

ALAR KILP

HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE DECLINE  
OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: COMMUNISM,  
CONFESSION OR CHURCH'S RELATION WITH  
NATIONAL IDENTITY?

In the beginning of the 19th century, the European populations in culturally Western Christian societies were religiously affiliated. By the end of the 20th century some decline of religious affiliation had occurred in all societies. Among the post-communist societies, however, the decline in religious affiliation has occurred with significant variations. The data from the World Values Surveys (WVS) of 1999/2000 shows an extraordinary high level of religious affiliation in Poland, which is surpassed only by Malta. At the opposite extreme, the three least religiously affiliated traditionally Western Christian cultures come also from the post-communist region. In general, the levels of church membership have declined less in Catholic, mono-confessional, and West-European societies. The alienation of individuals from the traditional Christian Churches, however, has not been *primarily* caused by the Confessional tradition, the Communist politics of religion or modernization, but because of the nature of the cultural relationship between the traditional religion and the national identity during the last two centuries.

European nation-building started with the process of *confessionalization* (confession-building) of societies<sup>1</sup>, which united or,

<sup>1</sup> The confessionalization of society aimed at "Christianizing" the everyday life and the (re)imposition of religious discipline. The confessionalization of politics meant "a deepening of the alliance between church and state and a tightening of the relationship between confessional and "national" identity." P. S. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700", *American Sociological Review*, no. 1, p. 152, 153.

if to use the sociological term, de-differentiated the “political” and “religious” spheres of life to the extent that the “sense of religious belonging” became equivalent to the sense of political membership. The Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), and Anglican confessions of faith, formulated since the Reformation, defined the political membership and guaranteed the internal coherence of the society and culture. Typically, where religious minorities were tolerated, they were tolerated also *as confessional* minorities.

During the 19th and 20th centuries secular nationalism<sup>2</sup> replaced the earlier confessional basis of political membership with the idea of political “citizenship”. In the present world of nation-states, political “citizenship” does not need to be accompanied by a formal connectedness to a particular religious association, tradition, membership, and identity. In fact, in a world, where religious freedom is perceived to be a universal human right, where individuals are free to adhere to the religion of their choice and preference, and where religious coercion of any kind is contrary to the fundamental values of the liberal cultures and democratic polities, the overlap of political and religious “sense of identification” occurs only in cases, where “the politically national” is positively related to the “culturally religious”.

The particular focus of this study is on the extent to which the “culturally religious” is connected both to the national identity and to a single historical confession. The main indicator for the evaluation of this connection is the religious affiliation.

Societies may build their internal cohesion on a functional equivalent of a religious homogeneity that secures cultural cohesion and provides a shared political identity also in the context of religious diversity.<sup>3</sup> All functional political communities behave in a religion-like manner, but not all of them are related to a particular religious tradition. As Timothy Crippen has put it, every society has its “unified systems of beliefs and rituals relative to conceptions of the sacred... beliefs

<sup>2</sup> For present purposes all types of nationalism, which base their legitimacy on the popular sovereignty, belong to the category “secular”.

<sup>3</sup> P. E. Hammond, “Secularization, Incorporation, and Social Relations”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1966, no. 2., p. 189.

and rituals that encourage individuals to subordinate their *apparent* self-interest in relation to the *collectively expressed* interest of sovereign organization". For that reason, religion is "a universal component of human societies" and every human society is inevitably "characterized by some form of sacred (although not necessarily transcendental) symbolism and ritual".<sup>4</sup>

To the extent that the religio-political symbiosis is not accompanied by a predominant membership in a related religious tradition, the religion that is functional in this symbiosis, is represented singularly by a *political community*, the sense of affiliation is singularly *political*. The sacralised political community retains its connections to religious symbols, but has become autonomous from a religious institution.

The sense of belongingness to a particular confessional tradition is in the weakest – in comparison with the other types of identification with a religious tradition such as belief in the doctrines of the particular religious tradition and attendance in religious services – and widest – because of being numerically the largest – possible manner manifested by the self-proclaimed membership in it.

The paper argues that the widest and weakest connection to a religious association – religious affiliation – persists mostly in cases, where the particular religious tradition is related to the cultural identity of the political community. Therefore, those who are the most "weakly" connected to a confessional tradition and to its religious institution, are worthy of our most thorough attention. As those, who are not committed believers and practitioners, who are neither self-conscious anti-clericals nor convinced atheists, but for various – cultural, social, and national – reasons are still loyal to a religious tradition, form typically the numerically largest category among the forms of identification with a religious institution, this "weakest" link may well be the "strongest" cultural asset that any church may have in its social environment.

The analysis proceeds in two parts. In the first part four forms of

<sup>4</sup>T. Crippen, "Further Notes on Religious Transformation", *Social Forces*, 1992, no. 1, p. 221, 223.

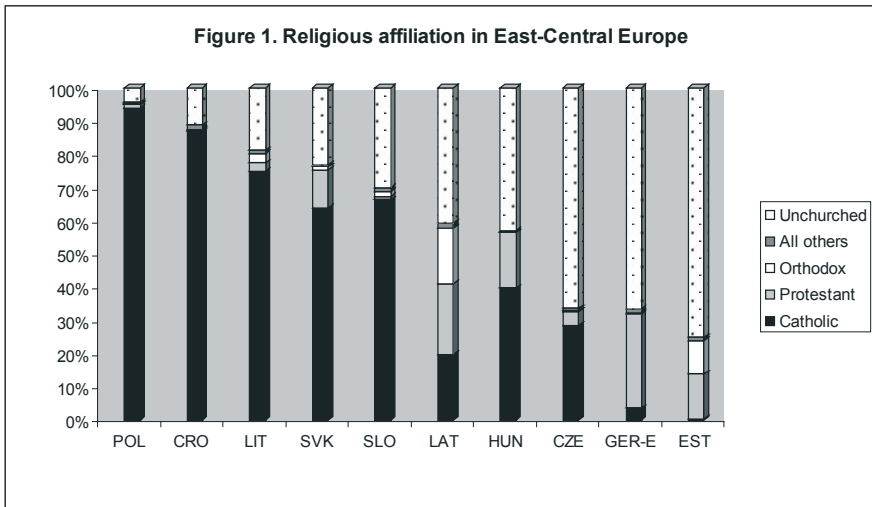
religion – belief, affiliation, attendance, and self-identification – are distinguished in order to map the patterns of church-related religion and un-churched religiosity in the traditionally Western Christian societies of Eastern and Western Europe. The data used is derived from the World Values Surveys of 1999/2000, which polled ten East-Central European (ECE) societies – Croatia, the Czech Republic, East Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – and seventeen West-European societies (WEST) – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and West Germany.<sup>5</sup>

The second part presents five alternative explanations to the diverging patterns of religion in European societies based on confession, confessional diversity, the legacy of Communist politics of religion, modernization, and the nature of the relationship between national identity and a church. These explanations enable one to identify the reasons why in some societies the cultural connection between the national community and the traditional religion has persisted and other societies have lost the common *sense of religious belongingness* to a particular religious institution. Each of the explanations presented offers useful insights. The main reason, however, for the decline of religious affiliation is based on a weak or a hostile nature of the relationship between a religious tradition and a national political identity.

