

Without losing my religion: The dilemmas of EU integration in Poland

Introduction

The role of religion in public life has mainly been examined in social studies, with contributions that pointed to the process of secularization in the 1960s and 1970s.

Peter Berger, author of *The Sacred Canopy* (1990), stressed later that these analyses have mistakenly confused the process of pluralization and secularization. He noted that the impact of modernization does not necessarily lead to secularization, but may change how we believe in God, and affect formations of values and attitudes.

Modernization impacts on varying choices and the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe had a similar influence across the region. As Jose Casanova (2006) underlines, the impact of secularization provides the Churches opportunities to emerge and enter the social and political discourse. The same Churches found opportunities within the fall of Communism and the process of democratization in the region.

Recently, comparative political science has offered contributions on the role of the Churches and to what extent they can maximize their policy influence (Grzymała-Busse 2012, 2015). However, studies rarely provide contributions beyond religious institutions and the state, and impact of the Churches on policy choices. This analysis seeks to contribute to this debate by taking a step backwards and to understand how the role of the Churches can find a new strength in a post-Communist environment in order to stabilize its position across public opinion and the social and political agenda during the democratization process. In particular the interest is in the investigation of the turning point that comes with EU (European Union) membership, which often

resembles the impact of modernization – and secularization – in Western societies, and the analysis of the ‘dilemmas’ of the Polish Roman Catholic Church. It is noted that the Polish Church has often had an uncomfortable, and antagonistic, relationship with democracy. Adam Michnik, former dissident, historian and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, defines it as a relationship of reciprocated mistrust (Baker 2009: 48). In addition, the Polish Catholic Church developed an antithetic relation towards political institutions under Communism, which seems to persist after the fall of the Soviet regime. Specifically, it is suggested that the Church would view the State as a system to implement the common good, which should reflect the Roman Catholic values and norms (Baker 2009: 52). In the run-up to EU accession, in March 2004, the Polish Episcopate published two documents, for the good of the nation, with reference to the nearing membership to the EU and increasing worrying concerns on the growing secularization of Europe (Machaj and Białas-Zielińska 2013). The reference was to support the resistance against Western laicization and addressed the importance of persuading society towards humanist and universal values for the protection of human life (Machaj and Białas-Zielińska 2013).

The Polish Roman Catholic Church has traditionally embodied the civilizational identity of Poland, but while most of the studies have focused on (exclusive) identity and the Orthodox Church (Marsh 2007; Leustean 2008) in the Balkans, where Orthodoxy is at the basis of national mythologies, Catholicism has generally been examined as a significant positive factor for support towards EU integration (Nelsen et al. 2011). Hence, the analysis here focuses on the possible dilemmas of the Church towards EU integration, and when, and if, it can seek an alliance with a political party and strengthen the Eurosceptic debate. It is in run-up to EU accession that the Churches are likely to find an opportunity to emerge and pursue to maintain their

people (*belonging*), while opening a dialogue in a new changing society and, often volatile, party system. In this analysis, the study investigates how the Catholic Church can enter the political discourse as a Eurosceptic actor, by using an original framework of analysis, adapted by the study of the Churches as interest groups in Western Europe (Warner 2000). The study is based on previous work on attitudes towards the EU and the role of religion (Guerra 2012, 2013) and inductively, by applying the theoretical framework, it shows that the Church has chances to enter the social and political discourse and strategically it can become a political actor, using a Eurosceptic narrative, in the run-up to and after EU accession.

Religion, politics as channel, and Euroscepticism

The process of democratization provided the opportunity to the Church to reorganize itself and fill the possible political vacuum left by the Communist regime. At the EU level, religious communities opened their offices in Brussels, while at the founding of the European communities elites were more interested in the ‘sovereignty of the nation-state’ (Leustean 2012: 71). At the same time, at the domestic level, the ‘rewriting of the past on Eastern Europe went hand in hand with religious revival across former communist lands and the return of organized religion into public life.’ (Byford 2008: 2) The process of EU integration can be perceived as a threat if the EU is viewed as a ‘secular’ organization, and represents a turning point in the political debates during the process of democratization in the region. ‘Mainline Churches are, by nature, conservative’ (Ramet 2006: 148) and the ultra-conservative Church can enter the social debate to defend national values and join a political alliance to strengthen its influence against secular Europe, framed in a Eurosceptic narrative. This would further provide opportunities to vocalize the Church’s official position at a

