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THE CORROSION OF AN IDEOLOGICAL IDENTITY?
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE
AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE FAITHFUL ELECTORATE

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Abstract: Electoral manifestos represent tools of political communication which do not only inform the electorate upon the fundamental values of a party, but which also legitimize future actions that the party might undertake once in power. The electoral manifesto of the European People's Party, drafted before the 2009 European elections brings together the main elements which define the action plan of the party. Religious values lie at the core of the Christian-democratic ideology. But given the dynamic of politics and the sometimes sudden shifts in the preferences of the electorate, manifestos can rapidly become out of touch with the needs of the voters. The current paper will analyze how much of what the EPP Manifesto contains on issues related to religiosity is truly in line with the general opinion of the Christian-democratic electorate in four European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, The Netherlands and Portugal. Moreover, using data collected through the Vote Advice Application data, the paper will also tap into the differences which still persist (or which are fading away) in the attitude of the right-wing versus the left-wing electorate on the issues related to religion. Communicating with the electorate is the main key in attracting those who share the ideas and values of a party. But what if the core ideas of a party are slowly becoming unappealing for its own electorate?

Key Words: Christian-democracy, religion, tolerance, political communication, election manifesto, ideology, vote propensity, electorate, comparative, European Parliament

Introduction

The aim of any political discourse is that of attracting the highest possible number of supporters, and therefore parties have always been interested in proving the validity of their own arguments to the electorate as opposed to those presented by their political rivals. Throughout history, the persuasion strategies that parties have employed underwent constant processes of improvement, given the fact that rhetoric is a key element in convincing and seducing the audience¹. Taking their message across, so that it reaches as many voters as possible, has also been quite a challenge for politicians. Regardless if they represent the right or the left, the Government or the opposition, political parties always seek to develop complex networks which can be used for disseminating ideas and initiatives that lay at the foundation of their actions. Politicians are very well aware of the important role of words in any political competition, and this is because any political action is prepared, accompanied, controlled and influenced by linguistic elements².

We can easily consider that political parties actually play the role of a *broker* between the preferences of the electorate and the policies of a certain administrative unit. It is in this sense that electoral manifestos have a crucial role not only in informing the citizens about the fundamental values and the action plan of a party, but also in legitimizing the potential decisions of one party or another once elected. Although it is commonly known that such manifestos are rarely – if ever – read by the ordinary citizen, one cannot dismiss the fact that they bring together on paper the main measures which parties seek to put in practice as soon as they have all the necessary means to do so. A great deal of the behavior of political parties can – or at least should – be understood by going through such documents, which most developed democracies in Europe regard as being vital for electoral competitions³.

The current paper will analyze the content of the manifesto drafted by the European People's Party (from now on, EPP) in 2009 in order to identify elements related to tolerance and religiosity. The study will then measure the attitude towards these issues of the electorate with a high propensity to vote for parties belonging to the EPP in four European states. This will allow us to understand whether the Christian-democratic electorate is actually following the same line of thought with the official party documents or whether there is a mismatch between the EPP manifesto and the attitude of those who voted for the Christian-democratic parties. Towards the end of the paper, we will shed light upon the differences between the attitude of the EPP electorate and that of the left-wing parties' electorate on issues of religiosity in each of the four states.

The theoretical controversy over the role of religion in shaping political preferences is on the rise, as opinions vary from what some see as a growing influence of religion over politics of what others consider to be a descendent slope for religious values in politics. It is in this sense that on the one hand, there are the well-known scenarios of a religiously driven World War III - as Huntington has warned, and on the other we have the effects of the so-called "twin tolerations", which erect boundaries between the elected authorities and religious groups, putting a halt to what could be the influence of religion over politics. Explanations on the decrease of the impact of religion in contemporary public space also relate to the fact that religious organizations are increasingly dependent on funds that come from secular institutions⁴. However, the institutional approach to democracy implies that no group - be it a religious one - can be prohibited from forming a political party⁵. Christian democracy is usually considered to be such a political entity, created around strong religious values. It is therefore not just a pragmatic strategy which was needed to counterbalance existing parties⁶; Christian-democracy is, according to official party studies, an ideology rooted in the social ethics of Christian churches⁷. But if religion is regarded less and less important in shaping political preferences, we argue that the legitimacy of such a party can be severely undermined.

