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# RELIGION AND IDEOLOGY

## CONDITIONS OF THEIR COHABITATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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### **Abstract**

One of the principles underlying the European political construction is tolerance. Started in the nineteenth century, the secularization of public space left an empty place which was filled, later on, by a phenomenon whose magnitude matches that of the religious phenomenon: ideology. There are various opinions about the relationship linking religion and ideology, from those which do not see a significant difference between them to those which consider them to be opposed phenomena. Yet, what we are able to see is that in all the countries of the European Union these two phenomena coexist, and their respective areas do not overlap the public-private distinction: religion is still present in the public space whereas ideology holds an important place in each person's symbolic universe. The motivational support of today's European construction was based both on religion, with the projection of 'Christian Europe', and on political ideologies, with their agendas. The spirit that animated the elaboration of this construction is recognizable in European legislation and in the functioning of European institutions. However, the challenges to which the EU has to rise now, in the early years of the twenty-first century (accepting new members in which Christianity is not the main religion, good neighbouring policies with non-Christian countries, unprecedented internal migration), require solutions that are both religious and ideological in nature. In a Europe of Christian tolerance, it is political ideologies that will make possible the cohabitation of Christians and Muslims, just as, currently, the three main ideological trends bring together Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, New Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and people of other religions. The two main integrators, religion and ideology, will continue to play a part in the EU's balance and stability, just as they have done up to now.

*Keywords:* ideology, individual, religion, tolerance, European Union

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### **1. Introduction**

The founding treaties of the European Union mention that this political construction is based on a culture wherein developed the universal values that constitute the inalienable rights of the human person. Thus, the Preamble of the *Treaty on European Union* [1], specifies that the signing states resolved to create

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the Union “drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law”.

All the values mentioned in this text are the defining products of European culture. Some of them have been used ever since ancient times, yet they received their current shapes as a result of major cultural, social, and political phenomena that have shaken the European continent. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were decisive for the European space, as they brought the industrial revolution, urbanization, literacy, and the emergence of national states. In this context, a phenomenon developed which makes the democratic play still possible today: ideology.

It is during the nineteenth century that religion retreated from the public space and its place was taken over by ideology. There are various opinions about the relationship linking religion and ideology - from those which do not see a significant difference between them to those which consider them to be two opposed phenomena. Yet, what we are able to see is that in all the countries of the European Union these two phenomena coexist, and their respective areas do not overlap the public-private distinction: religion is still present in the public space whereas ideology holds an important place in each person's symbolic universe.

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In this study I am going to show how religion and ideology live side by side in the European political construction. In order to achieve this goal, the first chapter explains the relationship that links religion and ideology, showing what they have in common and what differentiates them. Conceptual specifications and the simple observation of European realities will prove that in the area of tolerance that is the European Union there is room for both phenomena.

## **2. The relationship between religion and ideology: Conceptual specifications**

In order to put aside any terminological confusion, I insist on specifying that, after having studied a large number of definitions given to ideology – to mention but a few, Terry Eagleton [2], John Gerring [3] and, in the Romanian literature, Daniel Şandru [4] – I managed to extract three major meanings of this phenomenon that I have also used elsewhere [5-8].

1. Ideology is a coherent set of scientific and philosophical theories, beliefs and expressions, assumed in mass, through which individuals and communities perceive their identity, their relationships with the world and power relationships (all these objectifications being the effect of socialisation and the binder of any community) in order to pursue their happiness (regardless of the name it could possibly bear: emancipation, well-being, comfort etc.);
2. Ideology is a tool of political domination (that may take the form of emancipation) whose usage may take on many shapes: either the imposition of a type of rationality (the technical one) or of a symbolic universe as the only valid and desirable one, or the creation of some measures of social engineering, or the explanation and arrangement of facts as the succession of an idea;
3. Ideology is a method of knowledge in social sciences.

In this study, I will use the term 'ideology' with its first meaning, trying to leave aside the negative Marxist-based connotation that is visible in its second meaning; the third meaning is not of interest in this analysis.

When I talk about the cohabitation between ideology and religion in the European Union I take into account the three main political ideologies of the twentieth century which put forth models of the European construction. Yet, before proceeding with the presentation of this reality, I believe it is necessary to make some conceptual specifications relative to the manner in which the relationship between religion and ideology has been perceived up to now.

