
Religion and the EU's external policies

Increasing engagement



IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Since 11 September 2001, the European Union has been increasingly confronted by religious crises in a world in which globalisation is reshaping religious demography. In parallel with similar developments in the Member States and the United States, the EU has developed instruments to give greater consideration to religious trends when addressing human rights concerns and engaging key partner countries. Faith-based organisations are playing a pivotal role in a number of new fields, including climate change, development, and conflict resolution, and the EU is taking them increasingly into account. In addition, religion plays an important role in the internal and external policies of some key EU partners, as this study shows in annexes. That is why this field is slowly emerging as a new dimension in the EU's external policies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Nevertheless, Europe has had major religious conflicts to face since 11 September 2001 and the *Jyllands-Posten* Prophet cartoons controversy in 2005. Under the Lisbon Treaty, mechanisms have been put in place to organise dialogue between the EU institutions and the representatives of confessional and non-confessional organisations in Europe. In 2013, the EU published guidelines to mainstream its approach to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and in 2016, Ján Figel' was appointed Special Envoy for FoRB outside the EU.

In the EU Member States and the United States alike, there is a growing interest in improving understanding of and engaging with religious organisations. This interest is key as the number of people for whom religion is an important part of identity is rising worldwide, alongside increasingly uneasy co-existence between followers of different religions, and important shifts in global religious demography.

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

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

In order to engage more religious organisations and defend freedom of religion and belief, the EU is strengthening its capacities in religious literacy. The EU is not alone in this trend. Religion plays an important role in several countries' foreign policies. This study provides an overview of selected cases in annexes (Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States and Ukraine).

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1. Introduction

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

In the 1950s and 1960s, modernisation theory¹ linked technological development and overall economic modernisation with a decrease in religiosity worldwide. Rooted in European and sometimes Marxist sociological theories, it presented the West as an avant-garde soon to be followed by the rest of the world. Today, an overall process sometimes described as desecularisation² tends to show that there is no such link: Europe, together with a global international secularised elite, seems to be the exception rather than the avant-garde.

Worldwide, there is continuous growth in population as well as parallel growth in religiosity (religious people tend to have more children);³ the two countries in which atheism or agnosticism are most likely to progress are France and the United States of America (USA).⁴ In addition, it seems that modernity is not systematically linked to a new and more liberal interpretation of religious dogma: according to Peter Berger, a leading sociologist of religion, religions that have adapted their dogma to modernity have progressed demographically less than religions that have maintained a conservative supra-naturalism stand.⁵ A third element lies in the fact that modernisation is linked more to pluralism than to secularism: religious diversity has increased everywhere, partly because of globalisation. Thus, it appears that there is a strong case for the EU and the West to rethink the place of religious organisations in the 21st century, and the interaction of these organisations with external policies.

European, as well as for instance US, diplomacy tended to neglect these religious trends until the late 1990s, because religion was perceived as an ever-secondary factor in internal and international politics.

1.2. The EU facing religious crises

Since the start of the 2000s, the EU has been obliged to respond to diplomatic crises in which the religious dimension has been key. From the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, presented by Osama bin Laden as an act of religious war, and triggering a response by the United States in Afghanistan and later in Iraq that was perceived in the region as a clash of civilisations, to the Prophet cartoons crisis in Denmark,⁶ which provoked violent reactions from Muslim countries and some violent protests from Muslim populations all over the world, the European Union has been obliged to take the religious factor into account.

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

² Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Eerdmans, 1999.

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

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

⁵ Pew Research Center, [The Changing Global Religious Landscape_2017](#).

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

Before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009, the EU had no legal basis for developing mechanisms for analysis and dialogue with religious organisations. Therefore, the field is still quite new for the EU and its relatively newly established European External Action Service (formed in 2011). The EU did not adopt its first guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief until 2013.⁷

1.3. Evaluating religious factors, engaging religious players and streamlining EU action

The aim of this paper is to examine the place of religious issues in the EU's external action. Over the past two decades, the changing face of world religion has pushed the European institutions to give increasing consideration to religious aspects, be that in a proactive or a reactive way. First, the paper will address the state of the EU's approach to religion in external policies, as well as the wide diversity of European models and Member States' interest in including the religious factor in their foreign policies. Second, the study will discuss some of the EU's priorities and possible synergies with faith-based organisations in the fields of climate change, development policies and conflict resolution, where common interest is visible. Finally, it will compare the EU and US models of dealing with religious issues. In the annexes, it will offer short case studies on religious demography, freedom of religion and the influence of religion on foreign policies for a selected group of EU partners worldwide.

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

2.1. A variety of European models

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

At the regional level too, some arrangements are specific: for example in France, Alsace–Moselle has a special status owing to the fact that the region was German in 1905 when the law on *laïcité* (secularity) was adopted; in Germany, Schleswig-Holstein signed a concordat in 2009.

Therefore, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)⁸ states in its Article 17:

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

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

⁸ [Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), 13 December 2007.

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

In accordance with this article of the Treaty, the European Union endorses the subsidiarity principle when dealing with the various models of relationship between politics and religion in the EU.

2.2. The EU and religion: internal and international aspects

2.2.1. The European Union dialogue with religions and non-confessional organisations⁹

The European Treaties nevertheless provide for legal bases with regard to the EU's dialogue with confessional and non-confessional organisations.

First, the same Article 17 of the TFEU states that:

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

As a result, the European Commission and European Parliament engage in regular dialogue with churches and religious organisations, and also with non-confessional organisations. European institutions regularly meet the representatives of religious organisations and also convene an event with the representatives of non-confessional organisations¹⁰ to discuss EU policies. In the European Parliament, the dialogue under Article 17 is conducted by one of its vice-presidents, who organises meetings, conferences and events in association with confessional and non-confessional organisations. In addition to this dialogue, the European Union defends freedom of religion and belief as a human right. Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union specifies that:

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

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

Moreover, the European Union is bound by international standards of the United Nations and the Council of Europe.¹¹

Therefore, the EU institutions are committed to defending these principles and the Court of Justice of the EU has ruled on these issues in a number of cases, for example on the sensitive issue of bans on wearing a veil at work.¹²

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

¹⁰ Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, [Dialogue of the EU institutions with religious and non-confessional organisations](#), EPRS, European Parliament, June 2017.

¹¹ An indicative list is given in the annex to the Council's [EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), June 2013.

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

2.2.2. *In external action, EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief*

Since 2009, the European Parliament has been instrumental in triggering an interinstitutional debate on the protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in third countries. Many MEPs have been active in organising events and also meetings with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and in promoting the adoption of EU guidelines on FoRB. In 2012, a working group was created in the European Parliament and it successfully advocated guidelines in this field, which were adopted in 2013.¹³ In these guidelines, the Council of the EU recognised that protection of FoRB contributes to 'democracy, rule of law, development, peace and stability'. It also indicated that religious violence or obstacles to freedom of religion were often an early indicator of potential conflict.

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

In this protection, the EU underlines the role played by states in ensuring FoRB for all people under their jurisdiction, including religious minorities, and treating them equally. They should sanction violations of FoRB and prevent hate speech.¹⁴ The EU is against violence and condemns all executions on religious grounds and all calls to violence. It also takes a special interest in the situation of violence against girls and women. It aims to protect freedom of expression, and promotes diversity and the fight against discrimination.

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

2.2.3. *EU mechanisms to implement the guidelines*

In 2008 an informal like-minded group of EU officials and diplomats from the Member States, Norway and Switzerland was set up to discuss the impact of religion and belief in diplomacy. Since 2013, the EEAS has been organising training in religious literacy¹⁵ for EU

¹³ Cornelis (Dennis) de Jong, 'The Role of the European Parliament in Helping to Protect Freedom of Religion or Belief via the EU's External Action', *Freedom of Religion or Belief in Foreign Policy. Which One?*, European University Institute, 2013, and EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, June 2013.

¹⁴ In the case of the EU, this obligation has been reinforced through the European Union, [Framework Decision on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law](#), November 2008.

¹⁵ Religious literacy has been defined as 'the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses', [Harvard University Religious Literacy project](#).

officials.¹⁶ This training has gradually been enlarged to tackle peace, violence, development, and related issues.

The EEAS is part of the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD). The TPNRD was set up in 2015 and gathers diplomats and practitioners with responsibility for religious issues from the United States, Canada, EU Member States and the EEAS; the network meets twice a year. TPNRD's secretariat is based at the Cambridge Institute on Religion and International Studies in the United Kingdom (UK). In addition, and following a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in February 2016, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker created the function of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, as recommended by the European Parliament in a February 2016 resolution;¹⁷ appointing former EU Commissioner Ján Figel' to this role in May 2016.

2.3. Western diplomacies and religion

The EU initiatives mirror the changes at more global level in the past 25 years. Since 1986, the United Nations Human Rights Council appoints a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, following a declaration by the UN General Assembly in 1981 on the 'Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief'.¹⁸ The Special Rapporteur relies on UN member states' cooperation and undertakes fact-finding missions in order to write an annual report to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly.

In the United States, the Clinton administration created the International Religious Freedom Office within the US State Department in 1998.¹⁹ At that time, the place of religion in international affairs was perceived mainly as the promotion of religious freedom, a humanitarian objective disconnected from other policy goals. According to some of the office's former staff, it monitors the situation of persecuted Christians in particular.²⁰ Every year, the IRF drafts a report on religious freedom worldwide to be submitted to the US Congress.²¹ In 2013, the Obama administration created a Religion and Global Affairs (RGA) office, with the idea that US diplomats have to understand better how to engage with religious actors if they are to advance US policy interests.²² These two offices have different goals and objectives, covering two approaches to religion: while the IRF deals with FoRB as a core part of human rights, the RGA promotes the awareness and information of diplomats within the State Department, including a training curriculum in religion and foreign policies.

¹⁶ Michael Barnett, Clifford Bob, Nora Fisher Onar, Anne Jenicher, Michael Leigh and Lucian Leustan, [Faith, Freedom, and Foreign Policy: Challenges for the Transatlantic Community](#), German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2015.

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

¹⁸ [Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#), A/RES/36/55, United Nations, 1981.

¹⁹ Judd Birdsall, 'Keep the Faith: How American Diplomacy Got Religion, and How to Keep It', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2 April 2016, pp. 110–15.

²⁰ Birdsall, 2016.

²¹ [2001 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), US Department of State.

²² Peter Mandaville, [The Case for Engaging Religion in U.S. Diplomacy](#), Brookings, 7 March 2017.

In parallel to the debate in US diplomacy, the World Bank (WB) launched the first informal discussions in the late 1970s on how to analyse the nexus between religion and development; religion was finally acknowledged as an important factor in development policies in 1995.²³ Some EU Member States, such as the United Kingdom, soon afterwards applied the World Bank's approach to their own development policies. In 2005, the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs created a 'knowledge forum for religions and development policies'²⁴ in order to engage religious leaders and faith-based organisations in the discussion of development policies. In 2006, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned a five-year, £3.5 million research programme on religion and development. In 2012, DFID published 'faith partnership principles'²⁵ on its work with faith-based organisations. Even France, a country attached to a strict division of state and religion, upgraded its advisor on religious affairs to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (a position created in 1920) into a department for religion in 2009; although this later disappeared, the interest in religious networks remains strong.²⁶ The same is true of the French defence ministry, which in 2016 started to fund an International Observatory of Religions.²⁷ In 2015, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development published a report on the role of religion in German development policies.²⁸

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

3. Religious organisations as potential partners for EU external action

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

3.1. The changing landscape of world religion

It has been predicted that world population will continue to grow over the coming decades and that growth will occur mainly in regions in which religion is an important part of social and political life. Today, most unaffiliated and atheist people live in Asia

²³ John Rees, [Religion in International Politics and Development](#), Edward Elgar MUA, accessed 8 August 2017.

