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## **Religious Socio-Political Actors or Usual Charity Providers? Faith-Based Organization in Welfare Politics in Western and Eastern Europe**

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*Work in progress – please do not circulate or quote!*

### **Abstract**

*Irrespective of secularization processes, governments have identified faith-based organizations (FBOs) – again – as potential welfare actors which may fill the gaps states have increasingly left. However, acting on behalf of and being funded by the state, the organizations are confronted with the potential conflict between, on the one hand, their religious-based motivation and their role as advocates of socially deprived and, on the other hand, expectations by governmental actors who see them primarily as implementers of their social policy programs. Comparing the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Poland this paper examines in a qualitative content analysis the perspective of FBOs on their role as actors in social politics. The findings imply that in countries where the separation between church and state (such as in Netherlands) is rather strict, faith-based organizations tend to downplay their religious character in order to refute suspicions they might use their welfare work for missionary goals. In contrast, in countries with patterns of state-church cooperation (such as in Poland and the UK) faith-based organizations frame their activities in welfare policy implementation more openly as being in line with their moral values. When it comes to the role of faith-based welfare organizations in political advocacy, the results indicate that this role is considerably less significant in Poland due to a by comparison still underdeveloped voluntary sector in the country.*

### **Introduction**

Irrespective of secularization processes, governments have identified faith-based organizations (FBOs) as potential welfare actors which may fill the gaps states have increasingly left. At the same time, FBOs themselves have also been increasingly aware of their possible (renewed) role they and their values might be able to play in the sphere of public welfare. However, the organizations see themselves confronted with, on the one hand, the potential conflict between their wish to fulfil their welfare work in line with their moral values as well as their role as advocates of socially deprived people and, on the other hand, the danger of being exploited by state representatives who perceive them first and foremost as charity providers. Comparing the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Poland this paper examines the views of FBOs on their role as actors in social politics and providers of welfare services (on behalf of the state).

The question of the study is, first, how faith-based welfare providers deal with their renewed (potential) role in welfare against the background of increasing secularization and marketization, thus in the

light of contextual factors that differ from those they were confronted with in former times before centralized welfare states had been established. Second, the project asks how the role of religious welfare providers (from their perspective) differs in Western European countries with longer traditions of faith-based welfare and in Eastern Europe, where social service delivery is a newer phenomenon after a sharp break of more than four decades during the Communist rule. The project is based on a content analysis of documents published by Protestant and Catholic welfare organizations in the three countries. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews that have been conducted with representatives from faith-based welfare organizations were examined.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: First, the state of the art concerning the dual role of civil-society organizations as service providers and social advocates will be presented and, in this context, the specific role of FBOs considered. Second, traditions of welfare delivery in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Poland will be presented including the historical role of FBOs in welfare. Third, the paper analyses how FBOs try to reconcile their roles as providers of welfare and actors in social advocacy against the background of nationally divergent context factors regarding welfare delivery structures and traditions of church-state separation. In this context, a bottom-up-perspective is applied taken first and foremost the perspective of these organisations themselves into account. The paper finishes with a discussion and conclusion.

### **(Religious) civil-society organizations between social policy implementation and advocacy**

Since the 1990s at the latest researchers on governance have increasingly perceived non-state organizations as relevant actors within the policy cycle (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995). According to Börzel and Risse (2010: 115) governance “includes hierarchical steering by state actors, but also includes the involvement of non-governmental actors (companies, civil society) in the provision of collective goods through non-hierarchical coordination”. When it comes to non-profit organizations, particularly two different roles have been identified: service delivery and advocacy (Valentinova et al. 2013: 367).

Social policy is one of the realms where non-governmental organizations play an important role, for instance, at the stage of implementation by providing welfare (on behalf of the state) or of agenda setting by advocating for people in need. However, researchers have increasingly pointed to a possible conflict between the different roles of welfare provision and advocacy in social policy non-profit organizations have to deal with. Since welfare policies have more and more focused on the privatization and marketization of welfare, non-profit organizations have started “to conceptualize their clients as customers rather than as citizens” (Hasenfeld/Garrow 2012: 317) in order to adapt to official efficiency criteria and to be able to compete with their commercial counterparts for public funding. In an increas-

ingly tight competition for a decreasing amount of public money, non-governmental organizations potentially also run the risk of losing state support if they raise their voices for people in need and against government cuts in social welfare.

