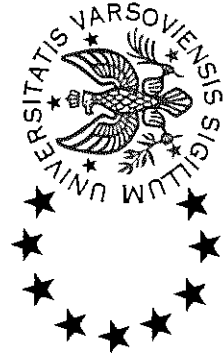


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Central Europe Two Decades After

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Conclusions

In the principal documents of the European Union the term “social cohesion” is understood as reducing of socio-economic disproportions between some countries or regions. Social cohesion policy is institutionalised in the EU and its results are to be measured by means of appropriate indicators. Despite a modest chronological period covered by the statistical data, some conclusions regarding the Central and Eastern European EU Member States could be presented. One can point out the dominant positive trend with some differences in initial level and dynamic. Other European States’ approaches toward social consolidation can be examined in the frames of two models represented by Ukraine and Russia. Ukrainian strategy is oriented towards the EU pattern but experiences strong influence of restrictive internal socio-political factors and geopolitical gap which is deepening under the impact of the EU development vector that is opposed to Russian one. Russian variant of coherence policy has rather ideological foundation with a certain emphasis on some privileged strata that provide political stability in the country.

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Joanna Kulska

Rebuilding the Role of the Catholic Church in Central European Societies After 1989

In one of the best known publications on the role of religion in international relations Scott M. Thomas points out the special input of the Catholic Church in demise of communism in Poland and the people’s revolutions in the rest of Europe. He notices that although many explanations have been given as to the reasons of the end of communism, “(...) what most of them have in common is that they leave little room for the role of culture and religion” (Thomas 2005, p. 4).

The specifics of the “Polish case” with regard to a special place of the Catholic Church in society is commonly known. But the role of the later must not be underestimated in other countries of the region, too. Despite the great historical, social and cultural diversity of Central Europe, Catholicism has been the dominating confession in most of the countries of this area and, according to some opinions, it has had its role both in deconstructing communism and in the transformation processes of the 1990’s.

When analysing the results of the first free or partially free elections in the countries of the former Soviet bloc it is easy to notice that the victory over communist candidates was most visible in the countries where the Catholicism has been a dominating confession such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia (Lecomte 2005, p. 106). But soon serious controversies concerning the Church-State relations began and the issue of role of religion in transforming societies arose. On the one hand, some theories emphasised the unique status of this part of Europe due to high level of religiosity and the special connection between religion and nation. On the other hand, other voices argued that the process of democratisation and modernisation makes secularisation of this region quite a natural, unavoidable consequence and that local Churches would have to find new identity and new ways of communicating with modernising societies.

The article discusses several fundamental issues. Firstly, the problem of specific features of Central European countries as far as the level of religiosity is concerned, compared to the rest of the continent. In this context the question of the socio-political

role of the Catholic Church in these countries it also taken into account. Secondly, the issue of institutionalising of the relations between the State and Church under new conditions of freedom of religion, separation of State and Church and pluralistic societies, seen from comparative perspective. Finally, the problem of mutual influences and interactions between religion and politics in the countries in question is presented.

The article focuses upon countries of Central Europe, such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic, but it also considers as background the situation in some other countries of the former communist bloc.

Central Europe. A Specific Case?

Catholicism has been dominating confession in most countries of the region. In Poland 94.3% of society is regarded as members of the Catholic Church. In Slovakia this is respectively 68.9%, in Hungary 84.1%¹. In the Czech Republic, in spite of very high level of secularisation, Catholicism is also a prevailing denomination of about 30% of the society (Brożyniak 2006)². The second biggest denomination after the Catholicism in the post-communist countries is Eastern Orthodoxy, while the third is made up of different protestant Churches.

The position of religion in Central and Eastern Europe has been closely related with the specific notion of State and nation. While in Western Europe the State is valued higher, in central and Western part of the continent what counts more is nation – quite often a nation confessing particular religion. This connection is particularly evident in the countries where the existence of the nation was, due to the historic reasons, supported by the Church³.

Both Orthodox and Catholic Churches refer to the links between religion and national identity and it was expected by the sociologist of religion that these two denominations could become a new ideology in the countries where these two Churches had historically and culturally strong position (Borowik 1999)⁴. Peter Beyer wrote in this context about the continued dominance of Christian/Catholic/Orthodox religious identities in the region, at least for the foreseeable future, but that was not meant to suggest continued or renewed power dominance of the corresponding religious authorities. He claimed that the form of privatised religion is more likely to appear, though the privatisation and pluralisation neither necessarily entails weakness of religious authority, nor organisational disunity (Beyer 1999).

