Christian Churches as special participants of European integration: the process of EU Treaties’ Reform

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Abstract
This paper takes the view that Christian Churches should be regarded as special participants of European integration. Churches embrace features of non-state actors and identity formers, and they take a unique stance as contributors to the initial stages of the integration process. In addition, Churches perform their functions within the Church-State regimes—the phenomena, unknown to other actors of European integration. Overall, Christian Churches have established themselves as unique and influential participants of European integration/EU politics. The concrete aspects of the Churches’ participation are analysed via their contribution to the process of the latest reform of the EU treaties (2001-2009). The focus is on three main stages of the reform’s process: the Constitutional Convention, the Inter-Governmental Conference and the Treaty of Lisbon. The presence of Churches was visible at every stage, but with a different degree of involvement. Churches managed to gain support of some influential politicians and some leaders of Member States/Candidate Countries, although the outcome was not as favourable for them as one could expect. Nevertheless, this outcome confirmed the unique and influential role of Churches in European integration/EU politics.

Introduction

The European Union, as it is sometimes claimed, is not just the political and economic union of European states. It is the “final world empire”, representing the fulfillment of those Biblical prophesies which speak about the last days of the world and the coming of antichrist (Franklin 2004). This image and vision of the EU, developed mainly by some Protestant groups, is a good testimony to the fact that the Union can perfectly be associated with religion and can even be perceived through religious lenses and discussed in religious terms. Although the principal theories of European integration (neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and social constructivism) have always been rather silent about the religious factor, such an approach, based on ignorance, seems to be unjustifiable nowadays. It appears that the religious component of the integration process in Europe is not a figment of the imagination. Instead it turns out to be the everyday reality, coming in diverse and even unexpected formats.
Indeed, the above mentioned vision of the European Union as an empire is only a small piece of a larger picture. In addition to this general characteristic of the Union, the religious context (often a negative one) is seen in the EU buildings and symbols, such as the EU Parliament building in Strasbourg, the central office of the European Commission in Brussels—Berlaymont, and the twelve-star European flag. For example, the Parliament’s building has been constructed, it is said, to resemble the Tower of Babel and the view of Berlaymont from above resembles a broken cross. It is argued that the stars of the European flag are taken from the scene, described in the Book of Revelation, where a woman is shown with twelve stars around her head: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev.12:1). Moreover, it is also claimed that a sculpture of the woman riding the beast near the EU Council of Ministers in Brussels is also taken from Revelation—namely, the 17th chapter, depicting a woman, sitting “[u]pon a scarlet coloured beast” (Rev.17:3) (see for the above mentioned: Ilin 2007, Noble 1998, 1999, Paisley 1999, 2000, Perver 2006, Winnail 2007 and Hilton 2006).

Such interpretations mainly appear in the writings of various Protestant authors, usually representing the Free Churches in Europe. They only further confirm that the EU can be discussed in religious terms. But we need to remember that religious interpretations are not confined to the EU political structure or signs and symbols. The reality is broader: the whole process of European integration, from its very beginning, is regarded by some as a religious ‘plot’, usually of the Roman Catholic Church, aiming at the construction of a new European Catholic empire and undermining of Protestantism (Noble 1998). However, the Catholic “plot” is not the end of the European religious story. Religion also appears in the life of the Union from a different angle. This angle is definitely less mysterious, certainly more pragmatic and is especially vivid in some important policy issues. We could recount, for example, the reasoning against the accession of Turkey in the Union. One of the arguments was explicitly religious: the membership of Turkey in the EU was regarded as dubious, because this large Muslim country professes a religion alien to the Union, considered by some to be a ‘Christian club’. Also the religious dimension was one of the most controversial and fiercely debated issues at the time of drafting the European Constitution: the inclusion in the text of reference to the Christian inheritance of Europe, or even the reference to God. Furthermore, these were the religious arguments which played an important role at the debates on the membership in the EU of the largest ‘newcomer’ of 2004 enlargement—Poland and at the discussion in Ireland on the referendums on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 and 2009 (see Burdzej 2005, Dinan 2009, O’Brennan 2009). The European Parliament repeatedly adopted resolutions which
referred to churches directly (requiring, for example, access of women to Mount Athos—an autonomous monastic territory in Greece, where women are prohibited to enter, in accordance with the Athos’ tradition, for about a thousand years) (The European Parliament, 2003). One could also recount how often religion emerged on the EU agenda when Rocco Buttiglione, an Italian candidate to the post of European Commissioner was rejected in 2004 by the European Parliament. The story was deeply marked by religion: Buttiglione made some statements about homosexuality and the family, perfectly reflecting the Catholic social teaching, but not favoured by the liberal MEPs, who eventually did not support his candidature (C-FAM 2004). His rejection led to the explicable raise of negative feelings among the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, culminating with the claims that devout Catholics are no more suitable for top EU jobs (Royal in C-FAM 2004).

1. Churches and European integration

The suggestion, expressed in the introductory paragraphs, that religion cannot (and should not) be viewed as alien to the integration process, is a good starting point for further development of the argument. It naturally brings to the agenda some specific issues which need to be addressed. In the first place, it is necessary to identify whether religion in European integration should be viewed and studied as religion in general (at least as three monotheistic faiths—Christianity, Islam and Judaism), or as a particular religion or confession.

Taking into account the religious composition of Europe, we are more inclined towards the latter viewpoint, suggesting that it is Christianity which occupies a special and most important place in the EU. Indeed, it is the religion of the vast majority of Europeans, and no EU member state can be regarded as non-Christian (in a few countries, like Czech Republic, where Christians are de facto in a minority, this is explained by the existence of a large group of non-believers or those believers who do not identify themselves with a particular religion). What is even more important, European Christianity, in its institutionalised forms, is embodied in three confessions: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. This makes the focus of research even narrower, confining it to the necessity of understanding how Christian Churches are incorporated in European integration and EU politics.

In other words, the acceptance of the fact that Christian Churches are indeed not alien to European integration requires us to identify how they can be placed within the European project. What is the theoretical foundation for that, if any? How should churches be seen and studied? Is there anything specific about their contribution to European integration? How and in what context can they exercise their influence? Is there anything which makes the
confessional distinction (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) meaningful in the EU context? Certainly, it will be wrong to claim that some of these questions were not raised before, since the increasing importance of religion in the EU was not left unnoticed. The number of publications on this theme is growing, with more attempts devoted to explaining of the role and presence of churches in European integration.