The analysis of the relationship that links the two phenomena is often carried out from a position that assumes history as progress, as an evolution from the age of religious obscurantism to that of the light of reason. Thus, the central concept in the assessment of this relationship is knowledge, in the form of scientific knowledge. Whereas knowledge and faith are closely linked together in religious discourse, they delimit different areas in secular settings. As I showed elsewhere, in some works religion and ideology "were seen as being linked together: either as aspects of common sense (there is no difference between them) or ideology was seen as the heir of religion within the order of faith; in other, any relationship between the two is rejected" [9].

A view that took hold in political thought belongs to Marx and Engels who, in *The German Ideology*, placed religion and ideology within the same scope of 'idealistic humbug': "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain their semblance of independence" [10]. Later on, another famous Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, integrated the two phenomena into *common sense*, and made them share, as common features, the lack of unity and inconsistency. The Italian communist thinker did not talk about religion as church, but "in the secular sense of unity of faith between a view of the world and a corresponding behavioural norm: yet – he asked – why should we call this unity of faith *religion* and not *ideology* or plainly *politics*?" [11]. Gramsci believed that the two phenomena proceeded in the same manner, the end being that of accepting a theoretical

model up to the point where it becomes a universe accepted by everyone, that is, up to the moment when it becomes an element of common sense. Just as religion configures a universe in which everybody believed, ideology transfers a philosophical theory into a vocabulary in which all the members of a community describe themselves. A theory fulfils its purpose only when it becomes an ideology by adding on the act of faith specific to the religious phenomenon.

There are also some approaches that introduce scientific language as an emancipating one, which crushes the illusions of religion but does not cut out the need for faith, whose satisfaction is taken over by ideology. Ghiță Ionescu believed that “ideology emerged when the apparent conflict between the epistemology of religion and the epistemology of science peaked at the end of the secularization process that changed society in the nineteenth century” [12]. The dryness of scientific language produced a communication crisis, because the masses were still using the language of faith. Thus, ideology is given the task to translate the language of science into layman's terms, and, more importantly, to provide a cosmogonic explanation to replace that which had been offered by religion. Reason “replaced the quieting reflexes of faith with the unsettling reflexes of doubt”, Ionescu said [12, p. 45]. This is why the task of ideology is to put forth a new vision of the whole, claiming to provide a method to ensure everybody's happiness. Yet, unlike religion, the *Weltanschauung* of ideology introduces itself as a product of reason, benefiting from the latter's authority and prestige; however, this situation transforms ideology into a hybrid phenomenon. “Man will find a new faith in reason and reason for a new faith. *The reason* that ideology has been providing is, however, a pseudo-reason, because, since it is essentially based on promises, it attempts to provide to men a substitute for faith; meanwhile, ideological faith is a pseudo-faith because it is not based on the acceptance of mystery but on theoretical pseudo-reasoning and on so-called scientific evidence” [12, p. 46]. Thus, ideology seems to be a mere substitute for religion, and its aspiration to replace religion has catastrophic effects. Aiming to take hold of the whole, ideology misses both the precision of Science's partial truth and the individual's peace; replacing religion, it exploits the individual's need for faith in order to get him involved in a project that it dissolves.

As I have already said, there are also some views which reject the idea of a resemblance or assimilation of the two phenomena. Alain Besançon also places ideology in a theory-faith relationship, but he does it in order to prove that it is none of those: “ideology is not a religion, not even a *secular religion*. One distinguishing feature is enough to set the ideology apart from the group of religions with which it is usually compared. This is to do with an act of faith. It is a commonplace that something cannot at the same time and in the same way be known (or seen) and believed” [13]. In the French author's opinion, ideology is rather a gnosis, a phenomenon characterised by: the acute awareness of a twofold decline (the world's and the self's) and the rebellion against this situation; the conviction that salvation comes through theoretical, historical and practical, knowledge. It should be mentioned that when he talks about ideology Besançon refers to Leninism that he sees as pure ideology and that he deems to

be similar to gnosis in many respects, such as: “over-interpretation of history; moral values that are deduced from doctrine, from which they also extract their critiques; self-criticism understood as re-learning of the interpretative system; relativization of man in relation with his contribution to salvation; a net separation between militants and masses; the knowledgeable, ascetic, professional, and chore-free militant; the geo-historical dualism between condemned ontological regions and saved regions” [13, p. 20]. However, there is also a difference between the two: unlike gnosis, ideology does not use religious arguments, but scientific ones. Ideology has “the form of a faith, but no longer has anything religious, up to denying its being a faith” [13, p. 22]. Regardless of this difference, it is crucial to notice that the two cannot be conceived separately, with faith being the essential element on whose ground they meet. If ideology is a new gnosis and not a religion, it should be noted that gnososes emerged in the field of religion out of man's wish to learn about the reality in which he believed. As I also showed elsewhere, “both the Jewish believer and the Gnostic looked for salvation, but their ways were different. What is important is that none of them excluded faith: in the case of religion, faith in what one does not know; in the case of gnosis, in what one does know. For the ideologically formed modern man, knowledge is the new divinity, and he believes that it is going to bring him happiness, just as he used to think (and still does) that God would do” [9, p. 56].