¹ According to B. Schanda, the number is smaller: 65–70%.

² According to J. Tretera, the number is smaller: 26.8%.

³ Poland is one of the most notable examples of such support.

⁴ An important factor was the fact that Orthodoxy was unable to engage in *aggiornamento*, which means the process of modernisation that had been undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church after the 2nd Vatican Council and by Protestant churches almost from the time of their creation (Stan 2009, p. 1).

Another interesting question was the role of traditionally dominating Churches, especially most centralised ones *i.e.* the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, in the process of modernisation and democratisation of societies and political systems. Since the arguments appeared that Orthodoxy is inimical or at least less conducive to liberal democracy than Roman Catholicism or Protestantism (Stan 2009), the issue of adjustment of both Churches to the new conditions have been discussed, along with the question whether the social and political influence of both dominating Churches would be comparable.

The religious specifics of Central and Eastern Europe is a phenomenon evoking many questions and sometimes contrary opinions. The basic problem is the lack of data on religious involvement in these societies, since the statistics on this issue were not updated during the communist era. The changes in the area of values and religious beliefs in the following generations that could have taken place after the regaining of independence by the countries of the region will become visible after many years (Norris, Inglehart 2006). But the first analysis based on the data collection showed some interesting tendencies. After decades of communist-enforced atheism, Europeans in this part of the continent either rediscovered religion immediately after the collapse of communist regime or discarded the religion reaching the level of a-religiosity comparable to Western Europe. Poland and Romania illustrate the former possibility, Czech Republic and Estonia the latter one (Stan 2009).

Different approaches are presented regarding the place of religion in East and Central Europe when compared with Western Europe. According to the first one, the secularisation process⁵ is taking place in this part of the continent just like it does in other modernising societies. In their book Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart present the outcomes of their research showing that post-communist societies in the countries that successfully went through the process of transformation perceive religion as less important following the pattern of other societies in which the sense of existential security is rising. This situation is typical when people reach higher level of well-being meaning the higher standard of life, education and longevity. The short-term religious revivals appear, according to these authors, only where, due to erosion of welfare State and painful consequences of transformation process, societies experience the lack of existential security. They also State that specific feature of post-communist Europe is the fact that in some countries of the region, contrary to the supply theory⁶, in the homogenous religious cultures, like Poland, the level of religious practice is higher than in other, more pluralistic societies (Norris, Inglehart 2006).

⁵ The term secularisation refers to many different aspects of social life. The theory of secularisation anticipating gradual disappearance of religion along with the process of modernisation has become more popular in the 1970's and 1980's. Today the phenomenon of the "religious change" is widely discussed, including especially "deinstitutionalisation" and "individualisation" of religion.

⁶ According to this theory, participation in religious life is conditioned by religious pluralism and the lack of State control over the Church organisations.

Peter Berger sees the issue from a different perspective. In his opinion, the process of modernisation does not necessarily imply simultaneous secularisation. Modernity first of all brings religious pluralism. He claims that the contemporary world is more religious than it had ever been and there is only one geographical exception to this rule. This exception is called Europe.⁷ Since the former communist countries have become part of the European Union they will follow the pattern of “euro-secularism” which is simply a part of the “European packet”. According to Peter Berger it is quite possible that some European countries will choose their own path and they will not adopt “euro-secularism”, just like it happened with Euro, but “this would be a fascinating case” (*Wojna religii z nowoczesnością?* 2007, p. 3–4).

According to another approach, there is a fundamental difference between East and Central Europe on the one hand and the Western Europe on the other hand as far as the level of religiosity and actual religious practice is concerned. One could say that region is following its own path, not consistent with the one of secularised Western Europe (Tomka 2001, p. 11). Of course it does not mean that this region can be analysed as homogenous. It should be pointed out that we are dealing here with one of the most religiously-diversified areas of the world where one can easily find both some very deeply secularised areas such as Eastern lands of Germany or Czech Republic and some highly religious places such as Poland or Romania. But, according to some opinions, it is also here that one may observe quite surprising resurgence of religion – the process opposite to the “old” Europe. According to the research done at the end of the 1990’s, the level of religiosity would be even increasing due to the end of atheist State and the new visibility of the previously hidden religious life. The areas where this level would not increase would be Eastern part of Germany, Czech Republic, Poland and Romania. In the two latter countries the level of religiosity – i.e. over 90% of people declaring themselves as Catholics in Poland and Orthodox in Romania – can simply not increase any more (Tomka 1999). However, it has to be emphasised that belonging to the Church does neither automatically mean active participation in religious practices nor following the code of norms and rules distinctive for each denomination.⁸

Even though at the individual level people remain intensely religious, Churches do not play an important socio-political role in the region. They undeniably played crucial role in the fight against communism, not only supporting the idea of human rights as one of the basic components of democratisation, but also creating the space for development of opposition movements. But they did not become political actors after the collapse of communism. As Jeff Haynes puts it, Central and Eastern Europe “(...) is a region where religious organisations frequently have an important bedrock of support in society but this does not normally translate into a significant political role” (Haynes 1998, p. 104).

