

Religion As a Component of Poland's State Identity and As Manifested in its Foreign Policy

Anita Budziszewska¹ , Anna M. Solarz² 

Abstract

This article is devoted to religion as one component of state identity; where the latter is here defined as a form of identity shaped by ruling elites, i.a. on the basis of national identity, with a view to the interests and conduct of the state being legitimised – both domestically and in foreign policy. In our case study relating to Poland, we have assumed that religion and the values founded upon it are key variables, and among the most important components to present-day state identity. At the same time, we note that this specific identity for Poland also materialises in axiologically-based conflict, given that a foundation upon the factor of religion represents one of the most deeply-rooted levels of self-determination – in the CEECs in particular. In this part of the world, religion has always played an exceptional role in building state identities, not least given the fundamental impact on any understanding of what freedom denotes. In the pursuit of such ideas, the authors have organised the present article into: (1) a theoretical part that introduces the relevant theory (stressing i.a. religion's role as a tool accounting for political and international reality); (2) research on religion's role in shaping domestic policy and state identity; and (3) an attempt to answer questions as to how a religion-based state identity is made tangible in foreign policy (in line with an assumption that the latter is in essence an extension of internal policy, whereby state identity influences the conduct of the state externally); and in that way also in international relations.

Keywords

the religion factor, State identity, Religion in domestic and foreign policy, Polish foreign policy, Poland, the CEECs

1 Corresponding Author: Anita Budziszewska (PhD Candidate), The University of Warsaw, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, Department of Diplomacy and International Institutions, Warsaw, Poland.
E-mail: anita.budziszewska@uw.edu.pl ORCID: 0000-0002-1950-2612

2 Anna M. Solarz (PhD), The University of Warsaw, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, Department of Regional and Global Studies, Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: asolarz@uw.edu.pl ORCID: 0000-0002-7110-3205

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Introduction

Work on religion in international relations has been done for several decades now and so appears to have found itself a little “out of breath” recently (cf. Haynes, 2021); not least in the face of the “burnout” of political Islam. However we may feel certain that this phenomenon accompanying humankind from its earliest times has not yet had its last word where the international sphere is concerned. This is why any abandonment of study (even in the face of a still-tangible lack of suitable research tools or theories) would denote a failure – perhaps even a dereliction of duty – on the part of IR theoreticians, not least when it comes to the need to anticipate and account for future events in the nature of breakthroughs, watersheds or tipping points where the world as a whole is concerned.

Conclusions of this kind are particularly called for whenever any closer look is taken at the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs), and most especially at one of their number – Poland. It is exactly this kind of scrutiny that we are encouraging with the considerations presented here on the basis of our investigations.

This article thus links up with research into the influence of religion on states’ foreign policies, not least the theoretical considerations spearheaded by C. M. Warner and S. G. Walker. For those authors, religion has remained nothing less than: “one of the great and the least understood security challenges in the twenty-first century” (Warner & Walker, 2011:113). That in turn led them to propose their own approach to issues involving interesting ways of applying different theories from IR (Warner & Walker, 2011:117-119). Like Warner and Walker, we recognise that constructivism in IR supplies certain tools by which the influence referred to may be studied – hence a theoretical aspect to our considerations relating first and foremost to the core analytical category of identity in IR, if also through a distinction being drawn between state and national identities.

Like other (Western) states coming together to co-create international structures, Poland has been pursuing a foreign policy that seeks to achieve security for its citizens, as well as a genuine opportunity for them to exercise their freedoms. To this extent, then, goals resemble those found elsewhere quite closely, even as Poland differs from most of its counterpart states further west (while resembling those in its part of Europe), *inter alia* as regards the role of religion in building national identity, and hence also identity at the level of the state. We recognise the influence of state-level identity in helping define the interests and directions that are considered to characterise the foreign policy that governments here in Poland pursue, and that religion has always had an exceptional role to play in building state identities in the countries now treated together under the loose heading of CEECs, exerting a very telling influence on those countries’ understanding(s) of the concept of freedom or liberty. The approaches are of a kind that have continued to stand out against the prevailing liberal discourse, and – while various views or assessments are possible in that regard – the importance of the role *vis-à-vis* identity is quite clear.

What is more, the identities in question here can be seen to have developed in line with what this borderland region has experienced in historical and geopolitical terms. For it needs to be recalled how the territory making up virtually all of today’s “Central and Eastern European Countries” formed for centuries a kind of “bulwark” zone that in practice operated in such a way as to afford more westerly parts of Europe protection

against "alien" incursions (be these by Mongols, the Ottoman Turks, the USSR or Russia). In an ideological sense, that also meant a safeguarding against the impact of different concepts of freedom (*de facto* mostly involving slavery) potentially or actually coming in from the east.

Indeed, even in today's world, it would be hard to resist the idea that something of the same kind of buffer function continues to be served. The CEECs themselves in fact seem to be nurturing a gradually-growing awareness that this is the case, especially in the face of a still-aggressive (or even increasingly aggressive) policy being pursued by Russia.

When it comes to Poland, its foreign policy is one founded on a state identity that exposes and expounds the aforementioned experience from history, in particular when it comes to the factor of religion. Indeed, this has all assumed a rather stark form since 2015 when *Zjednoczona Prawica* (the United Right") came to power, with *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (*PiS*, alias *Law and Justice*) at its head. Indeed, the present government has actively been seeking to give life and effect to the relevant concept, i.a. through the pursuit of religious rhetoric, as well as certain policy course-corrections that have more than once broken Poland out from the united front that is the West, and at the same time disrupting key powers' efforts to further their own key interests.