The dual role of service delivery and advocacy is usually also fulfilled by FBOs that are active in social policy (Bäckström/Davie 2010). For them, arranging the two tasks can become an even greater challenge since their social activities are not least motivated by specific moral values that derive from their religious teachings. Particularly if governmental actors tend to not appreciate these ethical motivations but rather include FBOs out of mere pragmatic considerations, religious welfare providers run the risk of being instrumentalized (Dinham 2009: 120). The latter becomes even more likely if countries become secularized and, consequently, religious teachings are less and less consonant with general values prevalent in societies (Manuel/Glatzer 2019: 15). In this context, worries may rise that FBOs try to use their role in welfare provision and social advocacy for proselytism (Dinham 2009: 121). On the other hand, Manuel and Glatzer (2019: 5) emphasize that “in many countries the most admired role of the church in contemporary society is precisely its work to meet the needs of the most vulnerable”. This is why the authors expect FBOs to be, in fact, outspoken on social issues openly challenging cuts in social services while being rather silent on ‘moral’ issues that can be more easily linked to their religious ethos (Manuel/Glatzer 2019: 3).

However, the role of FBOs in welfare provision as well as the way they reconcile welfare delivery and advocacy depend to a certain extent on traditional patterns of the link between welfare and religion which Davie (2012: 589) describes as “parameters set by the past”. Although the starting point of processes that resulted in the emergence of welfare states in Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was quite similar, that is “separating out of welfare from the influence of the churches” (Davie 2012: 593), the specific role FBOs had played before this process had started differed cross-nationally. This is why Davie (2012: 593) expects that the recently revived role of FBOs in social policy will be “as culturally specific as its predecessor”. Vodo (2016: 13-14) argues in a similar vein when pointing to “significant country by country differences in the way FBOs are structured and in the manner they operate” causing cross-nationally divergences in their welfare role in spite of European-wide “macro mechanisms such as globalization, neo-liberalization, and socioeconomic changes”.

In line with this, the research project at hand expects that the specific role FBOs play in social policy in the Netherlands, the UK and Poland and the way they reconcile their tasks of welfare delivery and social advocacy will to a certain extent be path dependent. Therefore, in the following section, respective national traditions regarding the welfare delivery role of FBOs in the three countries will be depicted.

### **Traditions of welfare delivery in the UK, the Netherlands, and Poland and the role of FBOs**

Both in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and in Poland the churches have played a crucial role in welfare delivery before welfare states were established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recently, in all three countries compared welfare state decentralization and public budget cuts have resulted in a revived focus on voluntary actors as possible service providers. This has also put religious and faith-based organization into the spotlight again as possible participants of the social service sector (Sager 2010).

#### *United Kingdom*

Rivers (2010: 268) emphasizes that “in historical perspective, the provision of community and welfare services in [the UK] has been closely connected with religious belief and practice”. Before their dissolution by Henry VIII in the 1530s it was particularly the monasteries that were the most crucial institutions for welfare services in favour of the poor, orphans as well as sick and old people – albeit as supplements only in line with the prevalent “rule of self-help” (Jawad 2012: 36).

However, in spite of the end of Catholic-dominated welfare, religious voluntary work remained crucial since the Anglican church quickly established social welfare institutions of its own (Jawad 2012: 38). Although the newly established welfare institutions were officially secular, their trustees were often members of the clergy with the consequence that despite the official distinction between welfare and religion “the Christian religion permeated all of their activities” (Rivers 2010: 269).

It was not before the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that British governments started to conceive of welfare provision as an essential task of the state. First, this resulted in increasing public funding of voluntary welfare institutions also for the benefit of FBOs. However, until the 1930s, more and more *public* welfare organizations such as hospitals were established which now weakened the role of voluntary welfare work, be it secular or religious. Nevertheless, the voluntary sector as a whole supported the emerging British welfare state since “voluntary agencies were grateful to be relieved of historic financial obligations to the poor” as Rivers (2010: 272) argues. At the same time, charities started to specialize their social activities by focusing more intensely on advocacy and welfare work in areas the state was neglecting such as international aid and environmental matters (Rivers 2010: 273). Esping-Anderesen (1990) classified the British welfare state as a representative of a ‘liberal welfare regime,’ that has focused first and foremost on the material well-being of the individual without addressing “the larger social context”. According to this “Anglo-Saxon model”, welfare is less about balancing social inequalities but rather about “ad hoc poor relief” (Bode 2003: 207) which is also expressed by the prevailing term of “charity”.

During a “shift from welfare to market-led approaches” (Dinham and Jackson 2012: 75) in the 1980s and 90s, the state again delegated more and more welfare tasks to the private sector, particularly to

commercial, but also voluntary providers (Middlemiss Le Mon 2009: 72). Furthermore, since the second half of the 1990s, welfare in the UK has been characterized by the “concept of localism” (Baker 2012: 566). In this context, the municipalities have become mainly responsible for providing welfare to those in need which, again, have increasingly contracted for- and non-profit-organizations in the hope of reducing costs in the light of welfare budget cuts. Therefore, local administrations have stimulated competition between potential welfare providers looking for the most efficient and cost-effective ones (Baker 2012).

