings to the surface the mobilising potential of the religious theme itself, *i.e.* the reflection on the relationship between (political) identity and religion (Mandry 2009: 279). One can point out that "organised Christianity" has indeed established itself as "[a]n important, publicly recognized, legitimate interlocutor in the institutional space of the EU" (Schlesinger and Foret 2006: 60), but this establishment is not necessarily a guarantee of success. Rather, the real level of success is dependent on the mobilising potential of the theme, chosen and advocated by the Churches themselves and those acting on their behalf, and which often involves identity-related issues. The correlation of Christian Churches and identity underlines their additional distinct feature.

Churches and identity

The role of Churches as non-state actors reflects one of the aspects of the Churches' participation in European integration. Although not defining their unique character, it paves the way for the consideration of additional aspects. These aspects are related to the historical role of Churches and the issue of Churches and identity.

The relevance of identity to European integration is broadly accepted and is normally learnt through the national and European identities (see Caporaso and Kim 2009; Carey 2002; Cram 2009; Mayer and Palmowski 2004; McLaren 2004; Risse 2003). Therefore in order to reveal an additional feature of the role of Churches in European integration, we need to look at their possible contribution to the formation of both national and European identities. Arguably, the question of "[w]hether Europe can be at least partly defined as a community of values and identity by virtue of its Christian past is a matter of long-standing

debate" (Schlesinger and Foret 2006: 59). But we are more inclined (in agreement with Enyedi) towards the viewpoint that defines the European continent in this way:

> [n]ational identity, particularly on the peripheries of Europe, is often built around religious values and is linked to church-state regimes as well. Churches provide rituals, unity, and identity for community builders even in the modern world (Enyedi 2003: 223).

Since religion is regarded as a part of identity (see Korostelina 2003), Churches are able to contribute directly to the process of identity formation. This is especially true for the areas where religion is an important part of everyday life. Certainly, this contribution is determined by European history, by its distinct features, which demonstrate the meaningful role of Christianity. Indeed, Europe was not created from nothing, nor did it appear as a result of random coincidences. Rather, we can suggest that Europe achieved the status of a continent because it was marked by Christian values and Christian faith.

Christian identity and the EU

One may argue (see Schlesinger and Foret 2006) that the proposition of Christian identity for the EU is not an easy thing. This is normally explained by the denominational diversity of Christianity (*e.g.* no unity) as well as by the fact that "[E]uropean history can hardly be written without acknowledging the centuries-long interplay between Christianity, Judaism and Islam" (Schlesinger and Foret 2006: 60). But the opposite approaches look more plausible. For example, Casanova describes Christianity as a "central component of the personal identity of many Europeans" (Casanova 2006: 82). According to Daniel Nexon, "[s]ignificant aspects of European identity are tied to a long history involving the consolidation of Latin Christendom as a political-religious community" (Nexon 2006: 256). Nexon describes in detail the various events of European history, in which Christianity was a meaningful contributor and participant. Augustin Jose Menendez (2005: 186) explaining the views of Joseph Weiler on that matter, emphasizes that:

> [n]ot only is Christianity the religion which has marked most deeply the identity of Europe and Europeans, but it is also the faith at present shared by the largest number of Europeans… [O]ther believers should acknowledge that their identity as Europeans is profoundly marked by Christianity nonetheless.

While acknowledging the difficulties surrounding the idea of Christian identity for the EU, we do not see any profound reasons for rejecting this idea altogether. Christianity should be given the leading role for the following reasons. First, in spite of the presence of other religions in Europe, Christianity has always maintained the status of the most powerful and influential faith. Christianity either gave birth to or made an outstanding contribution to the formation of European culture, literature and science. Monasteries were the centres of scientific research and important educational establishments. Christian architecture, embodied in magnificent Cathedrals and public buildings, became a constituent part of European cities. Many emperors, especially after the fourth century AD, were devout Christians for whom the Gospel values played a very important role. The mood of that time could be discovered through the words of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who wrote to one of the emperors: "You rule with Christ, and you command with Christ. So you should imitate God's love of man. This is the most divine feature of man, namely to do good″ (Christodoulos 2003). As it is also emphasised in one of the statements of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece: "Europe cannot, and should not forget that its spiritual foundations lie in the Gospel of Christ" (Church of Greece 2003). The foundation of Europe on the basis of the Gospel formed some of the distinct features of Europeans. The fact was admitted by Paul Valéry:

> [t]he European person is not determined by his race, language and nationality, since Europe is the motherland of many languages, nationalities and traditions. The European is whoever belongs to a people that has embraced the Roman rule of justice, has comprehended well Greek education and has accepted and assimilated *Christian teaching* (Valéry in Christodoulos 2000, emphasis added).

