# Europe between secularization and christianity religion essay



Can we still today perceive Europe as the last shelter of secularism? Is the position of Religion as we used to know it a personal matter that should not appear on the public space and even play a role at the state?

In the year 2007 an international conference was organized at the Libera Università degli Studi HYPERLINK "http://www. luspio. it/"" HYPERLINK "http://www. luspio. it/"" San Pio VHYPERLINK "http://www. luspio. it/"" in Rome to think about the nature and development of the European political thought after 1989 between globalization and new humanism. One of the main issues discussed was a question of how the different political and philosophical cultures have come back to questions about religion's role in public sphere. In addition to the issue of identity, this is the central intellectual question of our times and one of the most exciting new zones of interdisciplinary research and studies in both European and non European studies and even in some postcolonial research centers.

It seems quire relevant to ask these questions with the quite few issues that sprung up with the unification and Europeanization processes between more than 27 states now of the continent those new big and tremendous wars that lasted for decades.

In his article 'A new Humanism in Europe between Secularism and the Return of Religion Dnillo Brechi reported that even most renown intellectuals of atheism and secularism have started to raise questions about the limits of secularism. ' religions such as Judaism and Christianity.... Habermas is more and more sceptical about the thesis of an unstoppable secularization of the

West, if not of the entire world. On the contrary, the last years have shown how secularized Europe is much more of an exception than a rule.'1

One of the main drives for these questions about Europe's secularism is that dialectic on European identity and the position of religion in the unified constitution in addition to the big refusal and rejection of Turkey's to join the European Union and which is a rejection

see http://www. telospress. com/main/index. php? main\_page=
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most probably due to the fact of Turkey being a Muslim country.

Words like 'Lord' 'God', 'Christian Patrimony', and 'Christian Club' in the European constitution project appeared to put European secularism in doubt despite the continuous talk about the commitment to secularism. This idea has been reinforced by claims and declarations of personalities and European parties about accepting turkey's joining the European Union as a threat to the idea of Europe as a 'Christian Club'.

## 2. Christian Religion in the unified constitution

The dialectics of Christianity and secularism appear in the very daily practices of political and social institutions in a competitive yet complex manner. In his Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis, Bruce Steve wrote 'Where Culture,

identity, and sense of worth are challenged by a source promoting either an alien religion or rampant secularism and that source is negatively valued, secularization will be inhibited. Religion can provide resources for the defense of a national, local, ethnic, or status group culture. Again, Poland and the Irish Republic are prime examples, but Ulster can also be included, as in more attenuated form can other 'dual societies', or the peripheries of secularizing societies, resistant to the alien encroachment of the center. In the united kingdom, for example, the greater attachment to their religious institutions of the welsh and still more of the scots evidences this factor. The national culture and identity are associated with presbytery and chapel against the attempted cultural domination of metropolitan secularity. In Northern Ireland, rates of church involvement are high...' pp 17. 2

The involvement of religion is today more apparent as pressures started to insist on the Christianity of Europe in the unified constitution since the European conference in 2003. This also appeared in the discussions related to the issues of abortion and teaching religion in schools then also with the enlargements and the inclusion of Eastern European countries known for their excessive religiosity like Romania, Bulgaria and Poland.

p 17; Bruce, Steve, ed. Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992

This later instigated many troubles for this purpose and supported the current that calls for a Christian Europe with the increase of talks about accepting Islamic Turkey into the Union with its very dense population which

in its turn created some fears and worries about the dissemination of Islam at the extent of Christianity.

The Ex French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing who presided the conference tried to find a solution accepted by everyone without affecting the stable secular roof especially with the French insistence on the principle of secularism. He actually suggested three norms included in article 51 related to the churches and religious organizations:

The European Union should respect the position of churches, organizations and existing religious groups inside the member states.

The European Union should respect the position of organizations with philosophical beliefs.

The European Union should be committed to open a wide, honest and organized dialogue with churches and organizations, in recognition to their identity and participation.

Despite the medium solutions that contrast with secularism, looking at the problem proves a special characteristic and existence of religion, regardless of its bias to Christianity, it does in fact contradict the article included in the 'constitution'3 related to the freedom of expression and religious beliefs which permits the freedom of beliefs without prejudices or favorism.

The bias to Christianity is however clear in the direct pointing out to the Christian religion and church members without mentioning other religious institutions. All the articles and norms mention particularly the word Church instead of religious institutions add to that the fact that opening a dialogue https://assignbuster.com/europe-between-secularization-and-christianity-religion-essay/

with the church means implicitly recognizing its role in the issues and matters of the Union.

See Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Official Journal of the European Union, C 310, Volume 47, 16. 12. 2004. (HTML/PDF) or go to http://www.unizar.es/euroconstitucion/Treaties/Treaty Const. htm

### 3. The Truth of European secularism

Despite the continuous European insistence on the principle of secularism, the actual and concrete reality proves the strong existence of the Christian background even in public spaces that is supposed to be far from religion according to the secular text that means the complete split between religion and the state a reason why Turkey is refused integration into the EU.

Another contradiction is that although the 'Turkish Constitution'4 dictates the secularity of the state, many countries among the EU blames it for what they call an incomplete commitment to the principles of secularism. They blame Turkey for teaching religious courses at schools and making it obligatory and also for paying the teachers from the government budget. They also accuse Turkey of not respecting the rights of minorities and discriminating between them on a religious basis favoring the 'Sunnah' to the other minorities and privileging some cultural and political rights of some minorities to the others like Orthodox, Catholics and Armens.

The other contradiction is that this happens elsewhere in many of the European countries that claim secularism. Italy for example, insists on teaching Christianity in the public schools and hire priests from the churches to teach Christianity and get paid from the government. While describing https://assignbuster.com/europe-between-secularization-and-christianity-religion-essay/

Italy, L. Mariotti wrote in his book Italy: Past and Present 'From the Earliest period of Christianity, [until today....] Italy seemed to be designed to be its chief seat, its august metropolis...' p 34. 5. Also, the sate allows people to pay some of the taxes to the churches and present some subsidies to help them build new churches and religious places. Italy also allows schools to get funds and subsidies. The church marriages in their turn are more respected than the civil ones.

In England as well, the queen is considered the head of the church, 'she also supports inter-faith relations, often meeting with leaders of other religions, and granting her personal patronage to the HYPERLINK "http://en. wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Council\_of\_Christians\_and\_Jews" Council of Christians and Jews and is considered as Defender

see part I article II, c1 of the Turkish Constitution at

http://en. wikisource. org/wiki/Constitution\_of\_the\_Republic\_of\_Turkey#2. 1

Mariotti, L. Italy Past and Present. London: Oxford University, 1994

of the Faith'6. The queen has many exceptional privileges apart from the tax exonerations. It is a fact that 26 members of the board of lords in UK are priests from churches. The same thing applies to Denmark whose parliament includes a number of priests from the church and are nominated by a minister called minister of church affairs.

What is more is that secular parties in most Europe do not oppose the Pope's agreements between the church and the state, especially the Vatican. These agreements usually give a specific position to the religion in the state via https://assignbuster.com/europe-between-secularization-and-christianity-religion-essay/

legal texts. In February of the year 1984, Italy signed an agreement with the Vatican that gives a specific value to the religious culture and takes into consideration the catholic principles which is indeed a part of the 'historical patrimony' of the Italian peoples. In an article entitled 'Religion in Italian Schools: how it is taught, and to Whom?', we read 'The Italian Republic, recognizing the value of religious culture, and keeping in mind that the principles of Catholicism are part of the historic patrimony of the Italian people, will continue to assure, among the broader goals of education, the teaching of the Catholic religion in all public schools below university level. Respecting the freedom of conscience and educational responsibility of parents, everyone is guaranteed the right to choose whether or not to take advantage of such teaching. When enrolling, students or their parents can exercise this right, upon request of the school authorities and their choice may not give rise to any form of discrimination.' 7.

What is more is that when some disagreed and opposed this expression, the high court rejected the appeal and emphasized its acknowledgment of the agreement.

The same thing happened in Spain. Despite the law that appeared in 1980 that stresses the freedom of religions and equality of the different religious sects, the state however allowed itself to make 'agreements and relationships with Churches' 8, in addition to providing them with financial support that was declared on a text of law under what is called Not For Profit entities with charitable purposes.

See http://en. wikipedia.

org/wiki/Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom#Religion

See http://www. beginningwithi. com/italy/living/religion. htm

See religion in Spain in Livingstone, E. A. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. London:

Oxford University Press, 2006.

Now In Greece, a very good example of contradicting with secularism, the state declares a 'direct relationship between the state and the church'9, even after the democratic transition in the year 1975, for the religious institution exist with a legal text and under the law. Many practices and religious pacts take the form of a legal matter like religious marriages that is recognized by the law. Also, Greece is he only country that still refuses to have Islamic mosques built on its lands.

The situation may differ a bit in Eastern Europe that was under the rule of communist regime systems which limited the role of churches and nationalized its possessions and properties. However, immediately after the fall of communism, the church in fact restored its properties and its position in society. Poland here might be the best example we can illustrate with in this case for it is clear the very important role that the church played in overthrowing the communist regime and starting to inaugurate a new regime with a pope agreement and the Vatican signed in 1995 by the parliament, and when Poland was obliged to legally distinguish between the state and the church in order to be able to join the European Union, Poland

insisted on preserving its Christian identity through the name 'secular state with a Christian patrimony'.