⁷ Peter Berger also speaks about one sociological exception which is the international stratum of intellectuals.

⁸ In Poland, according to statistics, about 40% out of over 90% of Catholics, attend Sunday mass. Respective percentage for Slovakia is 25% of those declaring themselves as Catholics.

The sociological research performed in seven countries of the former communist bloc confirms this trend, especially with regard to political views and behaviours.⁹ An absolute majority of respondents deny religious conviction influences their political attitudes. Even in such countries as Poland positive answer to the question was given by only 20.5% of respondents, which is the highest number among all the surveyed countries.¹⁰ 17.6% of Slovaks, 9.4% of Hungarians and 8.6% of Czechs gave positive answer to this question. Consequently, in all the countries in question, the question “Do you consider it appropriate for the Church to declare its views on the government policy?” was answered negatively. In fact, most negatively in Poland (81.8% of respondents), followed by Slovakia with 76.3%, the Czech Republic with 73.9% and Hungary with 63.4%. The data provides the picture of a predominant lack of connection between religiosity and political stance (Flere 2001, p. 33).

The Catholic Church in Central Europe. Between Communism and Democracy

The present social and political position of the Catholic Church differs significantly from one country of the region to another. One of the crucial factors determining this position was the evolution of the role of the Church during the communist era which, despite some similarities, took different routes and greatly influenced the current situation in the analysed countries.

In Czechoslovakia the level of religiosity in 1950 reached 76.4% of Catholics, which today would be very hard to believe (Treteta 2004, p. 129).¹¹ In spite of very evident long-term social reluctance towards the Catholic Church, especially among Czechs, it gained high esteem for its fight against the Nazis during the World War 2.

During the communist era the situation of the Church in Czechoslovakia was one of the hardest ones in the Soviet bloc. The process of atheisation here was stronger and more successful than in other countries of the region.¹² In 1948 the property of economic importance, which means fields and woods, was confiscated. In 1950 the male orders were banned and monastery buildings were confiscated. In the years 1950–1952 the female orders were obligatorily paid by the government.

⁹ The research was conducted in Eastern Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia.

¹⁰ It should be pointed out that in Poland the respondents who consider themselves deeply religious and who regularly participate in religious services (once a week or more frequently) are also the ones more eager to follow bishops’ instructions on political choices. Such results was gained both by Borowik J. and Szawiel T. (Borowik 2000, p. 137).

¹¹ But the level of those actually practising was very low. In Prague out of 50% of those declaring themselves as Catholics it was about 10% (Leszczyńska 2002, p. 86).

¹² This model is described as containment of religion through administrative measures. The Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Romania fell under the same model (Eberts, Torok 2001, p. 128).

Charitable organisations were banned and the clergy was prohibited to carry out their service.¹³

It should be pointed out that the results of atheisation were stronger in the Czech part of the country and weaker in the Slovak one. The Slovaks differed culturally from Czechs and Catholicism had been one of the factors of their identity.¹⁴ Bernard Lecomte emphasises that Catholics in the Slovak part of the country were more rebellious both in the aspect of their dependence on Prague and the Marxism-leninism. This is where traditionally all contest movements started and this is where manifestations and petitions grew stronger in 1988–1989. In Slovakia the nationalism, anti-communism and Catholic faith were largely shared by the same groups and meant nearly the same thing (Lecomte 2005).

In the scholar literature **Poland and Hungary** are often considered examples of two different and in some aspects even contrary scenarios of Church's situation under the communist regime and, to a significant extent as a result of this situation, as examples of very different condition of the Catholic Church in the post-communist period. One could say the "stories" of Hungarian and Polish Catholic Church can be examples of two different ways of how they found themselves the new, democratic circumstances after 1989. Comparing Polish and Hungarian Catholicism is even more interesting because right after the WW2 situations of both Churches were quite similar – they were both rich and powerful (Borowik 2000, p. 44). The great difference, however, was in their histories of relations between Church and State. In the Hungarian case it was a long history of close cooperation between the State and the Church – the Church was associated with imperial power. In the Polish case it was a long history of Church supporting the society against the occupant ruler. In effect, although the Catholic Church was the moving force behind the Christian-national idea during the inter-war period, Catholicism never became equated with Hungarian patriotism, as it was in Poland (Eberts, Torok 2001).

