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Public Religion in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards an Investigation of José Casanova's theory

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Abstract

This article addresses the significant development of secularization theory as it emerged from the collaboration of José Casanova and Charles Taylor. In Casanova's approach, he attempts to maintain the conclusions of sociological and religious studies interpretations of contemporary social processes, based on the original secularization theory; at the same time, his deconstruction of the original theory and the further development of its elements offer an interpretative framework that is particularly suited for the examination of public religious dimensions of the East Central European societies following the political system change around 1990. First, I will review Casanova's main theses on secularization and public religion in order to facilitate the argument following it, in which I will examine the role religion plays in different East Central European democracies in relation to the state, party politics and civil society.

*Introduction: **The Nonreligious Sphere of Society***

To begin a discussion of the development of secularization theory as it emerged from the collaboration of José Casanova and Charles Taylor,[1] one must differentiate between three concepts that are often indistinguishably applied in describing the presence and significance of, or the diminishing of the presence of, religion in modern societies: the secular; secularization; and secularism. The *secular* is an epistemological category that helps us distinguishing between the secular and the religious. *Secularization* is a theory conceptualizing certain processes of our modern world, while *secularism* is merely an outlook, or an ideology.

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[1] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); José Casaonva and Anne Phillips, 'A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and Its Social and Gender Implications', *Gender and Development Programme Paper Number 5*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, September 2009.

These key concepts must be investigated in order to achieve a stable frame for our investigation of the East Central European region.

In Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), the first, contemporary sense of the word *secular* (and of *secularity*) is the separation of state and church, or more broadly, not perceiving God and the divine revelation as the natural origin of life's meaning and the norm for human actions. In contemporary societies individuals and social institutions are independent from this fundamental religious provenance and influence.[2] In its second sense, secularity means the decline of religious practice: people are not going to churches as often, are not praying as often, and so on. In this second sense secularity denotes the social process by which people no longer regard faith in God and the practice of faith as self-evident. For Taylor, however, the most important sense of the secular is its third interpretation: in our modern world the religious interpretation is merely one of many possible interpretations, the religious dimension itself is present in society, in the individual's self-interpretation, and in public discourse as an *immanent frame*.

Taylor accounts for three main subtraction stories that are characteristic of secular relations.[3] The first one is *the eradication of the religious outlook from the public sphere*. This is not merely the triumph of the 'scientific outlook'; it is the disenchantment of the cosmos, the disenchantment of the world previously full of enchantments. The worldview formerly held together by religious markers is now free and untethered. In enchanted world science, politics and religion were all part of the common religious system, and thus part of each other in an appropriate coherence. In the world of disenchantment all three spheres follow their own logic.[4] The second characteristic is *the diminishing of personal religiosity and of religious commitment*. From here, one can trace the disintegration from the public world /common good. The individual has turned away from the public, external and eternal sources to the individual, internal, and is following their own choices and decisions. The third characteristic, and the most crucial one for Taylor, is the fragmentation of opinion regarding social order. Public opinion has turned away from the notion that the roots of its norms reside in religion. Religious beliefs are no longer the universal foundations for the norms of society but merely one of many possible foundations. We live in a society where there is no single axis around which the whole revolves.

According to the secularity narrative, humanity must abandon infantile naivety and its belief in God in order to recognize and fulfil the goals of self-realization. Namely, belief in God does not support the modern way of sexual fulfilment, and the predominant values of technological development, and consumerism. It is easy to see how the predominance of these goals had a diminishing effect on notions that relativized them. The narrative of personal and social maturity also contributes to secularism's belief in scientific and technological progress.

Thus, God has been exiled to the margins of life, presented as a distanced deity, an immobile mover without empathy, the clockmaker of the universe having no stake in present life and contemporary society. One can recognize deism, comprehended in this sense, from order and beauty ruling over the world, from the laws of nature, but by no means from revelation. Religious practice within this system means recognizing and knowing divine order and attempting to live in harmony with it. Hence, being Christian is being good, following civic

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[2] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[3] However, Taylor is far from seeing modernity as merely a story of loss, i.e., subtraction. In his words, "[t]he key difference we're looking at between our two marker dates is a shift in the understanding of what I called 'fullness', between a condition in which our highest spiritual and moral aspirations point us inescapably to God, one might say, make no sense without God, to one in which they can be related to a host of different sources, and frequently are referred to sources which deny God" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26).

[4] Although Taylor uses Max Weber's key term 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*), he does not adhere closely to Weber's concept. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 3rd edition, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

norms, and being in harmony with an ordered society that more or less concedes to the moral requirements of the Decalogue. As a result, secular Christianity is experienced as a civil religion in the societies and adapted churches of present-day Europe, the United States and Canada. Taylor describes these state of affairs and terms it the immanent frame, as if every task humans have to face can be comprehended and solved with the logic and framework of immanence.[5]

Following Taylor's distinctions, I should mention that is not rare that we find in new, up-to-date specialized literature the term secularism denoting secularization in relation to state and church. This is primarily seen in socio-political texts, where *multiple secularisms* – following the pattern of Shmuel Eisenstadt's term of *multiple modernities* – seems to be the new buzzword.[6] However, despite the occasional inconsistency, secularism signifies the ideology that promotes the separation of the religious and the civic sphere, while secularity customarily refers to the complex system of relations of society and religion. The concept of secularization is used more or less consistently to signify the institutionalization of the differentiation between the religious and the civic sphere (sacred and profane), and the diminishing of the individuals' participation in religious practices, and of individuals basing their worldviews on religious ideas. Consequently, as the concept of secularization is not merely multi-layered but overburdened, authors are forced to separate combined phenomena signified by secularization, distinguishing from it both the ideological aspirations of secularism and the secular dimension of society too.

The concept of the secular is a modern category that allows for the recognition, construction, codification and separation of that which is nonreligious. It is clear that the concepts of the secular and the religious are categories that are mutually constitutive. Viewed historically, the secular world, or more precisely the secular view of the world, has been established by the gradual unfastening of the entirety of social reality from its previous religious framework. In European history, the religious was considered the primary and universal dimension, while the secular was its opposite and, thus secondary, dimension. In contemporary sociology the secular dimension is the self-evident, exhaustive interpretative paradigm in which the sacral, religious dimension either maintains a certain position and significance, or loses it to differing degrees, depending on the continent, region, state, and historical age in question.