These attempts allow us to see certain tendencies, although the integral picture can hardly be drawn from them. On the one hand, Christian Churches (or religion in general) are at times assigned a rather limited role, with the emphasis that the impact of religion in Europe “[d]oes not change the usual rules of the game” (Foret 2009, p.38). Even if the increase in the Churches’ level of influence is noticed, this mainly happens, it is argued, due to the EU initiatives. The Union just looks for new methods and ways for legitimisation, which include the attempts to put citizens in the centre of the decision-making process and to improve the dialogue with civil society, including Churches. Foret assumes that “The European Commission proposes a strictly consultative role for churches” (Foret 2009, p.39), which allegedly does not equip them with a realistic chance to influence decision-making. Foret’s perspective is partly echoed by Martin Steven, who insists that the EU is “[a]n inherently secular body with no mention of Christianity in any of its other treaties or directives” (Steven 2009, p.181). Still, the integration process does not pass by Churches; it makes them more vulnerable to supranational institutions (via the increase of the latter’s possibilities to interfere in the Churches’ activities at the national level). European legislation often concerns Churches; even if it refers to Churches indirectly (or accidentally), its influence is not necessarily marginal. Unlike Foret, Steven does not substantially constrain the role of Churches. He admits that they act, first, within some dimensions of the Church-State relations, exercising their influence on the voting behaviour and European values, and, secondly, as “[p]olitical interest groups, lobbying decision-makers on aspects of social policymaking which concern them” (Steven 2009, p.183). Benoit Challand, taking the legalistic approach, identifies the presence of religion in the EU legislation as very limited and that “the collocation of Europe and religion is only a very recent construction” (Challand 2009, p.66). Furthermore, even if the interest of the EU towards religion increases, this happens due to purely pragmatic reasons, such as the desire to separate the Union from its Islamic neighbours (Challand 2009, p.70).

However, the presence of religion in EU legislation does not need to always come in obvious and explicit forms. Keith Jenkins specifies that EU secondary legislation “[d]irectly refers to and impacts on religion in many areas of law, including non-discrimination, labour law, data
protection, culture, media law, animal welfare, cooperation, finances, customs, and economic law” (Jenkins 2005, pp.77-78). Some scholars (Doe 2009) even develop the concept of a “European ‘common law’ on religion”, which includes eight fundamental principles (value of religion, subsidiarity in matters of religion, the principle of cooperation (dialogue with religion), religious freedom, the autonomy of religious associations, religious equality (non-discrimination), the principle of special protection of religion, and the principle of religious privilege) (Doe 2009). The religious organisations are also exempt from some regulations of non-discrimination directives, since they are allowed to introduce requirements for religion or beliefs of prospective employees (Doe 2009, pp.152-153). Lucian Leustean observes the increase of the level of importance of religious issues in the EU, even though the “Contacts between European institutions and religious communities have officially been made relatively late in the life of the European Community” (Leustean 2009, p.167). The turning point appeared at the Treaty of Maastricht, with the prominent role of the Jacques Delors initiative on cooperation between Churches and the EU, known as the “Soul for Europe project” (see Silvestri 2009 for more detail). At present, according to Leustean, the Commission is open for dialogue with religious communities, with the likelihood that the benefits from this dialogue will be mutual, with religious communities “[b]ecoming more assertive in influencing the agenda of European institutions” and encouraging “[t]he European Union to become a world player, rather than to remain a regional one” (Leustean 2009, p.174). The growing Churches-EU cooperation led to increasing discussion of European integration issues in the Churches, with the subsequent identification of their attitudes towards the European Union and integration. In those few publications which deal with this issue, one can point out to Minkenberg’s and Haynes’ arguments that sectarian Protestants are more inclined towards Euroscepticism as well as Ramet’s claims that Orthodox Churches are allegedly “at war” with the EU (Haynes 2010, Minkenberg 2009, Ramet 2006).

Thus, there are three main sets of ideas, emanating from various approaches of scholars who analyse the role of Churches in European integration. First, the presence of religion is confirmed by EU legislation. Secondly, Churches exercise their influence in different formats, including the ones of the interest groups and lobbyists. Finally, the role of Churches becomes more visible and important after the Treaty of Maastricht, and cooperation between Churches and EU institutions is beneficial to both sides. These ideas, reflecting certain aspects of the Churches’ activities, do not provide a comprehensive vision of the Churches’ involvement in European integration and still leave a fragmented picture. The questions, raised at the beginning, are left partially unanswered. True, it is now accepted that the ignorance of the contribution of Churches makes a comprehensive and fully correct understanding of
European integration/EU politics impossible, but the necessity of the proper identification of their place and role is not removed from the agenda.

2. The theoretical approach
The key argument, which makes the approach in this paper different from the existing approaches and adds some distinctive features, is that we regard churches as special and unique participants of European integration. Being similar to other actors (NGOs), Churches keep their difference—as religious, spiritual organisations. This difference is demonstrated by their contribution to the European and national identities, by their role at the initial stages of integration and, finally, by the existence of phenomena of church-state relations. Before proceeding to the development of these arguments, we need to make a starting point with the analysis of the theories of European integration. This is the pertinent way of finding how Churches can be brought into the context of European unification, without the elaboration of a new theory. In addition, this is a good method of identifying shortcomings of existing theories, at least when referring to religious issues. Strictly speaking, finding the place for religion in the theories of European integration is not easy and not a particularly rewarding task.

Indeed, the mainstream theories of European integration, such as neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, are silent about religion. In principle, this should not be taken as a big surprise: with both theories the focus of their attention lies elsewhere, making the accommodation of religion highly problematic. Neofunctionalists point to economic groups and supranational institutions (which they call central) as the driving forces of integration (Haas 1968). In their reasoning, it is the supranational institutions which occupy a very specific role, being even able to pursue their own policy, since those institutions are “endowed with a potentially far-reaching legislative power” (Lindberg 1963, p.284). Their legislative power, neofunctionalists maintain, was especially noticeable at the key events of European integration. For example, signing of the Treaty of Maastricht became mainly possible due to the role, exercised by the European Commission, which acted as a “policy entrepreneur” (Sandholtz and Zysman 1989, p.108).

Even less attention to religion should be expected from liberal intergovernmentalism. Its “founding father”, Harvard’s professor Andrew Moravcsik, put the economic factors on the first place unilaterally. His vision is that European integration resulted from the series of rational choices, made by national leaders, pursuing economic interests. These economic interests come as an undoubted priority; they subordinate all other interests and objectives. In Moravcsik’s theory, unlike neofunctionalism, supranational institutions do not supersede the
will of national leaders. They simply reflect this national will (Moravcsik 1998). The role of non-materialist factors is reluctantly accepted, but only as secondary. As Moravcsik states: “[i]n the LI account of integration, ideas are present but not causally central” (Moravcsik 1999, p.675).

