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Hadzi Nenad M. Jovanovich®

Religion, politics and challenges of contemporary European identity

Centre for Research of Orthodox Monarchism
12 Djordja Tasica St., Belgrade, 11000, Serbia
czipm.org@gmail.com

Abstract. The question of modern European religious identity surpasses its spiritual and ecclesiastical boundaries and firmly dwells within the political sphere. This is precisely why this is a topic of great interest for the scientific discipline of politology of religion. It has been widely accepted in the European secular narrative that religion has lost its cohesive role and power, but faced with new temptations it could regain some of its vitality and importance. Such signs are visible and easily detectable even in some of the member states of the European Union such as those belonging to the Visegrad Group, but also in the wider European scale. In our opinion, it is precisely the question of identity that has found itself in the main stream of political, geopolitical, and even security and economic temptations of Europe, and even of Western civilization itself. The question of religious identity has thus become the focus of interest of many political, religious and other thinkers, who recognize the acuteness of this problem. All this is eloquently reflected, not only in the self-understanding of modern Europe, but also in its attitude towards the issue of the growing Islamic element on its own territory, its relationship with the Islamic world, [Baudrillard, 2002: 162] and, also, with China, the United States and especially with Russia. In that sense, as a paradigm of such relations, understanding and misunderstanding of the European Union with other geopolitical factors on a global level, can serve the fact that, on July 4 2020, constitutional changes came into force in Russia, which clearly determine this great power as a state based on Christian foundations. [Bilbija, 2020] Although this, of course, does not disqualify this world power as a society based on the separation of Church and State, nor does it in any way violate the principle of equality of all traditional religious communities on its territory, we will see that this concept is essentially foreign and ideologically unacceptable for today's European Union and much of the Western world. Namely, as we will see, the modern Europe (or more precisely - the European Union) builds its ideological matrix not on the foundations of its own Christian heritage, but on the foundations of agnostic secularism and liberalism, as inaugurated by the French Revolution, which places our topic in the domain of politology of religion.

Key words: Christianity; identity; politology of religion; Europe; European Union; Islam

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Introduction (). There is nothing new in the fact that, in the modern Europe, among many thinkers from the domain of social sciences and humanities, the opinion has taken root that religion has long lost not only its cohesive role in society, but also its political relevance. We say that what has been said is not new, because the expansion and development of such a school of thought can be followed, in its continuity, in the last almost two and a half centuries. However, from the consideration of many other, equally relevant, thinkers, one can recognize a completely opposite line of thinking, which testifies that, despite the indisputable rise of secularism, religion has not lost all of its political potency and importance. Such tendencies are quite logical and expected among the religious, conservative and counter-revolutionary thinkers from the recent or distant past (Ilyin, 2011: 14), but it is equally interesting for us that a similar treatment of the political and social role of religion can be recognized by modern researchers, who have approached the topic from the standpoint of the sociology of religion. Thus, for example, the principal research fellow of the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, head of the Forum on Religious Issues of the same Institute and associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Montenegro in Nikshich, Dr. Mirko Blagojević, notes: “Even in Europe, the center of the process of secularization, in the early '80s, religion and the church began to emerge in the public domain with increasingly obvious political pretensions” (Blagojević, 2015: 36). Of course, such a political actualization of religion opens up an abundance of possibilities for its abuse and extraction from the domain of spirituality into the domain of politics. In our opinion, the very indisputable fact that, even today, the abuse of religion for political purposes is very possible and widespread, testifies to its relevance in political life.

Methodology and methods (). Before turning to the subject at hand, it is our belief that we should first shed some light at the meaning and origin of politology of religion, as our method

of choice in dealing with the subject at hand and as a fairly new scientific discipline within the scope of political sciences, first established at The Faculty of Political Science of The Belgrade University, Serbia.

This new politological discipline was first introduced into the curriculum of the Faculty in 1993-94, most of all, thanks to Prof. Dr. Miroljub Jevtić. (“Politology of Religion”, n.d.) In fact, this is the first time that a globally relevant politological and religiological discipline was established and launched from Serbia. During the course of time, this scientific discipline has expanded from Serbia and is now being studied in other universities in the region (Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro etc), and gradually spreads further from the Balkans to the rest of the world. According to the definition of that science and the subject of research, given by Prof. Jevtić, it is also taught at some world universities e.g. at The Warwick University in the United Kingdom etc.

The International Political Science Association (IPSA), which is a worldwide umbrella political science organization, based at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, confirms the validity and method of this scientific discipline by including the subject: *Politology of Religion as Framework for Analyse Relationship Among Religion and Politics* in their World Congress to be held next year in The Nova University in Lisbon, Portugal (“Politology of Religion as Framework for Analyse Relationship Among Religion and Politics”, n.d.), but also various other researchers and authorities are showing more and more interest in this method of dealing with the impact of religion in to the realm of politics. Such tendencies are gaining momentum and are gradually becoming more and more visible in different parts of the world, such as Italy (Marega, 2014), India (Jevtić, 2009a), Nigeria (Sanusi, 2013), Poland (Jevtić, 2019) etc. For further insight in to this issue, one of the main resources is, most certainly, the renowned scientific journal titled *Politics and Religion* (Talovich, 2008) which is published in Belgrade by the Centre for

Study of Religion and Religious Tolerance (Politics and Religion Journal, n.d.).