Why study Christian-democracy?

Christian democracy has been neglected by scholars for quite a long time, one of the reasons being related to the difficulty in observing the relationship between religion and politics, a research element which is indispensable in studying this ideology. Understanding the religious phenomenon in relation to other aspects of human life usually has to mobilize researchers from more than one study area. Moreover, the neutrality which today's postmodern society is expecting from the state regarding religion does nothing but to amplify the complexity of the issue⁸. The persistent interconnection between religion and politics has been very well summarized by Sandu Frunză, who acknowledged: „We can easily notice that religion and politics are always together during the course of the history of human communities. This relationship becomes questionable in modernity because of the separation between religion and politics, as well as of the separation between the religious and the political imaginary and the separation between the purpose of political actions and decisions and those belonging to the religious sphere”.⁹

Most studies that referred to the Christian democratic ideology have often done so more or less accidentally or incidentally, by creating contrasts between social democracy and Christian democracy, and not by engaging into a thorough research of the nature and evolution of the

latter¹⁰. Some of these studies referred to the welfare state expenditure from a comparative perspective and concluded that the behavior of Christian-democratic Governments is very much anchored in the worldview which is typical of the Christian doctrine¹¹. The interest in studying European Christian-democracy has started growing once its curious evolution in recent years on the European continent. The years following the Second World War witnessed the most important Christian-democratic parties in Europe gathering approximately 40% in electoral support, thus being able to create comfortable majorities even without the help of other allies in national parliaments. This was mainly the case in Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria. Today's reality is radically different for the Christian-democrats, as few such parties still manage to gather important numbers of votes. In Italy, where the electorate is renowned for its religious voting behavior, Christian-democrats have declined dramatically, registering one of the most striking failures when *Partito della Democrazia Christiana* collapsed in the 1993 elections.

Despite of the image of a political ideology which was unable to keep its electorate close enough throughout history and which is currently divided into scattered bits and reduced to a scale which makes it too unimportant for today's political games, part of the literature still shows that reality is not as harsh as one would imagine for the European Christian-democrats. A series of studies refer to the fact that the EPP, under the umbrella of which Christian-democrats all over the continent ran for the European elections, still has a considerable force in the Parliament based in Brussels, as the European People's Party managed to gather the highest number of seats in the European Legislative during the elections in 2009. Moreover, as one would expect, much of the victorious illustrations of the Christian-democrats take Angela Merkel's CDU as a reference point. Some consider the dominance of her party as being an empirical and analytical puzzle¹². Although it remained quite a singular case on the European political scene and has recently been considered weakened, the German national elections reconfirmed that the Christian-democrats did not lose their distinctive ideological profile¹³. CDU is a somehow unique case of Christian-democracy whose roots go as far as a Protestant-Catholic interconfessionalism, which boosted a pragmatic type of political cooperation that gave the party its strength¹⁴. Moreover, other authors consider that the center-right parties (of which many are Christian-democratic) apparently managed to give better answers to the needs of the electorate during the economic crisis, thus making them more appealing to the voters than the center-left parties¹⁵.

