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Human rights vs. security? The EU's secular international identity from a transatlantic perspective

Abstract

This paper is a very first attempt to explore the EU's secular identity as it is constructed through the EU's external relations and in comparison to its main transatlantic partner, and 'other', the US. It primarily aims at understanding how the EU and the US interpret the role of religion in their foreign policies and whether and how their interpretations resemble or differ from each other. Against the background of debates on the EU's international role identity and based on a discursive approach, the paper analyzes official documents produced by EU and US foreign policy institutions in their relationship with predominantly Muslim states in which religion is political salient, such as Nigeria and Pakistan. The results suggest a relatively similar relevance of religion in EU and US foreign policy but differences in how issues of religion are framed. Whereas for the EU, religion is primarily a human rights as well as a security issue, which mainly contributes to political problems, the US primarily securitizes religion but also sees it more frequently as a resource for solving problems. EU institutions, especially the European Parliament, as well as the US Congress represent Islam and Muslims much more often in a negative way than Christians, while the US administration pursues a more balanced approach.

Introduction

Despite a growing political relevance of religion in many parts of the world (Berger 1999, Norris and Inglehart 2011), Europe and the European Union (EU) have kept a comparatively secular character (Bruce 2002, Davie 2002). A key question therefore is how the EU deals with this tension between its secular character and the continuing or even growing salience of religion in other states it interacts with. This paper conceptualizes this question as a question of the EU's international identity, which is often constructed to distinguish itself from its main international 'others', the United States (US) and Islam (Diez 2004; Smith 2009). This paper, therefore, aims at understanding how the EU interprets the role of religion in its foreign policies.¹ In order to explore the EU's international identity, it compares the EU's external policies towards predominantly Muslim states in which religion is politically salient, such as Nigeria and Pakistan (*case study on Pakistan not included yet*), with the foreign policies towards these countries of the US. By adopting a discursive approach, it specifically examines how ideas about the appropriate role of religion in politics form the background against which the EU and the US define their foreign policy.

The scope of the EU's external policy "now equals or exceeds that of any single national foreign policy, including the US" (White 2001: 15). Even though the EU is not a state like the US, both entities can be understood, and thus compared, as international actors, whose polities follow similar institutional logics (both are outcomes of the aggregation of distinct and separated territorial units and their citizens), even though they differ in their degree of 'actorness' and the degree of centralization of foreign policy decision-making (Brattberg and Rhinard 2013; Fabbrini and Sicurelli 2008).

¹ Foreign policy here is broadly defined as the formal policies of states and organizations which affect various military, economic, humanitarian, social, and cultural dimensions of its relations with other international actors (Warner and Walker 2011: 114). It thus does not only include the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy but also its development and external trade policies.

The role of religion in foreign policies of states and supranational organizations has remained relatively unexplored (Warner and Walker 2011). Unlike the foreign policy of the US, which has also been studied with respect to questions of religion (e.g. Bettiza 2013a; Byrnes 2011, Chaplin and Joustra 2010, Inboden 2010, Marsden 2007), this is particularly true for EU foreign policy. Religion has long been a blind spot in European studies in general, owing to the methodological secularism predominant in the social sciences which deemed religion a negligible force in Europe. Only after the secularization theory in the social sciences had lost much of its previous plausibility, the analysis of the religious dimension of the European integration process entered the academic agenda (Koenig 2010: 29). Since then the continuous or even growing relevance of religion in both EU member states and EU institutions have been demonstrated by a number of studies (e.g. Broughton and ten Napel 2000, Carol and Koopmans 2013, Foret 2015; Katzenstein 2006, Leustean 2011, Massignon 2007, Minkenberg 2009, Schlesinger and Foret 2006, Silvestri 2009, Soper and Fetzer 2002, de Vreese et al. 2009). Even though the widening interest of the EU in matters of religion has first emerged in EU external relations (Doe 2009: 149), there has hardly been any systematic research on the religious dimension of EU foreign policy so far. There are only a few exceptions: the role of religion in debates about Turkey's accession to the EU (e.g. Amiraux 2007, Bischof, Oberhuber and Stögner 2010, Boomgaarden and Wüst 2012, Hurd 2006, Jung and Raudvere 2008, Minkenberg 2012) and the interaction of the EU with Islamic political movements and agents in the Middle East and North Africa (Emerson and Young 2007, Pace et al. 2009). These studies represent typical contexts in which EU institutions deal with issues of religion, primarily illustrating their unease with Islam. However, they do not assess whether and how the EU's secular identity forms a contrast to the international identity of the US. Given conflicting presumptions about the questions of whether religion is more or less or equally prominent in US than in EU foreign policy and of whether there is a Christian bias incorporated, and additionally given the lack of empirical research on them yet, these are