In the communist era, the Catholic Church in **Hungary** experienced severe restrictions. Already in 1946 priests were imprisoned and executed. In 1950 religious orders were banned – over two nights ten thousand nuns and monks were expelled and interned (Pucilowski 2005). Though the level of religiosity grew rapidly right after the war and at the beginning of 1950's, the next two decades after the fall of the 1956 revolution brought the opposite trend. In spite of heroic attitude of the Primate Mindszenty¹⁵, the Church was gradually becoming practically absent in the public life.

¹³ Many Catholic priests, along with protestant pastors, participated actively in Charter 77. The Charter itself was neutral worldview. It is also worth mentioning that Charter 77 was not supported by the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia led by the primate František Tomášek. The attitude of the cardinal changed totally as a result of his contacts with the Pope John Paul II (Lecomte 2005, p. 274).

¹⁴ When Czechoslovakia was established after the World War I, these differences were very visible. This part of the country was less economically developed and less industrialised. Besides, Slovaks were generally "more Catholic" than Czechs.

¹⁵ In fact his irreconcilable attitude is perceived as the one making the situation of the Church in Hungary even more difficult. Contrary to the strategy of cardinal Mindszenty, reasonable flexibility of the Polish Primate Wyszyński is often evaluated positively as creating better conditions for the functioning of the Church in Poland.

In 1964 the first agreement being the result of the new *Ostpolitik* of the Holy See was signed. The purpose of the agreement, from the Church's point of view, was to save Catholicism from total destruction. The agreement eased the tensions between the State and Church, but the long-term effects of this agreement have been estimated very differently. On the one hand it solved the problem of filling in the vacancies in Episcopal sees. On the other hand, it resulted in even deeper dependence on the communist regime.¹⁶

After the period of outright assault that characterised all communist countries, the model of Church-State relations in **Poland** can be described in terms of coexistence and limited accommodation. Under this model religion was viewed as having a positive role in protection of national interests. After the partition of Poland in 1795, the Church became the guardian of Polish national identity and a symbol of freedom and opposition to foreign powers. Over the centuries Catholicism became equated with Polish patriotism (Eberts, Torok 2001), a "civil religion" (Borowik 2000) and the communist authorities had to consider this obvious fact, no matter how strong the external pressure was.

Bishops were chosen, religious gatherings were allowed as were religious orders and charitable organisations, although some of them, like Caritas, were practically controlled by the State. It does not mean that the Church was free in carrying out its mission. As in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the property of the Church had been nationalised, the Catholic press and radio were censored and access thereto was limited and religious education was banned from public schools. The clergy were urged to cooperate with the regime and often fined, imprisoned, harassed or even murdered, like priest Jerzy Popiełuszko. The believers were discriminated by the State employers. But in the systematic sense the situation of the Church was obviously better than in the countries like Hungary or Czechoslovakia. From the perspective of the authorities, the Church's strong social position was useful in the moments of social unrest. The communist authorities had to rely on Church's mediation in the severe inner crises over the two last decades of their rule (Eberts, Torok 2001). Meanwhile the churches became the centres of opposition movement, very much like in more remote past.

At the Crossroads. Catholic Church in the Process of Transformation

The Polish Church entered the transformation period with the support of almost 90% of the society, out of which 80% of those declaring themselves as the religious ones and 40% regularly participating in religious services. In Hungary 55% of the society declared themselves religious "in their own way", with no real connection

¹⁶ The opinions appear that from the present perspective the agreement of 1964 can be seen as disaster because the Episcopal sees were filled in with bishops cooperating with the Communist regime (Pucilowski 2005).

with any religious institutions; half of them did not take part in any religious activities. In Poland the Church was triumphant, while in Hungary it was weak and isolated (Borowik 2000, p. 57). In Poland it enjoyed the status of the supreme moral authority and was one of the main forces, if not the truly main one, that defeated communism. In Hungary it just "trailed after the events instead of participating actively in them". This position transformed directly into the engagement of the Church in the first partially-free parliamentary elections (1989) during which the Church in Poland played the role of headquarters of "Solidarity" and the Hungarian one in 1990 just "obeyed" the orders of the Christian Democratic People's Party to collect the necessary number recommendation notes from the population (Eberts, Torok 2001).