In conclusion, dealing with this topic, we will try to use and refer to the views and teachings of several Serbian and foreign authorities, who dealt with this issue from their own point of view and from the area of their own expertise, and who left a significant mark in the fields of theology, sociology, politology, religiology, literature, politics, geopolitics, law, history and other social and humanistic disciplines. In the following lines, we will try to list some of the opinions of the mentioned authors, not only to support the basic theses of this paper, but, even more, to draw the attention of the scientific community to this interesting and important topic and to try to initiate an intellectual exchange on this topic, which seems to us to be extremely relevant.

Research Results and Discussion

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In our opinion, in trying to cope with the question of contemporary European identity and its spiritual component (or, rather - the lack of one), one has to draw back some two centuries in to the time of the French Revolution, as a turning point and foundation of what we now recognize as modern European identity.

From the moment the French Kingdom was drowned in the streams of blood of the French Revolution, the establishment of a republican form of government, and then the regicide (Delorme, 2011) of King Louis XVI, a resolute departure from centuries of religious identity followed, with consequences for European identity of a much wider scope than France itself (Dimitrijevič, 1993: 3-6; Markovič, 1995; Bunich, 2002a; Bunich, 2002b). On the ideological and revolutionary matrix, which led to the mentioned change in the identity of France and Europe, the Very Reverend Protovicar Nemanja S. Mrdjenovič, a lecturer in Christian Discipleship at the Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Institute, the theological and higher education institute of the Australian and New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in Ade-

laide and chairman of the Board for Theological Studies of the Centre for Research of Orthodox Monarchism in Belgrade, says: "In France, in 1792, Louis XVI was beheaded, and an inverted value system flooded the Europe" (Mrdjenovič, 2017: 38-39). Father Nemanja further notices that: "like most European nations, we suffer from the recurrence of the French Revolution" (*ibid.* 40), thus emphasizing the importance of this historical event and political phenomenon in the sphere of identity and on a pan-European religious and ideological level.

When we look at things in this manner, the words and forebodings of a well known Serbian aristocrat and benefactor, Dr. Sava Popovič Tekelija, as a contemporary and witness of that turbulent time, are much clearer to us: "In the year 1793, a report came to the Chancellor, just at the session, that they had executed the French King Louis XVI, it has caused such a horror in everyone, and I can't say how I felt, as if all the blood in me stopped flowing" (Tekelija, 1989: 121). These revolutionary changes at the political level are a good illustration of the changes in the domain of identity and at a spiritual level, which took place in one and the same state, which chose a new direction of its existence, decided on a completely new and different philosophy of life, but remained the same (although, essentially, completely different) state. As Prof. Dr. Evgeny Vasilyevich Spektorsky, a pre-revolutionary rector of the Kiev University, later professor at the Belgrade University and Ljubljana University and, finally, a professor at the Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York and a corresponding member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, wrote: "A change of government in the same state does not indicate a creation of a new state. The XVII century Dutch lawyer, Bynkershoek, wrote: 'The state is the same, even if it is governed in one way or another.' Therefore, the current third republic in France is not a new state, but the same France that had previously passed through two republics, one kingdom and two empires during the XIX century" (Spektorsky, 1933: 14-15). Somewhat further, Spektorsky

illustrates this in the following way: “Continuity consists in the fact that contemporary power remains the same, even if its bearers change or die. In the old French monarchy, this continuity was expressed by the formula: *le roi est mort, vive le roi*, - the king is dead, long live the king! In the same vein, that representative of the Bourbon dynasty who ascended the French throne at the time of the Restoration, received the name of Louis XVIII, even though the last king was Louis XVI: in order to save the continuity of the legitimate monarchy it was considered that a fictitious Louis XVII ruled during the time when the power was actually in the hands of the Jacobins and Napoleon. In the same way, Napoleon III ruled in the second French Empire, even though Napoleon II never existed” (*ibid.* 71). However, then the question arises as to why each of these changes in the state life of France required changes in its identity. Why, then, during each of these changes, was the same state entity prompted to seek a new identity?

We have established that the continuity of the French state has remained unbroken regardless of the multiple and often brutal changes of its political layout, but, at the same time, the fact remains that its ideological nature has suffered tremendous recomposition along the lines of Catholicism of the *Ancien Regime* vs *laicite* of the bourgeoisie Republic, which is a point of great importance from the standpoint of politology of religion. Let us pause here and remind ourselves of the often witty and insightful view on the subject left by the Russian literary giant Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (Dostoyevsky, 1933: 75-91) about the revolutionary *liberte, egalite, fraternite* motto, as perceived by the French bourgeois (*tiers etat*), precisely during the reign of Emperor Napoleon III. For us, here, it is essential that this founding block of a new French identity is composed and left completely void of any religious content, contrary to the pre-existing and pre-revolutionary French state identity, based on Roman Catholicism and the rich legacy personified in Saint Louis. This fact was well observed and frequently criticized even

by some French traditionalist and conservative political thinkers like Charles-Marie-Photius Maurras, although he himself was an agnostic (Stakich, 1990).