In the view of many foreign observers (but also probably the greater part of the Opposition domestically), the policy in question is a version and manifestation of populist nationalism that can pose a threat to both democracy and peace. This kind of view would seem to be held by much of Poland's cultural elite, for example; even as it is (quite evidently) a minority standpoint among the Catholic clergy, and within the Church hierarchy. Where Polish society is concerned, there would appear to be a deep divide regarding the identity in question. Nevertheless, *Law & Justice* victories in elections over the last 6 years have been on a scale tending to indicate that a majority of voters are not swayed much by the rhetoric from either critics outside the country or the Opposition. Indeed, part of the "blame" for the present situation lies with the latter's unending desire to criticise *PiS* at all costs, in this way seeming to largely ignore the aforesaid regional cultural and historical conditioning that is present in reality. For, in our view, identity does indeed offer a key to understanding the issue of the "populist nationalism" present in Poland and the CEECs. And, as religion plays its particular role in that, the article we present will help ensure the presence of some more-profound research into this issue.

State Identity and National Identity in CEEC Region

Identity links up with awareness that is a feature of a person (awareness of "the self" as distinct from "the other"). Collective identity – has for decades been a popular, but also much-debated category anchored in the social sciences. The advantage of this approach lies, not merely in the way that a given society can be distinguished from its surroundings, but also in the way that an integrating function can be supplied in respect of units that are taking shape (Jenkins, 1996). In international relations (and all the more so in the period when this discipline was taking on its special features, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s), a striving to rationalise the issues of security, the subordination of other aspects to the economy, and a growing attachment to quantitative methods all mitigated against research into identity. However, the idea itself (as lifted from philosophy) was

not alien, and did therefore make occasional appearances in the hands of various different workers (cf. Szeptycki, 2018). However, the real breakthrough came along as cultural issues came to be injected into the considerations (i.e. as the so-called "cultural turn" took place, thanks to an end put to the Cold War that had not been foreseen by mainstream theories); and as social constructivism became more and more popular. The rejection of the hitherto-dominant unilateral materialistic approach combined with a focusing-in on human awareness and its role in international relations to bring about a "sociologisation" of the discipline (whereby "anarchy is what states make of it"). The effect was to open the field up to the matter of collective identities within the international dimension of social relations (Jackson & Sorensen, 2012).

As constructivists harbour a conviction that there is no objective social reality beyond human awareness, their research looks at ways in which shared meaning or significance arises. In their view, identity comprises two types of idea: how people imagine themselves and how others imagine them (Skolimowska, 2019). Against that kind of backdrop, some researchers (such as A. Wendt) focus on the influence of the international environment in the shaping of state awareness, while others have started to perceive the significance of the internal environment (Skolimowska, 2019). A certain breakthrough in this regard was achieved in work under the editorship of Peter Katzenstein, involving the analysis of internal ideas, norms, cultures and identities of states as causal factors, given the part they all play in defining interests and shaping national policies vis-à-vis security (cf. Katzenstein, 1996). Thus, state identity understood as a social construct shaped by a variety of different factors and people, and changing over time, has ceased to be a matter of mere secondary importance in considerations of foreign policy (cf. Telhami & Barnett, 2002).

It was *inter alia* Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett who engaged in more in-depth study of the influence of identity on states' foreign policy. In their view, the identity of a state needed to be distinguished from national identity, even as both ideas are tied to residents' relationships with those beyond the boundaries of their community (state identity) or their territory (national identity). According to these authors: "state identity can be understood as the corporate and officially demarcated identity linked to the state apparatus; national identity can be defined as a group of people who aspire to or have a historical homeland, share a common myth and historical memories, have legal rights and duties for all members, and have markers to distinguish themselves from others" (Telhami & Barnett, 2002: 8).

The way in which governments define state identity – which they usually build on the basis of their convictions as regards national identity – gains its expression in both domestic and foreign policy. The external aspect referred to by us in this article is furthermore the venue for some clash with the vision of the given state (i.e. the identity) as nurtured in the imagination of "another" – in fact the various "others" also pursuing international relations actively.

It would also seem reasonable to suggest that state identity and national identity (as both perceived by people) may not depart from each other too greatly, given the way that that would denote a potential loss of legitimacy on the part of a government, with the knock-on effect being impaired credibility and effectiveness on the international scene.

It is worth recalling that, thanks to identity policy, authorities may influence national identity, shaping it to a certain degree, even as many factors influencing it remain beyond their reach.

In Poland's case, one such factor is religion, with this having played a very major nation- and state-building role during the country's history. Nevertheless, even Poland's case can be well (or better) understood if set among the specific features of Central and Eastern Europe as a whole.

As researchers note, affiliation or affinity carries with it obligations – which is why politicians both government and opposition typically encourage voters to define themselves in terms of their nationality (Herrmann et.al, 2009). Radical views in this context were expressed in *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner, for whom: "Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures". Invoking E. Durkheim, Gellner further notes how religion favours nationalism, as the place of God as the subject of a cult can be taken by the nation – "in religious worship society adores its own camouflaged image" – thus using God as an intermediary in self-worship (Gellner, 1991: 64). A consequence of recognition for the above author's arguments as supranational communities and a global society are built may thus be an attempt to disarm, neutralise and oust "principles of nationalism" – noting their potential status as obstacles on the road to achieving the goal (cf. Gellner, 1991).

All that said, Gellner's approach may not be applied readily to the CEECs, and it would appear that we find here a cause for many misunderstandings in the subject literature as well, given the way that authors there eschew any more incisive or profound regional study. To be seen nevertheless as an interesting thesis – albeit one founded and pursued via simplification, as opposed to more in-depth research (in our region in particular) – is the work of the renowned Francis Fukuyama (as in Fukuyama, 2018).

