European Parliament

Religion and the EU's external policies

Increasing engagement

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Since the 1970s, several international organisations and the diplomatic services of a number of countries have started to question the place of religion in diplomacy and development. In parallel with similar moves in EU Member States and the United States, the EU has developed instruments to give greater consideration to religious trends when addressing human rights concerns and engaging with key partner countries. Both externally and internally, the EU has improved its analytical tools to deal with religious actors more effectively, strengthening its dialogue with representatives of religious communities.

Faith-based organisations are playing a pivotal role in a number of new fields, including climate change, development and conflict resolution, and the EU is increasingly taking these organisations into account. In addition, religion plays an important role in the internal and external policies of some key EU partners, as shown in the case studies at the end of the analysis. That is why this field is slowly emerging as a new dimension in the EU's external policies.

This paper updates a [December 2017 edition](#), with some new case studies.

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Executive summary

After centuries of religious wars, from the late 19th century and onwards throughout the 20th century, a number of European states perceived themselves as the avant-garde of secularism in the world. They therefore considered that religion would play an ever-decreasing role in international politics. As a result, when the EU institutions were established, they had no specific mechanisms for dealing with religious issues.

This changed when, as president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors launched a dialogue with religious representatives. Religion also became part of the debate on the 'religious roots of Europe' during the negotiations on a Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, which was rejected in 2005. The Treaty of Lisbon institutionalised the dialogue with representatives of confessional and philosophical organisations.

Both among EU Member States and in the United States, there is growing interest in improving understanding of and engagement with religious communities. This interest is key, as the number of people for whom religion is an important part of their identity is rising worldwide, alongside an increasingly uneasy co-existence between followers of different religions, and sizeable shifts in global religious demography. In 2013, the EU published guidelines to mainstream its approach to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and in 2016, Ján Figeľ was appointed special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.

For many reasons, it is likely that faith-based organisations – among others – will be important partners for the EU's global action in selected fields, such as climate change, development and conflict resolution. In the field of climate change, most religious leaders worldwide support the need to strike the right balance between fair development and protection of the planet. Faith-based organisations participated actively in the COP-21 and COP-22 summits, as did the EU, which remains a global leader in this field. In development and humanitarian aid, some of the biggest donors and non-governmental organisations active on the ground are faith-based. They provide a significant amount of healthcare and education in developing countries, and the EU is increasingly aware of the potential for partnership with them.

The EU has always worked with faith-based NGOs under a non-discriminatory policy, but now it is engaging more in linking development and religious awareness through training and calls for expression of interest in the promotion of inter-religious dialogue. Faith-based organisations are also active in peace-building in many parts of the world, be it through prevention, education or mediation. On the ground, the EU takes them into account in its peace-building efforts as important civil society players.

In order to work more closely with religious organisations and do more to defend freedom of religion and belief, the EU is strengthening its abilities to understand and engage with religious actors on priority issues.

Religion also plays a key part in the foreign policies of a number of countries worldwide, as illustrated in Section 5 by case studies of nine countries (China, India, Iran, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Ukraine).

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1. Introduction

1.1. From Europe as the avant-garde to Europe as the exception

In the 1950s and 1960s, modernisation theory[1] linked technological development and overall economic modernisation with a decrease in religiousness worldwide. Rooted in European, sometimes Marxist, sociological theories, it presented the West as an avant-garde soon to be followed by the rest of the world. Therefore, European diplomacy, among others, tended to neglect these religious trends until the late 1980s, because religion was perceived as a secondary factor in internal and international politics.

Nevertheless, times have changed. Today, a global trend sometimes described as desecularisation[2] is under discussion: Europe, together with a global international secularised elite, seems to be the exception rather than the avant-garde. Worldwide, there is continuous growth in population as well as parallel growth in religiousness (religious people tend to have more children, even if the latter do not all adopt their parents' religion);[3] atheism or agnosticism are most likely to increase in only two countries: France and the United States.[4] In addition, it seems that social modernity is not systematically linked to a new and more liberal interpretation of religious dogma: according to Peter Berger, a leading sociologist of religion, religions that have adapted their dogma to modernity have progressed less demographically than religions that have maintained a conservative supra-naturalist stand (illustrated for example by miracles).[5] A third element lies in the fact that modernisation is linked more to pluralism than to secularism: religious diversity has increased everywhere, partly because of globalisation. Thus, it appears that there is a strong case for the EU and the West to rethink the place of religious organisations in the 21st century and their interaction with EU's external policies.

1.2. The EU facing religious crises

In the 1980s, the EU Member States gradually reopened the debate on the link between politics and religion, largely because of major international events such as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the war in Afghanistan and the rise of religious conservative movements.

The EU has been obliged to respond to a number of political crises that are being framed increasingly in religious terms, both in public speeches and by the media. From the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, presented by Osama bin Laden as an act of religious war and triggering a US response in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, which was perceived in the region as a clash of civilisations, to the Prophet cartoons crisis in Denmark,[6] which provoked violent reactions from Muslim countries and a number of violent protests from Muslim populations all over the world, the EU has been obliged to take the religious factor into account. Today, the EU faces an increased number of threats of terrorist attacks on its soil, plotted in the name of radicalised versions of religious belief.

Before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009, the EU had no legal basis for developing mechanisms for analysis and dialogue with religious organisations. Therefore, the field is still quite

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[1]   This theory is partly based on Max Weber's work on modernisation. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

[2]   P. Berger, ed., *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Eerdmans, 1999.

[3]   R. Rowthorn, Religion, fertility and genes: a dual inheritance model, Proceedings of the Royal Society, 2011.

[4]   The Changing Global Religious Landscape, Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 5 April, 2017.

[5]   P. Berger, *ibid*.

[6]   The crisis unfolded mainly in 2006, with the reprinting of cartoons by Norwegian and French newspapers. In January 2006, the EU's offices in Gaza were raided by gunmen demanding an apology, and in March 2008, Osama bin Laden threatened the whole EU with religious war.

new for the EU and its relatively new European External Action Service, established in 2011. In the specific field of human rights promotion, the EU adopted its first guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief two years later, in 2013.[7]

2. Religion and belief in the EU's internal and external dimensions

To address the EU-religion nexus, two different aspects must be taken into account. The first is the dialogue with religious actors inside and outside the EU, as part of civil society. The second relates to the place of religion when understanding and evaluating the EU's foreign policy toward third countries and designing action to implement the EU's values and external action objectives.

2.1. A variety of European models

There is no single model of church-state relations across the EU. Specific historical circumstances mean that each Member State has developed its own specific balance in its relationship with religion. In Denmark, for instance, the monarch is the supreme secular authority in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, an established church supported by the state. In other Member States, such as Germany, Greece and Ireland, there is mention of God in the constitution. Other Member States, including Slovenia, Portugal and Slovakia, have a concordat with the Holy See. France has no such tradition and *laïcité* (secularity) is enshrined in the constitution: this provides for mutual independence of state and religion.

At local level, meanwhile, there are sometimes specific arrangements: for example, in France, Alsace-Moselle has a special status owing to the fact that the region was German in 1905 when the law on *laïcité* was adopted; in Germany, Schleswig-Holstein signed a concordat in 2009.

In recognition and respect for this diversity, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)[8] states in its Article 17:

> *1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.*

> *2. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.*

2.2. The EU and religion: internal and international aspects

2.2.1. Internal aspects: the EU's dialogue with religions and non-confessional organisations

The dialogue between the European Commission and religious representatives[9] was launched by European Commission President Jacques Delors in 1990.[10] Following the debate on the 'religious

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[7]   EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, Council of the European Union, June 2013.

[8]   Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 13 December 2007.

[9]   Philosophical and non-confessional organisations participating in the dialogue include humanist organisations, Free Masons and free-thought, ethical and adogmatic organisations.

[10]   On 5 November 1990, a delegation of Protestant and Anglican representatives asked for a meeting with the Commission. Jacques Delors closed the meeting with an appeal to churches to help to give a 'heart and soul to Europe'

roots of Europe' during the negotiations on a treaty establishing a constitution for Europe, which was rejected in 2005, the Treaty of Lisbon institutionalised the dialogue with representatives of confessional and philosophical organisations.

First, Article 17 TFEU recognised the strict principle of subsidiarity in this field but also states that:

> 1. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.

Accordingly, the European Commission and the European Parliament engage in regular dialogue with churches, religious organisations and non-confessional organisations. In Parliament, the dialogue under Article 17 is conducted by one of its vice-presidents, who organises meetings, conferences and events in association with confessional and philosophical organisations.

This dialogue is part of a more global commitment by the EU to defend freedom of religion and belief in the context of a more holistic defence of human rights. Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union specifies that:

> 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

> 2. The right to conscientious objection is recognised, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

In the European Commission, the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA), which used to be attached to the European Commission president's office, was responsible for maintaining a dialogue with religious and philosophical organisations. Since 2014, this responsibility has fallen to the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, together with

- the European Commission coordinator for the dialogue between the European Commission and churches, religious associations or communities, and philosophical and non-confessional organisations,
- the European Commission coordinator on combating anti-Semitism, and
- the European Commission coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred.

Moreover, the European Union is bound by the international standards set by the United Nations and the Council of Europe.[11] Therefore, EU institutions are committed to defending these principles and the Court of Justice of the EU has ruled on religious issues in a number of cases, for example, on the sensitive issue of banning the wearing of a veil at work.[12]

2.2.2. A discrete strengthening of the EU's capabilities in its external action

When it comes to religion in the EU's external action, the institutions have improved their capacity to understand religious developments across the world and their capacity to take this field into account when formulating and conducting the EU's external policies.

In 2008, an informal group of like-minded EU officials from EU High Representative Javier Solana's Policy Unit and diplomats from the Member States, Norway and Switzerland was set up to discuss the impact of religion and belief on diplomacy. Since 2013, the EEAS has been organising training

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and proposed to hold regular meetings with them. See: Laurens Hogebrink, *Europe's Heart and Soul. Jacques Delors' Appeal to the Churches*. Conference of European Churches, 2015.

[11] An indicative list is given in the annex to the Council's EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, June 2013.

[12] J. Rankin and P. Oltermann, 'Europe's right hails EU court's workplace headscarf ban ruling', *The Guardian*, March 14, 2017, on the judgment in Case C-188/15 – *Asma Bougnaoui and Association de défense des droits de l'homme (ADDH) v. Micropole SA, formerly Micropole Univers SA*, CJEU, 14 March 2017.

in religious literacy[13] for EU officials.[14] This training has gradually been expanded to cover issues such as peace, violence, development, and related issues. The concept has also recently been tailored by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) to specific work on development. In 2018, DG DEVCO launched an internal cross-DG discussion forum on the link between religion and development.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is part of the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD).[15] Set up in 2015, this network gathers diplomats and practitioners from the US, Canada, the EU Member States and the EEAS. Its duties include responsibility for religious issues and the network meets twice a year. The TPNRD secretariat is based at the Cambridge Institute on Religion and International Studies in the United Kingdom, and it recently started to share its resources in the field.

In September 2019, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini launched a new programme 'Global Exchange on Religion in Society', which should become operational in the first half of 2020. The aim is to gather social activists working at the crossroad of faith and social inclusion for a yearly programme of visits and exchanges.[16]

As regards the EU's institutional set-up, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, created the function of an EU special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, as recommended by the Parliament in a February 2016 resolution.[17] Former EU Commissioner, Ján Figeľ, took up the post in May 2016. His work is complementary to that of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights. In 2019, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU guidelines and the mandate of the EU special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.[18] In this resolution, Parliament 'calls on the Council and the Commission to carry out a transparent and comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and added value of the position of the special envoy in the process of the renewal of his or her mandate' and 'calls on the Council and the Commission, on the basis of this assessment, to adequately support the special envoy's institutional mandate, capacity and duties, by exploring the possibility of a multi-year term subjected to annual review and by developing working networks within all relevant EU institutions'. Parliament also 'recommends that the role of the special envoy could include competences such as: enhancing the visibility, effectiveness, coherence and accountability of the EU's FoRB [freedom of religion or belief] policy outside the EU; providing the European Parliament, the Council, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security and the Commission with an annual progress report and a comprehensive report on the special envoy's mandate at the end thereof; and working in close cooperation with the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM)'.

Parliament has been active in the specific field of freedom of religion or belief in third countries – one dimension of the EU's engagement with religions – since 2009. For instance, many MEPs have organised events and meetings with the EEAS, and have actively promoted the adoption of EU

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[13] Religious literacy has been defined as 'the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses', Harvard University Religious Literacy Project.

[14] M. Barnett, C. Bob, N. Fisher Onar, A. Jenicher, M Leigh and L. Leustan, Faith, Freedom, and Foreign Policy: Challenges for the Transatlantic Community, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2015.

[15] Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy.

[16] Towards a Global Exchange on Religion in Society, EEAS, 2019.

[17] European Parliament resolution of 4 February 2016 on the Systematic mass murder of religious minorities by ISIS.

[18] European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2019 on the EU guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.

guidelines on freedom of religion or belief. In 2012, Parliament created an informal working group,[19] whose successful advocacy for guidelines in this field resulted in their adoption in 2013.[20] In these guidelines, the Council of the EU recognised that protection of freedom of religion or belief contributes to 'democracy, rule of law, development, peace and stability'. It also indicated that religious violence or obstacles to freedom of religion were often an early indicator of potential conflict. The informal intergroup on freedom of religion or belief became a formal intergroup in 2015.[21]

In its approach, the EU makes it clear that it supports neither a specific confession nor non-religious attitudes: the EU promotes and protects freedom of religion or belief and the right to believe or not on an individual and a collective basis, as well as the right to change one's attitude and to practice religion in an individual manner or in a community ('including the right to establish and maintain freely accessible places of worship or assembly, the freedom to select and train leaders or the right to carry out social, cultural, educational and charitable activities').