Apart from this direct contribution, one should bear in mind the existence of the indirect contribution to the process of identity formation. This is connected with values as a parameter of identity. Indeed, values are related (at least partly) to religion, and there is a well grounded viewpoint that "[t]he identity of individual Europeans, and of Europe as a Union, continues to be heavily influenced by Christian values" (Weiler in Menendez 2005: 185).

Values in Europe

In the Europe of today one can observe the existence of two sets of values: secular and religious. They are in conflict with each other; this clash of values is the reflection of the desire to construct a certain type of European identity, based on either religious or non-religious dimension. Speaking about Christian values in their application to Europe, we need to emphasise that they are, by and large, conservative ones, not eroded by the modernist trends found within some Christian factions. These values contain a clear moral and ethical message, where, *inter alia*, the family is seen as the union between man and woman, human life exists and should be protected from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death; honesty, chastity and mutual help should be promoted, rather than criticised or even mocked. However, these conservative values are contested by European secularism (Alfeyev 2006).

A clash of values becomes the everyday reality of the contemporary EU. In this clash most Churches take a clear stance: as the defenders of conservative Christian values. In fact, this ongoing clash of values in the EU often leaves no other option than to encourage the active participation of Churches on one of the sides of the conflict. For Churches, it is very important to ensure that those values that will be laid at the foundation of European identity will not promote a secular vision of the EU. Logically, Churches see themselves as the defenders and promoters of certain values and lifestyle not only because of their theological doctrines and inclinations of moral theology, but also out of a desire to contribute to identity formation. The type of values defended by Churches correlates with their respective theological doctrines. Thus, Churches made their way into the process of European integration, becoming the identity formers and influencing the debates on both European and national identities. This adds an important feature to their special participation.

Christian Churches at the beginning of integration

One more issue, which must be considered in relation to the unique character of the Churches' presence in European integration, is the role of Christianity/Churches at the initial stages of the integration process. This issue remains disputable, since a degree of involvement of Churches and the level of their influence at the creation of the European Community is a matter for discussion. For example, Leustean (2009: 165) admits the influence of religion (through Christian Democratic parties) on the establishment of the European Community, but claims that "[w]ithout the political support of other parties, the ratification of the treaties of Paris (1951) and Rome (1957) would not have been possible".

Speaking about Churches (in the plural), one should realise that the main role is normally given to the Roman Catholic Church (or the institutions which reflected the values and

ideas existing in the Roman Catholic Church). Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah state that "[t]he Catholic Church actively inspired, promoted, and shaped European integration", while other Churches "[p]layed a relatively weak and sporadic role in promoting and shaping European integration" (Philpott and Shah 2006: 51). The contribution of Churches is usually discussed via the role of Christian Democratic parties at the initial stages of the integration process (see Madeley 2010) and the Christian convictions of the "founding fathers" of the European Community. These are the two main points, which are worthy of further attention.

Integration as a Christian Democratic project

In principle, many scholars agree on the substantial contribution of the Roman Catholic Church at the initial stages of European integration, which was even "sanctioned by the Vatican" (Casanova 2006: 66). The Vatican (and the Catholic Church more broadly) were closely connected with the Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe. Bryan Hehir (2006: 103) underlines:

> [t]he EU is built on the EC and the EC was powerfully influenced by Christian Democracy, a political movement but one directly rooted in Catholic social thought and close collaboration with the Holy See's role in postwar Europe.