Studying Christian-democratic parties becomes even more tempting if one chooses to look at the mutations which have taken place in their core ideological dimension, most evident after the fall of the communist

regimes in Eastern Europe. An argument which many consider valid is related to the end of the Cold War: once it reached its end, the scope of Christian-democratic parties in Western Europe, who advocated fiercely against communism, was seen by many as aimless. Moreover, there were also repercussions on the religious aspect of the ideology, which we will tap into later. The attachment of the Christian-democrats to religious values is of no doubt: the democracy which even the name of the ideology makes an appeal to is not any type of democracy, but a Christian one, therefore one which is unmistakably related to religion. Various studies issued by the *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* demonstrate the interest of such parties for the preservation of Christian symbols and practices. The current study will research, amongst others, if messages of religious nature still persist in the electoral manifesto of the EPP and if they are compatible with the attitude of the faithful electorate in different European states, given the fact that religiosity has drastically declined in recent years¹⁶.

The paper will shed light upon the religious dimension by conducting a content analysis of the electoral manifesto of the EPP, which was drafted in 2009 and approved by the Political Bureau of the party at the beginning of the same year. As expected, the manifesto contains ample references to values and aims of the EPP. We will then measure the receptivity towards the religious dimension of the Christian-democratic electorate in a comparative perspective, using data collected in 2009 on voter preferences from Austria (ÖVP), Bulgaria (GERB), The Netherlands (CDA) and Portugal (PSD). The case selection was realized so as to cover all regions of Europe: Center (Austria), East (Bulgaria), North-West (The Netherlands) and South (Portugal). In addition, choosing these four countries will also show how much the Christian-democratic electorate is different over the European continent, most interestingly in Bulgaria, a country which was not very familiarized with the ideology, given its birth only after 1989. The paper will therefore build the profile of the Christian-democrat electorate in the above-mentioned countries and will try to understand where they differ and how much of their profile is in accordance with the EPP manifesto in terms of tolerance and religiousness. Moreover, towards the end, the paper will also show the difference (or lack of difference in some cases) between the electorate of the right and that of the left.

Methodology

The methodology of the current paper will comprise two stages: first of all, we will create a content analysis and extract the main issues related to tolerance and religion from the political manifesto drafted by the Political Bureau of the European People's Party and approved in 29-30 January 2009, just a few months before the elections. It is in this sense that we will tackle issues such as (*social*) *solidarity*, *migration*, *gay marriage*,

euthanasia and the *degree of punishment for criminals*. The study will show how many such references can be found in the electoral manifesto and the context in which they were used, so as to better understand their meaning.

The first part of the methodology will use qualitative data analysis, discourse analysis being interpretative in its own nature, whereas the second part of the paper will show the results of a quantitative analysis, done by using SPSS. We will reveal the profile of the most important EPP parties in several European states, so as to understand whether the ideas found in the official party document can indeed be identified within the attitude of the electorate. As stated above, in order to create an image which is most representative for Europe, we have chosen to study the answers given by voters from the following states (we will also indicate the acronym of the party in parenthesis): Austria (ÖVP), Bulgaria (GERB), The Netherlands (CDA) and Portugal (PSD)¹⁷. The present case-selection was realized not only on the basis of geographical differences, but also given the very diverse experience which all four cases have had with the Christian-democratic ideology, some of them emerging from a historical and very clear-cut cleavage – as it is the case of the party in The Netherlands – and others being constructed as an ideology on a past which was profoundly altered by the communist regime – the case of the Bulgarian Christian-democrats. Austria is a country where the Christian-democrats were always fairly well represented in the Parliament, but the ÖVP has recently registered lower popular support as compared to the years after World War II. Lastly, Portugal provides a very interesting case, given the shift in ideology from the center-left to the center-right of the most powerful Christian-democratic party in the country. Moreover, Portugal was one of the first countries to be hit by the economic crisis and the scanty organization of the political system was argued to have contributed to the incapacity of the country to answer to the challenges posed by the economic crisis¹⁸. In order to create a framework that would allow a better understanding of the attitude of the Christian-democratic electorate in terms of tolerance and religiosity, the paper will also show how much the answers given by those with a high propensity to vote for the Christian-democrats contrasts with the answers given to the same questions by the supporters of the major left-wing parties in the same states, i.e. SPÖ for Austria, PSB for Bulgaria, PvdA for The Netherlands and PS for Portugal.