With this protection, the EU underlines the role played by states in ensuring freedom of religion or belief for all people under their jurisdiction, including religious minorities, and treating them equally. They should sanction violations of freedom of religion or belief and prevent hate speech.[22] In its dialogue with its partners, the EU also includes discussions over the prevention of radicalisation and religious persecution. The EU is against violence and condemns all executions on religious grounds and all calls to violence. It also takes a special interest in the situation of violence against girls and women. It aims to protect freedom of expression and promotes diversity and the fight against discrimination.

In order to boost its action, the EU monitors the freedom of religion or belief situation in all countries where it has a delegation and conducts political dialogue with local authorities in this field. The EU also includes this dimension in bilateral visits and is active in multilateral fora such as the UN.

2.3. Western diplomacies and religion

The EU initiatives mirror changes at a more global level in the past 25 years. In 1986, the UN Human Rights Council established the post of special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, following the adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1981 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.[23] The special rapporteur relies on UN member states' cooperation and undertakes fact-finding missions in order to write an annual report to the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

In the United States, the Clinton administration created the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) within the US State Department in 1998.[24] At that time, the place of religion in international affairs was perceived mainly as the promotion of religious freedom, a humanitarian objective disconnected from other policy goals. According to some of former IRF staff, the office

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[19]   The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance (Intergroup on FoRB & RT) was established in January 2015.

[20]   C. (D.) de Jong, 'The Role of the European Parliament in Helping to Protect Freedom of Religion or Belief via the EU's External Action', *Freedom of Religion or Belief in Foreign Policy. Which One?*, European University Institute, 2013, and EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, June 2013.

[21]   European Parliament Intergroup on FoRB.

[22]   In the case of the EU, this obligation has been reinforced through the Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, November 2008.

[23]   Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, A/RES/36/55, United Nations, 1981.

[24]   J. Birdsall, 'Keep the Faith: How American Diplomacy Got Religion, and How to Keep It', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2 April 2016, pp. 110–15.

monitors the situation of persecuted Christians in particular.[25] Every year, the IRF drafts a report on religious freedom worldwide, which it submits to the US Congress.[26] In 2013, the Obama administration created the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA), to help US diplomats learn to engage better with religious actors in order to advance US policy interests.[27] These two offices have different goals and objectives, based on their different approaches to religion: while the IRF deals with freedom of religion or belief as a core part of human rights, the RGA promotes the religion-related awareness and information of diplomats within the State Department, including by providing them with a training curriculum in religion and foreign policies.

In parallel to the debate within US diplomacy, in the late 1970s the World Bank launched the first informal discussions on how to analyse the nexus between religion and development; religion was finally acknowledged as an important factor in development policies in 1995.[28] Soon afterwards, some EU Member States, such as the United Kingdom, applied the World Bank's approach to their own development policies. In 2005, the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs created a knowledge forum for religions and development policies, in order to engage religious leaders and faith-based organisations in the discussion on development policies. In 2006, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned a five-year, £3.5 million research programme on religion and development. In 2012, DFID published a set of faith partnership principles[29] on its work with faith-based organisations. Even France, a country adhering to a strict division between state and religion, upgraded its post of advisor on religious affairs reporting to the minister of foreign affairs (a post created in 1920), into a department for religion in 2009; although this later disappeared, the interest in religious networks remains strong.[30] The same is true of the French defence ministry, which in 2016 started to fund an International Observatory of Religions.[31] In 2015, the German ministry for economic cooperation and development published a report on the role of religion in German development policies.[32]

To conclude, over the past 25 years, a number of international organisations, including the UN and the World Bank, have developed strategies to include religious organisations in their work more effectively, a move followed by EU Member States. As the number of believers in the world continues to grow over the coming decades and as the world becomes more religious, the EU can selectively cooperate with religious organisations sharing its values on a variety of activities where priorities coincide.

3. Religious organisations as potential partners for EU external action

The world's religious demography will change over the next 100 years, and the number of people for whom religion is an important part of identity will grow. For these reasons, the need for religious literacy and information in the formulation of the EU's objectives and means of action is high, and a better understanding of religious dynamics can help the EU to advance its priorities.

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[25]   Birdsall, 2016.

[26]   2001 Report on International Religious Freedom, US Department of State.

[27]   P. Mandaville, The case for engaging religion in U.S. diplomacy, Brookings, 7 March 2017.

[28]   J. Rees, Religion in International Politics and Development, Edward Elgar MUA, 2011.

[29]   UK Department for International Development, Faith Partnership Principles, 2012.

[30]   L. Besmond, 'La France reconnaît l'action diplomatique des religions', La Croix, 18 June 2017.

[31]   Observatoire international du religieux | Sciences Po CERI, SciencesPo, 19 October 2016.

[32]   German ministry of economic cooperation and development, The role of religions in German development policies, 2015.

3.1. The changing landscape of world religion

It has been predicted that world population will continue to grow over the coming decades and that growth will occur mainly in regions in which religion is an important part of social and political life. Today, most unaffiliated and atheist people live in Asia (76 % in 2010, 68 % in 2050), especially in China, but their share of the world population will decrease from 16 % to 13 % by 2060.[33] By 2060, most of the population growth will take place among the Christian community (up to 3.05 billion people; +34 %, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa) and the Muslim community (2.99 billion; +70 %), with Hindus (1.39 billion; +27 %) surpassing the number of unaffiliated/atheist people (1.20 billion; +3 %).

Some of these major changes will occur in regions where religious tensions are already high and where social conflicts also have a religious dimension. One example is sub-Saharan Africa, where the biggest concentration of Christian communities will live (from 26 to 42 % of all Christians worldwide by 2060) but where Islam will also gain millions of new followers (as the percentage of Muslims worldwide will increase from 16 % to 27 % by 2060). At the same time, India, where religious hostilities are already high,[34] will become both the first Hindu and the first Muslim country in the world, with the largest Hindu and Muslim communities by 2050.

These trends will play an important role in the crafting of EU foreign action in the future. First, in an increasingly diverse world, the need to promote and protect human rights will increase, including the freedom of religion or belief component. Second, as religion is and will remain an important dimension in the social and political life of the EU's partners worldwide, greater religious literacy and understanding of the connection between religious issues and the EU's priorities is of significant importance.

3.2. The role of religion in EU external action: climate change, development policies and conflict resolution

Regarding the promotion of human rights and the freedom of religion or belief, the EU is looking for opportunities to advance its objectives in its external action, while always taking account of the political context. For example, in the Central African Republic, the EU delegation maintains a dialogue with religious authorities, because they are key to fostering peace on the ground.[35]

Such cooperation is important in fields where religious organisations are particularly active and relevant to the implementation of the EU's Global Strategy[36] and the 2030 EU agenda for sustainable development,[37] such as climate change, development and conflict resolution. In these fields, the advancement of the EU's goals is reinforced by a better understanding of and interaction with faith-based actors.

3.2.1. Climate change

Many religious leaders worldwide have recently insisted on the need to protect the environment. Yale University has compiled a wide range of climate change declarations made by international

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[33] Least Religious Countries | Atheist Demographics | GRF, Pew Research Center, 2017.

[34] Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High, Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, January, 2014.

[35] Deutsche Welle, Comment les religions œuvrent pour la paix en Centrafrique, 2017.

[36] A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy – EU Global Strategy, European Commission, 2016.

[37] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, European Commission, 22 July 2013.

religious leaders:[38] Buddhist Dharma teachers worldwide, the Dalai Lama,[39] the Roman Catholic Pope in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*,[40] the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew[41] and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation[42] all recognise that climate change is an urgent global challenge. In 2016, the COP 22 Interfaith Climate Statement brought together 33 religious leaders (Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims) in support of the COP 22 summit and calling on all their followers to act individually and collectively to fight climate change.[43]

These concerns tie in with those of the EU, whose leadership role in the fight against climate change has become stronger. Despite US disengagement from the Paris Agreement, the EU will continue to engage global civil society and promote local awareness action and individual changes in order to tackle this pressing issue.

3.2.2. Development policies: from a taboo to a trend

Some of the biggest development and humanitarian NGOs in the world are faith-based. Every year, Caritas Internationalis, which is linked to the Catholic Church, mobilises[44] around US$5 billion for its work in 162 countries. The Aga Kahn Development Network (AKDN), was created in 1957 by the Aga Kahn,[45] 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. The AKDN's annual budget for non-profit development activities is approximately US$925 million; every year, more than 5 million people benefit from AKDN healthcare assistance. World Vision (WVI), an evangelical Christian development aid NGO created in 1950,[46] is active in 100 countries; its total income (cash and in-kind) for 2016 amounted to more than US$2.7 billion. In some cases, it is difficult to disentangle the various dimensions of the actions of faith-based organisations that link relief with missionary activities, a link sometimes criticised[47] by other donors.

For a long time, international donors' engagement with religions and faith-based communities was a non-issue for Western development aid. Nevertheless, in the past 15 years, this issue has been gaining increasing attention, generating a growing number[48] of conferences, reports and strategies by major donors.

There is no doubt that a considerable proportion of development aid is directed towards regions where religion is an important part of social life, and sometimes religious leaders are the only way to reach out to local communities. In Africa, the World Bank TerrAfrica/ARC partnership supported 27 faith groups – with a potential reach of 184 million people – as they prepared long-term plans to care for the environment.[49] In this region, half[50] of all aid and education services are provided by

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[38] Climate Change Statements from World Religions | Climate Change | Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University.

[39] Dalai Lama, Climate Change, Wisdom and Experience, Dalai Lama's official website, July 2015.

[40] Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si* on Care of Our Common Home, Holy See, 2015.

[41] Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Message by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for World Environment Day (5 June 2009), Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2009.

[42] Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Final Communique of the 13th Islamic Summit of the Heads of State/Government of the OIC Member States, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 15 April, 2016.

[43] COP 22 Interfaith Climate Statement, 2016.

[44] Caritas Internationalis, Annual report 2016.

[45] Aga Khan Foundation.

[46] World Vision.

[47] E. Ferris, Faith-based and secular humanitarian organizations, International Red Cross Committee, 2005.

[48] I. Swart and E. Nell, 'Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, Vol. 72, No 4, November 2016.

[49] Engaging with Faith Groups to Restore Land in Africa, World Bank website, 12 January 2015.

[50] German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, The role of religion in German development policy, 2015.

faith-based organisations; therefore, international donors have to take the work of faith-based organisations on the ground into consideration.

Despite its growing interest in religion, reflected in the 2016 appointment of a special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, the EU adopts a non-discriminatory policy when choosing partners to implement its development policy.

Therefore, the EU does not provide any preferential treatment for faith-based NGOs and is committed to non-discrimination and humanitarian principles. Over the 2007 to 2016 period, 263 grants were signed with faith-based organisations, amounting to €150 million, around 9 % of the total budget for the Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities under the Development Cooperation Instrument.[51]

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR),[52] created in 2007, with a total budget of more than €1.3 billion for the 2014-2020 period, channels support mainly to civil society organisations whose projects are selected following calls for proposals (issued by EU delegations or headquarters in Brussels). The EIDHR is a highly flexible instrument enabling the EU to support a variety of organisations or even individuals on the ground through direct or indirect funding as the local situation requires. In 2013, coinciding with the adoption of the EU guidelines, the EIDHR published for the first time an explicit, global call on combating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. A non-exhaustive list of projects funded under the EIDHR for 2007 to 2018 shows around 50 FoRB-related civil society projects, mainly in Asia. Between 2013 and mid-2018, the EIDHR spent €18 million on FORB-related projects (+82 % increase).[53] The European Commission does not usually publish precise data on the nature of beneficiaries, because the faith-based character of the organisation is not among the selection criteria, and freedom of religion or belief can be promoted by faith-based organisations and non-confessional NGOs alike. Hence, although external relations instruments do fund CSOs substantially, there is no systematic disaggregation of data by the faith-based orientation of CSOs and hence no readily available figures about funding for faith-based organisations specifically. In addition, some projects are confidential because they take place in sensitive contexts.

Faith-based organisations, as part of broader civil society, are encouraged to apply for EU funds. In 2016, the European Commission signed framework partnership agreements with a certain number of CSOs after an open call for proposals. One of them, Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité Internationale (CIDSE),[54] is the only faith-based organisation among 24 NGOs and platforms included in the framework partnership agreement with the European Commission.

In addition, there are other signs revealing the EU's interest in the dialogue on development with faith-based organisations: in 2017, a first-ever panel on religions was organised during the European Development Days,[55] and a category on freedom of religion or belief was included in the European Commission's Lorenzo Natali Media Prize.[56] A call for proposals to support intercultural and religious dialogue was also launched under the Development Cooperation Instrument.

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[51] Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and Local Authority. All the statistics provided in this study have been kindly provided by the European Commission, but they are incomplete and rely on non-representative samples because the EU does not keep any data on the faith-based status of the organisations it supports.

[52] European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

[53] Internal figures from the European Commission.

[54] Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité Internationale (CIDSE).

[55] European Development Days 2017, programme.

[56] European Commission's Lorenzo Natali Media Prize .

3.2.3. Conflict prevention

The role of religious groups has been key in some of the most deadly conflicts in the world.[57] In interstate violence, such as in the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) or the India-Pakistan dispute, religion may be just one aspect of the conflict, together with national or economic roots.

Since 1946, an increasing number of conflicts have been civil wars. Nevertheless, in the post-Westphalia world, most conflicts are still between states.[58] Since very few states in the world are theocracies, it can be difficult to ascribe a purely religious cause to interstate conflict. In the case of an internal / transnational civil war, the religious dimension can be more salient. In using a database on civil wars,[59] Monica Toft[60] demonstrates that religious civil wars,[61] with either a weak or a strong religious component, account for a third (44 of 135) of all wars in recent decades.