The situation changed dramatically for the Church in Poland in 1991 and 1993. Neither the results of 1991 parliamentary elections nor those of 1993 were satisfying to the Church.¹⁷ It turned out that the "process of pluralisation" was developing very fast – faster in fact than the Catholic Church was able or wished to follow. One could have an impression that the Church was against the society as it was obviously finding it hard to tolerate any opinions or judgements different from its own. Due to the Church's political activity, the support for the Church started to rapidly decline at the beginning of the 1990's. Over 80% of Poles at the end of 1992 opposed the Church's direct participation in politics.

Although it could have seemed, after this bitter lesson, that the Church reconsidered its political engagement, on the occasion of the presidential elections in 1995 the bishops again expressed their critical attitude towards Aleksander Kwaśniewski – a former leading member of PZPR, warning people against voting for this candidate. Aleksander Kwaśniewski's victory in this election was seen, just like the SLD's victory in the parliamentary elections of 1993, as moral and political defeat of the Church (Eberts, Torok 2001).

In Hungary, where the initial political position of the Church was weaker, the democratisation period was definitely less painful to the Church. But what is also interesting, at the same time, is that the Church gained high esteem within the society. While in 1985 both the government and the Parliament were held in higher esteem than the Church, in 1989 the Church had the highest prestige. Although this prestige declined during the years 1991–1994, it was still higher than the prestige of the government or the Parliament (Eberts, Torok 2001, p. 133).¹⁸ At the same time, during the parliamentary elections of 1990 and 1994, the originally weaker position of Hungarian Catholicism prevented the Church from militant engagement in the Hungarian elections. Even if the priests tried to influence the voters, they demonstrated much less power and vigour in political campaigns (Eberts, Torok 2001).

¹⁷ In 1991 Polish Sejm became very fragmented. The Church favoured the Electoral Catholic Action that gained only 49 seats. 62 seats were gained by Democratic Union that was criticised by the Church. In 1993 the former communists from SLD won the elections.

¹⁸ Data collected by M. Tomka.

At the time of the first partially-democratic elections in Poland, Czechoslovakia was still one country. The tendencies of Czechoslovakia, both in its political and spiritual life, were revealed after the first democratic elections of November 1989 which, differently to the developments in Poland, resulted in taking the post of Prime Minister by the former member of the Communist party Marián Čalfa.¹⁹ But at the same time 40% of people surveyed considered the Church an important defender of human rights in the former Czechoslovak territory (Mišovič 99).²⁰ The social position of the Church started to go down when the claims for the property restitution were first settled in 1991 and then repeated in the following years. In 1995 the dispute over the Saint Vitus Cathedral in Prague joined other property cases.²¹

According to Irena Borowik, religion should be perceived as the symbolic canopy of the societies in the process of transformation. On the one hand, new authorities and political elites, who possess only partial social acceptance for often painful processes of transformation, turned towards religions and the alliances with the churches seeing them as the institutions that can legitimise their power. Different concessions have been made by politicians and political parties eager to turn the churches into their key electoral allies (Stan 2009, p. 3).²² At the same time the churches turned towards the politics and the political authorities seeing them as the actors that can support them in the process of rebuilding their position and influences. (Borowik 2000). This way, as Irena Borowik puts it, the religion was politicised and the politics was "religionised" (Borowik 2000).

Church-State Relations in Central Europe

Two basic aspects of religious changes were dominant in the first years after the collapse of communism: new legal development (concerning the religious freedom) and property-related problems as the result of nationalisation in the post-war period.

The process of regulating Church-State relations primarily aimed at passing the legal regulations based on the fundamental freedom of conscience and belief. The point of reference for all the countries were both the universal regulations on human rights and the regional ones, especially the European Convention on Fundamentals Rights and Freedom signed in 1950. The second important issue was deciding on the nature of mutual relations between State and the Holy See.

All the countries in question introduced a similar model of Church-State relations in their constitutions. This model can be described as the secular model with friendly

¹⁹ Contrary to Czechoslovakia, in Poland the first Prime Minister after the elections of 1989 became Tadeusz Mazowiecki – a prominent member of the Catholic intelligentsia.

²⁰ It is interesting to notice that on the day of taking his post, 29 December 1989, president Václav Havel was baptised with his wife at the Saint Vitus Cathedral (Lecomte 2005, p. 279).

²¹ Cardinal Vlk was stating that the Church wanted to create its own model of independency from the State and that restitution of property is necessary to achieve that goal.