time when countries are re-drafting their Constitutions in order to preserve the role of the spiritual institution in the social and political developments at the national level. The 'politicization of religion is ... not merely a phenomenon of Orthodox religion' (Ramet 2005: 255), as the return to ultra conservative values in Poland can show (Guerra 2016).

Poland has shown very high levels of support for EU integration prior to joining. The EU represented a civilizational choice and, as a country, the choice for the EU was representing the 'return to Europe'. In addition, both economic rationality and affective reasons affected patterns of support. (Guerra 2013) Still, Polish citizenship expected a painless process, while after the opening of the negotiation process domestic debates opened to the emergence of Euroscepticism. Euroscepticism is defined as 'contingent or qualified opposition' towards the EU integration process, which may also incorporate 'outright and unqualified opposition' (Taggart 1998: 365-366). It further developed the distinction at the party level, with soft Euroscepticism, to indicate opposition to one or more policies, and hard Euroscepticism, supporting the withdrawal of the country from the EU or seeking to halt further integration (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002). More recently, continued and regular contestation brought the debate towards the embeddedness of the phenomenon (Usherwood and Startin 2013), indicating its pervasive and enduring presence across different domestic contexts in the EU member states. In Poland these emerged between 1999 and 2001, first with the Polish Agreement in 1999 and the League of Polish Families in the 2001 elections. It was in 2001 that Self-Defence and the LPR parties gained 10.20% (53 seats) and 7.87% (38 seats) of the votes, and brought Euroscepticism in the *Sejm* (polish parliament) for the first time. Therefore, the transformation process, together with the reforms, necessary for the transition and EU accession could provoke such a

varying attitude (Szczurbiak 2002a, 2002b). Social and economic changes due to the reforms spread the idea that Poland was not gaining a 'full membership', and opposition increased. Attitudes before joining saw first, very high level of support and the very low percentages of opposition (in June 1994, 77% supported, 6% opposed); second, the sudden drop of 1998 and 1999, when not only support collapsed, but the number of opponents reached almost 30% (in May 1999 55% supported, 26% opposed; later in March 2001 30% of Poles opposed membership); third, the slow increasing trend in the level of support in the run-up to accession, while a good share of opponents (31% in February 2004) remained until the membership.

Although the League of Polish Families can be seen as the most successful political party campaigning (also) on Euroscepticism and defending Polish values, Polish Euroscepticism was not centred on identity (Szczurbiak 2004). As Szczurbiak (2004) wrote, the League sought to preserve Polish national identity, co-operating 'with everyone who want[ed] to build social relations with Poland on a Christian basis' (Szczurbiak 2004: 257). Between 2001 and 2006, the League of Polish Families found an ally in Radio Maryja. Together they shared a common agenda with issues debated on heated tones of political confrontation; there was consistency between the political and religious leaderships. (Guerra 2012) They did not represent the official Polish Church, but the Polish experience proves that the political and social transposition of ultra-conservative Catholic values to the domestic and European debates may be successful.

The LPR lost any support with the 2007 general elections. In order not to lose a channel in the Polish party system, Father Rydzyk shifted its support for Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*: PiS), the mainstream social conservative party. It was in the interest of Father Rydzyk to select a party in order to influence on policy

choices at salient turning points of the domestic political process developments. After the successful general elections of October 2015, when PiS unsurprisingly returned to power (Guerra and Casal Bértoa 2015), the alliance has started to give more salience to sensitive themes for the Catholic voters (Guerra 2016), as a possible enacted draconian abortion law, amid general protests (Gazeta Wyborcza 2016).