From a scientific perspective, it should be acknowledged that these conflicts are not always triggered by religious causes. Juergenmeyer[62] argues that political theology, meaning the kind of political arrangement with the state proposed in the dogma of a religion, is not always at the centre of the conflict. Wars and conflicts, as with any social behaviours, are caused by a wide variety of causes, be it economic or identity-related, and the religious aspect of any war is only ever at most a dominant feature, among others. The British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences underlines[63] the fact that the role of religion is dependent on the local context.

Even when a conflict lacks a religious dimension, religious organisations can sometimes be instrumental in preventing or resolving it. In addition to faith-based NGOs in the field of humanitarian aid and development, some religious organisations are also instrumental in conflict prevention, examples including the Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies in Jordan and the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement[64] in Sri Lanka.

In the field of mediation, groups like Sant'Egidio[65] played a key role in Mozambique and are today active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Sierra Leone, the Inter-Religious Council helped to bring an end to the civil war (1991-2002) and in the Central African Republic, religious leaders helped to achieve and maintain a precarious peace through mediation at all levels (national and local).[66] In the field of reconciliation, religious actors and personalities such as Daisaku Ikeda and Desmond Tutu have played an important role in their countries.

4. Religion as an emerging field of EU external action

The specific nature of Europe as a continent where religion and politics are more disconnected than elsewhere used to be perceived as avant-garde, whereas it now appears to be the exception. It is

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[57] P. Perchoc, Religious organisations and conflict resolution, EPRS, European Parliament, 2016.

[58] Centre for Systemic Peace, Assessing the Quality of Systemic Peace, Centre for Systemic Peace, 2017.

[59] Civil war involves at least two combatant factions (the state being one of them), and at least 1 000 battle deaths.

[60] M. Toft, 'Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War', International Security, Vol. 31 (4), pp. 97-131.

[61] Religious civil wars are defined as civil wars engaging at least one religion-motivated group.

[62] M. Juergensmeyer, The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, University of California Press, 1993.

[63] S. Silverstri and J. Mayfall, The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peace Building, British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017.

[64] Sarvodaya: About Us, Sarvodaya, 21 July 2016.

[65] N. H. W. Hegertun, Faith-Based Mediation?: Sant'Egidio's Peace Efforts in Mozambique and Algeria, University of Oslo, 2010.

[66] T. Vircoulon, À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique. Médiations communautaires, religieuses et politiques, Institut Français Des Relations Internationales, June 2017.

the result of centuries of history on the continent, and the new interest in religion in the diplomatic community is an invitation to treat it as an important factor among others in the EU's external action, rather than to re-think the state–religion nexus in Europe.

As the world's religious demography will be transformed in the coming decades, an expert understanding of the impact it will have on the reception of the EU's external policies is key. For that reason, it seems important to increase the level of expertise and dialogue with religious organisations in the way some EU Member States and the United States have done, while also evaluating the role of religion in the EU's partner countries.

In the case of the EU, expertise about the situation of religious freedom and freedom of conscience in the world is gathered and spread among policy makers by increased attention from both the EU delegations and its headquarters in Brussels. It is also sustained by growing numbers of training courses on the subject.

The engagement with religious and non-confessional organisations on the ground, in Europe and beyond, is mainly performed by the European External Action Service and the European Commission, with both institutions gathering expertise and supporting the EU delegations in their daily work. Engagement also takes place at the level of the European Commission and European Parliament presidents, seconded by specific vice-presidents.

Networking and the exchange of information between the various European actors, as well as a strategic evaluation of the place of freedom of religion or belief and religious groups in the dialogue to advance European external priorities, can be a way to develop EU capacities for evaluation and action.

5. Case studies: the state–religion nexus in selected EU partner countries

Each of the EU's partners in the world has its own approach to the balance between the state and religion, often reflecting historical developments. At one end of the spectrum are countries where the state is a mere vehicle to facilitate and spread the exercise of a specific religion, while at the other are countries where the state has strict controls over religious life, as was the case in the communist, formally atheistic regimes. In many cases, understanding this balance is key for European diplomacy as it is an essential dimension of social life that might impact on human rights, but is also very often a factor in the foreign policy of partner countries. The cases in this paper focus on seven countries with which the EU has close relations, and which demonstrate a wide variety of models for church–state relations.

5.1. China

5.1.1. Religious demography of China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) recognises five religions: Buddhism and Daoism (perceived as indigenous religions) and the 'imported' religions Catholicism, Islam and Protestantism.[67] As shown in Figure 1, Buddhist believers are concentrated in the Tibet Autonomous Region and its adjacent provinces. Islam – mostly Sunni Islam – is practised by 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities[68] (out of a total of 55 officially recognised ethnic minorities coexisting with the majority Han Chinese).[69] These include the well assimilated Hui who are largely based in western China's Ningxia Autonomous Region and the Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces and the as yet less assimilated Uighurs, a Turkic people, who make up half of the population of the restive Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China.[70] China's north-east and south-east provinces are home to widely dispersed Catholic and Protestant believers.

Figure 1 – Major religions in China
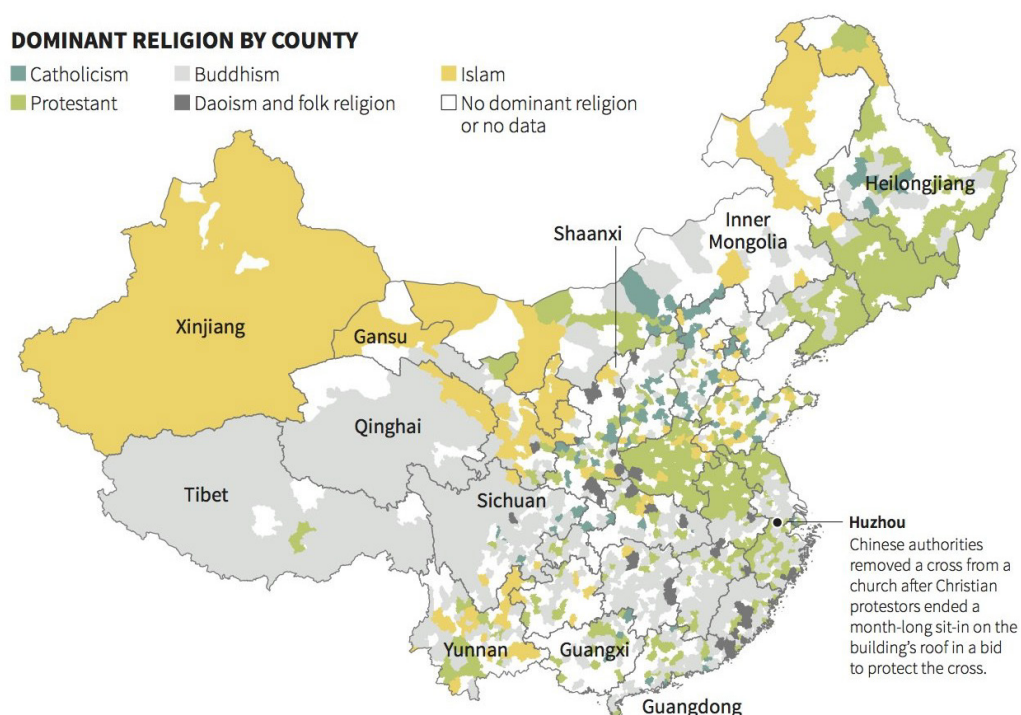
Source: Professor Fenggang Yang, Center on Religion and Chinese Society, Purdue University, retrieved from World Religion News, 2015.

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[67]   J. Zhou, 'Religious education in China', in D.H. Davis and E. Miroshnikova (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook on Religious Education*, Routledge, 2013, pp. 76-83.

[68]   J. Armijo, 'Islamic Education in China', *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (1), 2006.

[69]   Permanent mission of the PRC to the United Nations office in Geneva, 'National Minorities Policy and Its Practice in China', no date.

[70]   T. Lum, 'Uyghurs in China', Congressional Research Service, 18 June 2019.

5.1.2. Religious dynamics

In 2018, the Chinese government revised the estimated official number of religious believers who take part in religious activities as part of the PRC's state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations[71] from 'around 100 million' – as communicated since the mid-1950s[72] – to 'nearly 200 million'.[73] This figure includes more than 20 000 Muslims, 6 million Catholics, 38 million Protestants and a non-specified number of non-registered Buddhists and Daoists. Alternative sources provide higher estimates, suggesting a bigger rise than officially acknowledged and a greater receptivity of parts of Chinese society to religious content in order to fill a spiritual vacuum.[74] The main reason for the diverging statistics is that the broad official estimate does not capture the unknown but significant number of non-registered religious believers who take part in religious activities within what is referred to as a 'grey market', which up until recently was tolerated to varying degrees, including Christian underground and house churches. This 'grey market' has existed since the 1980s with porous boundaries between it and a 'red market' comprising religious activities of the state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations and a 'black market' of illegal and persecuted religious activities,[75] including practitioners of Falun Gong.[76]

Figure 2 – Estimated share of religious believers by religion in China (2010)
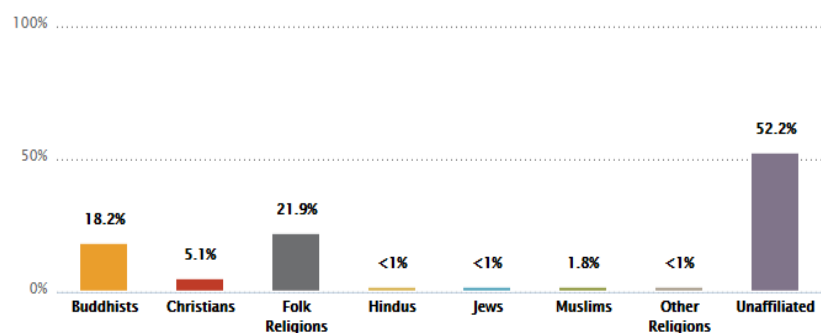
Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050, Pew Research Center, as of September 2019.

5.1.3. State–religion nexus

The state-religion nexus is a hierarchical one: the state gives the orders, the religions obey. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) mandates a strict separation of religion and the secular one-party state, which it governs. The CCP imposes Marxist atheism on all of its 90 million or so members (known as the vanguard of the Chinese people) and perceives religions to varying degrees as competing sources of political power and a potential threat to national security and its own survival. On the other hand, after having radically eliminated large parts of China's religious heritage across

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[71]   The Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the China Islamic Association, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council.

[72]   M. Spiegel, 'China: State control of religion', Human Rights Watch, 1997; UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15(a) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 – China, August 2013.

[73]   State Council, White Paper – 'China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief', 2018.

[74]   The US Commission on International Religious Freedom states that '[t]here are nearly 300 million Chinese who practice some form of folk religion; more than 246 million Buddhists; at least 68 million Christians; nearly 25 million Muslims; and fewer than 3.6 million apiece who practice Hinduism, Judaism, or Taoism', US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2016 Annual Report, April 2016. See also: Tony Lambert, 'Religious Statistics in China', Chinasource, 7 January 2013.

[75]   Massimo Introvigne, '"Gray Market": The Largest Segment of Chinese Religion', Bitter Winter, 23 August 2018; see also Yang, Fenggang, Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule, Oxford University Press, 2011.

[76]   UK Home Office, 'Country Policy and Information Note – China: Falun Gong', November 2016.

the country and having forced religious activities underground during the Mao-led Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the CCP under Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policy of 1978 allowed the most recent Chinese constitution of 1982 to once again enshrine freedom of religious belief.[77] However, its Article 36 limits the protection of freedom of religious belief to 'normal' religious activities[78] and sets clear boundaries, including in terms of the potential political dimension of religions and 'foreign domination'. The scope of this right is further constrained by the fact that in China the CCP ranks above the Constitution – the most recent amendment to its preamble has reinforced this.[79] The CCP therefore has broad leeway to define what 'normal' religious activities are according to its ideology.

With the 2004 Regulations on Religious Affairs the Chinese government published the first comprehensive legal framework for religions. Although these regulations set out the basic conditions under which religious organisations and leaders were to operate in China, they focused on the 'black market' and their omissions, vagueness and lack of specificity led to some flexibility, leaving room for religious freedom in the 'grey market' to survive.[80] By contrast, the revised regulations, which entered into force in February 2018, significantly tighten the existing rules and bureaucratic oversight and put a high price on obtaining legality for a significant number of religious believers.[81] They signal a crackdown on religious activities that are not state-sanctioned, including the online preaching, under the cloak of national security and control of foreign influence. The revised regulations are designed to place unprecedented pressure on the 'grey market' to merge with the 'red market'. They do so by providing greater detail on the need to register religious groups, religious schools and venues, and on the religious activities to be considered legal; by lowering considerably the fundraising threshold for religious groups not requiring authorisation; by prohibiting and penalising non-registered religious activities and support for them under (criminal) law; and by encouraging people to cooperate with the authorities in charge of identifying infringers.[82]

The revised regulations therefore signify a major shift away from Deng Xiaoping's policy of 'mutual adaptation between religion and socialism' toward a policy of rigorous 'sinicisation' of religions in President Xi Jinping's 'New Era'.[83] In his report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 Xi stated: 'We will fully implement the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that *religions in China must be Chinese in orientation*[84] and provide active guidance to religions so that

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[77] This was done on the basis of the expectation that in a socialist civilisation 'with its own material and spiritual values', religions would 'gradually disappear'; Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 'Document 19: The basic Viewpoint on the religious question during our country's socialist period', March 31, 1982, [translated sections published in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*, Orbis Books, 1989.]. Document 19 only set out general CCP principles such as that religions may not interfere with politics, education and other areas and that counter-revolutionary activities committed under the cover of religion are prohibited. The underlying concept of this policy was to co-opt religions rather than fighting them.

[78] They are not defined in the constitution and thus the qualification leaves room for wide discretion; Constitution of the People's Republic of China, Article 36. Examples are set out in the White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang, State Council, 'White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang', 2016.

[79] Global Times, 'Constitutional amendment will improve CPC leadership', 25 February 2018.