²⁴ Knowledge [forum](#) for religions and development policies.

²⁵ United Kingdom Ministry of Development, [Faith Partnership Principles](#), Ministry of Development, 2012.

²⁶ Loup Besmond, ['La France reconnaît l'action diplomatique des religions'](#), *La Croix*, 18 June 2017.

²⁷ [Observatoire International Du Religieux | Sciences Po CERJ](#), SciencesPo, 19 October 2016.

²⁸ German ministry of economic cooperation and development, [The Role of Religions in German Development Policies](#), 2015.

(76 % in 2010, 68 % in 2050), especially in China, but their share of world population will decrease from 16 % to 13 % by 2060.²⁹ By 2060, most of the population growth will take place among the Christian community (up to 3.05 billion people; +34 %, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa) and the Muslim community (2.99 billion; +70 %), with Hindus (1.39 billion; +27 %) surpassing the number of unaffiliated/atheist people (1.20 billion; +3%).

Some of these major changes will occur in regions where religious tensions are already high and where social conflicts also have a religious dimension. One example is Sub-Saharan Africa, where the biggest concentration of Christian communities will live (from 26 to 42 % of all Christians worldwide by 2060) but where Islam will also gain millions of new followers (as the percentage of Muslims worldwide will increase from 16 % to 27 % by 2060). At the same time, India, where religious hostilities are already high,³⁰ will become both the first Hindu and the first Muslim country in the world, with the largest Hindu and Muslim communities by 2050.

These trends will play an important role in the crafting of EU foreign action in the future. First, because in an increasingly diverse world, the need for promotion and protection of freedom of religion and belief is key: the possibility to practice or change one's religious orientation freely is more likely to be put into question when the management of religious diversity becomes a challenge. Second, as religion is and will remain an important dimension in the social and political life of the EU's partners worldwide, greater religious literacy and understanding of the connection between religious issues and the EU's priorities is of significant importance.

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

The EU adopted a set of guidelines on FoRB in 2013, and the EEAS applies them in a flexible way in each partner country. For example, in Russia, while the EU delegation's door is open to religious minorities, the EEAS also maintains good contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church as a moral authority to which the Russian leadership and public opinion refer.³¹ In the Central African Republic, the EU delegation maintains a dialogue with religious authorities, because they are key to fostering peace on the ground.³²

Such cooperation is important in fields where religious organisations are particularly active and that are relevant to the implementation of the EU's Global Strategy³³ and the 2030 EU Agenda for sustainable development,³⁴ such as climate change, development and conflict resolution.

²⁹ Pew Research Center, [Least Religious Countries | Atheist Demographics | GRF](#), Pew Research Center, 2017.

³⁰ Pew Research Center, [Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High](#), Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 14 January, 2014.

³¹ François Foret, 'How the European External Action Service Deals with Religion through Religious Freedom', *EU Diplomacy Papers*, College of Europe, 2017.

³² Les leaders religieux du République centrafricaine se réunissent pour promouvoir la paix, [Paris Catholique](#).

³³ A Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union – EU Global Strategy, European Commission, 2016.

³⁴ [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), European Commission, 22 July 2013.

3.2.1. Climate change

Many religious leaders worldwide have recently insisted on the need to protect the environment. Yale University has compiled a wide range of climate change declarations made by international religious leaders:³⁵ Buddhist Dharma teachers worldwide, the Dalai Lama,³⁶ the Roman Catholic Pope in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*,³⁷ the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew³⁸ and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation³⁹ all recognise that climate change is an urgent global challenge. In 2016, the COP 22 Interfaith Climate Statement brought together 33 religious leaders (Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims) in support of the COP 22 summit and calling on all their followers to act individually and collectively to fight climate change.⁴⁰

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

3.2.2. Development policies: from a taboo to a trend

Some of the biggest development and humanitarian NGOs in the world are faith-based. Every year, Caritas Internationalis, which is linked to the Catholic Church, mobilises⁴¹ around US\$5 billion for its work in 162 countries. The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), was created in 1957 by the Aga Khan,⁴² 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. The AKDN's annual budget for non-profit development activities is approximately US\$925 million; and every year, more than 5 million people benefit from the assistance of AKDN in healthcare. World Vision (WVI), an evangelical Christian development aid NGO created in 1950,⁴³ is active in 100 countries; its total income (cash and in-kind) for 2016 was more than US\$2.7 billion. In some cases, it is difficult to disentangle the various dimensions of the actions of faith-based organisations that link relief with missionary activities, a link sometimes criticised⁴⁴ by other donors.

For a long time, international donors' engagement with religions and faith-based communities has been a non-issue for Western development aid. Nevertheless, in the last 15 years, this issue has been given increasing attention, generating a growing number⁴⁵ of conferences, reports and strategies by major donors.

³⁵ [Climate Change Statements from World Religions | Climate Change | Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#), Yale University.

³⁶ Dalai Lama, [Climate Change, Wisdom and Experience](#), Dalai Lama's official website, July 2015.

³⁷ Pope Francis, [Encyclical *Laudato Si* on the Care of Our Common Home](#), Holy See, 2015.

³⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, [Message by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for World Environment Day](#) (5 June 2009), Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2009.

³⁹ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, [Final Communiqué of the 13th Islamic Summit of the Heads of State/Government of the OIC Member States](#), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 15 April, 2016.

⁴⁰ [COP 22 Interfaith Climate Statement](#), 2016.

⁴¹ Caritas, [Annual report 2016](#).

⁴² [Aga Khan Foundation](#).

⁴³ [World Vision](#).

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Ferris, [Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Organisations](#), International Red Cross Committee, 2005.

⁴⁵ Ignatius Swart and Elsabé Nell, 'Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography', *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies*, Vol. 72, No 4, 25 November 2016.

There is no doubt that a considerable proportion of development aid is directed at regions where religion is an important part of social life, and sometimes religious leaders are the only way to reach out to local communities. In Africa, the World Bank TerrAfrica/ARC partnership supported 27 faith groups – with a potential reach of 184 million people – as they prepared long-term plans to care for the environment.⁴⁶ In this region, half⁴⁷ of all aid and education services are provided by faith-based organisations, and therefore, international donors have to take the work of faith-based organisations on the ground into consideration.

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

Therefore, the EU does not provide any preferential treatment for faith-based NGOs, and is committed to non-discrimination and humanitarian principles. Over the 2007 to 2016 period, 263 grants were signed with faith-based organisations, amounting to €150 million, around 9 % of the total budget for the Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and Local Authorities under the Development Cooperation Instrument.⁴⁸

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR),⁴⁹ created in 2007, and with a total budget of more than €1.3 billion for 2014-2020, channels support mainly to civil society organisations whose projects are selected following calls for proposals (issued by EU delegations or headquarters in Brussels). The EIDHR is a highly flexible instrument, and it enables the EU to support a variety of organisations, or even individuals, on the ground through direct or indirect funding as the local situation requires. In 2013, coinciding with the adoption of the EU guidelines, the EIDHR published for the first time an explicit, global call on combating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, with the next global call on freedom of religion or belief due to be launched in autumn 2017.

A non-exhaustive list of projects funded under the EIDHR for 2007 to 2016 shows around 40 FoRB-related civil society projects, mainly in Asia. The European Commission does not usually publish precise data on the nature of beneficiaries, because the faith-based character of the organisation is not among the selection criteria, and FoRBs can be promoted by faith-based organisations and non-confessional NGOs alike. Hence, although external relations instruments do fund CSOs substantially, there is no systematic disaggregation of data by the faith-based orientation of CSOs and hence no readily available figures about funding for FBOs specifically. In addition, some projects are confidential because they take place in sensitive contexts.

Faith-based organisations, as part of broader civil society, are encouraged to apply for EU funds. In 2016, the European Commission signed framework partnership agreements

⁴⁶ [Engaging with faith groups to restore land in Africa](#), World Bank website, 12 January 2015.

⁴⁷ German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, [The Role of Religions in German Development Policies](#), 2015.

⁴⁸ Thematic [Programme](#) on Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and Local Authority. All the statistics provided in this briefing have been kindly provided by the European Commission, but they are incomplete and rely on non-representative samples because the EU does not keep any data on the faith-based status of the organisations it supports.

⁴⁹ [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#).

(FPAs) with a certain number of CSOs after an open call for proposals. One of them, *Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité Internationale (CIDSE)*,⁵⁰ is the only faith-based organisation among 24 NGOs and platforms included in the framework partnership agreement with the European Commission.

In addition, there are other signs of the interest of the EU in the dialogue on development with faith-based organisations: in 2017, for the first time, a panel on religions was organised during the *Development Days*⁵¹ and a category on FoRB was included in the *Lorenzo Natali Media Prize* of the European Commission.⁵² A call for proposals to support intercultural and religious dialogue was also launched under the DCI.

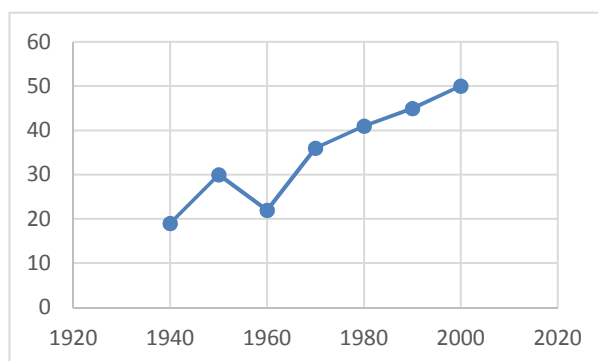
3.2.3. Conflict prevention

The role of religious groups has been key in some of the most deadly conflicts in the world.⁵³ In interstate violence, such as in the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) or the Indian-Pakistan dispute, religion can be just one aspect of the conflict, together with national or economic roots.

In the post-Westphalia world, most conflicts are state-based⁵⁴ and as very few states in the world are theocracies, it is difficult to ascribe a purely religious cause to a conflict. However since 1946 more and more conflicts have been civil wars. In the case of an internal / transnational civil war, the religious dimension can be more salient. In using a database on civil wars,⁵⁵ Monica Toft⁵⁶ demonstrates that religious civil wars⁵⁷ represent a third (44 of 135), rising in recent decades.

From a scientific perspective, it should be acknowledged that these conflicts are not always triggered by religious causes. Juergensmeyer⁵⁸ argues that political theology, meaning the kind of political arrangement with the state proposed in the dogma of a religion, is not always at the centre of the conflict. Wars and conflicts, as with any social behaviours, are caused by a wide variety of causes, be it economic or identity-related, and the religious aspect of any

Figure 1 – Religious civil wars as a percentage of civil wars in the world since 1940



Data source: Toft, 2007.

⁵⁰ *Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité Internationale (CIDSE)*.

⁵¹ *Development Days* 2017, programme.

⁵² *Lorenzo Natali Media Prize* of the European Commission.

⁵³ Philippe Perchoc, *Religious organisations and conflict resolution*, EPRS, European Parliament, 2016.

⁵⁴ Centre for Systemic Peace, *Assessing the Quality of Systemic Peace*, Centre for Systemic Peace, 2017.

⁵⁵ Civil war involves at least two combatant factions, the state being one of them and at least 1 000 battle deaths.

⁵⁶ Monica Toft, 'Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War', *International Security*, Vol. 31 (4), pp. 97-131.

⁵⁷ Religious civil wars are defined as civil wars engaging at least one religious motivated group.

⁵⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, University of California Press, 1993.

war is only ever at most a dominant feature among others. The British Academy underlines⁵⁹ the fact that the role of religion is dependent on the local context.

Even when a conflict lacks a religious dimension, religious organisations can sometimes be instrumental in preventing or resolving it. In addition to the faith-based NGOs in the field of humanitarian aid and development, some religious organisations are also instrumental in conflict prevention, examples including the Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies in Jordan and the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement⁶⁰ in Sri Lanka.