The only theory of European integration, where one could in principle find space for religion, is social constructivism. This is the theory, which brings non-economic concepts into the study of the integration process. It attempts to understand how norms, values and ideas become meaningful, and how they contribute to the various developments in the EU (Christiansen et.al, 1999). Social constructivists also try to bring non-state actors into the analysis of European integration, thus creating a comprehensive and diverse image of the integration process. Indeed, in their analysis, integration is not confined to strict economic calculations and rational choices, dictated by purely pragmatic interests. Instead, one encounters a more lively and human-oriented picture, where even the feelings, emotions and subjectivity do matter. In this picture, we see the influence of history and convictions, identity and various non-governmental organisations (Christiansen et.al, 1999, Checkel 1999). This more comprehensive and, we would dare to say, more realistic perspective deserves to be regarded as a more appropriate reflection of the integration process after the Treaty of Maastricht. Accepting the social constructivist’s approach as timely and appropriate, we cannot overlook its important shortcomings. Along with other theories it largely ignores the presence of Christian Churches in European integration. This ignorance is more surprising for social constructivists than for others, since it is the social constructivism only, which so confidently introduces non-state actors and identity into the analysis of European integration. Not sharing this ignorance, we assume that the constructivist’s approach and methods can be well applied for the introduction of churches in European integration. This, in fact, emanates from the logic of social constructivism and its theoretical propositions.

The introduction of churches is based on a number of important arguments, as will be later explained. First, it is the acceptance of the social constructivist’s inclusion of identity and non-state actors into the analysis of European integration. Identity comes both in the form of European identity and national identities of member states (see Caporaso and Kim 2009, Carey 2002, Cram 2009, Mayer and Palmowski 2004, McLaren 2004, Risse 2003). Second, it is the agreement with the concept that Churches can be regarded as identity-formers and non-state actors. Moreover, religion itself is regarded as part of identity, as one of its constituent elements (Enyedi 2003, Korostelina 2003, Djupe and Gilbert 2009, Warhurst 2008). These two points are a foundation for the inclusion of Churches, because we
encounter the coincidence of certain parameters from both sides—social constructivism and Churches. However, the identification of the role and place of Churches in European integration is not confined to the plain equalising of the features, coinciding with both sides. Certainly, social constructivism allows us to look at churches via the lenses of non-state actors and identity. Churches contribute to the formation of both European and national identities, directly and indirectly (via the system of values). Churches also embrace, in their relations with the outside world, the features of non-state actors, using the mechanisms of influence, which are similar to the ones of regular non-state actors (for example, petitions, negotiations, etc.) (Nelsen and Guth 2003, Summary 2003, Driskell et.al. 2008, Mandry 2009). There are, however, some other features which allow us to see Churches not like the ordinary actors introduced via social constructivism, but like the unique participants of European integration. These are historical circumstances and Church-State relations. In fact, these features originate mainly from the essence of churches, as religious and spiritual institutions.

In terms of historical nuances, it is worth mentioning that Churches (especially the Roman Catholic Church) played a vivid role at the initial stages of the process of European integration (with the Vatican taking an unambiguously pro-integration stance) (see O'Mahony 2009, Boomgaarden and Freire 2009, Katzenstein 2006, Risso 2009, Venneri and Ferrara 2009). The Catholic Church, it is claimed, “actively inspired, promoted, and shaped European integration” (Philpott and Shah 2006, p.51). Regarding Church-State relations, this is the phenomenon which applies to Churches only. No other actor of European integration has acquired anything similar to church-state regimes. These regimes denote the specific status of Churches, their relations with governments, as well as their influence on education and other important policy areas in their country. Normally Churches construct their relations with the state within three types of regimes: state (established) Church, total separation or secular model and the cooperationist (hybrid) model (Leustean 2008, see also Soper and Fetzer 2007, Robbers 2005, Francis 1992). Some variations within each type are possible, as well as the differences of the position of the church under the same type of regime in different countries (Sandberg 2008).

The very fact that Churches can be regarded as unique participants in European integration forms a solid foundation for the progression of the argument. We can explore in more detail how Churches are incorporated into the life of the EU, as well as try to assess their possible level of influence. One of the important findings, which is relevant here, is that the process of secularisation, which occurs in some parts of the Union, is not applicable to the EU as a
whole (Stark 1999). Indeed, the countries of Western Europe diverge considerably in religious matters, with religious participation higher in the Southern Catholic parts and lower in Northern Protestant (Pettersson 2006, p.232). Moreover, the importance of Churches increased in some parts of Europe, such as the countries of the former Soviet bloc, after the fall of Communist regimes. Overall, there is no reason to expect that Churches in the EU at large will substantially lose their influence or will be driven into the “private space”. The survey data demonstrate that most people in the EU regard themselves as believers, belong to a particular confession and express rather positive attitudes towards churches (see Eurobarometer 2005, European Social Survey 2008, European Values Survey 2000). Fox reminds us that religion influences people’s views, “their perception of events and their actions” (Fox 2001, p.59), including, of course, the views of the policy-makers.

However, one should not assume that Churches are active and influential in all areas. The reality is quite the opposite: in fact they are active only on selected issues that they regard as the most important. Such an approach is understandable: the limitations of Churches' resources do not allow them to monitor carefully all aspects of EU activity. Those issues, which are regarded as the most important for Churches, are mainly value-based, i.e. with the involvement of the concepts of identity, morality and the rights of vulnerable and oppressed groups (Jansen 2000). Taking into account the areas of importance for churches and their social concepts and doctrines, it seems plausible that Churches do not act in self-centered aims but mainly in common interests, which are meaningful for different layers of society. Altruism and the desire to serve humankind are the main traits of the Churches' activity rather than anything else (Conference of European Churches 2001). Indeed, churches aim at the promotion of moral norms and values, which are based on the Gospel, as the source of divine wisdom and truth (see Siluianova 2001, Values and Principles for the building of Europe 2003).

