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Jacques Delors, the Single Market and the Failed  
Attempt to Give *a Soul to Europe*

Michał Matlak

In memory of Professor Willfried Spohn (1944 – 2012)

European University Institute

**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**

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Give a *Soul to Europe***

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## **Abstract**

This working paper is concerned with the informal institutionalization of contacts between European institutions and religious organizations launched by Jacques Delors and its aftermath: the formal institutionalization of these contacts started by Jose Manuel Barroso. It was with Jacques Delors that the relationship between religion and the European project gained in importance. As president of the European Commission he recognised the social role of European religions by inviting them to the project “A Soul for Europe”, which aimed to find a more robust source of legitimacy for the European project. Subsequently, I describe the incorporation of Art. 17 in to the Lisbon Treaty obliging dialogue with churches, religious and philosophical organizations, which is in my opinion a direct aftermath of the “Soul for Europe”. It is my argument in this paper that the “religious” project of Jacques Delors in many respects failed, as he did not find a meaningful role for religion in European integration in the way he was hoping for, nor did he find the robust source of legitimacy for the European project.

## **Keywords**

Religion, secularism, Christianity, European integration, Jacques Delors



*If in the next ten years we haven't managed to give a soul to Europe,  
to give it spirituality and meaning, the game will be up.*

Jacques Delors<sup>1</sup>

We can identify two approaches to institutionalization of the relationship between religion and politics in the European Union. The first can be understood as a series of formal and informal contacts between churches and the European Commission concentrating on what could be of mutual interest: fighting poverty, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the future of EU enlargement. The other approach is linked to the constitutionalization of Europe, which is more about setting the limits of the Community by asserting “who we are” and “what holds us together”. In this paper I will concentrate on the first assertion.

The protagonist of this paper is Jacques Delors - a politician who has arguably had the most significant impact on the European Union as we know it. It was he who drove the launch of the Single Market, the single currency project and the cohesion policies, to name only a few fundamental enterprises in today's EU. Jacques Delors also personifies different strands present at the heart of the history of European integration – a follower of French personalists, a socialist, a practicing Catholic and a defender of French *laïcité*. These make him a complex personality who contains all that is important to understand the EU in terms of its willingness (and failure) to engage with religious matters. What is crucial about Delors is the fact that he was the only politician of the European Communities who meaningfully posed a question on the role of religion in the European project and tried to give an answer to this question.

In this paper I will firstly sketch briefly the biography of Jacques Delors, as this might help us understand his political positions in the fundamental periods of European integration. Then, I will concentrate on the “Soul for Europe” project – one of the very few EU initiatives dealing with religion. Subsequently, I will briefly describe the incorporation of Art. 17 into the Lisbon Treaty obliging dialogue with churches, religious and philosophical organizations, which is in my opinion a direct aftermath of the “Soul for Europe”.

It is my argument in this paper that the “religious” project of Jacques Delors in many respects failed. Certainly, Delors did not find a meaningful role for religion in European integration in the way he was hoping for. The project did, however, bring a concrete result – the practice of consultation between religious leaders and the EU leaders which was formalized as the Art. 17 of the Lisbon Treaty. Thus, Delors is the European politician who had the most significant impact on the emergence of the European agnostic form of secularism.

### **Christian democrat in disguise**

Jacques Delors is perhaps the most paradoxical personality in the history of European integration: a Catholic defending *laïcité*, a leftist who perpetuated the most free-market oriented period of European integration, a life-long member of the socialist party who has been closer to the ideology of Christian-democracy than most life-long Christian democrats.

He was raised in a rather poor Catholic family, as he puts it: “I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth.” As one of the members of his cabinet told me, he was “a guy from a humble background

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<sup>1</sup> ‘President Delors and the Churches’, Newsletter of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society, Brussels no. 2, 2 May 1992, cited in: (Leustean 2012, p.4)

who does everything to be better than the products of French *grands écoles*.<sup>2</sup> He is known as a person who is "driven", "knows every dossier he is working on in great detail", and also a person who was not easy to work with – "after a stressful meeting, he often used to kick the cat."<sup>3</sup>

An important inspiration for his engagement in Europe was the encounter with personalists linked to "Esprit" – the magazine in which he first became familiar with Maritain and Mounier, the key French personalist thinkers:

I didn't meet either of them, but I used to be around Esprit magazine, including writing articles as early as the 1950s, and communitarian personalism is still my line (Delors & Deschamps 2009, p.4).