As the European mentality and identity was primarily formed on Christian religious outlook and Christian theology, its primary religious paradigm is Christian. Its basic notions are therefore informed by Christian theology, which speaks of God as the creator of the world and of humans as the stewards of its values and missions. Hence, the foundation and significance the world's dimensions are to be found in God, whose will is expressed in His revelation. However, increasingly since the Enlightenment, reason and later social discourse has become the new, exhaustive spring for answers to the majority of questions. This state was termed "postmetaphysical thinking" (*nachmetaphysisches Denken*) by Jürgen Habermas.[7] It was to this state that Taylor applies the third sense of secularity.

Distinguishing between these different notions of the secular is critical within the debate on secularization theory, and subsequently for its application in sociology. Namely, in examining the development of the personal or the public presence of religion in different societies, one cannot lap back into the obsolete historical and philosophical framework in

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[5] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 539-93.

[6] See Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, 'Vielfältige Säkularitäten. Vorschlag Zu Einer Vergleichenden Analyse Religiös-Säkularer Grenzziehungen', *Denkströme: Journal Der Sächsischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften* 7 (2011): 53–71.

[7] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994).

which religious versus worldly dimensions formed the bipolar structure of thinking. Within current social relations, the issue at stake is not merely the process of the balance between these two equal and yet differently present spheres. Secularity is the universal framework of contemporary thinking; hence the religious dimension is present within this framework, particularly in the public space of society, influenced by its interpretation and functioning. Modernity has not repressed religion but provided new possibilities for religion to gain strength and manifest itself. Modernity has changed the meaning of society itself, partitioning the previously whole entity, differentiating it and fragmenting it. Religion has become one of the fragments, as has power, family, culture, industry, moral norms, and so on.

The concept of secularity, therefore, signifies two processes. In Europe, the concept of the secular was developed by Christian theology and meant the scope of the temporal realization of religious goals. Within the religious sphere one faces the turning away from the "temporal" towards the "eternal" goals, while on the other hand, there is the turning towards the temporal reality, towards the 'world(ly)'. In this sense, Christian theology and judicial practice differentiated between the monastics (regular clergy) and the secular clergy, and later between the clergy and the 'worldly'. Enabling simultaneously similar and dissimilar binary interpretations to the previous example is the model of the secular other, in which world is interpreted devoid of its religious content and purpose, and liberated from religious-church control. This notion and practice are based on the philosophy of *laïcité*, which defines its theory and practice in opposition to and liberated from religious sphere and church control. There is a significant difference between the two processes. In the first, secular is a religious category, in the second it is a nonreligious, a religion-less, category.[8] Both trends are legacies of modern societies in which we focus on the religious changes, i.e., the shift in the significance of religion in society. However, if we choose to focus primarily on the analysis of the secular, we will see these societies as completely secular, despite their aforementioned dual legacy. Secularity is the basic interpretative framework and space in which human life takes place, defining our thinking about religion. From this perspective, the secular is not the divergence from the religious, but the religious is the divergence from the secular. A religion-less, disenchanted present forms the framework for human pursuit of happiness in modern societies, and this paradigm is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. The switch between religion and secularity seems to be complete. As religion was the self-evident position with no need of proof in Christendom, so is today nonreligious secularity the obvious stance in no need of particular justification. Even dedicated believers consider their religious conviction as one of the many possible options.

Modern secular society or culture denotes three modes that are not necessarily closely connected. In Casanova's words:

> One may distinguish three different ways of being secular: (a) that of mere secularity, that is, the phenomenological experience of living in a secular world and in a secular age, where being religious may be a normal viable option; (b) that of self-sufficient and exclusive secularity, that is, the phenomenological experience of living without religion as a normal, quasi-natural, taken-for-granted condition; and (c) that of secularist secularity, the is, the phenomenological experience not

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[8] As Casanova repeatedly notes, it was Talal Asad who directed our attention to the "remarkable ideological inversion" of the historical process of secularization: "For at one time 'the secular' was a part of a theological discourse (*saeculum*)," while later "the religious" is constituted by secular political and scientific discourse, so that "religion" itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity. See José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited." In *Religion: Beyond the Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries, 101–119. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 103).

only of being passively free but also actually of having been liberated from "religion" as a condition for human autonomy and human flourishing.[9]

Secularity is the analytical and evaluative category that traces, describes and interprets the direction of social change of religion, religious institutes and religiosity within the development of European society, with the understanding that a certain religious position transforms into a certain secular position. Secularization as an interpretative framework within sociology was first applied to studies of Europe, but has achieved a global application, in as much it interprets the historical direction of social change, development to be from, in a sense, primitive sacred towards the modern secular. The decline of religion and the privatization of religion became inherent parts of the secularization theory.

At first glance, the theory of secularization does support the self-evidence of the immanent frame in several European societies. Modernization in these societies went hand-in-hand with the decline of religious life and conviction, with its privatization and the substantial collapse of its social effectiveness. However, in other highly modernized societies, like the United States of America or South Korea, the level of religiosity is still high. For this very reason, the two subtheses of the secularization theory – the decline of religion and the privatization of religion – have been subjected to criticism and revision, as the proportional relation between modernization and the decline of religion is no longer held under scrutiny.[10] Indeed, if the decline of religion could not be perceived in all of the highly modernized societies, the reasons for the change in religiosity within societies must be sought in different historical or other factors.[11] According to Casanova, who agrees with Taylor, the special factor responsible for the suppression of religion in European modernization is the so called *secularist stadial consciousness*.[12] In societies where one observes this stadial consciousness, one also observes a decline of religion in the process of modernization and, vice versa, where such consciousness plays no significant role the process of modernization is accomplished without religious decline.