<sup>5</sup> The 1999/2000 round of WVS did not include traditionally Western Christian societies like Andorra, Monaco, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The tables, graphs and figures include data for territories within political states which were polled separately such as West Germany (eleven states which formed the Federal Republic of Germany during 1949–1990), East Germany (five states which formed German Democratic Republic during 1949–1990), and Northern Ireland. The names of the countries are abbreviated by the three-letter style used in the Olympic Games: AUT – Austria, BEL – Belgium, CRO – Croatia, CZE – Czech Republic, DEN – Denmark, ESP – Spain, EST – Estonia, FIN – Finland, FRA – France, GER-W – Germany West, GER-E – Germany East, GBR – Great Britain, HUN – Hungary, ISL – Iceland, IRL – Ireland, ITA – Italy, LAT – Latvia, LIT – Lithuania, LUX – Luxembourg, MLT – Malta, NED – Netherlands, NIR – Northern Ireland, POL – Poland, POR – Portugal, SLO – Slovenia, SVK – Slovakia, SWE – Sweden.

PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, BELIEF, PRACTICE, AND  
IDENTIFICATION

Studies have demonstrated that the levels of affiliation, belief, practice, and identification of self as a religious person do not have to be mutually dependent and in accordance with each other.<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly, the varying patterns of affiliation, belief, practice, and identification may each require different explanations.



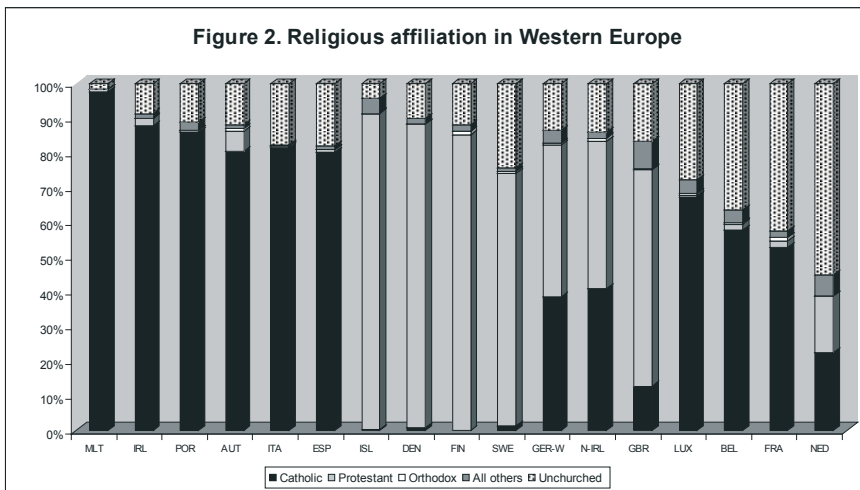
Source: [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org), online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

According to the data from WVS 1999/2000, the ten post-communist societies are characterized by a *lower* level of affiliation (60.6%) than the West-European societies (79.6%). In order to visualize the society-specific patterns of religious affiliation, Figures 1 and 2 present the post-communist and West-European populations according to the main types of religious affiliation.

In West-Christian Europe, those who have given up membership in the traditional churches of their forefathers, have not converted in significant numbers to pre-Christian indigenous or non-Christian

<sup>6</sup> I. Storm, "Halfway to Heaven: Four Types of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2009, Nr. 4, p. 702.

religions. Therefore, the term “un-affiliated” can suitably be replaced by the term “un-churched”, which refers to the proportion of the society that has lost their membership in a church. Following Robert C. Fuller, the category “un-churched” includes anyone, who lacks identification with the church, but includes those, who identify with the church, but lack faith.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, the “un-churched” category includes also those, who consider themselves as believers and religious persons, but lack religious affiliation.



Source: [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org), online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

In societies with the highest levels of religious affiliation, affiliation typically outnumbers the level of those who consider themselves as religious persons. In the WVS of 1999/2000, Malta had the highest level of religious affiliation (97.5% Catholics, 1% Protestants, look Graph 3 below). Concomitantly, the proportion of those who consider themselves as religious persons (74.7%) in Malta is significantly lower.

In regional comparison, 2.8% self-proclaimed atheists admitted belonging to Protestantism and 1% to Catholicism in WEST (in ECE

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Fuller. *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

the numbers were 0.5% and 0.8% respectively). Although relatively few in number, there still exist some members of the church who are lacking both Christian faith and a religious reason for identification with the church.

Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that in both post-communist and Western Europe the traditional religions overwhelmingly dominate the religious landscape. Where individuals have become *unchurched*, they have typically been alienated from all kinds of organized religions and have not *chosen* culturally alien types of religion. The culturally non-traditional religions typically emerge and increase due to recent waves of immigration (Muslims in Western Europe) or increased due to the internal migration within the Soviet Union (the increase of the Russophone Orthodox in Estonia and Latvia).

#### RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND AFFILIATION

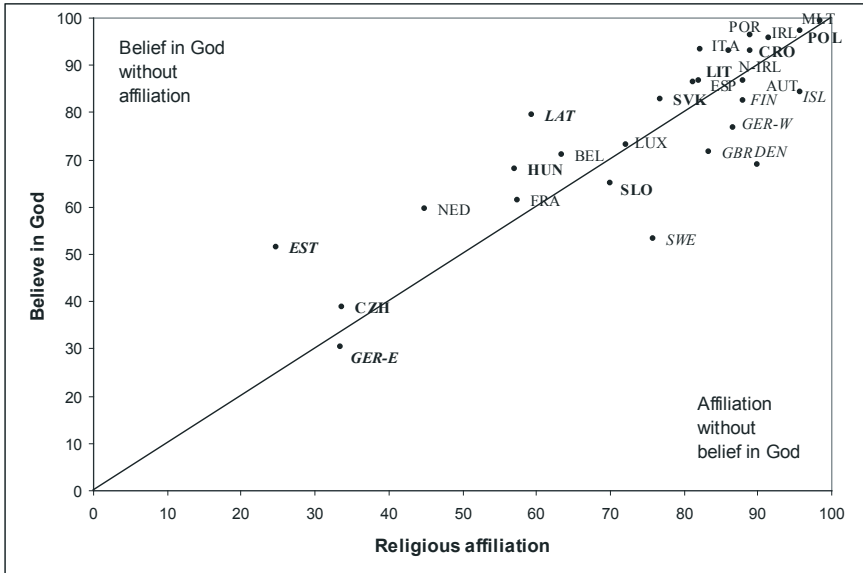
The relationship between religious belief and affiliation is ambiguous in nature. The specific articles of faith and the basic doctrines of the Christian churches are typically known, competently, and cognitively accepted by not many.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in the sociology of religion the “belonging” aspect of religious identity in European societies is assumed to be more important than “belief”.<sup>9</sup> The distinction between traditional and modernized (or easily modernizable) types of belief, however, can give us some insight about the social and cultural strength of the traditional religion. Some beliefs—such as belief in sin, hell, soul, and life after death—are more closely related to traditional religion than, for example, the belief in God.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> D. Voas, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> I. Storm, *op. cit.*, p. 703.

