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Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe.

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Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe examines the impact of EU institutions – including those both legal and political – on religious markers of collective identity. The focus here is specifically on religion, although broader themes with regard to national identity are recurrent across the volume. The insights from this volume appear increasingly relevant at a time when issues of identity are gaining momentum across the European Union, and when the question of national versus European identification is becoming increasingly salient.

The main aim of the book is to analyse the changing relationship between religion and national identity in the context of EU integration. The time frame is 1990-2010. The empirical materials include elite discourses, media debates and public opinion. With regard to the theoretical framework, the book links three literatures: secularization theory, nationalism and EU integration. There is a mix of three comparative chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, which draw forth common themes, and four individual case study chapters. In this sense, the overall rationale of the research design is clear: the book carries out both a broader comparative analysis and a more detailed case study examination of Germany, Poland, Greece and Turkey.

The case selection rationale is less clear. The editors offer a plausible justification: they have selected cases where EU integration has had an effect on national identity discourse, and where there has been either a regime change or other far-reaching domestic political transformations (p. 11). This choice also maximises variation in terms of religion – i.e., Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Islamic – and in terms of historical circumstance, relationship and stance on the EU. Yet one might ask if the variation could be better captured by, for example, juxtaposing two Eastern European countries; bringing in a Western European Catholic country or another ‘nationalist pattern’ country; and/or providing a counter-case (perhaps the UK would work well), where attitudes are broadly anti-EU but religion does not constitute a key defining feature of national identity. As Turkey is not a member of the European Union and the dynamics there are very different, one wonders if it fits as well into the research design as do the other cases.

That said, the individual case study chapters are interesting and consistent with the key themes. While not necessarily systematic in their methodology, the result is a rich narrative that traces the evolution of religious identity in the different cases. Of particular interest, for example, is Spohn’s historical-sociological approach, which traces the evolution and transformation of collective identities in Germany through unification and EU integration. Spohn focuses on the long-, middle- and short-term formations of German collective identities, with an emphasis on religion and secularity as an important cultural factor. Also interesting is Lewicki’s and Mandes’ account, which differentiates collective identity processes in Eastern Europe from those in Western Europe. In this chapter, the focus is on the religiosity of Poland, vis-à-vis the more secularised European nations. Greece brings together East and West, and the chapter by Fokas and Karagiannis discusses the tensions this has entailed, following a format similar to the two previous chapters: i.e., tracing the development of Greek national identity, and the role of religion. Turkey is somewhat of an outlier case because it is not a member of the European Union. In this chapter, Soysal, Özçürümez and Diner discuss how

the conditions for EU membership have impacted on cultural debates and on the country's Islamic heritage. Inevitably, all chapters focus more broadly on collective identities, as well as specifically on religion.

These insights are brought together in the comparative chapters. These chapters are, in many ways, the strongest precisely because they draw parallels between different cases, including but not exclusively the four individual case studies, and aim at identifying broader patterns. The introduction, which outlines the overall rationale and sets out the theoretical, conceptual and empirical framework, guides the rest of the volume. It lays out the 'puzzle' or 'overarching research problem', as the authors call it, which is a simple and topical one. Secularization, defined as the decline of religion's social significance, is expected to progress as modernization develops. But in fact the impact of modernization is uneven: there has been a resurgence of religious belief in some cases, and in fact we are witnessing the development of different patterns across different EU member states. This variation is indeed interesting and calls for further research into the relationship between religion and national identity in Europe. Precisely because of the variation in our empirical observations, the common themes raised in the introduction, and further nuanced in the two final chapters, are particularly appealing. These include the uneven impact of EU institutions; country differences in identity configurations; differences between the 'old' Western EU member states and the 'new' member states from Eastern Europe; and differences across confessional traditions and historical experiences.

These common themes are placed in an elaborate conceptual and theoretical framework, mostly in the introduction. The overarching conceptual framework consists of constructivist theories of collective identity, macro-sociological theories of state formation and nation building, and actor-oriented theories of boundary dynamics (p. 7). In terms of theory, the starting point are the modernist theories of nationalism, which assume that nationalism supersedes or replaces religion in the modern world. The authors/editors juxtapose these with the primordialist perspective. There is also an emphasis on the Durkheimian/ functionalist approach, which focuses on the binding, collective role of religion. These perspectives, while often contradictory and indeed contested, point to one key conclusion of interest: religion, both in terms of ideas and institutions, is somehow and in different degrees related 'to the imagined community of the nation' (p. 4). This allows the authors/editors to set up the research problem: how may we account for the variable role of religion in constructions of national identity (p. 4), and how may we understand the framing of debates in EU integration that address the question of identity within the context of the winners and losers of EU integration?

In sum, this is a book that traces, conceptually, theoretically and empirically, the impact of EU institutions on identity – and more specifically, religious identity. Much of the strength of the book derives from a research design that combines rich analysis of individual case studies with the identification of broad patterns and common themes. Much of it also derives from the topicality of its overall theme: identity in the European Union. The authors and editors have contributed to our understanding of the ways in which EU integration has shaped the development of national – and mainly religious – identity in different member states. But they have also implicitly contributed to our understanding of the reverse: the impact of the resurgence of identity on EU institutions, which is one of the most important issues facing European societies today.