To an extent, the churches’ role is also dependent on how the theme of European integration is discussed and perceived in various confessions. It is, undoubtedly, the issue of high interest for Catholics, with the Vatican trying to express rather optimistic views on the process of European unification (O’Hanlon, 2005, Nelsen et.al. 2001, Treanor 2007). These views are not always shared by some representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, who may be critical of what they see as a moral corruption in the EU. For example, an Irish Catholic priest warned that Brussels would impose on Ireland “mandatory abortion and euthanasia and homosexual unions” (Anderson 2003). This criticism of the EU is partly echoed by some Orthodox Churches, who warn that Europe loses its soul, denying its Christian roots (see
On the Protestant side, a clear Eurosceptic stance is taken by Free Churches, while mainline Protestants remain largely pro-European (see Hagevi 2002, Madeley 2010). Consequently, the level of influence of Churches is pre-determined by their own desire to be involved in the EU politics and the level of religiosity in various EU member states. Moreover, we need to clearly distinguish the influence on the supranational and national levels. It goes without saying that the Roman Catholic Church remains the most influential actor on pan-European level, mainly due to its resources and the specific position of the Vatican as a state. This is also confirmed by the Catholic presence in Brussels, with the COMECE office as the most professional, well-staffed and influential. However, one should not ignore the increasing number and activities of Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Protestant representations (which confirms the growing role of churches at large). On the national level, the influence varies, mainly depending on the level of religiosity and respect towards the national church. We assume that confessional structure does not play the leading role in that respect—i.e. the level of influence of, say, the Roman Catholic Church can be either high (Ireland and Poland) or low (France and Belgium). Indeed, we can observe sharp differences of the levels of belief in God, belonging to a religious denomination and trust in the Church, as well as the level of overall respect towards Catholicism in the mentioned groups of states (Eurobarometer 2005, European Social Survey 2008). Consequently, this denotes fluctuations in the level of influence of Churches. Overall, taking into account the parameters mentioned, historical circumstances and church-state regimes, we can distinguish three areas of different levels of influence of Churches: high, medium and low.

Additionally, the level of success and influence of Churches may depend on the issue at stake. If there is a problem, which attracts high attention from the public and governments, one can expect better mobilising potential of Churches, which, in many cases, outweigh the mobilising potential of their opponents. On some issues, Churches may also ally with secular organisations. Presumably, such alliances make their influence stronger, but it becomes more difficult to observe the specific contribution of Churches.

In order to assess the above mentioned propositions on the empirical level, we shall draw out attention to the concrete example: the role of Churches in the recent reform of the EU treaties. It is worth noting that the whole process of reform, announced at the European Council Meeting in Laeken in December 2001, took eight years and ended in December 2009, when the Treaty of Lisbon came into force. The process of reform began with the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe (the European Convention), which assembled in February 2002 and lasted until July 2003. The Convention eventually produced the text of the
Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (the European Constitution), which was designed to replace the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. The second stage took place from October 2003 to June 2004, when the text was discussed and amended at the Inter-Governmental Conference. The final phase came after the Constitutional Treaty failed at the ratification process, and Member States decided to draft the Reform Treaty instead. The Reform Treaty was finally agreed in October 2007 and signed in December of the same year in Lisbon. It was ratified by all Member States within two years.

The empirical part of this paper is divided into two main sections. First, it starts with the analysis of the Churches’ objectives in the content of the Constitutional Treaty. The second section analyses the role of Churches in the three main stages (phases) of the debates: the European Convention, the Inter-Governmental Conference and the Treaty of Lisbon.

3. The Christian perspectives’ on the Constitutional Treaty

The European Christian community well understood the great importance of the treaties’ reform, initiated in the early 2000s. As it was emphasised by the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), ‘Never before in the history of the European Union has the project of rethinking its objectives, responsibilities, structures, and the principles on which it is constructed been taken up so visibly and systematically’ (COMECE, 2002).

The religious contribution at the initial stage of the reforms’ process was chiefly word-driven: Churches articulated their goals and views, making them known both to the policy-makers and the wider public. In May 2002 in ‘the first contribution to the Convention’, COMECE touched upon a number of general issues, such as the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU Constitution, and the importance of the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity (COMECE, 2002). But the general issues had not come alone, since the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences did not refrain from making more specific recommendations. These recommendations were related to the three main issues (reference, dialogue and status), and they became the focus for the fierce debates of subsequent years. More precisely, COMECE recommended that a future Constitutional Treaty should:

(1) recognise the openness and ultimate otherness associated with the name of God. An inclusive reference to the Transcendent provides a guarantee for the freedom of the human person;
(2) [acknowledge] the specific contribution of Churches and religious communities [and] provide for the possibility of a structured dialogue between the European institutions and Churches and religious communities;

(3) Incorporate Declaration No.11 annexed to the Final Act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, expressing its respect for the status of Churches and religious communities as recognised by every Member State (COMECE, 2002, emphasis added).

A few days later the Orthodox Church of Greece joined the campaign, with the issue on 30 May 2002 of its official statement ‘On the future of Europe’. Metropolitan Athanasios (Hatzopoulos), the Head of the Representation of the Church of Greece to the EU, explained that the statement ‘was an answer to a question directly posed to the Synod of our Church by Giscard d’Estaing [the President of the Convention]’ (Hatzopoulos 2010). The Greek Church made three main proposals for the Constitution, requesting that:

a. The principles of Religious Freedom and basic Human Rights are to be fully and specifically guaranteed and safeguarded, and deceitful proselytism forbidden [...].

b. Respect for the common conscience of the Peoples of Europe concerning the Christian roots of their diachronic and contemporary spiritual legacy is to be ensured [...].

c. Church-State relations [...] are to be left to the internal Law of each Nation, within the framework of religious freedom, as this is specifically foreseen in Statement No.11 of the Treaty of Amsterdam [...] (Zorbas, 2003, p. 229)

One month later the course of events crossed the borders of the Catholic and Orthodox confessions. In June a number of Christian organisations (Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC CEC), Caritas Europa, European Federation for Diaconia, Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe, International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity and COMECE) produced a joint letter, addressed to the President of the Convention. It included both the general statements and the concrete proposals. The vagueness of the general statements made them non-pretentious and acceptable to virtually anyone (for example, the phrases about the support for the fundamental rights and ‘the pursuance of the common good’). More specific requests coincided, to a certain extent, with the May’s proposals of COMECE (especially when it referred to the status of Churches and religious communities). One of the novelties
was a request to acknowledge in the constitutional text ‘the religious and spiritual heritage of Europe’, but there was no appeal to make a reference to the Transcendent (CSC CEC et.al, 2002).

Three months later, in common proposals, articulated by CSC CEC and COMECE, May’s requests of COMECE were in general repeated, albeit with a slightly different wording. As in June’s letter, the request to make a reference to the Transcendent was not included (most likely because of the position of some Protestant Churches in the CEC). At the same time, COMECE and CEC stated clearly that the omission from the Constitutional Treaty of any reference to religion, churches or religious communities ‘[w]ould constitute a vacuum, given their vital significance to society as a whole, to the values and identities upon which a society is based, and to the Union’s relationship to its citizens’ (CSC CEC and COMECE, 2002).