In our opinion, the cause for this is the fact that the revolutionary French concept of secularism (*laicite*) was irreconcilable with any active political and social role of religion in the society. The revolutionary regime was determined to expel religion exclusively into the domain of one's personal relationship with God, thus removing that relationship from the framework of Community (*Koivmvia*). (Florovsky, 1993: 10). Needless to say that, consequently, this state forming concept eliminated the Church from the political sphere *per se* (Avramovich, 2007: 7-9, 99). The late Dr. Dragan Subotich (research associate of the Institute for Political Studies, editor-in-chief of scientific journals *Political Review* and *Serbian Organic Studies*), dealing precisely with the consequences of the French Revolution in the abovementioned sense, illustrates this by quoting Hadzi Djordje J. Janich, a Serbian literature professor, literary critic, lexicographer, essayist and poet, who says: “Secularism is the marginalization of faith in the life of the state, and then also of every believer. The renewal of faith, the attempt to regain its function in social and individual life, is being satanized, not only by militant atheists, but also by secularists who are mostly agnostics, declaring the real believer a fundamentalist, and fundamentalism a social destruction” (Subotich, 2004: 239). The result of such a social concept is the formation of modern Europe as a kind of *secular civilization* (Stanovchich 1999: 60), as opposed to the traditional - Christian, which is often, quite simplified, perceived in the modern European narrative as clerical or even - theocratic (Jovanovich, 2020a: 154-158). On the other hand, we are living in an era when many European scholars detect a certain strive in the direction of some degree of *deseccularization, religious renewal and revitalization* or, even *religious renaissance* (Jovich, 2018: 9). But, in all honesty, others do not see the potential for the return of a *sense of the common identity of the*

West in the return to its original religious heritage and foundations, but, for example, in the mobilization to oppose Islamism, i.e. in the service of the proclaimed *war on terror* (Huntington, 2002: 66). Either way, such trends are bound to produce certain social and, consequently, political repercussions.

The fact is that such a state concept is radically secularized and completely devoid of any Christian overtones, which completely corresponds to the ideological matrix on which that state was redefined. For us, this is clearly visible in the prevailing European cultural and ideological paradigm and, even, on the purely symbolical level (Jovanovich 2019b). The foundations of the identity of such a state were laid as early as 1789, because “(...) the ‘de-Christianization’ of the population and the establishment of a completely new religion was introduced into the program of the French Revolution. But neither the cult of ‘reason’, nor the cult of the ‘higher being’, nor ‘theophilanthropy’, literally love of God and man, succeeded” (Spektorsky, 1933: 192). The late Dr. Alexandros Kalomiros, a Greek scholar and expert in Orthodox patristics, iconology and ecclesiology, seems to follow up on this, when he observes: “The civilization of Europe is based on religion, but on a religion that no one will name as such, because it does not worship one or more gods, but worships man. (...) This is a European. Whatever religion he thought he had, deep down, his religion was the worship of the idol of ‘man’. The European no longer sees the image of God in man: he only sees his own image. In other words, the religion of Europe is in fact the old religion of humanity, the one that separated man from God. God's intention is to deify man. But man, deceived by the devil, thinks that he can become a god without the grace of his Creator, on his own initiative and only through his own powers. (...) It should be noted that the atheism that appeared in Europe is not just indifference, agnosticism or simply an Epicurean mood. Atheism in Europe is not an academic refutation either. It has a strong hatred of the Christian God, as He was known in Europe; it is a strong passion, blas-

phemy, indignation of the human soul”. (Kalomiros, 1990: 20-22). It seems to us that the modern consequences of such a spiritual climate are very well diagnosed by former French President Valery Marie Rene Georges Giscard d'Estaing, when he said: “Europeans live in secular political systems where religion doesn't play a significant role” (Pera, 2010: 171). It must therefore be acknowledged that these are processes of importance for the field of politology of religion, as a scientific discipline, especially if we notice certain fashionable tendencies in the spirit of religious syncretism, which are equally dangerous for the original religious identity of each of the European nations. (Dimitrijevic, 1995: 13; Krstich, 2004: 19).

To what extent is this assessment and perspective of Europe serious and to what extent does it surpass even the issue of identity self-determination and self-understanding of Europe, testifies the great Serbian theologian and former university professor, Archimandrite Dr. Justin (Popovich), i.e. Saint Venerable Justin of Chelije, when he warns us: “What is left of a man, when the soul is extracted from his body? - a corpse. What about Europe, when God is taken out of its body? - a corpse. They drove God out of the universe, didn't it become a corpse? What is a man who denies the soul in himself and in the world around him? Nothing but - uniformed clay, a walking coffin of clay. The result is devastating: in love with things, the European man has finally himself become a thing. The personality is devalued and destroyed; remained a man = a thing. There is no whole integral, immortal, godly man, but the very fragments of a man, the bodily shell of man, from which the immortal spirit is expelled. Admittedly, the shell is smooth, polished, tattooed, but it is still a shell. European culture has made a soulless man, made him material and mechanized him. It looks to me like a monstrous machine that swallows people and processes them into things. The finale is touchingly sad and shockingly tragic: a man - a soulless thing among soulless things” (Popovich, 1993: 9-10). Somewhat further, he

dramatically, and almost prophetically, concludes: "There is no doubt that all of Europe is mined by volcanic contradictions, which, if not removed, may soon explode with the final destruction of European culture" (*ibid.* 20). Dr. Marija Djorich, a research associate at the Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade, also discusses the issue raised by Saint Justin: "Perhaps we are witnessing the creation of a new European identity, in which the Christian pillar, which has been firmly carrying European culture for two millennia, is slowly but surely collapsing?" (Djorich, 2018: 104).