[80] E. R. Carson, 'China's New Regulations on Religion: A Small Step, Not a Great Leap, Forward', *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Volume 2005 (3), 2005.

[81] Library of Congress, China: Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, 9 November 2017; K. Chang, 'New Wine in Old Bottles: Sinicisation and State Regulation of Religion in China', *China Perspectives*, Vol. 2018 (1-2), 2018.

[82] There is certainly potential to link these rules to China's emerging social credit system, by introducing incentives for reporting illegal religious activities to the Chinese authorities. C. Mok, Why the China social credit system must be resisted, Ejinsight, 26 July 2019.

[83] Massimo Introvigne, 'The New Religious Affairs Regulation Came into Force in 2018: What Exactly Happened?', Bitter Winter, 6 September 2018; Z. Jiacai.

[84] Emphasis added. The official English translation of the Chinese characters for 'sinicisation of religions' used in the Chinese text is an euphemistic rendering for an assumed predominantly Western audience. M. Masláková and A.

they can adapt themselves to socialist society'. Meanwhile, five-year plans tailor-made for each of the religions have been developed to implement the CCP's sinicisation doctrine.[85]

This will have a particularly major impact on underground Catholic churches and Protestant house churches in China that are not state-controlled and that have not yet aligned their ethical guidance with the official ideology. They are associated by the CCP with foreign infiltration[86] and are now officially outlawed.[87] Already in the past Catholic religious groups professing loyalty to the Vatican were not able to register as legal entities and Vatican-appointed bishops have faced risks to their lives and freedom.[88] The revised regulations will entail greater suppression of Christianity in China since many religious activities (such as home Bible studies, religious conferences and publishing religious content on the internet) now require approval. It remains to be seen whether the provisional agreement[89] reached in September 2018 between the PRC and the Vatican on the appointment of bishops will lead to reconciliation between the official and unofficial Catholic communities in China. As the agreement has prompted many underground bishops to step down from their posts in favour of candidates officially appointed by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, it can certainly be seen as a victory for President Xi's sinicisation doctrine.

In 2018 and 2019, the Chinese government refined its policy to enhance control over religious activities in its Xinjiang province where Islamist separatism and terrorism among its Sunni Muslim Uighur population are considered a national security threat. The local authorities in Xinjiang in 2018 passed a law[90] making the existing 'transformation through education' camps,[91] which are rumoured to host up to 1.5 million inmates, mostly Muslim Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs, legal under Chinese law. In 2019, the State Council published two white papers[92] justifying the PRC's recourse to these 'camps'. The latter have drawn international criticism, including two urgency resolutions by the European Parliament,[93] while a number of governments have backed China's policy.[94]

5.1.4. Religion and foreign policy

Since the CCP leadership self-imposes atheism, the Chinese government does not sponsor or protect any particular religion abroad. Much to the contrary, it closely monitors the activities of its Buddhist and Uighur diaspora and its foreign policy aims to avert any foreign governments from possibly supporting religious forces in or outside China that could undermine the CCP's one-party rule. The most prominent example is the Dalai Lama, whom the Chinese government accuses of

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Satorová, 'The Catholic Church in Contemporary China: How Does the New Regulation on Religious Affairs Influence the Catholic Church?', *Religions*, Vol. 10(7), 2019.

[85] 'Five-Year Work Plan for Advancing - Adherence to the Direction of Sinification of Catholicism in our Nation (2018-2022)', translation by China Law Translate, August 2018; 'Outline of the Five-year Planning Outline for Advancing - the Sinification of Christianity - (2018-2022)', translation by China Law Translate, June 2018.

[86] 'China's revised regulations on religion fend off foreign influences', *Global Times*, 12 September 2017.

[87] The suicide note of a Protestant pastor provides recent insights into the impact of the implementation of the sinicisation policy on the ground. J. Tao, 'New Testimonies Help to Sort out the Mystery of Pastor's Suicide', *Bitter Winter*, 6 September 2019.

[88] 'Vatican concerns over bishop detained in China', *BBC*, 26 June 2017.

[89] 'Provisional Agreement between Holy See and China', Vatican news, 22 September 2018.

[90] Massimo Introvigne, 'New Law "Legalizes" Re-Education Camps in Xinjiang', *Bitter Winter*, 11 October 2018.

[91] Derived from the Chinese term 教育转化 (jiàoyù zhuǎnhuà). Massimo Introvigne, 'China Is Deprogramming One Million "Religious Extremists"', *Bitter Winter*, 8 June 2018.

[92] State Council, 'The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang', March 2019, and 'Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang', August 2019.

[93] European Parliament resolution of 3 October 2018 on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and resolution of 17 April 2019 on China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities.

[94] 'More than 20 ambassadors condemn China's treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang', *The Guardian*, 11 July 2019; 37 countries defend China over Xinjiang in UN letter, France24.com, 12 July 2019.

steering political separatism in Tibet from his Indian exile and thus considers a threat to China's territorial unity.[95] China therefore expects foreign governments with whom it has relations to refrain from official contacts with religious leaders. In the past, in cases where these contacts have nonetheless taken place, the Chinese government has wielded economic sanctions or frozen diplomatic ties, until the foreign governments concerned – given economic asymmetries – have aligned to China's core interests.[96]

5.2. India

5.2.1. Religious demography of India

India's dominant religion is Hinduism, which made around 80 % of the population and was the main religion in 28 out of the Union's 35 states and territories[97] in the 2011 census. Muslims were the second biggest group with 14 %, but enjoy a higher growth rate.

94 % of the world's Hindus live in India, which is also home to 11 % of the world's Muslims. According to Pew Research Center,[98] India has the second-largest group of Muslims within a single country, behind Indonesia. Christians, India's third religious group, are dominant in some north-eastern states. Sikhism is the dominant religion in Punjab (north-west India). Three-quarters of the Buddhist population are based in Maharashtra (India's west). Many of them are Dalits who converted from Hinduism because of discrimination in the Hindu caste system. The Jains, lastly, are an affluent community engaged in commerce and having an impact on the country's business.

5.2.2. Religious dynamics

Despite being a religious pluralistic country by nature, communal tensions between Indians of differing religious faiths and castes have long plagued Indian society and have culminated in violent riots, sometimes a heavy toll in terms of human life. In a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, eight in ten Indians said religion was very important in their lives. India is experiencing decreasing religious freedom, according to the 2019 report[99] by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which has had the country on its watch list (now named Tier 2) since 2009. A radical Hindu narrative has restricted the space for other religious expression in the country. Mob attacks by Hindu extremists on Muslims and others on the basis of rumours that the victims had traded or killed cows for beef are on the rise. The report also underlined frequent hate speeches by politicians belonging to BJP (the country's ruling party). The 2019 electoral campaign witnessed a resurgence of such episodes: BJP's president Amit Shah promised to 'remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha, Hindus and Sikhs', in an apparent attack against Muslims and other religious minorities. There is consensus in India that first prime minister Nehru's construction of a secular and culturally composite country has come to end and is currently being substituted with a Hindu nation-state vision of India.[100] Meanwhile, religious demographic trends imply that by

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[95]   'China lodges diplomatic protest after US delegation meets Dalai Lama', *Hindustan Times*, 10 May 2017.

[96]   'Mongolia Vows No More Dalai Lama Visits After China Turns Screws', Bloomberg, 21 December 2016. J. Lulu, 'The costs of normalisation: Norway and Mongolia respond to Chinese sanctions', *China Policy Institute: Analysis*, University of Nottingham, 22 February 2017.

[97]   In 2014, the State of Telangana was newly created from Andhra Pradesh and made India's 29th state. They both have a large Hindu majority. On 5 August 2019, the Indian government scrapped Jammu and Kashmir's state status as a state and transformed it into two Union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Muslims are the biggest religious group in both – despite the fact that in Leh, one of the two Ladakh districts, the population is largely Buddhist.

[98]   5 facts about religion in India, Pew Research Centre, 29 June 2018.

[99]   2019 Annual Report, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

[100] C. Jaffrelot, 'The Fate of Secularism in India', in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 4 April 2019.

2050 India's Muslim population is to grow to 311 million, making it the largest Muslim population in the world, though still a minority in the country (18 %).

5.2.3. State–religion nexus

When the Indian Constitution was amended in 1976, the country formally became a 'secular' republic. It was inspired by a doctrine of 'principled distance' between religion and state: the state would embrace India's many religious faiths, without favouring any of them. Meanwhile, the Constitution allows the state to interfere in religious affairs: for instance, legislating on religious practices it deems illiberal, or administering religious schools and universities. Article 48 of the Constitution provides for States to be able to prohibit cow slaughter (cows are a sacred animal for Hindus). Today, 21 out of 29 states prohibit it – already in 2005, the Supreme Court confirmed the constitutionality of cow slaughter laws. Cow protection lynch mobs have been on the rise in recent years, in some cases those responsible have benefited from impunity. Article 30 of the Constitution makes a reference to minorities based on religion. Six religions have been given 'National minority' status: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis). They can manage their own educational institutions and benefit from minority development schemes.

Some recent initiatives and public positions by the government and BJP leaders have given the impression of meeting the demands of the Hindu nationalist electoral base to the detriment of the traditional secular nature of India. Sometimes, indirectly or directly, a link has been established between citizenship and religion. In the State of Assam a controversial draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) may exclude four million people,[101] essentially those from Muslim Bangladesh (though it might affect Hindus too), prompting concerns among some UN experts that the people left out could become stateless. In 2016 the government introduced the draft Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in order to change the definition of illegal migrants and to give citizenship after seven years of residence in India to anyone of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan – therefore excluding Muslims, though some of them (Shias and Ahmediyas) sometimes face discrimination in Pakistan. The government dropped the draft in February 2019, but, after a landslide victory in general elections held in April-May 2019, reintroduced it again and had it adopted by the Parliament in December 2019. This controversial legislation sparked an outcry in northern regions, as Muslims fear discrimination.[102]

In July 2019, the Parliament eventually approved a law against the controversial Muslim practice of triple *talaq* ('instant divorce' only by men), making it a criminal offence punishable by up to three years in prison. In 2017 the Supreme Court had declared the practice unconstitutional. The practice has been prohibited in more than 20 Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan. Eight Indian

Figure 3 – Distribution of population by religion in India

Religion	% 2011	Population (million)	State / territory majority	% 2001
Hindu	79.80	966.2	28	80.5
Muslim	14.23	172.2	2	13.4
Christian	2.30	27.8	4	2.3
Sikh	1.72	20.8	1	1.9
Buddhist	0.70	8.4	-	0.8
Jain	0.37	4.4	-	0.4
Other religions	0.66	7.9	-	0.6
Not stated	0.24	2.8	-	0.1

Data source: Religion Census 2011 and 2001.

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[101] India's Assam could plunge into chaos after final citizen list is released, Deutsche Welle, 30 August 2019.

[102] The *Financial Times*'s Amy Kazmin wrote that the 'Country has incorporated religious criteria into its naturalisation and refugee policies'.

States have enacted legislation imposing legal restrictions on religious conversions, which seem basically aimed at intimidating religious minorities trying to proselytise. Also, some national laws secure reserved seats in the administration for lower-caste Hindus but not for lower-caste non-Hindus, which acts as a disincentive to lower-caste Hindus considering conversion[103].

On 9 November 2019, in the 'Babri Masjid' case, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the construction of a Hindu temple in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), on the site where a 16th century mosque had been destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992, sparking riots across the country – especially in Mumbai (then Bombay) – that claimed up to 2 000 casualties. The judgement, which was the culmination of a long-standing legal process spanning three centuries, also ordered the government to allocate five acres of land in Ayodhya for the purpose of building a mosque.

5.2.4. Religion in India's foreign politics

While on the one hand, in keeping with the secular nature of India, prime minister Narendra Modi has refrained from using religion upfront in foreign policy, on the other he has made soft use of religious diplomacy. His trips abroad have included visits to temples and Buddhist shrines, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Nepal – the only other country where Hinduism is the main religion – has been encouraged to reacquire a Hindu identity for its state. Modi has promoted Hindu spiritual practice and yoga: since 2015, 21 June has been International Yoga Day. Delhi has been organising international Buddhist conferences since 2015, and encourages links between Hinduism and Buddhism and related tourist circuits: seven of the Eight Great Places of Buddhism are in India. India's Buddhist diplomacy[104] is playing a rising role in Delhi's soft power strategy. It is worth noting that the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile have been based in India since China took control of Tibet.

During some of his visits to Muslim countries – some of which, in the Middle East, are host to millions of Indian workers – Modi has also visited mosques. He inaugurated the World Sufi Forum in Delhi in 2016. Despite India's history of strained relations with its Muslim neighbour, the Indian and Pakistani governments agreed to open the 'Kartarpur corridor' on the border between the two countries, allowing Sikh religious devotees from India to visit an important famous Sikh shrine in Pakistan. However, during the Rohingya crisis, the Indian authorities deported several groups of Muslims back to Myanmar, in a move justified by the threat to national security, showing that Muslim refugees were not guaranteed to find a shelter in India.

Kashmir is majority-Muslim region, partitioned between three countries (India, Pakistan and China). On 5 August 2019,[105] the Indian government announced that it was planning to scrap Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees India-administered Kashmir a special status, and intended to downgrade it to a Union territory – with much less autonomy. The region was split in two – Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. It is still unclear if the Supreme Court will endorse this decision, but the move sparked outrage both in and outside Kashmir. Pakistan downgraded its bilateral relations with India, while China termed Ladakh's transformation into a separate Union territory 'unacceptable' and supported Islamabad's request for a meeting of the UN Security Council, which was held on 16 August 2019 behind closed doors. Article 370 prevented people from outside the region from buying property: its revocation raises fears that Hindus will move to Kashmir and change its current religious composition.