<sup>10</sup> This list of social beliefs that were socially important in traditional societies uses examples from beliefs usually asked in social surveys. The other core beliefs of traditionally Christian societies were also the belief in the existence of the Devil, in the power of miracles, in the threat of damnation. P. S. Gorski, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

GRAPH 1. BELIEF IN GOD AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



Source: [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org), online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).  
Post-communist societies are showed in bold type. The largest confession is mostly Catholicism. The societies, where the largest confession is Protestantism, are in italics. The diagonal “equality line” shows the perfect overlap of the levels of two indicators tested.

Graph 1 shows a significant correlation between the overall level of religious affiliation and the proportion of those, who “believe in God” (most of the societies are situated close to the “equality line”). In some societies – most significantly in Sweden, Denmark, and Great Britain – the level of religious affiliation surpasses the level of belief in God. In few others – mostly in Estonia and Latvia – there are more of those who believe in God than are church members.

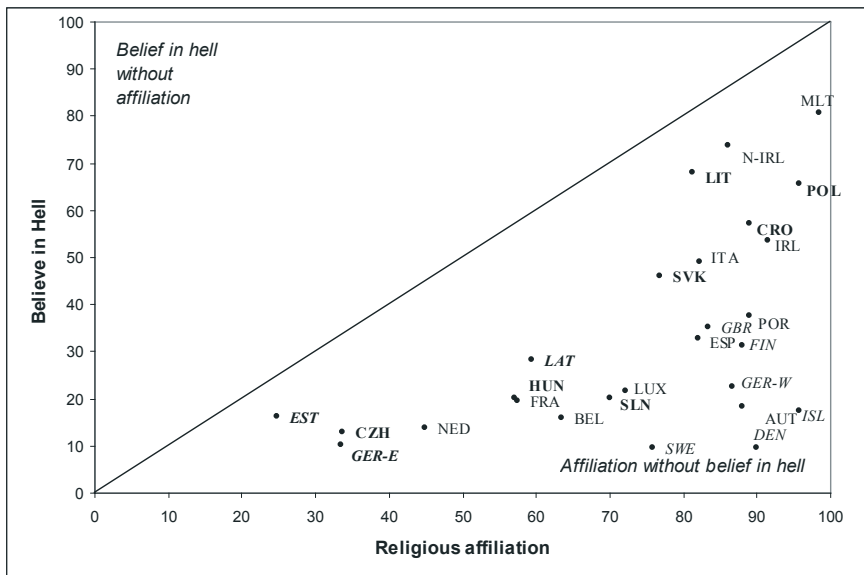
In general, the “belief in God” can be considered to be the weakest kind of belief that can relate a person to a religious tradition. On one hand, the general belief in God is related to the overall level of church membership, because these two variables have a significant correlation. On the other hand, the belief in God is extraordinarily ambiguous and multi-vocal. It can easily be subscribed by devout Catholics and pious Protestants, by atheist soldiers before or after the military operations and



by agnostics who feel “somebody” has miraculously taken care of them during various crises in life.

In modernizing societies, the belief in God can be interpreted in multiple, both traditional and detraditionalized<sup>11</sup>, ways. Additionally, the belief in God can also be efficiently individualized, subjectivized and contextualized, nationalized, politicised, and adapted to the varying environments and experiences, concerns and aspirations. Individuals and groups, political parties, nations, and cultures can interpret the belief in God on the basis of their subjective experiences and particular aspirations. By relying on the faith in God, they can give meaning to their present existence and identity, past origins and future mission in the human world.

GRAPH 2. BELIEF IN HELL AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org, online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

<sup>11</sup> P. Heelas, “The spiritual revolution: from “religion” to “spirituality”” in: Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami, David Smith, Linda Woodhead (Eds.) *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 236.

It is commonly known that the *way how* the societies believe in *God*, has changed enormously since the times of the Reformation. Michael Burleigh has identified a particular trend of conversion of religion into “a political convenience” from “an end in itself”, which it used to be in pre-Reformation times. Instead of using religion to direct men towards God, rulers started to use religion in order to advance their worldly goals.<sup>12</sup> Within this process, the ambiguous belief in God remained a significantly more instrumental religious resource in politics than the belief in hell.

In some nations the references to God still exist in lyrics of national anthems, in the texts of constitutions or are being typed on their banknotes. The belief in hell is never used in such cases, because individuals – and churches too – have an increasing difficulty in relating oneself to any particular conceptualization of hell in modernized societies. The “belief in hell” was functional in traditional societies, but has lost its relevance thereafter. The global study by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris has shown that during transitions from agrarian to industrial and from industrial to post-industrial level of socioeconomic development, the most obvious changes in beliefs were related to the declining belief in hell – 59% was the average for agrarian, 36% for industrial, and 26% for post-industrial societies.<sup>13</sup>

If we assume that the belief in hell is the main indicator of the traditional Christianity, then Graph 2 demonstrates that every society and confession has a significant proportion of those who “belong, but do not believe” in the way their forefathers traditionally did (which itself is an indicator of the secularization of *beliefs*). Not a single society has more of those who believe in hell than of those who are religiously affiliated. In this dimension, however, the religious beliefs are less detraditionalized in Catholic societies and in post-communist societies. Paradoxically, in un-churched post-communist Estonia the level of belief in hell is higher than in several church-friendly Scandinavian Lutheran societies (Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland).

<sup>12</sup> M. Burleigh. *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War*, New York: HarperCollins, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> P. Norris, R. Inglehart. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 57.