relevant questions, both academically and politically. The (*preliminary*) analysis in this paper yields some surprising results, such as the similar prominence of religion in foreign policies, as well as relatively unsurprising results, such as the respective focus on human rights by the EU and on security by the US.

The theoretical background of this paper, which will be described in the next section, is formed by the literature on the EU's international identity and the role of religion in it. Conflicting hypotheses on the role of religion in EU and US foreign policy are derived from this literature review as well as first findings on institutional developments. The following section describes the paper's methodology, which is based on a discursive approach, including the selection of cases and of the material for the analysis. Subsequently, first findings are presented and discussed in light of the hypotheses.

Theoretical background: The EU's secular identity from a transatlantic perspective

The paper conceptualizes the research question as a matter of the EU's international identity and argues that this identity can particularly well be studied from a transatlantic perspective.

In International Relations, identity is defined as “the images of individuality and distinctiveness (‘self-hood’) held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time), through relations with significant ‘others’” (Jeppersen, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996: 59). “Even though this definition comes from social psychology and applies to individuals, states – and organizations composed of states – also seek to project distinctive identities in the international arena” (Smith 2014: 14). “(I)nternational institutions – and among them regional organizations – need to possess a distinct identity in order to obtain the necessary support and legitimacy from their members, and to interact effectively and gain relevance in the regional and international arena” (Oelsner 2013: 116). Beyond distinguishing the organization from others, its identity-constituting features also represent the source of internal institutional

cohesion. “They are, in a sense, those central and enduring attributes that make states want to be and stay members of that institution rather than another one, however similar it may be” (Oelsner 2013: 119). The question here is whether different ideas on secularism and religion assume such a role in the EU, and if yes, how this role is constructed.

Drawing on constructivist IR theory, identity can also be understood as the foreign policy role conception of a state (or, again, the EU). It is therefore also often referred to as “role identity” (Aggestam 2000), which affects how states define their foreign policy interests and how they act abroad (Wendt 1994). This identity is always constructed in relation to an ‘other’ outside oneself. As foreign policy is about the interaction with ‘other’ states and organizations, it is a medium for the expression of identity (e.g. Katzenstein 1996, Wendt 1999) and at the same time a discursive practice through which this identity is constructed (Ashley 1987, Aydin-Düzgit 2012).

A prominent question in the study of EU foreign policy has been the question of the ‘nature’ of the European Union as an international actor, which, however, has seldom been linked with the question of religion yet. A variety of authors has identified different international identities of the EU, ranging from “civilian power” (Duchêne 1972, Kirste and Maull 1996) to “normative power” (Manners 2002, 2006, 2012) to “ethical power” (Aggestam 2008). These concepts of the EU’s identity, simply put, suggest that the EU’s foreign policy role in world politics is unique in its concentration on peaceful means and certain values, such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Others have countered that the EU is a ‘normal’ global actor, acting not only according to its norms and values but equally according to its strategic interests and material preferences (Hyde-Price 2006; Pollack 2012; Wood 2009). Further features of European foreign policy as part of a European role identity have been identified in terms of its role as a global leader in environmental policy and its special commitment to aiding developing countries (Bretherton and Vogler 2006), or its

preferred policy instruments, such as legal agreements with other actors, support for international agreements and conventions, institutionalized dialogue, and conditional promise of EU membership, which distinguish it from other major international players, notably the US (Smith 2014: 204-205). In the end, the question of the EU's international identity and its uniqueness is an empirical one of degree (e.g. of normativity in foreign policy) as well as interpretation (e.g. of the contents and desirability of norms) (Birchfield 2013; Forsberg 2011; Tocci and Manners 2008).

