



Wilfried  
**Martens Centre**  
for European Studies

# Ethics and Religion

What's The EU  
Got to Do with It?

**Jos J. van Gennip**





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## Credits

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The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP), dedicated to the promotion of Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

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**About us**



# Martens Centre profile

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The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, established in 2007, is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP). The Martens Centre embodies a pan-European mindset, promoting Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values. It serves as a framework for national political foundations linked to member parties of the EPP. It currently has 30 member foundations and three permanent guest foundations in 24 EU and non-EU countries. The Martens Centre takes part in the preparation of EPP programmes and policy documents. It organises seminars and training on EU policies and on the process of European integration.

The Martens Centre also contributes to formulating EU and national public policies. It produces research studies and books, electronic newsletters, policy briefs and the twice-yearly European View journal. Its research activities are divided into six clusters: party structures and EU institutions, economic and social policies, EU foreign policy, environment and energy, values and religion, and new societal challenges. Through its papers, conferences, authors' dinners and website, the Martens Centre offers a platform for discussion among experts, politicians, policymakers and the European public.

## Dedication

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*This study is a tribute to Wilfried Martens, after whom the political foundation of the European People's Party is named. He always stood for values-based, courageous politics with a holistic and long-term vision.*

# About the author



## About Jos J. A. M. van Gennip

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Jos J. A. M. van Gennip is a member of the Academic Council of the Martens Centre. He is President of the Socires Foundation, Chairman of the Food First Coalition and a member of the General Council at Inter Press Service (IPS). He was previously general rapporteur for the political platform of the EPP, a member of the Upper House of the Dutch Parliament, Deputy Director General at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Economic Committee of NATO.

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# Foreword



It has been a long time since I read a political science paper with so much interest. If there is one word to characterise this paper, it is 'extra-ordinary'. For it is extraordinary to find an author capable of setting forth the major problems of today in such an insightful manner and with just the right words—the basic precondition for finding solutions. And that he has been able to put these problems into their proper context without running into major problems with political correctness—this, too, is extraordinary. Moreover, it is not every author who can address highly complex problems using understandable language, thus disentangling a difficult topic and forcing the reader to think. Finally, it is not every day that one encounters an author so deeply engaged with his topic who acknowledges his own bias in choosing political solutions and shows such respect for the opinions of others. And yet here we have a text by an author who has all these characteristics.

Van Gennip indicates that the Christian Democratic movement faces fundamentalists from among both the liberals and the left. By doing so, he overturns the existing prejudice according to which dogmatism is a feature of Christian Democracy. It is encouraging to read arguments which show that rationality prevails even in those areas where prejudice finds only obscurantism.

Van Gennip sees the European People's Party as the only political power with the ability to harmonise traditional values with the challenges Europe is currently facing: not only globalisation, but also migration. He points out that it would be 'a misjudgement to disregard the importance of religion and traditional values altogether.' And he rightly adds, 'People will only really feel at home in this globalised world when a proper balance between tradition and modernity is found.' Such a stance makes him, in a certain manner, a successor to such unconventional thinkers as Madeleine Albright (see, for example, her book *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*). Van Gennip considers the European People's Party to be the only real defender of the principle of subsidiarity. In his view, the subsidiarity principle helps protect the freedom of religion and religious diversity at the national level against the relativism of the liberals and the left, which is often expressed in legislative proposals and resolutions at the EU level.

The author does not limit himself to describing the problems: he also sets forth concrete solutions for the European People's Party. He asks the party to commit itself to working hard towards finding a 'new balance between economic growth and a respect for the integrity of Creation.' Thus, he offers a compact and understandable vision.



It is up to us who are politicians to convey this vision to the people and to transform it into concrete political steps—measures that Europe so desperately needs.

**Pavel Svoboda MEP**



# Executive Summary



This essay argues that there is a strong relationship between ethics, religion and the EU. The member states and member parties of the European People's Party (EPP) should be leading the debate on ethics, values and religion, consistently applying the principle of subsidiarity: although policy matters should be dealt with at the lowest possible level of decision-making, some are best dealt with by a common approach at the EU level.

The present paper examines the relationship between ethics, religion and the EU in 10 sections. Section 1 explains the link between ethics and the economy, arguing that the project of the single market has ethical implications, for example concerning health care and abortion issues. Section 2 shows that the EPP is the only major party in the EU that defends the autonomy of the member states on questions of religion. In contrast, liberal and socialist ideologies violate the principle of subsidiarity and, in doing so, endanger religious pluralism.

Section 3 argues that ethics and religion are not relics of the past, but can provide resources to feel at home in modern times. The EPP cannot deny that European societies are becoming more secular. It needs to search for a balance between respect for traditions and cohesive societal relationships on the one hand, and globalisation, progress and individual autonomy on the other hand. Viewed from this perspective, our multicultural society can be seen as both a threat and an opportunity. Section 4 highlights that secularisation is not a universal phenomenon and European liberal democracy faces threats from isolated and radicalised communities, often funded by radical Islamist donors from abroad. Section 5 suggests that, in contrast to those small radicalised groups, the majority of immigrants and their descendants identify with European values. The coexistence of Christians and non-Christians can be a positive factor. The EPP might do more to attract those immigrants who subscribe to notions such as respect for the family and justice.

Section 6 explains the need to find political responses to the coalition between opponents of immigration and anti-Europeans. The EPP could contribute to changes in thinking about immigration and asylum, as well as development aid. Such responses could be facilitated by the building of a new coalition with the Orthodox Churches, as outlined in section 7. This coalition could focus on issues such as the economy and social policy, and the relationship with Orthodox Christians within the EU, as well as with the Church of Constantinople and Christians in the Middle East. The challenge of anti-Europeanism can also be met by fostering the European identity and values in a global context, as described in section 8.