The fact that Fukuyama's book is of value to researchers on the CEECs even despite the above shortcomings lies in the way in which, unlike Gellner, the author here perceives a dignity dimension to identity policy. One may nevertheless end up being much surprised, to say the least, by conclusions that throw together in one "populist sack" the likes of Putin, Erdoğan, Orbán, Kaczyński and Trump.

Researchers from the CEECs have come up with a different identifiable approach, presented effectively enough by M. Hroch, and drawing a distinction between two overlapping levels on which the nation can be comprehended, i.e. "the level of a large social community that exists in reality (it is a 'sociological fact')" and "the level of an abstract community of (shared) cultural values, i.e. as a specific cultural construct". The Czech researcher goes on to note how: "the nation in the sense of a community of shared values is currently being devalued and marginalised, while the nation as a sociological fact continues to thrive" (Hroch, 2020). In Hroch's view, the cause of the splitting apart of the two levels is "the neoliberal shift that has occurred on the value scale, one result of which has been the decline of education in the humanities", as well as a "postmodern campaign against 'nationalism', which has been supported by the European Union among

others” (Hroch, 2020). Hroch furthermore sees it as something obvious that a nation will be headed up by a national movement that seeks to put in place a state (with the elite in so doing making a reality out of the aspirations of the people). All ”young nations” are in particular invoked here, by which we mean those arising from the 19th century onwards, both East and West. The researcher regards this as historical fact that is hard to dispute or even discuss, notwithstanding the way in which it may or may not receive our positive assessment (Hroch, 2020).

Such approaches may be regarded as close to that proposed by Polish researcher A. Szeptycki, even though his arguments do not concern the category of nation directly, but are rather about the broader identity of international entities (or identities). [*As here translated*] the author defines this as: ”a set of symbols, norms and traditions that ensure continuity over time and distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* other groups, both when it comes to self-perception and the perceptions of others – i.e. those that are the subject of its particular care and influence over action taken in international circles” (Szeptycki, 2018). Similarity to the arguments of the Czech researcher can be noted in Szeptycki’s conviction that the identity in question is conditioned objectively by existing factors of an internal nature, if nevertheless subject to constant redefinition by actors in society coming within the given collective identity or polity, as well as indirectly via the surroundings (Szeptycki, 2018).

Looking through the prism of the two Central European authors’ considerations, we would have to see the approach advanced by Gellner as an extreme one not really suited to this particular region’s study, or indeed research on Poland specifically. In this case, “the nation” needs to be viewed, not as construct of the governing elite, but rather – first and foremost – as an instrument by which basic needs can be pursued. This is to say the ”freedom and truth” that ordinary people have been demanding. It is rather in this context that we need to locate the role of religion as a component of both national identity and state identity.

Religion and National Identity in the CEECs – Radosław Zenderowski’s Outlook

The last decade of the 20th century surprised the whole world in the exceptional intensity with which nation-building and religious processes took place among the CEECs, countries which might almost have been forgotten about altogether in the aftermath of the Second World War, and in a situation characterised by Soviet domination. The circumstances under which and means by which sovereignty was regained by states in the region, and even more so the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, did draw the attention of the world to the role of the religious factor in the processes involved, but there remains no more in-depth study of the intricate linkage between religion, the nation and the state in this region (cf. Zenderowski, 2011). This is why particular importance might be attached to the work of a Polish observer of the processes ongoing in this part of Europe – Radosław Zenderowski. The researcher himself stresses how a personal origin in a borderland between religions and cultures has left him feeling like a “participant-observer” in regard to the phenomena he documents (cf. Zenderowski, 2011). He further notes how an ongoing issue in all work done in the region is the overestimation or else underestimation of the role religion plays in shaping national identity. Moreover, it is typically true to say that religion either takes the blame for extreme nationalism and

ethnic hatreds, or else people simply fail altogether to notice its entanglement in the ills of the region (Zenderowski, 2010).

It is at the same time hard to offer up an unequivocal answer to any question regarding the moral dimension to "the ethnicisation of religion", or indeed the "sacralisation of ethnos" (two phenomena the author notes in this part of Europe that are obviously in essence sides of the same coin) (Zenderowski, 2010). What is certain is that the linkage between religion and ethnos has allowed national identity to be shaped – but also preserved – among Poles, Serbs, Hungarians, Greeks and so on. But Zenderowski notes that the link between religion and nationalism in Western Europe (be that Spain or France, Germany, the UK, or the Scandinavian countries) is different from that on display and at work in the CEECs. In the first group, the development of national identity was mainly conditioned (in particular from the 17th century onwards) by conflicts of a socio-political and economic nature, with religion tending to be left in the background.

However, in our continent's Eastern part, the situation was the reverse – the arising nationalisms were founded mainly upon religious and culture-linguistic animosities, with differences of a socio-political or economic nature left more on the back burner, as it were (Zenderowski, 2010). In turn, the development of societies in the West has proceeded in the direction of religion's incapacitation by nationalism. So today the topic fails to spark the kind of emotions in society that would provide for more far-reaching political change. It has in some sense been emptied of its secrets – or even its sanctity – having been incorporated into "civil religion" as a kind of decorative element (Zenderowski, 2010).

The eastern part of the Old Continent looks totally different from this point of view. Indeed, Zenderowski (2010) noted how religion and nationalism coexisted as two powerful forces effective at influencing society (and each other). The author thus observes that this part of the world features rivalry for what Mickiewicz called "the government of souls", even as there is also close cooperation between these powerful carriers of sense in our lives. The author's research suggests that – among other reasons – we had here a consequence of Christian Churches in particular serving in a substitute role in the face of non-existent statehood, indeed given what it meant to experience the lack of a state being present under the circumstances of partitioning by hostile outsiders, and/or the actual ceding of territory to another state more powerful than one's own had been. And in the absence of state institutions – let alone states as such – ethnos tended to integrate around a particular Church or Churches, whose activities under the circumstances extended far beyond the pastoral.