He has rather a developed view on what personalism is:

[I]t is time to go back to our ideal, to be fully conscious of it, through each of our actions in the field of politics, economics, social and cultural affairs, let us continue to investigate what can enable each man, each woman to flourish, in full awareness not only of his or her rights, but also of their duties vis-à-vis others and society as a whole. Let us strive to constantly re-establish human collectivities in which the individual is able to live and develop, and to grow through exchanges and cooperation with others (Delors 1989).

His devotion to the idea of Europe was strongly linked with his engagement with personalism and with Jacques Maritain's thought, as well as being influenced by the French "founding father" of the European project, Robert Schuman:

Yes, I had read up on all that in my spare time. I'd read it all and it had made a great impression on me, especially Maritain (...). It was always my underlying inspiration, so to speak. So, over and above events which I wasn't always capable of evaluating properly, I wasn't in a position of responsibility, but I was perfectly sensitive to it, and especially from the European point of view, to Maritain (...). I have to say that that was the moment when I realized that Robert Schuman's appeal — excuse me for saying this, people will say it's Christian — was of a high spiritual value. Not just political but spiritual. And that was the day when I said: 'There you are, your path is mapped out' (...). I think there is a link between that and my commitment to Europe (Delors & Deschamps 2009, p.3).

He started his political activities as a member of Christian democratic *Mouvement Republicain Populaire*, but according to Jérôme Vignon, he quickly became disenchanted with the party and became an activist within Christian democratic worker's unions (which later got secularized). Much later, in 1974, he joined the socialist party, a natural move given Delors long-standing sense that he was a person of the left:

[Étienne Deschamps] *And how were you able to put this communitarian personalism into practice in the active political life you then embarked on?*

[Jacques Delors] The Left. There's this saying by a Swiss writer that 'Nature is on the right, man is on the Left'. That's all. I think that believing in man means being on the Left. After that you can then start defining it in different ways. There are people in the present majority who think like me. But that's it, that's my point of view, I believe in man with my eyes open (Delors & Deschamps 2009, p.4).

There are different opinions on how Delors' religiosity translated into political action. People who worked with him were convinced that religiosity played a significant role in his political life:

You didn't have to work long with Delors to discover that he was a devoted Christian. He was not a doctrinaire Christian, though.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with David White, 20.09.2016, Brussels.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with David White, 20.09.2016, Brussels.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with David White, 20.09.2016, Brussels.

According to one of his advisors, he even went to see the nuncio of Belgium and asked him what could be done for Europe from the Catholic point of view. The nuncio suggested Delors to start a network of prayers in the Benedictine monasteries.<sup>5</sup> And indeed he did so – the network is called Groupe Chevetogne (the name comes from the monastery close to Namur in Belgium).<sup>6</sup> This movement was a clear reference to the monastic history of Europe - one of the fundaments of European culture, especially in the Middle Ages. It is rather surprising that a French socialist engaged so openly in an initiative like this and also shows that the dividing lines between Christianity and the European project are more blurred than one might suppose.

## **Delors and the Pope: Mutual disappointment**

Delors' religiosity did not lead to his close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. He was often at odds with those Christians (especially Catholics) who required religious visibility. This is probably the reason why his relationship with Pope John Paul II was rather a difficult one. They met for the first time in May 1985, and, as Jérôme Vignon recalls it, both were very much disappointed after the meeting. Delors probably wanted more support for his big European endeavours; John Paul II expected a clearer, more explicit reference in the European project to its Christian roots.

Delors was upset that the Pope did not see his efforts to change the fate of the continent and thought of the project as of economic nature. As he later said:

[L]e Vatican considère la construction européenne comme un phénomène purement matérialiste et économiciste. Le Vatican n'est-il pas conscient qu'au sein des responsables européens certains luttent pour essayer de préserver, contre vents et marées, une dimension sociale à l'économie, ainsi qu'une dimension sociale à l'économie, ainsi qu'une dimension éthique, voire spirituelle?<sup>7</sup>

Differences between the Pope and President Delors were significant. They inherited very different visions of the bond between Catholicism and identity. For the Pope, Catholicism was the primary identity marker – a defining feature for the political reality, even if he endorsed the post-Vaticanum II notion of the separation between church and state. One of the reasons for such a clear position was, among others, the communist idea of the atheist state, which John Paul II experienced in Poland.