Whilst sections 1 to 8 concern societal questions and the EPP's responses, sections 9 and 10 look more specifically at debates within the EPP. Section 9 examines different positions on the socio-economic and socio-cultural and ethical axes. The socio-economic axis describes the positioning of groups such as economic liberals, proponents of the Rhineland model and advocates of a strong welfare state. The socio-cultural axis relates to positions on the issues of faith, secularism and culture, and warns against polarisation between secularists on one hand and guardians of the Christian identity of the EPP on the other. The final section, 10, expands on three specific socio-economic points: the global financial and economic architecture, international development policies, and the ecological market model. Sections 9 and 10 both argue for the need for constructive discussions in the EPP, because the 'automatic pilot' of pragmatism and polls is an insufficient instrument to guide the party.

The text relates these themes to the new European parliamentary term 2014–19, for which the EPP has been entrusted with a new mandate and responsibility.

Within the atmosphere of pluralism, dialogue and tolerance, the EPP should continuously cherish its Christian roots and values while responding to the economic, social and cultural realities of the day. The EPP must also leave enough room for those that belong to non-Christian religions and other beliefs and convictions. Even non-Christians must be able to say: 'From the perspective of my own sources of inspiration (or religion), I agree enthusiastically with the EPP's view of humanity.'



# Introduction



Ethics and religion are important issues to reckon with within the EU. Nevertheless, the position of religion in the EU's institutional structure is a contentious one. Some people argue that the EU is foremost an internal market and therefore it should not regulate religious affairs. Others complain about the secular character of the EU, referring to the deep Christian convictions of the EU's founding fathers.

Still others do not grasp the importance of religious convictions in the analysis of political choices and conflicts. For instance, many observers do not understand the extent to which the Russian aggression in Ukraine is supported by the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate in Moscow, and to which both the Russian state and church view Ukraine as part of Russia (in contradiction with international law and official declarations).

The author of this essay is among those who are convinced that the EU plays a role in religious and ethical discussions. The Lisbon Treaty has, correctly, placed religious policies on the national level.<sup>1</sup> Those who take the value of subsidiarity seriously honour the principle that decisions on morality and religion are primarily decided by civil society and without government intervention. Where civil society is unable to decide, national governments have the ultimate say when it comes to matters of morality and religion. The question of whether governments should intervene in these matters lies primarily within the competence of the member states themselves. Nevertheless, the principle of subsidiarity also means that those matters that cannot be dealt with efficiently by national or regional governments, or by civil society, are best dealt with by a common approach at the EU level.

This author draws a distinction between EU agencies on the one hand, and EU-level political parties and civil society organisations on the other. EU agencies are neutral, but also tolerant with respect to religion, and that includes discussions about issues such as family and marriage. The EU institutions thus do not play any role in the re-Christianisation of Europe, as some people would wish, nor in promoting a secularist or anti-religious culture. Because of the neutrality of agencies such as the European Commission, it is civil society and political parties that have a role to play in formulating a common approach to the matters of ethics and religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty states: 'The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.'



The present study outlines those areas which should be tackled at the EU level and those which should be addressed at the national or regional levels. It aims to contribute to the discussion of what the meaning of religious and values-based policy choices could be today. The arguments presented here are based on the principle of the separation of church and state. They are also based on the conviction that our society and our politics need firm values and meaningful perspectives above pragmatism and short-term solutions. Only on such a basis can our democracy maintain its strength in a multiform society, and the improvement of our societies be fostered through policies for the common good.

The EU is facing historic challenges. The EPP, against the expectations of many, has been entrusted with a new mandate in the 2014–19 European parliamentary term. This mandate carries with it enormous responsibility with regard to tackling the EU's economic problems, facing external threats and defending the principles of liberal democracy as our form of government. This mandate also presents an opportunity to tackle the enormous questions of ethics and religion in the modern age.



# The internal market and ethical questions



While the EU clearly has powers in the field of the internal market, economic policies also touch, sometimes unwillingly, upon a number of ethical issues. No one will deny the competence of the EU in an area like that of genetically modified crops, but what about the creation and marketability of human embryos for medical research? Similarly, under German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1982–98), the protection of fixed prices for books had a cultural background, but also an ethical dimension.

The founding fathers of Europe could not have dreamt that their project would have influenced something as nationally defined as broadcasting systems in Europe. However, the free flow of services has resulted in Dutch television channels being ‘invaded’ by foreign commercial broadcasters. The same legal justification has been used by Scottish abortion clinics to advertise in Irish university magazines. There is also the commitment, not only from churches but also the trade union movement, to preserve the validity across Europe of the weekly day of rest. And whenever someone mentions a greater role for the EU in the field of health care, he or she very quickly ends up in deep ethical waters.

In addition, there are several social and ethical dimensions to account for within the free market sphere, such as the prohibition of child labour and the upholding of international conventions. One could take the argument one step further by arguing that at the core of the markets are ethical values such as the freedom of trade and the right to equal access. Finally, the recent economic crisis has shown us how unethical, if not always unlawful, practices in the field of financial trading and investment can harm the worldwide economy. Ethics and economics are thus interrelated and cannot be separated from one another.

# Subsidiarity and the question of the hierarchy of human rights



With regard to ethical and religious questions and policy, there is a debate surrounding the so-called hierarchy of fundamental rights. In the EU, this debate is closely linked to the division of competences between the EU and the member states. The notion of the hierarchy of human rights means that some rights are more important than others. For example, some have argued that the right to life or the right to due process are more important than the freedom of religion because only a limited number of rights can be enforced by the state. The EPP rejected the concept of the hierarchy during the preparation of its 2012 *Party Platform*,<sup>2</sup> although it agreed that conflict exists between different rights.