In the field of mediation, groups like Sant'Egidio⁶¹ played a key role in Mozambique and are today active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Sierra Leone, the Inter-religious Council helped to bring an end to the civil war (1991-2002) and in the Central African Republic, religious leaders helped to achieve and maintain a precarious peace through mediation at all levels (national and local).⁶² In the field of reconciliation, religious actors and personalities such as Daisaku Ikeda and Desmond Tutu have played an important role in their countries.

4. Religion as an emerging field of EU external action

The specific nature of Europe, as a continent where religion and politics are more disconnected than elsewhere, used to be perceived as avant-garde, whereas it now appears to be the exception. It is the result of centuries of history on the continent, and the new interest in religion in the diplomatic community is an invitation to treat it as an important factor, among others, in the EU's external action, not to re-think the state-religion nexus in Europe. As the world's religious demography will be transformed in the coming decades, an expert understanding of the impact it will have on the reception of the EU's external policies is key. For that reason, it is important to increase the level of expertise and dialogue with religious organisations, in the way some EU Member States and the United States have done, while also evaluating the role of religion in the EU's partner countries.

By comparison with the EU, in the United States two dimensions of the religious question have grown distinct over time (see annexes). The first of these is freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), for which the State Department is tasked by Congress to deliver an annual report. In that endeavour, the State Department relies on the expertise of US embassies around the world and the team of the Office of International Religious Freedom. A second dimension is dialogue with religious authorities around the world, and President Obama decided to task a second office, the Office for Religion and Global Affairs, with advising the Secretary of State on matters of religion and supporting diplomatic missions in engaging with them.

In the European case, the first function is now partly embodied by the EU's special envoy on FoRB, created in 2016, and the second function is performed at the level of the President of the European Commission and President of the European Parliament,

⁵⁹ Sara Silverstri and James Mayfall, *The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peace Building*, British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017.

⁶⁰ [Sarvodaya: About Us](#), Sarvodaya, 21 July 2016.

⁶¹ Nikolai Henrik W. Hegertun, [Faith-Based Mediation?: Sant' Egidio's Peace Efforts in Mozambique and Algeria](#), University of Oslo, 2010.

⁶² Thierry Vircoulon, [À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique. Médiations communautaires, religieuses et politiques](#), Institut Français Des Relations Internationales, June 2017.

seconded by specific vice-presidents. Nevertheless, this dialogue is focused mainly on the European level, as stated in the Article 17 of the Treaty.

A number of EU officials deal with religious issues on a daily basis across various departments in the European Commission (DG DEVCO, including the EU's special envoy on FoRB and DG HOME) and the European External Action Service (including the EU's special representative for Human Rights).

In the European Parliament, an intergroup on freedom of religion and belief and religious tolerance is also very active. Networking and the exchange of information between the various European actors, as well as a strategic evaluation of the place of FoRB and religious groups in the dialogue to advance European external priorities, can be a way to develop EU capacities for evaluation and action.

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

6. Annexes: The state / religion nexus in selected EU partner states

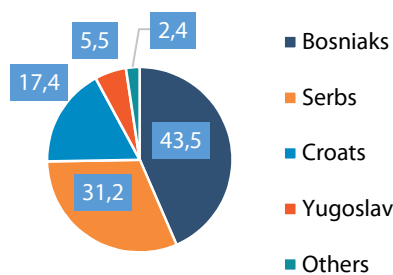
Each of the EU's partners in the world has its own approach to the balance between the state and religion, often reflecting historical developments. At one end of the spectrum are countries where the state is a mere vehicle to facilitate and spread the exercise of a specific religion, while at the other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

6.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a potential candidate for EU membership, offers a particular case of ethnic and religious diversity. Its complex history and political system⁶³ go hand in hand with a complex relationship⁶⁴ between religion and politics.

6.1.1. Religious dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Figure 2 – Ethnic groups in 1991



Data source: [Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees](#), 2005.

BiH is a multi-religious state:⁶⁵ Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Judaism and other religions have coexisted here for centuries, with a shifting balance among them at different times. Freedom of religion and the legal status of religious communities have been regulated in various ways. Under the Ottoman millet system,⁶⁶ religious communities were empowered to regulate their internal affairs, linking thus religion with national and cultural identity. During Austro-Hungarian rule, provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion were ensured for all. Later, socialist Yugoslavia introduced the model of the secular state and side-lined religion from public life.

Subdued in former Yugoslavia, ethno-religious divisions surfaced after its dissolution. Religious differences were not a root cause, but became a key element⁶⁷ in the 1990s war. Closely intertwined religion, ethnicity and politics exacerbated nationalist and separatist strife in this heterogeneous country and spurred a deadly conflict that ended with the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. The agreement's Annex 4, BiH's current constitution, set up a complex institutional structure with two autonomous entities (Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of BiH), and ethnic quota-based governance

⁶³ Velina Lilyanova, [Bosnia and Herzegovina: Political parties](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2015.

⁶⁴ Legal position of churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES).

⁶⁵ 'Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post-War Bosnia: Learning to be Free!', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 2017.

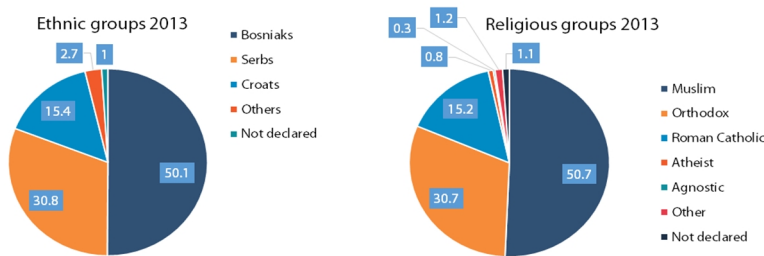
⁶⁶ Efrat Aviv, [Millet System in the Ottoman Empire](#), Oxford Bibliographies, November 2016.

⁶⁷ Bosnia: Ethno-Religious Nationalisms in Conflict, case study, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, 2013.

based on the established three 'constituent peoples' and seen as discriminatory to all grouped under 'Others', who do not identify with any of the three.

The 1991 pre-war census shows that despite decades of forging a Yugoslav identity, less than 6 % defined themselves as such (Figure 1). The three 'constituent' ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, largely overlap with religious identities. Bosniaks are mostly Muslim; Serbs are mainly followers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Croats are largely Roman Catholic.

Figure 3 – Ethnic and religious groups in 2013



Data source: [Index Mundi](#), 2017.

According to the results of the latest 2013 census,⁶⁸ published in 2016, the country remains divided along ethnic and religious lines, but the demographic map has changed. Bosniaks now make up just over 50 % of the population and the

number of people who identify themselves with the respective religions coincides almost exactly with their ethnic group (Figure 2). The results proved to be a particularly sensitive issue, first because they showed for the first time that one ethnic and religious group – the Muslims were a majority in BiH, and second because they revealed a 20 % population decrease. Republika Srpska immediately contested the results launching disputes over methodology,⁶⁹ as demography has played an important role in the power-sharing system since the Dayton agreement.

6.1.2. State / religion nexus

Present day BiH is a secular state with no state religion. The legal framework, comprising the country's multiple constitutions and the 2004 law on the freedom of religion and the legal status of churches and religious communities ensures the highest standards of religious freedom, a broad range of individual and collective religious rights, and state neutrality towards the religious communities. It guarantees freedom of religion or belief; that no one can be deprived of citizenship or discriminated on religious grounds; and that no religion can become a national religion or have special privileges.⁷⁰ The state does not interfere in the internal affairs of churches or religious communities and may provide them with financial funds based on equality.

The 2004 state law on freedom of religion was drafted by BiH's Interreligious Council (composed of members of the four main religious communities). It regulates the legal status of churches and religious communities, the rules for establishing new ones, and cooperation with the state in areas of common interest (education, culture and charity). A 2007 concordat with the Holy See recognises the public legal personality of the Catholic Church. In 2008, the BiH presidency ratified a similar agreement with the Serb Orthodox

⁶⁸ Rodolfo Toe, [Census Reveals Bosnia's Changed Demography](#), Balkan Insight, 30 June 2016.

⁶⁹ Charles Recknagel, [Bosnia Erupts In Feuding Over New Census Data](#), Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 30 June 2016.

⁷⁰ Republika Srpska's constitution specifically links a particular church and ethnic group: 'The Serbian Orthodox Church shall be the church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion', although it does not grant it any specific privileges.

Church. In 2010, the Islamic Community⁷¹ of BiH submitted a request to the BiH presidency for its own agreement with the state, which has yet to be signed. At state level, no religious holidays are recognised as official holidays, while entities and cantons observe religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion.

Citizens have the right to religious education at all levels of education. Like the education system generally, religious education is decentralised. Teachers are appointed by an official representative of the respective church or religious community. Government schools offer religious education classes generally only in the municipality's majority religion. By law, students may choose not to attend the classes. Parents may enrol their children in private schools for religious reasons. University level religious facilities are also available for the main religions. Bilateral protocols between religious communities and the state regulate the areas and terms of cooperation in more detail.

In spite of the high standards embedded in BiH's laws, practical implementation is hampered by challenges, such as discriminatory practices, informal privileges to certain communities in the separate entities; public display of religious symbols, illegal construction of religious buildings. No progress⁷² has been made towards amending the constitution to prohibit ethnic and religious discrimination.⁷³ Weak administrative and judicial systems also effectively restrict religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities.

6.1.3. Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy

Bosnia's Islamic Community (IC) is the main representative of the Muslim community in dialogue with the state, and an important political actor⁷⁴ that promotes Bosniak national identity. It sees itself as 'the sole and united' organisation of Muslims in BiH, as well as the wider region (Sandžak, Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia). Its former leader Mustafa Cerić secured a role for Islam in politics, while the current Grand Mufti Husein Kavazović is seen as moderate and committed to improving interreligious relations and combatting violent extremism.

He is known for encouraging the EU and its Member States to learn from the experience of European Muslims in order to tackle integration challenges. His predecessor, Cerić, was also very engaged in the dialogue with the EU institutions and people in BiH saw him as an embodiment of this modern thinking – a 'European Muslim'.

The Serbian Orthodox church, through its cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) allows⁷⁵ Russia to exert soft power, claiming cultural and religious ties⁷⁶ with the Serbs. More specifically, Russia supports separatist tendencies in Republika Srpska and encourages its president Dodik. By way of example, in 2016, unlike the EU and the USA, Russia backed a controversial RS referendum⁷⁷ on creating a Serb national holiday, to which the federal state is opposed.

⁷¹ International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, US Department of State.

⁷² Human Rights Watch [World Report 2017](#).

⁷³ The European Court of Human Rights 'Sejdić-Finci' ruling found that the constitution discriminates against citizens defined as 'Others', as it prohibits them from running for some public offices.

⁷⁴ '[Bosnia's dangerous tango: Islam and nationalism](#)', International Crisis Group, 2013.

⁷⁵ Russian soft power gaining strength in Serbia: goals, instruments, and effects, [CEAS study](#), 2016.

⁷⁶ Martin Russell, [Russia in the Western Balkans](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2017.

⁷⁷ The Serbian referendum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 2016.