Before going further with the analysis, it is important to specify that the answers which the paper is using in order to create the profile of the Christian-democratic and of the left-wing electorate in the above-mentioned countries represent data that were collected by an online application website developed by the Dutch company *Kieskompas B.V.*, based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Such online applications, called VAA's (Vote Advice Applications) are extremely valuable and have many

advantages as they are used by people who have the availability to answer quite a high number of questions. The answers are then archived in a data base that allows scholars to tap into a variety of studies, given the associations which can be realized between the answers given. One disadvantage could be related to the fact that such applications are most of the times used by those who know how to use a PC and internet. Even so, in most Western European countries this was not considered to be a hindrance and the gathered data were used for many academic purposes¹⁹.

The application that the current paper will use was developed especially for the 2009 European elections, and users from the 27 member countries could consult the application by visiting www.euprofiler.eu, available in all of the official languages of the European Union. The mechanism behind the application is the following: it allows the users to answer 30 questions and then it uses the answers to position each person on a left-right/GAL-TAN system, so that the user can see which party he/she comes closest to in ideological terms²⁰.

Christian-democracy and the EPP electoral manifesto

Main characteristics of the Christian-democrats

The interest of scholars in identifying the main characteristics of Christian-democracy grew only towards the end of the 1940's, when this particular ideology was becoming a major player on the political arena of many Western European countries. The first studies on parties embracing this ideology were conducted by Gabriel Almond. The author tried to make clarifications on the religious nature of these parties, especially relating it to their Catholic origin. Moreover, Almond makes references to the impact of the ideology over the electorate at the beginnings, when Christian-democratic parties would hold at least half of the most important portfolios in the post-war cabinets of Western countries, e.g. The Netherlands, France, Italy, and Austria. The popular support use to range from 26% in France to 50% in Austria²¹. However, the same author associated the new political phenomenon with the affinity for right-wing authoritarian regimes of Austria, Portugal and Spain, as he considered that the Christian-democratic ideology was aiming to create a counter-balance to what he labeled as Eastern European Bolshevik totalitarian regimes. Therefore, in order to withstand the communist threat, it is possible that these parties based their organizing on a discipline stronger than others. Maybe this is why Almond considered Christian-democratic parties to be dictatorial and saw their supporters as lacking any democratic belief. Interestingly enough, the author considers that despite their support for the church, Christian-democratic parties also show a left-wing sensibility, given their positioning on social issues, which takes them closer to a moderated left. Therefore, Almond's study suggests quite an intolerant

Christian-democratic electorate, despite their social sensibility and the clear support for the church.

Studies on the features of the Christian-democratic electorate became even more interesting once the existence of ideological differences in the European Parliament were officially recognized, and the Christian democrats, the Socialists and the Liberals became the first supranational political divisions²². Moreover, the fact that legislative behavior in the European Parliament is structured more by party affiliation than by national affiliation brings new incentives to see how much parties forming these political groups differ from one another²³.

Trying to understand the deeper psychological reasons behind ideological cleavages, recent studies have gone as far as trying to demonstrate that the feeling of fear is more characteristic for the right-wing than for the left-wing supporters. Fear, anxiety of the unknown, low resistance to conflicting situations and uncertainty are considered to represent characteristics which can show certain political affinities, these being also associated with the structure of the brain²⁴. Given such characteristics developed by the literature, our hypothesis is that the profile of the Christian-democrat electorate is one that shows intolerance towards immigration, gay rights, euthanasia, criminals and a slight support for social solidarity, as well as a consistent support for the church.

Content analysis of the EPP manifesto for the European Elections

The 2009 manifesto of the European People's Party makes not less than 19 references to the phenomenon of immigration. In more than half of the cases, the adjective used for describing this word is "illegal". Therefore, the party manifesto is treating the problem of illegal immigration as a delicate one, giving it a high importance and asking for the issue of a coherent and concerted policy at the European level for combating the problems of "mismanaged immigration" and "mass immigration"²⁵.