Freedom of religion continues to be defended at the national level. Member state regulations are possibly more effective than the protection offered by the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that some EU-level initiatives have threatened the freedom of religion. One typical example of this was the (non-binding) resolution, introduced in 2013 in the European Parliament by the Portuguese Socialist Member Edite Estrela. The resolution was rejected by the Parliament thanks to the efforts of the EPP. The intention of the resolution was to give the right to abortion and the duty to provide sex education priority over the competence of member states to apply their own regulations in this field.<sup>4</sup>

Another example is the discussion on the right to euthanasia, which is strictly prohibited in some countries, including Germany. On this matter, there have been attempts to move euthanasia up in the hierarchy of rights and into the area of the EU internal market, where it would become classified under the provision of medical services.

The EPP is the only major party that defends the autonomy of the member states in this field, and the only one that stands up for the respect for differing views on these issues within its own ranks and for the freedom of belief and conscience. This could become a specific point of attraction for the EPP, if it positions itself as the only major party in which the pluralism of ideas is still possible and where there is room for a real debate when it comes to the inevitably ethical aspects of EU politics.

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<sup>2</sup> EPP, *Party Platform*, final text adopted by the EPP Statutory Congress, Bucharest 17–18 October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Art. 10, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament, *Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, 2013/2040(INI) (3 December 2013).



The alternative, which some liberals and socialists stand for, is the image of human life and a society in which there is no meaningful or positive translation of religious diversity in the domain of politics and state. The increasingly secular liberalism and socialism movements do not incorporate this kind of pluralism within their worldview as a value in itself.

Initiatives such as the 'Estrela Resolution' have potentially serious consequences, which could endanger diversity. They jeopardise the possibility of defending pro-life arguments and the freedom of educational choice. Such initiatives could further fuel the aversion to a 'Brussels', and especially a European Parliament, that unnecessarily intervenes in the lives of citizens. Given the fanaticism with which many libertarians and secularists would like to implement their 'liberation agenda' at the European level, it is of great importance that the EPP builds a clear position in the next five years. In its position, the principles of subsidiarity and the balance between the various fundamental rights and dialogue should constitute important elements.



**The cover of  
religion as  
nostalgia for  
the past**



There is another dimension to the relationship between ethics, religion and EU-level policies. The EPP cannot escape a deeper discussion on the question of a modernisation and globalisation that goes beyond global economic competition and the need to balance fundamental rights.

Significant sections of our society are struggling with the disappearance of old familiarities, such as the vanishing of the authoritative position of churches, the disappearance of national borders and multiculturalism. This is coupled with the arrival of an 'evil' outside world that seems to be becoming ever more powerful.

There is nostalgia for old familiarities and therefore pressure on political movements and their representatives to strengthen the illusion that politics can bring them back. For example, the publications of the Pro Europa Christiana Federation (Federation Pro Europa Christiana) suggest that European politics, if not partly responsible for the secularisation and loss of familiarities, should at least work to reverse this decline.

This argument is aimed at the EPP in particular. However, a political movement that wants to be at the centre of society and that is 'of the people' cannot deny that our population has greatly changed, and in some ways has become more 'liberal' as well as more autonomous and secular. It is an illusion that politics could realise the 'dream of Compostela', a return to a Christian Europe.

It would be a misjudgement to disregard the importance of religion and traditional values altogether. People will only really feel at home in this globalised world when a proper balance between tradition and modernity is found. Within this understanding of modernity there should be space in public debates for voices that are reluctant to approve historic and irreversible decisions in the technology–ethics relationship, especially in the field of genetic discoveries. Finding a new balance between respect for traditions and cohesive societal relationships on the one hand, and mobility, autonomy and progress on the other has become more important than ever.

The EPP can become a party that has a future in big cities, but its appeal may also be, as Bavaria proves, found in light of its respect for traditions, human scale and relationships. In this way, its closeness to the citizens could become a second trademark. Change does not just mean degradation, therefore concepts such as conservation and preservation should not necessarily be cherished. It is for exactly this reason that elements of Phillip Blond's approach and his concept of a 'Big Society' are so popular, and not



just in the UK and Italy.<sup>5</sup> The time of waiting, sitting back and relying on the authority of the church is over. The EPP should develop a proactive policy.

Leading thinkers and institutions could help to find a new, modern interpretation of the EPP's 'right', 'conservative' and 'centre' characteristics. A leitmotif for this process could be what the French philosopher André Glucksmann said during the work on the 2012 EPP *Party Platform*: 'As a non-Christian, I consider the European Christian Democrats as the potentially most powerful, if not the only serious counter-movement against the dominant nihilism of today's Europe.'

In this context, it is also pertinent to note the changing relationship between the church and political engagement. Less than a hundred years ago some church authorities still discouraged democratic participation. Today, Pope Francis calls for political engagement. These calls are not designed to promote specific interests. They are about the idea, perhaps even the restoration of the idea, that political engagement, and certainly the profession of a politician, is a vocation that requires responsibility, expertise and defence of the ideal of the common good. This is an important issue which touches upon the strength of democracy and the civil sphere in society. Philosophers have noted before that dedication and commitment are vital to government.<sup>6</sup> But for those who know that a new connection between ethics and politics is indispensable for the restoration of respect, the recruitment of talent and the mobilisation of enthusiasm, these calls may be of immense importance. In any case, they are indispensable to countering the *Politikverdrossenheit* (political reluctance), and the deafening siren song of false populism and anti-Europeanism.

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<sup>5</sup> P. Blond, *Red Tory. How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* (London: Faber, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp / Insel, 2001), 9–31; and C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).



**Multicultural  
society as a  
threat to secular  
freedom**



Today we are facing an entirely different challenge, but one which also touches on the relationship between religion, ethics and the EU. This tendency actually counters the trend outlined above towards a secularist culture.

The emergence of a confident Islam on our continent, in the face of a Christianity that seems to be evaporating and disappearing, sets the issue of multiculturalism in a whole new light.