Timothy Byrnes (2006: 292) states that the EU was "powerfully shaped by Catholic social teaching". From those founding fathers of the EC, who were devout Catholics, one can name French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Italian Foreign Minister Alcide de Gasperi. Schuman believed that the project of European unification "cannot do without the inspiration of its Christian sources". As he also emphasised, "Europe is the implementation of a universal democracy, in the Christian sense of the word" (Schuman in Vanheeswijck 1997: 50). Rocco Buttiglione states that "faith in Jesus Christ [was] at the centre of the life of Alcide De Gasperi" (Buttiglione 2006 in Venneri and Ferrara 2009: 121). According to Stefano Trinchese, the tendency of de Gasperi to make "constant reference to the holy texts as an element of salvation constituted the main features of his actions, especially in moments of pain and uncertainty" (Trinchese 2006 in Venneri and Ferrara 2009: 122). Linda Risso notes that the Christian Democratic parties of post-war Europe "[b]ased their political programme on the radical view that western civilisation was embedded in Christian values and that it needed to be protected both from the seduction of modern lifestyles and from the even greater dangers of communism" (Risso 2009: 100).

Pope Pius XII, who was head of the Catholic Church from 1939 to 1958, as early as 1948 "[d]eveloped the theme of a possible European Union" (O'Mahony 2009: 182). Peter Pavlovic indicates that the main aim of integration was to prevent a new war in Europe and to reconcile two old enemies—France and Germany (Pavlovic 2007). Economic cooperation was just one of the methods of reaching the objective mentioned, but not the main objective itself. James Barnett insists that "The origins of the European Union in the Coal and Steel Community were related to the ideal of reconciliation. The implications have always been both economic and political" (Barnett 2005: 28). This fact, which was quite obvious in the early 1950s, is rarely remembered nowadays, although it allows to understand better and to see the presence of Christian (mainly Catholic) aspects at the birth of the united Europe after World War II. Indeed, it is not accidental that in the early 1950s Protestants and Social Democrats often viewed European integration "[a]s a Catholic conspiracy of conservatives, an ideologically tainted attempt to revive clerical politics as a hand-maiden of big business, orchestrated by the Vatican" (Katzenstein 2006: 17), while Catholics were supportive of the project (see, for example, Boomgaarden and Freire 2009). Whatever the truthfulness of this "conspiracy" claim, it underlines nonetheless

that it is impossible to put Christianity aside and to ignore the meaning and contribution of Churches at the initial stages of the process of European integration.

Church-State regimes as an additional factor

We have now identified the main features of the unique stance of Christian Churches in European integration. First, their role is seen at the initial stages of the process. Second, they embrace the features of non-state actors, using some similar methods to achieve their aims. Third, Christian Churches make their contribution to the formation of both European and national identities. There is one more feature which adds to the uniqueness of Churches and, at the same time, allows us to assess their possible degree of involvement in European integration and EU politics. This is the existence of such phenomena as Church-State regimes. Indeed, no other actor of European integration embraces this unique and distinct feature, peculiar to Christian Churches only.

Church-State relations in the EU

We need to mention that there is no EU-wide model of Church-State relations. Cooperation between state and Churches remains a sole competence of the EU member states. Therefore the diversity of relations between Church and State in the EU led to what Grace Davie has called a "bewildering variety" (Davie 2000). Some scholars (Leustean 2008) argue that "Church-state relations form the basis of contact between religious and political actors at both national and supranational level. They are at the very core of overcoming social differences and influencing the architectural evolution of the European Union" (Leustean 2008: 248). As Leustean (2008: 247) also explains, "[t]hese relations have deep historical roots and are moulded on the national differences of religious and political realms".

Enyedi (2003: 226) maintains that peculiarities of Church-State relations "affect three types of interests: the interests of states, churches, and of non-believers". However, no substantial claim is made that Church-State relations is the key to the defining Churches' role in European integration. Accepting this viewpoint, we shall further analyse how Church-State relations can form "the basis" of the contacts between religious and political actors at both national and supranational levels. Our first step will be the analysis of European Church-State relations per se.