To conclude, I believe that understanding the relationship between religion and ideology requires leaving aside the myth of progress. In the circumstances of the industrial revolution, of the secularization of public life, and of widespread literacy, the birth of ideology was not unexpected. However, as it is easy to see, it did not cause the extinction of religion. Ideology dressed the dry truths of science in the clothes of faith, betting on the need to believe showed by the new political character: the mass. If we leave aside some of its extreme forms (Leninism, Nazism), ideology did not wage a radical war against religion. We may observe this in the manner in which the agents of these two phenomena (the Church and political parties) have collaborated in the setting up of the European construction and in the manner in which religion and ideology live side by side in this political entity.

### **3. Ideological cohabitations on the common Christian background**

Several levels are taken into account when one talks about the European area. Meaning to shed light on this situation, Andrei Marga [14] invites us to distinguish between geographical, historical, institutional, and cultural belonging: “*Geography and history are indispensable conditions, but, as European unification is first and foremost an institutional and cultural process, European belonging is established taking into account institutions and culture*”.

Besides the events of European reality, there has been much talk about a ‘common European background’, about a ‘European culture’ or ‘European spirit’. At the beginning of the last century, Jose Ortega Y Gasset said: “France, England, Spain, Italy, Germany fight among themselves, form opposing leagues,

and break them only to re-form them afresh. But all this, war as well as peace, is a living together as equals... If we were to take an inventory of our mental stock today - opinions, standards, desires, assumptions - we should discover that the greater part of it does not come to the Frenchman from France, nor to the Spaniard from Spain, but from the common European stock.” [15]. Observing the various sources of European culture, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi noted: “the Christian tradition gave Europe its depth, the Greek tradition gave it form, the German tradition gave it strength. But all these three dimensions and elements come together in a point of the European soul: freedom.” [16] More recently, Edgar Morin also noted that “the originality of European culture does not reside only in its having been the daughter of Judeo-Christianity, heiress of Greek thought, and producer of modern Science and Reason. It resides in its having relentlessly been the producer and the product of a whirl of interactions and interferences between dialogue multiples that created and opposed: religion/reason; faith/doubt; mythical/critical thinking; empiricism/rationalism; existence/idea; the particular/the universal... The specificity of European culture resides mainly in the continuity and the intensity of its dialogues, wherein none of its constitutive voices crushes or exterminates the others, or even exerts an overwhelming hegemony for a long time. [...] *It is none of its elements or monuments, but dialogue that lies at the hearth of European cultural identity.*” [17] As I showed elsewhere, “*homo europaeus* has formed in time, each of his characteristics having been acquired during a particular historical age: the rational model of knowledge from the ancient Greeks, the principles of law - from the Romans, historical conscience - from Christianity, economic rationality - from nineteenth and eighteenth century protestants, democratic culture - from the Greek and from modern thinkers (such as Locke, Montesquieu and so on ), voluntarism - from the Enlightenment, reference to tradition - from the conservatives and the nationalists. All these characteristics make up Europeanness.” [18].

It is on the cultural background shaped by these two main sources (Greek-Latin culture and Christianity) that ideology emerged as an indispensable element in the dialogue specific to modern democracy. Advancing a geographical approach to European diversity, Emmanuel Todd says: “European passions, religious or ideological, are spatially circumscribed. A given nation, a given region adheres to the Reform or to the Revolution, to social-democracy or anarchism, to liberalism, to communism, to fascism or Nazism, and declares being ready to fight its neighbours in the name of values that are both absolute and non-demonstrable. Most of France believes in freedom and equality, Germany stands against it with dreams of authority and inequality, England is only interested in freedom. Some regions, such as central Italy, combine attachment to equality with a taste for authority. [...] When history comes to a halt in Italy, it is taken over in Germany; when it runs short in Germany, it comes back to life in England or France... The conflicts of values between geographical areas also explain the extraordinary brutality of confrontations during the last five centuries.” [19]