For about half a century, the approach in Europe has been to deal with the various minorities in a culture still dominated by Christian values. In addition there has been an assumption that modernisation and the increasing prosperity in the entire European population would lead to secularisation. The European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, the EU institutions' think tank, has made it clear in its recent report, *Global Trends 2030*, that this premise is not true worldwide.<sup>7</sup> Even in Europe it is by no means self-evident that transition and modernisation in non-Christian cultures will lead to the abandonment or modification of religious beliefs. In some areas of major cities and towns in Europe, particularly in the UK and France, the separation between church and state is becoming very thin, for example, through the de facto, although illegal, application of shariah law.

Here again, we, as the EPP, would like to leave the question of how to deal with these new phenomena to the nation state. However, if multiculturalism leads to situations in which the core principles of our constitutions, such as personal liberty and equal rights for men and women, are systematically disregarded, multiculturalism has reached its limits. Across the Union there should be no room for parallel judiciary systems. This could become a common European problem. Isolated and radicalised communities, often associated with foreign funding sources, which in some districts are becoming dominant, and the resulting recruitment of jihadists, setting up of militant cells and propaganda programmes, and deployment of agents, is certainly a challenge that requires European coordination. Safeguarding the basic principles of our democracy against authoritarian and fundamentalist ideologies touches upon the cornerstones of the EU.

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<sup>7</sup> Á. de Vasconcelos (ed.), *Global Trends 2030 – Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World*, European Strategy and Policy Analysis System and the European Union Institute for Security Studies (Brussels, 27 April 2012).

**Multicultural  
society as  
an opportunity  
to strengthen  
the EU**



Fortunately, there is another, shinier, side of the coin. The majority of immigrants and their descendants do like to identify themselves with Europe's fundamental values and European culture, while maintaining important elements of their own culture as well. This is the case for many Muslims, as well as for people with different religious backgrounds, and many migrants and refugees with a Christian background. That is why coexistence and a lively exchange between cultures are primarily good things. An open society cannot live without them, but at the same time has to reckon with the limits of its capacity to do so.

This will pose a particular challenge for the EPP in the years to come. In fact, the European centre and centre-right could have great appeal for many migrants thanks to its respect for the family, savings and work; its promotion of citizens' initiatives; and its belief in taking responsibility for oneself. However, for some reason, the EPP has only managed to attract a moderate proportion of the immigrant population with these values. A reflection within the EPP on the relationship with this group should be a priority in the next five years.<sup>8</sup> Concepts such as justice, solidarity and responsibility appear in one way or another in various religious traditions, leading to quite similar political and social choices. This important field of interest requires further exploration.

Curiously, there has been hardly any systematic attention paid to dialogue with the growing group of immigrant Christians that has become established in Europe in recent decades. Through systematic dialogue with this group, the EPP could not only create a bridge to potential supporters, but could also open the door for them to greater involvement in European public affairs.

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<sup>8</sup> The Martens Centre has published a paper about the need to account for the political potential of immigrants and their descendants. See R. Castro Nacarino, V. Novotný and J. Lageson, *Migrating Towards Participation: Immigrants and Their Descendants in the Political Process*, Centre for European Studies (Brussels, November 2012).

**The coalition  
between  
opponents of  
immigration and  
anti-Europeans**



There seems to be yet more ‘unfinished business’ emerging from the EPP’s discussions regarding the 2012 *Party Platform*. There are deep divisions over the advisability of increasing immigration levels to address labour shortages in the technology and care professions and to compensate for Europe’s demographic deficit. Do we want a restrictive policy *à la* Japan, or a welcoming one *à la* the US? This is an urgent question and, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, cannot be answered at the national level alone.

The EPP cannot avoid dealing with these problems given the response of large groups of citizens to that seemingly so uncontrollable phenomenon of immigration, both regular and irregular. Those who argue that the EU is not doing enough to protect its borders against irregular migration, that it is even encouraging immigration on purpose, often adopt an anti-European stance. Thus, anti-immigration votes and anti-European sentiments have been transformed into an appeal for a stronger Fortress Europe. The paradox lies in the fact that the anti-immigrant group advocates for ‘more Europe’ to keep immigrants out, but works with anti-European (‘less Europe’) elements to achieve this.

The EU’s eastern enlargement in the 2000s and the opening up of the inner EU borders through the creation of the Schengen zone have produced some surprising political alliances. One such alliance is that between Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV), who had previously advocated opening an anti-Polish hotline in the Netherlands, and a dubious Polish anti-European party.

These populist political movements have, so far, not been able to establish themselves in the European Parliament as an important political grouping. They may do so in the future though and, here again, there is a distinct role for the EPP to play in counteracting them.

There are also strong indications that an agenda of foreign interests is building up through these forces. Geert Wilders’ PVV receives finance from obscure donors in the US. The lessening influence of populist groups, including the French National Front (Front National) and the PVV, can be assumed from the expressions of sympathy and support received by them from the Russian government. (According to some, Russian funding for the PVV confirms the conspicuous absence of the normally loud Wilders in condemnation of Putin with respect to his role in the disintegration of Ukraine.)



The European asylum and refugee policy is also significant in this context. The ever-growing number of Europe-bound refugees drowning in the Mediterranean indicates that the EU's approach is completely inadequate. Even though strengthening the surveillance of the external borders and sharing the burden of relief care have been on the agenda for many years, these measures are doomed to failure if they are not part of a coherent wider approach, which also extends to the causes of why people flee from their countries of origin. Fragile states, local conflicts, extreme poverty and increasing migration due to likely future environmental catastrophes mean that Europe must develop a robust policy to tackle irregular migration flows.