Ever since the state started to withdraw from social services provision (again) as of the 1980s, it has been FBOs in particular that were seen suitable to fill this gap not least due to their historical role in this sector. This perception intensified after Tony Blair who had become Prime Minister in 1997 described religious welfare organizations as “some of the most effective voluntary and community organizations in the country” (quoted from Kettell 2019: 189) in welfare work. With the Localism Act of 2011 the conservative-liberal government of David Cameron continued the trend of decentralizing the British welfare state in the sense of transferring it from the public to the civic realm. This policy has been accompanied by the narrative of the shift from the ‘Big Government’ to the ‘Big Society’ which also included the perception of the importance and effectiveness of the voluntary sector in social welfare (Göçmen 2013a).

### *Netherlands*

Similar to the UK, in the Netherlands Reformation led to a restructuring of religious welfare work after Catholic monasteries had dominated this realm for centuries. However, in contrast to the dominant Anglican Church in England, in the Netherlands, at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century welfare work was characterized by a “fragmentation of poor relief along confessional lines” (Safley 2003: 12). In line with the increasingly dominant idea of respect towards religious pluralism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, all tolerated churches were seen as responsible for their welfare of their respective believers (Spaans 2002: 7). However, Safley (2003) describes continuous conflict not only across confessions but also between churches and the state since the municipalities increasingly defined welfare provision as a public task, too. Nevertheless, later regulations such as the Poor Law of 1854 still defined the private sector – thus, *de facto* *religious* agencies – as primarily responsible for poor relief whereas the state only functioned as a safety net for those the churches were not able to help (Beaumont/Noordegraaf 2013: 143).

Religious confessions also played a crucial role during the so called “pillarisation” of the Dutch society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period the Dutch society was divided into a Catholic, Protestant, liberal-secular and a socialist pillar, that is social groups, each with their own organizations such as parties, schools, sport clubs, unions, but also welfare facilities (Brandesen et al 2013: 3-4). After

this “pillarized” structure began to dissolve in the 1960s, consequences were far-reaching for voluntary welfare, too. Particularly since the General Assistance Law of 1965 finally explicitly defined social welfare as a task of the state, non-governmental welfare work quickly became less and less relevant (Beaumont/Noordegraaf 2013: 143). Furthermore, the accelerated process of secularization particularly hit *religious* voluntary welfare organizations which increasingly merged with or transformed into secular agencies (Zehavi 2012: 438).

In the 1980s, Dutch welfare policies were also influenced by the individualistic approaches that were popular in the UK as well. Accordingly, reforms that strengthened market principles and individual responsibility within welfare delivery made the Dutch welfare system more similar to a liberal welfare state type (Delsen 2012: 27). Since the 1990s, governments have transferred the provision of benefits more and more to the private sector again – albeit leaving the responsibility for monitoring their activities with the state which also guarantees public safeguards (Adema and Whiteford 2010: 122). Therefore, observers such as Platinga and Attolenaar (2007:1) have described the Dutch social system as a “regulatory welfare state” which is supposed to “increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the system”. Similar to the British ‘Big Society’ narrative, in 2007 the Social Support Act (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning; WMO*) strengthened the principle of “active citizenship” particularly stressing the importance of the civil society as an actor in welfare provision (Lub et al. 2010: 1). In this context, the Dutch welfare system has been decentralized mandating the municipalities with the task to coordinate the system and mobilize the local civil society potentially also including the churches (Lub et al. 2010: 3).

### *Poland*

Unlike in the UK and the Netherlands, the historically dominant role of the Catholic Church in Polish welfare was not challenged by Reformation which only had little impact in the country. Consequently, between the 12<sup>th</sup> century and World War I “the voluntary-sector-dominant pattern of social service provision based on the principles of [Catholic Christian charity” (Nalecz et al 2015: 2361) remained widely unchallenged whereas the state played a complementary role only. However, after the re-establishment of the Polish state in 1918, public welfare gained the upper hand in Poland, too, leaving the (religious) non-profit sector now with a secondary social service delivery function (Nalecz et al 2015: 2361). During the years of Communism as of 1945, the Polish welfare system became highly centralized with the state being the provider of nearly all – albeit compared to Western standards rather scarce – services (Borowik et al. 2012: 93). Whereas the voluntary sector generally was diminished to a large extent and civil-society commitment largely oppressed, the Church was also expropriated which resulted in the loss of their welfare facilities such as hospitals.