Democracy, Religion, and EU integration

The role of the Church and the state is an essential characteristic of democracy and, as argued by Michael Driessen (2010), the government role towards the Church may have neutral or positive, and not harmful, as expected, outcomes during the process of democratization. As the arrangements of this relationship can vary, the inclusive role of the Church can provide an additional support of moral and public authority. In particular, where religion still represents a hegemonic symbolic influence, it is contended that embedding civil and political rights that blend on the 'values of the predominant culture' in the new system can further strengthen its legitimacy (Driessen 2010: 77)

A varying outcome in the relationship with religion is highlighted also in the analyses on political attitudes (Ben-Nun Bloom and Arkan 2012a; 2013a; 2013b). Religious attitudes can affect multi-faceted values and can combine with different and opposing attitudes towards society and democracy. Religion can influence conservative values, which would oppose liberal ideas and support order - in opposition to democratic values. Also, religious belonging and individual involvement in social networks would lead to positive attitudes towards democracy (Ben-Nun Bloom and Arkan 2012a; 2013a; 2013b). In particular, 'traditional and survival values' (Ben-Nun and Arkan 2013a) can emerge and the process of EU

integration is likely to trigger more conservative values, when it is perceived as a threat to national values.

This explanation does not seem to be sufficient to explain Eurosceptic attitudes, but it can represent a factor influencing the Eurosceptic narrative of religious actors. In particular, if religious actors find an ally among the extreme-right wing political family, and support a soft, opposition to a policy, or hard, outright opposition, Eurosceptic agenda based on threat to sovereignty and national values in the run-up to accession (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). Catholicism in Poland was encapsulated in Polish identity; the Catholic Church could play the role of strengthening national identity and political resistance against the Soviet regime. While the democratization process and the EU represented a promotion of 'pluralist' and secular society, the Catholic Church felt challenged in its role of spiritual, but also social, cultural and political guide, as it was able to maintain also during the Soviet regime.

The opening towards a pluralist society added to the loss of a share of believers. The impact of the social and political changes also affected religious attitudes. Citizens perceived that the Church could not cope with the new challenges of contemporary life and accepted its spiritual guide in their individual life, but rejected its voice on the social and political debates (Jasińska-Kania and Mirosława Marody 2004). In the 1990s religiosity started losing its institutional role (*belonging*), while maintaining its spiritual leadership (*believing*) and created opportunities for social and political alliances. (Guerra 2012)

Catholicism in Poland

Catholicism in Poland has historically played the double role of maintaining social cohesion and representing the symbol against the enemy. It resisted in opposition to

the Slavic tribes at the time of the Piast family, and in the Eighteenth century it represented Polish unity against the devastation following the three partitions. Even though the Polish state was divided, the Polish nation could persist and national religious symbols helped overcome any divisions (De Lange and Guerra 2009). In a narrative discourse and in the literature, Poland has often been transposed to the Catholic idea of purity and sacrifice for Europe. In the words of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński:

The strength and vitality of the Church in Poland rest on these things: the faith of the people, divine grace in the Polish souls, trust between people and clergy, a supernatural community and a sharing in the truly 'rich' means – the holy sacraments and prayer. From these the Church draws its power. (1966: 65)

With the end of World War II Poland experienced the Soviet occupation. Nonetheless the Church could maintain a role in social life in a regime later defined as authoritarian (Linz and Stepan 1996). When the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) movement was founded (see De Lange and Guerra 2009), the leadership of Lech Wałęsa emerged also by shared values with Catholicism. The visit that John Paul II, the first non-Italian and Polish Pope, paid to his country in 1979 further strengthened the impulse that the movement had in the democratization process of the country. Therefore, Catholicism was able to guide this process from within the Solidarity movement and play a major role, protecting Polish national sovereignty against Communism and as an active actor in the process of democratization. Since then the Church has assumed a double position, on one hand it has supported democratization, on the other it has had a defensive, and contrasting, attitude. In the 1990s, it has defended the Catholic roots of the Polish national identity in the new Polish

constitution (1997), but also perceived the loss of the symbolic transposition between the Church and national identity that permeated the history of the country.