6.2. China

6.2.1. Religious demography of China

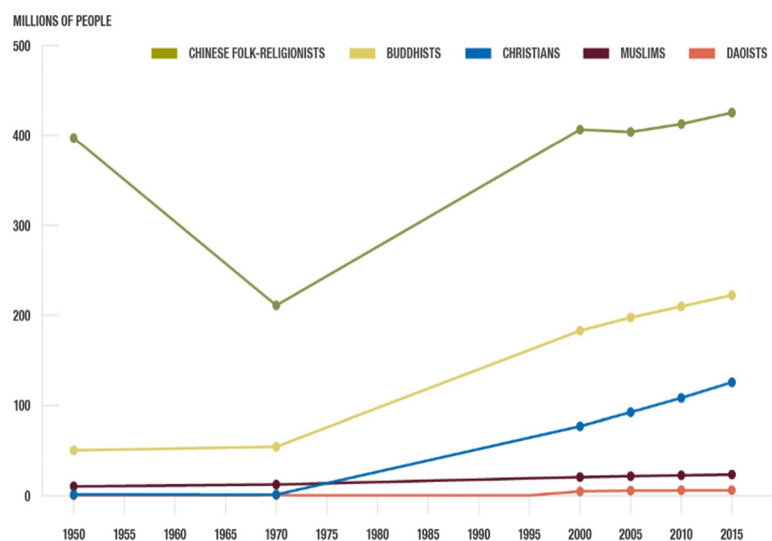
The People's Republic of China (PRC) recognises five religions: Buddhism and Taoism (perceived as indigenous religions) and the 'imported' religions Catholicism, Islam and Protestantism.⁷⁸ The Chinese Government has for several decades indicated a constant number of religious believers in China of roughly 100 million,⁷⁹ which does not reflect their significant rise over time (see Figure 3). China's State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) provides only fragmentary statistical data of Chinese adherents to these religions.⁸⁰ These official data do not capture the considerable number of religious believers who take part in underground religious activities.

6.2.2. State / religion nexus

In China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) mandates a strict separation of religion and the secular one-party state, which the CCP governs. The CCP imposes Marxist atheism on all of its 90 million or so members (the so-called vanguard of the 1.4 billion Chinese people) and perceives religions to varying degrees as competing sources of political power and a potential threat to national security and its own survival. The CCP is well

aware of the role the Catholic Church in Poland played in the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the current role of Buddhism and Islam in political separatism in China's Tibet and Xinjiang provinces. From a CCP perspective, religions cannot therefore simply co-exist independently with the state, but must be tightly controlled.

Figure 4 – Religion in China over time



Source: [Religion in China](#), Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, based on the World Religion Database.

⁷⁸ Jinghao Zhou, 'Religious education in China' in *The Routledge International Handbook on Religious Education*, Derek H. Davis and Elena Miroshnikova (eds.), Routledge, 2013, pp. 76-83.

⁷⁹ Mickey Spiegel, [China: State control of religion](#), Human Rights Watch, 1997; UN Human Rights Council, [National report](#) submitted in accordance with paragraph 15(a) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 – China, 10 November 2008; UN Human Rights Council, [National report](#) submitted in accordance with paragraph 15(a) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 – China, 5 August 2013.

⁸⁰ It does not provide estimates of the number of Buddhist and Taoist believers invoking difficulties in collecting data. It states that China's Muslim population is estimated at 22 million, Catholic believers at more than 5.7 million and Protestant believers at over 23 million. By contrast, Open Doors Germany estimates the [number](#) of Christians in China at 97.2 million. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom states that '[t]here are nearly 300 million Chinese who practice some form of folk religion; more than 246 million Buddhists; at least 68 million Christians; nearly 25 million Muslims; and fewer than 3.6 million apiece who practice Hinduism, Judaism, or Taoism', US Commission on International Religious Freedom, [2016 Annual Report](#), April 2016.

On the other hand, after having radically eliminated large parts of China's religious heritage across the country and having forced religious activities underground during the Mao-led Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the CCP under Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policy of 1978 allowed the most recent PRC Constitution of 1982 to again enshrine the freedom of religious belief.⁸¹ However, its Article 36 limits the protection of freedom of religious belief to 'normal' religious activities⁸² and sets clear boundaries, including in terms of the potential political dimension of religions and 'foreign domination'. The scope of this right is further constrained by the fact that in China the Chinese Government/CCP policy and rules on religions in practice rank above the constitution.⁸³

Document 19 of 1982 requires that religion not interfere with politics, education and other areas.⁸⁴ It states that counter-revolutionary activities committed under the cover of religion are prohibited. However, at the same time it seeks to coopt religions to support the CCP's economic and social agenda. The 2017 revision of the 2004 Regulations on Religious Affairs⁸⁵ which set out the conditions for religious organisations and leaders to operate in China signals an attempt by the CCP among others to crack down – under the mantle of national security – on non-state-sanctioned religious activities associated with China's alleged infiltration by foreign religions.⁸⁶

To be considered legal in China, the Chinese government requires all religious organisations to register with one of the government-controlled religious patriotic associations that advocate the principle of an independent church and that are supervised by SARA.⁸⁷ SARA in turn is controlled by the CCP's United Front Office. Religious organisations that do not belong to the five religions and are not SARA-registered are illegal or even officially banned like the Falun Gong⁸⁸ and may be persecuted under Chinese law. There is a considerable number of SARA-unregistered and

⁸¹ This was done based on the basis of the expectation that in a Socialist civilisation 'with its own material and spiritual values' religions would 'gradually disappear'; Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Document 19: [Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period](#), March 31, 1982, [translated sections published in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*, Orbis Books, 1989.].

⁸² They are not defined in the constitution and thus the qualification leaves room for wide discretion; Constitution of the People's Republic of China, [Article 36](#). The examples set out in the White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang suggest that religious activities must not have any political dimension whatsoever, State Council, [White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang](#), 2016.

⁸³ Jinghao Zhou, 'Religious education in China', op. cit., page 78.

⁸⁴ Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Document 19: [Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period](#), op. cit.

⁸⁵ State Council, [Regulations No 426 of 2004, Regulations on Religious Affairs](#), 1 March 2005; Eric R. Carlson, '[China's New Regulations on Religion: A Small Step, Not a Great Leap, Forward](#)', *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Vol. 2005 (3), 1 September 2005, pp. 747-798.

⁸⁶ '[China's revised regulations on religion fend off foreign influences](#)', *Global Times*, 12 September 2017. '[China's underground churches head for cover as crackdown closes in](#)', *South China Morning Post*, September 11, 2017.

⁸⁷ As of 1997 there were seven of them: the Chinese Buddhist Association, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and the Chinese Bishops Conference, the Chinese Daoist Association, the Chinese Islam Association, and the 'Two Associations' of Protestant Christianity – the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Chinese Christian Council (CCC); State Council, [White Paper Freedom of Religious Belief in China](#), 1997.

⁸⁸ United Kingdom Home Office, [Country Policy and Information Note – China: Falun Gong](#), November 2016.

thus non-state-controlled underground Christian house churches in China. They are formally illegal, but have been tolerated to different degrees depending on the respective stance of the communist leadership in provincial governments.⁸⁹ Religious activities of traditional Chinese folk religions tend to have the tacit approval of local authorities, as they are deemed indigenous and not dangerous.

State-controlled religious organisations in China run their own affairs independently,⁹⁰ the caveat being that religious organisations have to tailor their teachings to the party doctrine, be religions 'with Chinese characteristics' and be cut off from external financial, political and spiritual influence. Religious leaders and leading organs of state-sanctioned religious bodies are selected and ordained in accordance with their own regulations.⁹¹ Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican have therefore not been able to register as legal entities.⁹² It remains to be seen whether the announced consensus reached between China and the Vatican on the appointment of bishops will lead to reconciliation between the official and unofficial Catholic communities in China.⁹³ As of June 2017, Vatican-appointed bishops continue to face risks to their life and freedom.⁹⁴

State-controlled religious organisations set up their own religious schools and institutions for the training of their religious leaders. To enhance control over religious activities⁹⁵ in its restive Xinjiang province in the West of China where Islamist separatism and terrorism among its Sunni Muslim⁹⁶ Uighur population, which speaks a Turkic language written with an Arabic script, is considered a national security threat, the Chinese government has increased its offer of government-controlled religious training, while cracking down on underground schools for Koran studies.⁹⁷ At the same time as

⁸⁹ State-sanctioned churches have also been targeted however. In 2014, the new CCP party secretary, [Xia Baolong](#), in Zhejiang province, a centre of Christianity in China, launched a campaign of tearing down rooftop crosses from Christian churches on a large scale and at the peak of the campaign demolished [Sanjiang Church](#) in Wenzhou, reportedly too big and thus illegal. A leaked government document referred to the 'political meaning behind the symbols' and 'infiltration of foreign forces'. ['Interview with a Wenzhou Pastor: The Chinese Government's Large-Scale Destruction of Crosses in Zhejiang Province'](#), *China Change*, 29 July 2015.

⁹⁰ State Council, White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in China, op. cit.

⁹¹ The US Department of State reports that in April 2013 'the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) promulgated the Regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops, requiring candidate bishops to publicly pledge support for the CCP', [2014 International Religious Freedom Report](#), 14 October 2015.

⁹² United Kingdom Home Office, [Country Information and Guidance – China: Christians](#), March 2016.

⁹³ Rachel Xiaohong Zhu, ['The Division of the Roman Catholic Church in Mainland China: History and Challenges'](#), *Religions*, Vol. 8 (3), March 2017.

⁹⁴ [Vatican breaks silence on missing Chinese bishop](#), USA News.com, 28 June 2017. [China. Why the Agreement With Rome Is Slow In Coming. With a Postscript](#), L'Espresso, 22 June 2017.

⁹⁵ United Kingdom Home Office, [Country Information and Guidance – China: Non-Christian religious groups](#), August 2016.

⁹⁶ [Sunni Islam](#) is by far the largest branch of Islam: its followers make up 87 to 90 % of the Muslim global population. Its name derives from the term ahl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a ('people of the tradition of Muhammad and the community'). As this characterisation suggests, Sunni Islam claims to represent the Muslim consensus concerning the teachings and habit of the Prophet. It originated among those Muslims who, contrary to Shiites and Khawarij, denied that Ali had been designated as Muhammad's only legitimate successor.

⁹⁷ Jacques Neriah, ['The Chinese Approach to Radical Islam'](#), *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs*, Vol. 17(7), 27 March 2017.

organising charter flights for the annual pilgrimage of its Muslim Uighurs to Mecca,⁹⁸ it has carried out an array of repressive policies, including the restriction of travel by confiscating passports.⁹⁹ China's second Muslim community, the Mandarin-speaking Hui, who can be found throughout China, by contrast, have largely assimilated into Han mainstream society and no tensions have arisen with the Chinese government with respect to their religious activities.¹⁰⁰

Since China advocates the separation of religion and education, religious education is not a subject taught in schools in China, while classes on Marxist theory are compulsory. Recently, in some provinces school children were banned from attending Christian camps or going to church with their teachers, reflecting a harder line towards religious activities.¹⁰¹

6.2.3. Religion and foreign policy

Since the CCP leadership self-imposes atheism, the Chinese government does not sponsor or protect any particular religion abroad. Much to the contrary, it closely monitors the activities of its Buddhist and Uighur diaspora and its foreign policy aims to avert any foreign governments from possibly supporting religious forces in or outside China that could undermine the CCP's one-party rule. The most prominent example is the Dalai Lama, whom the Chinese government accuses of steering political separatism in Tibet from his Indian exile and thus considers a threat to China's territorial unity.¹⁰² In its relations with foreign governments China therefore expects the latter to refrain from official contacts with religious leaders. If in the past these contacts nonetheless took place, the Chinese government wielded economic sanctions or froze diplomatic ties with those governments, until the latter – given economic asymmetries – aligned to China's core interests.¹⁰³

6.3. Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is constitutionally defined as a theocratic state. Shia Islam¹⁰⁴ is the country's official state religion and a strict interpretation of Sharia law permeates all aspects of society. This can range from overt discrimination on religious grounds in

⁹⁸ 'Xinjiang takes active measures to make religions to adapt to socialist society, and prevents (sic) the use of religion in interfering in the administrative, judicial, educational and other social affairs', State Council, White Paper Freedom of Religious Belief in China, op. cit. '[Chinese Muslims Begin Annual Pilgrimage to Mecca with China Southern Flight](#)', *China Aviation Daily*, 16 August 2016.