However, after 1989 and particularly in the wake of the new Polish Constitution of 1997 the principle of subsidiarity gained relevance in Poland as well and pathed the way for an increasing decentralization upgrading local governments, that is municipalities, counties and provinces, as responsible actors in welfare (Borowik et al 2010: 95; Les et al. 2000: 22). The Social Welfare Act of 2004, which regulates the Polish welfare state, has implemented elements of a liberal welfare state type such as the principles of self-responsibility and activity (Krawczyk n.d.: 2). In the course of decentralization local governments have increasingly outsourced welfare provision to the private sector developing a system of contracting. According to Rybka (n.d.: 4) local governments tend to favour NGOs such as religious agencies since they are said to “react more quickly and accurately to changing welfare needs and, moreover, conduct a non-profit activity based on co-operation between professionals and volunteers”. Furthermore, NGOs have also benefitted from – albeit only temporarily paid – European funds (Simienska et al 2008: 4). However, Borowik et al. (2012: 95) conclude that – compared to West European countries – the public sector is still clearly the dominant sphere within the Polish welfare system whereas the private sector “is still very weak”. Borowik et al. (2010: 93) describe this “conviction that the State should ensure social security” as a ‘post-communist mentality’ which is “deep-rooted” in large parts of the Polish society.

### **Religious welfare in the UK, the Netherlands and Poland: empirical analysis**

#### *United Kingdom: governmental approach*

With regard to the United Kingdom observers speak of “a modern revival and reinvention” (Hill 2010: 31) of faith-based welfare which “has come back in from nearly sixty years out in the cold” (Baker 2012). Although this had hold initially for the established Church of England, Pettersen (2011: 30) emphasizes that other faith-based organizations have been seen as potential welfare providers as well. Baker (2012: 568) defines three ‘rationales’ that have guided British governments since the end of the 20th century when identifying faith-based organizations as actors in social service delivery again. First, they have seen local leadership potential in faith groups that (isolated members of) their communities might depend on. Second, politicians have rediscovered the churches’ resources such as their infrastructure, but even more so their pool of potential volunteers that might commit themselves in welfare work. Third, Baker refers to a normative rationale arguing that members of faith groups might enrich the system of welfare delivery with their theological values which also serves as the source of their motivation. Dinham and Lowndes (2008: 2-5) finally relate to the hope of British governments that faith groups may foster “active citizenship and community development” and act “as key agents in promoting ‘community cohesion’” in an increasingly (ethnically and religiously) diverse country of immigration. In the light of the comeback of religious welfare, according to Baker (2012) some social scientists even conclude that British “public policy has shifted in favour of a post-secular position”.

However, others suggest more pragmatic motives that might have caused governments to focus on religious welfare again: Finding partners that help resolving the problems of an overburdened welfare state and enable the state to withdraw (Göçmen 2013a: 157). This is also shown by the fact that faith-based organizations have to compete for public funding in the same way as non-religious providers facing the same challenge of meeting efficiency criteria (Göçmen 2013b: 497).

*United Kingdom: perspective of FBOs*

For FBOs in the UK, the new political interest in their potential as welfare providers comes with both opportunities and challenges. Although their public role may be (potentially) upgraded, Dinham and Jackson (2012: 276) refer to a snag: “the political sphere valorises faith resources but yet gives practically no account of faith.” Therefore, authorities that appreciate faith as a source for the motivation for religious welfare may not always be aware of or even acknowledge the fact, that this faith also creates particular ideas as to which activities are legitimate (and which are not) and how these activities should be carried out (Jawad 2012). Furthermore, religious welfare organizations express the fear their commitment might only be exploited by a state that is primarily looking for ways of withdrawing from its own responsibilities and of reducing costs (Hill 2010).

Interviewees from FBOs active in welfare in the UK particularly refer to David Cameron’s concept of the ‘Big Society’. Whereas there was lots of support by the churches in the beginning their view on the plan has become increasingly negative in the course of the time. Initially, the Church of England was even part of a cross-party movement bringing together MPs from both Labour and Conservative Party that, according to Malcolm Brown, Director of Mission and Public Affairs of the Church, aimed at “re-thinking welfare in a way that’s more functional” and enhancing “the solidarity between rich and poor and, so, implicitly challenging material inequality” (*interview Malcom Brown, 4 May 2016*). Mark Wiggin, Director of Caritas Diocese of Salford, Manchester, also refers in an interview to similarities between “a conservative philosophy” and “the philosophy of the [Catholic] Church” since both were about “subsidiarity” and “grass roots” instead of always relying on the state. However, when it comes to the details, he contrasts the Church’s view clearly from the one the government: “pull your socks up is what they say, get on with it, don’t be lazy, whereas the Church doesn’t adopt that attitude, the Church’s view is for human dignity and for human society to flourish.” (*interview Mark Wiggin, 25 February 2016*). The critical view towards the government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda has been shared by Anglican bishops who in particular complained about the cuts in the public welfare budget that accompanied the new policy. In 2011, the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, who was considered as a supporter particularly of the decentralization plan that came with the ‘Big Society’, argued: “It is not sufficient for the Government, in its localism programme, simply to step back from social need and say this is a local issue.” (Cramner 2011). Malcolm Brown from the Church of England also criticizes the