In general, the liberal and Protestant understanding of religion based singularly or primarily on belief *and* on individual choice<sup>14</sup> describes adequately only tiny proportions of religious affiliation (and un-churched religiosities) in contemporary Europe (including traditionally Protestant societies). Such Protestant conception of religion may be instrumental in the private life of a particular individual, but is strongly normative (i.e. it does not describe accurately the way individuals identify themselves with religion in real societies and cultures). It assumes the separation of the religious sphere from non-religious spheres of life from the start.<sup>15</sup> It requires the churches to distance themselves from the ethnic and national communities and to be transformed into organized groups of *interest* within a civil society.<sup>16</sup>

Religion may have become a matter of an individual choice to a level unprecedented in previous history, yet the renowned statement of John Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* – “Nobody is born a member of any church”<sup>17</sup> – is still in strong discord with the most contemporary patterns of religious affiliation in Europe, where “being born” still forms an overwhelmingly larger category of religious affiliation over the “having individually chosen”. Additionally, the Lockean assumption of the supremacy of an individual over the secular rulers and religious leaders in his choice of a religious association and the conception of a church as a free and voluntary society of men who join themselves in order to save their souls and secure eternal life by

<sup>14</sup> L. Woodhead, “Five Concepts of Religion”, *International Review of Sociology*, 2011, no. 1, p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> John Locke defined religion as a form of human association that is separate from the other types of human relations and associations (political, parental, marital and economic). Michael Walzer’s liberal system of separations requires the separation of the sphere of religion from non-religious spheres of life (such as education, politics, economy and family). M. Walzer, “Liberalism and the art of Separation”, *Political Theory*, 1984, no. 3, p. 315-330.

<sup>16</sup> C. Hann, “Problems with the (De)Privatization of Religion”, *Anthropology Today*, 2000, no. 6, p. 14, 15.

<sup>17</sup> J. Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration”, in: Ian Shapiro (Ed.) *John Locke: Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 220.

worshipping God in ways *they* (as individuals in their consciences) believe to be pleasing to God<sup>18</sup> introduces inevitably the marketing of religion and the relativizing of any particular systems of religious belief. As Locke himself observed, “For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical”.<sup>19</sup>

In modernized societies, individuals seek *more intensively* answers to the questions related to the individual and social existence than in traditional societies and find less answers in traditional religious doctrines partly because the giving of meaning to the social and individual existence has become increasingly *marketized, commodified* and thus turned into an object of consumer choice.<sup>20</sup> Recently introduced new means of mass communication (such as television, internet, and social networks) have resulted in multiplication of the products and producers of the “meaning” that can be attached to the individual and social existence, and in the proliferation of the channels of inter-personal and inter-associational communication. In the dimension of religion as belief, religious meaning *is* becoming increasingly a matter of an individual choice (largely irrespective of whether an individual belongs to a religious confession or not), yet the overwhelmingly dominant form of religious identification everywhere in Europe is still *cultural* and strongly overlapping with the ethnic and national identities.

The connections between religion and culture make the religious alternatives inevitably unequal. To convert from Lutheranism to Islam in a traditionally Lutheran Estonia involves significantly higher “*cultural cost*” for an ethnic Estonian than to convert from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Additionally, to the extent that the Lutheran connection to the national identity is shared by all members of the political community, this type of religion is not a subject to individual choices at all.

Any issue related to a national identity and to a political community in general (such as a security threat) tends to be immune from the

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219-222.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

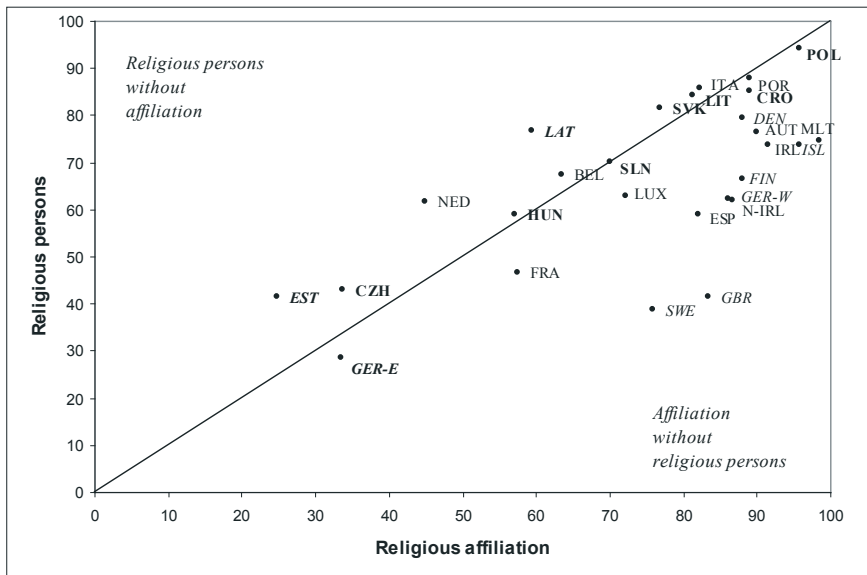
<sup>20</sup> Bryan Turner has observed that the main threat to religious faith in postmodernity is not cognitive, but is based on “the commodification of everyday life”. B. S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, Routledge: London, 1994, p. 9.

competition of ideas and beliefs that otherwise divide the contemporary populations and disintegrate the societies internally. Common symbols of the national identity and shared cultural identities *unite* the members into a holistic whole. In these cases we speak about “Us” as a culture in singular.

The national religion, however, is not the only symbolical representative of the nation. The contemporary nationalisms are represented also by national art, economy, entertainment, sports, media, and non-religious producers of culture such as artists, politicians, composers, celebrities, athletes, and scientists, who – to the extent that they are autonomous from religion – compete with a traditional religion in the symbolical cultural representation of the national community. Importantly, the national culture can be symbolized by a basketball team, which were non-existent in the national communities of the late 19th century. The symbolical representation of the nation becomes particularly intense when the national team is playing with the politically and culturally relevant Other.

### SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND AFFILIATION

GRAPH 3. RELIGIOUS PERSONS AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



Source: [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org), online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

The patterns of the level of the self-identified religious persons (Graph 3) resemble the patterns of the belief in God (Graph 1). Estonia and Latvia are again among those countries, where the level of affiliation is *lower* than the proportion of religious persons in society. Similarly, Sweden and Great Britain are among the societies that represent the contrasting extreme. In general, the *post-communist* countries are closer to the “equality line”. In West-European societies, there are more unchurched forms of religion and individualized conceptualizations of religion.

As a rule, those, who consider themselves as religious persons or believers in God, but remain unaffiliated, are less proud of their nationality than those who belong, but do not believe.<sup>21</sup> The reason is simple. Any kind of shared beliefs are strongest and most plausible when supported by socialization and confirmed by everyday interactions between groups and individuals. As the belief in a nation is a shared “religion” of a national community, the higher level of patriotism among the nationally motivated “belongers, but not believers” than among the “believers, but not belongers” can reasonably be expected.

In a case, when an atheist by belief identifies with a religious tradition for national reasons, his identification with *a nation* is strong from the beginning.<sup>22</sup> The similar situation may occur, when a traditional religion has become a cultural symbol to the extent that persons do not identify with its institution any more. For example in Estonia the cultural identification with Lutheranism is significantly higher than the level of membership in the Lutheran church. According to the interpretation by Andrew Hart, the Lutheran church in Estonia is weak as a “manifest church” (as “manifested” by buildings, formal membership, theological and social doctrines), but stronger as the “latent church”, which symbolically unifies the Estonian

<sup>21</sup> I. Storm, *op. cit.*, p. 715.