Church-State relations: the main patterns

There is a substantial degree of agreement among scholars on the typology of Church-State relations in the EU. Leustean (2008: 247) mentions three models (or systems): the state Church, the cooperationist (or hybrid) and the secular (or separation). If a religious confession is predominant and is regarded as a "national" or "established" Church, this will be the state Church model. In the case of the formal separation between Church and state, normally with the existence of agreements with the states (regulating the status of churches), one can speak about the cooperationist model. Finally, in the case of the secular model, there is no religion which is favoured by the state and no established Church exists (Leustean 2008: 247-248).

Christopher Soper and Joel Fetzer explain the notion of laïcité which is the opposite of an established Church, and provide some insights on the intermediate system. They spell out two main categories of laïcité: strict and soft. The first version implies that "[c]itizens may, in their private life, believe what they will about religion. In public, however, religious individuals face more restrictions". According to the second version, "[t]he state should

respect all religious beliefs but also foster the free exercise of religion by, for example, funding private religious schools" (Soper and Fetzer 2007: 937). The third (intermediate) system is located between these two polar cases. In the third model, there is no established Church by law, but national legislation guarantees the patterns of cooperation between Church and State. As Soper and Fetzer (2007: 938) say, "The German Basic Law establishes a formal separation between Church and State, but at the same time the constitution secures cooperation between the two institutions in such areas as education and social welfare provision".

Gerhard Robbers (2005: 578-579) mentions three "basic types of civil ecclesiastical law systems": State Church or predominant religion, strict separation, and basic separation, when the existence of common tasks for both sides is recognised. John Francis (1992: 800) offers a broader explanation, describing five main models of Church-State relations:

> [t]he Erastian model, in which the state has assumed responsibility for the direction of the church; the liberal model, in which the state is secular and neutral in its relationships with the church(es) found in its society; the theocratic model, in which the church has achieved supremacy in religious and secular affairs; the spheres model, in which the church prevails in some spheres and the state in other spheres of society; and the anti-church model, in which the state stands in opposition to the church and seeks to curtail or eliminate religion.

Of course, the aforementioned approaches can be inserted into the three main regimes: state Church, strict separation and cooperationist model. The first two are the exception in the EU. Indeed, the system of state Church exists in Denmark, England, Finland, Malta and Greece. Strict separation is probably peculiar to France and (as stated sometimes) to the Netherlands. In all other cases, we encounter the model of cooperation between Church and State, although it is true that the depth and intensity of cooperation varies a great deal. Therefore it seems plausible, in agreement with Russell Sandberg, to speak of the abandonment of the so-called tripartite system (Sandberg 2008: 336). Sandberg correctly argues that the position of the Church under the same type of system may vary a great deal. For instance, in Denmark, within the state church system, there is a high degree of state control over the Lutheran Church, while in Greece the Orthodox Church is a self-governing structure (Sandberg 2008: 331).

Historical and confessional trajectories

It is worth noting that the formation of Church-State systems has been a long and complicated process, not without its own conflicts and disputes. The modern models of the Church-State relations were mostly developed in the 20th century, since in the centuries before "[c]hurch and state institutions were closely intertwined" (Riedel 2008: 252). Indeed, in most countries of what is now the EU, the monarchs normally dominated the Church, even assuming the right to appoint bishops and, further, to interfere in doctrinal issues (Riedel 2008: 253-255). The relations between Church and State were largely unequal; and this inequality took a disadvantageous form for the Churches (Riedel 2008: 252).

Historical peculiarities, of course, matter, as well as the confessional tradition. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd argue that the religious inheritance "[r]emains part of Europe's fabric today, still a palpable presence in its state and political traditions, educational institutions" (Ruane and Todd 2009: 2). There is indeed a perspective that the confessional distribution left its impact on Church-State relations. Knippenberg, for example, maintains that Church-State relations differ substantially between Western and Eastern Christianity, "[a]nd this divide can be expected to have direct implications and consequences not only

for political conflicts in the European states, but also for the religious landscapes involved" (Knippenberg 2006: 255). His viewpoint is similar to John Madeley's, who argues that:

> [t]he pattern of church-state relations in society X can, in part at least, be explained by the fact that it is a mono-confessional Orthodox or Catholic or Lutheran society; alternatively, in the case of society Y, that it is a multi-confessional society with a particular range and balance of confessions represented. To make sense of these patterns, two factors must be examined in each case: the character of the different confessional traditions, particularly as this relates to church-state relations, and how strongly they are represented relative to other traditions (Madeley 2003: 34).