Regarding criminal activity, the EPP manifesto dedicates entire paragraphs to organized crime and to terrorism. One can also identify references to new forms of criminal activity which the document considers to need new methods of approach. The document uses the phrase "zero tolerance" when referring to the combat of violent attacks, terrorism and crimes who have religious justifications. The manifesto also provides that the European Union should intensify its collaboration with EUROPOL and do its best to combat organized crime²⁶.

Euthanasia and the issue of gay marriage are not discussed at all throughout the document, which indicates the lack of importance of such issues for the EPP. However, the manifesto does refer to private life and social exclusion, but in a different context than the one that would interest the current study. It is in this sense that the document refers to family, professional and private life as some of the main values which the

EPP considers to be of great importance for every person. The program also refers to social exclusion, but mostly as an effect of economic factors, not cultural ones. The concept of solidarity is also tackled, but in the context of solidarity between generations and between member-states of the European Union. Solidarity is regarded as the basis of any strong society, as the EPP manifesto considers that prosperity can only be achieved through solidarity. It is interesting to note that the document of the European People's Party considers that more important than social solidarity is social responsibility, without which the manifesto argues that no sustainable economy can exist.

Last but not least, religion is another important aspect of the EPP manifesto, as one can find ten references to the term throughout the document. The electoral manifesto warns about the anti-religious behavior of certain groups (the document also refers to "religious extremism"), this concept being also related to the issue of combating criminality. The document reads: "We should nevertheless be 'intolerant to intolerance' of our own value system and beliefs [...]". Thus, the document creates a real fortress around the values which the European Christian-democrats consider to be of vital importance. We can therefore state that religion and its entire value system has a central role in the program of the EPP, the electorate being urged to respect all other beliefs, but always answer when the Christian roots of Europe are threaten.

The profile of the Christian-democratic electorate in four countries

Using the data obtained, I have created simple frequencies in SPSS which mirror the profile of the Christian-democratic electorate in the four above-mentioned countries: Austria, Bulgaria, The Netherlands and Portugal. The data retrieved refer to the answers given to the following questions²⁷:

1. Social programs should be maintained even at the cost of higher taxes;
2. Immigration into the country should be made more restrictive;
3. The legalization of same sex marriages is a good thing;
4. Religious values and principles should be shown greater respect in politics;
5. Euthanasia should be legalized;
6. Criminals should be punished more severely.

The following tables reflect the attitude of the Christian-democratic electorate regarding the above-mentioned statements:

1. Social programs should be maintained even at the cost of higher taxes

Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	9.3%	2.8%
ÖVP (Austria)	13.1%	6.1%
PSD (Portugal)	12.1%	10.4%
GERB (Bulgaria)	6.9%	12.0%

2. Immigration into the country should be made more restrictive

Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	18.3%	2.3%
ÖVP (Austria)	26.1%	7.6%
PSD (Portugal)	33.4%	5.8%
GERB (Bulgaria)	19.2%	6.8%

3. The legalization of same sex marriages is a good thing

Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	27.4%	8.8%
ÖVP (Austria)	27.3%	18.2%
PSD (Portugal)	12.6%	39.7%
GERB (Bulgaria)	6.2%	37.3%

4. Religious values and principles should be shown greater respect in politics;

Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	10.0%	5.8%
ÖVP (Austria)	11.2%	22.0%

PSD (Portugal)	22.8%	10.6%
GERB (Bulgaria)	18.5%	7.5%

5. Euthanasia should be legalized		
Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	24.9%	6.9%
ÖVP (Austria)	14.8%	16.8%
PSD (Portugal)	20.1%	18.4%
GERB (Bulgaria)	14.0%	8.8%