All of that has left the legacy of a particular attachment on the part of this region's people(s) to religion. However, in this circumstance, religion can be taken to mean the sacred dimension, obviously; but also the cult and ritual aspects; and beyond that the idea that religious symbols are also those of the given nation (Zenderowski, 2011). What Zenderowski saw as a consequence of that was the CEECs and the region in which they are located experiencing an *en bloc*, long-term assuming of a specific identity as "bulwark of Christianity" in a borderland region forever subject to the visitations (and the repression imposed by) other outside cultures. That left religion as a matter extending beyond piety at the individual level, in the direction of its being a factor integrating an entire large group of people. What else could offer the hope of eventual victory in (repeated) moments of

defeat and calamity? In the view of the author, religion helps (as it has in the past helped) with the maintenance of identity within an ethnic minority coming under foreign rule and domination thanks to this region's very complex history (Zenderowski, 2010).

Needing to be seen as of particular importance are the researcher's observations when it comes to the consequences of the role religion plays in the shaping and maintaining of national identities among the CEECs. It is hard not to concur with Zenderowski when he says that this underpins a division of Europe into east and west that is also observable within the European Union. Zenderowski (2010) contends straightforwardly that (*in translation*: "the different ways of looking at the role of religion in public life leads to many misunderstandings, and upholds the feeling of belonging to different civilisations"). Furthermore, this fissure can be seen as far more serious than either the economic or ideological gulfs that may be hangovers from the communist era. Words from the researcher written back in 2010 may be viewed as rather prophetic, given that they describe Europeans being divided ever more firmly on the basis of attitudes to the presence or religion in public life.

Work done in 34 European countries by the Pew Research Center (as published in October 2018) served to confirm the existence of deep cultural differences between our continent's eastern and western parts. Asked whether being faithful to a given religion of religious denomination was an important part of national identity, people were far more likely to answer in the affirmative if they were from the CEECs, as opposed to Western Europe. In most of the former countries, the shares of the population accepting the validity of the statement even exceeded 50% (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Equally, more in-depth work completed a year previously (in relation to the links between religion and national identity in the CEECs) pointed to an interesting trend. While states with a Catholic majority (like Poland, Hungary and Czechia) in fact showed 1991-2015 declines in the percentages identifying themselves with that faith, the trend for the countries dominated by Orthodox faiths (in particular Russia, Bulgaria and Ukraine) was quite the opposite, even though the share of people practising actively is actually much lower in these countries than in their Catholic counterparts. The fact remains that, while for 70% of followers of Orthodox faiths on average, religion is an important aspect of national identity, the corresponding figure is already down at 57% in the case of the Catholics (Pew Research Center, 2017). The Center's research further pointed to marked east-west differences in perceptions of the "immigration problem", abortion and gay marriage. This helps sustain Zenderowski's reflection that a civilisational fissure is opening up across the Old Continent. Zenderowski's research shows some uniqueness of the CEECs region in terms of the role of religion, especially if we will compare it to West countries history and concept of freedom that shaped the western identity. Thus, as Zenderowski states we cannot understand the Polish national identity without having in mind its traditional attachment to Christianity and to the role religion played through a difficult history and at the same time, in shaping national character. These characteristics, although less striking nowadays, are still important factors of identity.

Statistical Research on Religion and National Identity in Poland

Those seeking to answer a question as to how Poland positions itself among these identity dilemmas (on the basis of how strong is the link between religion and the nation

that today's ruling elite use to shape the state identity they later expound in foreign policy), would need to engage in precisely the kind of in-depth sociological study that is lacking at present (cf. Szeptycki, 2018). However, it is worth referring to polling research revealing how, as of 2019, some 91.9% of Poles declared affiliation with the Catholic Church, while more than 90% regarded themselves as believers in one way or another (KAI, 2021). That said, there truly remains an inadequate basis to support a clear conclusion as regards Poles' strong links to religion and the Church. While the share of people engaging in religious practices is falling less rapidly in Poland than in other European states, we are nevertheless witnesses to a "creeping secularisation" even here. As of 1990, just 50.3% of Polish Catholics participated in Mass each Sunday, while the figures for 2013 and 2019 were as low as 39.1 and 36.9% respectively (KAI, 2021). Even fewer people were prepared to back the mainstream Catholic stance when it comes to sexual ethics. What this attests to is a religiosity on the part of Poles that can rather be dubbed "cultural Catholicism" (KAI, 2021).

That said, religiousness (including the "intensity" of religious practices), is distributed very unevenly across Poland. According to data from 2017, the proportions of people taking part in Sunday Mass ranged from 71.1% of the Catholics in the Diocese of Tarnów, via 64.1% in Rzeszów and 59.8% in Przemyśl, and just 25.6% in Koszalin-Kołobrzeg and 24.6% in Łódź and Szczecin-Kamień (KAI, 2021). The places that usually emerge as the most religious areas of Poland are those in the south-east, especially Galicja – i.e. the part of Poland once partitioned by the Austrian Empire. The lowest level of religiosity in turn characterises the large cities in the west of the country – these being lands in fact taken (back) from Germany after World War II and settled by Poles from the east – i.e. those areas lost to the country, having been forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the Church in Poland has had a difficult few years recently, having been hit by paedophilia scandals of the kind at which (fairly successful) efforts at whitewash were once targeted by those high up in the hierarchy. A demand that these old scores be settled comes, not only from the liberal media (especially those viewing an attack on The Church as a simultaneous attack on the in-power *Law and Justice*). For Catholic publicists are also at times inclined to demand the same thing, knowing that this might improve the condition of a Church that has been losing its influence on people – the young especially (KAI, 2021).