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[103] Article 16 (4A) of the Constitution enables states to provide for reservation in matters of promotion to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes which were not adequately represented in public sector jobs. Lower-caste Hindus belong to the former group.

[104] C. Kishwar, The Rising Role of Buddhism in India's Soft Power Strategy, ORF Issue Brief, No 228, February 2018.

[105] India-administered Kashmir: current situation, E. D'Ambrogio, EPRS, 13 September 2019.

5.3. Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is constitutionally defined as a theocratic state. Shia Islam[106] is the country's official state religion and a strict interpretation of Sharia law permeates all aspects of society. This can range from overt discrimination on religious grounds in areas such as employment, education and housing,[107] to more covert ways of 'guarding' the citizen's political, professional and social life. On paper, the 1989 revised constitution of Iran features 'liberal-democratic' elements, such as freedom of expression and separation of powers, but these are only marginally safeguarded in practice. The organisation of the Iranian state is based on the 'velayat-e faqih' principle, i.e. the supreme leadership of an Islamic jurist. All laws and regulations must comply with Islamic criteria, and conversion to any religion other than Islam is illegal. Only a few religious minorities are recognised by the state, while others are severely persecuted. Iran's current President, Hassan Rouhani, who first took office in 2013, was initially believed to espouse civil liberties, but has not acted on his promises.[108]

5.3.1. Religious demography of Iran

The Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) conducts a census every 10 years. However, official statistics provide little information on the exact religious breakdown. According to external estimations, 99 % of the Iranian population are Muslim (approximately 83 million people), 90 % follow the Twelver school of Shia Islam (also known as Imamiyya) and 5-10 % are Sunni. This makes Iran the country with the seventh-largest Muslim population worldwide; only a vanishingly small percentage of the Iranian population, approximately 1 to 2 %, is non-Muslim.[109] Baha'is (approximately 300 000),[110] Christians (close to 300 000) and Yarsanis (unknown) constitute the three largest non-Muslim minorities. Zoroastrians (approximately 25 000), Jews (9 000 to 20 000) and Sabean-Mandeans (5 000 to 10 000) account for the rest.[111] However, the statistics on these groups differ and lack accuracy, since citizens may hide their religious beliefs on account of fear of non-recognition or persecution.

Iran's constitution recognises three religious minorities, namely Jews, Zoroastrians and non-converted Christians. Followers of these faiths, if duly registered, are protected by the State and have the right to express their religious beliefs publicly. Five seats in the parliament (out of 290) are reserved for adherents of these religious minorities. However, adherents of other religious minorities experience discrimination. Baha'is, in particular, are frequently targeted by the government. Baha'is are not recognised by the state and are denied political, economic, cultural and social rights. Since 1979, more than 200 Baha'i leaders have been executed,[112] over 1 000 have been arbitrarily arrested and Baha'i-owned businesses have been shut down.[113] Christian converts and evangelists are equally oppressed: since 2010, hundreds of Christians have been detained, leaders

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[106] S. Kusserow and P. Pawlak, Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam, EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016. Shia Islam differs from Sunni Islam mainly in the legitimacy given to Ali's (Muhammad's nephew) succession, over any other possible successor. The origin of Shiism lies in the martyrdom of Ali's son Husayn, who was killed by Umayyad troops in the Battle of Kerbala in the Islamic month of Muharram in the year AD 680. Several branches of Shiism recognise a different number of imams (successors) of Ali. The majority of Shia people recognise 12 imams.

[107] GlobalSecurity.org, Iranian Religious Groups, retrieved 23 October 2017.

[108] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Iran Chapter – 2017 Annual Report.

[109] Pew Research Center, Mapping the Global Muslim Population, 2009.

[110] Created in 19th century Iran, Baha'ism is inspired by other world religions and teaches equality between human beings. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed are important figures of Baha'ism, according to which Godly revelation has used different figures at different periods. There are between 5 and 7 million Baha'is living mainly in India and Iran.

[111] US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2016.

[112] Website of the Baha'i International Community, Situation of Baha'is in Iran, retrieved September 2019.

[113] United States Commission on Religious Freedom, Iran Chapter – 2019 Annual Report.

of house churches intimidated and anti-Christian resentment reinforced by the media.[114] Despite the fact that Iran is home to the second largest Jewish population in the Middle East, the government also engages in anti-Israeli rhetoric and the propagation of anti-Semitism.[115] There are Shi'a sects in Iran that the Twelver Shia clergy consider 'heretical', including the Sevener branch of Shi'a Islam, or Ismailiyya. Several thousand Isma'ilis live in north-eastern Iran. Their spiritual leader is the Aga Khan, who resides in India.[116]

5.3.2. Religious dynamics

The predominance of Shiism in Iran dates back to the early days of the 16th century and the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722); it was at this juncture that Twelver Shia became the government's official religion. The successive dynasties continued to promote Shia Islam among the elites, and it became more influential over the course of time. Progressive and liberal movements gained pace at the beginning of the 20th century. From 1925 onwards, the Pahlavi dynasty modernised and secularised Iranian society. The 1979 Iranian revolution marked a turning point in this development. The overthrow of the Shah's regime paved the way for an authoritarian regime change and gave the Shiite clergy significant political powers. Subsequently, the situation of non-Muslims deteriorated. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini guaranteed the physical integrity of the Jewish community. He could not, however, prevent a mass exodus of Jews, and figures have been in severe decline ever since. Only one-tenth of the 1979 Jewish population lives in today's Iran. Recent forecasts point to constant growth of the Muslim community in the coming decades (up to approximately 86 million in 2050).[117]

5.3.3. State–religion nexus

Iran's state apparatus is grounded in the Islamic faith and discriminates against religious minorities across all branches of state and society. The Islamic legal order is perceived as 'sacred' and 'divine'. Hence, criticism of the regime is tantamount to blasphemy, and 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic' harshly persecuted.[118] Even though the supreme Islamic leader exercises power over the legislature, executive and judiciary, he remains embedded in a complex Islamic network wherein a 'factional balance of power'[119] is to be respected. Independent ayatollahs, i.e. high-level Shia Muslim clerics, are highly influential and have a bearing on day-to-day politics. In addition, the state funds Islamic organisations, which engage in public diplomacy, charitable work, education and publishing.[120] Furthermore, para-governmental 'bonyads' (foundations) are central to Iran's economy; they are exempt from federal taxes and benefit Islamic religious groups.

5.3.4. Religion in Iran's foreign policy

Iran has a strong interest in a stable and secure neighbourhood. It is 'leading from behind' in several countries and conflicts in the region involving Shia majorities or minorities, including in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, mainly to restore the status quo and prevent instability. Nonetheless, Iran is often accused of fuelling proxy wars in the region. Iran's domestic and external agendas are closely intertwined, and religion and the Sunni-Shia divide are central to Iran's foreign policy

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[114] United States Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2016.

[115] United States Commission on Religious Freedom, Iran Chapter – 2019 Annual Report.

[116] Sebastian Kusserow and Patryk Pawlak, Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam, EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016.

[117] Statista – Das Statistik Portal, Iran: Religionszugehörigkeit der Bevölkerung im Jahr 2010 und Prognosen bis 2050, retrieved 23 October 2017.

[118] Bertelsmann Stiftung, Iran Country Report, 2016.

[119] A. Nader, D. E. Thaler and S. R. Bohandy, The Next Supreme Leader. Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran, RAND Corporation, 2011.

[120] S. Paivandi, Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks, Freedom House.

strategy. The territorial integrity of the predominantly Shiite Iraq and Alawite-governed Syria[121] is a matter of national concern. Likewise, Iran supports Shiites worldwide and aims to limit Saudi Arabian, i.e. Sunni, expansionism. The rise of radicalised Sunni terrorist groups, primarily ISIL/Da'esh, poses a major threat to Iran. On human rights, Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN promised in 2006 to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, but did not specifically mention religious freedoms.[122] At the same time, Iran's regime rejects full cooperation with the UN-assigned special rapporteur on human rights. The European Union continues to seek closer relations with Iran, but the Trump administration's hostility towards the Iranian regime has put the West's relations with Iran under great strain.

5.4. Myanmar

5.4.1. Religious demography

According to Myanmar's 2014 census,[123] the overwhelming majority (88 %) of Myanmar's 51.4 million people are Theravada Buddhists. Christians of various denominations (Catholics, Anglicans and various Protestant denominations such as Baptists) make up 6.2 %, while 4.3 % are Muslims. Animists (0.8 %) and Hindus (0.5 %) make up most of the remainder.

Despite these figures, there is considerable uncertainty over the number of Muslims. The Rohingya are a mostly Muslim minority from Myanmar's western Rakhine province. In 2014, at the time of the census, there were over one million in the country. The government has consistently refused to refer to them as Rohingya, the term by which the minority identify themselves, instead describing them as 'Bengalis', implying that they are migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and India rather than natives of the country. In protest over systematic persecution and denial of the right to identify in the census as Rohingya, most declined to participate in it.[124] The Myanmar authorities decided to include them in the total number of Muslims anyway, working on the assumption that the overwhelming majority of non-enumerated persons living in Rahkine were almost certain to be Rohingya and therefore Muslim.[125] Since then, following brutal military 'clearance operations', over 700 000 Rohingya have fled the country. The number remaining is estimated to be in the range of 520-600 000[126]. On the other hand, some believe that the number of non-Rohingya Muslims is considerably understated, and that the total size of the Muslim minority is closer to 10 %.[127]

Ethnicity and religion are closely linked in Myanmar. The country's Bamar majority (68 %[128] of the total population) are mostly Buddhist, as are the Shan, Rakhine and Mon minorities. On the other hand, the Kachins, Chins and Nagas are predominantly Christian, and the Karens are split between

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[121] Alawis form a significant minority in Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. The Alawi religion is traditionally a secret doctrine, knowledge of which was limited to chosen male members of the community. Owing to the highly syncretistic nature of Alawi beliefs, their affiliation with Islam is disputed, and they have been branded as heretics. The Syrian ruling family and large parts of the state's inner power circle are Alawi. Extract from Kusserow and Pawlak, 2016. Given the disputed affiliation of Alawism with Islam, Iran's support of the Assad regime is believed to be driven more by geopolitical than religious considerations.

[122] Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, The Islamic Republic of Iran's Pledges and Commitments on Human Rights, May 2006.

[123] Census Atlas Myanmar: the 2014 Myanmar Population And Housing Census, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2016.

[124] Enumeration of Rohingya population a 'complete failure', census observers say, Myanmar Times, 22 August 2014.

[125] Myanmar Census (see footnote 1).

[126] Burma 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, US State Department, 2018.

[127] Census data shows Myanmar Muslim population has fallen, Kyaw Ye Lynn, Anadolu Agency, 21 July 2016.

[128] The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, 2018.

Christianity and Buddhism. Most Rohingya are Muslim, as are Kamans (who, unlike the Rohingya, are counted among the country's 135 officially recognised ethnic groups). Some Bamars are Muslim.

5.4.2. Religious dynamics

Decades-long ethnic insurgencies continue to smoulder in several areas, although the intensity of fighting has declined since the 1990s. On the other hand, religious intolerance is on the rise. The Rohingya have long been persecuted, but in recent years, hostility towards Muslims in general has become more common. Paradoxically, the country's recent democratic transition has exacerbated the situation. Although fears of Islamic terrorism and a Muslim takeover of the country are considered by many as irrational,[129] populist politicians win votes by playing on them. In 2018, a parliamentarian from the military-allied opposition Union Solidarity and Development Party compared the presence of Muslim communities to a 'cancer'.[130] At the time of the junta, in 2003, Buddhist fundamentalist monk Wirathu[131] was jailed for inciting anti-Muslim riots; since 2011, with fewer curbs on freedom of expression under civilian rule, he has been able to preach with relative impunity.[132] In addition, social media, until quite recently only accessible to a tiny minority, allow the rapid spread of Islamophobic views. The military has reportedly used fake Facebook accounts to stir up anti-Muslim sentiment.[133] Although intolerance is directed mostly at Muslims, there have also been attacks on Christians.[134]

The government has taken some steps to promote religious pluralism, for example by setting up interfaith bodies to encourage dialogue between different religious minorities. In addition, the government-backed SSMNC Buddhist council has tried to rein in extremists, for example by banning Wirathu and his Ma Ba Tha movement (which has since re-appeared under a different name). However, the ruling National League for Democracy party relies on the votes of the Buddhist majority, and its defence of the Rohingya and Muslims in general has been half-hearted. In 2015, it did not field a single Muslim candidate.[135]

5.4.3. The state-religion nexus

Myanmar's 2008 constitution[136] guarantees religious freedom, prohibits discrimination based on religion, and acknowledges Buddhism as the country's mostly widely professed religion, alongside Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism. Members of religious orders, including half a million Buddhist monks,[137] are barred from voting or standing in elections.

In 2007, Buddhist monks led 'Saffron Revolution' protests against the military junta. Since then, however, close links have developed between Buddhist radical monks, the military, and its political allies in the USDP party. There is also a strong institutional bias towards Buddhism. Some Buddhist universities receive state funding; although there is no religious education at schools, many classrooms have Buddhist shrines, and pupils are often required to recite Buddhist prayers. Authorities are reportedly slow to approve administrative requests from Christians and Muslims (for example, planning permission for churches and mosques). Nearly all senior civil servants are

[129]   Why the Rohingya? Myanmar's ethnic cleansing is driven by an irrational fear of Muslims becoming the majority, *South China Morning Post*, 12 September 2017.

[130]   The Kaman: Citizens who suffer, Frontier Myanmar, 28 May 2018.

[131]   Myanmar police hunt 'Buddhist bin Laden' over Suu Kyi comments, *The Guardian*, 29 May 2019.

[132]   An arrest warrant was issued against Wirathu in May 2019, but that was for verbal attacks on Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, not on Muslims.

[133]   A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military, *The New York Times*, 15 October 2019.