Dr. Dragan Subotich has also detected the beginning of the European deviation from its centuries-old identity scheme precisely in the processes initiated by the French Revolution, when he said that: "(...) our anti-Europeanism it is not the primitive and anti-European one, but derived from Saint Justin's theological philosophy as this practical theology says, that the public or secret aspiration of those who turn to the 'European culture' and liberate themselves from God through humanism and renaissance, naturalism of Rousseau and messy romanticism, positivism and agnosticism, rationalism and voluntarism, parliamentarism and revolutionism, that is, through the slogan 'God should be killed', inevitably ends at the end of European culture, because 'Humanism inevitably turns into atheism, goes through anarchism and ends in nihilism. If someone is an atheist today, you should know, if he is consistent, tomorrow he will be an anarchist, and the day after tomorrow a nihilist. And if anyone is a nihilist, know that he came to it from humanism through atheism.' (...) Having in mind the situation in which our nation gradually found itself after 1789, and especially in the last half century, we firmly stand on the position that all the troubles of modern society originate from the anthropocentric individualistic principle which took the human individual as the ultimate measure of all values, forgetting its relationship with God, the Universe, the nation and the family, forgetting that without the family and the nation the individual could not survive, and losing sight of the fact that only placed in the right relationship

with God - the individual can be understood. That is why the individualistic principle in the 20th century, as a consequence of the three greatest phantoms of European civilization: Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx, gave birth to democracy, capitalism, Marxism, Bolshevism, materialism and atheism, whose disastrous consequences are felt by the Serbian people on the threshold of the third millennium" (Subotich, 2000: 11-12). In order not to presume that such an attitude can be attributed only to Orthodox theologians or Serbian conservative political researchers, we have to remind that even, for example, a well known contemporary French writer Michel Thomas (alias Michel Houellebecq) notes that: "(...) without Christianity, European nations have become soulless bodies - zombies". (Houellebecq, 2015: 226).

Dr. Miroslav Spaljokovich also warned, not without zeal, about the above when he noted: "Only the morally strong and spiritually vital nations will be able to survive in the terrible struggle of the present. If their national consciousness is filled with faith in the indomitability of their spiritual energy, then all material tribulations and crises will be only a temporary temptation for them. Degenerate nations are doomed. Their political psychology, based on unhealthy doctrines and false social sophistry and not on healthy affirmations of the people's being and the natural instinct of self-preservation, classifies them as sick nations, as nations without roots, as human groups without a spiritual homeland. There are certain laws of life that no human society can violate without stumbling. The life of a shaky social community easily turns into a mechanical process of atomic decay" (Spaljokovich, 2003: 93). It is not without significance to mention that Dr. Spaljokovich was a French student and that he ended his rich diplomatic career, as an ambassador of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in France. Although, he is best known as the last envoy of the Kingdom of Serbia in the Russian Empire, who was the only foreign diplomatic representative who literally spat in Lenin's face and called him a bandit and a traitor to Slavdom. Furthermore, Dr. Spaljokovich concludes and warns: "European culture originated from

the ancient Hellenic-Latin civilization, crowned and perfected by Christian ethics. Only on these foundations can it continue to develop universally and spread victoriously. Without it, the life of Europe loses its highest meaning and is doomed to blind obedience to the fatal laws of material civilization" (*ibid.*) Or, as His Grace the Right Reverend Bishop of Budimlje and Nikshich k.k. Joanikije (Michovich) states: "We believe that if the European Union wants to transcend the narrow concept of a pragmatic community of interests of economically rich countries and become a community of spiritual values and achievements, it must also remain aware of its Christian heritage" (Michovich, 2009: 327).