Though research has not yet shown this (Bożewicz, KAI, 2020), it is reasonable to anticipate that the COVID-19 pandemic will also have changed the traditional practice of Sunday Mass, with fewer faithful than before likely to return to churches once they are fully open once more.

The work of foreign research centres allows us to set the religion and religiousness present in Poland against the situation in other countries; as well as to assess the links between their faith and national identity. Again according to the Pew Research Center, Poland was (as of 2015) the country in which the largest share of the population recognised itself as Catholic. The figure of 87% here may be compared with the 84% noted for Croats, 75% for Lithuanians, 56% for Hungarians and 21% for Czechs. Nevertheless, as the corresponding Polish figure for 1991 was 96%, a clear (if not very marked) downward trend is to be discerned (Pew Research Centre, 2017).

Equally, it is in Poland that a higher percentage of Catholics than anywhere else (as many as 64%) feel that this religious status also represents a key element of being a citizen of the country (Pew Research Centre, 2017). In a hierarchy of 34 European states associating religious affiliation and citizenship of the given state in this way, Poland took a high 7th place (after Armenia, Georgia, Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria – in which faiths other than Catholicism prevail). Ninth and fourteenth places are then taken by the Catholics of Portugal and Italy (Pew Research Center, 2018). Fifty five percent of Poles also concur with a statement to the effect that, while they may not be perfect as a people, their culture is better than others (on average an answer to this effect was given by as many as 68% of the inhabitants of Orthodox countries, even as that could be set against a figure of 45% for the other countries considered) (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Overall, then, Poland finds a place for itself between the adherents of the Orthodox faith for whom that faith is a key determiner of identity, as well others far less likely to feel this way. In turn, where majority-Catholic countries are concerned, it is again Poland that stands out – in Europe as a whole, not merely among the CEECs.

Any depiction of Poland's Catholicism and its linkage with national identity would be incomplete without a reference to the role of the Polish Pope (and now Saint) John Paul II. During a papacy lasting almost 27 years, the Pontiff made many return visits to his homeland – always receiving a hugely warm welcome with ovations. His final illness and death in April 2005 were thus responded to with near-universal sadness in Poland, with acts of mourning assuming massive proportions and extending far beyond hard-core believers, or even believers in general. For a great many, a moment or period for "national recollection" was afforded then – albeit one differing in scale more than kind from other papal anniversaries (be they of the election of The Pope, of his birth or of his death) – as all marked ceremonially and richly in Poland.

Indeed, no matter which corner of the world he visited on his travels (of which there were famously many), Pope John Paul II would often refer back to his Polish roots and experiences. There remains widespread recognition – among Poles at least – of and for Karol Wojtyła's part in toppling the communist system, generating a revolution in terms of conscience, and giving rise to *Solidarność* (Poland's pioneering "Solidarity" trade union). Research carried out in 2010 found 71% of Poles saw this person as their greatest countryman. No fewer than 62% would go on to claim that the teaching of this Pope had changed their life (even though 33% admittedly said that he had not). Almost two-thirds (64%) were of the view that any reflection on John Paul II brought to mind either a particular situation, or an image or event, or certain words that the great man had spoken. For only 27% of adult Poles was there no association whatsoever of this kind (Boguszewski, 2010).

Most tellingly of all, 91% of Pope John Paul II's fellow Poles claimed that their nation owed something particular or specific to that person (with 65% saying "yes" to that, and a further 26% "rather yes"). That left only 3% voicing the opposite opinion (Boguszewski, 2010).

Religion in Post-2015 Polish Foreign Policy

It needs to be noted however, that the timeframe introduced for the purposes of this article (i.e. 2015) is not a time of "religious revival" in Polish foreign policy, but rather a

specific type of linkup with a combined state-and-religious identity present consistently in Poland's policy from 1989 on, and especially noted and known at European fora. Here one may immediately invoke the intense debate surrounding Poland's EU accession (i.e. pre-2004). A very telling description of that time was offered – back in 2003 – by J. Casanova (Casanova, 2003: 2), for whom: [in translation: the fact that Catholic Poland was "rejoining Europe" at a moment when the Western part of that continent was abandoning its Christian civilisational identity was a cause for concern for both Polish Catholics and secularised Europeans (...) Catholic Poland's re-inclusion within a secularised Europe might thus be perceived as either a tough challenge or a great Apostolic task].

Casanova also referred then to the still-vibrant concept of "Polish Messianism", the maintenance of a Catholic identity, and slogans concerning "Europe's return to Christianity". The still-current status of Christian aspects and values gained reconfirmation in 2019 in an interview during a visit to Washington made by Poland's then Minister of Foreign Affairs, who put it like this (after Przewozinski & Tomasik, 2018): [in translation: Poland also has its specificity in the European Union. We are a Christian country and we try to be faithful to certain values. We want the right to keep our identity].

Thus, in seeking to offer some kind of systematisation of the influence of religion on Poland's activity and conduct at international fora, it is possible to single out several types of activity. These are:

- the recognition of religion as an important space for foreign-policy activity, including as regards the presence of religion and religious practices in public discourse;
- action taken by the state to promote defined values associated with or arising out of religion (with defined motives in the context of, for example, the promotion or non-promotion of different human rights);
- the context of international cooperation between states, i.e. partnership (including of a strategic nature) where religion is concerned and on account of the approach to religion – spontaneous or intended closeness to states sharing the vision to a greater or lesser extent.