⁹⁹ [China: Passports Arbitrarily Recalled in Xinjiang](#), Human Rights Watch, 21 November 2016. One Passport, Two Systems. China's Restrictions on Foreign Travel by Tibetans and others, Human Rights Watch, July 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Brent Crane, '[A Tale of Two Chinese Muslim Minorities. There is a chasm between the conditions experienced by the Hui and Uyghur peoples in China](#)', *The Diplomat*, 22 August 2014.

¹⁰¹ World Watch Monitor, '[China bans children – and their teachers – from churches](#)', 11 September 2017.

¹⁰² '[China lodges diplomatic protest after US delegation meets Dalai Lama](#)', *Hindustan Times*, 10 May 2017.

¹⁰³ [Mongolia Vows No More Dalai Lama Visits After China Turns Screws](#), Bloomberg, 21 December 2016. Jichang Lulu, '[The costs of normalisation: Norway and Mongolia respond to Chinese sanctions](#)', *China Policy Institute: Analysis*, University of Nottingham, 22 February 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Sebastian Kusserow and Patryk Pawlak, '[Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam](#)', EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016. Shia Islam differs from Sunni Islam mainly in the legitimacy given to Ali's succession, Mohammed's nephew, over any other possible successor. The origin of Shiism lies in the martyrdom of Ali's son Husayn, who was killed by Umayyad troops in the Battle of Kerbala in the Islamic month of Muharram in the year AD 680. Several branches of Shiism recognise a different number of Imams (successors) of Ali. The majority of Shia people recognise 12 Imams.

areas such as employment, education and housing,¹⁰⁵ to more covert ways of 'guarding' the citizen's political, professional and social life. On paper, the 1989 revised constitution of Iran features 'liberal-democratic' elements, such as freedom of expression and separation of powers, but these are only marginally safeguarded in practice. The organisation of the Iranian state is based on the 'velayat-e faqih' principle, i.e. the supreme leadership of an Islamic jurist. All laws and regulations must comply with Islamic criteria, and conversion to any religion other than Islam is illegal. Only a few religious minorities are recognised by the state, others are severely persecuted. Iran's current President Hassan Rouhani, who took office in 2013, was initially believed to espouse civil liberties, but has not acted on his promises.¹⁰⁶

6.3.1. Religious demography of Iran

The Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) conducts censuses every 10 years. However, official statistics provide little information on the exact religious breakdown. According to external estimations, 99 % of the Iranian population are Muslim (approximately 74 million people), 90 % follow the Twelver school of Shia Islam (also known as Imamiyya) and 9 % are Sunni. This makes Iran the country with the seventh largest Muslim population worldwide; only a vanishingly small percentage of the Iranian population, approximately 1 to 2 %, is non-Muslim.¹⁰⁷ Bahai'i (approx. 300 000),¹⁰⁸ Christians (approx. 85 000) and Yarsanis (unknown) constitute the three largest non-Muslim minorities. Zoroastrians (approx. 25 000), Jews (9 000 to 20 000) and Sabeans-Mandeans (5 000 to 10 000) account for the rest.¹⁰⁹ However, the statistics on these groups differ and lack accuracy, since citizens may hide their religious beliefs on account of fears of non-recognition and persecution.

Iran's constitution recognises three religious minorities, namely Jews, Zoroastrians and non-converted Christians. Followers of these faiths, if duly registered, are protected by the State and have the right to publicly express their religious beliefs. Five seats in the parliament (out of 290) are reserved for adherents of these religious minorities. However, adherents of other religious minorities experience discrimination. Baha'i, in particular, are frequently targeted by the government: since 1979, more than 200 Baha'i leaders have been executed,¹¹⁰ approximately 10 000 have been dismissed from state-funded positions, and Baha'i-owned businesses have been shut down.¹¹¹ Christian converts and evangelists are equally oppressed: since 2010, more than 600 Christians have been detained, leaders of house churches intimidated and anti-Christian resentment reinforced by the media.¹¹² Despite the fact that Iran is home to the second largest Jewish population in the Middle East, the government also engages in anti-Israeli

¹⁰⁵ GlobalSecurity.org, [Iranian religious groups](#), retrieved 23 October 2017.

¹⁰⁶ United States Commission on Religious Freedom, [Iran Chapter – 2017 Annual Report](#).

¹⁰⁷ Pew Research Center, [Mapping the Global Muslim Population](#), 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Created in 19th century Iran, Baha'ism is inspired by other world religions and teaches equality between human beings. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed are important figures of Baha'ism, which thinks that Godly revelation has used different figures at different periods. There are between 5 and 7 million Baha'is living mainly in India and Iran.

¹⁰⁹ United States Department of State, [International Religious Freedom Report 2016](#).

¹¹⁰ Website of the Baha'i International Community, [Situation of Baha'is in Iran](#), 19 September 2017.

¹¹¹ United States Commission on Religious Freedom, [Iran Chapter – 2017 Annual Report](#).

¹¹² United States Department of State, [International Religious Freedom Report 2016](#).

rhetoric and Holocaust denial.¹¹³ There are Shi'a sects in Iran that the Twelver Shia clergy consider 'heretical', including the Sevener branch of Shi'a Islam, or Ismailiyya. Several thousand Isma'ilis live in north-eastern Iran. Their spiritual leader is the Aga Khan, who resides in India.¹¹⁴

6.3.2. Religious dynamics

The predominance of Shiism in Iran dates back to the early days of the 16th century and the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722); it was at this juncture that Twelver Shia became the government's official religion. The successive dynasties continued to promote Shia Islam among the elites and it became more influential in the course of time. Progressive and liberal movements gained pace at the beginning of the 20th century. From 1925 onwards, the Pahlavi dynasty modernised and secularised Iranian society. The 1979 Iranian revolution marked a turning point in this development. The overthrow of the Shah's regime paved the way for an authoritarian regime change and gave the Shiite clergy significant political powers. Subsequently, the situation of non-Muslims deteriorated. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini guaranteed the physical integrity of the Jewish community. He could not, however, prevent a mass exodus of Jews and figures have been in severe decline ever since. Only one tenth of the 1979 Jewish population lives in today's Iran. Recent prognoses point to constant growth of the Muslim community within the next decades (up to approximately 86 million Muslims in 2050).¹¹⁵

6.3.3. State / religion nexus

Iran's state apparatus is grounded in the Islamic faith and discriminates against religious minorities across all branches of state and society. The Islamic legal order is perceived as 'sacred' and 'divine'. Hence, criticism of the regime is tantamount to blasphemy, and 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic' harshly persecuted.¹¹⁶ Even though the supreme Islamic leader exercises power over the legislature, executive and judiciary, he remains embedded in a complex Islamic network wherein a 'factional balance of power'¹¹⁷ is to be respected. Independent Ayatollahs, i.e. high-level Shi'a Muslim clerics, are highly influential and have a bearing on day-to-day politics. In addition, the state funds Islamic organisations, which engage in public diplomacy, charitable work, education and publishing.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, para-governmental 'Bonyads' (foundations) are central to Iran's economy; they are exempt from federal taxes and benefit Islamic religious groups.

¹¹³ For example, in [May 2016](#), the state-owned Owj Media & Art Institute and Sarcheshmeh Cultural Complex sponsored an international Holocaust cartoon contest; the contributions were exhibited at the Islamic Propaganda Organisation in Teheran and widely criticised on account of their anti-Semitic nature. Later, the Iranian government tried to distance itself from the event.

¹¹⁴ Sebastian Kusserow and Patryk Pawlak, [Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam](#), EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016.

¹¹⁵ Statista - Das Statistik Portal, [Iran: Religionszugehörigkeit der Bevölkerung im Jahr 2010 und Prognosen bis 2050](#), retrieved 23 October 2017.

¹¹⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, [Iran Country Report](#), 2016.

¹¹⁷ Alireza Nader, David E. Thaler and S. R. Bohandy, [The Next Supreme Leader. Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#), RAND Corporation, 2011.

¹¹⁸ Saeed Paivandi, [Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks](#), Freedom House, retrieved 23 October 2017.

6.3.4. Religion in Iran's foreign policy

Iran has a strong interest in a stable and secure neighbourhood. It is 'leading from behind' in several countries and conflicts in the region involving Shia majorities or minorities, including in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, mainly to restore the status quo and prevent instability. Nonetheless, Iran is often accused of fuelling proxy battlegrounds in the region. Iran's domestic and external agendas are closely intertwined, and religion and the Sunni-Shia divide are central to Iran's foreign policy strategy. The territorial integrity of the predominantly Shi'ite Iraq and Alawite-governed Syria¹¹⁹ is a matter of national concern. Likewise, Iran supports Shi'ites worldwide and aims to limit Saudi Arabian, i.e. Sunni, expansionism. The rise of radicalised Sunni terrorist groups, primarily ISISL/Da'esh, poses a major threat to Iran. On human rights, Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN promised in 2006 to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, but did not specifically mention religious freedoms.¹²⁰ At the same time, Iran's regime rejects full cooperation with the UN-assigned special rapporteur on human rights. The European Union continues to seek closer relations with Iran, but the Trump administration's hostility towards the Iranian regime has put the West's relations with Iran under new strain.

6.4. Russia

6.4.1. Religious demography of Russia

According to unpublished data from Russian independent pollsters Levada Center, 79 % of Russians were Orthodox in 2016, the vast majority belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. Catholics and other non-Orthodox Christians make up less than 0.5 %.

Levada Center puts the number of Russian Muslims at just 5.7 %, but other estimates go as high as 15 %.¹²¹ The highest concentrations are in the Northern Caucasus and Tatarstan, but Muslims live throughout the country, many of them migrants from ex-Soviet Central Asian countries. Insofar as they identify with a Muslim sect at all, Russian Muslims are far more likely to describe themselves as Sunni rather than Shia Muslims.

Smaller minorities include pagans (1.2 %¹²² in 2012), many of them from the indigenous peoples of Siberia, but also from the Caucasus region of North Ossetia; Buddhists (0.4 %, traditionally from southern Siberian regions such as Buryatia) and Jews (0.1 %).

¹¹⁹ Alawis form a significant minority in Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. The Alawi religion is traditionally a secret doctrine, knowledge of which was limited to chosen male members of the community. Owing to the highly syncretistic nature of Alawi beliefs, their affiliation with Islam is disputed, and they have been branded as heretics. The Syrian ruling family and large parts of the state's inner power circle are Alawi. Extract from Sebastian Kusserow and Patryk Pawlak, [Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam](#), EPRS, January 2016. Given the disputed affiliation of Alawism with Islam, Iran's support of the Assad regime is believed to be driven more by geopolitical than religious considerations.

¹²⁰ Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, [The Islamic Republic of Iran's Pledges and Commitments on Human Rights](#), 8 May 2006.

¹²¹ Gabriela Baczyńska, [Putin opens Moscow's largest mosque, warns against extremists](#), Reuters, September 23, 2015.

¹²² [Arena Atlas of Religions and Nationalities of the Russian Federation](#), Sreda Research Service, 2012.

6.4.2. Religious dynamics

Religions were repressed in the Soviet Union (but remained influential, nevertheless; it was not exceptional for children from Communist families, such as President Vladimir Putin, to be baptised into the Orthodox church). In 1989, 26 % described themselves as Orthodox Christians, but by 2016, that percentage had increased to 79 %; during the same period the share of atheists fell from 72 % to 5 %. Looking to the future, one source¹²³ forecasts that the share of Muslims could increase to 17 % by 2050, owing to the fact that they have more children than the general population.

