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Diplomacy and Religious Engagement:  
The American and the European approach

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ANNO ACCADEMICO  
2015/2016

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## **Introduction**

The present thesis analyzes the relationship between religious engagement and diplomacy through a comparison between the American and the European approach on this issue.

The first part of the opening chapter introduces the concept of religious engagement, trying to sketch the theoretical framework of the concept and discussing the necessity to consider it as a new imperative for the Western countries foreign policy. In the second paragraph of this chapter, I focused on the development from religious freedom to religious engagement in the USA, analyzing the American experience starting from the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998 up to the State Department new “US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement” in 2013 and the birth of what is now the Office of Religion and Global Affairs. The creation of this Office marked the shift from the broader concept of religious freedom, and the question of religion as a security problem, to the one of religious engagement. In this perspective the United States developed a new diplomatic approach avoiding direct application of military, diplomatic and political power to compel change, working at the intersection of religion and foreign policy through a strategy that prioritize the engagement of religious communities from below, enhancing their active participation as constructive change agents in their own societies. The chapter concludes discussing some recommendations from the Report by the Chicago Council “Engaging religious community abroad: a new imperative for US foreign policy” about the steps that can be taken inside the United States to build the capacity to engage with religious communities and guidelines for using this capacity effectively.

The second chapter deals with the European experience in facing the challenge of religious engagement in diplomacy, considering the obstacles for a coherent and common foreign policy also in the field of religion. I started the analysis comparing two different approaches to religion in society: the secular and civic integration view adopted by France, which considers that the universal values prevail over the rights of different communities and the communitarian Anglo-Saxon model adopted by the UK. Then, I moved on to the European Union approach to the religious question, discussing the EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in June 2013. The Guidelines explain what the international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief are, and give clear political lines to officials of EU

institutions and EU Member States, to be used in contacts with third countries and with international and civil society organizations. In the last part of the chapter, I analyzed the new figure of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union, describing the role and mandate of the Special Envoy and also discussing the challenges that this new figure will have to face in carrying out his tasks in the field of religious engagement.

The conclusive chapter examines the perspective for a transatlantic cooperation in international religious freedom, through a comparison between the American and the European approach. In this part of the thesis I focused on the differences and the common points of the two approaches, considering that even if the role of religion results different on the two sides of the Atlantic, both American and European societies face similar challenges to religious liberty. The chapter concludes looking at the measures that are bringing the USA and the EU toward a model of transatlantic cooperation aimed to engage religious community abroad, focusing on the necessary skills that government officials, diplomats and civil servants need for a better understanding of the role of religion in the countries they work and to enforce common foreign policy interests.

The goal of the thesis is to analyzing the recent trend to move beyond the traditional approach of the government in their foreign policy on the relationship between diplomacy and religion, recognizing the value of religious engagement in international affairs and strengthening its role in managing the crisis and in facing the challenges of our current times.

As Peter Mandeville argues, there was a distinctive up search on the part of policy makers both in the USA and in the European countries on the question of how and whether it might be possible to build a greater awareness and attention to the issue of religion in the context of diplomacy. In this perspective, shared values on promoting freedom of religion or belief globally present a unique opportunity for joint action between Europe and the US and, as Knox Thames claims, networking efforts multiply the effectiveness of this kind of bilateral engagements. Indeed, traditional bilateral engagements with countries of concern are needed and should be increased, but they can be more effective and impactful if pursued in concert with others.

## 1. Religious engagement: introducing the concept

Religion has been a major force in the daily lives of individuals and communities for millennia. Recent data show that the salience of religion is on the rise the world over. As Scott Appleby claims, once considered a private matter by western policymakers, religion is now playing an increasingly influential role in the public sphere on many different levels. The global resurgence of religions in international affairs has been considered by the governments as a specific policy challenge that requires strategic thinking and appropriate policy responses: this new growing policy area is now often referred to as religious engagement in foreign policy<sup>1</sup>.

As P. Ferrara and F. Petito argue, the realization that religion matters in international relations can be identified in three moments. The first moment was after the end of the Cold War, when emerged a predominant view of religion in the form of a “violent-prone form of politics”<sup>2</sup>. Examples of this view can be the religious-nationalist political lines in the Bosnian conflict to the worldwide rise of radical Islamism and terrorism. The second moment was when the scholars realized to have overlooked the positive political role that religion could play in the modernization and democratization process, and also in the development field in many parts of the world. In fact, as Scott Appleby argues, we have to bear in mind that religion is “political ambivalent”<sup>3</sup>: on the one hand it could be promoter of political violence and conflicts but on the other hand it could also promote non-violent engagement, development and conflict-resolution.

For this reason, there is a need for a broader understanding of the nature of religion and how it impacts the lives of global communities. “We need to move beyond a conversation about ‘what people believe’”<sup>4</sup> to a better understanding of how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they engage politically.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Mandaville, S. Silvestri, *Integrating religious engagement into diplomacy: challenges and opportunities*. Issues in Governance Studies, 67, 2015, pp. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> P. Ferrara, F. Petito, *An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects*, The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs, August 2015

<sup>3</sup> R. Scott Appleby. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000

<sup>4</sup> P. Finlow, G. Fitzgerald, Conference report *Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference*, Wilton Park, March 2014

The third moment was when Western governments realized to have failed to understand that in “collapsing states”, local mainstream religious communities played a key role in providing education, sanitation and other social services when the state structure no longer existed. In this perspective, religious actors are central players in local, national, and international life, from providing basic services and impoverished areas of the world, influencing larger social, economic, and political developments and advancing the goals of peace, justice and freedom.

Instead, Western policy makers framed religion only in a counter-terrorism perspective, not looking at it as part of the solution to build stability but just as part of the problem of security. In addition religions, despite their dogmatic contents, represent one the most dynamic factors that can facilitate change and mobility within large civilizations and according to F. Petito, this new religious dynamicity could be a potential asset in the field of international relations. Indeed, religion can represent a resource for diplomacy and in this perspective, diplomats should perceive religion and core religious values as an opportunity for discovering a new language for such engagement.

Nevertheless, religious engagement is not to be misinterpreted as merely placing well-established interfaith religious leaders on government appointed committees to study the role of religion in the diplomatic process. Rather, it is the direct engagement of religious leaders working with diplomats and foreign policy analysts in seeking solutions to complex foreign policy challenges affecting conflict stabilization and peace.

In this perspective, the mistakes of the past highlight the necessity of a new diplomatic comprehensive approach, based on the idea of religious engagement, to promote development, advancing human rights, prevent and resolve conflict.

As P. Ferrara and F. Petito claim “the transition from an understanding of the political role of religion in international affairs beyond the concept of religion as a security problem, towards the concept and practice of religious engagement is not easy” and we are going to see how the U.S.A faced this challenge.