The Place and Role Of Religion in Poland's Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021

The most recent government document designating directions and priorities in Polish foreign policy, i.e. the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy for 2017-2021 (hereinafter "(the) Strategy") makes only 5 references to religion as understood in the broadest sense. Indeed, the contexts present are diverse, given that there is religious radicalism (Strategy, p. 2), the dialogue between religions (Strategy, pp. 22-23) and religious communities (Strategy, p. 22). Even this limited context for the above-mentioned makes it clear that these are only really present symbolically. The document text makes more frequent references to terms like Christianity, civilisational progress, Polish history and ties, and the promotion of Polish values.

In general, then, aspects of the document relating to religious identity are worded less directly; first and foremost calling upon traditional Polish values shaped by the country's history, though with references also made to the Christian foundations underpinning both European integration and the development of civilisation.

The axiological layer was regarded as an area of sufficient importance that a separate point entitled “Values” was devoted to it. The role of Christian values was therefore encapsulated by reference to the key premises of Poland’s position relating to universal values like democracy, governance duly constituted under the rule of law, and respect for human rights. A further general reference was to the Christian values underpinning European integration. The dissemination of these values internationally is deemed to be in Poland’s interest, representing the best guarantee of peace, stability and development around the world. Their promotion therefore needs to be treated as a manifestation of recognition for the axiological dimension, as well as a way in which Poland’s security might be strengthened, even as circumstances favourable to the further development of civilisation are favoured (*Strategia*, 2017).

In what follows in the Strategy, objectives to be pursued in relation to this dimension include action in support of human rights, albeit in line with the initial assumptions of UN documents; as well as support for – and the initiation of – action in respect of the dialogue between religions, and recognition that the promotion of Polishness abroad serves as a platform by which to promote the values present in Polish history and culture (*Strategia*, 2017).

Secondly, while the Strategy has no wording relating directly to any civilisational and cultural divide within the EU, stress is placed on policy addressing the need for national sovereignty to be retained, in the face of less-than-complete integration within the EU. More specifically, a balance is invoked between full integration and EU-reserved policies on the one hand and the independence of national policies on the other hand.

This all may in fact be suggesting an identity context contrasting with the direction being taken up by the EU as such. The Strategy thus refers to a Polish vision of the EU as a union of sovereign states that is neither a superstate on the one hand, nor on the other merely the sum of its national egoisms (...). More explicit objectives thus include action seeking to ensure that the EU reinstates some balance between the principle of state sovereignty and the prerogatives enjoyed by Community institutions, with efforts also needing to be made to enhance the transparency of EU decision-making processes, as well as the democratic mandate they enjoy (*Strategia*, 2017).

All of this needs not denote that Polish integration-related action signalled in such a way arises out of a desire to impose the country’s vision upon Europe. However, it *does* imply account being taken of values distinct from those to which homage is paid by a secularised, progressive and modernised “west” Europe.

The community of interests and shared history of the CEECs may have some alternative impact in reorientating Poland towards “the East”, with associated moves closer together in the axiological dimension (as Zenderowski suggested). This has in fact assumed a more material form in joint initiatives of a “para-religious” nature. An example here would be the joint Polish-Hungarian project to build an orphanage for 118 children in the village of Zeidal in Syria’s Hims province. In one of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs interviews it was recalled how the agreement entered into with Hungary had been aimed at what was termed the pursuit of joint action in the area, in the interests of Christians in particular (Przeciszewski & Tomasik, 2018).

Our interviewee also referred to US readiness to commit to the defence of clergy engaged in the protection of human rights. In that same context it was noted how Mike Pence had stressed the way in which religious freedoms (at least possibilities for faith to be declared freely and openly in public life) were in his view being curtailed in countries such as the UK, France and Germany (Przeciszewski & Tomasik, 2018). This leaves it as natural-looking if Poland does direct itself towards the CEECs in at least some subtle way, even as the emphasis is placed on the role of cooperation within the region, and a certain agreement at the axiological level. This derives from, but also further emphasises, a certain specific identity present among the countries in question, with its religious context shaped by history. It is this aspect that R. Zenderowski (as referred to in the first part) has sought to account for.

Religion in the Political Discourse Internationally, and Poland's Strategic Partnerships of A Religious Nature

A manifestation of religion's influence on Poland's foreign policy has been an orientation in the direction of inter-state cooperation based around the factor of religion. In this regard, the United States of America under Donald Trump became a natural partner for Poland. Besides interests relating to security (NATO) and the economy, the cooperation involved here was conditioned by joint initiatives making reference to the religious sphere. The work to achieve greater closeness that this entailed materialised *inter alia* in a series of joint conferences under the heading *Ministerials to enhance the freedom of religion or belief*. The three such gatherings were convened in the US in 2018 and 2019 and in Poland in 2020. They were open in character, and international. The last (Warsaw-based) event took place on November 16th and 17th 2020, with participants including, not only Ministers/Secretaries for Foreign Affairs and their Deputies, but also Special Envoys for freedom of religion. The Council of Europe was *inter alia* represented by the Secretary General's Special Representative on Antisemitic and Anti-Muslim Hatred and Hate Crimes; while others present were the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, a representative of the US Commission on Religious Freedom, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee, and the Secretary General of the Community of Democracies.

The lead subjects at these meetings were naturally the rights to religious freedom (as this also includes the rights and status of religious minorities) as fundamental human rights; the need for the international community to make efforts to ensure dialogue between religions; and actions to protect people persecuted on religious grounds (MSZ, 12.11.2020; MSZ, 17.11.2020).