A change in thinking about development aid is also needed. The new perspective should offer an integrated approach for the protection and promotion of global public goods, from climate policy to peace and security policy; ensure the creation of the conditions for prosperity, such as access to education and health care; and address the new scarcities in the fields of energy, water and food.

Aside from the susceptibility of some traditionalist groups to anti-European and anti-immigration sentiments, ethics and religion are relevant to this debate in another way. Concepts such as human dignity and responsible involvement in the fate of refugees are ethically distinctive starting points. The next few years will be all about translation of the notion that the process of globalisation has winners and losers, and that losers—both inside and outside the EU—should be able to count not on our indifference but on our compassion—that notion central to all world religions. This is in addition to the fact that the EPP's 2012 *Party Platform* so clearly articulates our responsibility for the Creation. It is our responsibility to counteract the problem of refugee flight, for this and future generations. Do we want a 'globalisation of indifference or of mutual involvement?', asked Pope Francis recently, following the disasters around Lampedusa.



**A new chapter in  
the relationship  
with the  
Orthodox  
Churches**



Traditionally, the EPP has been the only force that has fostered and facilitated dialogue with the Church of Constantinople. The initial decision to enter into conversation with Constantinople was taken 15 years ago. In the coming years it will be increasingly important that the relationship with the multifaceted Orthodoxy is on the EPP's agenda. If the EU stands for the promotion of human rights, a flourishing civil society, an effective neighbourhood policy, the fight against corruption and the promotion of reconciliation, then it must have an interest in forming alliances with the concerned countries, both inside and outside the EU, which stand, or should stand, for these same goals.

Inside the EU, Orthodox churches from various denominations other than the Greek one have become an important part of the intra-European socio-religious landscape since the accession of the Central and Eastern European states in the 2000s.

The relationship with the Church of Constantinople is equally important outside the EU. Initially the dialogue with Constantinople was intended to bring the position of Christians in Turkey under its care and protection. This has become even more important today, both because the secular nature of Turkey is under pressure and because Constantinople can act as a link to several heavily threatened minority groups in the Middle East. Christians in the Middle East are now, for the first time in their almost 2,000 years of history, being faced with existential challenges. And as far as their position is concerned, the EU will be judged by history for its credibility or its hypocrisy. If courage, vision and decisiveness are not shown now and in the years to come to reverse the current trend and help victims and receive refugees, we will be committing a form of historical treason. There is a lot at stake here, not least the question of whether we proceed selectively in standing up for human rights. The EPP will have a vital role to play here.

There is also the complicated new situation in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church. On the one hand we can see that a rapprochement between the Bishops' Conferences of Poland and the Patriarchate of Moscow has occurred in a joint effort to defend against the secularisation of European culture. On the other there is a sharpening of the differences between Rome and Moscow due to the conflict in Ukraine, as the religious divisions within that country partially coincide with the political, and even military, ones. The fruits of the dialogue between Pope John Paul II and Moscow have been seriously damaged by the undisguised support of the Orthodox Patriarchate for the policies of Putin. A number of factors in this support coincide with issues that the EPP and the EU have been involved with: the dislike of certain forms of modernisation



and secularisation; the restoration of Moscow's political spheres of influence; and loyalty to related currents, from Serbia to the Middle East.

Within the EU, the dialogue with Orthodox Christianity (and with other denominations and religions) is provided for by the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>9</sup> However, if this dialogue is to be effective, the EU and the EPP should be conscious of the more than a thousand year-old difference in development in the church–society–government relationship between the Christians of the West and those of the Orthodoxy. Any such dialogue requires knowledge and an understanding of those differences and should not just deal with problems—although the Orthodoxy has traditionally paid less attention to issues such as the economy, the direction of society and structural poverty. However, the lack of attention paid to social issues does not necessarily imply that the potential for very strong moral, if temporary, interference in worldly matters by the Orthodox Church cannot be used in favour of issues such as the fight against corruption, and improving democratic participation, the quality of education and training, and youth protection.

For the EPP, there is an additional responsibility to provide a political home for the millions of Orthodox Christians who want to connect religion and modernity. The challenge is to preserve the social structures and combine them with modern welfare policies.

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<sup>9</sup> According to art. 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, 'recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations'.



**Fostering  
the identity  
and values  
of Europe**



Another important and unavoidable issue is that of the identity and values of Europe. Helmut Kohl once remarked in a conversation with the author:

As the youth of Europe find each other on the Spanish Steps in Rome, on the Charles Bridge in Prague or on the banks of the Rhine in Bonn, they feel a sense of recognition and kinship that goes beyond national boundaries: thus it is a clear reality, even though it is not always strictly defined.<sup>10</sup>

Along the same lines, 'Europe is first and foremost a consciousness, a *Gesinnung*',<sup>11</sup> as stated by the German theologian Romano Guardini in his speech at the first awards ceremony for the Erasmus Prize in 1962. Although we have to recognise that the nourishing and strengthening of the European identity is not a primary matter for the EU itself, it is nevertheless a broad and deep challenge for the European societies and culture as a whole.

If the European identity consists of core values like freedom, solidarity, justice, pluralism and tolerance, then we must conclude that these values do not automatically assert themselves. The hope since the mid-1980s that, with the passing of time, these values would lead to a worldwide spread of human rights and pluralist democracy has been contradicted by many developments outside Europe, even in neighbouring countries. On the contrary, when those values are translated into some form of democracy, especially the Westminster model, resistance arises. Surviving and thriving Communist party regimes in countries such as China and Vietnam point in the direction of another form of acceptance. As long as these countries' elites ensure huge annual economic growth, the authoritarian road towards economic progress is an option. The same applies to the many democracies around the world which are characterised by corruption, manipulation by a few rich elites and the violation of human rights. The disillusionment with the Arab Spring and the increasingly authoritarian regimes in several of the EU's eastern neighbouring states are bringing rival ideologies and states closer together than ever before. These developments are at serious odds with our European values system. This gives, again, a compelling rationale for strengthening the foundation of the European project in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation with the author, not dated.