## **From Religious Freedom to Religious Engagement in the USA**

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching".<sup>5</sup>

It was the 16 December 1966 when the United Nations adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Ten years later, on 23 March 1976, the covenant entered into force. More than thirty countries have signed up to that, and that is supposed to be binding. But it has not worked. As Thomas Farr claimed, "we have had a lot of paper, a lot of people signed up a lot of things that say they believe in religious freedom and belief" but this is no more sufficient. During a speech at the Georgetown University he argued for a covenant among the governments in which they would agree "on what it is we're doing"<sup>6</sup>. As P. Ferrara claims, "Religious Freedom is even sometimes conceptualized as a root right, upon which the entire building of human rights and fundamental liberties is constructed"<sup>7</sup>, in addition the growing salience of religion today is deepening the political significance of religious freedom as "a universal human right and a source of social and political stability"<sup>8</sup>. In order to understand this last point, it could be useful to recall the distinction proposed by P.Ferrara between religious freedom as principle and the politics of religious freedom. Following the first definition we can claim that religious freedom is recognized as a "value to preserve and defend, at least in all societies where fundamental rights are respected"; on the other hand by politics of religious freedom, P.Ferrara refers to the increasing accountability of the governments in religious concerns, that made religious freedom "a new defining field for the advancement of human rights in relation to state behavior"<sup>9</sup>. This means that religious freedom is

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<sup>5</sup> Article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

<sup>6</sup> "International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation", October 8, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Ferrara Pasquale, "Religious Freedom: The Case for International Consensus", October 14, 2015

<sup>8</sup> R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, Thomas Wright, "Engaging Religious communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy", Task Force Series, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010

<sup>9</sup> See 4

also becoming, as P.Ferrara argues, an issue that challenges the traditional diplomatic way of implementing inter-state diplomacy, including in the diplomatic activity also actors that do not come from the political or governmental environment.

Some Western Countries seems to have accepted the challenge and have recently begun to treat international religious freedom more systematically in their foreign policy, recognizing that the new religion's role can only be properly understood as "part of an international system that is increasingly dynamic and volatile"<sup>10</sup> in which economies, cultures and also religions became increasingly connected.

What we are going to see is the birth and development of new "diplomacies" and diplomatic approaches, starting from the American one, that avoid direct application of military, diplomatic and political power to compel change. The United States have a strong heritage of religious freedom and a "historically avant-garde character"<sup>11</sup> in this field. In addition, as Ambassador Saperstein claims, the United States has a very specific role to play internationally, they are unique in the approach to freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

In this perspective, due to the new global dimension that the religious question has acquired in the last years, it is necessary to face it through new strategies, tools, commitment and engagement abroad.

The United States starting this "restyling" in 1998 because of the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), a fundamental starting point that put the basis for transatlantic cooperation in promoting religious freedom globally, recognizing the principle in U.S. law as a core value critical to healthy democratic society. Even if religious freedom is the "first freedom" of the American constitution and also rooted in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it had been neglected in U.S. foreign policy before 1998. The IRFA was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 27, who also organized groups of religious leaders to travel to China and engage local leaders. The law has seven titles: Department of State Activities, Commission on International Religious Freedom, National Security Council, Presidential Actions,

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<sup>10</sup> R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, Thomas Wright, "Engaging Religious communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy", Task Force Series, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010

<sup>11</sup> Peter Berger, speech at Georgetown University, October 8, 2015



Promotion of Religious Freedom, Refugee, Asylum and Consular Matters and Miscellaneous Provisions. Each title contains numerous sections.

Under the first title was formed the Office of International Religious Freedom, with the mission of promoting religious freedom as a core objective of US foreign policy. The office is headed by the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, David N. Saperstein, who defined the IRFA law a “kind of affirmative action program that would lift religious freedom up to the level of other core human rights”.<sup>12</sup>

The position of Ambassador-at-large should ensure that religious freedom would be a component of foreign policy on equal footing with other human rights and that religious freedom would be integrated into a broader U.S. foreign policy concerns such as counterterrorism, democracy promotion and economic development. According to the report of the Chicago Council<sup>13</sup> nowadays the Ambassador’s first priority should be to redefine religious freedom as a broader concept that protects not only religious minorities but also majorities from the domination of the state or of one particular school of thought, communicating both to majority and minority religious communities why religious liberty is in their interest. The report also recommends to the administration to elevate the position of the Ambassador-at-large to a status commensurate with other ambassadors-at-large and seniors envoys based at the State Department, ensuring to him the adequate resources to perform his tasks.

The first activity of the Office of International Religious Freedom is to monitor religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommending and implementing policies in respective regions or countries, and developing programs to promote religious freedom. On the base of the international covenants that guarantee the religious freedom as the “inalienable right of every human being”, the U.S. government aims to promote freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries. In addition, the Office seeks to assist emerging democracies in implementing freedom of religion and

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<sup>12</sup> David Saperstein, speech at Georgetown University, October 8 ,2015

<sup>13</sup> R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, Thomas Wright, “Engaging Religious communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy”, Task Force Series, Chicago Council on Global Affairs,2010

conscience, assist religious and human rights NGOs in promoting religious freedom and identify and denounce regimes that are severe persecutors on the basis of religious belief.<sup>14</sup>

One of the tools used by the Office to carry out its mission is The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, provided by the first title of the IRFA. “On September 1 of each year or the first day thereafter on which the appropriate House of Congress is in session, the Secretary of State, with the assistance of the Ambassador at Large, and taking into consideration the recommendations of the Commission, shall prepare and transmit to Congress an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom supplementing the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom”.<sup>15</sup>

In compliance with the provision, each Annual Report shall contain in its first part the “status of religious freedom”. It is a description of the status of religious freedom in each of 195 foreign countries throughout the world including the trends toward improvement in the respect and protection of the right to religious freedom and the trends toward deterioration of such right, any violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the government of that country and particularly severe violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the government of that country.

Then there is the part regarding the “violations of religious freedom” that is an assessment and description of the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom in each foreign country, including persecution of one religious group by another, religious persecution by governmental and nongovernmental entities, persecution targeted at individuals or particular denominations or entire religions and the existence of government policies violating religious freedom. It also includes the existence of government policies concerning limitations or prohibitions on openly conducted, organized religious services outside of the premises of foreign diplomatic missions or consular posts and the forced religious conversion of minor United States citizens who have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, and the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

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<sup>14</sup> See the U.S. Department of State website <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/>

<sup>15</sup> International Religious Freedom, title I, section 102(b).

Follows a section about the “United States Policy”, a description of United States actions and policies in support of religious freedom in each foreign country engaging in or tolerating violations of religious freedom, including a description of the measures and policies implemented during the preceding 12 months by the United States under titles I, IV, and V of the Act in opposition to violations of religious freedom and in support of international religious freedom. The report in this section contains three more points: the international agreements effect, training and guidelines of government personnel and the executive summary. The first mentioned point is a description of any binding agreement with a foreign government entered into by the United States. The second is a description of the training described on violations of religious freedom provided to immigration judges and consular, refugee, immigration, and asylum officers and the development and implementation of the guidelines described in successive sections.