general approach of the government's welfare policy that only focuses on dealing with short-term crises without taking the social context into account: "a welfare system should not just be to meet immediate needs but it should be to combat isolation, it should be to build people's relationship from the family to the neighbourhood to the community" (*interview Malcom Brown, 4 May 2016*). According to him, the current social policy is even "counterproductive" since people are forced to leave their neighbourhoods in order to move into cheaper apartments in alien communities.

When it comes to the government's welfare policy representatives from faith-based welfare organizations utter further criticism with regard to the principle of competition between potential welfare providers. Mark Wiggin from Caritas complained that the criteria set by the government disadvantaged religious organizations such as his own: "we are competing with the private sector for price, not quality, but for price and also for scale, they can do it on a much bigger scale than we can, we are small so the government wants to deal with bigger providers and not smaller ones." (*interview Mark Wiggin, 25 February 2016*)

The statements made by representatives from both of the churches show that – apart from being active in welfare delivery – religious (welfare) organizations in the UK also clearly understand themselves as advocacy groups. Although they are aware of the danger of – as Cramner (2011: 2) puts it – being "swept up into the 'contract culture' of providing services [which may] in turn [...] erode their ability to give voice to any criticism of government policy", their utterances do not imply that this has already happened. When it comes to the Church of England, its status as an established church provides for multiple channels to government and parliament. However, Catholic interview partners are also anxious to underline their advocacy role. Caritas-representative Alexander De Forges emphasizes in an interview that "Caritas Social Action Network will be part of the debate" also referring to a network of Catholic MPs as well as receptions in parliament his organization holds in order to address issues such as "homelessness [...] and the Catholic activity in that area" (*interview Alexander de Forges, 1 November 2016*). Mark Wiggin from Caritas Manchester alludes to annual invitations to the House of Commons where Caritas has been able to establish valuable contacts with MPs: "it's not lobbying in that sense, it's more information giving, looking for support on issues and we've got better at it and we are becoming more effective at it." (*interview Mark Wiggin, 25 February 2016*)

When it comes to welfare provided by faith-based organizations the question of what the role of faith in this context will and *can* be is repeatedly dealt with. Dinham and Lowndes (2008: 15) quote a Church of England activist saying: "the government doesn't want to hear about what makes us faithful people. They'll fund us if we don't do anything religious with the money." However, in the interviews this issue is first and foremost referred to by Catholic representatives which try to counter criticism blaming

religious welfare work to be discriminatory and/or (also) about proselytization. The allegation of discrimination was particularly fuelled in 2006 when a public funded Catholic adoption agency refused to permit adoption by same sex couples since the Church did not regard this as being in accordance with their theological principles. Then Labour government forbade this rejection arguing that publicly-funded adoption agencies were not allowed to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation. As a consequence, the Catholic Church stopped its commitment within this area (Cramner 2011: 3). Mark Wiggin from Caritas Manchester conceives of this incident as an example of the Church's shortcoming of "promoting itself properly". Since the Catholic Church and Caritas were too defensive about its identity "we are increasingly making our faith less and less advertised in what we are doing". Addressing the government and the public, Wiggin goes on that people had to "appreciate and respect the ethos and values of our charities and our organization". This also holds for candidates applying for a job at Caritas: Even though his organization was anxious not to discriminate against any applicant and was also willing to hire people of other faith ("in that room there, those two people in there, they are Muslim, we are a Catholic organization, but they get their job because they are good") people needed to understand what Catholic welfare was actually about. In his view, Caritas should be more confident about the religious character of its welfare work arguing this might even turn out to be an asset: "and if you become the same as everybody else, you don't have a distinctiveness, you don't have a unique selling point". Therefore, being outspoken about the faith in faith-based welfare may come as an advertisement for the church without having anything to do with missionary work in the pure sense. Against the background of the benefits of Catholic welfare young people might even consider committing themselves for the Church again without being actively recruited (*interview Mark Wiggin, 25 February 2016*). When it comes to the Catholic Church's qualities Alexander de Forges also refers to its plural character which enabled it to be an inclusive actor in the society that enhances cohesion: "we have people from across the world and they are working in the help service, they are working all over, they are servicing the country, and so I think of the Catholic Church in its ability." (*interview Alexander de Forges, 1 November 2016*).