<sup>22</sup> “National atheists” and “national traditionalists” care for national religious traditions, rites and rituals as a means for being connected to the national community. E. Barker, “But Who’s Going to Win? National and Minority Religions in Post-Communist Society”, *Philosophy and Sociology*, 1999, no. 6, p. 62-63.

culture, connects it culturally with Western civilization and provides a resource "around which Estonians can rally for nationalist causes".<sup>23</sup> As will be argued below, this kind of cultural Lutheranism may also be interpreted not as a hidden strength of a religious institution, but as a form of public religion that has become autonomous from the Lutheran Church.

The sense of cultural bond between church and nation within an individual is always symbolic, emotional, and real. One can identify with a national culture or reject it, but cannot change it at will. Thus, the Lithuanians can support their discus thrower Virgilijus Alekna as much as Estonians support their own Gerd Kanter. We are free not to be interested in a discus throw and to be interested in a basketball or pop music instead. But we cannot support the team of Lesotho in a play between Lesotho and Lithuania (or Estonia), because by this choice we self-ostracise ourselves from our cultural community.

"God of the nation" is on the side of the nation anyway.

#### ATTENDANCE AND AFFILIATION

The level of regular attendance in religious services indicates the intensity of the identification with a religious association. Typically, the focus on the religious practice is an important indicator for the study of religious voting preferences in political elections, where scholars often find that religious practice causes variations that cannot be explained by formal identification with a particular religious tradition. In the latter case, however, those who regularly attend church services are found to identify themselves with a particular policy, program or political party, and not with the symbolical relationship between church and culture. The focus on the attendance is typically useful in the study of issues that divide societies internally, not in the research on cultural symbols that integrate a political community.

<sup>23</sup> A. Hart, "The Role of the Lutheran Church in Estonian Nationalism", *Religion in Eastern Europe*, 1993, no. 3, p. 10-12.

TABLE 1. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, ATTENDANCE AND IDENTIFICATION  
IN WEST AND ECE

	WEST	Difference WEST-ECE	ECE
Percentage of the religiously affiliated, who practically never attend religious services	51.9	+33.3	18.6
Religiously affiliated	79.6	+19.0	60.6
Percentage of the religious persons, who practically never attend religious services	34.9	+9.5	25.4
Percentage of the affiliated Catholics who consider themselves as religious persons	81.6	-11.5	93.1
Percentage of the affiliated Protestants who consider themselves as religious persons	63.6	-20.3	83.9

Source: calculated from the results of WVS 1999/2000 ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)).

Second, the decline in religious attendance in modernized societies is subject to many interpretations. It may be argued that individuals are less committed to any kind of – religious, ideological, communal, civic – regular collective practices due to the general changes in individual habits and life-style, social mobility, patterns of cohabitation and changes in the means of mass media, and interpersonal communication. People today have simply “too much to do”, they mostly do not go regularly to church services, but at the same time they do not say that “they do not believe in Christianity any more” either.<sup>24</sup> Fewer people attend churches, political parties, trade unions, and voluntary organizations.<sup>25</sup> Such lifestyle changes are a characteristic feature that accompanies the late modernization and is reflected in the decline of previous patterns of associational commitments (“bowling alone”) as much as in the decline of collective religious practices (“praying alone”).<sup>26</sup>

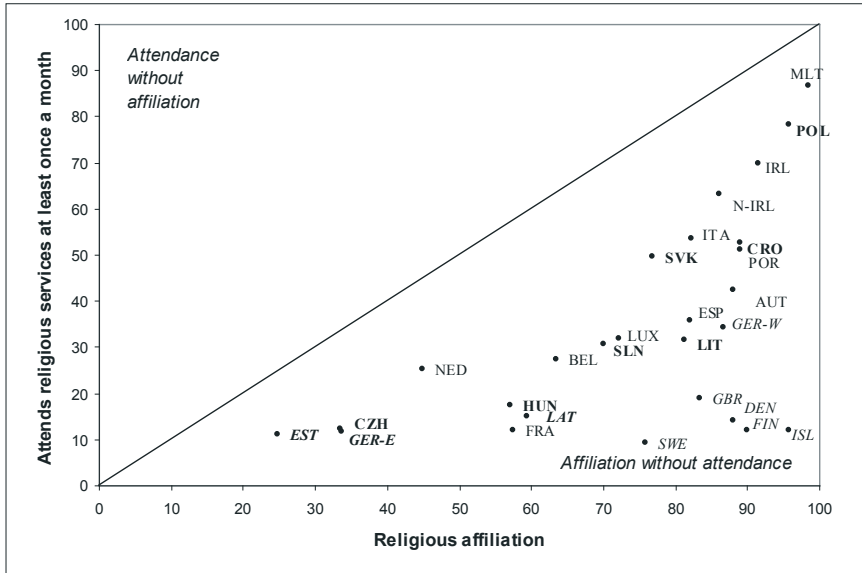
<sup>24</sup> R. Gill, “A Response to Steve Bruce’s “Praying Alone?””, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2002, no. 3, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> G. Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Sage, 2007, p. 93.

<sup>26</sup> R. D. Putnam. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000; G. Davie, “Praying Alone? Church-



GRAPH 4. RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND AFFILIATION



Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org, online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

As seen from Graph 4, in Catholic cultures, the positive connection between a political community and a church is reflected in both high levels of religious affiliation *and* attendance. In Protestant cultures, however, the levels of religious attendance are low everywhere. Among the latter, the sole indicator that demonstrates the cultural connection between a national identity and a religious tradition is the level of affiliation.

In any society, however, the cultural connection between the church and the political community is strongest, when both regularly attending and practically never attending, believers and non-believers, religious and non-religious persons can easily identify with a religious tradition as with an inseparable part of what it means to be a full member of a political community.

Going in Britain and Social Capital: A Reply to Steve Bruce”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2002, no. 3, p. 329-334.

## EXPLANATIONS

### CONFESSION AND CONFESSIONAL HOMOGENEITY

As the previous graphs demonstrated, the West-European Catholic societies differed less from the Protestant<sup>27</sup> ones in the levels of religious affiliation, belief in God, and in the proportion of religious persons. The starkest differences were related to the levels of religious attendance and to the belief in hell.

It can be speculated that the Protestant tradition of defining religion mostly as a matter of *belief* contributes to the pluralization and relativization of the meaning of religion. Cultural Lutheranism can still have public functions, but by becoming general, it tends to lose its particular religious characteristics (belief, values, doctrines), and by becoming public, it tends to be interpreted and defined by non-religious social actors. As noted by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, in (Scandinavian) Protestant (public) value systems, the Protestant values “are not transmitted primarily by the church, but by the education national system and the mass media”.<sup>28</sup> In these cases the content of the Christian values in the public sphere are defined by public deliberation similarly to any other public norms.