### 4. The position of the Vatican

The longing for Christian identity of the united Europe was not however sought only by the member states but there has also been the power of the Vatican, the biggest and strongest religious institution in Europe and which put a lot of pressures and lobbied against the political leaderships and decision makers in the states and their representatives in the European Union to stress the 'Christian identity in the constitution'. 10

Before the ratification of the Maastricht Agreement in 1979, the Vatican suggested an idea to be added to the articles related to the rights and the general freedoms which is to mention in the constitution that Christianity is the Christian cultural patrimony of European peoples. This recommendation was refuse with the argument that the Vatican is

9. ibid

10. No better account of this extremism can be like Michael Barkun's
Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement
which examines the origins and ideology of the so-called Christian Identity
Movement.

not a member of the European Union; yet, just before the Amsterdam conference of the same year Italy, Germany and Portugal adopted this suggestion and hence the Vatican practiced its pressures on representatives of the member states until he succeeded in adopting the article number 11

that stipulates the preservations and the privileges that churches and religious communities should have without the intervention of any states. Thus, with this ratification all the member states became obliged to abide with these privileges although this contradicts with secularism. Pressures and lobbying continued with the start of talks and discussions of the constitution project in order to modify and add in the article 11 some words that are to preserve the important role of the church through calling the Union to start honest and clear dialogues and in a constant manner with the churches and religious organizations.

In Chapter III named 'The Vatican Power' Avro Manhattan goes far in his huge well documented book 'The Vatican in World Politics' and says that "[....] the diplomatic machinery of the Vatican would be of little value if the Pope had to rely upon it alone. What gives the Vatican its tremendous power is not its diplomacy as such, but the fact that behind its diplomacy stands the Church, with all its manifold world-embracing activities. The Vatican as a diplomatic centre is but one aspect of the Catholic Church. Vatican diplomacy is so influential and can exert such great power in the diplomatic-political field because it has at its disposal the tremendous machinery of a spiritual organization with ramifications in every country of the planet. In other words, the Vatican, as a political power, employs the Catholic Church as a religious institution to assist the attainment of its goals.' P 28. 11

It is worth mentioning also that before the conference related to the future of Europe was held, the Catholic academy in Berlin organized a meeting to discuss the Christian social responsibilities which gathered hundreds of personalities from twenty different European states. Among the https://assignbuster.com/europe-between-secularization-and-christianity-religion-essay/

recommendations was calls for demonstrations in the winter of 2004 that should be open to all those who are interested in the Christian message that the civil

11. See page 28 on Manhattan, A. The Vatican In World Politics. London: C. A. Watts & Co., Limited

Gaer Associations, Inc, 1949.

society should base itself upon. The meeting stressed the importance of the European Union as a federal Union that encourages connections and cooperation which is a principle that allows churches to practice and play their roles without any hurdles from the state.

The other controversy is hat these meetings and gatherings were welcomed by the institutions of the Union whose parliament supported and financed indirectly these meetings.

In a parliament meeting dated October 10th 2004 related to the budget status of 2005, Salvador Garriga Polledo the Spanish politician and Member of the European Parliament with the PeopleHYPERLINK "http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/People's\_Party\_(Spain)"' HYPERLINK "http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/People's\_Party\_(Spain)" s Party, part of the European PeopleHYPERLINK "http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/European\_People's\_Party"' HYPERLINK "http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/European\_People's\_Party" s Party and sits on the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and also a substitute for the Committee on Budgetary Control and the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, Polledo suggested an adjustment which

consists of transferring a million and a half Euros to finance the international Youth Day arguing that it is the day that gathers all European youth to call for values of justice, freedom and coexistence, without mentioning of course the truth of this gathering and that it was the German Catholic Church which was behind organizing this event and that they invited more than four thousand journalists to broadcast the words of the Pope of Vatican which he was going to deliver in front of eight thousand catholic youngsters. His words in fact contained some preaching that mention the Christian roots of Europe ...and others related to Peace.

For this reason, the head of the Catholic Church does not oppose the calls of both Catholics and orthodox to unify to defend their Christian heritage. In February 2003, John Paul II delivered a preach at the Saint-Siège Church in the Vatican in front of the catholic politicians where he urged them to fight in order to keep the word of 'god' in the constitution; he also urged them to unify with their orthodox brothers. A few Days after that call, the president of the papal board asked to meet with representatives of the Orthodox Church.

It is clear then that the Vatican with its continuous pressures was able to unify all the right and left parties in Italy to call their representatives in the Union to mention the expression 'the Christian Patrimony' in the constitution. This was parallel to many actions led by bishops and archbishops and secretary of the Vatican state to put many more pressures on the rest of the European Politicians.