6. Criminals should be punished more severely.		
Party (country)	Totally agree	Totally disagree
CDA (Netherlands)	38.9%	0.9%
ÖVP (Austria)	27.3%	4.2%
PSD (Portugal)	58.8%	1.4%
GERB (Bulgaria)	72.5%	3.0%

The profile differences of the Christian-democrats in Europe

The data above reflect the profile of the Christian-democratic electorate in the selected countries. As the electoral manifesto of the EPP allows the reader to understand, one of the main aims of such parties is keeping a low rate of criminality. The last table shows as clear as possible that the Christian-democratic electorate supports the idea of stronger security by punishing criminals more severely. The popular support for such an idea goes from 27.3% for the right-wing electorate in Austria all the way to 72.5% in Bulgaria.

Immigration, related by some scholars to the so-called politics of identity²⁸, is another issue which shows uniformity in the Christian-democratic electorate from the four countries. Numbers that show how many right-wing supporters are totally against restrictions for immigrants are distinctively low. It is in this sense that only 2% of the Dutch, 6% of the

Portuguese and 7% of the Austrian and Bulgarian Christian-democrats are totally against restrictions for immigrants. However, most of the Christian-democratic electorate declared its total support for restrictions: 18% in The Netherlands, 19% in Bulgaria, 26% in Austria and 33% in Portugal.

Regarding religious values and the way they should be respected in politics, the proportion of Christian-democrats that believes this is an important issue rises from 10% in the Netherlands to reach almost 23% in Portugal, therefore showing that religion, although it is not completely ignored, tends to become a second-ranked aspect of the Christian-democratic ideology in the eyes of the voters.

Legalizing gay marriage is considered to be a positive measure by much of the Dutch and the Austrian Christian-democrats, whereas the Portuguese and the Bulgarian Christian-democrats tend to be more reluctant regarding this issue. Surprisingly enough, euthanasia seems to be a less controversial issue for the electorate which the current study focuses upon, and this is because more Christian-democrats are in favor of this issue than against it; the only ones who have a distinct opinion are the Austrians, who would rather be against it.

The issue of maintaining social programs despite rise in taxes has clearly divided the Christian-democrats. Although differences between total agreement and total disagreement are relatively low, the Christian-democratic electorate in The Netherlands, Austria and Portugal seems to be more willing to accept such social policies, as opposed to the Bulgarian Christian-democrats, which show their disagreement.

Measuring right vs. left on the same issues

By using the same methodology, we have also created the profile of the left-wing electorate so that we can also tap into a comparison between the profile of the left-wing electorate and that of the right-wing electorate in the four countries. This comparison shows quite sharp differences between the left and the right in The Netherlands, Austria and Portugal, whereas in Bulgaria such a cleavage is almost inexistent. The issue of interplay between politics and religion is a very sensitive one in Eastern European orthodox countries, mainly given the involvement of politicians into religion and the sometimes the involvement of priests into aspects of political life, which curbs differences between the attitudes of parties towards religious values. Even so, in the field of party politics, the expectation that the party systems of Central and Eastern Europe will come to resemble those of Western Europe is still persistent²⁹.

Because showing the profile of the left-wing electorate would exceed the academic purpose of the current paper, we will only present some of the most important aspects that define the differences (or lack of difference, as is the case of Bulgaria) between the two. In the Netherlands,

only 9.3% of the CDA supporters declared themselves totally in favor of social programs that would lead to higher taxes, whereas the initiative is supported by 22.4% of the supporters of the Dutch labor party (PvdA). The difference between left and right is even more obvious in Austria, where only 13.1% of the Christian-democrats support the idea, whereas the Austrian social-democrats wholeheartedly support it in a proportion of 44.4%. In Portugal, the number of socialists in favor of the issue is double the number of Christian-democrats and in Bulgaria, the difference is 10%, with the socialists being more inclined to support social programs.

It is the cultural dimension that shows how weak the Christian-democratic ideology is in Bulgaria, because the difference between Christian-democrats and socialists on the issue of restrictions for immigrants is only 1%, whereas in all other states the difference goes beyond 10%.