The Executive Summary to the Annual Report highlighting the status of religious freedom in certain foreign countries, identifying *countries in which the United States is actively promoting religious freedom* and *countries of significant improvement in religious freedom*. In the first case, this section of the report shall include a description of United States actions taken to promote the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion and oppose violations of such right under title IV and title V of the Act during the period covered by the Annual Report. Any country designated as a country of particular concern for religious freedom shall be included in this section of the report. In the second one, the section provides an identification of foreign countries the governments of which have demonstrated significant improvement in the protection and promotion of the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion during the period covered by the Annual Report. The report is a public document available online and in book form from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

In addition, the Office of International Religious Freedom identifies, through the designation by the Secretary of State, nations guilty of particularly severe violations of religious freedom as "Countries of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998<sup>16</sup> and its amendment of 1999.<sup>17</sup> Nations so designated, meaning countries where one has reason to be concerned about religious freedom, are subject to further actions, including economic sanctions, by

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<sup>16</sup> H.R. 2431

<sup>17</sup> Public Law 106-55

the United States. Currently there are nine countries that are designated as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. According to the Ambassador Saperstein the designation of these countries is a “vital tool to help force improvements when other diplomatic initiatives have not succeeded” also in the frame of religious engagement approach.

During his speech at the Georgetown University, Ambassador Saperstein also reminded that the work of his office is complemented by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, underlying the importance of its independent oversight role. As we said before, the Commission is the second of the seven titles of the IRFA and it is an independent agency led by a bipartisan panel of nine expert commissioners who monitor religious freedom globally and provides policy recommendations to both Congress and the administration. Reporting the words of the Ambassador, we can claim that “there are no other entities like the USCIRF that exist in the world”.

The Office of International Religious Freedom carries out its mission also through: meetings with foreign government officials at all levels, as well as religious and human rights groups in the United States and abroad, to address problems of religious freedom, testimony before the United States Congress on issues of international religious freedom and sponsorship of reconciliation programs in disputes which divide groups along lines of religious identity, seeking to support NGOs that are promoting reconciliation in such disputes.

As President Obama claimed in his speech in 2009 at Cairo: “ Faith should bring us together. That’s why we’re forging service project in America to bring together Christians, Muslims and Jews. Around the world, we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action”. The same year, President Obama reestablished the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and extended its mandate, believing that “faith-based and smaller secular neighbourhood organisations can play a role in American renewal. They can work with the federal government to address big problems”.<sup>18</sup>

President Obama laid out four priorities for the office: he first three had a domestic orientation while the fourth was quite new. In fact, according to these priorities the office was to

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<sup>18</sup> Joshua DuBois, interview with AP

focus “beyond American shores, work with the National Security Council and foster interfaith dialogue with leaders and scholars around the world”.

We can find a call to the strict cooperation with religious communities and non-governmental organizations also in the Annual Report, where it is provided that “In compiling data and assessing the respect of the right to religious freedom for the Human Rights Reports, the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, and the Executive Summary, United States mission personnel shall, as appropriate, seek out and maintain contacts with religious and human rights nongovernmental organizations, with the consent of those organizations, including receiving reports and updates from such organizations and, when appropriate, investigating such reports”. Nevertheless, monitoring and reporting is no more sufficient in order to face the challenges that religion is representing worldwide. It is necessary a new effort that goes beyond the religious freedom discourse. Regulations to protect the religious freedom are not enough. According to Prof. Ferrara “religious freedom does not do enough in international political discourse today to advance the cause of peaceful cooperation and solve conflict”. As also highlighted by the scholars that worked on the Chicago Council Report, it is necessary that America look ahead, recognizing that religious actors can provide enormous opportunities to create new alliances and forge new paths to peace and prosperity in many troubled areas of the world.

Religious engagement could be seen as a “new frontier of religious freedom”, because it goes beyond the concern on ‘what people believe’ and the efforts to avoid and contrast the discriminations, it aims to better understand how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they engage politically. It is a more articulated and more comprehensive approach in which diplomats and policy makers have to be in the field, to be committed. This also means engaging religious communities on their own terms, listening to their concerns and entering into substantive dialogue about how to realize their legitimate aspirations. In fact according to some scholars, the effectiveness of the communication with the religious counterparts is one of the most important element on which the new American strategy should focus on, including listening to what religious communities say about how to promote understanding, rights and matters of common interest.

On this point, the Report of the Task Force on Religion and the making of U.S. foreign policy suggests to the American government, not only to develop a far greater understanding of

religion's role in politics and society around the globe but also "to move beyond traditional state-to-state relations to develop effective policies for engaging religious communities within and across nations", moving the focus of the diplomatic activity from a traditional inter-state paradigm to a transnational level. The influence of religious groups, in fact, is growing in many areas of the world and affects virtually all sectors of society, from politics and culture to trade and science.

Moreover, religion is playing an important public role where governments lack capacity and legitimacy and institutions are seen as something far and out of the daily life of people. In fact, often the figures that are legitimate and effective to provide care in the most impoverished and underdeveloped areas of the world are religious groups. They build and manage hospitals, food programs and so on. It is interesting to notice that many U.S. non-governmental organizations abroad that receive financial support from the government are faith based. According to a study conducted by Farah Stockman for the Boston Globe, one hundred fifty-nine faith-based organizations received more than \$1.7 billion in USAID<sup>19</sup> contracts and grants.

It is not by chance that often local governments and even international institutions are regarded with suspicion and sometimes rejected and contested. It is also for this reason that it was necessary a change in the approach with the religious communities and multiplicity of religious beliefs, in order to work for realizing their legitimate aspirations, understanding local faith and custom. In other words promoting religious freedom through a real engagement with the local religious communities, in a way that is not perceived as a form of imperialism or threat.

During the conference on Foreign policy and Religious engagement, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome, Scott M. Thomas proposed a diplomacy religious engagement based on the idea of religious non state actors involvement, based not only on ethic but on the deep knowledge of international relations and its dynamics from an internal point of view. In order to do this is necessary, according to him, engage with ordinary people in every day problems. This kind of approach is part of the variety of methods of diplomacy that are outside the formal diplomatic or governmental system. This is what is called "multitrack diplomacy" which refers to the informal, non- governmental contacts that take place at the individual, state, and society levels including private citizens, social groups, religious groups and a wide range of non-state actors. On this point, Ambassador-at-Large Saperstein claimed that "you learn best about

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<sup>19</sup> United States Agency for International Development

other faiths and learn to respect other faiths not just by talking about it, but by doing things together. Those things may be social service work, building homes, feeding hungry people or tutoring kids in schools. These things are done by individuals, youth groups or families.”

In order to promote development and humanitarian assistance, advance human rights and prevent and resolve conflict it is necessary to use this paradigm, but also provide a new strategy that is clear about what is and is not permissible for American officials (and not) engaging abroad. In fact, making religious engagement a new imperative for U.S. foreign policy means also delete or reformulate that constitutional constraints on U.S. engagement of religious actors abroad, that act as a brake on new approach in this field. In particular the uncertainty on the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment that brought in 2009 the USAID inspector general to raise concern that the agency may have breached the Clause using public funds to rebuild four mosques and adjoining community centers in Fallujah. This is no more permissible, because authentic religious engagement means also this, rebuild together places of worship for the local community in troubled areas of the world, sending the message that the United States has an interest in their playing an active part in their own society.