In 1996, in Poland more than 90% of the citizens replied they belonged to a religious denomination, second after Iceland, and almost 60% attended the religious service ‘once a week or more often’, second after Ireland (Guerra 2012). For Polish citizens the holy sacraments, such as birth and marriage, were more important than for any other European citizens. Nonetheless, while the Church was able to maintain its spiritual guide, only one third thought that it could provide adequate answers for the ‘social problems facing the country’ (Guerra 2012). The role of Catholicism in Poland has been fundamental as preserving and protecting the often-threatened Polish identity. However, the position of the Catholic Church in citizens’ life has changed during the democratization process and the path to EU membership. The challenge of a ‘pluralist society’ has impacted on the role of the Church in everyday life, but the institutional dimension (*belonging*) was losing believers, moving towards the individualization of religiosity. This change could be perceived within the lenses of the EU integration process. The Polish Church became concerned with the consequences of EU integration and its perceived promotion of secularization and consumerism.

Ultra-conservative narrative before and after EU membership

With EU integration, a new wave of anti-Semitism, linked to the Polish past, revived around young radical-right groupings. Previous research found that anti-Semitic attitudes doubled between 1999 and 2002 (from 8 to 16%), with increased salience of the anti-Semitic discourse in the public debates. Abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriages became to be discussed publicly and up to then civil liberties had not been

applied to sexual preferences. (Graff 2006) Cases of violence against gay rights marchers emerged, with the involvement of a young far-right movement, the All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*: MW). A few years before, the young leader of LPR, Roman Giertych, appointed as Minister of Education in 2006, was a member of the same group, and in office always called for a ban on pro-equality marches and supported the teaching of classes on Polish history separated from general history classes. With 16% of the votes at the 2004 European Parliament elections, the LPR secured 10 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) and the European Parliament (EP) addressed the rising tide of illiberal attitudes in Poland. A very small percentage thought that homosexuality was a normal thing (4%) and 58% was hostile to equality marches (Graff 2006). This attitude was generally linked to heartfelt Polish patriotism and the idea that the EU was corrupt and led by a homosexual lobby (Graff 2006: 446-447).

The League fell short of votes at the 2007 general elections, but represented for about eight years, the political party that could promote and support a (conservative) Christian social programme at the domestic level and defend Polish values in the European Parliament. Catholicism represented a core Polish value, which had been able to keep together the Polish nation, against the other, when historically the 'others' (Prussia, Austria, Russia) strengthened the role of religion in Polish life, impacting on the national character.

In her study on the Catholic Church in Europe after the Second World War, Carolyn Warner (2000) suggests to examine the alliance that the Church can establish with a Christian Democratic party as an interest group. As such the Church is interested in establishing an alliance with a political party in order to represent its social agenda. As I have explained (Guerra 2012), in Poland, it was the ultra-

conservative Church and Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, of the Redemptionist order, who supported the LPR, which created the social and political alliance. This was fundamental for the League's electoral success and the League itself represented the political 'channel' for the social agenda of Father Rydzyk. Its emergence came at a 'time, in the run-up to accession, when the social costs of the reforms materialized and the path towards EU membership, expected to be achieved in a few years, became long and demanding. Politically, the League represented a sort of subcultural party (Enyedi 1996) and represented those Christian values that were dispersed in any other political party or coalition. So, while in post-Second World War Europe the Church generally found an alliance with the Christian Democratic, Father Rydzyk, of an ultra-conservative religious order, assumed more conservative and Eurosceptic positions. He also provided essential 'resources' to both the party and its political leaders, through its radio, newspaper and public channels, and this became a successful factor for the LPR success. Also, before the accession referendum (2003), the League was the only party that campaigned against EU membership and was perceived as the party that could care for the position of Poland in the EU, filling a political gap.