6.4.3. State / religion nexus

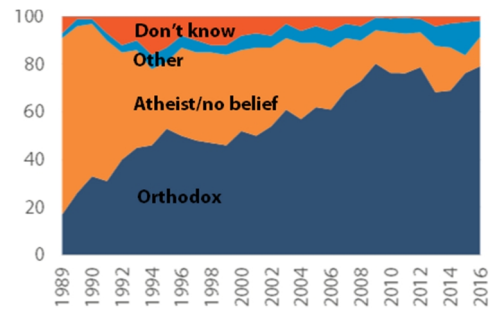
Constitutionally, Russia is a secular state. Formally, all religious communities are equal and can be legally registered subject to having existed informally for at least 15 years; however the Russian Orthodox Church has close links to the state and considerable influence. Nevertheless, that influence is constrained by secularism, a legacy of Soviet-era atheism; although most Russians are nominally Orthodox, 62 %¹²⁴ of them also declare that religion plays no role or only a minor one in their lives, and only 13 % of all Russians (including Muslims) worship regularly. Many oppose a stronger role for the Orthodox Church; in March 2017, thousands of St Petersburg residents protested against the city's decision to restore control of St Isaac's Cathedral to the Orthodox Church.¹²⁵

6.4.4. Kremlin-Orthodox alliance

Under the influence of nationalist thinkers such as Alexander Dugin, Vladimir Putin sees Orthodoxy as central to the Russian values that he claims to defend from decadent Western liberalism (a point of view which resonates with ordinary Russians, 57 %¹²⁶ of whom see Orthodoxy as a key part of their national identity).

The ideological affinity between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church is the foundation for a mutually beneficial alliance: in 2012 Patriarch Kirill, whose popularity is second only to Putin's (current approval rating: 71 %¹²⁷) endorsed the latter's presidential bid, describing his rule as a 'miracle of God'.¹²⁸ In return, the Kremlin adopts legislation inspired by Orthodox values (such as the law banning 'gay propaganda'¹²⁹) and criminalises behaviour seen as disrespectful to the church; in May 2017, a blogger was given a suspended sentence for playing Pokemon Go in church.¹³⁰ A recent ban¹³¹ on

Figure 5 – Russian beliefs



Data source: unpublished [Levada Center](#) data.

¹²³ [Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project](#), Pew Research Center, 2016.

¹²⁴ [Public Opinion 2016](#) (Общественное Мнение-2016), p. 166, Levada Centre, 2017.

¹²⁵ [Thousands Protest Cathedral Transfer In St Petersburg](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 18 March 2017.

¹²⁶ [Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe](#), Pew Research Center, 2017.

¹²⁷ [Church and State](#) (Церковь и государство), Levada Centre, 8 February 2012.

¹²⁸ Gleb Bryanski, [Russian patriarch calls Putin era 'miracle of God'](#), Reuters, 23 September 2015.

¹²⁹ Jennifer Rankin, ['Russian 'gay propaganda' law ruled discriminatory by European court'](#), *The Guardian*, 20 June 2017.

¹³⁰ Natalia Shurmina, [Russian who played Pokemon Go in church avoids jail term](#), Reuters, 11 May 2017.

¹³¹ Fred Lucas, [Putin Goes to War with Russia's Free Churches'](#), *Newsweek*, 23 July 2016.

proselytisation favours the Russian Orthodox Church over its smaller competitors, as does the decision to bar Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds of 'extremism'.¹³²

At the same time, Putin, mindful of the need to be seen as the president of all Russians – including Muslims, and the 66 %¹³³ of Russians who feel that the Orthodox Church has no place in politics – has also kept a certain distance from Orthodox-backed proposals that run counter to the country's secular values, for example on discouraging abortions.¹³⁴

Religious education in Russia is an example of the country's balance between Orthodox values and secularism. Until recently, religious education was not compulsory, although Orthodox influences were apparent in many schools.¹³⁵ After years of lobbying by the Church, in 2012 religious education became compulsory for all fourth-grade primary school pupils.¹³⁶ However, 'Basics of Orthodox Culture' is only one of several options, and is followed by just one-third of pupils; many choose other courses, such as secular ethics or world religions. More recently, Patriarch Kirill has pushed for eight years of religious education,¹³⁷ but this proposal has not been taken up by the education ministry.

6.4.5. Financial aspects

Religious organisations in Russia are essentially self-financing. In line with its special status, in 2016 the Orthodox Church received government subsidies worth US\$35.1 million (including for church restoration), as well as benefiting from various financial arrangements;¹³⁸ Patriarch Kirill is believed¹³⁹ to have earned billions of dollars from the church's right to import alcohol and cigarettes duty-free.

6.4.6. Religion in Russia's foreign policy

Justifying his country's annexation of Crimea, in 2014 Vladimir Putin claimed the peninsula was as sacred to Russians as the Temple Mount is to Jews.¹⁴⁰ Given that he stands to lose many followers in Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill has refrained from endorsing Russian incursions into Ukraine. Nevertheless, many Russian Orthodox priests in Eastern Ukraine have openly sided with pro-Russian separatists.¹⁴¹

Russian Orthodox churches abroad, such as the new Kremlin-funded cathedral in Paris, are the physical expression of Orthodoxy as a means of projecting Russia's soft power.¹⁴² A recent survey shows that, even in pro-Western countries such as Romania

¹³² ['Jehovah's Witnesses Added to Russia's Extremism Registry'](#), *The Moscow Times*, 17 August 2017.

¹³³ Church and State (Церковь и государство), op. cit.

¹³⁴ Ola Cichowlas, ['Russia's Abortion Debate Is Back'](#), *The Moscow Times*, 29 September 2016.

¹³⁵ Clifford Levy, ['Welcome or Not, Orthodoxy Is Back in Russia's Public Schools'](#), *The New York Times*, 23 September 2007.

¹³⁶ Matthew Brunwasser, ['Russia's New Required Religion Class for 4th Graders'](#), Public Radio International, 26 December 2012.

¹³⁷ ['Patriarch Wants More Religious Education in Russian Schools'](#), *The Moscow Times*, 3 February 2015.

¹³⁸ Anna Kuchma, ['Where does the Russian Orthodox Church get its money from?'](#), *Russia Beyond*, 9 March 2016.

¹³⁹ Fiona Clark, ['Russian Orthodox Church tries to make hay'](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 16 August 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Ishaan Tharoor, ['Why Putin says Crimea is Russia's 'Temple Mount''](#), *The Washington Post*, 4 December 2014.

¹⁴¹ Paul Coyer, ['Putin's Holy War And The Disintegration Of The 'Russian World''](#), *Forbes*, 4 June 2015.

¹⁴² John Lichfield, ['Paris welcomes Kremlin-funded Russian Orthodox cathedral'](#), *The Independent*, 18 March 2016.

and Georgia, Orthodox Christians are far more likely than members of other faiths to support a strong Russia as a counter-influence to the West.¹⁴³ Moscow's defence of Orthodox-inspired conservative values also appeals to followers of European far-right parties.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Patriarch Kirill's historic meeting with Pope Francis in February 2016 and a possible future visit by the Pope to Russia could help the Kremlin to reach out to Catholics.

6.5. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is officially an Islamic state and the Quran and the Sunna (the teaching and traditions of the Prophet Mohammad) are integral parts of its constitution.¹⁴⁵ The country's legal system is unique in that laws derived from the Quran and the Sunna represent the core of the legal system, supplemented by the legal opinions (*fatwas*) of the Council of Senior Scholars (CSS), and royal decrees. The CSS is composed of Sunni religious scholars and jurists, headed by the grand mufti; 18 of its 21 members are trained in the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, with one representative of each of the other three Sunni schools (Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi'i).¹⁴⁶ The CSS has no Shia members. All citizens are required to be Muslims. According to the constitution, the duty of every citizen is to 'defend the Islamic faith', as well as society and 'the homeland' (Article 34).

6.5.1. Religious demography of Saudi Arabia

Out of the total estimated 20 million citizens of Saudi Arabia (July 2016 estimate),¹⁴⁷ between 85 to 90 % are Sunni Muslims. Most follow the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. The other 10 to 15% of the citizen population are Shia Muslims. Most of the latter adhere to the Twelver or Imamiyya persuasion of Shiism,¹⁴⁸ the largest of the Shia branches, who follow the Ja'afari school of jurisprudence. Around 700 000 Shia follow the Isma'iliyya persuasion; they make up the majority of the population of the oil-rich Eastern province of Najran. A very small number – 20 000 – belong to the Zaidi branch, also known as Fiver Shiites. Zaidis are a significant group in neighbouring Yemen (30 % to 45 % of the population).

In addition, around 10 million foreigners reside in Saudi Arabia. These include approximately 5.5 million Muslims, 1.2 million Christians (including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants and Roman Catholics), 310 000 Hindus, 180 000 'unaffiliated', 90 000 Buddhists, 70 000 followers of 'folk religions' and 70 000 followers of 'other religions'.

The Saudi government bans the public practice of non-Muslim faiths. Moreover, the law criminalises the public display of non-Islamic religious symbols, conversion by a Muslim to another religion and proselytising by a non-Muslim.¹⁴⁹ The government has formed a special religious police force – the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) – tasked with enforcing 'public morality, including displaying

¹⁴³ [Majorities in Orthodox countries look to Russia to counter the West](#), Pew Research Center, 5 May 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Antonis Klapsis, [An Unholy Alliance](#), Wilfred Martens Centre, 2015.

¹⁴⁵ [Saudi Arabia's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 2005](#) (version of 6 June 2017).

¹⁴⁶ Beatrix Immenkamp, [Understanding the branches of Islam: Sunni Islam](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2016.

¹⁴⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, [Annual Report on Saudi Arabia](#), 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Sebastian Kusserow, Patryk Pawlak, [Understanding the branches of Islam: Shia Islam](#), EPRS, European Parliament, January 2016.

¹⁴⁹ US Department of State, [Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report](#), 2016.

symbols of non-Islamic faiths or failing to respect Islam. Non-Muslims are allowed to practice their faith privately. However, the religious police has in the past raided private non-Muslim religious gatherings, and arrested and even deported participants, especially when the gatherings were loud, involved large numbers of people or used religious symbols visible from outside the building. As a result, non-Muslims practice their religions in fear of reprisals.

For many years, the government has specifically targeted Shia Muslims. Officially, this is on account of security concerns, especially over Shia links to Iran. The prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr was executed in January 2016 on charges including inciting sedition and disobedience to the ruler.¹⁵⁰ Shia Muslims have been detained and imprisoned for violations including holding small religious gatherings in private homes, organising religious events or celebrating religious holidays and reading religious materials. The Shia community also experiences discrimination in education, employment, the military, political representation, and the judiciary. Nevertheless, in some predominately Shia provinces, the commemoration of Shia holidays is permitted and judges can use Shia schools of Islamic jurisprudence in cases involving family law, inheritance and endowment management.

6.5.2. Religious dynamics

Saudi Arabia is a country of particular concern under the US International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, meaning that the country engages in 'systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom'. Any public expression of religious beliefs has to be compatible with the government's particular puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam (known as Wahhabism), which is opposed to popular religious practices such as Sufism or shrine worship. The religious police enforces public morality, in coordination with law enforcement authorities. This includes combating public and private contact between unrelated men and women, immodest dress, the sale of media that is 'contrary to Islam' (including pornography), the consumption of alcohol, as well as adultery, gambling and homosexuality. Individuals have been imprisoned on charges of apostasy, blasphemy, violating Islamic values and moral standards, insulting Islam, black magic and sorcery.¹⁵¹ Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger promoting liberal ideas, was sentenced in 2015 to 10 years in prison, 1 000 lashes and a fine of one million Saudi riyals (US\$266 000) for, among other charges, insulting Islam and religious authorities. The European Parliament awarded Badawi the Sakharov prize in 2015.¹⁵²

6.5.3. State/religion nexus

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been ruled by the al-Saud family since its founding in 1932. The regime has established a 'working relationship'¹⁵³ between politics and religion, giving authority to the followers of the puritanical teachings of the Muslim scholar and reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in exchange for affirmation of the monarchy's religious legitimacy.¹⁵⁴ Wahhabi clerics form an integral part of the kingdom's religious and political establishment and the rules and laws adopted to govern

¹⁵⁰ Mark Townsend, '[Sheik Nimr al-Nimr: Shi'a cleric was a thorn in Saudi regime's side](#)', *The Guardian*, 2 January 2016.