Among the traditionally Lutheran cultures, where the level of affiliation is very low, for example in Estonia, the symbolical identification with Lutheranism can be stronger than the general sense of belonging to the Lutheran Church. In this case, the “ethno religious capital” that results from the convergence of ethnic and religious boundaries and turns religion into a source of “symbolic and authoritative moral resources” in national public sphere<sup>29</sup> is *weakly* related to the church institution and

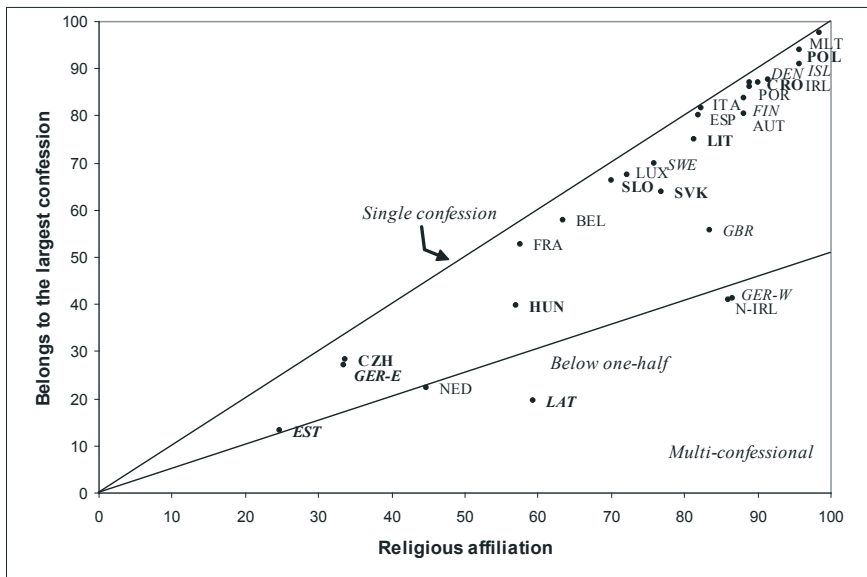
<sup>27</sup> Protestantism in tables was a compound variable. WVS used a category “free/non-denominational church” which was included to the general category “Protestant”. The “free/non-denominational church” category formed more than 3% from population in WEST only in Northern Ireland (27.3%), Great Britain (6.8%) and Netherlands (7.4%) and in ECE above 1% from population only in Latvia (4.4), Hungary (1.8%) and Germany East (1.3%).

<sup>28</sup> P. Norris, R. Inglehart, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> J. Campling, *Religion, Ethnicity & Society*, New York, NY: Palgrave, 1999, p. 10.

largely not under the control of the church hierarchy. In Scandinavia the “ethno religious capital” is identified with institutional churches, the populations are more church-friendly, and the political and religious elites are perceived to be in closer collaboration. In the latter cases, the lack of political autonomy of the churches has motivated the emergence of the anti-clerical Protestant parties.<sup>30</sup>

GRAPH 5. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND BELONGING TO THE LARGEST CONFESSION



Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org, online data analysis (WVS, 1999/2000).

The increasing confessional diversity (Graph 5) does not relate positively to the high levels of religious affiliation (Northern Ireland and Western Germany are the only exceptions). Other global and European survey studies also support this observation. Religious pluralism in European societies does not correlate with higher levels of religiosity.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> P. Freston, *Protestant political parties: a global survey*, Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, p. 35-42.

<sup>31</sup> V. Draulans, L. Halman, “Mapping Contemporary Europe’s Moral and

On a global level, the religious homogeneity is positively related to higher levels of self-identified “religious persons”.<sup>32</sup>

The reasons why in multi-confessional societies the indicators of religion tend to decline can be cognitive and social. In religiously divided societies it is more difficult for individuals and groups to connect religion cognitively with the ways, how a good person should be and behave in a given society and culture. When there are multiple organized ways of defining religion and being religious, but only one way how to define the nation and culture, the emergence of the mutually supportive symbiosis between religion and nation becomes less likely. As observed by Ingrid Storm, “the value and likelihood of following national traditions depends largely on the degree to which others do the same” wherefore the degree of religious pluralism in one’s social circle typically is negatively associated with the following of national traditions.<sup>33</sup> And vice versa, the mono-confessional Scandinavian Protestant cultures demonstrate that even when the traditional religious beliefs are largely lost, a tiny minority attends religious services, the shared religious tradition can still remain socially functional and culturally meaningful for all members of society.

Last, but not least, the study has shown, that in both traditionally Protestant and Catholic societies, the levels of religious affiliation have remained high *in cases* when there exists a positive relationship between a religious tradition and a national identity, *and* the religious landscape is homogeneous and mono-confessional.

#### LEGACY OF THE COMMUNIST POLITICS OF RELIGION

The Communist period did not necessarily result in the decline of religious affiliation and religious practice or in the loss of the positive relationship between the church and a nation.

Religious Pluralist Landscape: An Analysis Based on the Most Recent European Values Study Data”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2005, no. 2, p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> J. Fox, E. Tabory, “Contemporary Evidence Regarding the Impact of State Regulation of Religion on Religious Participation and Belief”, *Sociology of Religion*, 2008, no. 3, p. 266.

<sup>33</sup> I. Storm, *op. cit.*, p. 705.

In cases, where the relationship between the national identity and the church was close and mutually supportive *before* the Communist period (such as in Poland, Lithuania and Croatia), the militantly secular stance of the Communists contributed to the further *strengthening* of the pre-existing *religio-national symbiosis*.<sup>34</sup> The Communists were well aware of the positive and negative character of the relationship between a particular nation and its church, and formulated therefore their politics of religion in direct correlation with their politics of nationalism.<sup>35</sup>

In general, the Communist period tended to magnify the pre-existing patterns of church and nation-where the connection was weak, the hostile policies to religion and the church were more used and were more successful. In other cases, the intense and positive connection between nation and a church was carefully taken into account and at times of severe crises even encouraged and *used*. Thus, the Orthodox Churches were instrumental during the Second World War in promoting solidarity and loyalty within a Communist society.<sup>36</sup> Positive policies regarding Orthodoxy were particularly needed in order to impress Orthodox Romanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and Serbs.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, the politics of religion – as well as the politics of nationalism – of Communists was largely driven by pragmatic concerns. Detlef Pollack has argued that the higher the level of repression of religion during the Communist regime, the more secularized the societies became.<sup>38</sup> I elaborate this argument – the persecution of religion

<sup>34</sup> W. Spohn, "Multiple Modernity, Nationalism and Religion: A Global Perspective", *Current Sociology*, 2003, no. 3-4, p. 274. I. Borowik, "Why Has Religiosity in Poland not Changed since 1989? Five Hypotheses", *Politics and Religion*, 2010, no. 2, p. 265.