Table 1 about here

With the loss of political representation at the 2007 general elections, Father Rydzyk shifted its support for Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*: PiS), the mainstream right-wing social conservative party. It was in the interest of Father Rydzyk to select a party in order to impact on policy choices and the voter could still see the most salient issues represented (Guerra 2012) (see table 1). The PiS electorate is more conservative in matters of economy and tends to protect Polish national values and

norms, while supporting Polish sovereignty over EU integration. In particular abortion and the position of Poland towards the EU remain salient issues for the conservative right wing voter and both the LPR, before and after joining the EU, and PiS represent the party that can defend Polish values at the domestic and EU levels. Sociological research applied to previous changes in the case of Poland shows that Christianity seemed to 'acquire meaning only in relation to its role as an eliminator of oppression and instigator of revolution or, in the case of Poland, as a guardian of the national consciousness and as an instrument of political opposition.' (Pomian-Srzednicki 1982: 169). It still does.

Waves of resistance

As for the League, Radio Maryja now favours (and exchanges favours ie: resources) with the PiS government. In December 2015, when the Radio celebrated its 14th years, Marek Jurek, Speaker of the *Sejm* (Polish parliament) travelled to Toruń to give a speech and to stress that PiS value 'the Catholic voice in (Polish) homes' (Guerra 2012). PiS currently represents the party that can guaranteed the 'Christian social' programme Father Rydzyk seeks to pursuit, where the ultimate auspicated goal in the social agenda is the 'hegemonic position' on life and orientations of the collectivity. (Warner 2000 in Guerra 2012). The two sides support and strengthen each other and their position in the social and political life by stressing 'Catholicism, the Nation and Patriotism'.

The year 2016 further offers the Church more opportunities. It is a Jubilee year in Poland, and Pope Francis visited Kraków in July (25-31) for the World Youth Day – the World Youth Day 'is coming home ... It's no accident that the pope is starting the trip by going by helicopter to Częstochowa' – less than 100 miles from Kraków, it is

where Poland's 'Black Madonna' is located, at the Monastery of Jasna Gòra, a sign of the link with Pope John Paul II and enduring Polish link with Catholicism. (Allen Jr. 2016)

The government is definitely positive towards the Church: it has exempted it from a restrictive inheritance law and religious representatives often attend state ceremonies. In their agenda, the EU is seen in a negative frame and is accused of not understanding the new member states. Hence, on 14 April, when Poland's Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, gave a speech at a ceremony celebrating the 1,050th anniversary of the Catholic Church as the national faith, the narrative became the occasion for a Eurosceptic accusation against the EU. In December 2015, the European Parliament summoned the Prime Minister over accusation on the respect of the rule of law in Poland. Concerns emerged following plans to limit the power of the national constitutional court but also reforms in the media and civil service. So, on one hand the Eurosceptic rhetoric finds a new breeding ground in the challenging relationship between PiS and the EU, on the other religious actors are becoming more prominent in the political and social life, where Euroscepticism can re-enter the debate protecting the Polish nation. The PiS victory has heralded a predictable turn towards more socially conservative policies, attempts to control education, pro-life stances and the promotion of religion in everyday life, but it has also changed Poland's approach towards more pragmatic away from the EU. This can be seen as linked to the party's relationship with the Church. The Church perceives itself as both provider and defender of Polish values.

Thus, when a popular initiative supported a more restrictive Abortion law, debates became more and more contested with political elites avoiding taking a formal position. Abortion on social grounds is also illegal and the rules are very restrictive: in

1993 the Polish Parliament introduced the law called the Act on Family Planning stating abortion is legal, when pregnancy is a threat to the health of the pregnant woman, when the embryo is irreversibly damaged, or when there is justified suspicion, confirmed by a prosecutor, that pregnancy is the result of an illegal act. Doctors who perform illegal abortions are subject to punishment up to three years of prison. The law was slightly relaxed in 1996, but then tightened when abortion was ruled as unconstitutional, on the basis that the Polish Constitution includes provisions of legal protection of life to every human being (Art.38). The debate around abortion is further complicated by the fact the government is anxious to increase birth rate to tackle Poland's demographic problems. In April the government launched its flagship 500+ programme, which allocates a monthly allowance of 500 złoty (112-114 Euros) to families for all second and subsequent child up to 18 years old age, with forecast of about 300,000 children born in the next decade. Despite initial enthusiasm, protests have emerged across the country (Kośmiński 2016), although the proposal of a new law with a total ban of abortion returned at the end of September 2016. The *Czarny Protest* (Black Protest) supported by civil society and the *Czerny Poniedziałek* (Black Monday), on the 3rd of October, with the Polish women's strike, was by far not the most numerous street protest, but it definitely signaled the changing face of Polish Catholicism. While part of the Church maintains a rather conservative attitude, public opinion remains quite neutral and would favour the status quo. Still, there is a changing attitude, in particular among young people (Mandes and Rogaczewska 2013) who feel distant from more traditional forms of religiosity. The protest was successful and the Parliament voted the proposal down, but the full support that the government had for a long time may change and create a challenge for the alliance between the PiS government and the religious conservative groups. In particular, the