²² In Poland such an example was the bill regulating the issue of abortion which is described as the compromise between the State and Church.

separation between Church and State and without explicit recognition of the legal status of one of the Churches (Orzeszyna 2007). All except the Czech Republic have also signed the concordats with the Holy See, although the process of regulating the mutual issues caused much political controversy.²³

While the legal changes were a less interesting topic for the public opinion, the property-related issues have attracted a lot of attention. According to Irena Borowik, these disputes and conflicts involving the State, the Churches and members of the Churches could have been the moment when cracks appeared in the relations between the societies and Churches, especially dominant ones. The Churches, quite often having great merits in overturning the communism, appeared to have two faces – the transcendental one and another, quite an earthly one, focused upon material goods, revealing much imperfection, temptations and mistakes (Borowik 2000).

Another controversial issue was the status of less numerous religious communities. One of the most visible tendencies in the area of Church-State relations after ten years of transformation was limiting the range of non-traditional religious movements and the activities of missionaries coming from abroad (Borowik 2000). It has been observed that despite various disputes and unsuccessful cooperation, dominant churches and religious minorities united to oppose new religious movements. This remark also referred to the Catholic Church. As Irena Borowik puts it "(...) *Catholic Churches in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe where Catholicism is a dominant religion are described in terms of cultivating pre-council traditions*" (Borowik 1999).

On the other hand, opinions are heard that perception of the Catholic Church as one of the important social actors and the necessity of regulating Church-State issues created some legal patterns, objected by other religious organisations on the grounds that the post-communist democratic legal order was meant to be based on the rule of equal position of all the confessions (Krukowski 2008, p. 109). It should be observed in this context that although in all the countries considered religious groups can worship freely even in the absence of formal State recognition, registration by State agencies brings about significant advantages that are denied to non-registered groups (Stan 2009).²⁴

Catholic Church in the Process of Modernisation: Between *Sacrum* and *Profanum*

When in 1997 the "Decade of Spiritual Restoration", initiated by the Church in Czechoslovakia in 1987²⁵, ended, cardinal Vlk spoke about spiritual vacuum, decay of values and devastation of human heart as the result of forty years of atheistic

²³ In Poland ratification of the concordat took 5 years (1993–1998).

²⁴ This refers to the right to perform officially recognised marriages, to offer religious instruction in public schools, to receive State subsidies for wages and pensions of clergy and religious instructors, to have the clergy exempted from military service and to qualify for tax-exemptions (Stan 2009).

²⁵ This initiative was directed both at the society and the Church itself.

indoctrination. At the same time the opinions were heard that the Church was not prepared to operate in free, democratic and pluralistic society (Mišovič 1999).

The Catholic Church in the Czech Republic has marginal political significance, at least at the level of political decisions, and the activity of the Church is rather directed towards the Catholics who are in minority (Leszczyńska 2002). It does not mean, however, that the organisation gave up on the attempts to exert some influence in politics or economics. In 1997 serious controversies on Church's involvement in politics appeared when cardinal Vlk called for Vaclav Klaus' resignation from the post of the Prime Minister and then expressed his satisfaction after it happened (Mišovič 1999). During the elections in 1998 the priests called for participation, stressing that this is both civil and religious duty of Catholics. At the same time, cardinal Vlk claimed the Church will sustain from supporting any party.

The Church property and greedy clergy have been the favourite topic for Czech media and politicians for years. The issue becomes really topical as the restitution of the property of the Churches confiscated in communist era has not taken place yet. The debate about that matter, in which all 17 Churches and religious communities registered in Czech Republic have been involved, have lasted for almost 20 years, since the beginning of the 1990's. In 1990–91 as many as 169 monasteries were returned to the orders. But after the decomposition of Czechoslovakia the process of negotiation was suspended. In January 2008 the government accepted the draft of the bill on this issue, which for the first time was approved by all 17 Churches and religious communities, but the bill has not been passed so far, due to critical attitude of both the ruling ODS and the opposition. Also, the Czech Republic has not signed the concordat with the Holy See.

Just as in many Western European countries, hundreds of Churches are closed. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, the Czech Republic became the missionary area again. The current social attitude towards the Catholic Church was well visible during the visit of Benedict XVI to Czech Republic in September 2009. On the banners, the pope was called to apologise for the death of Jan Hus. The Czech newspapers entitled their articles "Pope, welcome to the country of the atheist" (Palata 2009).