The 2013 State Department new “US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement” and the birth of what is now the Office of Religion and Global Affairs, marked the shift from the broader concept of religious freedom - and the question of religion as a security problem - to the one of religious engagement. During a conference in Rome Shaun Casey, the U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs, claimed that the main characteristics of the office are: its realism in facing the questions of religion, the inclusive approach and the leadership. The “institutionalization” of the office allows religious countries to play constitutional rights in a democratic participation. The office also works in coordination with the Religious Freedom Act and the Annual Report that we have analyzed above.

The Office of Religion and Global Affairs works to implement the National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement through three overarching roles for the Department. The office advises the Secretary on policy matters as they relate to religion supports the posts and bureaus in their efforts to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors and

serves as a first point of entry for individuals, both religious and secular, who would like to engage the State Department in Washington on matters of religion and global affairs.<sup>20</sup>

In order to maximize strategic collaboration between special envoys and representatives working at the intersection of religion and foreign policy, the Secretary consolidated a number of existing offices within the Office of Religion and Global Affairs. The Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation are part of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs but maintain their special mandates. The office collaborates regularly with other government officials and offices focused on religion-related issues, including the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

As described in the Report edited by the Chicago Council<sup>21</sup>, religious engagement is based on two assumptions. First, as we have said before, religion should not be approached as only a problem that needs to be solved, but also as a set of beliefs and values that offers opportunities for enhanced dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Second, religion should not be treated or appear to be treated instrumentally. It is not an attempt to manipulate religion in pursuit of a narrowly drawn set of interests, neither a dialogue pursuing some sort of fundamental change in the mentality or behavior of an interlocutor. As F. Petito and P. Ferrara wrote, "religious engagement is by no means the equivalent of moral suasion towards difficult subject".<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, as claimed by the same professors, the conceptual and practical shift from the recognition and the understanding of the political role of religion in international affairs toward religious engagement is not easy. In fact, in order to make the religious engagement approach really effective, the generic intercultural background that allows the diplomats to negotiate across culture is not sufficient.

Especially in current times, in order to face the challenge of religion, the specific expertise on this topic would be useful. We will see in the following chapter how the European countries are

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<sup>20</sup> See the website <http://www.state.gov/s/rga/>

<sup>21</sup> R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, Thomas Wright, "Engaging Religious communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy", Task Force Series, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010

<sup>22</sup> Pasquale Ferrara, Fabio Petito, "An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, August 2015



dealing with this issue and the lack of mandatory training for their diplomats on religious matters. The U.S. instead, are already moving in the right direction. As F. Petito argues, in the process of religious engagement diplomats should engage themselves, meaning that they cannot adopt a bystander attitude, remaining outside the social construction of the dialogue itself. The diplomats need to become, to some extent, “insiders” in order to represent at best the main elements at stake in complex society. On this point the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in her book *The Mighty and the Almighty* wrote that all the American ambassadors should have a deep understanding of the faiths commonly practiced in the country to which they are assigned and according to her, given the nature of today’s world, knowledge of this type is not only necessary, rather essential. About the specific expertise of the diplomats she added that the State department should train “a core of specialists in religion to be deployed both in Washington and in key embassies overseas”.

### **Religious engagement: a new imperative for U.S. foreign policy - Recommendations**

Following this line, the Report by the Chicago Council “Engaging religious community abroad: a new imperative for US foreign policy” providing interesting recommendations to the U.S. government in this field. The recommendations for engaging religion can be divided into two main categories: steps that can be taken inside the United States to build the capacity to engage with religious communities and guidelines for using this capacity effectively. A fully understanding of the religious communities in which you are working and a real engagement with the local religious communities would allow the American officials to avoid risky underestimations, as it was for the capacity of Iranian religious leaders to conduct a successful revolution in 1979, or in other cases such as the underestimation of the role of the Catholic Church in democracy movements in Poland and Latin America.

In the first part of the report, we can find the suggestion for the U.S. government to “provide mandatory training for government officials on the role of religion in world affairs”. According to the recommendation “the United States will be able to effectively engage religious communities only if it puts in place the structures and requirements that will enable officers in the Foreign Service, military, and development sectors to be trained and educated about the role of religion in

world affairs”. Courses and seminars should include a comprehensive introduction to the varied ways that religion shapes political culture and inform political life and how this kind of knowledge serves the goal effective U.S. engagement.

During a conference hosted by the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University, the Ambassador-at- Large for International Religious Freedom, David Saperstein, reminded that the U.S. are investing in professional diplomatic training in religious freedom. In particular he underlined that the training on religious freedom provided at the Foreign Service Institute to U.S. diplomats and other government officials is “more than just learning on the job”, it is about different aspects of religion and global affairs. He also added “ I think all of us who are engaged in this work would like to see this training mandatory, not just for incoming Foreign Service officers but for the re-training that is given to the deputy chief of mission and to ambassadors when they go out as well”. The Ambassador Saperstein also presented another initiative of his Office, with the aim to go out across the globe and pull together staff from embassies to do training and talk about common problems that they share.

As we know religion’s presence in people’s lives is more pervasive and complicated than such an approach allows. The influence of religion on individual and collective action in the public sphere should not be underestimated because religion is not “epiphenomenal”, it is considered as a primary human experience that has a bearing also on political developments.

In line with the recommendation proposed by the scholars engaged in the task force, the United States should ensure that ambassadors to countries where religion plays a significant role have the standing and the expertise necessary to effectively engage religious communities. Senior and respected presidential envoys could be appointed to engage with religious leaders that are not covered by existing ambassadorial appointments.

In this perspective, the success of American diplomacy in the next decade will not simply be measured by government to government contacts, but also by its ability to connect with hundreds of millions of people throughout the world whose identity is defined by religion. In fact, as Professor Ferrara wrote, “in a world where the great majority of people declare to believe in some divinity or metaphysical entities and supernatural order, religions in themselves are part of the very identity of

persons, communities and people”.<sup>23</sup> From the American point of view, better prospects of success are offered through a strategy that prioritize the engagement of religious communities from below, imprinted but not driven by government-to-government diplomacy, by working with religious communities enhancing their active participation as constructive change agents in their own societies.

During the conference “Religion and Global Affairs” hosted by the university of Notre Dame in Rome on 31 may 2016, Scott Appleby<sup>24</sup> claimed that the story of religion was largely overlooked. In his view it is necessary a greater understanding of religion that was not integrated enough in policy and it is important for governments to focus on the ways in which religious dynamics can be understood around the world, changing the conversation about religion.

On this point, Shaun Casey of the U.S. State Department added that it is necessary promoting the assessment of religious dynamics but not through an essentialist approach, so religion is not the centre of all. The best thing that the government can do, according to him, is to use a case by case approach. During the conference, Shaun Casey proposed some “lasting solutions” for the American government in dealing with religion such as the respect of religious leaders independence, the protection of religious freedom as a human right and the collaboration with regional bureau in assessing religious dynamics engaging with religious actors.