According to Taylor, stadial consciousness is formulated throughout the nineteenth century, gradually becoming one of the most significant factors.[13] Stadial consciousness provides a certain interpretative framework that facilitates differentiation between values, relations and significances, as well as their acceptance or rejection based on the stage they belong to. The era of modernity is also a product of this. Everything belonging to the era of modernity, whether value or relation, is considered obsolete and untenable from this point of view, as stadial consciousness describes stages in terms of advancement. Consequently, everything contemporary is acceptable, supportable, and in some sense is a norm that does not require particular justification or explanation. Starting from the Enlightenment and deepened by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, stadial consciousness has released societies' cognition and interpretative skills from tensions. This simple and effective model, damning anything from the past and imputing advance in a positive direction from past to future to be obsolete, has simplified and rendered plausible perceptions related to religion. The influence that religion, religious thought, and institutions once had on society and the individual were once and for all relegated to the discredited past. The contemporary era is a bearer of new

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[9] José Casanova, 'The Secular, Secularizations, Secularism', in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 60.

[10] N. J. Demerath III, "Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed", in *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, eds James A. Beckford and N. J. Demerath III (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore: SAGE Publications, 2007), 57-80.

[11] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 103-106.

[12] Casanova, 'The Secular, Secularizations, Secularism', 59.

[13] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 289.

interpretative and value system replacing the religious system and the role it played in a former era. In Taylor's words, "[t]his stadial consciousness is, so to speak, the ratchet at the end of the anthropocentric shift, which makes it (near) impossible to go back on it."[14]

Multilayered Secularization

Casanova deemed it necessary to rectify his previous thesis on public religions and address its criticism on three levels: "[First,] rethinking secularization beyond the West: toward a global comparative perspective; [second,] public religions beyond ecclesiastical disestablishment and civil society: the dual clause and the 'twin tolerations'; [third,] transnational religions, transnational imagined communities and globalization."[15] In order to rethink secularization beyond the West (in this context signifying Western Europe), Casanova builds on Eisenstadt's thesis of "multiple modernities", according to which one cannot simply posit a continuation between the traditional and the modern, nor can one claim a radical break between the two.[16] The relationship of tradition and modernity can rather be described with multiple modernities, particularly if we step outside the context of Western Europe. The initial interpretative theory of secularization was modelled on Western European societies and following Western Europe's colonization trajectory ascribed a global applicability to the theory. However, from a wider, multi-continent, or even from an East Central European perspective, Europe is the exemption rather than a model of a global occurrence.

The global perspective, when applied to Casanova's second level of rethinking public religion, relativizes the previously normative claim containing the deprivatization of religion "within the public sphere of civil society, within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, and within the constitutional premises of ecclesiastical disestablishment and juridical separation of church and state."[17] Acknowledging his initial views to be informed by the Catholic *aggiornamento* of the 1960s, Casanova claims that the Catholic Church has shed its antimodernist sentiments at latest at the Second Vatican Council (wherein the *aggiornamento* reached its peak), recognizing the inalienable right of every individual to religious freedom.[18] He accepted "the modern principle of disestablishment and the separation of church and state", embracing democracy and, consequently, changing "from a state-oriented to a civil-society oriented institution," all of which enabled its "crucial role in opposition to authoritarian regimes and in processes of democratization throughout the Catholic world."[19] Changes like this are observable in twentieth-century histories of other world religions too. A pressing issue today is the not so theoretical question of Islam's compatibility with democracy. As Casanova notes, there are three separate, but interconnected, issues related to Islam reminiscent of the nineteenth-century anti-Catholic sentiments that were perceptible even in the twentieth century. Firstly, at a geopolitical level the question is whether we are witnessing a clash with Western civilization (reminiscent of earlier clash between 'Republicanism' and 'Romanism'); secondly, the presence of political Islam, particularly in Turkey, provokes reactions that can easily be related to reactions to Christian democracy; and, thirdly, there is the question of the articulation of the Muslim *ummah* outside the realm of *Dar el Islam*.[20]

Although the last two centuries have facilitated changes in the relationship of churches and democracies, primarily in Europe, enabling church support of democratic relations, "the

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[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 289.
[15] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 103.
[16] S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29.
[17] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 106.
[18] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 106.
[19] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 107.
[20] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 109.

pattern of caesaro-papist regulation and control of religion established by the early modern confessional absolutist state […]" has been preserved to the present.[21] The formal separation of state and church is characteristic of the majority of European countries, although in different ways. The so-called post-socialist countries have not followed the French model in which separation, among other things, means the complete lack of government support for churches. Nor are they following the Scandinavian model, or that of Great Britain, where one can talk about state churches. According to Casanova, in the post-socialist countries one discerns, besides the formal separation, also "an informal single or multichurch quasi-establishment" with "various corporatist-consociational arrangements and church-state entanglements" that necessitate a certain level and type of restriction of religious pluralism. Hence, the question especially pertinent to these countries is just how far the impenetrability of the "wall of separation" extends? As Casanova emphasizes, the existing, different European models of state and church separation are not tightly interconnected with levels of democratization. Consequently, separation of state and church in its classical liberal sense cannot be the measure of democracy.

Following Alfred Stepan's suggestion, Casanova sees the model of "twin tolerations" better suited for the interpretation of the relation between state and church, between society and religion within democracies. In Stepan's words, the model of "twin tolerations" is described as "the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions *vis-à-vis* religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups *vis-à-vis* political institutions."[22] As Casanova summarizes:

> Religious authorities must "tolerate" the autonomy of democratically elected governments without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy. Democratic political institutions, in turn, must "tolerate" the autonomy of religious individuals and groups not only in complete freedom to worship privately, but also to advance publicly their values in civil society and to sponsor organizations and movements in political society, so long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law.[23]

Returning to the third level on which Casanova deemed it necessary to reformulate his thesis on public religions, one encounters the change in the global significance of Catholicism. For centuries the Catholic Church has directed, influenced, and controlled the political and cultural relations of Europe and its colonies. Following the French revolution,[24] this global significance of Catholicism has diminished considerably, attaining new significance only in the last few decades. However, Casanova does not restrict the opportunities that the process of globalization allots to religions with ambitions to attain transnational and global status to Catholicism only, as he exemplifies another, differing trajectory with Pentecostalism. While the first is a centralized, global institution of great tradition, the latter is decentralized, with low territorial and traditional roots allowing an easy naturalization in any of the contemporary societies. The global cultural conditions have allowed even religions defined within boundaries of civilizational territories, like Islam or Hinduism, to attain partly deliberately, partly inevitably global statuses; however, this comes at a price of deterritorialization. Global media presence and global migration have both rewritten the principle of *cuius region, eius religio*

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[21] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 110-1.
[22] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 103.
[23] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 103.
[24] Casanova traces the diminishing of the transnational dimension of Catholicism to the emergences of the Westphalian system of territorial nation-states in the sixteenth century and illustrates it with the fluctuating fate of the Jesuit order. See Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 114.

that, in a sense, provided denominational peace in the past, but seems to be inadequate when it comes to facilitating the accommodation of religious diversity generated by global migration in the present. There is a need for new models of interreligious peace.