Another one of our prominent intellectuals, but also a French student and later a professor at the universities of Belgrade, Paris and Bordeaux, the late Prof. Dr. Dragan Nedeljkovich, reasoned in a similar fashion: "It is a banal truth, and banal truths are the greatest truths, that the foundations of European civilization are Greco-Roman and Jewish-Christian; that European culture has two wings, both Christian, western and eastern. The east wing is no less European. (...) Indeed, we have fatally slipped off the rails of the European civilization: the moment we began to renounce our own, and that is the tragic consequence of the plague we have survived. But even those who imagine that they are the true representatives of the European civilization are constantly confirming themselves as its traitors: because the Christian spirit cannot reside under the same roof with the demon of low material interests, which embodies modern capitalism; the humanistic spirit cannot go hand in hand with the gendarme despotism of the new world order; democracy, as a European heritage, and human rights, as the pride of European civilization, are today compromised values, colorful lies for the naive. All the values of European civilization are in crisis, which terribly complicates our position in the family of European nations and states" (Nedeljkovich, 1995: 59-60). From what has been said above, we could draw the conclusion that the contemporary European Union is, in fact, an entity that builds its

identity upon ignoring or even on the negation of its own Christian heritage and legacy. In that sense, we believe that the position expressed in the famous *Paris Statement* from May 2017 is rather interesting and important. (Dougherty, 2017; Schall, 2017; Keqin, 2017; Warner, 2017) Among other things, this document claims that: "The culture of rejection deprives the next generation of a sense of identity" (Beneton et al., 2017: 16), which testifies that there, indeed, are quite a few of people within the European intellectual circles who are fully aware of the serious nature of this problem.

The identity issue in the European Union is one of the most important today, not only for religious, cultural or purely sentimental and emotional motives, but also for its purely sociological and political implications, such as the impossibility of forming a credible, stable and consistent common foreign and defense policy (Djurkovich, 2015: 10-11, 62-63) or the policy regarding human rights etc. Prof. Dr. Loukas Tsoukalis, also, deals with this matter. We believe that his views on this issue should not be lost sight of, since he is a professor of European integration at the University of Athens, president of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy and former special adviser to the President of the European Commission. Tsoukalis believes that "(^) a common security policy, which implies a clear commitment to sacrifice national soldiers for the common good, presupposes a true common foreign policy which is difficult to devise without a much clearer European identity than it is now and which is likely to be in foreseeable future" (Tsoukalis, 2012: 18).

Thus, the problem we are talking about here produces very specific problems, which, ultimately, can lead to serious consequences in the field of international politics and global economics, and jeopardize the very survival of the pan-European political project. The fact is that the European Union does not have a consensus and a common position on some other political issues, so the question arises whether we can actually talk about one Europe or about multiple *Europes*. For example, a couple of

such political issues are the problems of: physician-assisted suicide, abortion, surrogate motherhood, the so called same-sex marriage, as well as their claim to be allowed to adopt children etc. (Djurkovich, 2015: 16-19, 241-260). Undoubtedly, these issues primarily encroach on the fields of ethics, politics and legislation, but it is also an issue that has a strong religious and sociological component (Chovich, 2015: 414).

Indeed, these are some of the open European issues, which places our topic in the domain of sociology, as much as in the domain of the politology of religion. To illustrate our point of view, we could, for example, recall the hot political topic of legalizing abortion in Northern Ireland, which was deeply imbued with religious content, even though it was primarily a political, medical and sociological issue (Kelly, 2016; Bloomer, Pierson, 2016; Farrell, 2017). As for the domain of foreign policy, it seems to us that, in this sense, the most obvious example is one of the long-standing issues of the possibility of Turkey's accession to the European Union. Namely, it is obvious that this is not just a political matter of the enlargement of the European Union, because it is equally obvious that it is not deprived of a religious connotation (Djurkovich, 2015: 41-42). And, finally, regarding the political and economic crisis as a consequence of the weakening and strengthening of religious identity and about modern religious processes in Europe, from the position of politology of religion, the above-mentioned problem is dealt with in several places by Prof. Dr. Miroljub Jevtich, a pioneer of politology of religion in Serbia and in the world (Jevtich, 2009b: 79-90; Jevtich, 2012a: 202-219; Jevtich, 2012b).

However, it seems to us that the impossibility of establishing a common position about the migrant crisis and about the quotas for the reception of illegal migrants is, in fact, a political issue, which most clearly supports our thesis that the lack of a credible religious identity and foundation in the European Union is a cause of the lack of political consensus on some issues of acute importance. The fact is that in that sense, the member countries of the

Visegrad Group, and especially Hungary, are most often recognized as those that, in a way, prevent the formation of a common political position in the European Union (Ivanova, 2016; Mitrovich, 2017; Lopez-Doriga, 2018; Riegert, 2019). Precisely this fact most clearly supports our position that this whole problem is most expediently viewed through the prism of the politology of religion, because we must not forget that Viktor Orban argues his dissent with the agreement on fixed quotas for the distribution of illegal migrants in the European Union, precisely by his perception of the need and desire to protect and preserve the Christian identity of Europe (Brunsden, 2017).

When we consider that the illegal migrants in question come from predominantly Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa (the so-called MENA countries), then it is much clearer why this political issue is treated and viewed from the standpoint of religious identity, as well as from the point of view of security, economy, human rights etc. (Pavlichevich, 2016) Then, the clearly and unequivocally articulated, political position of Viktor Orban is also clearer: "Europe can only be saved if it finds its way back to the source of its true values, to its Christian identity" (MTI, 2019). In accordance with the stated position, it seems logical and expected that the foreign ministers of Hungary and Poland, Peter Szijjarto and Zbigniew Raut, did not fail to point out that *the policies of the two cabinets are "patriotic and based on Christian values, and with a focus on national interests" even though this is often unacceptable to "the international liberal mainstream" continually attacking the two countries*" (MTI, 2020).