The common Christian positions, articulated between May and September, looked like de facto reference points for those politicians and officials, who respected the opinion of Churches and shared the same values and beliefs. This gained particular importance when debates at the Convention (especially on the Preamble) became very heated, attracting substantial attention from far beyond the session halls of conventionalists. How these debates progressed is the issue of concern of the next section.

4. Churches as non-state actors and identity-formers: mobilisation and support
We now look in more detail how Churches and the organisations or individuals who supported them acted during the process of the treaties’ reforms. This requires the analysis of the three main stages: debates at the Constitutional Convention, debates on the Constitutional Treaty at the Inter-Governmental Conference and the debates on the Treaty of Lisbon.

4.1 Debates at the Convention
The Convention on the Future of Europe was composed of 105 members, representing Heads of States and Governments, national parliaments (of the fifteen Member States and the thirteen candidate countries, including Turkey), European Parliament and the European Commission. The plenary sessions were normally held once a month, and the Presidium, composed of twelve members, was assembled as necessary between the plenary sessions.

The first mention of religion at the Convention came as early as during the second session (21-22 March 2002), in the context of the discussion on European values. The Italian
members of the Convention spoke about the Christian-Jewish values and the role of Churches in the social area. In particular, the member Marco Follini “[m]entioned the ‘role of the religious traditions’ and reminded the states not to forget about that aspect in their debates on the future of Europe” (The European Convention, 2003, p.8). During the third session (15-16 April 2002) Henning Christophersen, a representative of the Danish Government, ‘[e]mphasised that the regulation of the state-church relationship has to remain in the competence of the member states’ (The European Convention, 2003, p.15). Also, the Dutch member Rene van der Linden at the fourth session (23-24 May 2002) spoke about ‘the importance of the Churches for the development of civil society’ (The European Convention, 2003, p.23). Interestingly, the members of the Convention, who spoke at the second and third sessions, did so before the appearance of any formal Churches’ submissions to the Convention. Apparently, the Italian and Danish members acted just from their own convictions, and, in the case of Denmark, reflected the constitutional arrangements of their state. A representative of COMECE confirmed that they indeed did not ask the members to articulate any concern at the plenary sessions (COMECE representative 2010).

A more active campaign from the Churches and Christian organisations came later, as well as the mobilisation of the members of the Convention. In June, the representatives of the Churches (CEC) articulated their ideas and concerns at the special session of the Convention, devoted to the hearing of the civil society groups (24-25 June 2002). But the most intensive involvement of the Churches, both at European and national levels, was recorded in the second half of 2002 and the first half of 2003—especially after it became clear that ‘In the skeleton of the draft constitutional treaty made public by the Praesidium on the 28 October 2002, no reference to religion was made’ (Leustean, 2007). Churches acted in three main dimensions: petitions, negotiations, and the use of the opportunities, provided by specific Church-State relations of their countries. Not surprisingly, the Pope, as the head of both the Church and the State (the Vatican) was able to act on the highest political level. In a meeting on 31 October 2002 with the President of Convention, Valery Giscard d’Estaing, John Paul II ‘repeated his request for a clear reference to God and Christian faith’, emphasising that ‘[i]n the contribution of Christianity and man’s Christian vision in the history and culture of different countries is part of a common treasure and it appears logical that this should be inscribed in the project of the Convention’ (Smith, 2002).

To these requests, coming from the outside, the insiders also joined. Just a day before the meeting of d’Estaing and John Paul II, two German MEPs (Ingo Friedrich and Joachim Wuermeling (Convention’s alternate)) ‘announced their intention to push for a more precise
reference to religious heritage and to God in the preamble or the body of the constitutional
text’ (Smith, 2002). As Wuermeling explained:

We waited until the process of the work in the Convention became more structured. I
was in close contact with Noel Treanor [COMECE General Secretary] and the Catholic
and Protestant Churches in Germany. But the decision [to launch the petition] came
out of my own convictions and the position of my party— the Christian Social Union in
Bavaria. I did not get formal requests from the Churches. Anyway, it was not
necessary, since we had the talks before, and there have been these ideas long before
the Convention started (Wuermeling 2010).

Peter Pavlovic (CEC) also confirmed that the CSC CEC ‘had the discussions with several
members of the Convention, but not in order to ‘organise’ them. We simply wanted to express
our position, and the rest was with them, to act as politicians’ (Pavlovic 2010). Wuermeling
presented his contribution with the 25 signatures of the members and alternates on 31
January 2003. The proposed text (based, as it was explained, ‘[o]n the texts from the Charter
of Fundamental Rights and the Polish Constitution’) was as follows:

The Union values include the values of those who believe in God as the source of
truth, justice, good and beauty as well as of those who do not share such a belief but
respect these universal values arising from other sources (CONV 480/03).

Between the end of October 2002 and the end of January 2003 the religious agenda did not
suffer a lack of events either. At the 14th plenary session of the Convention (7-8 November
2002), Farnleitner, representing the Austrian government, ‘[s]pecifically asked for a
recognition of declaration No. 11 annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam, which protects
national church-state relationships’ (The European Convention, 2003, p.80). The working
group on the ‘Complementary competences’ (led by Christophersen from Denmark) proposed
that the provision ‘The Union respects the national identity of Member States’ should also
exemplify ‘the essential elements of the national identity’. Notably, it was suggested ‘the legal
status of churches and religious societies’ be included in the list (The European Convention,
2003, p.82). This was especially welcomed by Teufel and Wuermeling (Germany), Farnleitner
(Austria), and Serracino-Inglott (Malta).

In mid-December, COMECE and CSC CEC submitted their second joint legislative proposal
to the Convention. They suggested three versions of the Preamble: one similar to the Charter
of Fundamental Rights (‘conscious of [...] what Europe owes to its spiritual and moral heritage’), one as suggested by some members of the Convention (‘taking inspiration from its cultural, humanist and religious heritage’), and the formulation, presumably, of Churches' own: ‘Conscious of human responsibility before God and equally conscious of other sources of human responsibility...’ (CSC CEC and COMECE, 2002a). Notably, it was the first time that the representatives of the three Christian confessions jointly wrote about the possibility of mentioning God in the text of the Constitutional Treaty. Churches also repeated their requests to preserve their status under national law and asked that provisions be made for structured dialogue: ‘The European Union respects the specific identity and the contribution to public life of churches and religious communities and maintains a structured dialogue with them' (CSC CEC and COMECE, 2002a, emphasis added).