According to him restricting people full expression of religion is counter-productive. During the roundtable of the conference the panelists discussed the matter of the ongoing missions of U.S., on this point Shaun Casey claimed that the U.S.A. is not a “missionary”. In fact, according to him, “Mission is something like I have to teach and convince you, this is not what we do” and added “We do not promote a particular theological view, we have foreign policy positions; we engage with all the religious groups also with the one that are more critical with us, in this way our dialogue is more interesting”. This is a crucial point that we can find also in the Report drafted by the Chicago Council. There are parts of the world in which religious groups have acquired a strong political connotation, becoming real religious political parties. In these cases the engagement is not so problematic as it could be seem. In fact, if from an ideological point of view the differences with such parties are strong and several, pragmatically in a day-to-day dimension focused on the

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<sup>23</sup> Pasquale Ferrara, “Religious Freedom: The Case for International Consensus”, October 14, 2015

<sup>24</sup> Director, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame

necessities of the people, the problem solving options are often place over ideology. For this reason, one of the suggestion provided in order to engage religion and religious communities effectively is to engage religious political parties even if they may oppose U.S. foreign policy. The real challenge for the U.S. is to promote religious freedom in a democratic context without strengthening anti-Americanism, and this is possible only embracing a comprehensive approach to democracy promotion and human rights in order to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of religious communities. “Authentic engagement is the most effective way to support and further empower the progressive and benevolent elements within societies and cultures shaped by religion”.<sup>25</sup>

For a long time after the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act was passed in the United States, it looked like religious freedom was an American project. Many people criticized it for that, as if this was America imposing its particular constitutional values and historical experience on everyone else. But now it looks like Europeans are embracing it, even if, as highlighted by P. Ferrara, United States and Europe interpret religious freedom according to their respective political cultures. In the following chapter, we will analyze the European approaches to the religious engagement issue, looking at the possibility of a unitary, common foreign policy of religious engagement abroad.

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<sup>25</sup> R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, Thomas Wright, “Engaging Religious communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy”, Task Force Series, Chicago Council on Global Affairs,2010

## 2. The European experience

### Between the “pôle religions au Quai d’Orsay” and the Anglo-saxon model

“We have to bear in mind that the EU is a hybrid animal. It has many institutions, but we also have the member states with their rich history, diversity and differences in their constitutional setup, and also the differences in how states deal with religion”<sup>26</sup>.

All this elements constitutes obstacles for a coherent and common foreign policy also in the field of religion. According to Timothy Samuel Shah, some of these obstacles are the differences between Western governments and society themselves in terms of their understanding of religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought. Indeed in Europe there is a tension between two visions of religion in society: the Anglo-Saxon model, communitarian, and the vision of secular and civic integration, as in France, which considers that the universal values prevail over the rights of different communities. “These two models are now moving”, notes Joseph Maïla. “Belgium, Holland and Great Britain show that the communitarian model gives signs of fatigue.”

Our aim is not to investigate which of the two models is fair or more effective, neither if one of the two models will prevail on the other, we want to show the different approach in deal with religion used by some European countries and diplomacies before to look at the “communitarian one”, in order to understand the specificity and the challenges for the European foreign policy in this field.

We are going to start from the secular and civic vision embodied by France. According to this perspective, the universal values prevail over the rights of different communities, also religious, in fact more that freedom *of* religion France seemed to be embracing freedom *from* religion.

In 2009 the Minister Bernard Kouchner announced the creation of a special unit that has the task of studying the influence of religion in foreign policy, a “pôle religions au Quai d’Orsay”. This center, guided by Professor Joseph Maïla, was established to consider the religious factor in international relations. It is true that the Foreign Ministry lacked the structures dedicated to this purpose, nevertheless the question of religion was not absent but it was just treated differently.

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<sup>26</sup> Sofia Lemmetynen, European Commission

Historically, Councillor for Religious Affairs since its inception in 1920, symbolized the representative and operational component of the French diplomacy towards religions. From this point of view, he had the means representing an official religious dimension (reception of foreign religious dignitaries visiting France, relations with foreign religious authorities, etc.) but it lacked the operational component, an overall reflection conducted on the evolution of religions, orientations and their impact on diplomacy.

The creation of this special unit did not come from a specific event. Nevertheless from October 2007 to July 2008 in France took place some meetings on foreign policy and in particular on this field.

The first result of these debates was basically that France could not work in the field of international relations in the conventional way as it did before, taking into account not only factors that go into what is called “the realist school of international relations”, including territory, economic potential, the strength of armies. It was clear the necessity to consider also other factors, including sustainable development, but also religions because of their new increasing impact in the field of international relations and global affairs.

The pole is linked to the “Direction de la prévoyance”, and its directives come into effect in a long-term frame of major issues of the French diplomacy. In the field of religion, it provides a blink of the changing currents and religious movements in the world and see their impact in foreign policy. In this way France recognized that religion plays an important political role in many countries and that the religious dimension is often present and his influence is a constitutive part also of the national identity.

In addition, the unit exchanges information and consults the Central Bureau of worship that is managed by the Interior Ministry. The Office was set up in the wake of the so-called 1905 law of separation of church and state. Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministry is of course internationally oriented and do not have to deal with organizational matters of religion or secularism. Even if there are several occasions in which both entities work together we have to bear in mind that the scopes of the two offices are different.

We are dealing with matters in which the classical analysis must be complemented by an approach that focuses strictly to the religious element.

According to Minister Bernard Kouchner, inter-religious dialogue should be left to religious and it is not the role of a secular state like France to play in the field of this type of dialogue. He argues, “The real debate today is to know what can be the role of religions in the regulation worldwide. We must determine the contribution of religions to peace, especially in the dynamics of political stabilization and crisis”.

The Minister added that according to him the process of an effective dialogue is not yet started. He argued that today Western countries are “in the context of modern and post pluralistic societies that recognize the diversity of beliefs. The dialogue is a necessity to not give the simple juxtaposition of diverse and varied opinions. I note again that we never talked so much about interreligious dialogue in international debates. But it is true that we need to know to go beyond the mere formality and the announcement effect”.

In France, secularism is not an ideology but a principle of institutional separation and regulation in the public sphere. In that context, it is hard to realize a “national community” from strong identity links. This is the greatest common denominator that prevails from the French society. It concerns national integration and the constant struggle against tendencies towards isolationism which leads sooner or later to the temptation of rejection.

According to Maïla, it is possible to live in a secularized society, with a strong citizenship and have a dialogue with transparency. Secularism adapts perfectly, in his opinion, with a concern and interest to religions. The two are not contradictory. This may be the meaning of “positive secularism”.

Some scholars saw a sign of “positive secularism” advocated by the former President of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy. Further, a “zeitgeist” that gives religions a key role in the supposed clash of civilizations.

We could identify three missions of the “pôle religion”. First of all the observation, identifying the religious trends that will ultimately influence international relations. “When a national identity mean anything, religious identity can become political,” says Joseph Maïla watching closely the development of Russian Orthodoxy and global expansion of evangelical Protestantism.

Second, supporting the active diplomacy of the embassies, with analysis of the pole religions that must leave the traditional geopolitical schemes. Third mission: assistance in managing crisis situations. Professor Maïla thought of "training to prepare diplomats to multi-community bargaining" and he insisted that the governing principle of this function and its setting, it is the secularism. Nevertheless, through the creation of this unit, the French diplomatic culture adopted more "modern elements" that it would have had modifying the basis of secularism.