protests seem to have further widened a more liberal Poland and a social conservative Poland.

Since 2005 Poland has seen the alternation between the social right, represented by PiS, and the liberal right, represented by Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*: PO). When the PiS led the country in 2005, the majority was formed in coalition with two junior allies, Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*: SO) and the League of Polish Families, so the degrees of freedom of the party were constrained within the coalition alliance. At the time it was the League to sustain and defend Polish values. When the liberal right PO won the 2007 and 2012 elections under the leadership of Donald Tusk (now president of the European Council), Poland saw continuity in power for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union. The stable leadership of the liberal party, and the additional success of PO at the presidential elections, guided Poland during the first decade in the EU. This coincided with a positive economic outlook and pro-EU attitudes reflected in public opinion polls. In the months after joining the EU the average level of support has never declined below 72% (CBOS) with very low levels of opposition to the EU integration process. Civic Platform has led a narrative on the success of Poland as a winner of the transition across the region, but this has increasingly been perceived negatively by citizens and as the arrogant triumphalism of the elites. As a result, those from the areas of poverty that persist across the country preferred to vote for conservative political parties, while protest parties won in particular the vote of young people, while Euroscepticism is part of this agenda, with the support of the ultra-conservative Church.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Roman Catholic countries with a predominant Catholic post-Communist society see the Church as having a legitimate role in political life. In post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, membership of the

religious community and membership of the nation often go hand in hand. The notion of belonging together – free from the Soviet regime – overlapped with those values and norms that were developed and strengthened the nation during the years of democratization. Similarly, in the Western Balkans, religious institutions presented themselves ‘as the only legitimate institution providing moral judgement upon the acts of the individual within each nation. They were and still are the judge, the jury, and the executioner.’ (Ognjenović & Jozelić 2014: 3). As this role fades away with the increasing process of secularization, the Church seeks to regain its position, in some cases at the price of self-destruction (Ognjenović & Jozelić 2014). That seems to happen also in the case of the Polish Church, as Rebecca Pasini (1996) observes, it often behaves as a self-interest actor, striving to achieve its own goals, even against the popular will, and as such possibly triggering a backlash.

Conclusion

This analysis, based on the Polish case study, aimed to explore and examine if, why and when the Catholic Church enters or seeks to enter the debate on EU accession in Eurosceptic terms. In Poland, the Church has played a fundamental role in the development of the national history and domestic politics. In Central and Eastern post-Communist Europe, where there is a predominant religion, belonging to that religious community is ‘linked to the belonging’ to the nation (Bremer 2008: 265). The notion of belonging together, free from the Communist regime, overlapped with those values and norms that protected or were strengthening the nation during the democratization process. In the case of Poland, it seems to feed into Euroscepticism.

The alliance between the ultra-conservative Church and a radical-right wing political party vocalised religious Euroscepticism in the run-up to accession. It also

affected the narrative with anti-Semitism after joining the EU, while it currently returns to pursue a social conservative agenda, possibly polarizing public debates.

The Polish Catholic Church does not reject globalization, but tries to give it a Catholic direction, and shows that it can affect evaluations of the democratic system and the EU. In the past religion has remained ambiguous and has represented a symbol in the fight for democracy or against modernization and democratization, as in the Spanish case. Similarly, now it seems to remain ambivalent in the post-Communist region. However, a few factors determine the success of religious Euroscepticism, and in particular the role of the Church at the domestic level. The future of enlargement can impact on future critical debates that, with the presence of young radical-right groups and a nationalist ideology at the party system level, can result in a social and cultural alliance to control the government agenda in a Eurosceptic frame. That has happened in Poland between 2001 and 2007, and the return of this political alliance can represent a channel for a Church willing to resist the change and affect the direction of social life.