<sup>11</sup> R. Guardini, *Damit Europa werde . . . : Wirklichkeit und Aufgabe eines zusammenwachsenden Kontinents* (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 2003).



If the *Global Trends 2030* study is right in stating that transition does not necessarily go along with democratisation, then Europe needs to foster and defend its values. From this perspective, globalisation also means a rise in threats and a need to defend the European identity. This does not necessarily mean that there should be a ‘clash of civilisations’; rather that Europe should invest in an ‘alliance of civilisations’. At the same time we have to face the reality that Europe’s economic power is decreasing relatively and that its share of the world population will fall to 5% within a few decades. Furthermore, our readiness to take truly global responsibility has diminished considerably. Despite this, the willingness to use soft and hard power is indispensable. It is exactly these developments on the borders of the EU, combined with the above-identified socio-cultural trends in certain minority groups that require alertness, reflection on what our central values are and translations thereof into a coherent policy. The core of European identity is no longer a free export product, nor is it something disposable.

When Pope Francis addressed the European Parliament in November 2014, he stressed the need to revitalise the European project by reflecting anew on Europe’s identity, roots and values: ‘In many quarters we encounter a general impression of weariness and aging, of a Europe which is now a “grandmother”, no longer fertile and vibrant. As a result, the great ideas which once inspired Europe seem to have lost their attraction, only to be replaced by the bureaucratic technicalities of its institutions.’<sup>12</sup> The Pope also spoke of the need to restore hope in the future, beginning with the younger generation, and to end the ‘throwaway culture’, a theme that will probably become central in his Pontificate. He called upon MEPs ‘to protect and nurture Europe’s identity so that its citizens can experience renewed confidence in the institutions of the Union and in its underlying project of peace and friendship.’

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<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Pope Francis: Address to European Parliament’, text of a speech made in Strasbourg on 25 November 2014, *Vatican Radio* (2014).



**Socio-  
economic and  
socio-cultural  
questions as  
'unfinished  
business'  
for the EPP**



In addition to facing the societal and political challenges described above, the EPP itself has internal work to do. In 2012, under President Wilfried Martens, the EPP approved its new *Party Platform*.<sup>13</sup> This was done with great enthusiasm by the Party Congress in Bucharest, 20 years after the EPP platform that was adopted in Athens. The Bucharest *Party Platform* is one of the last great contributions of Martens to the EPP and we have to cherish this legacy. However, during the process of formulating this programme of principles, tensions as well as opportunities became clear. These will need to be dealt with in the years to come.

The *Party Platform* has chosen as its basis a clearly Christian concept of the human person, with its core values being the dignity of human life, freedom and responsibility, solidarity, subsidiarity, and justice. These values serve as beacons for ensuring that universal welfare and the common good are the central objectives of our political commitment. To this extent, the founding parties of the EPP should not be dissatisfied. But there are two inherent tensions that our movement may have to learn to live with, and which should not be hidden.

## The socio-economic axis

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The first tension concerns the positioning of the EPP on the socio-economic axis. With a large degree of generalisation, three groups exist inside the EPP.

First, for some, the future of our movement lies exclusively to the right of the centre, not in the conservative sense but in the economic liberal one. The elements of this school of thought include full acceptance of the free market principle with as few restrictions as possible, a small government with limited services, and the maximum level of personal responsibility. (As an example, proponents of this school advocate the abolition of international development assistance, not because one is against helping people in need, but because it is seen as something that should be dealt with as a private matter). The concept of the social

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<sup>13</sup> EPP, *Party Platform*.



market economy and concerns about the relationship between capitalism and inequality are recognised but placed within this context.

Second, EPP parties in the Benelux countries, Austria and Italy, as well as the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern), have fostered belief in the ‘Rhineland’ socio-economic model<sup>14</sup> since 1945. This group is not served by the exclusivity of the concept of the centre–right, and yet is certainly not ‘liberal’. They advocate recognition of the concept of the centre party and often take a Christian Social position on the socio-economic axis.

Third, and finally, some factions in the EPP have a preference for a centre–left position, namely on matters such as welfare benefits, the minimum wage and protecting the national market.

These differing attitudes all have their pros and cons. With the third group for example, there is no way around the criticism that the social market model has solidified into repeated advocacy of workers’ rights and generous welfare. This arrangement is not always conducive to the survival of the very principles of the social market model. Likewise, it can be argued that an economic policy that is concentrated on budget cuts, downsizing and reversing the gains of the welfare state does not help the social market model to flourish.

Irrespective of the individual merits of certain socio-economic models, it must be re-emphasised that it is not appropriate to interfere with the competences of national governments, or the economic views of the member parties. Yet, in the years to come, a perspective should be developed inside the EPP that offers a socio-economic vision that goes beyond minimising the role of the state, opens the way for strengthening our global competitiveness and offers solutions to the problems of the growing inequality in (youth) unemployment. The EPP, as a whole, cannot ignore the increasingly obvious fact that the next generation in Europe may be economically worse off than the current generation.

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<sup>14</sup> An economic model which relies on the free market to create wealth but recognises that government intervention is essential to ensure a fair result. It also puts emphasis on subsidiarity and on tripartite consultation between workers, employers and government. See, for example, Centre for European Studies and CD&V, *Applied Christian Democracy: The Rhineland Model*, Centre for European Studies (Brussels, December 2010).



Despite this socio-economic pessimism, the EPP has much more to offer than the mantras of the free market or guaranteed generous welfare. We are the movement of personal responsibility, savings and hard work. And as far as economic actors are concerned, we are much more than just the big companies; we are also the protagonists of the family business, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, start-ups and innovators, farmers and artisans.