The need for religion and ideology to live together in the European Union is best expressed by Romano Prodi, who said that “the twofold conscience of the fact that we cannot abdicate the confession of religious faith and full political responsibility, and of the fact that we need to tend towards a new cultural unity through the dialogue of ideal inspirations gives us back, on the other hand, impetus, identity, and function. To offer a soul to today's Europe means to contribute to the shaping of conscience.” [20]

Even if there is talk about a European cultural space, about the affinities linking the peoples from this part of the world, nothing forces them to unite in a superstate political form such as the current one. Political elites were those who gave an impetus to this construction. And, as these elites are supporters of ideologies, there are as many projects for Europe's future as there are ideologies.

Besides the project of the third Reich and Stalin's claim of building a communist Europe, there are at least three great ideological projects which made possible today's political construction, the European Union. These are the liberals', the socialists' and the Christian-democrats' projects.

It is widely known that liberal ideology put forth the idea of representativeness and the market economy. At the core of the liberal state lies the conception according to which governmental political activity applies to a historically formed reality, with an economic and social structure, with particular personality traits and mindsets, which is the civil society, and this reality independent of public order can never be the raw material of political experiments. In playing its role as society's manager, the liberal state, finds itself in a dilemma: it must perform the tasks for which it was created, taking into account the obligation it owes to those who mandated him, and, at the same time, it must use the power with which it was invested as a limitless type of power. The art of liberal government resides in keeping this balance.

Currently, the chosen topic of European liberals is the re-affirmation of the principles of liberal constitutionalism. As Nicolas Rousseiller notices, “it is not only the presidentialism of democratic regimes and its corresponding criticism that determine the re-emergence of constitutional issues in each country, to the benefit of a rehabilitation of Parliament or control authorities (Councils or Constitutional tribunals) and of a new distinction of powers (information and, recently, the mass media), but also the European construction itself, through transfer or through the creation of sovereignty, questions once again the concentration of power, carried out, since 1945 (or previously), to the profit of executives and state powers. The two phenomena, through their promise of renewal, as well as through the risks they encompass, go in the same direction in order to question again, at a twofold scale - national and multinational - the issue of liberal constitutionalism: to divide and distribute sovereignty and power, but to avoid the dispersion of the unity of representation, deliberation and pursuit of the common Good.” [21]. Besides these issues, liberals may also have political interests linked to the European construction: support for a unitary construction at the expense of segmentation (a topic that could clash with ‘social’, ‘green’ Europe).

Socialist ideology is represented in the European Parliament by the social-democrat group. Classic social-democrats believed, following in Marx's footsteps, that the economy of the free market is a source of crises, which could only be overcome by collective decision-making (government, owners and unions). Since the '80s, the social-democrats have diminished their socialism, sliding towards liberalism, and this owing to the changing features of the electoral pool (the mass from the secondary sector, which was likely to vote for the left and was predominant in the industrial society, migrated to the tertiary and the quaternary sector, which are predominant in the post-industrial society; the number of employees has declined, while the number of small entrepreneurs has increased, and the latter consider that their interests are better defended by liberalism), and introducing itself as a 'third way' between socialism and liberalism, according to the concept developed by Anthony Giddens [22]. Besides these, the welfare state created according to the classic social-democrat doctrine is changing its features owing to the emergence of some new interventionist agents, both very powerful and effective; they are international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank) and superstate structures such as the EU.

In the evolution of the EU, socialists played a crucial role in unlocking negotiations in the Community when it took the power from de Gaulle, in 1969, and during Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik. However, soon after, conflicts burst out between French socialists and Labour Party members who opposed Britain's accession to the EC. The '70s brought along a strong anti-European trend among European socialists, as they turned their attention towards the problems of the 'Third World'. Also, they were interested in social integration rather than in political integration. Michel Dreyfus considers that "this position offered a double advantage: while fulfilling the progressive requirements of the parties as a whole, it left aside the issue of community political structures, which was greatly debated upon. Thus conceived, Europe would be 'extended', 'pacifist' – coming closer to the analyses of the Socialist International – and, finally, 'united', that is, opposing both dictatorship and the economic oppression of the Third World." [23]