[134]   Christians, Buddhists Brawl in Southern Rakhine on Christmas Eve, *The Irrawaddy*, 26 December 2018.

[135]   M. Russell, Myanmar/Burma's 2015 elections: Democracy at last? EPRS, European Parliament, October 2015.

[136]   Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008).

[137]   Militant Buddhist monks are stoking sectarian tensions in Myanmar, *The Economist*, 10 August 2017.

Buddhists.[138] Christians do at least have political representation (over 10 % of parliamentarians are declared Christians, including the speakers of the upper and lower houses),[139] but Muslims have none.

5.4.4. Religion in Myanmar's foreign policy

Myanmar's brutal treatment of its Rohingya minority has poisoned relations with Muslim and Western countries, overshadowing reforms that led to democratic elections and civilian rule in 2015. As a rule, the 10 member states of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) refrain from commenting on one another's internal affairs, but in December 2016, then-Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak called for foreign intervention to end 'genocide' in Myanmar.[140] There have been mass protests in several countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. The EU and US, which lifted most of their sanctions against Myanmar in 2013 and 2016 respectively, have since re-imposed some restrictions on senior military officers.

Although Myanmar is no longer such a pariah as it was at the height of military rule, the international community's criticisms of its treatment of the Muslim minority risk pushing it back into over-dependence on China, which has steadfastly defended Naypyitaw's handling of the Rohingya crisis.[141]

5.5. Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is a religiously diverse nation. Its population is more or less equally divided among Christians and Muslims. The former are concentrated in the South, while the latter live mostly in the North. Coexistence has not always been easy and since its independence Nigeria has witnessed repeated bouts of violence and civil conflict that at times have included a religious dimension. The introduction of Sharia law in the Northern states starting in 1999 has raised issues of constitutionality. Nigeria's federal constitution supports broad religious freedom.

5.5.1. Religious demography of Nigeria

Nigeria does not collect data on the religious affiliation of its population. Estimates of the size of the Muslim and Christian communities are not necessarily reliable, also because a sizable minority practices syncretic beliefs. According to data gathered[142] by the Pew Research Center, based on the size of its Muslim and Christian populations respectively, in 2015 Nigeria was the fifth biggest Muslim country and the sixth biggest Christian country in the world. The same source put the Muslim population at 50 % and the Christian population at 48 %. Demographic differentials contribute to a shifting religious landscape. A combination of religious, cultural, social and economic factors supports significantly higher fertility in the North than in the South. According to the Pew Research Center,[143] it is very likely that Nigeria will have the third largest Muslim population in the world and a sizeable Muslim majority by 2060. This may impact on its political system as well.

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[138] Burma 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, US State Department, 2018.

[139] Parliamentary Development in Myanmar: An Overview of the Union Parliament 2011-2016, The Asia Foundation, May 2017.

[140] Malaysian PM urges intervention to stop 'genocide' of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, Reuters, 4 December 2016.

[141] China offers Myanmar support over Rohingya issue after US rebuke, Channel News Asia,16 November 2018.

[142] See J. Diamant, The countries with the 10 largest Christian populations and the 10 largest Muslim populations, 1 April 2019.

[143] Pew Research Center, The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050, Why Muslims Are Rising Fastest and the Unaffiliated Are Shrinking as a Share of the World's Population, April 2015.

M. Stonawski, M. Potančoková, M. Cantele, 'The changing religious composition of Nigeria: causes and implications of demographic divergence', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 54(3), Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 1-27.

5.5.2. Religious dynamics

Nigeria was formally established as a colony by the British in 1914, who merged disparate territories together into a Governorate that would become independent Nigeria in 1960. Certain fracture lines still persist today, particularly between the Muslim north and the Christian south, but not only. Coexistence between the two communities has at times been uneasy, but the country was able to establish a political system based on informal power sharing between the two groups that guarantees a relatively functional democracy. Nigeria's two main political forces have country-wide coverage and are not based officially on religious affiliation. In practice each one is more popular with voters from the north and the south respectively. Following independence, most Nigerian presidents came from the north. Since the reestablishment of democracy in 1999, there has been a rotation between Muslim/Northern presidents and Southern/Christian presidents. This zoning principle is recognised informally by political forces.

On the ground however, the situation is dire. Violence motivated by religion, among other factors, continues to take a major human toll, particularly in the Middle Belt region, where the two communities intermingle. According to one Christian advocacy group, the conflict between Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers in Nigeria was deadlier in 2018 than Boko Haram's insurgency.[144] In 2018, Nigeria alone accounted for 90 % of all Christians killed worldwide because of their faith. While the herder-farmer conflict has some religious overtones, it is difficult to conclude however that religion is its main cause, as many other factors play a role, such as population pressures, scarce land, drought and water scarcity, and an insufficient state response, perpetuating a cycle of violence, ethnic conflict, etc.[145] While the terrorist group Boko Haram has attacked Christian communities repeatedly, moderate Muslims are also frequently among its victims.

5.5.3. State–religion nexus

The country has a federal system that has undergone reforms several times since independence in 1960. The 1999 Constitution in force today does not proclaim Nigeria expressly a secular state. It prevents it however from adopting a state religion. Article 10 provides that 'The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion'. It remains a matter of controversy whether the constitution allows Islamic law to be recognised as a source of law.[146] The constitution recognises the jurisdiction of Sharia courts for private and family related matters. In practice, 12 Northern States have adopted Sharia for criminal matters since 2000, following the path traced by the first northern state to do so, Zamfara, in 1999. Some states also use religious police to supplement the regular police force. According to critics, the adoption of Sharia for criminal matters at state level is not constitutional.[147] There have been no recent reports[148] of Christians being obliged to use Sharia courts, but some of the prohibitions imposed by Sharia law, such as the ban on alcohol, concern them as well.

The Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate a religion or belief

[144] Open Doors, January 2019.

[145] J. Campbell, Conflict in Nigeria Is More Complicated Than 'Christians vs. Muslims', May 2019.

[146] O. N. Ogbu, 'Is Nigeria a Secular State? Law, Human Rights and Religion in Context', *The Transnational Human Rights Review*, Vol. 1, pp. 135-178, 2014.

[147] D. E. Agbiboa, Sharia and the Nigerian Constitution: Strange Bedfellows?, ConstitutionNet, April 2015.

'It is certainly the case that Section 4 (7) (a) of the federal Constitution allows state National Assemblies to legislate on 'any matter not included in the Exclusive Legislative List' that enumerates the issues falling within federal jurisdiction. However when it comes to the application of Sharia, Sections 262 and 277 qualify this relative legislative freedom of both the federal and state National Assemblies to specific issues of personal law'.

[148] US Report on Freedom of Religion, 2019.

through worship, teaching, practice and observance (Article 38.1). The constitution also calls on the state to create facilities for religious life (Article 17.3). In practice, according to the USCIRF 2019 Report,[149] the Nigerian government, at national and state levels, has 'continued to tolerate violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and suppressed the freedom to manifest religion or belief'.

5.5.4. Religion in Nigeria's foreign policy

The orientation of Nigeria's foreign policy reflects the fault lines between the two major communities. Nigeria is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), but this membership is not without controversy.[150] Ibrahim Babangida (a military dictator from the North who ruled Nigeria from 1985 to 1993) decided to enrol Nigeria in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (the predecessor of the OIC) without much public debate in 1986, sparking a political crisis and public opposition.

Nigeria is also one of the founding members of the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition. President Buhari, a Muslim from the north, decided to join this coalition in 2016, apparently without a prior broad consultation of the rest of Nigerian society.[151] One of the arguments in favour of joining was that it would help Nigeria to fight its own terrorism problem at home, through intelligence cooperation, funding or training. Critics pointed out however that Saudi Arabia had not provided Nigeria with any significant assistance at the height of the Boko Haram insurgency. Western countries had provided help rather.[152] Membership was opposed from the outset by the Christian community, more specifically by the Christian Association of Nigeria, the umbrella body for the country's Christian groups, which said that 'membership harms Nigeria's pluralistic character [and] portends great danger to national unity and integration'.[153]

Membership of OIC is hard to reconcile with the fact that Nigeria has traditionally had strong ties with Israel. For example, in 2015 Nigeria abstained from recognising Palestine in a UN vote, in contradiction with official OIC policy.[154] Nigeria is among the top 20 importers of Israeli goods. Nigeria is also Israel's second biggest source of Christian pilgrims.[155] The ties between the two countries were strengthened during the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan (in power from 2010 to 2015), a Christian from the south, who, in 2013, was the first Nigerian president to visit Israel.

5.6. North Macedonia

5.6.1. Religious demography

According to the last national census, in 2002, an estimated 65 % of the population was Orthodox Christian and 33 % Muslim.[156] The Muslim community includes a small number of Sufi orders. Other religious groups, which together constitute less than 2 % of the population, include Roman Catholics, various Protestant denominations, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Jewish community, residing mostly in Skopje, estimates it has 200-250

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[149] Ibid.

[150] B.O. Faseke, Nigeria and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: A Discourse in Identity, Faith and Development, 1969–2016, Department of History and International Studies, Redeemer's University.

[151] No to Saudi-led coalition, editorial in *Punch*, March 2016.

[152] Ibid.

[153] M. Usman-Janguza, Why Nigeria should think twice before joining Saudi Arabia's Islamic Military Alliance, African Arguments, August 2016.

[154] 'Palestinians blast Nigeria for UN vote', in *Haaretz*, January 2015.

[155] S. Gruzd, L. Benjamin, C. Rawhani, Israel's ties with Africa: focus on Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, SAIIA Occasional Paper No 284, July 2018.

[156] World Population Review, Macedonia.

members. According to a 2017 Brima/Gallup poll, less than 1 % of the population identifies as atheist.[157]

5.6.2. Religious dynamics

The largest religious community is the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Relations between Orthodox Christians and Muslims, mainly part of the Albanian minority, used to be of 'some concern regarding both human rights and democratic development', as noted by Helsinki Commission.[158] However, there have been positive developments and new regional initiatives have had an impact.[159] Despite the fact that legal protection of religious minorities is largely in line with international standards, there are recurrent issues of registration of some communities. The Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid (OAO)[160] has remained unable to register as a religious entity. The OAO has been refused registration by the national courts on the grounds that its name and symbols are not sufficiently distinct from those of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC). The MOC is recognised by the State Religion Commission, but not by any other Orthodox churches, which consider its unilateral 1967 declaration of autocephaly a breach of canon law. Following the unsuccessful request for registration, the OAO appealed the government decision and requested a decision of the European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR). In April 2018 the ECtHR rejected the government's appeal of the court's November 2017 ruling that the government had violated the OAO's rights by refusing it registration.[161] With regard to the abuse of state power, the case of the OAO Archbishop Jovan Vraniskovski was also mentioned in the 2019 UN Human Rights Council report on freedom of religion or belief, in the chapter on 'Religious hatred and extremism'.[162]

Muslims represent the second largest religious group in North Macedonia after the Macedonian Orthodox Church. From a historical perspective, the Muslims in North Macedonia have close links to Turkey; however new relations are developing with communities from Gulf countries. 2019 was marked by internal power struggles within the official Islamic Community (IVZ). In April 2019, Imam Skender Buzaku requested confirmation as the new head of the Islamic Community. However, the group around Sulejman Rexhepi insisted that the documents provided for new registration were illegal, appealed the case and Rexhepi remained the official head of the Community.[163] Later, Rexhepi caused outrage when he called the majority Orthodox Christian Macedonian community 'wild people who have no identity and will never have one'.[164] Later, Rexhepi tried to justify his speech stating that he was 'misinterpreted'. The North Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights has filed charges of hate speech against him for this statement.

5.6.3. State / religion nexus

The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia has been amended several times, in 1992 and also in 2001, following the Ohrid Framework Agreement, in order to increase protection for freedom

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[157] International Religious Freedom Report for 2018, United States Department of State.

[158] See Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2019.

[159] As noted by the European Commission's Annual report on the Republic of North Macedonia, published in May 2019, Albania provided strong support for the Prespa agreement that entered into force in February 2019. Relations with Turkey remained good; steps have been taken by the Turkish State Development Agency TIKA in the areas of historical and religious heritage preservation.

[160] The autonomous Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid has canonical jurisdiction over the territory of North Macedonia and is recognised by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is notionally based in the lakeside city of Ohrid.

[161] Cf. Orthodox Ohrid Archdiocese (Greek-Orthodox Ohrid Archidiocese of the Peć Patriarchy) v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (legal summaries of the case).

[162] See UN Human Right Council, 2019 Freedom of religion or belief. Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, March 2019.

[163] S. J. Marusic, Rivals Battle to Lead North Macedonia Islamic Community, April 2019.

[164] Islamic leader: Macedonians are wild people with no identity, April 2019.

of religion and to ensure a peaceful co-existence between the country's major ethnic groups: Macedonians, who adhere to Orthodox Christianity, and ethnic Albanians, who follow Islam. In December 2018, hate crimes were added to the Criminal Code, including crimes based on the religion or belief of the victim. Article 9 of the Constitution's Chapter on 'Basic Freedoms and Rights of the Individual and Citizen' states that, 'Citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia are equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status'. Furthermore, religious freedom and separation of State and religion is underlined in Article 19, amended in 2001, following the Ohrid Framework Agreement, by Amendment VII: 'The freedom of religious confession is guaranteed. The right to express one's faith freely and publicly, individually or with others is guaranteed. The Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as the Islamic Religious Community in North Macedonia, the Catholic Church, United Methodist Church, the Jewish community and other religious communities and groups are separate from the state and equal before the law'.[165] When it comes to legislative provisions, the 1977 Law on religious communities was in force until 1997, when it was replaced by the Law on religious communities and religious groups. This was amended by the 2007 Law on the 'Legal status of church, religious communities and religious groups'. According to the judicial authorities, the law treats these three categories equally, bestowing the same legal rights, benefits, and obligations on all of them. By 2019, the government recognised 37 religious organisations, including 17 churches, 10 religious communities, and 10 religious groups.