Revisiting and reconsidering the initial thesis of public religions seems to be most pressing from the globalization perspective. The conditions of globalization necessitate, in Casanova's words, that all the religions draw not only upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Intercivilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are as much part and parcel of the global present as Western hegemony, cosmopolitan homogenization, religious fundamentalism, or the clash of civilizations.[25]

So far, I have given an overview of the new discourse on the secularization paradigm as it emerges from recent works of Casanova and Taylor, in the process distinguishing the notions and concepts of secular(ity), secularization, and secularism. This was necessary for two reasons. The first reasons might be termed historical, namely, related to the history of theory. It is important to note that ever since the 1970s some of the initial assumptions of secularization still echo as dogmas even in contemporary scholarly works by prominent authors. My revisiting of the subject, particularly of its further development, wishes to free the present discourse from the shackles of this decades-long problem. However, I do not propose to completely reject the significance the original notion might have in the present day, in light of diverse religious revivals; rather, I wish to emphasize its relativity and, at the same time, offer a possibility for its further development. The consistent applications and validation of this paradigm shift is what I consider the chief aim and result of my own research related to secularization. The second reason for distinguishing between the differing notions of secular, secularization and secularism is for the purpose of perspective, especially as I consider the approach from the secular framework to be the adequate approach in examining the religious stock of the East Central European societies. Namely, it assures the omission of perspectives informed by theology and/or church power from the sociological approach.

The First and Second Wave of Transition

In East Central European societies, the democratic transition might be deemed paradigmatic, as the political systems of what were arguably dictatorships were replaced by rather more than less democratic systems: multi-party free elections, constitutional courts, and separation of powers, to mention just a few of their features. Apart from the structural transition, these countries also face debates about the quality of public life within democratic relations. One can draw basic conclusions both on the structural elements and on the quality of the democracies in the examined societies. I will provide an overview of the criteria that allows for such an examination. However, it must be remembered that the nuanced analysis of public religions' relations is possible only by nuanced description of democratic relations.

Andrew Roberts, arguing for the validity of the procedural conception of democracy in assessing the quality of East European democracies, claims that democracy can be defined as based on two major principles and/or practices (he terms them "main institutions").[26] The first is that of free election: a procedure by which the adult population of a country chooses its "most powerful policy makers" at free elections organized at regular intervals. At the elections each adult is entitled both to vote and to be a candidate. The second is the existence of civil rights that ensure for each adult the possibility to provide or obtain sufficient information allowing

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[25] Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', 119.
[26] See Andrew Roberts, *The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe: Public Preferences and Policy Reforms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

him or her to effectively participate in the election. Based merely on these two principles, the definition of democracy is minimalist, as it omits the presence of other criteria, such as legislation, law enforcement, and so on. However, the East Central European transition requires a definition that allows the classification of countries; hence, definitions with multiple variables would limit the effectiveness of the model. Further, we do not aim for exhaustive analysis, but merely for the examination of the roles religions play in some of these new democracies.[27]

If we link the formal presence of democracy to the procedure of well-informed free election of the electors, the quality of the democracy can be assessed based on how the governing relations of a given country facilitate the operation of the structural elements of democracy. In other words, if we define democracy according to certain rights of the people, the quality of that democracy depends on how those rights are realized; that is, whether the electors can exercise control over their government or are, rather, controlled by it.[28] Democracy is of a higher level in countries where the population exercises higher control over their politicians, and of lesser level where the populace's influence and control is realized in a lesser degree.

According to Roberts, there are three distinct areas where one can assess the support democratic institutions provide (or lack to provide) in order to advance popular rule:

> Elections and rights give citizens three different powers: (1) the power to sanction incumbents, (2) the power to select new officials, and (3) the power to petition the government in between elections. All three powers enable citizens to control policy makers. If democracy promotes citizen rule, these linkages should be strong [and, consequently, one might also perceive the quality of democracy as strong].[29]

A common mode of discussing the East Central European transition in public discourse, and often in academic discourse as well, is to identify transition focusing on a shift from autocracy to democracy. However, the last two decades following the 1990s has shown that the transition in this region is a much longer and a more complicated process. There are marked differences between the first half of the 1990s and the period following it. In all three areas of public sphere – in organs of government, politics, and civil societies – one can perceive a distinct boundary separating the first phase of the transition from the second. This line is not pinned to the same date in all states, but it is present in all of them. Let us now observe this trajectory in one of Roberts' case studies, namely, that of the Czech Republic.

First of all, the first free election cannot be perceived as an institution of established democracy for various reasons. On one hand, the Communist (or crypto-Communists) parties running in the first election held incomparably large advantages over other parties. They had exercised uncontested power for almost forty years and had developed a network of connections in every settlement. Their incumbents were imbedded in existing institutions of socialism, and their connection capital was unsurpassed. On the other hand, while the new parties could ride the wave of novelty, catching in their sails the winds of change, their programs were unfamiliar and their representatives unknown to the public. Also, this was the first instance of free election in several generations; hence, the knowledge and practice of this political procedure was rudimentary not only in Czech Republic but in all of Eastern European countries.[30]

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[27] According to Freedom House's survey, *Nations in Transit 2012*, in only eight countries of East Central Europe can the democratic structure be perceived as complete, i.e., consolidated (Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Hungary).

[28] Roberts calls this quality *linkage* (Roberts, *The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe*, 25, 26).

[29] Roberts, *The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe*, 32-3.

[30] Roberts, *The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe*, 54-55.

Following the system change, the associations as institutions of civil societies have metamorphosed and, most significantly, new societies have emerged gradually taking over the role of defining the institutional system of civil society from the previous, slowly metamorphosing associations. In analyzing this civic sphere of society, one can observe three phases of change: first, the phase of liberalization, starting with the termination of the state, i.e. state party control and the (police) power influence; second, the phase of institutionalization, in which new associations develop and their institutions are build up on new legal regulations; and third, the phase of consolidation, marked by the social, maintaining and profiling clean-up activities of these civil societies.