It needs to be noted just how keen Poland was to expose this cooperation for all to see, with emphasis being put on the community of values linking it with the United States. The fact that a strategic partnership pertained in this area was *inter alia* emphasised in a joint communique the two countries issued. Published on the website of the US Embassy and Consulates in Poland – among other places – this had among its key wording: “The close strategic partnership between Poland and the United States is highlighted by our common interest in advancing religious freedom” (U.S. Mission Poland, 2020). In February 2020, during the visit made by the Polish Delegation to Washington, Poland's Minister of

Foreign Affairs stressed purely and simply that his country was the main partner for the USA in the given domain (Obremski (PAP), 2020).

At the same time, this cooperation stood out in its true religious character, also showing very clearly how religious narrative and spiritual values can tend to be interwoven, as indeed can religious nomenclature with the political discourse. This happens very rarely indeed – in the sense that it is actively avoided – in secularised states that often still have much in common otherwise – with both Poland and the USA. For the Polish-US meetings have sometimes been associated with highly symbolic religious celebrations and ceremonies – e.g. with joint participation in Washington in the so-called *National Prayer Breakfast*.

Comments from the Polish Foreign Minister following one of these visits alluded to American politicians and religious leaders from around the world praying for US leaders – both Trump as President and the House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi (Obremski (PAP), 2020). Later, the Minister cited Trump, who had emphasised the way in which the struggle for religious freedom included that for the right of school pupils to say prayers and the right to have the Cross on display in public places (Obremski (PAP), 2020). It was also noted how bold references to religion in public life were important matters, and (Poles might not be fully aware of the fact that they are) very much acceptable under the political culture of the USA (Obremski (PAP), 2020). Emphasis was further put on a strong message that every child was a gift from God – with this being presented as the kind of value that was subject to “eye-catching” levels of support within America’s political class (Obremski (PAP), 2020). Quite clearly, the praise and recognition for practices of this kind in the USA was seen as legitimising – giving the seal of approval to – the same kinds of customs and habits in Poland.

There have nevertheless been other international meetings and gatherings at which Poland has shown itself more than willing to resort to religious symbolism. July 2020 brought a scheduled meeting of Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers to inaugurate Poland’s 6th holding of the Group’s Rotating Presidency (in the period January-June 2021). The selected conference venue was Wadowice, i.e. the home town of Karol Wojtyła (later Bishop and Cardinal and then Pope John Paul II). This reflects the status of 2021 as marking the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Pope and Saint. The fact that Wadowice was not a chance location for the meeting was stressed by Polish diplomats as they inaugurated the event (MSZ, 2020). It is worth adding the emphasis laid on the international role of the Visegrad Group in speaking up for Central European interests.

Religious Matters and Polish Activity in International Organisations

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland has been stressing how a priority for Poland in the international arena is to postulate consistently how international organisations need to be more active when it comes to fully respecting the rights of religious minorities, as well as the safeguarding of freedom of religion and belief, and the extension of protection to the victims of religious persecution. Polish diplomats have also been active in promoting freedom of religion and belief, *inter alia* at the United Nations and its Human Rights Council, in the EU and at the Council of Europe and OSCE (MSZ, 17.11.2020). Official statements from Poland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and President

have confirmed this approach many times, with activity engaged in at the UN, and Polish diplomats often taking up relevant initiatives.

Poland's stances and priorities could and can be further emphasised and made clear in connection with the country's terms served on the UN's Security Council (as a non-Permanent Member in the years 2018-2019) and the Human Rights Council (2020-2022). One aspect described from the outset was the role played by religion and freedom thereof. This was signalled by the Minister at a meeting in the US, when he said that action in defence of these was indeed a Security Council priority for Poland (Przeciszewski & Tomasik, 2018).

This policy approach was to be continued with confirmation at the 43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council – the one inaugurating Poland's 3-year term on that body. The Minister then mentioned, not only the safeguarding of the right to belief and religion, but also the rights of the child and the disabled (including via a Polish project in the form of the *Joint Statement on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day*).

In turn, one of the first symbolic initiatives taken up by Poland in the UN context was the establishment of the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, as marked on August 22nd. Work on a two-page Resolution establishing the Day began at the initiative of Poland when it was one of the rotating Members of the UN Security Council, back in 2018. The Resolution wording was worked on, not only by Poland and the USA, but also by Brazil, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Canada, Nigeria and Pakistan. The text and document as finally agreed upon gained the support of 88 UN Member States.

It should be noted that Poland's activity at the UN has not been confined to promoting the right to religion, having also made itself felt in a certain selectivity; and a tendency to look at matters involving rights and values through what might be called a "religious lens". In other words, religious values may be said to condition the Polish stance in other matters (involving the aspect of religious identity). This therefore gains emphasis in – among other things – the promotion of particular human rights and the protection of defined values.

The fact above is illustrated by two types of activity engaged in by Poland at the UN. The first of these involved a perception of the right to the freedom of religion as a foundation for further activity (in the case of human rights, the promotion of those rights that can be said to originate in – and/or be in accordance with – the teachings of the Church). This kind of conceptualisation of the role of the right to religion was in some sense confirmed by Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Session of the UN General Assembly in New York held on May 28th 2019, when he said: (in translation) "The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which is commonly referred to as the right to freedom of religion or belief, is a universal right of every human being and the cornerstone of many other rights".

Polish diplomatic polemics were also engaged in at UN plenary sessions devoted to the generally-accepted norms that that organisation promotes. Poland would seem to have had reservations in this area, given that what is promoted fails to correspond with the likes of the country's ruling elite. This would be particularly the case where LGBT matters are

concerned. The dissonance was on display most clearly in March 2020, when a plenary discussion turned its attention to a UN report on the pursuit and enforcement of cultural rights in Poland (Bennoune, 2020). Elements covered by this report and coming to be seen as especially "alarming" related to a Polish religious narrative in line with which women might apparently be discriminated against, while hate speech, intolerance and other kinds of discrimination could spread, and Polish society had become steadily more polarised. Particular emphasis was laid on the lack of protection extended to minorities, including those of a gender-related nature (see more Bennoune, 2020).