However, it would be wrong to assume that similar tendencies are present only among the political actors from the Visegrad Group, since this phenomenon is also visible among some of the prominent political thinkers from the founding countries of the European Union. Especially from the ranks of the conservatives and the so-called sovereignists, who recognize and underline the *role of the Christian religion in creating a European identity*, each from its

own ideological and political perspective (Giubilei, 2019: 55). Regardless, we believe that it is unnecessary to argue and further elaborate what kind of a reception such an attitude has encountered in some other influential political circles of the European Union, but we cannot but underline that it is a resounding proof of our thesis on the political relevance of religion in modern Europe, which is also noticed and dealt with by some of the scholars from the field of sociology of religion (Blagojevich, 2015: 13). It is also interesting that such a fear for the Christian identity of Europe is articulated and politically exploited regardless of whether certain political actors do make a clear distinction between Islam and Islamism, as *extreme Muslim fundamentalism that represents a rising anti-Western ideology*. [Muravchik, 2004: 178] Even when a clear distinction is made between Islam, as a religion, and Islamism as a political ideology, it is noticeable that this religion also still has a pronounced political potential in Europe. In that sense, the problem of the schism within the Islamic community in Serbia can serve as an example, in which, in addition to Muslim religious leaders in Serbia, both local political actors and those from abroad (mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Turkey) are abundantly involved, in an effort to use the dispute for their own political promotion and for purely political purposes (Radulovich, 2014: 181-184). In closing, we have to underline that our belief is that credibly and validly spiritually based individuals and societies do not perceive other people's different religiosity as an unreasonable threat to their own identity, since they are firmly established and secure in it. In today's Europe, however, that is not the case.

As we have already noticed, many of the representatives of the European intellectual elite of today are treating this problem and contemplating upon this issue, which many have recognized, considered and diagnosed in detail long before they did. Here, first of all, we think of Saint Venerable Justin of Chelije, who said: "Reduce honestly and impartially the balance of the European philosophy, science, politics, culture, civilization, and you will see that they

killed God and the immortality of the soul in European man. But, if you take this tragedy of human history seriously, you will have to see that deicide always ends in suicide. Remember Judas. He first killed God, and then destroyed himself. It is the inevitable law that governs the history of this planet. The building of European culture, built without Christ, must be demolished, demolished very quickly as prophesied by the clairvoyant Dostoevsky 90 years ago, and the sad Gogol 100 years ago^ And the prophecies of Slavic prophets are taking place before our eyes. The European Tower of Babel was built for ten centuries, and a tragic vision fell upon us: look, a huge zero was built!" (Popovich, 1993: 15-16). Also, the spiritual experience of His Grace the Right Reverend Bishop of Ohrid and Zhicha k.k. Dr. Nikolaj (Velimirovich), i.e. Saint Nikolaj of Ohrid and Zhicha is similar, as he wrote in a similar manner: "The new pagan Europe does not boast of any deity behind it. It brags only about itself, its mind, its wealth, its strength. The inflated bubble is about to burst, to the laughter of Africa and Asia, a ripened ulcer about to burst in order to fill the whole universe with its stench. That is your current anti-Christian Europe, the White Demonia" (Velimirovich, 2000: 93).

We are additionally persuaded in such a vision and conviction by the credible opinion of Prof. Dr. Marcello Pera, philosopher and the former president of the Italian Senate (i.e. the upper house of the Italian Parliament): "What is happening in Europe is apostasy from Christianity, struggle on all fronts, from politics to science, from the law to customs, in which the traditional European religion, the one that baptized it and raised it for centuries, takes on the role of the accused of mistakes that come from threatening the secular state, difficulties, social coexistence, aversion to scientific research. The result is complex and tells us that in a Europe without God, Europeans live without an identity" (Pera, 2010: 25).

Let us once again go back to the opinion of the abovementioned important Italian philosopher and politician to be supported by the words of Saint Justin of Chelije. Namely, they

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not only supplement but also emphasize the importance of the spiritual component of the European identity, which has not only been neglected but also consciously suppressed and marginalized: “The homo europaeicus had to go mad at the end of his culture; The God-killer had to become a suicide. Wille zur Macht turned into Wille zur Nacht. Night, a difficult night fell upon Europe. The idols of Europe are crumbling, and the day is not far off, when not a stone will be left of the European culture, which built cities and destroyed souls, which worshiped the creatures and rejected the Creator_ In love with Europe, the Russian thinker Herzen lived in it for a long time, but at the end of his life, 90 years ago, he wrote: ‘We have studied the worm-eaten organism of Europe for a long time; in all layers, everywhere we have seen the finger of deaths Europe is approaching a terrible cataclysm^ Political revolutions are collapsing under the weight of their impotence; they have done great deeds, but they have not accomplished their task, they have destroyed faith, and they have not attained freedom; they stirred desires in their hearts that they were unable to fulfill I am the first to fade, and I am afraid of the dark night that is coming Goodbye dying world, goodbye Europe!’ ^ The sky is empty, because there is no God in it; the earth is desolate, because there is no immortal soul on it; the European culture turned its slaves into cemeteries. It became a cemetery itself. ‘I want to go to Europe,’ says Dostoevsky, ‘and I know that I’m going to the cemetery’^” (Popovich, 1993: 16-17).