The US is often constructed as one of the main 'others' of the EU. It regularly serves as a – mostly negative – point of reference in debates on EU identity (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). The US and its foreign policy is often considered to be more militaristic, more coercive, less interested in issues of the environment and less self-reflective than the EU's (Diez 2004: 330; Diez 2005; Falkner 2007). Whereas the EU's external relations focus more on development aid, US foreign policy emphasizes security (Fabbrini and Sicurelli 2008). However, some have argued that the dichotomous construction of the US as the EU's 'other' often rests on a selective analysis and stereotypical depiction of European and American foreign policies (Hamilton 2008). Policy differences are furthermore not exclusively caused by oppositional identities but also by institutional variation in EU and US foreign policy making. US foreign policy making is highly centralized with the main decision-making power lying with the President, whereas in the EU, the common foreign and security policy is highly decentralized due to the predominance of the member states in decision-making. Development aid, by contrast, is largely controlled by supranational institutions (Fabbrini and Sicurelli 2008). The EU's reluctance, for example, to use coercion is therefore often caused by difficulties to reach agreement among member states as member states can block negative measures to protect national interests. Persuasion and dialogue are simply easier options to pursue if member states disagree to do more (Smith 2014: 205).

Much of the debate on European identity implies a pivotal role of religion in concepts of the EU (Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006), even though this seems to be a rather recent narrative that emerged after the Cold War (Challand 2009). Most debates on EU identity, however, focus on domestic politics and on the features and understandings that European citizens attribute to the EU (e.g. Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Risse 2010). The debate on the EU's international identity, by contrast, has hardly been linked with the question of religion yet. There are only a few exceptions, such as Henrik Larsen (2014) who studied the EU's behavior in the UN Human Rights Council on issues of religion, and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2008) who explored how the discursive tradition and political authority of secularism shape the formation of identities and interests and of foreign policy-making in the EU and the US.

Larsen (2014) demonstrates in his article the importance of the discursive context which can seriously constrain the EU's exercise of its normative power. He focuses on the discursive context of religion and politics because "(...) the EU's common framework of meaning is the Western secularist discourse where politics and religion are two separate realms. (...) (T)he ability of the EU to set the agenda in the politics of religion ought to be central to a discussion of the EU's power, given the increased role of religion in international relations (IR) today" (Larsen 2014: 420). Larsen's analysis of the debates on the defamation of religion and on freedom of religion in the UN Human Rights Council reveals that "(i)f a large proportion of actors in a policy area or in IR in general adhere to a different discourse than the EU's, the EU cannot set the agenda according to its own discourse. The EU's discourse apparently does not have an overwhelming appeal just because the EU is a carrier of it or because of the nature of the discourse itself" (Larsen 2014: 432-3). The EU discourse in this context, as Larsen highlights, is a Western secularist discourse in which human rights have assumed the status of the 'sacred'. Religions are only welcomed into the political sphere

if they adopt the language of human rights. Therefore, there is an emphasis of individual freedom of thought, conscience and belief, however also of interfaith dialogue; and discrimination based on religious beliefs is seen as a human rights violation, which is not confined to any one religion or belief. “In summary, the EU’s common framework of meaning is the Western secularist discourse in which the influence of religion at the political level is kept in check by the importance placed on individual human rights” (Larsen 2014: 427).

Shakman Hurd (2008) differentiates this Western secularist discourse further. She identifies two trajectories of secularism influential in the international relations of the West: a laicist tradition, which is based on a separationist narrative in which religion is expelled from politics. “With its origin in the French term *laïcité*, the objective of laicism is to create a neutral public space in which religious beliefs, practices, and institutions have lost their political significance, fallen below the threshold of political contestation, or been pushed into the private sphere” (Shakman Hurd 2008: 5). The second tradition rests on a more accommodationist narrative with Christianity and Judaism as unique bases of secular democracy. “For in this second trajectory of secularism, Euro-American secular public life is securely grounded in a larger Christian, and later Judeo-Christian, civilization” (Shakman Hurd 2008: 6). Islam constitutes the discursive other to both of these secularist traditions. Hurd argues that the politics of secularism has shaped the relationship between the West and the Islamic Middle East and that recognizing its impact helps to better understand what these relationships really are about. The accession of Turkey to the EU, for instance, is not only contested because of the potential accession of a Muslim-majority country to the historically Christian Europe, it is also controversial “(...) because it brings up long-dormant dilemmas internal to Europe regarding how religion and politics relate to each other” (Shakman Hurd 2008: 8). The Islamic Revolution in Iran, for instance, from a Judeo-Christian perspective,

“(…) confirmed the existence of ‘natural’ linkages between Islam and theocracy in contrast to alleged natural linkages between Christianity and democracy”, fuelling “(…) powerful American condemnations of the revolution and the representation of revolutionary Iran as a threat not only to American national interests but also to the foundations of American national identity itself” (Shakman Hurd 2008: 9).