<sup>35</sup> S. P. Ramet, "Politics and religion in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union", in: George Moyser (Ed.), *Politics and Religion in the Modern World*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> S. M. Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941–1945*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> J. H. Nichols, *History of Christianity, 1650–1950: Secularization of the West*, New York: Ronald Press, 1956, p. 454.

<sup>38</sup> D. Pollack, "Religiousness Inside and Outside the Church in Selected Post-Communist Countries of Central and Eastern Europe", *Social Compass*, 2003, Nr. 3, p. 322-323.

succeeded only in cases, where there was a realistic and pragmatic opportunity for persecution. The more anticlerical and repressive policies succeeded among the Czechs, but did not succeed or were also less relied on among the Poles.

According to WVS 1999/2000, the Czech population had the extremely *low* proportions of those “who believe in God” or “get comfort and strength from religion” (38.9 and 25.7 percent, respectively).<sup>39</sup> Most likely such a decline in religious beliefs would never have occurred without the experience of the Communist regime. One has to remember, however, that a significant amount of the Czechs felt alienated from the Catholic Church already in the beginning of the 20th century. After the First World War, more than 10% of the population (1.5 million out of a total 13.5 million) in Czechoslovakia left the Catholic Church mainly due to the nationally inspired anti-Catholic sentiments.<sup>40</sup> Correspondingly, the study of Paul Froese identified the main cause for the religious decline in the Czech society not in modernization or religious repression, but in the failure of the dominant religious group of the country “to establish a credible link between itself and a popular nationalist movement”.<sup>41</sup>

For Communists, the Protestants were more easily controlled and de-socialized from their religious tradition than Catholics or the Orthodox.<sup>42</sup> The Communist period succeeded in undermining the connection between Protestant populations and their traditional religious institutions in Estonia and Eastern Germany *more* than they succeeded in traditionally Catholic, Orthodox or Islamic cultures. It is also true that the traditionally Lutheran Estonia and East Germany

<sup>39</sup> L. Halman, *The European Values Study: A Third Wave, Source book of the 1999/2000 European Values Study Surveys*, Tilburg: WORC, 2001, p. 86, 96.

<sup>40</sup> D. Hamplova, Z. R. Nespov, “Invisible Religion in a “Non-believing” Country: The Case of the Czech Republic”, *Social Compass*, 2009, no. 4, p. 591.

<sup>41</sup> P. Froese, “Secular Czechs and Devout Slovaks: Explaining Religious Differences”, *Review of Religious Research*, 2005, no. 3, p. 280, 281.

<sup>42</sup> J. J. Linz, A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 245.

are today highly secularized.<sup>43</sup> They were not, however, the countries which experienced the highest levels of repression of religion during the Communist period. The level of the repression of religion was significantly higher within the Soviet Union during the years 1922–1923, 1929–1930 and until the 1939, when the direct replacement of religion by atheism was attempted, than in post – 1939 Estonia or in post – 1945 East Germany. Estonia, however, has lower level of religious affiliation than any other post-Soviet society. Similarly, the policies of religion in the German Democratic Republic were less repressive than in Soviet Union or in Czechoslovakia.

Multiple hypotheses can be raised, why the indicators of religion are extraordinarily low in East Germany<sup>44</sup> and the lowest European level of religious affiliation is in Estonia. As there does not exist any post-communist traditionally Protestant society with a high level of religious affiliation, it may be speculated, that with Lutherans the Communists succeeded in their anti-clerical and anti-religious policies both in cases where the connection between religion and nation was weak (Estonia) or moderate (East Germany and Latvia). The Scandinavian societies, however, demonstrate clearly that *without* the Communist experience, the traditionally Protestant cultures are capable of retaining high levels of religious affiliation and the cultural sense of religious belongingness.

MODERNIZATION. Modernization influences the relationship of an organized religion with the state, society, and culture in multiple dimensions and in different ways. Generally, the secularization paradigms expect modernization to be accompanied by three main processes.

First, *the differentiation of the sphere of religion from non-religious spheres* (such as politics, economy, art, entertainment, culture, science,

<sup>43</sup> D. Pollack, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Froese and Steven Pfaff explain the East-German “religious anomaly” by “a unique combination of weak monopoly churches prior to communism, strong substitution-oriented anti-religious policies during communism, and new religious circumstances produced by German reunification”. P. Froese, S. Pfaff, „Explaining a Religious Anomaly: A Historical Analysis of Secularization in Eastern Germany”, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2005, no. 4, p. 403.

sexuality).<sup>45</sup> The traditional religious institution is expected to lose its authority over all non-religious spheres of social and political life. The church is expected to be institutionally separated from the state and lose its authority and influence over all the processes related to the formation of government and the political decision-making (elections, deliberation in the public sphere, agenda-setting, public policies etc).

Second, the *pluralization within the sphere of religion*, which in some instances may result in religious revivals and increases in religious vitality<sup>46</sup>, but always increases the number of religious alternatives due to the protected religious liberty and the amount of interpretations of any particular religious tradition due to the adaptation of the new means of communication and the protection of the free speech. Therefore, even in contemporary Catholic cultures there are several alternative ways how an individual can be Catholic today – non-practicing, non-believing, or not agreeing with Church dogmas – which were not possible earlier.<sup>47</sup> The related “cognitive secularization” is reflected mostly in the multiplication of the ways that groups and individuals make sense of their individual and social existence.

Third, the *cultural secularization* as manifested in the transformation of the mythic and symbolic markers of the political culture<sup>48</sup> and in the replacement of the traditional worldviews with the culture that is “based in large part on humanism, material values, science, and technology”.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> M. Weber, „Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions“, in: *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Hans H. Gerth, C. Wright Mills (Eds.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 323-359.

<sup>46</sup> S. Bruce, “A Novel Reading of Nineteenth-Century Wales: A Reply to Stark, Finke, and Iannaccone”, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1995, no. 4, p. 520.

<sup>47</sup> C. Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, London: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> K. M. Schultz, “Secularization: A Bibliographic Essay”, *The Hedgehog Review*, 2006, no. 1-2, p. 174.

<sup>49</sup> D. E. Smith, “Religion and Political Modernization: Comparative Perspectives”, in: Donald E. Smith (Ed.), *Religion and Political Modernization: Comparative Perspectives*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974, p. 8.