Bernard Kouchner, the creator of this unit, looked at this result as "an effect of globalization" and a necessary "modernization" of mentality. In his view demographics, ecology and trade were built on strategic thinking, so why not religions too? He claimed that " Pour certains pays, faire de la politique signifie parler de religion, et vice versa. Nous ne pouvons pas l'ignorer"<sup>27</sup>, also defending the head of the new division, Joseph Maïla, Islam expert and sociology of conflict, founder of the training Institute for mediation and negotiation.

"The religions pole is 6 people for 16,000 diplomats" the Minister emphasizes. But its proponents point out that French diplomacy, imbued with the principles of secularism, sometimes shows down compared to religious questions. The "pole religions" also will educate the new generation of diplomats to religious questions. In fact, Mr. Maïla asked "How can we mediate in a conflict if we do not know the difference between Shia and Sunni, between a Greek Orthodox and a Maronite? From his experience, he claims that often the conflicts are resolved by a compromise between religious communities, nevertheless he underlines that the purpose of the unit is political and diplomatic and this latter remains regulated by secular values.

By relying on the experts, the religions pole will lead an upstream thinking, following the great religious movements worldwide and their possible policy implications, supporting the active diplomacy of France. This prospective work should as well be interested in the developments of evangelical Protestantism, the various facets of Islam, the weight of Orthodoxy in Russia, etc.. The proselytizing religions pole will also centralize international reactions following statements or decisions of France on religious subjects. One of his first assignments is to give to the Ambassadors a common language elements in order to avoid criticism and misunderstanding with the religious communities inside the country. In addition, the unit will also works on issues affecting the theological foundation of Iran's Constitution in the current crisis. So far, the diplomatic experience

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<sup>27</sup> Transl." for Some countries do politics means to talk about religion, and vice versa. We cannot ignore it"



of France in religious matters was confined to its relations with the Vatican and its position vis-à-vis religious congregations responsibility. Since the 1920s and after the normalization of the diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican, an adviser on religious affairs is indeed attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

About the anglo-saxon model, we can consider now the Great Britain example.

The UK Government is firmly committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world, and to being a strong voice internationally in defence of this fundamental right.

Reflecting a growing awareness of the government about the need to strengthen policy making by engaging with religious actors, on February 2014 the executive agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Wilton Park, organized a conference brought together academics, policy makers, diplomats and religious actors to discuss challenges and opportunities for learning and closer collaboration in the integration of religious awareness and engagement in foreign policy.

The conference was a direct response to a felt need to enhance policy-making processes by engaging with religious actors and institutions across the full range of functional and regional domains in foreign policy and development. Despite a growing body of academic work arguing for the importance of faith in world affairs, government dialogue or partnership with ‘religion’ remains problematic and contentious, both domestically and internationally. The purpose of the conference was to move the discussion forward by tackling directly many of the obstacles, challenges and opportunities associated with integrating awareness of religion and religious engagement into foreign policymaking and development practice.

The key outcomes and findings from the conference for policy makers were numerous. First of all the need for a broader understanding of the nature of religion and how it impacts the lives of global communities. Indeed, it is necessary to move beyond a conversation about ‘what people believe’ to better understand how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they engage politically. Too often in recent years, discussions about religion, foreign policy and development have been concerned primarily with a single religious tradition, for example Islam, and often focused on security issues. There is a need to broaden this discussion such that it considers how engagement with a wider range of communities may add value across multiple

and diverse policy domains. In addition, during the debate was pointed out the risk of ‘ghettoising’ engagement with religion by treating it as a function separate from broader policy making processes. The integration of religion into the everyday practice of foreign policy and development should be a policy goal. Many perceive foreign policy and development institutions to possess a secular bias and operational culture that predisposes them to be wary of religion. “Religious literacy” training may help to ameliorate this problem where it exists, but more also needs to be done to disseminate examples of good practice.

Another point that clearly emerged from the conference is the importance of the understanding of the faith-based world for people who have to work in this field and on the ground. Actors need to be aware of the role that faith plays in societies so they can develop effective strategies to work with representational and congregational faith groups. However, religious awareness, religious literacy and skills relevant to religious engagement are not routinely part of the training of diplomats and religion has been driven out of academic institutions and isolated from the mainstream. This compounds the problem of low religious literacy among policy makers who often do not understand the multi-faceted nature of religious communities, the diverse authority structures of different religions or the political significance of emergent religious movements. There is a clear need to train young diplomats and civil servants about the importance of religion and religious engagement in order to develop skill sets that can address the opportunities and issues in this field. It is important that officials understand how people of faith think and act, not just what they believe, and appreciate the influence of the different development and transitional contexts in which they operate.

On this point, in 2013 the Woolf Institute delivered the first ever course run by the Foreign Office on religion and foreign policy. The focus was on the issue of freedom of religion or belief, but the wider goal of the course was to help British diplomats understand better the importance of religion in shaping foreign policy. The course included case studies, lectures and reflections from diplomatic practitioners and also high profile contributions from figures such as Foreign Office Minister Baroness Warsi and H.E. Archbishop Vincent Nichols. This latter focused his speech on the international role and activity of the Roman Catholic church, the importance of religious freedom, and the relationship between the Catholic Church and government. Ambassador to the Holy See Nigel Baker addressed the first workshop and later commended the course for its

engagement with the dynamics of religion and faith in global society, stating that “an understanding of the dynamics of religion and faith in global society is not only a legitimate and important tool of foreign policy practice, but an increasingly essential one for our diplomats and foreign policy advisers in a modern world in which religion is ever more important as a driver of political, social, cultural and even economic motivation. In the same way that we expect diplomats to develop a keen knowledge of international economic issues, or the intricacies of multilateral negotiating techniques in areas from disarmament to climate change, we cannot ignore religion”.<sup>28</sup> Unlike in much of the world, most British school children or students do not regularly attend a place of worship, even if a large majority of British people still express a religious affiliation. So the new recruits, and more experienced diplomats, need training to engage a world where faith and religiosity is more common and evident than at home.

In this framework, the UK have recently adopted a new strategic approach to human rights, refocusing the work around three themes: democratic values and the rule of law, strengthening the rules-based international system and human rights for a stable world. The work on freedom of religion or belief cuts across all three of these themes.

Related to the first theme, it is only where freedom of religion or belief is protected that we can expect to see democratic values and the rule of law being fully implemented across societies.

For the second case, only through strengthening the rules-based international system can we work towards securing fundamental rights and freedoms for all. In the UN for example, this means ensuring that there are regular resolutions that focus on the full definition of freedom of religion or belief, as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

About the last theme, freedom of religion or belief supports much of the Government's work to promote stability and security overseas. In societies where freedom of religion or belief is respected, it is much harder for extremist views to take root. In all our work we continually make the case for freedom of religion or belief, and we implement it in practice through our project work.

Freedom of religion or belief is often crucial to peace in society. In this perspective, one of the UK's strategic policy goal is to prevent and resolve conflicts. So it is in the interests of the UK

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<sup>28</sup> Ambassador to the Holy See Nigel Baker, *Training Diplomats to Understand Religion*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office

to help people to enjoy freedom of religion or belief and to end discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. It is also a value that is essential to the UK's own culture and its success as a multi-cultural and religiously heterogeneous society, and a human right that the UK is committed to uphold.