Among many others, Dr. Misha Djurkovich, director and principal research fellow of the Institute of European Studies and the Centre for Conservative Studies in Belgrade, speaks about the acuteness and topicality of this issue, but also highlights another dimension of this problem, which makes it even more urgent and serious from the perspective of European security: “Namely, as one of the main issues in Europe in recent years, emerged the question of identity and integration of non-European ethnic groups that refuse to integrate in accordance with secular liberal-democratic

rules and insist on preserving their own religious identity and traditional customs, which are most often in conflict with European practice” (Djurkovich, 2004: 16). In that sense, it is well noticed and established that *the mentioned socio-cultural trends lead to the weakening of the previously homogeneous European cultural-religious landscape* (Blagojevich, 2015: 51). Certainly, this issue cries out for a solution and a credible response along the lines of recognizing and renewing Europe's spiritual, cultural and civilizational values. If not, Europe will not be able to give a worthy and sustainable response to the question of its own survival.

Conclusions of western scholars, like those of Prof. Dr. John Louis Esposito, professor of Religion and International Affairs and Islamic Studies and founding director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, about the *traumatic* experience of Europe, during the strong penetration of Islam, in the era of Ottoman conquests, [Esposito 1994: 54] seems meaningful and justified to us, because we are witnesses that, in the Europe of today, there is a similar strong feeling, even pronounced anxiety. It is just that the identity (especially religious) of today's Europe is far different in relation to that period, which is not the case with Islamic identity. Many contemporary European thinkers recognize the great danger in this insufficient European identity in its current encounter and relations with Islam, which could be an echo of the mentioned *traumatic* experience and historical memory of the period of Muslim rule in parts of Europe, as well as the real attitude of Muslim conquerors toward the conquered Christian population in certain parts of Europe. The question remains whether such an attitude and caution could still be attributed to the *fanatical bigotry of Christian states*, (*ibid.*) or to a significantly different perception of Islamic rule on European soil, than the one portrayed by Esposito. His insight, with a view from Pennsylvania, Washington or Brooklyn, seems to us to be significantly different from the one that has been created for

centuries, for example, in the Balkans, the Iberian Peninsula or parts of the Caucasus.

The question is if the Europe of the XIV and XIX centuries and the Europe of the XX and XXI centuries are one and the same? Namely, was it equally *fanatically bigoted* back then as it is today? In our opinion, we are observing two completely different identities from a religious point of view. The rising tide of European insecurity in the face of its own impotence and inability to assimilate the rising Islamic masses on its own soil serves to show how urgent and important is the issue of the lack of its own religious identity. In that sense, it is indicative that even excellent European experts on Islam, who profess to be Christians, like Dr. Jurgen Todenhof (a former Christian Democratic Union of Germany member of the Bundestag, a judge, an author and a journalist), openly admit that they *absolutely do not understand* the religious motivation of Islamist terrorists and suicide bombers. (Todenhofer, 2016: 9). On the other hand, he openly admits one of the crucial points which are in the very foundations of European insecurity in the face of Islam: "The image of Islam as an enemy has been etched in the consciousness of the West for hundreds of years" (*ibid.* 23). Possibly, some other Europeans dealing with this issue would not agree with this perception, but they have to recognize and acknowledge it. In such a conviction, we are also confirmed by the position of His Grace the Right Reverend Bishop of Novi Sad and Bachka k.k. Prof. Dr. Irinej (Bulovich), as one of the most eminent hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who, in his view of the topic at hand, testifies to his conviction that "Western Europe is not at all aware of what kind of fire it is playing with" (Bulovich, 2019).

Namely, modern European states could be called Christian only conditionally, while the European Union itself, even, resolutely refused to self-determine itself as Christian, in its own well-known *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* (Rome, 29 October 2004), or at least to refer to its Christian historical origin, heritage or roots. This fact seems interesting to

us from the standpoint of politology of religion, especially when we take into account that the very concepts and political projects of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951-2002) and European Economic Community (1957-1993), as the nucleus and a starting point of a wider European unification, emerged as an idea of some of the well known and most influential European Christian Democrat politicians of the time, who largely were active and devout Roman Catholic believers (Jovanovich, 2019b: 39). This is an indisputable fact, well noticed and treated by numerous scholars in the field of political philosophy, political theory, international relations and other related fields. The important thing is that some of them often link the emergence of such a (geo)political project, despite its prominent secular nature, to the teachings and aspirations of the Roman Catholic Church, placing this issue firmly within the domain of politology of religion (Djurkovich, 2015: 32-33).