The same 1 percent difference can be found in the attitude of the left versus the right on gay marriage (37.3% of the Christian-democrats are totally against and 38.2% the socialists). In Portugal, the difference is more than double, with 30.2% of the socialists and 12.6% of the Christian-democrats supporting gay marriage. The numbers are double in the case of Austria as well, where 57.4% of the Christian-democrats support gay marriage, while only 27.3% of the Christian-democrats declared to be totally in favor³⁰.

Regarding the support for religious values, in Portugal 20% of the socialist party's electorate declared to be totally against mixing religion with politics, thus placing itself at a difference of only 10% from the Christian-democrats. In Austria, 45% of the social-democrats consider that religious values should not interfere with politics, whereas only 22% of the Christian-democrats are of the same opinion. The numbers in the Netherlands show that the Labor Party is opposing religious values in politics twice as much as the Dutch Christian-democrats. The difference in Bulgaria is of only 4% between right and left, with 18.5% of the GERB supporters considering that religion should have a say in politics and 14.9% of the socialists considering this is agreeable.

Conclusions

The current study allows us to understand that elements such as immigration and crime rates are still central to the concerns of both the EPP official party documents and citizens with a high propensity to vote for the Christian-democratic parties. Sensitive cultural topics such as legalizing euthanasia or same-sex marriage do not benefit from a wide tolerance from the core electorate of the Christian-democrats, but their attitude is not radically against such measures.

The analysis also confirms that despite the much-acclaimed end of ideologies, differences still persist in respect to the attitudes of right-wing

versus left-wing supporters in Europe. However, the cleavages between the two sides of the political spectrum are less visible in Bulgaria, as the historical context in which Christian-democracy has developed in this particular country is quite different from that of Western Europe. We can suppose that the case of Bulgaria is representative for more or less all of the Eastern European countries which are still building their democratic framework after the collapse of the communist regimes. Another conclusion that the paper reaches is that the Austrian Christian-democrats seem to be closest, from an attitudinal point of view, to the official program of the European People's Party. The Portuguese manifest the most radical attitudes, whereas the Bulgarian electorate seems to be the least synchronized with the European ideological realities. Lastly, the Netherlands, given its very liberal policies, has managed to blur any rigid ideological shapes, but still keeps a vivid left-right difference between the two ideologies.

The fading role of religion in the political sphere is considered to be a reality of today's society, in which secularization is gradually growing into a central element. However, this situation does not necessarily exclude the association of politics with the sacred³¹. As seen above, a European manifesto can cover major differences in respect to sensitive ideological issues between member parties of the same political group. Religion is only one of the issues which cannot fit a unique measure European-wide. And the mismatch between the party manifesto and the attitude of the faithful electorate can only lead to the corrosion of an ideological identity on the right side of the political spectrum.

Notes:

¹ Karl Sornig, "Some remarks on linguistic strategies of persuasion", in *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), 97. The author makes a clear difference between the concepts of "convincing" and "seducing", as he considers that there is not only a difference in intensity between the two verbs. Seducing a person is actually the act of creating the mental impression for a certain person that he/she has deliberately chosen something, although in reality the decision is nothing but the effect of an exterior impulse.

² Christina Schäffner, *Analysing political speeches* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997), 1.

³ Stefaan Walgrave and Michiel Nuytemans, "Friction and Party Manifesto Change in 25 Countries, 1945-98", *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2009): 191.

⁴ Sandu Frunză, „Minimal Ethics and the New Configuration of the Public Space”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 11, issue 32 (2012): 4.

⁵ Alfred C. Stephan, "Religion, Democracy, and the Twin Tolerations", *Journal of Democracy*, 11 (2000): 39.

⁶ Bonnie Meguid, "Competition Between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success", *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005): 350.