From this viewpoint, businesses, large and small, are seen as a community of stakeholders, from investors to workers. Through these groups, the interests of society as a whole are recognised. And the EPP is not against robust public benefits, if they are really needed, such as a ‘footbridge’ to real work and incentives for technology and innovation. In short, the EPP is a movement of work, entrepreneurship and change. Within this setting, it should also be possible to position the reconnection of the European spirit with political prospects for hope as the central assignment for the coming years. The EPP can use its *Arbeitsethos* (work ethos) to restore this necessary link, as is pointed out in the Bucharest *Party Platform*.

## The socio-cultural and ethical axis

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The other internal dilemma for the EPP is related to its Christian identity in a secularised society which is becoming increasingly distanced from faith and tradition. In this context, ‘testimony politics’, a hyper-idealistic view of an imaginary world that has never existed, is not an option. The EPP is a party of responsibility that needs to see the reality as it is.

As with the socio-economic questions, this socio-cultural axis, which relates to faith, secularism and culture, includes several schools of thought. The school that probably commands the strongest support is that which favours a gradual evolution towards a laicist–secularist movement that appeals to the ‘common man and woman’ and, hence, is culturally liberal. In the opinion of certain founders of the Christian Democratic movement, this tendency was designed to protect, deepen and modernise the very Christian Democratic nature of the EPP’s centre–right coalition, allowing and accounting for the accession of so many parties that do not come from the Christian Democratic tradition.



Others in the EPP have a more clearly defined programme to ‘escape from the Catholic ghetto’ (*sich zu befreien aus dem katholischen Ghetto*). They emphasise the liberal, as opposed to the Christian Democratic, roots of the EPP. These opposing views led to robust debates during the formulation of the 2012 *Party Platform*.

It should be noted that the socio-economic liberals are not necessarily the socio-cultural liberals of the centre–right. And it is not automatic that the proponents of the classical Christian Democratic character of the EPP will take centre to centre–left positions in the socio-economic area. Some of the strongest advocates of Christian ethical principles are inspired by the predominant economic school of the US Republican movement that advocates a market that is as free as possible.

The statements and policies of the present Pope Francis have added gravity to this socio-economic debate. Some at the centre and on the centre–right have supported the shift in Catholic doctrine towards an inclusive economy. Those on the liberal economic side have taken exception to the new thinking from the Vatican, finding in it an additional argument to distance themselves from Catholic and Christian Social doctrine.

For those who feel an affinity with the founding generation of Europe and classical Christian Democracy, this is a difficult period. Those who are enthusiastic about the socio-economic choices of the current Pope (and other thinkers from the sphere of the World Council of Churches, such as Konrad Raiser or Professor Friedhelm Hengsbach) and at the same time respect the opinion that the time of the self-evident nature and dominance of the churches in the public domain is over, face a lonely challenge. If this debate remains unresolved, it may bring mixed messages to the policies of the EPP.

We must be aware that the polarisation between secularists on one side and guardians of the Christian identity of the EPP on the other could easily lead to the party becoming irrelevant if these tensions are not constructively addressed. The same applies to the socio-economic debate. Analysis, dialogue and tolerance are needed in order to achieve a strong, innovative and meaningful movement in the centre and centre–right in Europe, which can maintain continuity with the founding generation whilst facing the new socio-economic and socio-cultural realities, and the needs of today.



In making this effort, the EPP could take inspiration from philosophers and theologians who consciously transcend polarisation. For example, Rowan Williams, the former (Anglican) Archbishop of Canterbury, takes the reality of the autonomy of the contemporary citizen, the growing disengagement of Europe with religious traditions and the characteristics of a contemporary urban society seriously. From a minority position, he nevertheless advocates a religiously inspired leadership concerning politics and social services, without lapsing into religious preaching or illusion politics.

In the parliamentary term 2014–19 any reflections on the relationship between ideology and society, and the relationship between church and state could receive useful input from a number of individuals who are perhaps religiously inspired yet realistic. The diverse nature of the EPP requires that the existing tensions are addressed. If such a conversation were organised at the European level it could deliver outstanding contributions to the appeal of the EPP. However, the debate would have to be free from attempts to restore past realities or to promote isolation.

**The social  
market beyond  
the borders of  
the nation and  
generation**



In the period 2014–19, the EPP needs to give space and priority to a thorough reconsideration of the real challenges of the future and to the formulation of socio-economic policies based on our values and inspiration sources. If the *Global Trends 2030* report is correct and ‘transition’ is the core concept of our times, then politics must respond by making fundamental choices. The ‘automatic pilot’ of a combination of pragmatism and polls will only help us to get lost. Some basic decisions about the new directions to be taken are needed. And we need to learn from each other in the EPP family: from each other’s examples, as well as our failures and setbacks.

The Bucharest *Party Platform* listed a number of relevant items on which a strong focus is required: the need for the maximum space to be given over to technological innovation in order to strengthen our economic resilience; the urgent need to further coordinate and harmonise our defence efforts; the need to address the questions of equality for ethnic minorities; the need for a new, future-oriented European energy policy; and much more.

All member states are reforming their welfare systems. What was progressive and socially aware yesterday might be petty and counterproductive tomorrow. If demographic policy is high up on the future agenda, then textbooks should be written about why certain incentives do or do not work in the specific socio-cultural context of one country. Of course, in the present parliamentary period we also need to find answers to how to deal with the ever-growing and burdensome debt mountain that will be passed down to succeeding generations. This needs to be tackled at the same time as the need for economic incentives to increase employment. Often the fundamental thinking in these areas has been done, and what remains to be found is the political willingness to translate this into practice. Sometimes it is simply a case of tying the loose ends together.

In particular, the values that underlie the social market model should not only be translated into formulas that can be adapted to the current social and political premises, but also deserve to be expanded to the following three dimensions.