Where the influence on religion is concerned, the report focused on this last issue in particular, and the wording was as follows: "Some voices associated with the Catholic Church reflect discriminatory views, for example about LGBT people, which is of grave concern. On the other hand, among the range of Catholic viewpoints in Poland, some use their interpretation of Catholicism as the basis for their activism for human rights and inclusion, and may themselves be criticised by clerical bodies" (Bennoune, 2020). The Recommendations section also noted how: "Safeguarding the separation of religion and state is vital for cultural rights in Poland today" (Bennoune, 2020).

Actions of this kind are not really anything new in state policy, wherein a major role for religion is recognised, along with the influence exerted on state identity. This may be exemplified by, in some sense analogous examples, existing not least in the United States under Donald Trump. Indeed, 2019 saw Mike Pompeo convene a Commission on Inalienable Rights whose main task was to offer "a review of the role of human rights in American foreign policy." (Gessen, 2019; Pompeo 2019).

Pompeo went on to propose that two catalogues of rights be proposed, i.e. the inalienable on the one hand and the *ad hoc* on the other – with the latter being the ones added in the aftermath of the Second World War. This leaves as *ad hoc* rights in respect of LGBT, as well as rights of women to make decisions regarding human reproduction, not least as regards abortions (Rapior, 2019). The Commission was in fact chaired by one of the Professors of the Harvard Law School (Pompeo, 2019), for whom the key subject matter is the relationship between rights and religion, as well as human rights in general. In the past, this person had posts including US Ambassador to the Holy See (Harvard University website, 2021).

The idea to call such a Commission into being thus developed – *inter alia* – around fears expressed by human-rights activists that the State Department might be developing a hierarchy of human rights within which religious freedom would be placed at the top (Rapior, 2019). Where US activity in the UN as such is concerned, a symbolic matter was the country's 2018 withdrawal from the organisation's Human Rights Council (Tarnogórski, 2018).

The above list of examples is by no means exhaustive when it comes to Poland's activity at international fora, as regards religion. Separate issues would be the activity and polemics present in such organisational fora as those of the Council of Europe or EU – not presented here in any more detail, but going a long way to confirming a specific kind of breach over identity and culture when it comes to the Polish case.

The response especially from Europe and the international community to this Polish identity will be important in signalling the condition it itself displays, along with the

state of integration processes ongoing within the European Union. The place and status of Poland in Europe is also to be revealed. The cultural diversity invoked and lionised by the EU, the Council of Europe (as even a constituent element of European-ness) and the UN may perhaps denote an acceptance of difference manifested by Poland, with account also being taken of Europe's traditional links with Christianity. The expert Jose Casanova (who was referred above) himself made reference to the words of former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland – the late Prof. Bronisław Geremek, noting as follows: "I fully agree with Bronisław Geremek that any genealogical reconstruction of the idea of the social imaginary of Europe that makes reference to Greco-Roman antiquity and the Enlightenment, while erasing any memory of Medieval Christendom in the very constitution of Europe as a civilisation evinces either historical ignorance or repressive amnesia. Secondly, the inability to openly recognise Christianity as one of the constitutive components of European cultural and political identity means that a great historical opportunity may be missed to add yet a third important historical reconciliation to the already-achieved reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics, and between warring European nation-states, by putting an end to the old battles over Enlightenment, religion and secularism" (Casanova, 2003: 16; Geremek, 2003/2004).

Conclusion

Those who research the domestic and foreign policy of Poland cannot fail to notice the place religion occupies in the ruling elite's shaping of state identity; bearing in mind the way in which this conditions state activity in the public sphere, including the conduct of Poland internationally, and the decisions taken at international fora. It is worth emphasising that Catholic-and-national "imaginings" are a consequence of the role religion has played in the history of this nation, and indeed the CEECs in general. As Polish decision-makers define the identity of the state and take account of religion in so doing, they face a tough task – as the years since 2015 have made clear. Reference to the faith adhered to by ancestors and predecessors is not a popular thing in an "enlightened" Western Europe, and indeed it also arouses emotion and provokes division within Polish society itself (with traditionalism and Christian values being set against progress, unfettered freedom and laicisation). However, it is hard not to notice that it is these very values which underpin the concepts of national and individual liberty "proper" for the Eastern part of Europe and many times in history "erupting" with great strength. This region's process of laicisation has usually therefore proceeded much less rapidly than those looking in from further west would anticipate.

We may presume that, as the external environment changes, there will also be an evolution of Polish foreign policy (not least with the handover from Donald Trump to a Joe Biden determined not to continue with his predecessor's policies). So does the system internationally give rise to a change of definition of Polish state identity, and will there be a change of configuration of emphasis ... with a more nuanced invoking of religion? Beyond that, if such a change actually does take place, will it mean a loss of Polish "originality" as set against the West in general? Moreover, does Polish foreign policy enjoy any chance of success in the face of the difficulties it must address in this area? For a further question arises concerning the way in which Polish society might start to analyse

a new policy of this type, given that that society is itself divided when it comes to the current role of religion as a component of state identity.

While the considerations we have engaged in here do not offer full or even partial answers to the above questions, the reference to the concept of identity has at least allowed us to advance the Polish case as an example of the complex role the factor of religion has to play in a state's foreign policy. We trust this will encourage other researchers to press on with research into the role of religion in international relations, in particular when it comes to the Central and Eastern European Countries.

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