It was a moment of some disappointment to the Churches and their supporters, when in the articles 1-16 of the Treaty, released on 6 February 2003, no reference to religion or God was made. However, at the 16th session (27-28 February 2003) the Convention’s President promised that '[t]he Presidium would at a later stage propose clauses of relevance to religion and the churches in three areas of the future Constitution' (The European Convention, 2003, p.114). A number of the members of the Convention spoke strongly in support of the religious content, with Danuta Hubner, a representative of the Polish Government, summarising the opinions:

My personal view is that without such a reference [to religious heritage], the Constitutional Treaty will not be complete. Religions and Christianity among them have been part and parcel of our continent’s history. Respect for pluralism of opinion can very easily go together with a recognition of the role of religion, for example in the Preamble to the Treaty (Personal remarks, p.3)

After February’s uncertainty, the coordinated efforts of the Churches became even more visible. In March 2003, at the meeting in Crete, the representatives of the Orthodox Churches of Albania, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Poland, Serbia, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and the Ecumenical Patriarchate adopted ‘Conclusions of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation’ on the Draft Constitutional Treaty. In this document, reflecting the will of the European Orthodox family, Churches asked, inter alia, for the 'explicit reference to Europe’s Christian heritage' and for the incorporation in the Constitution of the 11th Declaration of the Treaty of Amsterdam ‘on status quo of the Churches and non-confessional religious unions' (Conclusions, 2003).
Thus, by April 2003 almost all major European Churches, either acting alone, or in the unity with others, became involved in the drafting process. The only discordant voices, breaking unity among Christians, were from the Protestants. For them the issue of the Preamble seemed to be of little importance. Paul Verner Skærved, Chairman of the Council on International Relations of the Lutheran Church in Denmark, stated that '[i]f something is to be inscribed in the treaty, it should not be God or the Christian values but the recognition of the role of the churches as a part of the European picture and, above all, the religious freedom' (Church of Denmark, 2003). The Lutheran Churches in other countries held the similar views. For the Lutheran Church of Finland (one of the most active on the EU issues among the Protestant Churches in Europe), the question of the Preamble ‘was not a priority’ (Eloranta, 2010). In fact, the more important issues for the Lutherans included social policy, human rights and participatory democracy. On the Preamble, the Church of Finland did not produce any separate statement (it only acted via CEC), and a number of the minority Protestant Churches (for example, in France and Italy) were even not in favour of the reference to God, because ‘the laicite was the way that allowed them to function’ (Eloranta, 2010). The Quakers were unable to take a common view on the ‘reference problem’, due to the broad range of incompatible opinions (Weitsch, 2010). Instead, in their recommendations (as formulated by the Quaker Council on European Affairs), the ‘Society of Friends’ touched upon other issues: the human values, the improvements to democracy and transparency within the EU institutions and the external action (Thomas, 2003, Weitsch, 2010). Quakers argued in favour of the regular dialogue with the civil society, NGOs and Churches and opposed the increase of military capabilities of the Union (Weitsch, 2010).

However, this certain break of consensus did not prevent the majority of Christian Churches seeing in April their first real success. At the 18th session of the Convention (3-4 April 2003), the Vice-President Dehaene presented the article 37, which proclaimed the guarantees for the status of Churches under national law and declared the regular dialogue of the EU with Churches. ‘Philosophical and non-confessional organisations’ also came under the regulations of the article, but Dehaene underlined that ‘[t]he dialogue of the European institutions with the churches, religious, philosophical and non-confessional communities has to be clearly distinguished from other forms of regular dialogue with civil society organisations’ (The European Convention, 2003, p. 127). In May, in the first draft of the Preamble, published on 28 May 2003, reference was made to religion, but in very general terms and in combination with statements which were considered subjective and biased:
Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, which, nourished first by the civilisations of Greece and Rome, characterised by spiritual impulse always present in its heritage and later by the philosophical currents of the Enlightenment, has embedded within the life of society its perception of the central role of the human person and his inviolable and inalienable rights, and of respect for law (CONV 722/03).

The criticism of this draft was mainly concerned with the ‘historical incorrectness’. The Russian Orthodox Church underlined that the ‘philosophical currents of the Enlightenment may be mentioned in the Preamble only along with the Christian inheritance and perhaps that of other religions visibly present in Europe. A reference to an abstract “spiritual impulse” does not remove this problem’ (Moscow Patriarchate, 2003). Many other Christian Churches articulated similar criticism, speaking about the lack of the objective reading of the history in the document.

Some members of the Convention (mainly from the Candidate Countries) fully shared this concern. Edmund Wittbrodt, member of the European Convention (Poland) and Marta Fogler, alternate member (Poland), initiated an amendment: to insert, along with the philosophical currents of the Enlightenment, also the ones of the Christianity and the Renaissance (CONV 795/03). Frantisek Kroupa, alternate member of the Convention (Czech Republic), suggested that, in order to acknowledge the importance of religion, ‘the heritage of Bible’ should be mentioned (CONV 769/03). Danuta Hubner spoke about the ‘[n]eed to indicate the Christian values as one of the sources of Europe’s inheritance, especially when there are made particular references to the traditions of Greece and Rome, and of the Enlightenment’. Indeed, as the members of the Convention Peter Serracino Inglott and Michael Frendo, and alternate John Inguanez (all from Malta) pointed out, the inclusion of Christianity could be necessary ‘for a more faithful reflection of history’. Gabriel Cisneros Laborda, member of the Convention (Spain), called the formulation of the draft Preamble ‘unacceptable and scandalous’ (in the words of Ignace Berten), which is in fact ‘the historical falsification’, and the expression of a deliberate attempt ‘to eliminate Christianity from the European memory’ (see ‘Proposed amendments’, 2003).

Possibly due to the ‘historical’ criticism, the references to Greek and Roman civilisation, as well as to the Enlightenment were deleted from the Preamble. The text gained more a neutral and balanced context. In the new version the EU was drawing inspiration
[f]rom the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage, has embedded within the life of society the central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights, and of respect for law.

But this new version still attracted some criticism, accompanied by the requests for its further alteration. Edmund Wittbrott suggested that the Preamble should also speak about the ‘Christian-Judaic inheritance of Europe’ (Proposal of the Polish members, 2003). Although 37 members and alternates of the Convention put their signatures in support of this amendment, their proposal was not accepted, and the Preamble remained unchanged. Also almost unchanged was the article 51 (initially 37), which was fiercely opposed by some humanist associations and some members of the Convention. Their objective was to delete it altogether, since, as they claimed, the ‘interests and role [of the Churches] are covered by other articles dealing with civil society’ (Suggestion for amendment of Article: I-51). However, the Draft Treaty, presented at the Thessaloniki European Council on 19-20 June 2003, contained both the disputed Preamble and article 51, to the visible dissatisfaction of those who wanted (and promoted) a different wording. But the struggle was far from over, since the process entered into the most important stage—the search of consensus among member states.