Delors, who grew up in France, was strongly influenced by the heritage of 1905 law and the general consensus on the strict separation between Church and state (the French Catholic Church came to terms with the separation only after the decades of culture wars). Also, his experience was marked by the failure of the Catholic Church in France in the time of General Petain, which according to David White was an experience that influenced his vision of the relationship between religion and politics. This fascist experience was also crucial for the flourishing of left-wing personalism after World War II in France<sup>8</sup> that was so close to Delors' heart. Personalism was also well known to John Paul II, who as a young priest visited Paris in late 1940s and presumably had contacts with personalists. Yet, by the 1980s his position on the public role of Christianity was in many respects different than the one represented by the inheritors of French personalist tradition (especially those on the left).

It is not surprising that Delors and John Paul II took very different stances in the constitutional debate. John Paul II was very much in favour of the symbolic presence of Christianity in the

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with John O'Loughlin, 22.03.2016, via Skype.

<sup>6</sup> More information can be found here: <https://paradis-paris.com/groupe-de-chevetogne/> and here: <http://www.bistum-eichstaett.de/ru/bischof/bischofsweihe/presstexte-der-bischoeflichen-pressestelle/pde-text-vom-14102006/>

<sup>7</sup> Note to the president of the EC by Marc Luycx from 30.03.1994: (Massignon 2007, p.142)

<sup>8</sup> Although the relationship of personalists with the Petain regime was rather ambiguous as Jan-Werner Mueller argues (Mueller 2011, p.138).

Constitution, while for Delors it was a second range issue. He was more interested in the dialogue between Commission and churches on the most important issues from his perspective: the fight against poverty, the enlargement of the EC, the question of unemployment. He did not see Christianity as an identity marker of Europe.

It is remarkable that Delors was a proponent of Turkish membership in the EU. As Bérengère Massignon demonstrates, this was in line with his understanding of what Europe should be:

L'argumentaire proposé par Jacques Delors en faveur de l'entrée de la Turquie se rattache aussi au modèle de l'identité contrat, avec le souhait de rattacher le projet européen à des valeurs universelles, mais tirées de l'expérience de la construction communautaire (...). L'âme de l'Europe, c'est son projet qui trouve justement ses racines dans la volonté de dépasser les conflits de passe. Pour Jacques Delors, l'Union reste une communauté de valeurs (non spécifiquement européennes certes), mais pourtant au cœur du projet européen depuis les Pères fondateurs, comme la paix, la démocratie... L'Union, alors, pourrait être un modèle de diffusion des valeurs démocratiques et de droits de l'homme (Massignon 2007, p.282).

It would be interesting to compare the personalism of founding fathers (like Alcide de Gasperi or Robert Schuman) with its more contemporary versions. One thing seems to be clear: the personalists of the 1940s and 1950s did not see the need to make out of Christianity “an identity marker”, because the European imaginary was still very much Christian. The fact that contemporary personalists like Delors or Van Rompuy (van Rompuy 2009) are rather far from seeing Christianity as a distinctive trait of the European project has different meaning in Europe which is largely a post-Christian entity. The second difference concerns the attitude towards liberalism: today's personalists are much less anti-liberal, which would be unthinkable for thinkers like Emmanuel Mounier. To Mounier, liberalism was perhaps worse than fascism. As Tony Judt put it: “fascism might be the immediate threat, but liberalism was the true enemy” (Judt 1992, p. 17).

### **The intensification of integration**

Delors became president of the European Commission in 1985. This was a time when the political will to further liberalize trade arrangements between members of the European Communities and remove barriers to the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital, and labour between member countries was at its high point. In 1985, Delors found a Community in the split between the advanced constitutional federal order and an intergovernmental political order. The constitutional legal order of the Communities was the result of two decades of “integration through law” which almost unnoticeably changed the legal order of the continent by strengthening the legal basis of the communities, above all through the doctrine of direct effect and the supremacy of European over national law. Legal federalization was not, however, accompanied by a political one, as the Luxembourg Accord was still in place. This left each Member State with veto power over Community legislation affecting “its vital interest”; in practice, this meant a general right of veto for every Member State (Weiler 2001).

After the first enlargements, consensual decision making became more and more difficult to achieve. Therefore, there was an idea to switch to Quantified Majority Voting in issues concerning the single market. This was adopted by the states as a minor revision of the Treaty of Rome. Most heads of state thought that it is just a simple change that would not change the community's equilibrium and sold it to the public in their countries as such. However, it became clear that after the adoption of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1985, the European Communities were moving on to a track of faster integration.