It seems to us that, thanks to this fact, such an impressive phenomenon on the European cultural stage, such as the well-known novel *Submission*, by the above-mentioned French writer Michel Houellebecq, has to thank for its popularity. Namely, it is a novel that treats the question of possible future Islamic domination in Europe and which, immediately after its publication, became a real best-seller in France, Germany, Italy and other European countries (Knausgaard, 2015). Here Houellebecq writes: "Atheistic humanism, on which secular 'coexistence' rests, is doomed to rapid collapse, followed by a rapid increase in the percentage of the monotheistic population, which is especially true for the Muslim population - not counting the new immigration, which will only further underline this phenomenon. From the point of view of fighters for European identity, in the beginning it is understood that between Muslims and the rest of the population, sooner or later, a civil war must necessarily break out" (Houellebecq, 2015: 63). Contemplating upon these alarming artistic visions, we can only hope that Houellebecq will not, in the future, experience the ill fate of the greatest Serbian poet, His Eminence The

Most Reverend Metropolitan and Prince Petar II (Petrovich-Njegosh) of Montenegro, and be declared a genocidal and anti-Muslim writer... (Jovanovich, 2019a; Kostich, 2019).

For our subject it could be useful to draw attention to what Marcello Pera says: "A large part of European culture today is so paralyzed because of the idea of a civil war with Islam and because of the memory of religious wars, that it would be ready to do everything - implying also the denial that Europe itself is a civilization and has a religion - just to avoid conflicts or not to show itself as aggressive or closed to 'dialogue'. Unfortunately, this path leads neither to European identity nor to European unification: rather it leads to European surrender, to the loss of all sense that we are Europeans" (Pera, 2010: 98). Pera further remarks: "Europe loves Islam for the same reasons why Islam hates Europe: because of its secularism, relativism, multiculturalism, loss of reputation and feelings of faith. And Europe offers Islam dialogue for the same reason that it is unable and will not talk to itself anymore: and that is the rejection of its own roots. In such conditions, everything turns upside down: understanding of Islam turns to a secret agreement, alliance means consent, addressing means submission, confrontation means surrender. And Islamic integration means occupation from the Islamic side. Europe knows that too, but it is like a patient who surrenders to his illness. That proud and powerful liberal teaching that it has invented is today in the phase of cultural agony, and those powerful liberal regimes that it has created and brought into the world are today going through the lowest stage of their own curve" (*ibid.* 133). Or, as noted by Hadzi Djordje J. Janich: "Western atheism stemmed from the hatred of God. From the spiritual sterility of the Western man. This can be seen from the attempt to export first Europeanism and then Americanism to the East. The result? For now, its al-Qaeda, and in the future, who knows what else" (Janich, 2012: 143).

The layout of contemporary European religious and identity insecurity is thus perfectly depicted and gives us a valid view of

how it influences some of the crucial points from the sphere of security, defense and foreign policy. On the other hand, some other important European thinkers, such as the German political scientist Dr. Thomas Meyer, notice that religion in Europe is experiencing a certain renaissance, which inevitably produces related political and sociological consequences (Meyer, 2009: 71-77).

Conclusions (). The question arises if the modern European secular ideological paradigm is, indeed, irreversible. If so, what are the future consequences of such a rejection of its own religious identity in the sphere of politics, and especially in the domain of the security policy and common foreign policy of the European Union, as a *conditio sine qua non* of its own survival? (Stanovchich, 1999: 76-77). The prospects seem to be rather gloomy because the ruling dogmatic liberal ideology lacks any of the cohesive and spiritual elements, which could be tempting either for the ever-growing Muslim population of Europe (Blagojevich, 2015: 51) or, the ever depopulating, native-European majority, thoroughly alienated from its own Christian legacy and identity.

We are sure that the issue of religious identity and religious affiliation is among the essential ones that can generate crucial political and social (Blagojevich, 2006: 108; Blagojevich, 2016) trends, movements and ideas in Europe. Failure to recognize religion not only as a fundamental feature of certain identities, but also as one of its basic building blocks, prevents us from dealing in a credible way with the problems facing today's Europe and the world. In this sense, we also read and understand the words of Gregory R. Copley, president of the Washington based International Strategic Studies Association and its Centre for the Study of Monarchy, Traditional Governance, and Sovereignty - The Zahedi Centre, who testifies that: "If the nations, within this global crowd in motion, lose their awareness of identity and historical landmarks, they also lose much of their ability to act collectively in the direction of their survival" (Copley, 2008: 87). This fact can be easily detected especially

in European regions such as the Balkans (Kuburich, Kuburich, 2006; Subotich, 2018; Pavlovich, 2019: 34-37). We are convinced that such potency of religion in the political sense is not exclusively a question of long past times (Grujich, 2020), but also of current political and geopolitical issues (Cucchi, 2005: 7-16), which is why the failure to seriously deal with this problem, from the position of the politology of religion seems an unforgivable mistake and irreparable omission. In that sense, the issuing of a special political Declaration by a group of members of the European Parliament from the European Christian Political Movement, June 30 2020, ("Declaration on the New Law in Montenegro Regarding Religious Minorities", 2020) dealing with the issue of religious freedoms and rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro (Jovanovich, 2020b: 42-43), could serve as one of the indicative examples in support of our conclusions.

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Hadzi Nenad M. Jovanovich, Deacon, PhD Student of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, Director, Centre for Research of Orthodox Monarchism.

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