Even though politics in both the EU and the US are based on the Western secularist discourse, there are significant differences in the social importance of religion in both regions. When drawing on comparative data on individual religiosity, Americans are more religious than most Europeans: More of them, for example, believe in God, identify themselves as a religious person, consider religion to be more important in their lives, and pray and attend religious services more frequently (Norris and Inglehart 2011: 83ff). Also with respect to religion, the US often constitutes the ‘secular other’ of Europe (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). Following from that, one could assume that religion is more prominent in U.S. than in EU foreign policy. Mass attitudes and opinion, as well as interest groups, are among the main mechanisms through which religious values and ideas are transmitted and channeled into foreign policies (Warner and Walker 2011). If there are more people in a democratic society for whom religion is important in social and political life, it is likely that policy-makers are also more responsive to these views of a large part of their constituencies. It is furthermore likely that there are also more policy-makers who themselves are religious and might, therefore, be more prone to act accordingly. More religious vitality might also mean that there are more religious interest groups advocating their values.

Alternatively, religion might be equally (less) prominent. Religiosity is not evenly distributed within societies but contingent on, for example, academic education. Also in the US, universities belong to the most secularized institutions. Political administrations are usually staffed with people holding degrees from higher education institutions, which is why

their policies are often not as religious as the degree of religiosity in the wider population would let one expect (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). The EU, despite the variety of religion-state relations in its member states and conflicting views on the EU as, for example, either a modern secular community of values or as cultural community of Christian character (Risse 2010: 50-51), has so far followed a secularist trajectory, keeping religion largely out of its political sphere (Willaime 2009). For these reasons one could assume that in foreign policies of both the EU and the US religion plays a similarly subordinate role. Or has the EU with its recent activities to adopt Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2013 within the scope of its external human rights policy, and by developing an agenda of religious engagement in its external affairs.

Given the above explicated differences in the EU's and the US' foreign policies, one could moreover expect that also religion in the EU is primarily framed as a human rights and development issues, while in the US an interpretation as security issues seems to be more likely.

Last but not least, there is the question of religious difference. There might be a bias towards Christianity due to the majority populations in the EU and the US and due to the construction of Islam as their 'geographical other' (Bettiza 2013b; Diez 2004).

This paper will address the question of whether the EU's and the US' secular foreign policy identities are similar due to the Western secularist discourse or whether they differ from each other due to institutional differences, contrasting secular traditions, and social importance of religion.

Methodology

The paper is particularly interested in the construction of the EU's secular identity communicated through its external relations and in comparison with the secular identity of the US. Since identity and its attributes are not directly observable, but "(...) their effects can be seen in an institution's unique pattern of binding commitments, organizational choices, and identity-revealing discourse" (Oelsner 2013: 119), the analysis is based on a discursive approach in order to assess whether "(t)he accumulation of EU decisions and activities distinguishes the EU (...) from other international actors" (Smith 2014: 14), notably the US. Organizations and states are formed and maintained by individuals, in case of regional organizations representing member states. At different points in time they negotiate and take decisions, which materialize in official written documents and oral declarations. These sorts of text therefore constitute the main source for the empirical analysis here.

In order to limit the amount of text, to maximize comparability and to get the most information about religion out of them as possible, the paper focuses on the EU's and the US's relationships with predominantly Muslim states in which religion is politically salient, such as Nigeria and Pakistan.

In Nigeria, despite a secular constitution, religion has become salient in the public sphere due to political liberalization and federalism which accords high degrees of autonomy to the state governments. The federal state is divided into a predominantly Christian south and a predominantly Muslim north. Religious organizations frequently challenge institutions provided by the state, such as the justice system in the north and the education system in the south, promoting discrimination of the respective minority religious community. Religious differences are often mobilized in political conflicts over resources, oftentimes leading to lethal violence. For a couple of years now, the militant group Boko Haram has terrorized the population of parts of the northern states (Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji 2009; Onapajo 2012).