# Towards a global financial and economic architecture

It has become clear, especially since the fall of Lehman Brothers, that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of the Bretton Woods arrangements, and for the development of a new global financial and economic architecture. A promising dialogue has emerged between global financial experts, entrepreneurs, policymakers and ecclesiastical authorities<sup>15</sup> regarding the translation of our values into the global economic system. As far as politics is concerned, the message of the EPP family can be formulated much more clearly if we try to bring ethics, but not illusion politics, into the processes of globalisation.

The humanisation of globalisation is one of the central challenges for the coming years and its absence has caused the financial and economic crisis to worsen. Whether we like it or not, stronger and more balanced standards should be promoted through the implementation of a new global financial and economic architecture. Fundamental debate has been undernourished at the centre and on the centre–right, and we need to absorb the lessons of the crisis of the past seven years. We can no longer afford to foster conflicting views on issues such as tax on certain financial transactions or the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions.<sup>16</sup> The EPP can rely on eminent experts and is, therefore, able to take real leadership in this process.

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<sup>15</sup> This has been carried out through a partnership between the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung), the Association of Catholic Entrepreneurs in Germany (Bund Katholischer Unternehmer), the International Christian Union of Business Executives, the Platform for a Responsible Society (Socires) and the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*.

<sup>16</sup> This system includes the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.



# International cooperation and global poverty reduction

In many cases, the constituencies of the Christian Democratic parties have been prepared to give a generous political mandate with respect to development aid. However, this has not been accompanied by the development of a comprehensive EPP policy. In particular, the translation of the concept of subsidiarity in this field has lagged behind. As a result, the Social Democratic parties' preferred notions of solidarity and justice have prevailed. This has resulted in the state exercising control of development aid programmes. In 2013 the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands) group in the Bundestag called for the systematic translation of the principles of the social market economy to the domain of development cooperation, and this should happen at the EU level as well.

In this area a real paradigm shift is required. We need to move from 'we help them', to 'together, world-wide, we stand for conservation, restoration and enhancement of global public goods, security, and access to water and food'. We need to go beyond a focus on good governance to the equal treatment of women. We need to foster the conviction that this is not state business, but that the individual, the market, the government and communities must work together in order to achieve the conditions needed for the adequate supply of global public goods in the coming decades. If conducted robustly, such a policy would undo the expropriation of international development cooperation by the Social Democrats.



## A social ecological market model

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Finally, there is the important ecological dimension. It is clear that the EPP would not do justice to its principles, if, in the coming years, we did not work very hard to create a new balance between economic growth and a respect for the integrity of Creation. The climate, the environment and the Earth's resources are too important to be left to the left-wing circles and parties alone. 'We are not less concerned' about the environment than the left is, as Wilfried Martens once put it, but we have other options. We have also different intellectual traditions. We could follow the example of the *Energiewende* of the Christian Democratic Union under Chancellor Angela Merkel (2005–present) and Environment Minister Peter Altmaier (2012–13), which aims to transition to a policy of renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable development. The final goal of this energy policy is the abolition of the use of coal and other non-renewable energy sources. The fundamentally new choices available regarding these issues prove that they are in the best hands with the centre and centre–right.



**Conclusion**



This essay has explored 10 areas of the relationship between religion, ethics and the EU. The principle of subsidiarity that is at the core of centre–right thinking asks us to find solutions at the EU level where appropriate. The same principle also requires that we remain vigilant when other political movements want to abuse the power of European institutions. In addition, before drafting future party programmes, the EPP needs to be better aware of its vision of humanity, in order not to have to deal with too many pragmatic policy details.

At the same time, let us be aware that the EPP is a European political family. Matters that do not require a common European response can still be a subject of dialogue, and can lead to mutual enrichment and deeper understanding.

When framed within centre and centre–right politics, the relationship between ethics and philosophy within the EU is sometimes burdened by unnecessary contradictions. Those who are motivated by injustice in society are not automatically socialists. Those that are in favour of the free market principle are not automatically liberals. Those who take their core values and a Christian-inspired view of humanity as their starting point do not necessarily want to use politics to re-Christianise Europe.

While being fully in line with the *Party Platform* of the EPP, core values can be based on sources of inspiration other than religion. However, dialogue and tolerance do not mean that we should ignore our roots and beacons—rather, they should be cherished through determination and frugality. As Angela Merkel said in her speech in Frankfurt: ‘Why else would I be standing here other than that I am a Christian?’ Many Christians, and those who are not or are no longer, seek a political home, a home that transcends pragmatism and the delusions of the day and which connects the future with their value systems.

The Christian viewpoint should be cherished by the EPP. Nevertheless others, for example, those that belong to Judaism or Islam, or agnostics, should also be fully respected and welcomed. They should be able to say:

From the perspective of my own inspiration sources and philosophies, I agree enthusiastically with the EPP concept of human life and the common core values. These values are dignity and equality, justice, respect for the integrity of the Earth and the created world, subsidiarity and diversity. They apply equally to all human beings on earth.

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This paper contends that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, the EU is highly relevant to the issues of ethics and religion. Although policy matters should be dealt with at the lowest possible level, some are best dealt with by a common approach at the EU level of decision-making. In examining areas such as ethics and the economy, human rights, multiculturalism and the relationship with the Orthodox churches, the paper applies the tests of subsidiarity and centre and centre-right values. It also looks at areas that represent 'unfinished business' for the European People's Party (EPP), including socio-economic and socio-cultural questions and the notions of social market.

The author argues that member states and member parties of the EPP should lead the debate on ethics, values and religion. Within the atmosphere of pluralism, dialogue and tolerance, the EPP should continuously cherish its Christian roots and values while responding to the economic, social and cultural realities of the day. The party should also leave enough room for those that belong to non Christian religions and have other beliefs and convictions.



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