There is little doubt that much of this was due to Delors and his personality. He managed to bring Europe on the path of intense political and economic integration<sup>9</sup> for the first time since the 1960s. The SEA marked the beginning of his mandate. He used the pro-European momentum to intensify the efforts to create a more integrated Europe in both political and economic terms. In the 1992 White Paper he outlined a path towards a completion of the internal market, proposing simple legislative steps to achieve this goal. This supposed ideological "neutrality" marked most of revolutionary steps that the Delors Commission proposed. The same can be said about the Economic and Monetary Union (Delors programme) and the political union.

There was another aspect to Delors economic and political reforms – the project of a social Europe. It was Delors who pushed for social legislation on the European level, trying to strengthen the position of workers in the Member States. He wanted thus to include workers in the growth produced by the expansion of the Single Market. This was also rationale behind his other achievement, the development of structural funds that were designed to finance the underdeveloped members of the Community and compensate their weaker performance in the single market. The deployment of structural funds played a big role also after the subsequent enlargements and might be seen as one of the most significant examples of the manifestation of European solidarity.

The 1992 programme resulted in a new treaty – the Treaty of Maastricht – which followed the impetus given by less spectacular SEA. The Maastricht Treaty established the European Union in place of the European Communities (a step which will be discussed in detail below), the establishment of the European Monetary Union (leading to the European single currency), the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and strengthening of the role of the Parliament. Maastricht moved Europe towards a centralized political and economic federation.

Delors' vision of Europe differed from the one that he managed to achieve. One of the most significant failures was arguably his vision of "social Europe" which would balance the "single market Europe" that he successfully brought about. He managed, however, to bring about the political union which was incorporated into the treaties. The problem is that the political union proved to be incapable of creating a bond between the European institutions and European citizens. Political federalization of Europe lacked popular support, and the ambiguity of European societies has thus appeared as a constant theme in European integration in the last twenty-five years.

## **Union or Community?**

Perhaps the most significant symbolic change which happened during the presidency of Delors was the change of the name of the polity-in-the-making. Instead of the European Communities, it became the European Union. According to the member of his cabinet, this went against Jacques Delors and his insistence on the "community method", instead of the "intergovernmental method" (which was symbolized by the Union and the need for unanimity):

Most heads of state and government who participated in the Intergovernmental Conference that took place in 1991–92 was against extending the "community approach", the third and second pillar. On that point Delors had lost because he was in favour of such an extension. It was finally decided that for matters relevant to foreign and security policy, the decision process should be framed with the intergovernmental procedure. Therefore, the Maastricht Treaty clearly signalled that a new political entity was born out of the combination of three pillars, but only the first under "community method", should no longer be called a Community. Delors not only disliked the word "union", but this word illustrates an option against his own preference.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> With a significant exception of legal integration, as Joseph H.H. Weiler argues in the "Transformation of Europe" (Weiler 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jérôme Vignon, 23.12.2016, via Skype.

This strong dislike shows a certain division within Delors: he understood the importance of "community", he emphasised the social aspects, he was attached to subsidiarity,<sup>11</sup> but at the same time he created a market-oriented, centralized polity which seemed to go in the direction of a super-state. Maybe because of this duality, Delors wanted to pursue a new project that would involve churches in his work. Maybe this is why he thought that there is a need to give this project a soul, because – as he famously said – “you cannot fall in love with the Single Market”.

## Soul for Europe

Delors thought that the European Union cannot be based solely on market and supranational bureaucracy. This is why he started to meet regularly with the representatives of Christian churches, seeking their support in the transforming Europe:

We are in effect at a crossroads in the history of European construction. 1992 is a turning point (...). The Maastricht summit marked the end of the economic phase of European construction – what has been described as the ‘semi-automatic’ development of the EC, based on drive towards the Common Market (...). Believe me, we won’t succeed with Europe solely on the basis of legal expertise or economic know-how. It is impossible to put the potential of Maastricht into practice without a breath of air. If the next ten years we haven’t managed to give a soul to Europe, to give it spirituality and meaning, the game will be up. This is why I want to revive the intellectual and spiritual debate on Europe. I invite churches to participate actively in it. The debate must be free and open. We don’t want to control it; it is a democratic discussion, not to be monopolized by technocrats. I would like to create a meeting place, a space for free discussion open to men and women of spirituality, to believers and non-believers, scientists and artists (Leustean 2012, p.4).

The meeting was one of a series of meetings with religious leaders organized under the name of “A Soul for Europe” and coordinated by the Forward Studies Unit in the European Commission (directly reporting to the president) and managed by two people: Marc Luycx and Jérôme Vignon.