Despite a generally positive assessment, the European Commission's 2019 annual report on North Macedonia noted that 'the European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR) has found violations of the European Convention on Human Rights in 12 cases related mainly to freedom of association in conjunction with freedom of religion, right to liberty and security and right to a fair trial'.[166] In April 2018, the ECtHR reached a unanimous verdict in favour of the Muslim Bektashi Community and determined that the government had violated the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by denying the community registration.[167] Later in 2018, the Basic Court Skopje II approved the registration of the Bektashi religious community seated at Hadder Baba Teqe in Kichevo. An application from the Tetovo Bektashi community remains pending. Furthermore, in May 2018, unidentified individuals vandalised the Harabati Baba Teqe (shrine), causing material damage and stealing documents. Representatives of the Bektashi community notified the police and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe field office in Tetovo. The Bureau for Representation of the Republic of North Macedonia before the ECtHR (administrative body of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of North Macedonia) is preparing a new action plan for implementation of the judgements under the enhanced supervision procedure as a follow up to the March 2019 Committee of Ministers meeting.[168]

5.6.4. Religion in foreign policy

In the past, Western diplomats and religious experts have voiced concerns about the spread of radical Islam among Muslim communities of the Western Balkans, after it transpired that alleged Wahhabi radicals were operating and increasing their influence in the region.[169] This also involves links to transnational Islamic terrorism, both to Al-Qaeda and, more recently, the Da'esh/ISIS. A Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung analysis has also raised the question of the high proportion of foreign

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[165]   In addition to Article 19, Article 48 guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of the nationalities; and Article 54 provides a negative delimitation of freedoms and rights that cannot be discriminated against on grounds of sex, race, colour of skin, language, religion, national or social origin, property or social status'.

[166]   European Commission, Annual report on the Republic of North Macedonia, May 2019.

[167]   The European Court of Human Rights, Decision regarding the case of Bektashi community and Others v the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, April 2018.

[168]   Bureau for Representation of the Republic of North Macedonia before the ECtHR.

[169]   P. Petrović, Islamic radicalisation in the Balkans, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 10 June 2016.

fighters within the Western Balkan countries as compared with their total population.[170] Even though North Macedonia's authorities effectively mitigate foreign influence,[171] some nationalist politicians, such as Albin Kurti from the Kosovo Self-determination Party, are working for the future unification of all Albanians and often exploit religious issues.[172] During his visit to Skopje in September 2019, Kurti said that Albanians in North Macedonia – the majority of whom are Muslims – are 'tragically not yet unified' with either Kosovo or Albania.[173]

Even though there are only around 20 000 Roman Catholics in North Macedonia (1 % of the population), the Catholic Church has a strong symbolic presence in Mother Teresa's native country, with both Byzantine and Latin rites represented. Roman Catholicism improves the image of the country and supports the aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.[174] This symbolic role and function of unity was reinforced during the visit of the Pope Francis on 7 May 2019. While visiting Mother Teresa's birthplace in Skopje, Pope Francis recalled the need for a culture of encounter and fraternity. He pointed out that in 1910, when Mother Teresa was born, the city of Skopje was part of the Kosovo Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire, but now would belong to a united Europe. During the visit, Pope Francis also noted North Macedonia's position as a meeting place for various cultures and religions and he praised the 'peaceful and enduring coexistence' rooted in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious countenance of the people, which he called the nation's 'most precious patrimony'.[175]

5.7. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is officially an Islamic state and the Quran and the Sunna (the teaching and traditions of the Prophet Mohammad) are integral parts of its constitution.[176] The country's legal system is unique in that laws derived from the Quran and the Sunna represent the core of the legal system, supplemented by the legal opinions (*fatwas*) of the Council of Senior Scholars (CSS), and royal decrees. The CSS is composed of Sunni religious scholars and jurists, headed by the Grand Mufti; 18 of its 21 members are trained in the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, with one representative of each of the other three Sunni schools (Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi'i).[177] The CSS has no Shia members. All citizens are required to be Muslims. According to the constitution, the duty of every citizen is to 'defend the Islamic faith', as well as society and 'the homeland' (Article 34).

5.7.1. Religious demography of Saudi Arabia

Out of the total estimated population of 34 million,[178] between 85 and 90 % are Sunni Muslims. Most follow the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. The other 10 to 15 % of the citizen population are Shia

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[170] L. Hänsel and F. Feyerabend (ed.), The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans: A map of geopolitical players, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2018.

[171] Idem.

[172] In September 2019, during his visit of Skopje, Albin Kurtin said: 'Due to our tragic fate, the Albanian people were spread through several states and across the world. So, the fate of the Western Balkans remains linked with the fate of the Albanians. (…) It's our duty to come from Pristina and from Tirana to Skopje, because Albanians from 'North' Macedonia made a contribution to the independence of both Albania and Kosovo, and yet you were left outside of both countries. With that, you paid a large price'. Cf. Albanian nationalist politician promises help for Albanians in Macedonia, Republika, 15 September 2019.

[173] Albanian nationalist politician promises help for Albanians in Macedonia, *Republika*, 15 September 2019.

[174] In the past, the Holy See strongly supported Euroatlantic integration of some countries of the region, such as Croatia and Slovenia.

[175] C. Wells, Pope Francis in North Macedonia: Dream big, and dream together, Vatican News, 7 May 2019.

[176] Saudi Arabia's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 2005, August 2019.

[177] B. Immenkamp, Understanding the branches of Islam: Sunni Islam, EPRS, European Parliament, 2016.

[178] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report on Saudi Arabia, 2019.

Muslims. Most of the latter adhere to the Twelver or Imamiyya persuasion of Shiism,[179] the largest of the Shia branches, who follow the Ja'afari school of jurisprudence. Around 700 000 Shia follow the Isma'iliyya persuasion; they make up the majority of the population of the oil-rich eastern province of Najran. A very small number — 20 000 — belong to the Zaidi branch, also known as Fiver Shiites. Zaidis are a significant group in neighbouring Yemen (30 % to 45 % of the population).

Around 12 million foreigners reside in Saudi Arabia. These include approximately 5.5 million Muslims, 1.2 million Christians (including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants and Roman Catholics), 310 000 Hindus, 180 000 'unaffiliated', 90 000 Buddhists, 70 000 followers of 'folk religions' and 70 000 followers of 'other religions'.

The Saudi government bans the public practice of non-Muslim faiths. Moreover, the law criminalises the public display of non-Islamic religious symbols, conversion by a Muslim to another religion and proselytising by a non-Muslim.[180] The government has formed a special religious police force – the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) – tasked with enforcing public morality, including discouraging and reporting displaying symbols of non-Islamic faiths or failing to respect Islam. Non-Muslims are allowed to practice their faith privately. In a positive development, following a 2016 decree limiting the CPVPV's activities, some Christian congregations have been able to conduct large Christian worship services discreetly and regularly without substantial interference from the CPVPV or other government authorities.

For many years, the government has specifically targeted Shia Muslims. Officially, this is on account of security concerns, especially over Shia links to Iran. The prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr was executed in January 2016 on charges including inciting sedition and disobedience to the ruler.[181] Shia Muslims have been detained and imprisoned for violations including holding small religious gatherings in private homes, organising religious events or celebrating religious holidays and reading religious materials. The Shia community also experiences discrimination in education, employment, the military, political representation, and the judiciary. Nevertheless, in some predominately Shia provinces, the commemoration of Shia holidays is permitted and judges can use Shia schools of Islamic jurisprudence in cases involving family law, inheritance and endowment management.

5.7.2. Religious dynamics

Saudi Arabia is a country of particular concern under the US International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, meaning that the country engages in 'systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom'.[182] Any public expression of religious beliefs has to be compatible with the government's particularly puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam (known as Wahhabism),[183] which is opposed to popular religious practices such as Sufism or shrine worship. The religious police enforces public morality, in coordination with law enforcement authorities. This includes combating public and private contact between unrelated men and women, immodest dress, the sale of media that is 'contrary to Islam' (including pornography), the consumption of alcohol, as well as adultery, gambling and homosexuality. Individuals have been imprisoned on charges of apostasy, blasphemy, violating Islamic values and moral standards, insulting Islam, black magic and sorcery.[184] Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger promoting liberal ideas, was sentenced in 2015 to 10 years in prison, 1 000 lashes and a fine of one million Saudi riyals (US$266 000) for, among other charges, insulting

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[179]   S. Kusserow and P. Pawlak, Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam, EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016.

[180]   US Department of State, Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report, 2018.

[181]   M. Townsend, 'Sheik Nimr al-Nimr: Shi'a cleric was a thorn in Saudi regime's side', The Guardian, 2 January 2016.

[182]   The US Department of State has designated Saudi Arabia a country of particular concern since 2004, most recently in November 2018.

[183]   B. Immenkamp, Understanding the branches of Islam: Sunni Islam, EPRS, European Parliament, 15 February 2016.

[184]   US Department of State, Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report, 2018.

Islam and religious authorities. In 2015 the European Parliament awarded Badawi the Sakharov prize.[185]

5.7.3. State/religion nexus

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been ruled by the al-Saud family since its founding in 1932. The regime has established a 'working relationship'[186] between politics and religion, giving authority to the followers of the puritanical teachings of the Muslim scholar and reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in exchange for affirmation of the monarchy's religious legitimacy.[187] Wahhabi clerics form an integral part of the kingdom's religious and political establishment and the rules and laws adopted to govern social and religious affairs in Saudi Arabia are based on Wahhabi ideas. There is extensive government-owned religious media and broadcast programming. Journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the religious establishment or the ruling authorities are banned. The government financially supports approximately 70 % of Sunni mosques; the remaining 30 % as well as Shia mosques are privately funded and operated. In 2007, the government began to remove content from textbooks and curricula that disparaged other religions. Nevertheless, intolerance in the classroom still exists, with teachers reportedly expressing discriminatory and hateful views of non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects.[188] Mohammad bin Salman, the de-facto ruler of the Kingdom, has championed social and economic reforms under the Vision 2030 project. He has vowed to break the grip of puritanical Islam on the Kingdom and to promote a moderate form of Islam, more in tune with the aspirations of the 70 % of Saudis who are under 30 years of age.[189]

5.7.4. Religion in Saudi foreign policy

Spreading Sunni Islam throughout the world is an important tenet of Wahhabism and of the Saudi education system.[190] According to estimates, Saudi Arabia has invested billions since 1979 – the year of the Islamic revolution in Shia Iran – to promote its Wahhabi ideology through charitable foundations. These have funded educational and religious facilities, and also hospitals, in south and south-east Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel and the Balkans.[191] In some instances, funds have been diverted to support terrorist organisations, contributing to accusations that Saudi Arabia is funding terrorism. At the same time, the puritanical form of Islam promoted by these charitable foundations has changed the face of Islam[192] in many Muslim communities around the world.[193] A Saudi royal decree has since banned financing outside Saudi Arabia of religious schools, mosques, hate literature, and other activities that support religious intolerance and violence toward non-Muslims and nonconforming Muslims.[194] Moreover, measures have been put in place to stop controversial Saudi-based clerics from traveling abroad, to prevent the appearance of interference, or actual interference, by Saudi-based clerics in the domestic affairs of other states.[195] In the context

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[185] European Parliament awards Sakharov Prize to Raif Badawi, European Parliament, 29 October 2015.

[186] N. J. Delong-Bas, 'Islam and Power in Saudi Arabia', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, p. 411.

[187] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017 – Saudi Arabia: Key developments in 2016.

[188] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019 - Saudi Arabia.

[189] M. Chulov, 'I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2017.

[190] S. Stalinsky, Preliminary Overview – Saudi Arabia's Education System: Curriculum, Spreading Saudi Education to the World and the Official Saudi Position on Education Policy; The Middle East Media Research Institute, 20 December 2002.

[191] C. Moniquet, The involvement of Salafi/Wahhabism in the support and supply of arms to rebel groups around the world, European Parliament, 2013.

[192] C. Gall, 'How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS', *New York Times*, 21 May 2016.

[193] S. Kinzer, 'Saudi Arabia is destabilizing the world', *The Boston Globe*, 11 June 2017.

[194] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report on Saudi Arabia, 2019.

[195] US Department of State, Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report, 2018.

of the civil wars in Iraq,[196] Syria and Yemen, Saudi support for one side of the conflict has a distinct sectarian dimension, intended to stop the spread of Shi'a Islam and curb the influence of its Iranian backers.

5.8. Turkey

For decades, Turkey's secular model was compared to the French model. Nevertheless, the use of the word *laïcité* (or secularity) is misleading: in the French case, it embodies the mutual independence of state and religion from one another. In Turkey, the independence is one-sided, as the state is independent from religion but is actively involved in the daily management of the various religions. In the French model, the state does not promote any religion, as all are supposed to be equal, but in the Turkish model, Sunni Islam is de facto promoted by the state. Religious symbols such as the headscarf used to be banned in schools and state institutions, but in the last 15 years, this interpretation of secularism has been softened by the ruling AK Party.

5.8.1. Religious demography of Turkey

Turkey does not provide precise statistics on the religious affiliation of its 79 million citizens, even though religious affiliation used to appear on identity cards. The population is 98 % or 99 % Muslim, mainly Hanafi Sunnis.[197] Among Turkish Muslims, Alevis[198] form a large minority (between 15 and 20 million). There are debates among the scholars on the status of Alevism as an unorthodox branch of Sunni Islam, as part of Shia Islam or as an independent version of Islam. The Shia community in Turkey numbers around 3 million believers, mainly Twelvers.

There is also a small number of other religious minorities: Jews (17 000), Armenian Orthodox[199] (90 000), Roman Catholics (25 000), Syriac Orthodox (20 000),[200] Yezidis[201] (22 000, 17 000 of whom have arrived from Syria since 2014), Baha'is (10 000) and fewer than 2 000 Greek Orthodox.