In case of Czech Republic, the transition comprises both the rapid collapse of the Communist regime and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into two separate states. The period between the two historical events (the collapse and the dissolution) simultaneously marks the phases of liberalization and institutionalization ending with the Constitution that took effect on 1 January 1993. The start of the consolidation phase might be dated from the time Constitution took effect. The number of civil societies in the two years of the system change has been still concise. The first drastic leap in numbers was produced in the period between 1989 and 1992, by the end of which there were almost 20,000 registered civil societies in the country (the majority of them forming from the break-up of previous large associations). By 2008 the number of registered civil societies has reached 100,000.[31]

The characteristic of the increase in the number of civil societies supports the existence of a clearly dividable, two phases in the period following the system change. One can discern a short transitional phase concluding in legislation, followed by another phase that is significantly different from the first particularly in terms of corporate and political roles of civil societies. A strong corporate and political role seems to be characteristic of civil societies in the first, short transitional phase only, while one observes a continuous political impartiality both before that phase (due to enforced party directives) and following it (due to disappointment in the existing democracy and to the lack of civil society traditions).

The most significant religious-political issue still under debate in the Czech is that of the "return of church property confiscated in 1949."[32] The support of and the opposition to restitution plays a large role in the self-definition of post-system change political parties and is also a tool for distinction between them. The issue of church financing tied with the issue of restitution played equally large roles in election campaigns and in subsequent parliamentary debates. If the confiscated properties were to be returned to the church, they would provide a source of finance independent of the state. However, if these were retained, necessitating the continuation of the state-paid salaries, the state could exert a strong control over the church. The ambiguous role of Catholicism in the history of the Czech nation only complicates the matter. On the one hand, the notion of an independent, self-maintained church evokes and activates Czech anti-Catholic sentiments because "[u]nder the Habsburgs, forced Catholicisation proceeded hand-in-hand with Germanisation, and there has thus always been a feeling in the Czech lands that Catholicism, despite its being the major religion, is also anti-national."[33] On the other hand, the proponents of active independent church refer to the fact that "key Catholic dissidents played an active role in the opposition."[34] All in all, the participationists support restitution as they claim that "proper recognition of groups and

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[31] Benjamin Zeitler, *Verbandliche Interessenvertretung Und Mitgestaltung in Den Mittel- Und Osteuropäischen Transformationsstaate* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011).

[32] Joan O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and Civil Society: Democratic Options in the Post-Communist Czech Republic', in *Church and State in Contemporary Europe: The Chimera of Neutrality* (ed. by John T. S. Madeley and Zsolt Enyedi (London: Routledge, 2003), 174.

[33] O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and Civil Society', 176.

[34] O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and Civil Society', 176.

associations require the creation and preservation of the resources that allow groups to govern themselves", while the elitists consider issues related to religious societies as tools of party-political identity struggles; in their opinion religious societies have no interest in public activities.[35]

It is a curious paradox that in a country showing the lowest religious rates in Europe, the relationship between religious societies and politics is not merely an issue concerning – according to many – an isolated religious sphere, but one of the basic issues of the post-Communist democracy. In a state where the relationship between church and state is characterized by distance, the political debates about the church touch on the core of democracy.

Religion in Public

Secularization has two dimensions: that of individual conviction and of the shifting, changing relationship between church and public. In his initial assessment of religion's presence in the public, Casanova distinguished the spheres of the state, of politics, and of civil society. Casanova's division of public space into the aforementioned spheres has a particular merit in relation to religion's East Central European presence.[36] Namely, one of the primary features of the region's countries following 1990 was the dissolution of the monolithic public life of the one-party dictatorship, and the development of the public structures characteristic of Western European democracies. Churches and other religious societies played crucial roles in this process, so much so that the political processes can be adequately analyzed by examining the public presence of religion. Let us take a more detailed look at Casanova's tripartite division.

The three spheres of a society's public life are the state, politics, and civil society. Religion is present in all three of these throughout Europe's history and in the present. The religious institutions on church level correspond to the publicity on state level. Apart from few exceptions (for instance the UK and Sweden), the separation of state and church has been accomplished in Western Europe and is considered evident both in political and in religious thinking. In the political sphere – comprised of the parties, legislation and big political organizations influencing legislation – religion is present on institutional level through Christian political parties supported by the church(es), through church organized political interventions that aim at influencing legislation, and through social organizations supported or operated by churches. In Western Europe the presence of religion in this sphere has gradually reduced and withdrawn from politics for reasons often not merely political, but theological too. There are not many existing Christian parties, unions, social movements supported by the church. The third sphere of civil society is where individual conviction is communally guarded, displayed, and revealed. Civil society expressly accepts and incorporates the separate operation of state and church, meaning that the state cannot demand its citizens to comply to certain church requirements (hence, the civil registration of birth records and marriages), nor can churches rely on state cooperation to provide for their exclusive rights. Civil society asserts the freedom of individual political convictions and of their collective, public manifestation. The activity of religious communities within the sphere of civil society can be also defined as the network activity of faith-based communities. In Western Europe these faith-based communities form the primary form of religion's public presence in societies.

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[35] O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and Civil Society', 172.
[36] José Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective', *The Hedgehog Review* 8, no. 1-2 (2006): 21.

State

The primary political demand of the East Central European countries following the system change was that of (re)establishing state sovereignty. Although some of the countries have a longer or shorter history of state sovereignty – the continuation of which was broken by shorter historical periods – there are countries that have achieved independence only following the system change, all of them to a more or lesser degree experiencing a restricted state sovereignty before the system change. Consequently, one of the common features of the region's countries is the demand of independent state existence and its guarantee, and the constitutional and political actions aiming to secure it.

The leaders of religious communities with substantial memberships and, therefore, large influences whose histories have long been interwoven with the history of a given country, have supported the primary strategic goal of the state. In several countries, the foundation of the state and the Catholic Church gaining ground can be perceived as the result of the same state act. In other Orthodox countries, the existence of nation-state and nation-church has been inseparable.