The fact that there is a State religion or dominant ideology believed by the majority of the population does not justify discrimination against other individuals who do not share that religion or belief. In the UK, there are two State churches, in England and Scotland, but none in Wales or Northern Ireland. But no-one in the UK is discriminated against because they do not belong to a State church. All people in the UK, whatever their religion or belief, enjoy the same freedom of religion or belief. This issue is related to the concept of "Britishness" that has changed in recent decades. There has been a shift in national identity from an ethnocentric view, with a focus on British origin and past, to a civic understanding of "Britishness" as respect for the rule of law and shared values.

As we know, religious beliefs entail specific practices and symbols which cannot be entirely contained in the private sphere. But even if such remaining differences could be accommodated, in the Anglo- Saxon model of society, people can choose between assimilating to working class culture, metropolitan lifestyles or, in some areas, to pre-existing ethnic minority communities. There is in fact no monolithic culture or social order to assimilate to, as democratic societies contain many different lifestyles, values and institutional processes, which are constantly changing.

As we have seen, There are considerable national differences in understandings of religion and religious issues that arise from different social and political histories. These domestic norms influence how countries think about the intersection of religion and politics and can also pervade the language, institutions and mind-sets at the supranational level.

In addition, It is not often clear where the world of 'religion' begins and ends. However, what is clear is that the simplistic classification of civil society actors into binary and oppositional 'secular' and 'religious' categories in the abstract does not capture the complexity of social reality.

Looking forward at the challenges of how to make better policies at the intersection between religion, development and foreign policy, it was recognised that a double effort is required: conceptually and pragmatically and oriented simultaneously introspectively and externally. Both

faith-based groups and governments and international institutions may need to reconsider their roles and languages in order to overcome mutual misconceptions and to ease communication with diverse external interlocutors and stakeholders.

### **EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.**

In the last decade the EU incorporated freedom of religion and belief into its foreign policy goals. We could say that it was the moment in which the issue of religious freedom looked like not only an “American project” abroad. Nevertheless, now the element of freedom or belief is at the core of the European project and the process of European integration, trying to overcome the limits of the several visions about religion that, as we have seen above, characterizes the EU.

Starting the explanation and the analysis of the European Union approach to the religious question we have to underlying that the European countries include the religious freedom among the other human rights. In other words, the issue of religious freedom or belief is a matter of human rights.

In human rights discourse, however, the use of the term “religion” also includes support for the right to non-religious beliefs, such as atheism or agnosticism. We can find this specification also in the formulation provided by the EU guidelines 2013. In the section regarding the definitions it is suggested the reading of FoRB enshrined in Articles 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in the light of the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment n°22: “Under international law, FoRB (is considered as a component of) the freedom to have or not to have or adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice”. Considering the holding or not of a religion, or belief, as an absolute right is a characteristic of the approach used by the EU, as reaffirmed in the Guidelines.

EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief were adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in June 2013 following broad consultations with specialised civil society organisations, as well as churches, religious associations or communities, and philosophical and non-confessional organisations. In these Guidelines, the EU reaffirms its determination to defend freedom of religion

or belief as an individual right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

The Guidelines explain what the international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief are, and give clear political lines to officials of EU institutions and EU Member States, to be used in contacts with third countries and with international and civil society organisations. They also provide officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief, to analyse cases, and to react effectively to violations wherever they occur, in order to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief in the EU's external action.

The document is divided in three sections: an introduction in which are expressed the reasons, the purpose and the scope of the action, and some definitions of the principle of “freedom of religion or belief”, a section regarding the operational dimension of the guidelines and a conclusive section with some implementation and evaluation of the action.

In the first part is highlighted the dimension of religious freedom as a human right. As such, it also safeguards respect for diversity, so the equal protection also for people who change, leave their religion or persons holding non-theistic or atheistic beliefs. Furthermore, the guidelines express the indivisibility, inter-relation and interdependence of religious freedom with the other human rights, weather civil, political, economic, social and cultural ones.

In the second part, the operational one, there is a focus on eight priority areas for action, such as: violence, freedom of expression, promotion of respect for diversity and tolerance, discrimination, changing or leaving one's religion or belief, manifestation of religion or belief, support and protection for human rights defenders and support for and engagement with civil society.

We are going to focus on two points of this second section. First of all the point number eight, regarding the tools that the EU will use to follow the Guidelines. In particular this point is about the importance of the training as a useful and effective tool for the promotion of religious freedom and also as a mean for avoiding violations in this field. “The EEAS, in coordination with Member States and in co-operation with civil society including churches and religious associations, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, will develop training materials for staff in the field and in headquarters. Materials will be made available to Member States and EU institutions.

Training will be practical in its orientation, focused on enabling EU missions to use EU tools for analysis and reporting effectively so as to highlight EU thematic priorities and respond to violations.” As we have seen before, the importance of a training in religious field for the officials, diplomats and civil society on the ground it is an important element also for the U.S. foreign policy of engagement abroad.

Among the tools it is reaffirmed the role of activities such as monitoring, assessing and reporting situations of concern that need the EU intervention. Nevertheless, what it would be more effective, as we are trying to demonstrate in this thesis, is the necessity to go beyond the mere monitoring and reporting, for sure useful mean but not sufficient, in order to achieve a real and effective engagement with the religious communities on the ground, in that countries in which there are “situations of concern”. In this perspective, we can consider a promising sign the provision at point number eight of the second section affirming that: “The EU will make clear its full support for the efforts of civil society to promote freedom of religion or belief. The EU and its Member States will, where appropriate, continue to make available financial support to non-governmental organisations working for freedom of religion or belief. The EU will promote the visibility of local organisations working on freedom of religion or belief, through hosting or supporting public events on this issue, with special emphasis on involving different religious and belief groups. The EU will regularly consult civil society, including religious associations, non-confessional and philosophical organisations on ways to promote FoRB in its external human rights policies, as well as on individual cases”. In this provision there are some elements that it could be interesting to underline and discuss. First of all the openness of the EU to non-governmental organizations, religious groups and civil society that, as we have said, is a good starting point, nevertheless we may wish for an evolution of the “ regularly consultation” to a more deep commitment and engagement with civil society, religious associations, non-confessional and philosophical organizations.

On the other hand it is important to notice the terms used in the guidelines text. In particular when the EU affirms its will to promote FoRB in “its external human rights policies”. The introduction of the terms “human rights” as a specific of the external policies of the Union, underlines once again the meaning and the reading that the EU gives to religious freedom, as characteristic of the European union approach.

According to Daniel Philpott, before 2013 and the EU Guidelines there was already a commitment to freedom of religion coming out of the European experience, but then “certain events in the world in a sense activated it”. In fact, as Sofia Lemmetynen claimed during a speech at the Georgetown University “before those guidelines, we also published council conclusions on freedom of religion or belief with regard to the EU’s External Action in 2009 and 2011, as a result of developments in the world”.