In Slovakia temporary revival of religious life was visible at the beginning of the transformation period. The seminaries were full, monastery life developed, 60 Catholic schools were established. The Catholic Church in Slovakia was hoping for the spiritual renewal of the nation. Today it is expected that the level of a-religiosity may soon equal that of the Czech Republic, even if 25% of Catholics still participate regularly in the Sunday mass. The level of vocations for the ministry is decreasing. The polls of public opinion show, just like in most countries of the region, that moral teaching of the Catholic Church is not followed by the believers.

Slovakia is not free from political controversies in the area of Church-State relations, either. In 2003 the dispute concerning the liberalisation of the abortion law and the bill on the Catholic education took place. The issue of the restitution of Church property was not solved for a long time, as well. Despite the first bill on restitution

of the property of the Churches was passed in 1994, the final regulations came into force only in November 2004.

According to Balázs Schanda, from the political breakthrough of the 1990's the Catholic Church in Hungary became the subject of the struggle between two intellectual-political wings that pay much attention to the issues related with the situation of the Church. In the opinion of this author, the Church has the status of the observer rather than participant of the disputes. Where controversies appear, they are raised by different political parties. Such disputes concerned such issues as financing the Churches, restitution of the property confiscated from them, lessons of religion in schools, legal status of religious communities. Also the questions of recognition of religious marriages and referring to religious denomination in the census caused conflicts (Schanda 2004, p. 73).

On the other hand, in Hungary the State very radically drew back from controlling churches and left them practically total independence, which complicated the toughest issue of restitution of their lost property (Borowik 2000, p. 92). This process started in 1997, few months after the concordat with the Holy See was signed (Borowik 2000, p. 110).

The level of religious practices of Hungarian Catholics is close to that of secularised European societies. Depending on the region, only 4–12% of Catholics regularly participate in the Sunday mass. There are no new vocations for ministry. But the strong point of Catholic Church are religious orders which are not associated by the society with the communist regime. The competition of different denominations may also be seen as a chance for preserving some religiosity among Hungarian Catholics.²⁶

In Poland the topic of the restitution of Church property still belongs to the most difficult and controversial issues, even though initial regulations on this issue were adopted in 1991. The Property Commission has so far considered over 2800 cases, out of 3063 issued by different Church institutions. It has been criticised for years for being an unconstitutional body and for acting only to the advantage of the Church. In the context of its activities the Church is often perceived as the institution robbing the State. Though in the past the Catholic Church used to get involved in political issues, certain evolution can be observed in this respect. One could say this evolution is the result of experience gained during the first years of democracy when it appeared the strong political voice of the Church caused more harm than benefits. But still the basic problem is the Church's conviction of being the only moral leader. The Church wants to be the moral voice of the entire nation, which appears impossible in the pluralised society, even as religious as the Polish one. Although the Church's political presence is less visible the all-nation disputes deal with the issues of liberalising the abortion law or introducing in vitro conception as regular medical procedure. What is interesting in this aspect is the fact that despite Polish society does not want the

²⁶ 20% of Calvinists, 4% of Lutherans, 1% of Jews, 2% – some smaller religious communities (Schanda 2004).

Church's involvement in such disputes, the society itself appears more conservative than in other countries. On such issues as abortion, euthanasia or same-sex marriages the public opinion polls show high level of objection. According to some sociologists, this is also the factor confirming strong religious identity of Poles. In Tadeusz Szawiel's opinion, in spite of dynamic changes after 1989, Poles did not turn their backs on religion. The indicators of religiosity remain high or even increase and it is possible Polish society may follow the American pattern of preserving its religious heritage (*Wojna religii z nowoczesnością?* 2007, p. 4).

Concluding Remarks

The discussion on the role of the Catholic Church in the countries of Central Europe is a part of broader debate on the place of religion not only in Europe and the European Union, but also in the globalising world. Disputes about the status of religion in modern societies have not been finished yet even in such secularised parts of Europe as Scandinavian countries where deep secularisation of societies did not transpose into the Church-State relations for a long time and where the model of secular State has been introduced only very recently and just partially.²⁷

In this context it is understandable that twenty years after the collapse of communism this issue still provokes many questions and contrary opinions. The processes of "speeded" modernisation of the Central European societies are connected with developing of often deficient political culture, also on the level of political elites, and simultaneously difficult adjustments to pluralism on the level of the Catholic Church.

After the decay of communism the fundamental issue for the Catholic Church was to become "the conscience of societies": It was obvious that some new axiology would be necessary to substitute the old, atheist one. But another important issue was also at stake: the choice of social and economical model for the countries that have experienced a few decades of materialistic culture and centrally planned economy. From the Church's perspective referring to the catholic social teaching could have been a solution constituting the "golden middle" between the collective and liberal model.