¹⁵¹ US Department of State, [Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report](#), 2016.

¹⁵² [European Parliament awards Sakharov Prize to Raif Badawi](#), European Parliament, 29 October 2015.

¹⁵³ Natana J. Delong-Bas, 'Islam and Power in Saudi Arabia', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, p. 411.

¹⁵⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017 – [Saudi Arabia: Key developments in 2016](#).

social and religious affairs in Saudi Arabia are based on Wahhabi ideas. There is extensive government-owned religious media and broadcast programming. Journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the religious establishment or the ruling authorities are banned. The government financially supports approximately 70 % of Sunni mosques; the remaining 30 % as well as Shia mosques are privately funded and operated. In 2007, the government began to remove content from textbooks and curricula that disparaged other religions. Nevertheless, intolerance in the classroom still exists, with teachers reportedly expressing discriminatory and hateful views of non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects. For the past two years, Saudi Arabia's newly appointed crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman, has championed social and economic reforms under the Vision 2030 project. He has vowed to break the grip of puritanical Islam on the Kingdom and to promote a moderate form of Islam, more in tune with the aspirations of the 70 % of Saudis younger than 30 years of age.¹⁵⁵

6.5.4. Religion in Saudi foreign policy

Spreading Sunni Islam throughout the world is an important tenet of Wahhabism and of the Saudi education system.¹⁵⁶ According to estimates, Saudi Arabia has invested billions since 1979 – the year of the Islamic revolution in Shia Iran – to promote its Wahhabi ideology through charitable foundations. These have funded educational and religious facilities, as well as hospitals, in south and south-east Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel and the Balkans.¹⁵⁷ In some instances, funds have been diverted to support terrorist organisations, contributing to accusations that Saudi Arabia is funding terrorism. At the same time, the puritanical form of Islam promoted by these charitable foundations has changed the face of Islam¹⁵⁸ in many Muslim communities around the world.¹⁵⁹ A Saudi royal decree has since banned financing outside Saudi Arabia of religious schools, mosques, hate literature, and other activities that support religious intolerance and violence toward non-Muslims and nonconforming Muslims.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, measures have been put in place to stop controversial Saudi-based clerics from traveling abroad, to prevent the appearance of interference, or actual interference, by Saudi-based clerics in the domestic affairs of other states.¹⁶¹ In the context of the civil wars in Iraq,¹⁶² Syria and Yemen, Saudi support for one side of the conflict has a distinct sectarian dimension, intended to stop the spread of Shi'a Islam and curb the influence of its Iranian backers.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Chulov, '[I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince](#)', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Stalinsky, [Preliminary Overview - Saudi Arabia's Education System: Curriculum, Spreading Saudi Education to the World and the Official Saudi Position on Education Policy](#); The Middle East Research Institute, 20 December 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Claude Moniquet, [The involvement of Salafi/Wahhabism in the support and supply of arms to rebel groups around the world](#), European Parliament, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Carlotta Gall, [How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS](#), *New York Times*, 21 May 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Kinzer, [Saudi Arabia is destabilizing the world](#), *The Boston Globe*, 11 June 2017.

¹⁶⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, [Annual Report on Saudi Arabia](#), 2017.

¹⁶¹ US Department of State, [Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report](#), 2016.

¹⁶² Patrick Cockburn, '[We finally know what Hillary Clinton knew all along – US allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar are funding ISIS](#)', *The Independent*, 14 October 2016.

6.6. Turkey

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

6.6.1. Religious demography of Turkey

Turkey, like France, does not provide precise statistics on the religious affiliation of its 79 million citizens, even if religious affiliation used to appear on identity cards. The population is 98 % or 99 % Muslim, mainly Hanafi Sunnis.¹⁶³ Among Turkish Muslims, Alevis¹⁶⁴ form a large minority (between 15 and 20 million). There are debates among the scholars on the status of Alevism as an un-orthodox branch of Sunni Islam, as part of Shia Islam or as an independent version of Islam. The Shia community in Turkey numbers around 3 million believers, mainly Twelvers.

There are also a small number of other religious minorities: Jews (17 000), Armenian Orthodox¹⁶⁵ (90 000, including 60 000 Turkish citizens), Roman Catholics (25 000), Syriac Orthodox (20 000),¹⁶⁶ Yezidis¹⁶⁷ (22 000, 17 000 of whom have arrived from Syria since 2014), Baha'is (10 000) and fewer than 2 000 Greek Orthodox.

6.6.2. Religious dynamics

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

6.6.3. State / religion nexus

Turkey is a secular state and the constitution provides for freedom of religion. Nevertheless, religion is regulated by the state through a complicated recognition system. The Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (presidency of religious affairs) under the Prime

¹⁶³ Hanafi is one of the four main jurisprudence schools of Sunni Islam and the largest in the world.

¹⁶⁴ Alevism maintains links with both Twelver Shia Islam, which recognised Ali as the rightful successor of the Prophet, followed by 12 imams, and with Sunni Islam. Contrary to other branches of Islam, Alevis use wine and music in their worship, do not observe the five prayers a day and do not see the pilgrimage to Mecca as an obligation. They practice in assembly houses rather than regular mosques; men and women are not separated during the ceremony.

¹⁶⁵ The Armenian Apostolic Church, also referred to as Gregorian Church or Armenian Orthodox Church, is the national church of Armenia and part of the Orthodox family.

¹⁶⁶ The Syriac Orthodox Church is a self-governing church of the Orthodox family.

¹⁶⁷ Yezidism is practiced mainly by Kurds in the Middle East. It is a monotheist faith with ancient Iranian roots (maybe connected to the Mithra cult) and elements from the Sunni faith. Their principal temple is situated in Lalech in Iraqi Kurdistan. The wars in Iraq since 2003 and the emergence of ISIL/Da'esh have pushed the Yezidi to immigrate to Turkey or Western Europe.

Minister's office coordinates religious matters, administers places of worship in Turkey and abroad, and promotes Islam. The Diyanet provides the imams with training, supervises the sermon to be read in the more than 80 000 mosques of the country every week and salaries the imams. Since 2006, the budget of the Diyanet has increased fourfold (to around US\$2 billion in 2016)¹⁶⁸ and the role of the administration has changed from control of the religion by the secularist state to a greater emphasis on promotion of Islam. The number of officers in the Diyanet has doubled to 150 000 and its budget is 40 % greater than that of the interior ministry.

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

Other religions, including non Hanafi Sunnis, must sustain themselves¹⁶⁹ and they sometimes face obstacles to their freedom to worship. The legal recognition of leadership, structures and properties is often a challenge, for non-Muslim religions as well as for Alevis. It shows the special status of Sunni Islam in Turkey. Religious education is compulsory but tends to favour Sunni Islam. Recognised religious minorities can be exempted and sometimes benefit from teaching in their own religion, but not Alevis, non-Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Yezidis, agnostics or atheists. The only Greek Orthodox seminary meanwhile, in Halki, was closed in 1971 and has yet to reopen.

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

6.6.4. Religion in Turkey's foreign policy

Since 1983, the Diyanet has had a diplomatic branch to oversee Turkish Islam abroad¹⁷⁰ and this development has given Turkey a role in shaping Islam in many European countries, including Germany. For years, this action has been credited by experts¹⁷¹ as one of the reasons for low levels of radicalisation among Turkish communities abroad. In countries like Belgium, the Turkish community is most often served by a Turkish imam sent by the Diyanet to a mosque also run by the Diyanet.¹⁷² Turkey, officially a secular state, is therefore promoting Islam abroad.

Turkey is member of a number of international religious organisations, including the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. In Turkey's humanitarian and development policies, the country puts an emphasis on Islamic solidarity,¹⁷³ in the Balkans, in the Middle East and in Africa, especially in Somalia. Turkey is advocating for a reform of the United Nations Charter in order to include a Muslim nation as permanent member of the UN Security Council. Nevertheless, Turkey's religious affiliation does not prevent the country

¹⁶⁸ David Lepeska, '[Turkey Casts the Diyanet](#)' Foreign Affairs, 17 May 2015.

¹⁶⁹ This inequality has given grounds for complaints about discrimination. In 2016, the government paid for the utility costs of most mosques, but also of 419 minority places of worship.

¹⁷⁰ Leela Jacinto, '[Turkey's Post-Coup Crisis Arrives in Europe, Dividing the Diaspora](#)', *France 24*, 2 August 2016.

¹⁷¹ Leela Jacinto, '[Morocco's Outlaw Country Is the Heartland of Global Terrorism](#)', *Foreign Policy*, 7 April 2016.

¹⁷² Didier Leroy and Joost Hiltermann, '[Why Belgium?](#)', *The New York Review of Books*, 24 March 2016.

¹⁷³ Philippe Perchoc, '[Turkish Humanitarian Policy: An Emerging Donor](#)', EPRS, European Parliament, 17 May 2016.

from cooperating closely with partners of different persuasions, such as Israel, Iran or the United States.

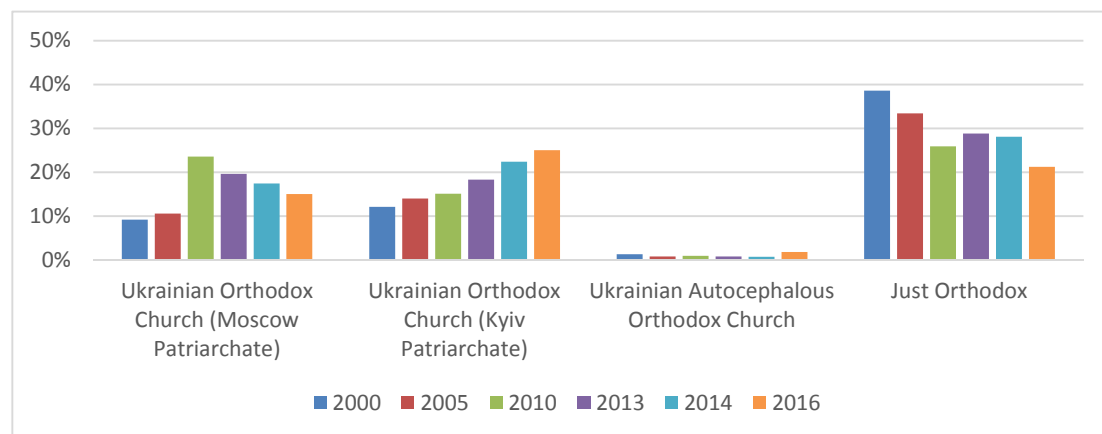
6.7. Ukraine

6.7.1. Religious demography of Ukraine

Ukraine — predominantly an Orthodox Christian country with a high degree of religiosity against the background of the country's official atheistic Soviet era — has three Orthodox denominations: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), originally a dissident church (from Moscow) during the Soviet era. Another major player is the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which follows Orthodox rituals but also recognises the authority of the pope in Rome.¹⁷⁴ The Orthodox branches in Moscow and Kyiv developed separate and distinct traditions during medieval times; the Russian tsar consolidated the two churches in 1686 after establishing a political union with Ukraine. UOC-KP sought autocephaly in 1992 following Ukraine's political independence.¹⁷⁵

According to a 2015 survey,¹⁷⁶ 73.7 % of respondents identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. Of those, 37.9 % identify with UOC-KP, 19.6 % with the UOC-MP and 39.1 % identify as 'just Orthodox'. The Ukrainian population identifies as 8.1 % Greek Catholic, 0.8 % Roman Catholic, 0.9 % Protestant, and 0.7 % 'other' religious groups. Of those who took part in the survey, 8.5 % said they were 'just Christian', and 6.1 % stated that they did not belong to any religious group.