This analysis argues that the process of EU integration develops contrasting attitudes within the Catholic Church. The EU may be perceived as a secular organization or threaten national sovereignty and the Church or religious actor can choose to join the Eurosceptic political arena to defend Catholicism and national values. Although Catholicism never represented a determinant factor impacting on negative attitudes towards the EU in Poland (Guerra 2013), it could become a source for EU opposition and influence a Eurosceptic narrative in the public discourse during the integration process, when the language of forgiveness became the language of extremism. As aforementioned the religious institution and its active role can have a positive influence on strengthening democracy, but may also have a negative impact.

In the case of unprecedented floods in Southeastern Europe, Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church ‘commented that the floods were God’s punishment for letting Conchita win European Song Contest... “a divine punishment for their vices”... ‘God is thus washing Serbia of its sins’”, where her victory was standing as ‘one more step in the rejection of the Christian identity of European culture’ (Ognjenović & Jozelić 2014: 212). This follows the Church’s narrative before joining the EU in Poland. Father Rydzyk used to talk about the EU as an organization threatening Polish farmers, in his words, with EU membership, ‘foreigners buy the farmer’s land, while the farmer himself starves’, and the EU was represented as a land of vices, perversion and abortion.

If in the Southeastern case the call is for counterfeited religious symbolism and the address of unjustified means of political strategies, in the case of the EU and religion the interest relies on an inclusive and social vision of the EU. The case of Poland and the current post-Brexit political and social debates show that Euroscepticism is multi-faceted and it attaches to contingent issues. The socially conservative PiS government has offered new opportunities for the Church to influence a pro-life agenda and more contested EU debates. Still the pro-family policies are positively affecting shares of society. This government shows growing satisfaction across public opinion, although at small levels, with 38% supporting it (April 2016, CBOS) – to find similar data we should look back up to 2014 – and decreasing levels thinking that the country is moving towards the wrong direction and more towards the right direction, it was 57% vs. 28% in May 2015, and it is 45% vs. 37% (April 2016, CBOS). Early to assert whether behind these numbers there is only the honeymoon effect, but figures award the protest in a polarized country divided between two Polands, a pro-EU secular Poland and a social national conservatism Poland, supported by the Church, further

strengthened by popular protest against the new proposed law on abortion in October 2016.

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Table 1. Issue salience: LPR and PiS vs. Polish (PL) voter compared

<i>2001 PNES</i>	<i>LPR</i>	<i>PL</i>
Role of the Catholic Church	6.77	4.59
Clearing with the communist past	4.75	3.29
Polish policy towards the EU	4.96	6.10

2005 PNES	LPR	PL
Abortion	6.77	4.59
Low birth rate	6.67	5.33
Settlement of foreigners	5.50	4.50
Clearing with the Communist past	6.43	5.16

2011 PNES	PiS	PL
Role of the Church in political life	3.7	1.7
Abortion	4.7	3.0
Privatization	6.1	9.9
EU and Poland	5.2	1.2

2001 and 2005 PNES: Values from 0 (less supportive) to 10 (more supportive); 2011 PNES: Values from 0 (less supportive, more conservative) to 10 (more supportive, more liberal).

Legenda: 2001 and 2011 PNES: Role of the Catholic Church, as more influence of the Catholic Church; Polish policy towards the EU, as supporting EU integration. 2005 PNES: (and 2011 PNES) Abortion and Low birth rate, as supporting pro-life policies; 2011 PNES: EU and Poland, favouring Polish sovereignty vis-à-vis EU integration.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge Professor Radosław Markowski and Professor Mikołaj Czeńnik, Polish Academy of Sciences and Warsaw School of Social Psychology for the PNES data, the reviewers and Professor Milda Ališauskienė and Dr. Panagiotis Pentaris for their perceptive comments on the article.