4.2. Debates at the Inter-Governmental Conference

It took quite a long time for the participants of the Inter-Governmental Conference to reach an agreement on the text of the Constitutional Treaty, since many principal questions (such as the rule on majority voting) were at stake (see Streinz 2008). Indeed, although the Conference started on 4 October 2003, the text of the Treaty was fully agreed only in June 2004. It was signed by the 25 member states in Rome, on 29 October 2004.

Although Churches achieved some success at the time of Convention, it soon appeared that they were not fully satisfied with the draft version of the Treaty. As early as in June 2003 the Pope appealed again ‘to those drawing up the future European Constitutional Treaty so that it will include a reference to religion and in particular to the Christian heritage of Europe’ (AFP, 2003). The Vatican’s stance was supported by voices from the ‘periphery’. In a letter, addressed in September 2003 to the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the Conference of Polish Bishops stressed that ‘It is impossible to build the future of Europe without a spiritual foundation, which is based on the truth about its past and present’. Bishops expressed the hope that Italy, during its presidency, will ensure that the text of the Constitutional Treaty will
recognise Christian roots of Europe and will also give ‘the appropriate place to the religious meaning’ (List, 2003).

But overall, statements and declarations of the Churches during the IGC were less frequent than before (mainly because the Churches had articulated and thoroughly explained their ideas earlier, at the time of European Convention). The usual contacts of Churches with various political institutions and groups continued, and the Churches’ message was basically the same as in 2002–2003. For example, archbishop Christodouloıs of the Church of Greece claimed in his October 2003 speech to the members of the European Parliament:

The demand for a reference to Christianity is not an act that aims to obstruct the secular state, but an act that desires to protect European consciousness. The planned European constitution’s failure to refer to the foundations of European consciousness represents in my view the first truly regrettable event in the history of the Union (Address, 2003).

Although the Churches became less visible at the time of IGC, some governments and politicians took on more actively their support. In September 2003, before the formal opening of the Inter-Governmental Conference, eight countries (Italy, Spain, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) indicated their wish to see the presence of Christianity in the Constitution. The Czech Republic made even a greater suggestion, with a reference to Ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law, Jewish and Christian roots and rationalism (CIG 37/03, p.3). This initiative of the eight was supported by a proposal, signed by 82 Members of the European Parliament. Also, an attempt was made to get public support: in November 2003 a petition, signed by 400 thousand people from different countries of Europe, was presented to the Council Presidency by a number of MEPs, led by Mario Mauro (Italy) and Elizabeth Montfort (France). Montfort underlined that Europe, which spells out its own identity in Christian sense, will thus be open to other cultures (EPP Group, 2003). The actors behind the petition, as indicated on the European Peoples Party website, were the ‘[i]ndividuals who spontaneously launched the petition’ (EPP Group, 2003). Schlesinger and Foret assume that this petition remained unknown to the most of the key actors in the debates, therefore ‘attempts to develop a broader constituency in order to mobilize the support of various strands of public opinion has had little success’ (Schlesinger and Foret, 2006, pp.68-69).
Indeed, Churches were evidently not successful, since the final version of the Constitutional Treaty, agreed by the Member States, omitted any reference to God or Christianity. This was partly provoked by the fierce opposition from such secular countries as Belgium and France. The French representatives consistently stressed the principle of laicite in the French Constitution as their key argument. An emphatic reply from Richard Chartres, Anglican bishop of London (‘why should the whole of Europe retreat from genuine pluralism in favour of a secular confessional state?’) (Values and Principles, 2003, p.474) did not bring much change.

As in the phase one, the reference was not the only problem at the time of IGC. Secular groups renewed their demands for deleting the article on the ‘Status of churches and non-confessional organisations’. In December 2003 a coalition of secular groups ‘urged EU leaders to delete Article 51’. They claimed that the above mentioned article ‘not only maintains the privileges of the churches in each member state but also defines them as permanent established partners of the European Union’, which ‘would mark the end of the principle of separation of churches and the state’ (Evans, 2003). It was even suggested that with the joining of the EU of the countries with a strong influence of the Vatican, ‘[t]he door will be wide open to the Church hierarchy to impose its reactionary social views’ (Evans, 2003). Churches and their supporters managed to successfully resist to those who campaigned for the deleting of article 51. One of the opponents of this article, Anne Van Lancker (former member of the Convention and MEP in 1994-2009) claims that there was a sort of political bargain: ‘In the end we did not succeed to remove the article 51, since that was the political price to pay to the EPP in order to avoid a reference to God in the Constitution’ (Van Lancker, 2010).

In fact, the provisions, relating to the religious issues, remained virtually unchanged in the final text of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (if compared to what was proposed by the Convention in June 2003). One can even suggest that these provisions became slightly more favourable towards religion. ‘The cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe’ remained in the first sentence of one of the articles of the Preamble, but the article itself was moved from the second to the first place in the Preamble. In addition, a new wording of the article clearly put the religious inheritance (alongside cultural and humanist) as one, from which ‘have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law’ (CIG 87/2/04, p.3). The article on the ‘Status of churches and non-confessional organisations’ became the article I-52 (instead of 51), and added only the words ‘under national law’ in the
text of paragraph 2 (‘The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations’) (CIG 87/2/04, p.54).

The final version of the Treaty was assessed quite positively by the Catholic Church. In a paper, published in March 2005, COMECE regretted that the Treaty ‘does not include reference to Christianity’, but at the same time welcomed that ‘[t]he religious freedom in its corporate dimension, the dialogue between Churches and the Union, as well as the protection of the status of the Churches in the Member States has been introduced into the Constitutional Treaty’ (COMECE, 2005, pp. 3-4). Moreover, COMECE argued that ‘[b]y making reference to the religious inheritance of Europe, the Constitutional Treaty implicitly accepts the predominant contribution made by Christianity to today’s Europe’ and ‘by explicitly using the Christian term ‘church’ and respecting their specific contribution, the Union shows consciousness of Europe’s Christian heritage’ (COMECE, 2005, pp.14-15).

4.3. The Treaty of Lisbon: actions and evaluation

The fate of the Constitutional Treaty was not happy one, since its ratification process did not go according to plan. It was necessary for all Member States to complete the ratification within two years, but the ‘no’ votes at the referendums in France and Netherlands in May and June 2005 ‘destabilised the EU’ (Syrpis, 2008, p.221). In June 2005 the European Council called for a ‘period of reflection’, in order to find a solution acceptable to all Member States. Syrpis claims that ‘throughout this period, there was great uncertainty as to the fate of the Constitution, and as to the prospects for, and direction of, any reform of the EU’ (Syrpis, 2008, p.221). According to Tsebelis, ‘The purpose of this reflection period was to give the countries more time to debate and to ratify the constitution’ (Tsebelis, 2008, p.266). Christiansen and Reh claim that the reflection period ‘[a]llowed the actors to buy time’ (Christiansen and Reh, 2009, p.253).