Pakistan was founded as a state for Muslims but due to the self-serving use of Islam by secular elements as well as the influence of politico-religious forces has gradually been revamped into an Islamic state. Drifting more and more towards extremism, Pakistan today is characterized to a large extent by violence against religious minorities and women, as well as the mobilization of religion in conflicts such as the one with India over Kashmir (Abbas 2005; Shaheed 2010). *(as mentioned, the Pakistan case is not included yet, and I am still looking for a third case...)*

However, this paper is not about EU and US policy in Nigeria and Pakistan. It uses the two cases to comparatively analyze how the EU and the US understand the role of religion in politics outside of their borders. Nigeria and Pakistan present the opportunity to compare how the EU and the US ‘think’ about religion as one can expect that, due to the political salience of religion in both countries, religion is also salient in EU and US foreign policies towards them. Both cases furthermore allow studying whether there are differences in the EU’s and the US’s external behavior concerning different denominations as in both cases there is discrimination against Christians (in the north of Nigeria and in Pakistan in general) as well as Muslims (in the south of Nigeria and Shias and Ahmadis in Pakistan). In both cases, finally, there are religious organizations and individuals which advocate inter-religious dialogue, human rights, peace and development, potentially allowing an understanding of religion not only as conflictual factor but also as a resource to overcome social, economic and political problems.

I retrieved the material analyzed here from websites of the EU (EUR-Lex, websites of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, press release database of the European Commission), and the US (website of the Department of State and of the US Congress). I first selected all documents between 1999 and 2014 with either ‘Nigeria’ or

‘Pakistan’ in the title, or which dealt exclusively with one of these countries.² The time frame allows me to make comparisons between pre- and post-9/11, pre- and post-Treaty of Lisbon as well as between the Bush and the Obama administration. The choice of time frame was furthermore constrained by the accessibility of US Department of State documents as a large portion of documents is destroyed after an administration leaves so that there is only a very limited selection of foreign policy documents left of the Clinton and prior administrations (*rendering the pre- vs. post-9/11 comparison largely impossible*).

In a next step, I identified those documents referring to issues of religion (based on a list of key words) for further analysis. The number of texts included in the analysis can be found in table 1. As can also be seen from table 1, the US Department of State has a comprehensive reporting system, encompassing reports on investment climate, terrorism, trafficking in persons, human rights and democracy, as well as religious freedom. As the EU does not have such a system (with the exception of yearly human rights and democracy reports by the EEAS since 2009), these reports are analyzed separately to avoid a distortion of the comparison.

In a first quantitative step, the share of documents including references to religion was calculated in order to compare the relevance of religion in EU and US foreign policy by institution and by time period. The qualitative content-analysis of these documents which explicitly refer to religion identified the contexts in which religion is referred to (broadly differentiated between the fields of security, human rights, democratization and development), whether religion is considered as contributing to a problem or as a resource for solving problems, and the difference in how the texts refer to different denominations.

² Documents which simply announce upcoming events, visits and press availabilities are not included, documents reporting on these are. Statements by EU Delegations and US Embassies are excluded for practical reasons (*no archived statements available*). Excluded (*so far*) are also responses to parliamentary questions (EU) and testimonies before US Congress (hearings and committees) as EP and Congress are more interested in issues of religion and thus might and do prompt foreign policy officials to stress issues of religion more than they usually do. (*However, they might be included at a later stage in order to get more material in which they actually speak about religion.*)

Table 1 Number of documents included in the analysis by institution and country (1999-2014)

Documents and Institutions	Countries	Nigeria		Pakistan		(third case?)	
		<i>total</i>	<i>religion</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>religion</i>		
Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and Declarations of its Presidency		23	9				
Statements and Declarations of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or her Spokesperson (since 2009)		25	7				
Reports by the European External Action Service (since 2009)		5	3				
Regulations, decisions and activities by the European Commission and its members (reported on in press releases)		18	1				
Resolutions of the European Parliament		16	13				
Sum of EU Documents		87	33				
Statements and press releases by the White House		14	4				
Speeches, statements and remarks by the US Secretary of State		20	6				
Statements, remarks and media notes by other US Department of State officials		54	15				
Reports by the US Department of State		69	59				
Bills and resolutions of the US Congress (both House of Representatives and Senate)		4	3				
Sum of US Documents		161	87				