In terms of confessional distribution, one can observe the following picture in the EU (bearing in mind some difficulties in counting the number of adherents of different confessions). If we accept Madeley's concept of monoconfessional blocs and multiconfessional belts, than the picture will be as follows:

- Austria, Belgium, Poland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malta, Slovenia and Italy belong to the Catholic bloc;

- Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus belong to the Orthodox bloc;

- Denmark, Sweden and Finland belong to the Lutheran bloc.

All other EU countries (Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Hungary, Latvia, and Estonia) cannot be regarded as monoconfessional states, although in some of them religious minorities are few in number.

What can we expect from these models? Does a State Church, for example, presuppose greater influence for the Church? This is not necessarily the case, although Soper and Fetzer are in favour of this perspective, claiming that "[C]hristian leaders in Britain and Germany are already well positioned politically. That fewer people are attending religious services might not reduce the political influence of church leaders or lead inevitably to a secular public policy" (Soper and Fetzer 2007: 941). However, this perspective is contested. Fink argues the opposite: "[t]he very fact that Churches are closely tied to the state may jeopardise their power and ability to influence" (Fink 2009: 84). In some cases, it is the state which tends to dominate the Church, not vice versa. Overall, we can, in line with Minkenberg, regard the Church-State relations more as an opportunity structure for religious interests in politics since "[t]hey determine to some extent whether churches, as political actors, operate as public institutions or as interest groups" (Minkenberg 2003: 196). Church-State relations do matter for policy outputs, but mainly if taken in connection with other variables (Minkenberg 2003: 196). For us, they are important as a factor, confirming the unique stance of Christian Churches in European integration, although their impact on the level of influence of Churches and the combination with other variables will require further research. However, the latter is not of the concern of this article.

Concluding remarks

The active participation of Christian Churches in European integration is not an alien concept. As we have identified in this article, Churches are logically incorporated in the EU politics; they form a constituent part of EU life and have been visible since the earliest stages of European integration. The role of Churches is not limited to the private space. Instead, Christian Churches act in different formats, bringing their unique contribution to the process of European integration. They are similar, in some features, to other actors, but they are at the same time different, due to the fact of being religious, spiritual organisations. Christian Churches embrace the familiar features of regular non-state actors,

but they also act as identity formers. As identity formers, Churches are willing to contribute to the formation of their own vision of European identity, where Christian values and norms constitute a substantial or, at least, important part. The unique stance of Churches, combined with some other factors, allows us to make more concrete conclusions.

First, we suggest that Christian Churches have increased their level of influence in the EU in the last 20 years. The process of secularisation, occurring in some areas of the Union, is not applicable to the EU at large. Secondly, Churches are active only on selected EU issues, which they regard as the most important. These are largely value-based issues, involving concepts of identity, morality, and the rights of vulnerable and oppressed groups (*i.e.* illegal immigrants). Churches mainly act out of common interests, rather than their own egotistical aims. Third, one can expect that the degree of influence and involvement of Churches goes according to confessional lines. We can expect a higher degree of influence and involvement of the Roman Catholic Church on the supranational level, while on the national level this depends on the circumstances of a given country. The variations can be tremendous even between countries with a similar confessional distribution and they also involve the peculiarities of Church-State regimes. Finally, we assume that the level of influence and success for Churches may depend on what issues are at stake. On the issues attracting a high degree of attention from the public and governments, one can expect better mobilising potential of Churches, outweighing the mobilising potential of their opponents. Arguably, on some issues Churches may ally with secular organisations. This will make their potential even stronger.

Overall, Christian Churches are now the inalienable participants of the integration process and the EU politics. It is impossible to ignore them, even if the EU aims to position itself as a secular organisation, with no direct competence in faith issues. Nowadays Christian Churches have firmly accepted their role as the unique and special participants of European integration—a role which cannot be assigned to anyone else.

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