After this period (which ended in December 2006), there was the understanding among the EU leaders that the new treaty needed to be worked out, preserving the main provisions of the Constitutional Treaty (Konig et.al., 2008). The text of this new treaty, known as the Reform Treaty, was agreed at the Inter-Governmental Conference in Lisbon in October 2007 and signed in December of the same year. The main provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, related to religion, were left almost identical to the ones of the Constitutional Treaty. Only some ‘technical’ amendments emerged. The paragraph on the ‘religious inheritance’ in the Preamble moved from the first place to the second. The article on the ‘Status of churches and non-confessional organisation’ (article I-52 of the European Constitution) became the article
17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, losing its name, but retaining its full content.

After an uneasy ratification process, with the two referendums in the Republic of Ireland, the Treaty of Lisbon came into force in December 2009. The religious or religion-related issues did not play a substantial role at this stage, although their presence was certainly visible. For example, at the debates before the referendums in Ireland fear was expressed that the Lisbon Treaty, if ratified, would allow the EU to ‘undermine Ireland’s constitutional prohibition of abortion’ (Dinan, 2009, p.116). Some Catholic groups, led by Coir, argued that the Lisbon Treaty ‘would also encourage the growth of euthanasia and prostitution’, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, becoming legally binding under the Lisbon, ‘would be used as a Trojan horse to introduce extreme secular legislation which would further erode Irish identity and attachment to Christianity’ (O’Brennan, 2009. p.263).

Although at this last stage Churches were indeed less visible than before, they definitely did not disappear from the constitutional horizon. Therefore it is fair to claim that Christian Churches were the active participants of the process of the treaties reforms from the very beginning to the very end. Their assessment of the outcome is varied, but in general favourable. The official report of COMECE, mentioned earlier (and dedicated to the Constitutional Treaty), may well reflect the position of the Catholics towards the Treaty of Lisbon (since the religious and religion-related elements were left virtually unchanged). The Church and Society Commission of the CEC, in its report on the Treaty of Lisbon (December 2009), stated that in many aspects the content of the Treaty coincided with the objectives of the CSC. In particular, the Charter of Fundamental Rights became legally binding, the status of Churches is respected under national law, and the EU is obliged to hold regular dialogue with the Churches (CSC CEC, 2009). ‘The biggest disappointment concerns the lack of progress in the enhancement of non-military means of conflict prevention and crisis management’,-- underlines the report (CSC CEC, 2009). However, as Peter Pavlovic noted, ‘I believe that most of the crucial submissions from the Churches were adopted, and they are found in this or that way in the formulations of the Treaty’ (Pavlovic, 2010).

Lutheran Churches of Sweden and Finland were generally satisfied with the final text of the Treaty, asserting that the ‘Christian values are very much represented in the Treaty’ (Eloranta, 2010). The Quakers welcomed the articles on the dialogue with civil society and religious organisations, but were displeased that their pacifist stance on the military issues was largely ignored (Weitsch, 2010). A representative of the Russian Orthodox Church,
admitting that ‘without Christian roots the text of the Preamble was deprived of its sense as a whole’, stated at the same time that ‘from the practical point of view, the fact that there is now the systemic dialogue with the Churches (article17) is probably even more important’ (Ilin 2010). The Russian Church also welcomed that, in the light of the article 17, Churches are not equalised with the NGOs, interest groups and social partners (Ilin 2010). The idea that Churches cannot be equalised with the NGOs was also explicitly articulated by bishop Porfyrios, the Church of Cyprus representative, who stated that ‘These issues are in different categories’ (Porfyrios, 2010).

However, the comparison of the initial requests with the outcome is suggestive that the level of success for the Churches and their influence should not be overestimated. Indeed, the reference to the religious inheritance in the Preamble was included, but any references to the requested Judeo-Christian inheritance or God were omitted. Although Churches managed to get the recognition of their ‘identity and specific contribution’, this was done alongside the same recognition for the philosophical and non-confessional organisations (which are often anti-religious).

The same applies to the provisions for the ‘open, regular and transparent’ dialogue with Churches and religions. Indeed, it was the Churches’ achievement that this dialogue was separated from the dialogue with the civil society, but it was watered down by the inclusion of the abovementioned ‘philosophical and non-confessional organisations’. Moreover, initially Churches requested ‘structured’ dialogue, but this word does not appear in the wording of the article. Consequently, article 17, if applied in its totality, simply means dialogue with almost everyone, without any specific obligations from the European Union. In fact, it is left to the goodwill of the EU to establish a formal structure for the dialogue. This has already been requested by the representatives of Christian Churches, but nobody can force the EU to do more than was done before the Lisbon Treaty came into force (the regular meetings of the religious and the EU leaders started several years earlier). It is not surprising that even one of the opponents of the Churches, Sophie in’t Veld, chair of the European Parliament Platform on secularism in politics, admitted that the final outcome of the Reform Treaty ‘can be regarded as a success or failure for one of the sides, depending on how you will put in practice’ (in’t Veld, 2010).
Conclusion

Christian Churches took an active part in the whole process of the recent treaty reforms, which lasted from 2001 to 2009. They acted in different formats, but with a clear set of objectives and with a range of methods, which were selected to achieve these objectives. Their activity was visible at both national and supranational levels, involving different layers of the EU decision-making process. This activity was welcomed and supported by some politicians and by the public opinion of the countries with a more religious population.

At the same time, it is worth noting that Churches acted under a very strong opposition, in circumstances, where politics is dominated by secular forces. Therefore, albeit their success was indeed limited and only partial, they managed to establish themselves as strong, influential and respected participants of debates and European policy-making. Sophie in’t Veld admitted that Churches are ‘a very influential, if not the most influential lobby in Brussels’ (in’t Veld, 2010). The work on the treaties’ reform clearly reflected the fact that Churches are constituent parts of the modern European society. They are able to contribute well to debates on identity and to the formation of identity itself, even in a time of growing secularisation in some parts of the European continent. What is more important, Churches proved to be efficient in forming very strong coalitions in their support— the coalitions, which included influential representatives of intellectual and political elite. They were able to actively contribute to national agendas, not least due to their special roles in some European countries, embodied in the models of the church-state relations. Thus, their ability to mobilise, their ability to appeal, and their ability to deal with top officials, as well as historically sound and grounded argumentation reaffirmed that the specific status and role of Churches in European integration is very unlikely to be ignored either now or in the future.

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