(Preliminary) Findings

Regarding relevance, the numbers in table 1 suggest that religion is more prominent in US than in EU foreign policy (on Nigeria). However, this is an effect of the wide reporting system of the US Department of State, which since 1999, among others, includes reports on international religious freedom. If one excludes both US and EU reports, the situation changes. Whereas with reports religion is referred to in 54% of US documents and only 37.9% in EU documents, the figures drop when the reports are excluded to 30.4% (US) and 36.6% (EU), respectively. The analysis here confirms the often stated criticism by US

advocates of international religious freedom that, even though yearly reporting is mandatory for the US Department of State to Congress since the adoption of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998, issues of religion have been largely shunted off to the Office of International Religious Freedom within the State Department, and since 2014 the new Office of Religion and Global Affairs, but have not considerably impacted the rest of the foreign policy activities of the US (Farr, Hertzke).

The numbers in table 1 furthermore demonstrate that the legislative branches of the EU and the US attribute by far more importance to religion than the executive branches (EU: 81.2% vs. 25.8% of the documents contained references to religion; US: 75% vs. 28.4%; both excluding reports).

Comparing different time periods (again excluding reports), in the EU, the proportion of documents including references to religion was higher before than after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (38.5% before, 34.9% after), countering the impression that religion has become more relevant in EU external relations in the last couple of years (*however, this might also be an effect of the single case study*). In the US, by contrast, the share of documents comprising references to religion has increased, meaning it is higher under the Obama administration (34.6%, through 2014) than under the last Bush administration (28.6%), which is surprising given the contiguity of Bush to the Religious Right. However, this does not necessarily mean that its impact on foreign policy-making under the Bush administration was lower as well. Bush and his administration just emphasized conservative values in foreign policy, such as “abstinence until marriage” education to prevent HIV/Aids (Saunders 2004) and the withholding of international funding for NGOs that provide abortion-related services (Crane and Dusenberry 2004), rather than that they attributed more relevance to religion itself as a policy issue. Under Obama, by contrast, religion itself has gained in importance as a policy issue. This is not only suggested by the evidence presented here but

also by his recent moves to establish a second office on religion in the Department of State (on Religion and Global Affairs), to appoint a Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs, and to devise a US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement.³

The framing of religion in EU external relations and US foreign policy documents (on Nigeria) features interesting differences (again excluding reports in order not to distort the comparison). The US addresses issues of religion almost exclusively in the area of security (terrorism, primarily since the end of 2011, and religious violence, tensions, conflicts, and rioting). Sometimes the issue is raised in the context of democratization (elections), very rarely in the fields of human rights (women's and girls' rights to education, religious freedom of LGBT people) and development (primary education, poverty, prevention of HIV/Aids). The EU, by contrast, frames religion as a problem for security too (also terrorism, religious violence, radicalism, intolerance, clashes, tensions, and differences), but more often so it, and primarily the EP, frames the issue in the context of human rights (freedom of religion or belief, religious discrimination and equality, LGBT rights, death penalty and corporal punishment, women's and children's rights). Religion is almost never referred to in the fields of democratization (once in context of political transition) and development (once in context of opposition to vaccination).

Both, the EU and the US, put forward the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation as one solution to the security problem presented by religious violence. However, EU and US officials are also often keen not to simplistically blame religion for political and ethnic tensions. On Nigeria, the EP, for example, "(c)alls for a wider examination of the root causes of the conflict, including social, economic and ethnic tensions, and to avoid broad and simplistic explanations based on religion that will not provide the basis for a long-term, lasting solution to the problems of the region" (European Parliament 2012: art. 9). In another

³ <http://www.state.gov/s/rga/strategy/> (last access: 02.03.15)

resolution, it lists as some of the causes a lack of economic development, adverse effects of climate change, and conflicts over control of fertile farmland (European Parliament 2010: art. G). US officials condemn the exploitation and inflammation of religious differences by terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, “in order to create chaos and make Nigeria ungovernable” (US Department of State 2012).