The project consisted of numerous meetings between the president of the Commission and religious leaders (Catholic and Protestant, above all – though Delors did not want to close it off to other religions). At times Delors wanted to discuss with them the current shape of the European Communities, but usually they were devoted to important social problems, such as unemployment, agriculture, migration, the problem enlargement and deepening of the EU. It seems clear that the idea was to discuss the issues important from the perspective of European institutions, not the other way around.

These meetings were continued by Delors’ successor, Jacques Santer, but were in fact blocked by the socialist president of the European Commission Romano Prodi. Nevertheless, dialogue with churches remained institutionally linked with the Forward Studies Unit (changed then to Bureau of European Policy Advisors, now it is the European Political Strategy Centre).

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<sup>11</sup> “Another guiding principle of the Maastricht Treaty is the principle of subsidiarity, whereby – to put it briefly – a higher level of power must be empowered to deal only with those matters which are better dealt with at that level, let’s say (...). I think the Protestants said it before the Catholics, to be historically accurate. I did a great deal of work on it. And secondly, a personalist like me can only be in favour of the principle of subsidiarity. So, I realised at a particular time that the wind, after the Danish referendum result against the Treaty, I realised – and then a UK Presidency – that there had to be (...) so I proposed repealing a dozen or so directives. And among the ones I did (...) it’s very typical of the contradictions you find in the European countries, there was one about the transporting of swine or pigs. It said that each pig should have its own place in the vehicle, and that it must also be able to look at another pig so that it wouldn’t be mentally or psychologically disturbed. The text had been adopted in 1979, I’d had nothing to do with it. I asked for it to be repealed. Kohl burst out laughing, but the British, who were keen on animal protection, took another line altogether. So, I’d put my finger on where it hurt. And as a result, subsidiarity – ‘Yes’, I even told you a moment ago that I supported the approach taken by the Lisbon Treaty, but the governments also had to find a way out of their contradictions.” (Delors & Deschamps 2009)

It is not a coincidence that Delors decided to name this project like he did. He spoke of the European soul on several occasions. The idea of soul is clearly linked with the European philosophical and spiritual tradition. It was "invented" in ancient Greece – the concept of soul can be found in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophic systems and was then transferred to Judaic and then Christian theology – where it constituted a basic feature of the human person and the main source of its dignity. The soul has a place in the history of European culture and Delors was well aware of that. He was also aware that there is a need to create a bond between the European societies and the European institutions – he thought that churches should play a prime role in this endeavour – at least regarding some groups of European societies.

Did he succeed? It would be very difficult to find arguments for such a thesis. The European project did not become less technocratic and the regular contact with churches did not change the economic character of the European Union. There is, however, one lasting element of the Delorsian dialogue with churches: the institutionalization of dialogue between churches and European institutions.

## **The Churches Article**

Paradoxically, Jacques Delors was against the institutionalization of dialogue with churches (as an heir to French *laïcité* he favoured less official form of contacts between religion and politics), but the presidents of the European Commission who followed him did institutionalize the dialogue. The formal step was taken by Jose Manuel Barroso in 2005, when he started to organize regular meetings with the churches and humanist organizations. The article was transferred (as large parts of the TCE) to the Lisbon Treaty which was signed by the EU member states on 13 December 2007, and entered into force on 1 December 2009. Thus, Delors set in motion a logic which led to the institutionalization of the dialogue.

The authors of the Treaty thus decided to incorporate a special article obliging European institutions to conduct a dialogue with the churches and non-religious organizations:

- 1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.*
- 2. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical<sup>12</sup> and non-confessional organizations.*
- 3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organizations.*

The first format of these contacts established by Barroso is the annual formal high-level meeting event with representatives of different religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism), which is devoted each time to a different topic: terrorism, fundamental rights, climate change, economic crisis, poverty (often linked with the "European Year of" various things). There is one high-level meeting with the representatives of churches and one with the non-confessional leaders. The EU is represented by the president of the European Commission (now it's first vice-president Timmermans), the president of the European Council and the president of the European Parliament. The second format is a dialogue seminar organized by churches and religious organizations mostly on the issues where the Commission has competences (for detailed data see (Houston 2013)).

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<sup>12</sup> The category of philosophical organisation is a part of a French and Belgian legal and cultural landscape, inspired by the tradition of Enlightenment, fighting against the involvement of the churches in politics, sometimes linked to free-masonry. In Belgium, humanist organisations are seen as a part of religious landscape. One of the interesting and paradoxical examples of this approach are the humanist chaplains in the army.