#### *The Netherlands: governmental approach*

Since in the Netherlands faith-based organizations are perceived primarily as civil-society organizations they are in principal entitled to provide social services on behalf the state in the same way as their secular counterparts. According to Davelaar et al. (2011: 51) faith-based providers that are usually funded by the local authorities have been particularly active in areas where the state is rather absent such as the support of homeless people or the re-socialisation of ex-convicts. Like in the UK politicians in the Netherlands particularly conceive of a potential of religious actors to "reach certain groups (better), to stimulate voluntary work or to enhance social cohesion and inter faith dialogue" (Davelaar et

al. 2011: 80) not least having their historical welfare role in mind (Dautzenberg and Westerlaak 2007: 17). However, as Maussen (2013: 16) argues, since welfare work has become more and more professionalized, commercialized and diversified “the role of faith-based organizations and institutions differs radically from the role they played in Dutch society before”. Furthermore, more than in the UK, (local) authorities prefer to cooperate with ‘neutral’ organizations (Davelaar et al. 2011: 80) since they have been increasingly anxious not to jeopardize church-state separation by potentially (also) funding religious purposes and activities of faith-based welfare providers. Therefore, municipalities differ considerably when it comes to assessing the legitimation of giving public funds to these actors (Davelaar et al. 2011: 79).

#### *The Netherlands: perspectives of FBOs*

Similar to their counterparts in the UK faith-based organizations in the Netherlands have also initially reacted positively to recent welfare reforms such as the Social Support Act (WMO) and the intended upgraded role for the churches as welfare providers. In an interview, Evert Jan Hazeleger, program manager of the Protestant Church in Action (*Kerk in Actie*) highlighted the fact that churches have been rediscovered as a part of the civil society that might be recognized as a contact partner if individuals were not able to help themselves in times of crises. In his view, since with the WMO quality had become a central criterion when (local) authorities were looking after potential welfare providers, Christian organizations with their “diaconal infrastructure” were likely to be benefitting (*interview Evert Jan Hazeleger, 16 February 2016*). Erik Sengers, representative from the Catholic Caritas, shares the impression of a principally increasingly positive view on church welfare in politics and society referring to an example in Amsterdam Southeast where the municipality invited a representative from Caritas to talks that were taking place in the so-called WMO-council. These boards were established at the local levels in the wake of the implementation of the WMO in order to enable the municipalities to fulfil their tasks in welfare with the help of the private and voluntary sector (*interview Erik Sengers, 13 February 2016*). However, both interview partners referred to limited public funds that – unlike in the past – were only sporadically permitted at the local level for a specific purpose, but never for long-term or structural matters such as schooling volunteers. Therefore, Church in Action representative Jan Evert Hazeleger argues that “cynically spoken” the proclaimed “participation society” may also be understood as an “austerity programme”. (*interview Evert Jan Hazeleger, 16 February 2016*)

In a survey conducted by Dautzenberg and Westerlaak (2007: 18) shortly after the implementation of the WMO in 2007 churches already expressed their fear of being overburdened because the state expected them to be more active in welfare without equipping them with more financial matters since, in the government’s view, they had a sufficient number of volunteers. When it comes to finances, Church in Action representative Evert Jan Hazeleger refers to the organization’s “own money” that

needs to be acquired primarily by the base of the Protestant Church (*interview Evert Jan Hazeleger, 16 February 2016*).

Not only against the background of the perceived shortcomings of the WMO Church in Action attaches importance to not only engaging in welfare work but also openly speaking their mind – an approach Evert Jan Hazeleger subsumes under the slogan of “helping under protest”: “we help but at the same time we also protest to the authorities, be they national or local. Therefore, lobbying and help go hand in hand.” Against the background of recent retrenchment, he expects this advocacy role or “signaling function” to become more important in the future since poverty is likely to become an even greater problem in the society (*interview Evert Jan Hazeleger, 16 February 2016*). Erik Sengers from Caritas reports on requests by church members asking Catholic representatives to be more outspoken about undesirable developments in the Dutch welfare system; however, in his view, due to the centralist structure of the Church it is difficult for a priest or deacon to make political statements without coordinating with the Bishops Conference first (*interview Erik Sengers, 13 February 2016*). Both Protestants and Catholics also express principal criticism with regard to the increasingly prevalent idea of the state transferring its responsibilities in welfare to non-governmental actors. Church in Action spokesperson Hazeleger argues that it was “actually the government’s task to guarantee a minimum subsistence level” (*interview Evert Jan Hazeleger, 16 February 2016*), whereas Caritas-representative Sengers quotes volunteers also seeing the state being responsible in the first place before it was the Church’s turn (*interview Erik Sengers, 13 February 2016*).