Even though the lack of emphasis on human rights and religious freedom in the analyzed US documents is partly caused by the exclusion of the reports, primarily those on international religious freedom and on human rights, it nonetheless demonstrates again the compartmentalization of US foreign policy and the marginalization of these issues in actual foreign policy behavior. *(separate analysis of human rights and international religious freedom reports to be included here)*

Another interesting, though relatively small, difference between the EU and the US is that, even though both primarily interpret religion as a problem (or as contributing to problems), the US tends to consider religion also to be a resource for solving problems more often than the EU (US: 28.6% of the analyzed documents contained respective references; EU: only 23.3%). Both stress the role of religious leaders in promoting interreligious cooperation and tolerance and in combating violence, as well as activities of religious human rights groups in the fields of election monitoring, democratization in general and the fight against HIV/Aids (US), as well as harsh punishment (EU). Whereas US officials emphasize religious diversity as a particular strength (of Nigeria), EU officials stress the tradition of religious tolerance, and the experiences and expertise in contributing to inter-religious dialogue.

Last but not least, what kind of images do the EU and the US project of different denominations? The analysis suggests that EU institutions are more biased than US institutions, and that legislative branches are more biased than their executive counterparts.

While in the analyzed EU documents, the majority (42% in the case of Council and High Representative and 72.3% in the case of the European Parliament) of direct references to Islam and Muslims (and related terms such as Sharia) referred to problematic contexts of causing violence and human rights violations, Christians and Christian institutions were primarily presented as victims (57.1% and 80%, respectively). Even though there were also explicit statements that a clear-cut differentiation between Muslims as perpetrators and Christians as victims was not possible, such statements constituted a minority. Human rights issues not located in the north of Nigeria, by contrast, were either not mentioned at all or not linked with religion. Documents of the US executive, on the other hand, were more balanced in how Islam/Muslims and Christianity/Christians were represented, as opposed to Congress resolutions with also predominantly negative references to Islam/Muslims (58.3%) and Christians exclusively represented as victims. However, both EU and US executives seem to try to avoid a (mis)representation of Islam and Christianity by just omitting them – about one third of the documents referring to religion do not mention any denomination at all.

Conclusions

The (preliminary) analysis in this paper suggests that the secular identities of the EU and the US are built on different premises. In US foreign policy, religion, or more precisely, religious freedom, due to the reporting mechanism, is more prominent than in EU foreign policy. However, this particular policy issue is also quite marginalized in the Department of State. If excluded from the analysis, issues of religion are similarly prominent in EU and US foreign policy. In the EU, they are framed both as a security issue and as a human rights issue, whereas in the US, issues of religion tend to be securitized, reflecting general differences in EU and US foreign policy which, according to the literature on the distinct role identity of the EU in world politics, focus more on human rights, on the one hand, and security, on the other.

However, the US regards religion more frequently than the EU also as a resource contributing to the solution of problems. This might be a consequence of the generally higher acceptance of religion in the public sphere in the US than in the EU (“freedom to religion” vs. “freedom of religion”, see Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). The EU’s secular identity indeed can be considered as a ‘secular community of values’, allowing religion, as already suggested by Larsen (2014), only as a human rights issue into the public sphere, otherwise trying to banish it from politics as it is regarded primarily as an issue causing or contributing to political problems. One could, though, add that the EU also constructs itself as a ‘Christian Club’, especially the European Parliament, protecting Christian minorities in violent Muslim countries, whereas the US administration, unlike Congress though, at least rhetorically, pursues a more balanced approach.

There are, however, some caveats. The results might be skewed due to selection bias, primarily as, at the moment, the analysis is based on just one case. The selection of predominantly Muslim countries characterized by political instabilities and violence, as well as religious division, might forestall, for instance, the representation of religion primarily as problem, or of Islam as violent and of Christians as victims. The differences identified in this paper based on the analysis of just one case, however, already demonstrate that the analysis even of only a few and relatively specific cases can be illuminating. Even though they do not allow drawing conclusions representative for EU and US foreign policy in general, they facilitate a better understanding of how the EU and the US construct their secular identities through their external policies. Future research can include more cases and add the analysis of documents produced by EU Delegations and US Embassies in order to trace and explain variations in the EU’s and US’s secular identities contingent, maybe, on geographical and cultural context.

As the case with all international identities, they can only be ideal types (Forsberg 2011). Whether and to what degree international actors act according to their identity constructions, remains an empirical question for future research.

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