The connectedness between a religious tradition, church institution, political culture, and the national identity is capable of persisting during the processes of modernisation more intensely than any other type of church's connectedness to politics and public life. As argued by Steve Bruce, the positive relationship between religion and national identity is the main reason for the delays or reverses in the general processes of secularization.<sup>50</sup>

The positive relationship of the church with a national identity and its aspirations undermines the processes of secularization in all three dimensions mentioned above: it sets limits to the differentiation of religion from non-religious spheres of life, because the church remains connected to a national community and culture as a whole; in this dimension the religious institution that represents symbolically the national religion is immune to the pluralization of religious choices and forms of organization that are taking place in other dimensions of the political and public life; as far as religion is related to a shared political identity, it becomes protected from public debates and rational criticisms that traditional religious belief systems otherwise inevitably experience; and lastly, the existence of the connection to the political culture by definition indicates about the low level of the secularization of the political culture.

How much can then be explained simply by the level of modernisation? If the ideological secularization or the "polity dominance secularization"<sup>51</sup> of the Communists had no particular results, then simply from the perspective of socioeconomic modernization, the post-communist societies should be expected to score lower and to be *more religious* than the West-European societies, because the level of modernization determines the level of secularization.

By 1999–2000, Malta was the most religious of the society studied *and* was the only society of the WEST that categorized as "industrial" according to the level of economic development (all the other West-

<sup>50</sup> S. Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1999, p. 24-27.

<sup>51</sup> D. E. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

European societies were “post-industrial”). And vice versa, the least religious society of the whole Europe, East Germany, was the only post-communist society categorized economically as “post-industrial”.<sup>52</sup> Inside both regions, therefore, the “modernization” explanation has also its value.

In West-European societies the traditional religious beliefs are losing their appeal and the meaning of a religious person and belief in God is less related to a traditional religious institution, which is also in accordance with the “modernization thesis”. The *more modernised* West-European societies, however, have higher levels of religious *belonging*, and even in otherwise highly secularized societies – such as in Sweden, Denmark, and Great Britain – the historical churches function as the public carriers of the national religion. This cultural connection between a traditional church and a political community may not be corresponded by any significant authority of the church over others spheres of social and political life. Nevertheless, without the experience of the Communist regime, the declining levels of belief and church-related religious practices have not been accompanied by the cultural alienation from the national religious traditions. In this dimension, in Western Europe the “secular” and “Christian” have successfully accommodated with each other.<sup>53</sup>

To put it differently, despite the general “Eurosecularity”<sup>54</sup> that characterises most of the European societies in most dimensions of religion and public life, the modernized societies of Europe *have retained the religious sense of belonging* that accompanies the political notions of citizenship. The latter has been undermined only in cases, where the historically dominant religious tradition has been negatively related to a national identity, the religious landscape is multiconfessional or the politics of religion of the Communist regimes were successful in the alienation of the Lutheran populations from their religious traditions.

<sup>52</sup> P. Norris, R. Inglehart, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> J. Casanova, “Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism”, in: Thomas Banchoff (Ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> P. L. Berger, “Secularization Falsified”, *First Things: Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 2008, no. 2, p. 24.

### CONCLUSIONS: NATION AND RELIGION

The study has shown that in both traditionally Protestant and Catholic societies, the levels of religious affiliation have remained high *in cases* when there exists a positive relationship between a religious tradition and national identity, *and* the religious landscape is homogeneous and mono-confessional. Correspondingly, the connection between a traditional religion and national identity is capable to persist in contemporary societies despite the increasing secularization in other dimensions of religion, society and politics. The strength of the cultural connection is reflected most simply in the extent to which the connection between, for example, Estonianness and Lutheranism, Polishness and Catholicism, is by any Estonian and Pole considered to be a part of their “natural identity”. The intensity of this kind of “cultural religion” varies among European nations, but has remained the single largest category of religious orientation in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

When the connection between church and a nation becomes intense and strong, like it has happened in Poland since the Third Partition in 1795, religion becomes *more* than just a religion. It *defines a nation*,<sup>56</sup> it extends to non-religious areas and retains extra religious functions,<sup>57</sup> and, most importantly, it provides for the social cohesion and integration.

There are, however, at least two reasons, why the positive connection between a church and a nation should be handled with a caution.

First, the more related to culture the religious tradition is, the more general and “civil religion” like it becomes. Instead of focusing on beliefs, doctrines and moral norms that tend to divide and disintegrate the contemporary individualized, pluralized and secularized societies; it relies on collective rituals and symbols that integrate.<sup>58</sup> As Peter Berger

<sup>55</sup> N. J. Demerath III, “The Rise of “Cultural Religion” in European Christianity: Learning from Poland, Northern Ireland, and Sweden”, *Social Compass*, 2000, no. 1, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> T. A. Byrnes, *Transnational Catholicism in Postcommunist Europe*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> I. Borowik, *op. cit.*, p. 265, 266.

<sup>58</sup> I. Borowik, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

has put it, as far as religion is generalized and becomes common “it lacks “reality”, insofar as it is “real”, it lacks commonality”.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the all-inclusive church affiliation becomes an indicator social conformity and of how members of society express their “solidarity with society and its basic values” instead of the commitment to theological beliefs or frequent practice.<sup>60</sup>

Second, the cultural connection between a church and a nation tends to ideologize, politicize and nationalize the religious tradition involved. In this symbiosis the religion becomes a kind of “ideological religiosity”<sup>61</sup> that allies closely with the ideological sentiments and aspirations of the national community. It still defines its orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but to the extent that it retains its theological framework, these definitions will inevitably be based on *both* ideological *and* theological frameworks.<sup>62</sup>

The intense fusion of religion and nationalism helps to create and preserve cultural identity and to stimulate the intra-societal integration, but it also tends to delimitate, alienate and increase animosity “towards the “Other””.<sup>63</sup> Correspondingly, in contemporary ethno-religious conflicts religious faith, belief and creed play usually no significant role. In the latter the “religion” means just a “little more than the rituals and customs forming the core traditions of an ethnic community”.<sup>64</sup>

All in all, the “cultural religion” is the “weakest” link between contemporary populations and traditional churches, but also the

<sup>59</sup> P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books, 1969, p. 134.

<sup>60</sup> E. M. Hamberg, “Christendom in Decline: the Swedish Case”, in: Hugh Mcleod, Werner Ustorf (Eds.), in: *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> S. Chodak, “People and the Church Versus the State: The Case of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland”, in: Richard L. Rubenstein (Ed.) *Spirit Matters: The Worldwide Impact of Religion on Contemporary Politics*, New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987, p. 292.

<sup>62</sup> B. Porter-Szucs, in: *Faith and Fatherland—Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> I. Merdjanova, “In Search of Identity: Nationalism and Religion in Eastern Europe”, in: *Religion, State & Society*, 2000, no. 3, p. 234.

<sup>64</sup> J. Kurth, “Religion and Conflict – In Theory”, *Orbis*, 2001, no. 2, p. 293.

“strongest” hindrance to a social, cultural and political secularization, the “largest” category of the popular identification with religion, the most common means for the European societies to secure cultural integration of societies and also the *type* of connection between religion and politics that is mostly present, active and functional in ethno-religious conflicts.