In the Netherlands, the identity of faith-based organizations that are active in welfare work has been a bigger issue than in the UK. Although “their faith-based identity and/or working philosophy make them competitive in certain section of the [...] welfare market” as Davelaar et al. (2011: 51) argue, the authors also identify increasing “pressure on their faith-based identity”. On the one hand, because of their religious orientation (local) authorities frequently perceive them as houses of prayers while simply ignoring their social and societal activities (Dautzenberg/Westerlaak 2007: 14). On the other hand, there has been a debate in the Netherlands if publicly funding faith-based organizations principally threatens to jeopardize the separation between church and state – even if the funded organizations committed themselves not to use the money for any religious activities or missionary goals. Interview partners referred to fundamental differences across municipalities when it comes to answering the question if church-based welfare initiatives are generally eligible for funding (*interviews Erik Sengers, 13 February 2016; interview Bram van Rebergen, 8 November 2016*). This debate was particularly fuelled after the Protestant organization Youth for Christ, which had been active in youth welfare in Amsterdam also using public money, was accused of (also) pursuing proselytism (Jager-Vreugdenhil 2013). In an interview, Bram van Rebergen, national director of Youth for Christ in the Netherlands, defends his organization against these accusations arguing that the motivation of their volunteers to

help was based upon their faith: “the intrinsic motivation, in our view, is inextricably connected with our world view. [...]. How nice is it when people want to do something good for their neighbours out of their particular religious conviction?” In his view, the criticism of Youth for Christ reflects an “exaggerated idea of the separation of church and state [as well as] the so-called liberalization and neutralization of local welfare work. Pushing religious attitudes as much as possible behind the private door.” (*interview Bram van Rebergen, 8 November 2016*) The authorities’ aspiration for maintaining neutrality was also noticed by interview partners of other faith-based organizations. Caritas-representative Erik Sengers referred to the policy of taking different world views into account: “this is how it works in the Netherlands, [funds] have to be given in equal shares to the humanists, to the Muslims and the Christian applicants.” (*interview Erik Sengers, 13 February 2016*)

The fact that Dutch politics and society attach rather high importance to church-state separation may be traced back to the accelerated process of secularization in the country which has one of the highest shares of non-denominational persons worldwide. This has not only questioned the legitimacy of faith-based providers of welfare of which prompted many of them to drop their religious character (Vonk et al. 2013) as Caritas representative Erik Sengers confirms: “if we apply for project funding we always need to do this in a secular language, even if we apply at Catholic or former Catholic foundations, we have to describe our goals secularly.” Sengers, finally, also complains about rapidly decreasing numbers of volunteers or younger staff missing knowledge about religious contents: “with Caritas there are many people who are not very religious and who don’t go regularly to church, either. This is why we have days of spirituality for Caritas personnel so that they learn again that Caritas is not social welfare only.”

#### *Poland: governmental approach*

In an increasing number of Polish localities authorities have supported social projects with public money after church welfare organizations have applied for funds (Pavlovic 2004: 104). This holds particularly for the Catholic Church, which, according to Borowik et al. (2012: 95), enjoys the reputation of being “an important and competent partner” that might help to counter the shortcomings of the “not effective enough” public welfare system and step in areas the state has largely neglected such as care for the homeless. Nevertheless, as Pavlovic (2004: 104) argues, and similar to the Dutch example, these opportunities largely depend on personal contacts between representatives of the church and the respective locality whereas formalized cooperation structures are rare.

*Poland: perspective of FBOs*

To begin with, the conditions for faith-based welfare in Poland differ from those in the UK and the Netherlands due to the facts that, first, the decentralization of the Polish welfare system is less developed and, second, religious welfare organizations have been re-established only at the beginning of the 1990s. However, the perspectives that representatives of Polish church-based welfare organizations provide do not only show differences but also similarities compared with those in the two West European countries. The latter holds particularly for experiences with the very motives of (local) authorities to include religious welfare initiatives in the first place. In an interview, Marian Subocz, director of Caritas Poland, argued that the state increasingly favours church-based welfare particularly for financial reasons: “the state says it is cheaper for us to engage Caritas because they have many volunteers.” (*interview Marian Subocz, 29 August 2016*) Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, former director of Diaconie Germany and current advisor of the Polish branch of the Protestant welfare organization, also refers to intensified cooperation with local authorities that, now and then, were also willing to fund welfare activities of Protestant communities. However, in his view, this was still the exception and only held “for some mayors that had primarily in mind: I will save money if I give this to the NGOs.” Nevertheless, at least when it comes to the former national Civic Platform (PO) administration, which was in office until the end of 2015, Kottnik also perceives – independent from financial motives – an increasing governmental “interest in value-based social work”. Therefore, the government not only “encouraged also and in particular Diaconie to do more” but also the local authorities to contact Diaconie more frequently. According to him, this increased interest at the local levels has also remained after the new Law and Justice (PIS) government had come into power (*interview Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, 13 July 2016*). Apart from volunteers and religiously inspired commitment, the interviewed representatives also refer to another asset of their organizations, which is noticed by the state, too: the organizations’ international network. Both Diaconie and Caritas were not only founded in the beginning of the 1990s with important assistance from abroad<sup>1</sup> but still have – and to a certain extent have depended on – cross-border contacts. Caritas-director Marian Subocz refers to a project that was realized with money provided by Caritas Germany: the purchase of two cars and payment of two nurses in order to establish a mobile care service (*interview Marian Subocz, 29 August 2016*). Diaconie-representative Klaus-Dieter Kottnik mentioned study trips of a Polish Diaconie envoy to facilities of Diaconie Germany in order to benefit from their expertise and help developing elder care in Poland (*interview Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, 13 July 2016*). According to Marian Subocz from Caritas, the organization’s transnational network made it also attractive for cooperation with the government, for instance, when it comes to support by the