### 5. Why Turkey Only?!

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One cannot understand the insistence on the Christian identity without the strong dissent and disagreement about Turkey's joining the European Union for all the arguments and proofs show that the main reason behind not accepting Turkey is for her being Islamic otherwise Turkey has all the necessary potentials and institutions to fit in the EU.

As a matter of fact, Turkey is one of the founding states of the European council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1995. Turkey is also one of the pillars of the NATO and holds the biggest military after the US, this means that Turkey has the biggest Military in the western European Union that constitutes now a vital component of the European Military. It is not possible neither to deny Turkey's role in protecting Europe from the Eastern alliances during the cold war for it was the country that shared frontiers with Russia and then played a vital role in preventing Russia's Military incursions and raids in the European lands. Turkey did equally the same in confronting the Russian maritime presence in the black sea.

Turkey has no doubt an economic importance as well for Europe. It represents a big and new market and a gate for big European expected economic enlargements in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Through this Europe could control ways of transports of the Hydrocarbons, Oil and Gas from Iraq, Russia and Iran. It has also immense water resources in the time of expected wars on waters. There are also many political fears that Turkey will turn its back to Europe and go instead towards Asia and the Middle East especially Iran which would mean emphasizing its Islamic https://assignbuster.com/europe-between-secularization-and-christianity-

belonging and thus for Europe the 'Danger' of the existence of a strong Islamic country on the frontiers of Europe.

It is clear then that despite all these 'qualifications' the right wing Christian parties in Europe insist to refuse the idea of Turkey joining the EU, which we can deduce now is because of the will to keep Europe unified with a Christian civilization and which would be threatened if Turkey with its 70 million inhabitants join the EU.

These fears and worries are also explained by the fact that if Turkey joins the EU, this would lead to a big demographic transformation. Searching in the internet today one could easily find some propaganda films and documentaries about Muslim demographics and how immigration threatens the European existence, and as a matter of fact since 1990, 90 % of immigration towards Europe has been 'Islamic immigration' 12; and while in France it is a 1. 8 children per family, Muslims 8. 1 per family which are not very plausible statistics. Claims that in some parts of European cities there are more mosques than churches are also not plausible. However the German government for example decided to talk publicly about this matter and said that while now there 52 millions Muslims in Europe, it will double in just 20 years. All this is considered to be an obstacle to the Christian Club.

Some of the opposing European countries present many arguments from the past history of Turkey especially human rights, and racial ethnic minorities like the Armenian genocide in 1915, the persecution of Christians in 1955 and the invasion of Cyprus in 1973. So this resort to history is an argument

to legitimize their fears. However, what is certain also is that these kinds of crimes and mistakes happened also in most of European countries.

Some of these arguments might be true but these violations can also apply to many of the countries that joined the EU especially those related to public and general freedoms and rights especially the Easter European countries like Slovenia and Estonia and may be even some of western European countries also like Spain with the worse human rights records in violating minorities and immigrants rights with the most horrible ways like

12. See http://www. youtube. com/watch? v= 6-3X5hIFXYU shooting them, torturing them and humiliating them.

It is clear therefore that the EU has a specific and a systematic strategy to marginalizing Turkey's candidature to join the EU. In his Turkey and the EU: An Awkward Candidate for EU Membership, Arikan Harun wrote '...In fact, the EU has developed an alternative approach towards Turkey, which can best be described as a containment strategy, designed to delay indefinitely the prospect of membership while anchoring Turkey in the European structure through a close relations......on the other hand [ pointing out ] to Turkey's failure to undertake the necessary policy reforms to meet requirements for EU membership which has enabled the EU to legitimize its hard policy stance towards Turkey's membership.' P 2. 13

### 6. Conclusion

The joining Turkey to the European Union poses more questions and problematic on the notion of Europeanization and Europeaness which should

as said the European Deputy in the European parliament, a peace project that should not be limited to the western Christian patrimony for the joining of Turkey will benefit Europe to a great extent.

The definition of Europe through its Christian heritage or the Enlightenment era is not very convincing for there are no objective criteria that could define one's future and identity. So what is then Europe? It is what we want it to be through a subjective meaning of human rights and democracy which is in fact unsustainable since we have witnessed a war which is not very far n time, that of former Yugoslavia and also through the implication of many European countries with the CIA in kidnapping people and sending them to Guantanamo. The strategic importance of Europe in Central Asia and Middle East is clear and vital and so it is for the world. The challenge in my view will soon always be that continuous clash and dialectic between the regional and the global. The future alone will determine which path the White continent will take.

# 13. Arikan, H. Turkey and the EU: An Awkward Candidate for EU Membership. Ashgate Publishing, 2006.