5.8.2. Religious dynamics

During the Ottoman period and in the first years of the Turkish Republic, there was a relative degree of religious diversity in Turkey. With the exchange of populations with Greece in 1923 (when 1.2 million Greeks left Turkey for Greece) and the expulsion of the remaining Greeks in the 1950s and 1960s, Turkey became a country that defended secularism while having a large Muslim majority. In recent years, the number of religious minorities has started to rise again, owing mainly to the more than 3 million refugees arriving from Iraq and Syria.

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[196]   P. Cockburn, 'We finally know what Hillary Clinton knew all along – US allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar are funding ISIS', *The Independent*, 14 October 2016.

[197]   Hanafi is one of the four main jurisprudence schools of Sunni Islam and the largest in the world.

[198]   Alevism maintains links both with Twelver Shia Islam, which recognised Ali as the rightful successor of the Prophet, followed by 12 imams, and with Sunni Islam. Contrary to other branches of Islam, Alevis use wine and music in their worship, do not observe the five prayers a day and do not see the pilgrimage to Mecca as an obligation. They practice in assembly houses rather than regular mosques, and men and women are not separated during the ceremony. The Court system has recognised assembly houses as places of worship under Turkish law, but the government still does not fund or recognise them.

[199]   The Armenian Apostolic Church, also referred to as the Gregorian Church or the Armenian Orthodox Church, is the national church of Armenia and part of the Orthodox family.

[200]   The Syriac Orthodox Church is a self-governing church of the Orthodox family.

[201]   Yezidism is practiced mainly by Kurds in the Middle East. It is a monotheist faith with ancient Iranian roots (maybe connected to the Mithra cult) and elements from the Sunni faith. Their principal temple is situated in Lalech in Iraqi Kurdistan. The wars in Iraq since 2003 and the emergence of ISIL/Da'esh have pushed the Yezidi to immigrate to Turkey or western Europe.

5.8.3. State–religion nexus

Turkey is a secular state and the constitution provides for freedom of religion. Nevertheless, religion is regulated by the state through a complicated recognition system. The Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (presidency of religious affairs) under the president's office coordinates religious matters, administers places of worship in Turkey and abroad, and promotes Islam. The Diyanet provides the imams with training, supervises the sermon to be read in the more than 80 000 mosques of the country every week and the salaries of the imams. Since 2006, the budget of the Diyanet has increased fourfold (to around US$2 billion in 2016)[202] and the role of the administration has changed from control of the religion by the secularist state to a greater emphasis on promotion of Islam. The number of officers in the Diyanet has doubled to 150 000, and its budget is 40 % greater than that of the interior ministry.

The penal code prohibits imams and religious leaders from reproaching or vilifying the government or state laws and there are legal restrictions on insulting religions.

Other religions, including non-Hanafi Sunnis, must support themselves financially[203] and sometimes face obstacles to their freedom to worship. The legal recognition of leadership, structures and properties is often a challenge, for non-Muslim religions as well as for Alevis. It shows the special status of Sunni Islam in Turkey. Religious education is compulsory but tends to favour Sunni Islam. Recognised religious minorities can be exempted and sometimes benefit from teaching in their own religion, but not Alevis, non-Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Yezidis, agnostics or atheists. The only Greek Orthodox seminary, in Halki, was closed in 1971 and has yet to reopen. In the past year, the Armenian Apostolic Church was also prevented from electing a new patriarch, on account of administrative obstacles.[204]

Nevertheless, the government has also taken some positive steps: some properties have been returned to religious groups including the Syriacs; dual citizenship has been permitted for the Greek Orthodox metropolitans in order to participate in the Holy Synod; and school curricula have been revised in order to comply with a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights to make sure that religions are represented equally.

5.8.4. Religion in Turkey's foreign policy

Since 1983, the Diyanet has had a diplomatic branch to oversee Turkish Islam abroad,[205] and this development has given Turkey a role in shaping Islam in many European countries, including Germany. For years, this action has been credited by experts[206] as one of the reasons for the low levels of radicalisation among Turkish communities abroad. In countries such as Belgium, the Turkish community is most often served by a Turkish imam sent by the Diyanet to a mosque also run by the Diyanet.[207] Turkey, officially a secular state, is therefore promoting Islam abroad.

Turkey is a member of a number of international religious organisations, including the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. In its humanitarian and development policies, Turkey puts an emphasis on Islamic solidarity[208] in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa, especially in Somalia. Turkey is advocating for a reform of the UN Charter in order to include a Muslim nation as a permanent

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[202]   D. Lepeska, 'Turkey Casts the Diyanet', *Foreign Affairs*, 17 May 2015.

[203]   This inequality has given grounds for complaints about discrimination. In 2016, the government paid for the utility costs of most mosques, but also of 419 minority places of worship.

[204]   Turkey chapter, annual report, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, August 2019.

[205]   L. Jacinto, 'Turkey's Post-Coup Crisis Arrives in Europe, Dividing the Diaspora', *France 24*, 2 August 2016.

[206]   L. Jacinto, 'Morocco's Outlaw Country Is the Heartland of Global Terrorism', *Foreign Policy*, 7 April 2016.

[207]   D. Leroy and J. Hiltermann, 'Why Belgium?', *The New York Review of Books*, 24 March 2016.

[208]   P. Perchoc, Turkish Humanitarian Policy: An Emerging Donor, EPRS, European Parliament, 17 May 2016.

member of the UN Security Council. Nevertheless, Turkey's religious affiliation does not prevent the country from cooperating closely with partners of different persuasions, such as Israel, Iran or the United States.

5.9. Ukraine

5.9.1. Religious demography of Ukraine

In absolute terms, Russia and Ukraine have the largest populations[209] of Orthodox Christians: some 100 million in Russia and 35 million in Ukraine. The Orthodox branches in Moscow and Kyiv developed separate traditions in medieval times; the Russian tsar consolidated the two churches in 1686 after creating a union with Ukraine. Whereas the Soviet Union officially embraced atheism, both Ukraine[210] and Russia[211] reconnected with their Orthodox roots after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The new post-Soviet borders were not mirrored by the churches, however. While the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) remained the only major Orthodox church in Russia, Ukraine's Orthodox Christians (UOC) were divided among three Orthodox denominations:[212] the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the small Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), originally a dissident church (from Moscow) during the Soviet era. A fourth church – the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church – is of the Orthodox tradition and recognises the authority of the Pope in Rome.

5.9.2. Religious dynamics in Ukraine

In late 1991, the all-Ukrainian sobor[213] (synod) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, called by Metropolitan Filaret Denysenko, requested autocephaly[214] from Moscow. In April 1992, the sobor of the ROC rejected the request and replaced Filaret. In response, in June 1992 a part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, led by Filaret, decided to separate from the ROC and unite with the UAOC to form the UOC-KP. However, the UAOC refused the union. Since then, the three Ukrainian Orthodox churches – the UOC-MP, the UOC-KP and the UAOC – have existed separately and competed over parishes, church property and churchgoers in Ukraine. The 15 December 2018 unification council[215] of the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine voted to merge the UOC-KP, the UAOC and parts of the UOC-MP. With 12 251 registered religious entities as of January 2011 (including 11 952 communities) and 9 680 clergymen, the UOC-MP has hitherto been the largest in terms of religious entities.[216] The UOC-KP had 4 508 registered associations (including 4 371 communities) and 3 021 clergymen. The UAOC had 1 227 registered religious associations (including 1 190 parishes) and 699 clergymen. Five years after the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople – widely seen as the spiritual leader (*primus inter pares*) of the Eastern Orthodox world – granted the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) 'autocephaly' on 5 January 2019, formalising a split from the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The move follows an intensified Ukrainian campaign to obtain religious independence and thereby reduce the influence of the ROC, which plays a key role in the Kremlin's identity politics in the region. Since the OCU was granted autocephaly, more than 300 parishes of

[209]   'Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe', Pew Research Center, 10 May 2017.

[210]   'Declaration of Independence of Ukraine', Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 24 August 1991.

[211]   'Post-Soviet Russia', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

[212]   'Religions in Ukraine', *RISU - Religious Information Service of Ukraine*, 2019.

[213]   'Definition of *sobor*', *Merriam-Webster*.

[214]   A. Zhukovksy, 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church', *Internet Encyclopaedia of Ukraine*, 1996.

[215]   'From UOC-MP to OCU: Interactive Transition Map', *RISU - Religious Information Service of Ukraine*, 26 December 2018.

[216]   'Religions in Ukraine', *RISU - Religious Information Service of Ukraine*, 2019.

UOC-MP – mostly in the western and central part of Ukraine – had moved[217] to OCU as of 12 February 2019.

Ukraine is home to between 56 000 and 140 000 Jews, making it the fourth largest Jewish community in Europe[218]. According to the US State Department report on freedom of religion, there was a decrease in anti-Semitic crimes in the past year.[219] Still Jewish authorities advocate for the return of lost properties during the Second World War and the Soviet period. In occupied Ukraine, the Ukrainian Helsinki Committee reported severe religious restrictions by the de facto authorities.[220]

Figure 4 – Poll asks Ukrainians: To which Orthodox Church do you belong?
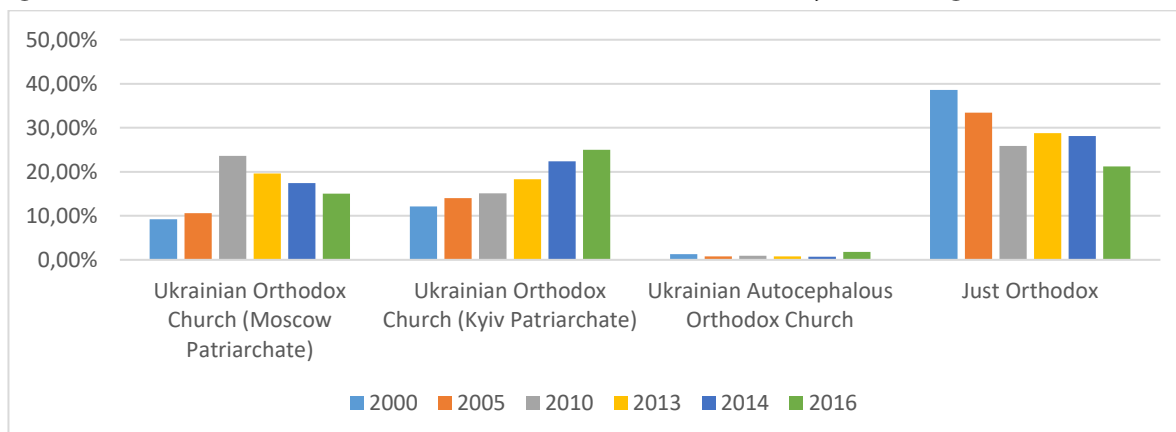
Data source: Kyiv Post, June 2016.

5.9.3. State–religion nexus

The Ukrainian constitution protects freedom of religion and provides for the separation of church and state. By law, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship.

Religious rifts have grown deeper since 2014.[221] The religious situation in Ukraine remains partly polarised by the political divides in the country. Before the union of Ukrainian churches, the UOC-KP emerged as a strong pro-Ukraine actor during the protests. While protesters in November 2013 initially distanced themselves from political and religious actors, the Kyiv Patriarchate stepped in as public gatherings turned violent. The Monastery of St Michael provided sanctuary for the injured, and soon spiritual leaders from different faiths (including some from the Moscow Patriarchate) erected tents to administer to the spiritual needs of protestors. Owing to the UOC-KP's proactive role in supporting the protesters and Russian support for the separatist movement in the east, the Kyiv Patriarchate's following has grown more in the past few years than it had since the end of communism.[222]

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[217] 'Over 300 Parishes of UOC-MP Joined OCU So Far', *RISU - Religious Information Service of Ukraine,* 12 February 2019.

[218] Berman Jewish DataBank, World Jewish Population 2016, American Jewish Year Book 2016.

[219] 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ukraine, United States State Department report, 2019.

[220] Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Open Address of the Human Rights Agenda on freedom of religion in the occupied Crimea and in certain territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, controlled by the Russian Federation to Sam Brownback, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, 2018.

[221] N. Bentzen, Ukraine: Religion and (geo-)politics. Orthodox split weakens Russia's influence, EPRS, 2019.

[222] Thanks to Russia, Ukrainians Swell Ranks of Kyiv Patriarchate, Atlantic Council, 22 June 2016.

5.9.4. Religion in Ukraine's foreign politics

On 16 May 2014, representatives of the self-styled Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) published a 'constitution', according to which 'The leading and dominant faith is the Orthodox faith … as professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The historical heritage and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognised and respected, including as a main pillar of the Russian World doctrine'.[223] Priests in the Donbas have prayed openly for the separatists,[224] and in a 2014 letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul, Moscow Patriarch Kirill I framed the conflict as a religious war. According to a 2015 report on the role of religion in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, prepared by the Ukrainian Center for Civil Liberties and the International Partnership for Human Rights, separatist militias have violently targeted religious leaders from the UOC-KP, Protestants and the UGCC.[225]

All Orthodox denominations in Ukraine maintain conservative views towards LGBT rights, in a country that already ranks towards the bottom in Europe in terms of LGBT acceptance. In terms of politics, however, the UOC has positioned itself as pro-European, reaching out via the high-profile All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (AUCCRO) to European organisations to raise awareness of Ukraine abroad.

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[223] When God becomes the weapon, Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, report prepared by the Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015.

[224] 'Rebel priest' prays for Ukraine gunmen, denies doing more, Reuters, 29 April 2014.

[225] Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights report, 2015.

Religion has been emerging as a new dimension in the EU's external policies. This paper provides an overview of the principles, institutional set-up and policies underpinning the EU's approach to religious issues in third countries.

Nine case studies meanwhile serve to illustrate the important role played by religion in the foreign policies of a number of different countries worldwide.

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