⁷ Karsten Grabow, ed., *Christian Democracy: Principles and Policy Making* (Berlin: Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011), http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21408-1522-2-30.pdf?110620094744, (accessed April 17, 2014).

⁸ Ioan Hosu, Sandu Frunză, „Religious Affiliation and Social Action in the Public Space”, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, 43 (2013): 242.

⁹ Sandu Frunză, “Political Ethics between Biblical Ethics and the Mythology of the Death of God”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 11, issue 33 (2012): 207.

¹⁰ Stathis N. Kalyvas and Kees van Kersbergen, “Christian Democracy”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13 (2010): 184.

¹¹ Evelyne Huber, Charles Ragin, John D. Stephens, „Social democracy, Christian democracy, Constitutional Structure, and the Welfare State”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (1993): 717.

¹² Charles Lees, “Christian Democracy is dead; long live the Union parties: explaining CDU/CSU dominance within the German Party System”, *German Politics*, 22 (2013): 64.

¹³ Jan-Werner Mueller, comment on „Has Christian-democracy reach a dead end in Europe”, *The Guardian* – Comment is free, posted June 10, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/jun/10/has-christian-democracy-reached-a-dead-end-in-europe> (accessed April 7, 2014)

¹⁴ Maria D. Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy: Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁵ A. Krouwel, T. Bale, “Down but not out: a comparison of Germany’s CDU/CSU with Christian democratic parties in Austria, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands”, working paper, 2012.

¹⁶ A 2010 Eurobarometer shows that in terms of church attendance the proportion of people who have never went to church is 46% in the Netherlands, 40% in Belgium, 28% in Germany and 17% in Austria. The same survey shows that only 9% of the Austrians, 8% of the Belgians and Dutch and 7% if the Germans go to church every week.

¹⁷ Despite its name (Partido Social Democrata) which is usually adopted in Europe by center-left parties, in Portugal PSD is actually the main Christian-democratic party (Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission being a member of this party). The main left-wing party in Portugal is the Socialist Party, which we will also refer to later in my study in order to underline the differences between the two parties.

¹⁸ Andre Correra d’Almeida and Nuno Antonio, „The Political System in Portugal: People’s Demand versus Political Parties’ Supply: A Contribution to Institutional Analysis and Development” (workpaper, Center on Globalization and Sustainable Development, Columbia University, 2013)

¹⁹ The number of users which the online application has reached for the Netherlands in 2006 was more than one million and a half (1,634,057 users).

²⁰ S. Walgrave, P. Aelst, M. Nuytemans, “Do the Vote Test’: The Electoral Effects of a Popular Vote Advice Application at the 2004 Belgian Elections”, *Acta Politica* 43 (2008): 50.

²¹ G. Almond, “The Christian Parties of Western Europe”, *World Politics* 1 (1948): 32.

²² Simon Hix et al., “The Party System in the European Parliament: Collusive or Competitive?”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 41 (2003): 311.

²³ Simon Hix, "Legislative Behaviour and Party Competition in the European Parliament: An Application of Nominate to the EU", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 39 (2001): 684.

²⁴ R. Kanai, T. Feilden, C. Firth, G. Rees, "Political Orientations Are Correlated with Brain Structure in Young Adults", *Current Biology* 21 (2011): 677.

²⁵ Draft EPP Election Document, 2009

²⁶ Draft EPP Election Document, 2009

²⁷ The answers taken into consideration were "Totally agree" and "Totally disagree".

²⁸ Brigid Laffan, "The Politics of Identify and Political Order in Europe", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34 (1996): 82.

²⁹ Tim Bale and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Why is there no Christian Democracy in Poland (and why does this matter)?" (working paper, published by the Sussex European Institute, December 2006).

³⁰ We consider the Netherlands to represent a particular case regarding this issue, as the legalizing of gay marriage is a measure which was already adopted.

³¹ Sandu Frunză, "Political Communication and the Median Space of Religious Experience", *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* 39 (2012): 182.

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