Figure 6 – Orthodoxy in Ukraine



Data source: [Kyiv Post](#), June 2016.

6.7.2. Religious dynamics

The importance of churches as tools for public diplomacy has increased, accompanying the evolving conflict in Ukraine. The communities that define themselves as separate from the Moscow Patriarchate — UOC-KP and UAOC — remain unrecognised, as the

¹⁷⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica: [Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church](#), accessed 9 October 2017.

¹⁷⁵ [Church and Religion in Ukraine: The Religious Dimension of the Current Conflict](#), Radboud University, Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, September 2016.

¹⁷⁶ February 2015 [national survey](#) conducted by independent polling groups Center for Social and Marketing Research, SOCIS, Sociological Groups Ratin, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, and the Razumkov Center.

Moscow Patriarchate has refused to recognise them as autocephalous, and no other Orthodox churches have recognised them. The UAOC played a role in the initial establishment of the UOC-KP but remained separate for internal reasons. Patriarch Filaret (by his secular name Mykhailo Denysenko, current head of UOC-KP and a former Russian Orthodox bishop) has transformed the UOC-KP into a strong religious community, as well as a pro-Ukraine civil society actor. On the other hand, the Ukrainian legislators' push to regulate the activities of UOC-MP and establish an independent Orthodox church for Ukraine has met with resistance from pro-MP forces.¹⁷⁷

In February 2016, a historic meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill occurred in Cuba, as a part of the Catholic Church's efforts to bridge the historical divide with the Orthodox Church.¹⁷⁸ Analysts saw Russian President Vladimir Putin's implicit approval of this meeting as a geopolitical move to enhance Russia's standing, sparking concern in Ukraine. Despite this rapprochement, the Russian Patriarchate in Moscow has remained suspicious of the UGCC and its allegiance to the Vatican, accusing the UGCC of driving a wedge between Orthodox Christians and Catholics, alleging that 'the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine repeatedly positions itself as a force that breeds enmity and hatred and systematically hinders reconciliation between the East and the West'.¹⁷⁹

6.7.3. State / religion nexus

As already noted, religious rifts have grown deeper since 2014. Ukraine's Orthodox churches have found themselves aligned along the country's political divides, a trend exacerbated during the Maidan revolution. The UOC-KP emerged as a strong pro-Ukraine actor during the protests. While protesters in November 2013 initially distanced themselves from political and religious actors, the Kyiv Patriarchate stepped in as public gatherings turned violent. The monastery of St. Michael's provided sanctuary for the injured, and soon spiritual leaders from different faiths (including some from the Moscow Patriarchate) erected tents to administer to the spiritual needs of protesters. Owing to the UOC-KP's proactive role in supporting the protesters and Russian support for the separatist movement in the east, the Kyiv Patriarchate's following has grown more in the past few years than it has since the end of communism.¹⁸⁰ According to a 2016 survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, almost 60 % of respondents ranked the church (denomination unspecified) as Ukraine's most trusted institution.

6.7.4. Religion in Ukraine's foreign politics

Although political rather than religious factors continue to drive the conflict in eastern Ukraine, religious identities have sharpened divides, and have in eastern Ukraine proved another way for militia groups to single out perceived enemies. The Moscow Patriarchate remains internally divided between pro-Russia and anti-Russia camps and has called for an end to the violence on both sides. However, the Ukrainian public perceives it as de facto supporting the separatists.¹⁸¹ On 16 May 2014, representatives of the self-styled

¹⁷⁷ [Ukrainian anti-Russian Church bills run into resistance](#), BBC Monitoring, 5 June 2017.

¹⁷⁸ ['Why meeting between pope and Russian church leader is a big deal'](#), *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 February 2016.

¹⁷⁹ [Russian Church: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is stumbling block in East-West relations](#), Tass, 2 August 2016.

¹⁸⁰ [Thanks to Russia, Ukrainians Swell Ranks of Kyiv Patriarchate](#), Atlantic Council, 22 June 2016.

¹⁸¹ A Hug, [The EU's Eastern Partnership God problem](#), November 2015.

Donetsk Peoples Republic (DPR) published a 'constitution', according to which 'The leading and dominant faith is the Orthodox faith ... as professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The historical heritage and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognised and respected, including as a main pillar of the Russian World doctrine'¹⁸². Priests in the Donbas have prayed openly for the separatists,¹⁸³ and in a 2014 letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew I in Istanbul, Moscow Patriarch Kirill I framed the conflict as a religious war. According to a 2015 report on the role of religion in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, prepared by the Center for Civil Liberties and the International Partnership for Human Rights, separatist militias have violently targeted religious leaders from the UOC-KP, Protestants and the UGCC.¹⁸⁴

All Orthodox denominations in Ukraine maintain conservative views towards LGBT rights, in a country that already ranks towards the bottom in Europe in terms of LGBT acceptance. In terms of politics, however, the UOC-KP has positioned itself as pro-European, reaching out via the high-profile All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (AUCCRO) to European organisations to raise awareness of Ukraine abroad. In June 2015, an AUCCRO delegation visited Berlin, meeting with former European Parliament President and head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Dr Hans-Gert Pottering as well as with representatives from a group associated with the Christian Democratic faction in the Bundestag. In March 2016, the AUCCRO visited the Netherlands ahead of the referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The absence of leaders of the UAOC and UOC-MP suggested that the issue of a pro-Europe Ukraine may not be able to overcome polarised political loyalties. An AUCCRO delegation held high-level meetings with the EP, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in May 2017. In September 2017, a conference on 'The role of religion in European integration – from the perspective of Ukraine and the European Union' was held in Kyiv, with the participation of AUCCRO and members of the European People's Party.¹⁸⁵

6.8. United States of America

The United States is a religiously diverse and pluralistic country, with a number of Christian churches coexisting with other religions, such as Islam and Hinduism. The free exercise of religion is enshrined in the US Constitution and in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. In foreign policy, the US advocates the promotion of religious freedom throughout the world and is considered a leader in this area of international politics.

¹⁸² [When God becomes the weapon, Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine](#), report prepared by Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015.

¹⁸³ ['Rebel priest' prays for Ukraine gunmen, denies doing more](#), Reuters, 29 April 2014.

¹⁸⁴ [When God becomes the weapon, Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine](#), report prepared by Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015.

¹⁸⁵ [Member of the European Parliament and AUCCRO discuss the role of religion in society](#), Religious Information Service of Ukraine, 22 September 2017.

6.8.1. Religious demography

In 2016, the population of the US was estimated at 324.6 million.¹⁸⁶ According to the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study,¹⁸⁷ based on a sample of 35 000 Americans from all 50 states asked about their religious affiliations, beliefs and practices, the major religious categories in the US are: 70.6 % Christian (of which 25.4 % evangelical Protestant, 14.7 % mainline Protestant, 6.5 % historically black Protestant, 20.8 % Catholic; 1.6 % Mormon,¹⁸⁸ 0.5 % Orthodox Christian, 0.8 % Jehovah's Witnesses and 0.4 % other Christian denominations). Of the 6.0 % of Americans declaring a non-Christian faith, 1.9 % are Jewish, 0.9 % are Muslim, 0.7 % are Buddhist and 0.7 % are Hindu. The remaining 22.8 % declare themselves to be unaffiliated (agnostic or atheist).

6.8.2. State/religion nexus

According to the First Amendment of the US Constitution 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. The Constitution thus prohibits the government from establishing an official religion as well as government actions that unduly favour one religion over another. According to legal scholars, this also means the prohibition of unduly preferring religion to non-religion, or non-religion over religion. The second part of the amendment, referred to as the 'Free Exercise Clause', reserves the right of American citizens to accept any religious belief and engage in religious rituals.¹⁸⁹ In addition, Article VI of the Constitution states that 'no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States'.¹⁹⁰

In spite of the spirit of the US Constitution, and in contrast to the fact that it makes no explicit mention of God or the divine, all 50 state constitutions in the USA do.¹⁹¹ In seven states it is even prohibited constitutionally for people who do not believe in God to hold public office.¹⁹²

Beyond the constitutional provisions, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993¹⁹³ protects the free exercise of religion. Nine states have Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) legislation pending in 2017.

6.8.3. Religion in US foreign policy

The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998 declares that two objectives of US foreign policy are to condemn violations of religious freedom, and to promote, and to assist other governments in the promotion of the fundamental right to freedom of religion; and seek to channel US security and development assistance to governments that are found not to be engaged in gross violations of the right to freedom of religion.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁶ [CIA World Factbook](#).

¹⁸⁷ Pew Research Center, [Religious Landscape Study](#).

¹⁸⁸ The official name of the Mormon Church is the 'Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints'.

¹⁸⁹ Legal Information Institute, [Free Exercise Clause](#).

¹⁹⁰ Legal Information Institute, [US Constitution](#).

¹⁹¹ Aleksandra Sandstrom, [God or the divine is referenced in every state constitution](#), Pew Research Center, 7 August 2017.

¹⁹² Maryland, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

¹⁹³ 103rd Congress of the United States of America, [Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993](#).

¹⁹⁴ 105th Congress of the United States of America, [International Religious Freedom Act](#) of 1998.

Within the US State Department, the Office of International Religious Freedom¹⁹⁵ has the mission of promoting religious freedom. The stated function of the office is to 'monitor religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommend and implement policies in respective regions or countries, and develop programmes to promote religious freedom'. The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom heads the office.

The office is an institutional expression of US commitment to religious freedom, and to the international covenants that guarantee it as the right of every human being.

The office carries out its mission through a number of tools, including an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom in the world, which is mandated by and presented to the US Congress;¹⁹⁶ designation by the Secretary of State of nations guilty of particularly severe violations of religious freedom as 'Countries of Particular Concern';¹⁹⁷ meetings with foreign government officials, as well as with religious and human rights groups in the US and abroad, to address problems of religious freedom; testimony before Congress on issues of international religious freedom; cooperation with the independent United States Commission on International Religious Freedom;¹⁹⁸ sponsorship of reconciliation programmes in disputes that divide groups along lines of religious identity; support for NGOs.

In 2013, the State Department established the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA), headed by a special representative.¹⁹⁹ RGA also has three additional principal officers: the special envoy for monitoring and combatting anti-Semitism, the special envoy to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the special representative to Muslim communities.²⁰⁰ The RGA works to implement the National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement²⁰¹ by: advising State Department leadership on policy matters as they relate to religion; supporting posts and bureaus in assessing religious dynamics and engaging religious actors; and serving as a first point of entry for those seeking to engage the State Department on matters of religion and global affairs.

¹⁹⁵ US Department of State, [Religious Freedom](#).

¹⁹⁶ [Annual Report on International Religious Freedom](#).

¹⁹⁷ Nations so designated are subject to further action, including economic sanctions, by the USA.

¹⁹⁸ The [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan US federal government commission created by the IRFA that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

¹⁹⁹ [Office of Religion and Global Affairs](#).

²⁰⁰ The US policy of religious engagement has had a mixed critical response from scholars. For example, Roberto Bosco argues that the US global strategy on Islam moderation, which aims to build coalitions with key states and to promote religious freedom, has been relatively successful.

²⁰¹ [National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement](#).

Since 11 September 2001, the European Union has been confronted by an increasing number of religious crises in a world where globalisation is reshaping religious demography. In parallel to similar developments in its Member States and in the United States of America, the EU has developed instruments to give greater consideration to religious trends when addressing human rights issues and engaging with key partner countries. Faith-based organisations are playing a pivotal role in a number of new fields, such as climate change, development and conflict resolution, and the EU is taking these organisations increasingly into account. In addition, religion plays an important role in the internal and external policies of some key EU partners, as illustrated in the annexes to this study. For these reasons, religion is slowly emerging as a new dimension of EU external policies.

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