As we move further from the years of the system change (1989-1991), all of the region's countries have achieved, and constitutionally established, their sovereignty, so the next issue for the now independent states became establishing their network of international contacts. Negotiations were initiated, new alliances were made. These diplomatic actions, on the one hand, posed challenges to the interpretation of state sovereignty and, on the other hand, forced the states to freely renounce certain elements of their total and inviolable sovereignty. The establishment of state sovereignty is the primary state activity of the period following the system change, while participating in international networks and facing the tensions it provokes must be seen as a subsequent period. In some countries these two actions are almost simultaneous; in others there are years between them. The two most important international organizations influencing this period are NATO and the European Union. The question of joining NATO has historically generated fewer debates than the question of joining the EU. Controversies around joining the EU were significant in all of the region's countries. While all of them shared the unambiguous goal of joining the EU, not all of them were able to meet its requirements by the last two periods of EU expansion.[37]

In this second period, the churches strove to cooperate closely with the state, or rather to accommodate to the new statehood in two areas: cultural and economic. Culturally, they strove to transcendentally establish the new state, revoking the state-creating role of Christianity in history and emphasizing the central elements of Christian state conception. Economically, the most important task of this second period, after establishing the constitutional guaranty of state and church cooperation, was the legal assurance of church financing from government budget. Internal to the topic of church financing is the complex problem of restitution of church estates/properties – a problem that simultaneously showcases the similarities and differences between the countries of the region. Finally, there is a third component of the financial issue; namely, the role churches play in public functions,

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[37] Bettina Wagner, 'Unterstützung Der Europäischen Union in Mittel- Und Osteuropa: Die Rolle Nationalstaatlicher Einstellungen Als Heuristiken', in *Information – Wahrnehmung – Emotion: Politische Psychologie in Der Wahl- Und Einstellungsforschung*, ed. by Thorsten Faas, Kai Arzheimer, and Sigrid Roßteutscher (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010); Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012). Although I am not analyzing economic processes, I still feel it is important to reference Bohle and Greskovits's *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery* (2012) for the authors definitely distinguish two periods in their comparative economic examination of the region: one immediately following the system change, and one subsequent to that (ff. 81).

particularly in education and healthcare. In the second period following the system change, these area in-between state and church required primarily legal regulation and achieved judicial form in laws related to churches and in statutes clarifying various state-specific issues. Although the legal regulations of the region's countries show marked differences pertaining to the relations between state and church, one clearly perceives a couple of basic tendencies. All of the states acknowledge the historical and moral significance of the churches, particularly of the Catholic and the Orthodox Church, and they desire and rely on their cooperation. The legal entity of the churches is recognized in all countries of the region, along with the legal entity of church institutions referring to the canonical law of the churches. The state law guarantees the freedom of churches to inner structure and function. Hence, there is no need for churches to form additional civil legal organizations in order to function in civil society: they can function so as churches. This kind of legal regulation seems reasonable as a response to the needs of a cultural vacuum that emerged in the wake of Communism's dissolution and in compliance to the criteria defined by European states in Vienna in 1989. According to the latter, freedom of religion comprises not merely the individual's right to practice their religion individually or in their community, but also the right of denominations, churches as organizations to hold the rights of legal entity and freely practice their articles of faith and religious practices.[38]

East Central European countries with constitutionally provisions related to religious rights

Croatia	1990	Slovakia	1992
Bulgaria	1991	Russian Federation	1993
Latvia	1991	Belarus	1994
Macedonia	1991	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1995
Romania	1991	Armenia	1995
Slovenia	1991	Poland	1997
Estonia	1992	Hungary	1997
Lithuania	1992	Czech Republic	-

Source: Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, *UNESCO*, at https://en.unesco.org/themes/social-transformations/most.

Politics

In the present context I limit the concept of politics to that of party politics, based on the region's societies' experience in developing and functioning multi-party systems following a transition from a one-party regime, which can be seen as the most defining dimension of the region beside its economic transition. The political life following the system change primarily meant the structural regulation of the multi-party polity as it emerged from the one (legitimate) party, reviving parties that were either incorporated into Communist autocracy or terminated, and establishing new parties. This structural process also means a closer attention to elaborating and representing the public identity of the parties as the former more or less monolithic political-ideological space suddenly changed in front of the public, due to cessation of media censure, into a plural ideological space.

The religious communities took different strategies in this period. The majority of churches were informally, rather than formally, supporting national parties or parties

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[38] Peter Erdő, 'A Katolikus Egyház Jogrendje: A Kánonjog Helye És Sajátossága a Jog Világában', *Jura* 8, no. 1 (2002); Baláz Schanda, 'Staatskirchenrecht in Den Neuen Mitgliedstaaten Der Europäischen Union', in *Recht in Kirche Und Staat: Joseph Listl Zum 75, Geburtstag*, ed. by Wilhelm Rees (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004); Baláz Schanda, 'Church and State in the New Member Countries of the European Union', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 8, no. 37 (2005).

representing Christian ideologies. Based partly on historical experience and partly on ideological reasons, the minority or newly established religious communities preferably supported new parties, often becoming their support base. Within the study of the relationship of churches towards political parties the examination of their intimate relations with Christian democratic parties, that is, parties with pronounced national-Christian rhetoric, warrants a separate task to be examined from both the side of the parties and that of the churches.

Immediately after the system change one observes among the party members, and even more so among their representatives, the attitude of personal dedication. As political responsibility was possible only within one party in the previous system, those who did not agree with the ideology of that party could only practice their profession for the benefit of society. The multi-party system opened the space of public life for many who could not play a role in it before. Due to the conditions of its emergence, I call this new stratum of party politics the lay-existential layer: lay, for lacking experience in participating in the public life, and existential, as it is a public activity motivated by personal dedication and conviction, inspired and defined by a certain idea.

Such a lay-existential public activity can be seen as religious in character from a number of viewpoints irrespective of the fact whether such a politician is linked to a religious community and professing a faith or not. Functionally it can be seen as a religious attitude as it is motivated by an idea which the politician undertakes with their whole persona along with possible risks. The politician is, so to speak, under a mission for social change defined by the motivating idea. Their personality gets interwoven with the idea, and their self-esteem is primarily the mixture of the idea and of their role and identity. In the period following immediately the system change the public activity of persons motivated in such a way often run parallel both in party political and in religious areas.