The meetings and all the other forms of dialogue were organized by a special work force in the European Commission which used to be called the Forward Studies Unit (founded by Jacques Delors), then Group of Policy Advisors (GOPA), then Bureau of European Policy Advisors (then BEPA). All these units were responsible directly under the president of the European Commission. Under president Jean-Claude Juncker, however, this has changed. The dialogue with religious and philosophical organizations is now a competence of the first vice-president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, and is located in the DG Justice, which changes a bit the importance of the question of dialogue.

The dialogue since Jose Manuel Barroso has been run by Katharina von Schnurbein<sup>13</sup>. Although the level of the officials responsible is high, one cannot avoid the impression that the salience of the dialogue for the European Commission is not very high. Also, the format of the annual high-level meetings seems to be problematic from the perspective of both sides. On the one hand, the Commission has difficulties in finding representative partners (apart from the Catholic Church, which has a clear hierarchy). Therefore, some representatives of, for example, Muslim or Protestant communities seem to be chosen randomly. On the other hand, the insights from the meetings do not seem to be meaningful. As one of their participants told me, “you can write the press release before the meeting”.



Pope Francis meeting the representatives of COMECE (17.05.2017). Source: [www.comece.eu](http://www.comece.eu)

The issue of representativeness is, as mentioned, not a problem only with regard to Catholicism. The church is represented by the nuncio (diplomatic representative of the Vatican) and COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences), the equivalent of the Council of the European Union at the church level. As for “high politics”, it is obviously the competence of the popes and Vatican's secretaries of state, and contacts between the leaders of the EU and popes are regular.

It is already a much bigger problem regarding the Protestant and Orthodox churches. They are represented in Brussels by the CEC (Conference of European Churches), an organization established in 1959 (with a secretariat since 1967) that brings together various Protestant and Orthodox churches (the idea to bring the Orthodox churches came about to bring together churches from both sides of the iron curtain). However, this produces difficulties in coming to a single opinion within the CEC, as the

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<sup>13</sup> In 2017 Katharina von Schnurbein was replaced by Vincent Depaigne

position of Protestant churches (which is far from united itself) is often very different from the position of the Orthodox churches, especially regarding sexual morality.

Another problematic issue regarding the dialogue is the question of the balance between religious and non-religious organizations. While it is more or less clear who is represented by the representation of churches (i.e. the members of their churches), it is not entirely clear who is represented by the non-religious organizations. As Katharina von Schnurbein notes it, these organizations often claim to represent the majorities in many European states who are not practicing any religion (or simply do not believe in God). It is, however, of course very difficult as the “humanist organizations” are most often linked with the tradition of masonry, which is a very specific form of non-belief. The question of how to engage with philosophical beliefs of non-believers seems still in need to be answered.<sup>14</sup>

Despite criticisms, Jose Manuel Barroso reported being happy with the results Art. 17 brought about:

It's a good exercise. Dialogue with various churches, but also those who have no religion. Some people ask me what is the concrete result of these meetings? Look, the very fact that we have this dialogue – this in itself is very important. I absolutely don't agree with European extreme secularists. Religion is a part of our societies, politics should not try to eradicate it. The political institutions should be secular of course, but they should have intelligence and openness to recognize the importance of religion. Radical secularists are so similar to the dogmatism of some religions that they criticize. They create a kind of a church of secularism. This leads us to an issue of identity. Identities in the contemporary Europe cannot be understood in an exclusive way – because then we're doomed to unresolvable conflicts.<sup>15</sup>

This excerpt from my interview with Jose Manuel Barroso might serve as a good exemplification of the state of minds of Brussels elites with regard to religion – most of them sincerely believe in the need of dialogue with religious organizations and genuinely reject the strict ideological secularism. They, however, do not look for religious insights, but rather believe in the need to accommodate certain forms of religiosity in the European public sphere.

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<sup>14</sup> There is an impression that the Christian churches benefit from the dialogue much more than “philosophical organizations”. This discrepancy was criticized by the European Ombudsman, who issued a decision criticizing the European Commission in the case submitted by the European Humanist Federation. The federation complained about the refusal of the European Commission to organize a dialogue seminar on issue of religious tax exemptions. The Ombudsman suggested that it “constitutes an instance of maladministration” (European Ombudsman 2013). It is thus not surprising that article 17 is “a reason for concern” for the humanists (Pollock 2013, p.122).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Jose Manuel Barroso, 29.04.2016, Princeton.

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