

The Politics of Religious Lobbies in the European Union

Summary of Findings and Recommendations 31 October 2011

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Abstract

This project investigated the mechanisms and prospects of religious/convictional representation at the decision-making level in the European Union. Through a comparative analysis of religious and convictional groups in Brussels, it addressed the following questions:

1. How do (trans)national religious/convictional communities enter into contact with European institutions?
2. What are the rationale and the mechanisms of religious/convictional representations?
3. How are religious values transposed into political strategies?
4. And, how has the construction of the European Union been influenced by religious/convictional representations?

The project drew on unpublished material from archives in Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany, and qualitative and quantitative data from Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Humanist bodies in Brussels.

Summary of Findings

1. Despite the widespread perception that religious issues have been absent from the process of European integration, this project has demonstrated prolonged contact between churchmen, politicians and EU civil servants from the 1950 Schuman Declaration until today.
2. The project proposed four types of relations between European institutions and 'churches, religions and communities and conviction', namely public-private (1950-82), experimental (1982-90), pro-active (1990-2007), and institutionalised (2007-today). Each type reflected the increasing role of the European Commission in engaging in contact with religious and convictional groups.

3. The project revealed that the ecumenical movement of the interwar period led to the first transnational reflection group composed of churchmen and politicians advising churches on the process of European integration. This group lasted from 1950 until 1974. The Roman Catholic Church opened the first religious representation at the Council of Europe in 1956 and an office in Brussels in 1963.
4. The project identified 120 religious/convictional groups in dialogue with the European Commission from the Schuman Plan until today. After President Delors launched a public debate on the 'heart and soul' of Europe in 1990, an increasing number of religious/convictional bodies entered in dialogue with European institutions.
5. The number of Catholic bodies in contact with European institutions is very close to that of all other Christian bodies. Similarly, there are close figures between the representation of 'religions' and 'communities of conviction' in dialogue with European institutions.
6. An overview of the interests of 'churches, religions and communities of conviction' reveals that there are three common areas, namely 'education', 'advocacy' and the generic term 'rights'.
7. The functional breakdown of religious/convictional representations in the European Union includes: diplomatic representations, official representations of churches, inter-church or convictional organisations/networks, religious orders and single-issue organisations. Contact between local communities and European institutions is through single-issue organisations which transpose the EU policy at national level. The Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of single-issue organisations, many of which are active both in EU member-states and outside Europe.
8. The Lisbon Treaty institutionalises 'an open, transparent and regular dialogue' with 'churches, religions and communities of conviction' without indicating the parameters and the shape of this dialogue. Religious and convictional issues remain under the jurisdiction of EU national member states; however, the increasing number of religious groups reveals that religious/convictional groups are acquiring an active role in shaping the *acquis communautaire*.
9. The representation of religion takes place at both national and supranational levels. The shape of religious representation at national level is influenced by the state-church relations models existent in each EU member-state.
10. The political mobilisation of religious representations in Brussels resembles the activism of religious lobbies in Washington; however, the contrasting political systems on both sides of the Atlantic entail major differences in the nature and scope of religious representations.

Recommendations

1. The European Commission, through its Bureau of European Political Advisors, remains the only institution with a mandate for dialogue with religious/convictional actors. A clearer mechanism of religious/convictional dialogue in the framework of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty is necessary. In addition, a debate on the possibility of extending dialogue to other European institutions would raise awareness of religious/convictional issues.
2. Religious/convictional issues remain closely connected to social and political mobilisation in Europe. Religious dialogue with European institutions is

- particularly important for those new EU member-states in Eastern and South-eastern European countries in which religion plays a major role.
3. The development of a coherent foreign policy of the European Union needs to take into account religious/convictional factors. In particular, EU enlargement to South-eastern Europe and Turkey, and EU relations with countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia need to take into account the prime role of religious communities in fostering social cohesion.
 4. Dialogue between European institutions and ‘churches, religions and communities of conviction’ could benefit from better coordination at national level. Rather than focusing on ‘photo opportunity’ meetings in Brussels between high level religious leaders and EU officials, dialogue on specific EU policy issues at the national level would increase the participation of religious/convictional communities and awareness on the construction of the European Union.
 5. There remains limited comparative research on religious/convictional communities in the European Union. Closer contact between religious practitioners and academia would be beneficial for European institutions, governmental bodies and public policy organisations.

Publications

1. Lucian Leustean (ed), *Representing Religion in the European Union: Does God Matter?*, Routledge Studies in Religion and Politics, forthcoming 2012;
2. Lucian Leustean (ed.), ‘Transatlantic Representations of Religion’, special issue of *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 2011, 12 (3);
3. Lucian Leustean, ‘Representing Religion in the European Union. A Typology of Actors’ in *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 2011, 12 (3), pp. 295-315;
4. Lucian Leustean, ‘The Ecumenical Movement and the Schuman Plan, 1950-54’, *Journal of Church and State*, 2011, 53 (3), pp. 442-71;
5. Lucian Leustean, ‘Religion, Modernity and Theories of European Integration’ in *The Politics of Religion in Western Europe*, François Foret and Xabier Itçaina (eds.), Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science, 2012, pp. 61-73;
6. Lucian Leustean, ‘Does God Matter in the European Union?’ in Lucian Leustean (ed.), *Representing Religion in the European Union: Does God Matter?*, Routledge, forthcoming 2012.

The findings of this project and recommendations do not reflect the official position of any religious/convictional bodies and/or European institutions.

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