This period is quite distinct from the period following it and characterized by the strengthening of professional party politics[39] After a number of free parliamentary and municipal elections the political layers have been sifted and the social approach to party politics has changed. The majority of the lay-existential politicizing generation has forsaken direct party-political public roles, and has partly or completely withdrawn from party political life. Those who stayed became familiar with the democratic framework of politicizing and became professional politicians themselves. A new stratum of politicians was added to this layer, namely, those who stepped into the party-political arena with a professional area to begin with.

Party-political professionalization also means differentiation in regard of relations towards certain parties and of opinions about parliamentary democracy in general. Characteristic of the societies belonging to this region is the disenchantment from the naïve expectations related to economic upheaval and political freedom, and the disappointment related to the unfounded, though understandable hopes they attached to the notions of economic and political prosperity. The differentiation and disappointment felt within churches and other religious communities is also a sign of a professional relation to the party-political sphere. During their common learning process, religious communities have learnt that the area of politics has its own goals, laws and norms to which one should related in suitable manner. The parties should not be perceived as the political representatives and executives of religious ideologies and institutional requirements. Religious communities had experienced that parties instrumentalize them in order to promote and realize their own political goals, and that their

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[39] Béla Pokol drew attention to the figure of the professional politician as early as 1993, and provides Hungarian examples. See Béla Pokol, 'A Hivatásos Politikus,' *Politikatudományi Szemle* 2, no. 2 (1993a), 61-78; and Béla Pokol, 'Professzionalizálódás, Értelmiség És Politika,' *Politikatudományi Szemle* 2, no. 2 (1993b), 135-140 . With reference to other East Central European politicians, particularly relying on East German experiences, are the works of Klaus von Beyme. See Klaus von Beyme, *Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996).

Christian rhetoric does not necessarily align with what churches mean by 'Christianity'. The sheer diversity of their members' political sympathy is yet another incentive for religious communities to differentiate in their relations to party politics.

There is another consideration one must account for from the party-political dimension, namely, the difference between the antagonistic and agonistic view of politics and their realizations. According to Chantal Mouffe, antagonism – the us/them difference seen as one "between friend and enemy" – is an always present constitutive possibility of democratic politics, therefore, one must distinguish between *antagonism* proper, "the struggle between enemies", and *agonism*, "the struggle between adversaries."[40] In other words, antagonism wishes to deprive its adversary from all possibilities of public corporate representation and clout, while agonism perceives the simultaneous and continuous presence of political adversaries in the discursive realm as important, in a sense the 'dogma' of politics. Hence, a mature democracy is characterized by agonistic political culture, while immature democracy demonstrates antagonistic politicizing in which the adversary is virtually or, in extreme cases, really destroyed and at best discredited. Religion has a bearing on this political dimension, as one of its primary functions is to draw a line between 'us' and 'them'. It is therefore of no little importance to what extent the region's churches, particularly those wielding greater political influence, identify with or are critical of the party-political demarcation. This is especially relevant in case of the Catholic Church, as it is international in nature and, nevertheless, closely related to a given state and social community through its local church organizations.

The shifts in how different governments are constituted as a result of party politics and election struggles can be observed in a number of the region's countries. A number of the parties that emerged in the wake of the 1990's change can no longer reach election thresholds ensuring their presence in the parliament, while newly established parties are much more successful in achieving representation.[41] Concerning the relationship between large churches and political parties, it is especially interesting to consider the success of Christian parties in the last twenty-five years.[42] Expressly Christian democratic parties that used to wield great influence in the 1990 have, in the cases of Hungary, Poland and Romania, alike lost their bearing and public role. At the same time, parallel to this occurrence, one observes a migration of Christian political ideology and rhetoric to right-wing parties, which have attained influence and parliamentary seats after 2000 and have joined the coalition government.

Civil Society

The third public sphere of society is that of civil society. The presence of these in the new democracies of the region is a novelty surpassing that of the multi-party system. Even in Western Europe, civil society emerges and gains significant foothold after World War II, irrespective of their different European versus American nature and structure, particularly when comparing the relationship between religious communities and civil societies. This continental difference aside, the development of a civil society in East Central Europe in the era of total dictatorship was completely impossible, because one of the goals of the region's

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[40] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2004), 13, 102-3.

[41] Tönis Saarts, 'Comparative Party System Analysis in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of the Baltic States', *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 3 (2011); Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge 2000).

[42] Ann Grzymala-Busse, 'Why There Is (almost) No Christian Democracy in Post-Communist Europe', *Party Politics* 19, no. 2 (2013); Gábor Dániel Nagy and Tamás Szilágyi, 'Szavazhat-e a Hívő Katolikus a FIDESZ-KDNP-Re 2012-Ben? Gondolatok Tomka Miklós Cikkéről Kortárs Kontextusban', *in Vallás a Keresztény Társadalom Után (Tanulmányok Tomka Miklós Emlékére)*, ed. by Mónika Földvári and Gábor Dániel Nagy (Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2012).

dictatorships was annihilation of all party independent social institutions, or their absolute assimilation.[43]

Despite the stifling climate, some form of civil society did emerge in the region termed "the second public sphere" (*Zweite Öffentlichkeit*) by social historians. They emerge with the slacking of the total dictatorship, for from the 1970s and 1980s onward it no longer launched its expressed police rigor against independent initiatives as before, at least in case of Hungary and Poland. A significant part of this alternative, 'second public sphere' was comprised of religious circles, present in form of national and international pastoral movements, and groups linked to congregations and parishes.[44]

Immediately after the system change, the societies of the region could be characterized by the lack of civil society. In particular, the number of non-state organizations was very low, there were no bylaws regulating the organization and activity of civil societies, and the later had to face the pressing issue of non-existing budget, not having yet the means – either cultural or technological – to support themselves.

Despite these factors, groups and activities characteristic of civil societies did precede the formation of new parties, often becoming the base for the latter. Several members from the religious communities of the second public sphere before the system change have later stepped into party politics. The movements and groups were partially dissolved into more liberally organized church congregations and parishes and have, thus, lost the framework partially securing their identity: the ethos of resistance. The legal regulation of the civil society sphere, and the provision of competition possibilities from both national and international resources ensuring financial support, have largely contributed to the growth and spread of this layer of public life. At the same time, one can observe besides the rapid growth of leisure associations and foundations also a proliferation of civil societies focusing on a specialized project, moreover, of organizations maintained by political parties that are legally listed under civil societies while their function and activity is subjected to party political goals and programs.