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<sup>1</sup> In a brochure published in 2012 Caritas Poland introduces itself saying: “caritas began its activity in Poland mainly through the distribution of material gifts received from abroad” (Caritas Polska 2012: 2)

Polish state in international crises such as the war in Eastern Ukraine: “they say: we have the money, you have the contacts in Ukraine so we want you to get involved.” (*interview Marian Subocz, 29 August 2016*) However, the main problem for faith-based welfare providers – and for all non-profit providers in general – derives from the fact that public money is not only very scarce but also paid very irregularly or, as Klaus-Dieter Kottnik put it, only given “based on the cash situation”, if there is political will and/or the organizations have personal connections within local authorities. Furthermore, since the state considers both Caritas and Diaconie as NGOs they may, according to the law, not be funded with structural funds (*interview Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, 13 July 2016*).

A clear difference between faith-based welfare organizations in Poland and those in the Netherlands and the UK becomes visible when it comes to a potential political advocacy role. Whereas the organizations in the West European countries clearly express political demands and criticize their governments’ social policy measures openly, for their counterparts in Poland this is hardly an option. Caritas-director Marian Subocz mentions meetings with the Minister of Labour where Caritas gets the chance to speak about projects and also sometimes refuses to accept a contract if it, in their view, appears to be “immoral” or “unethical”. However, there is no open criticism of the government: “we do not try to engage in political activity, we do not attack the state directly of something like that.” (*interview Marian Subocz, 29 August 2016*) Klaus-Dieter Kottnik from Diaconie has the same impression when it comes to Caritas (“Caritas does not openly engage in lobby work, they concede this to the bishops”) and also rules this out for Diaconie and even the Protestant Church in general: “since it is a very small church the Protestant Church keeps a low profile when it comes to political statements.” (*interview Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, 13 July 2016*) However this does not mean that the organizations always speak in line with the government’s views as Marian Subocz emphasizes when it comes to the government’s restrictive refugee policy: “we need to respect the state because the people that come to us need to be checked. But our position is: You need to help the refugees.” (*interview Marian Subocz, 29 August 2016*)

All in all, unlike in the UK and, particularly, in the Netherlands, in Poland faith-based welfare work does not seem to be questioned as such. Quite the contrary, the fact that the organizations offer value-based help rather seems to work in favour of their reputation. In a self-portrayal of Caritas published in 2012 the organization confidently proclaims that “Caritas has not only the Church’s but also the society’s trust”(Caritas Polska 2012: 2). However, when it comes to the current Polish government, this does – at least according to Klaus-Dieter Kottnik – not unrestrictedly hold for Diaconie since he had recently noticed some reluctance towards the Protestant Church and its welfare facilities (*interview Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, 13 July 2016*).

## Conclusions

This paper examined the views of FBOs on their role as actors in social politics and providers of welfare services (on behalf of the state) in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Poland. Principally, European-wide trends in welfare such as the withdrawal of the state and decentralization have caused a similar starting point for a comeback of voluntary organizations such as FBOs as significant actors in social service delivery. However, due to cross-national differences with regard to the (historically rooted) relation between state and religion and religious welfare, respectively, FBOs in the three countries show differences when it comes to openly involving their religious values in their welfare work or reconciling welfare delivery and social advocacy.

The findings of this study imply that in countries where the separation between church and state is rather strict (such as in Netherlands), faith-based organizations tend to downplay their religious character in order to refute suspicions they might use their welfare work for missionary goals. In contrast, in countries with patterns of state-church cooperation (such as in Poland and the UK) faith-based organizations frame their activities in welfare delivery more openly as being in line with their moral values. When it comes to the role of faith-based welfare organizations in political advocacy, the results indicate that this role is considerably less significant in Poland due to a by comparison still underdeveloped voluntary sector in the country.

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