Finally, Christian-democracy is the ideology best supported in the EP by the European People's Party, a group that encompasses, for the most part, Christian-democrat political parties. The Christian-democrats' most important contribution is the enforcement of the subsidiarity principle, supplemented by that of proportionality. The former answers the question of 'whether' and the latter of 'how' the EU should intervene in the policies of member states. The principle of subsidiarity is also expressed in Romano Prodi's statement that: "European nations can only be led through the organisation of a 'weak state'. A 'weak' state is by no means lesser than a 'stronger' one, because it can develop more important functions in a better way, while consolidating its bond with citizens. [...] The EU citizenship standards could also function as starting points for national reforms concerning the abolition of the 'strong state' – for instance, concerning the consolidation of the role of civil and trade law at the expense of



‘administrative’ role played by the typical nineteenth century state.” [20, p. 8-12].

Although Christian-democrat parties have a Universalist ideology, their specificities blocked the coagulation of their forces for a long time, and their unity today is due to the exigencies of European integration. However, besides their differences, a common element to Christian-democrats has been their engagement to defend ‘Christian civilization’, which was defined as follows by one of the first architects of the European people’s political group, Luigi Sturzo: “Defending the principles of morality and law which are to be found in the political conception and in the practical organization of civilized states, especially in what regards the respect for human freedom and personality, for equality before the law, the administration of justice, the respect for family rights and for the Christian faith, the enforcement of social fairness and collaboration between classes, international cooperation among states and the affirmation of the international right to peace among peoples” [24].

The Programme of the Christian-Democrat International, adopted in 1976, proclaimed “We want Europe’s unification”, a desideratum for whose realization the Christian-democrats have always sought an alliance with the liberals, without excluding strategic agreements with the social-democrats. Here is how a Christian-democrat such as Romano Prodi perceives Europe: “European nations and peoples have incorporated Christian life into their diversity. Hence, the necessity to rediscover both pluralism and the identity of inspiration in order to give life to Europe’s ideal.” [20, p. 66]

Each of these three ideological orientations and each of these projects is to be found in the *Constitutional Treaty*: the liberal market economy, the welfare state sponsored by the social-democrats, and the subsidiarity and personalism of the Christian-democrats. And the benefits of this ‘programmes of happiness’ advocated by the three great ideologies target all the EU citizens, regardless of their religion.

If the great ideological movements were shaped on the Christian cultural background, a new situation would emerge if the EU included Turkey, a country with a mostly Muslim population. Then could we still talk of a ‘Christian Europe’? In this case, we come back to the discussion about EU borders, which may be geographical, economic, or cultural. The question that lingers, as, Nilüfer Göle notices [25], refers to what the EU should be: a construction based on Christianity and the Western civilization or one based on democratic values, regardless of history or geography?

I believe that we could still talk about a Christian Europe after Turkey’s adhesion, because Christian principles were taken over by the political ideologies that proposed the projects of a unite Europe which made possible today’s political construction. Tolerance, as a fundamental value, will make possible a Europe which would bring together Christians and the Muslims of Turkey and Croatia. There is no single model for the relationship between religion and the state in the current Christian EU membership states, so Turkey will under no circumstances be a completely new case. What is important is to

what extent the Turkish society is willing to adapt to European standards, because EU membership means not only a geographical position on the European continent, but also adhering to the *community acquis*.

#### 4. Conclusions

Today, the expression 'European area' refers not only to the geographical borders of a place on Earth but also, and most important, it designates a cultural and political entity. It has formed throughout a history of over two millennia, in which the peoples living on the European continent created or assumed cultural models which have eventually led to the 'European cultural model'. The Greek-Latin and Judeo-Christian cultures created a cultural and political reality at whose core lies the individual.

The secularization of public life led to the birth of ideology, a phenomenon that has not removed religion from people's lives but only reduced its coverage in the universe of political decision-making. Thus, we are currently witnessing a cohabitation of religion and ideology in the European area, as today's political construction was possible owing to the Christian background as well as to the three great particular ideologies (liberalism, socialism, and Christian-democracy).

Besides affirming Christian principles from partisan positions, I believe that the central value of the European construction is tolerance, which will allow bringing together in the same area all the citizens who respect this principle, regardless of their religion. It is political ideologies that will make possible the cohabitation of Christians and Muslims in the European Union, just as, currently, the three main ideological trends encompass Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, New Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.... If the religions of the future European Union maintain differences which seem difficult to overcome today, it is ideologies that will bring the European citizens together, regardless of their faiths. The two main integrators, religion and ideology, will continue to play a part in the EU's balance and stability, just as they have done up to now.

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