Having its own concept of all the most important social issues, the Catholic Church wanted to become the moral leader or at least a strong voice in the public discussion. But serious controversies arose soon. They were caused by the traditional and very demanding requirements of the Catholic doctrine on such issues as family planning, abortion or same-sex marriage. In the context of discussions that dealt with the moral issues Catholic Church was perceived as the one attempting to impose its norms and limiting the right of free decisions in the societies longing for freedom of choice and pluralism. Simultaneously, in the countries with powerful religious

²⁷ The secular model was introduced in Finland and Sweden but not in Norway and Denmark.

hierarchy, attempts have been undertaken by the Church to influence the legal developments. Due to its position held in these debates, the Catholic Church was blamed for involvement in politics²⁸. The issue of restitution of the Church's property made the relations between Church, State and society even more tense. It appeared that even though the existence of the Church in the communist time of persecution was very difficult, in a sense it was easier than in democratic, pluralistic society (Halik 1997, p. 18). As a result, it seems that "we are certainly not confronted with the situation where the Roman Catholic Church could claim a historical revenge or reconquista. Furthermore, the part of population for which it would represent a "political sacred canopy" remains a minority by any account" (Flere 2001, p. 40).

Two decades after the collapse of communism the process of rebuilding long-term relations between State and Church has been partially completed. This refers especially to the issue of legal regulations which means mutual relations between the State and Church, although the problem of restitution of the Church property will take some more years before it is finally solved. What is more interesting at the present stage is the question of relations between higher religiosity of Central Europeans and the way of modernising the societies in this part of the continent, mainly understood as development of civil societies. Since the religious background as the element of cultural background has been proved to have significant influence on the processes of social modernisation, it is worth asking about further developments in this region (Harrison, Huntington 2003).

Another issue discussed over the last years is that about the role of the Catholic Church in the process of creating European identity. According to some scholars, due to trans-national worldview Catholicism and Catholics are perceived as better suited to this issue than Protestants or the Orthodox (Katzenstein, Byrnes 2006, p. 685). At the same time one has to realise that in the Eastern and Central Europe, due to the specific, partially religion-based notion of national identity, Catholicism has its strong national dimension. This problem seems to be gaining new importance in the context of reviving national identities in the countries of Western Europe. The question in which direction this process of strengthening national identities will go is still open. With regard to this question also the issue of further transformations of the societies of Central Europe is discussed. While the processes of political and economical transformation are completed or almost completed in this part of Europe, cultural transformation is still a question mark. Though it is certain that Central Europeans have already partially Westernised and will still Westernise, the fundamental question is about the limits of this Westernisation. Religious factors will be certainly discussed in this context for many more years.

²⁸ The pressure of the Catholic hierarchy to influence political developments was so strong that the Pope John Paul II pointed out such attitude as inappropriate. In 1993 pope declared "the hour of the laity" in Polish Catholicism and rejected partisan Church in two ad limina addresses to Polish Bishops (Weigel 2009).

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Civil Society in Central Europe – Polish-Austrian Comparative Study

Introduction

The notion of civil society in Western studies during the 20th Century was strongly related to the theory of democracy and its citizens' context. It was taken for granted that civil society is only a consequence of social environment in a democratic State, because only democratic State provides freedom of association and other civil rights. However, the emergence of a new concept of anti-political civil society – both in theory and civic practice – in communist Central-Eastern Europe (for the first time in Poland in 1980's, but also in Czechoslovakia and Hungary) revolutionised thinking about civil society. Democratic opposition in this region used the idea of civil society in theorising their struggle to create a protected societal sphere separated from the official sphere. The 'politics' of civil society (especially of Polish opposition and 'Solidarity' movement) was directed against the State.

The aim of this study is to compare two models of civil societies – one which is historically and practically situated within the Western tradition of civil society area, that is Austrian, and the second – which is situated within the transforming, post-communist, Central-Eastern model of civil society, that is Polish. Consequently, the proposed deliberation is a comparative study dedicated to the picture and ways in which civil societies in Poland and in Austria are functioning. There are a few reasonable grounds that make this comparison well-founded: firstly – historical relationships between Austria and Poland, which have their contemporary consequences visible, for example, on the map of election participation and political affiliation; secondly, Poland's and Austria's belonging to Central Europe area (geographical and historical closeness), accompanied by affiliation to completely different political traditions and systems (the 'iron curtain' divisions) make this two countries most interesting ones as objects of comparative analysis. The reason to compare them, in political science, also includes the question about the current differences between these two models of civil societies. Thirdly, the meaningful reason