In this period of proliferation of civil societies, one also observes an unambiguous growth in number of religiously based civil societies, and the exploitation of competition resources particularly in relation to social and mental health activities. At the same time, these societies or, rather the communities behind them, lack civil courage of a political nature; moreover, they tend to separate themselves from non-religious civil spheres of similar status. Within this religiously based civil society there too are organizations established for the realization of the pastoral and other interests of church institutions, organizations that explicitly or even exclusively serve the spiritual growth of individuals, and organizations that that function as national branches of larger international movements.

Compared to the self-interpretation of the East Central European civil society, Alexis de Tocqueville's classical observations about civil societies are in a sense atypical, and yet offering a productive perspective. In his seminal two-volume work, *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840), Tocqueville did not define the significance of civil societies primarily in their role of filling the void between the individual and the power structure, nor in their function to limit the totalitarian endeavors of the government, but in emphasizing their function in curbing the excess selfishness of the individual. He calls this notion "the doctrine of self-interest well understood."[45] According to Tocqueville, the individual citizen in and of themselves is incapable, nor willing to limit their self-interest, and cannot withstand the principles and practices of

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[43] Elemér Hankiss, *Diagnózisok 2* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986).

[44] The role of religions in the second civil sphere in case of Hungary is well researched. See István Kamaras's *Búvópatakok* (Underground Streams) (Budapest: Márton Áron, 1992) and *Kis magyar relgiográfia* (Small Hungarian Religiography) (Budapest: Pro Pannonia, 2003).

[45] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. by Harvey C. Manfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

economic market controlling society. Hence, the need for (grassroots) civil societies, associations, and connections. In order to break centralism and atomism, and the forced circle of individualism and despotism, the subsidiary organization of civil society needs to be reanimated to mediate between the state and the individual. Tocqueville attempts to illustrate his conviction with the example of the Puritans and the Huguenots. These examples furthermore demonstrate the connection and link between civil society and religion, as both examples are of religious communities. The role of religion in creating and revitalizing civil society is in setting up immaterial ideals, and in representing the goal of human perfection. According to Tocqueville, religion and civil society are based on the same belief, or at least cannot be maintained without a common belief. However, this common belief is not merely a faith in God, but a belief in responsibilities towards one's fellow man. Self-interested considerations were not sufficient foundations for a society to escape the rocks of excessive individuality (selfishness) and the shoals of governments' excessive power-hunger. Religion guarantees that the creation and union of society will not equate with the abandonment of democracy, as religion cannot stand behind/in for power, nor can religion hold it. The freedom characteristic of America can stand because the obligation to moral good is based on religious faith.

Tocqueville's observations and conclusions—fitting well with those of his Hungarian contemporary, József Eötvös—make it clear that in societies under democratic political structure, the function of the civil society dimension is not primarily the opening and maintaining of free public life in face of dictatorship, but forming a solidarity community that facilitates reaching beyond self-interest. In a culture void of democracy, religions, and churches, the emergence and support of civil societies could signify the opposition to dictatorship; in democracies their function is to oppose selfishness, and egotism. In autocracies they fight for democracy, while in democracy they strive for solidarity.

Conclusion: The Mutual Acknowledgement of Public Life

In summary I am compelled to primarily state the importance of acknowledging the public sphere as social public space. This imperative applies to public figures. The secular nature of society's non-religious area does not merely signify independence and/or opposition to the religious in its traditional forms, but exemption from all other religious, and even non-religious ideologies. While the struggles of political interest seem to play out naturally within the given framework of a democracy, public figures should realize that the standard of their argumentation is not political success, but the factual solution of the tasks society faces. However, the acknowledging of secular, disenchanted society—particularly considering the temptation of secularism's ideology—is not merely the obligation of civil public figures, but also of religious public figures. Given their creed, religions and religious institutions will inevitably look upon the reality of a secular world as a missionary territory. However, they also need to accept and be familiar with the logic of how a secular society works if they want a balanced cooperation with other agents/factors shaping that society. All of this does not mean disregarding the historical traditions of a country, or ignoring the religious, denominational division of a society's members. One merely has to acknowledge that in a constitutional democracy—due to separation of state and church—religious public actions are possible within the legal framework of a secular society. Secularity in itself does not mean exemption of values or opposition to values, as democracy itself is sustainable only if built on certain basic values, primarily the respect of human rights and the principles facilitating undisturbed democratic discourse. It is in this discourse that the representatives of religious communities take part while advocating the interests of their religious institutions and offer their stance in questions related to the society at large.

The Communist regime assigned a common lot to the societies of the East Central European region; however, its dissolution has opened up new possibilities for them to structurally develop and culturally realize democratic relations. In this region's countries, the foundations of democracy were laid and completed, more or less successfully, within the first few years following the system change. The directing of societies within these new democratic frameworks, however, is burdened with hardships to this day. Public representatives and analysts of social change, both must acknowledge the second wave of transition in present democracies. The most important challenges of present-day societies in the region are not resistance to autocracy, nor the paving of democracy, but politicizing for the benefit of the public within democratic relations. The acknowledgement of this second wave requires professional analyses that must be preceded by revisions of theoretical stand points. Hence the need for differentiating between structural and qualitative democracy, and for analyses considering the basic elements of both. As there are differences between the theories attempting to interpret the logic of dictatorship(s) and the theories addressing the changes brought forth in the first wave of transition, so is there change between these latter theories and the ones analyzing the second wave of transition.

Concerning public religion, a new generation is growing up whose basic knowledge not only of dictatorship but also of system change is acquired indirectly. Personal experiences do not enrich, nor bias the new generation in their attempt to solve current social issues, analyzing them and setting up interpretative frameworks. From their current discourse perspective, this generation looks upon the region based on economic indicators, and not on the memory of their common lot. Especially in regard of public religion, the interpretation of the religious institutions' repression and of the opposition to religion no longer feature as interpretative tasks for this generation. In their perspective the legitimate scope of comparison is Europe as a whole and the rest of the world's continents. For this generation East Central Europe is no longer a given condition but a question and, perhaps, a research result.

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