In the first document, “Council conclusions on freedom of religion or belief” published in November 2009, the Council “reaffirms the strong commitment of the European Union to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief”, recalling the nature of religious freedom as a fundamental rights and covering also the “right to adopt, change or abandon one’s religion or belief, of one’s own free will”. Even if these council conclusions are more focused on the protection of religious minorities and emphasize “that freedom of religion or belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of opinion and expression”, however there is a strong recall to evaluate existing EU initiatives and to elaborate proposals, as appropriate, for promoting the freedom of religion or belief in bilateral relations and in multilateral context."

The council conclusions published on 21th February 2011, after a previous recall to the comprehensive conclusions adopted in this respect on 16 November 2009, underline the particular situation of fear and intolerance in particular “The Council expresses its profound concern about the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination, as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities, which it firmly condemns. Regrettably, no part of the world is exempt from the scourge of religious intolerance”. Following the previous conclusions, the document reaffirms the link between freedom of opinion and expression as well as to other human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition, in this council conclusion we can find a call to the engagement of the EU in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

More recently, in the occasion of the 10th anniversary year of the UN Human Rights Council and ahead of its 31st session, the EU reaffirmed its strong commitment to the United Nations bodies tasked with the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU will again actively engage with the Human Rights Council and General Assembly Third Committee to defend and promote the



universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights, and will continue to draw the attention of these fora to human rights violations and abuses worldwide.

In addition, The European Parliament's Intergroup on FoRB and Religious Tolerance, which was introduced last year in January, is very supportive as well. There are already several programs and instruments to promote human rights in general and of FoRB in particular, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The new EIDHR regulation for 2014-20 specifically includes FoRB as a priority. Out of a total allocation of 20 million Euros, 5 million Euros have been earmarked for the promotion of FoRB projects.

### **Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union: role and challenges**

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2016, on the occasion of the award of the Charlemagne Prize, an annual award for contributions to European unity, President Jean-Claude Juncker announced his decision to appoint Mr. Ján Figel as the first Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union. Mr Figel, former European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth from 2004-2009 and First Deputy-Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic from 2010 to 2012, assumed this new role for an initial mandate of one year, renewable.

During his speech President Juncker affirmed the nature of Freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental right which is "part of the foundation of the European Union". According to him the persistent persecution of religious and ethnic minorities make protecting and promoting this freedom inside and outside the EU all the more essential. President Juncker said: "I trust that Ján Figel, our Special Envoy, will help us in this endeavor, sharpening our focus and ensuring that this important issue gets the attention it deserves".

The European Parliament supports and has called for this initiative in its Resolution of 4 February 2016. Given the importance of promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief outside the EU in the context of the European Union's dialogue and assistance programmes with third countries, the Special Envoy will serve as Special Adviser to the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica.

As part of his mission, Mr Figel' will present a report in the context of the on-going dialogue between the Commission and churches and religious associations or communities, outside the EU.

On 20<sup>th</sup> September the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, answered to some questions on behalf of the Commission about the role and the mandate of Mr. Figel as new Special Envoy. Mr. Mimica claimed that in his quality as Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, Mr Ján Figel' has a contract as Special Advisor to the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development. This contract foresees an adequate number of working days and of mission days. In addition, Mr Figel' is assisted by staff in different Commission services, in order to contribute to a successful delivery of his mandate. The Special Envoy consults and liaises with relevant EU services such as, the European External Action Service, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, and relevant services of the Commission. Sound cooperation ensures that action is focused on agreed priorities, is complementary and adds value.

Nevertheless the Commissioner affirmed that a detailed concept of this new role will be developed in the next months, autumn 2016. Meanwhile, The Special Envoy's approach will be in line with the 2013 EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief that as we said before, include for everyone, everywhere, the right to believe or not to believe and to adopt or change a belief.

Whereas other advisors to commissioners have clearly defined mandates on the EC website, the fact that Jan Figel has only a title on his web page, indicates that he will have some flexibility to shape his work. In addition, there are several questions and tricky issues that should be face and manage in order to make this new figure really effective.

First of all, the religious framework behind the Special Envoy and his character. Indeed, as several newspapers have stressed, "the atmosphere in which Mr Figel's mission was revealed to the world was, putting it mildly, a Catholic one". In addition, three European institutions such as European Council, European Commission and European Parliament are presided by people with a Catholic background, president Donald Tusk, president Jean-Claude Juncker and president Martin Schulz.

Mr Figel is Catholic too, so one of his challenge will be to manage and induce all the political groups inside the EU institution to work together in favor of freedom of religion and inter-religious dialogue as a way of conciliation and building trust in communities for all the religions worldwide and not only the Catholic one (that is the position by the EPP and the far right that tend to care for Christians in third countries primarily).

Sophia Kuby, EU campaigner for the Alliance Defending Freedom, an international religious lobby group, called the move “an important step in the right direction”. Moreover, the EU's defining treaty carefully safeguards the autonomy of member states in the way they treat religion and as religion scholar Pasquale Annichino notes in a forthcoming article in the Oxford Journal of Law and Religion, churches are very keen to preserve that national autonomy, but they want a religious dimension in the Union's dealing with the outside world.

The will to mainstream freedom of religion or belief into the EU's wider external agenda is a very welcome sign. Given the increasing number of FoRB violations taking place both inside and outside of Europe, it is necessary to push for an increased awareness of the need for FoRB and the way that it benefits communities. Pew's most recent study on religious hostility worldwide found that 5.5 billion people worldwide live in countries with high or very high overall restrictions on religion. Several of these countries are recipients of EU development aid.

Another aspect to consider is the influence that the EU Special Envoy will have actually. We could say that It remains to be seen what the relationship will be between the Special Envoy and Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU's Special Representative for Human Rights and the EEAS. Given that the EEAS is responsible for arranging the EU's human rights dialogues, it would be in the interests of coherence for Mr Figel to establish close contact with this institution. If Jan Figel uses the EU's FoRB guidelines as a basis for his work, then he could play an instrumental role in pushing for their wider dissemination and implementation at the dialogues. He could also work to mainstream religious concerns more broadly in the EU's peacekeeping initiatives. According to Susan Kerr and Claire Gilder from the CSW's Europe Office, Mr Figel should strive to form a working group incorporating all of those concerned with different aspects of FoRB so as to ensure the coherence and consistency of EU action on the matter. Moreover, the Special Envoy has the

opportunity to bring together all the elements of FoRB protection and promotion in the EU and move them forward to create a safer world for people of all faiths and none.

“The persistent persecution of religious and ethnic minorities makes protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief all the more essential and we must focus on this important issue and ensure its visibility” with these words Mr. Figel talked about his task during an interview. He also added, “The European Parliament recognized that the ongoing persecution of religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East is a crucial factor that contributes to mass migration and internal displacement. Therefore, together with the European Commissioner, Neven Mimica, who is responsible for International Cooperation and Development, my priority will be to promote practical mechanisms of protection for the persecuted next to humanitarian aid for those in need in the most affected areas. We will work harder together with the European Parliament, the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Council and our international partners to engage in a permanent dialogue on how the EU can best contribute to the promotion of FoRB in the world”. After having strongly recalled the hard cooperation with the European institutions and offices, Mr. Figel claimed that one of the priority of his mandate concerned about the rise of violence and threats in non-EU countries, particularly Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic and others. He affirmed to be determined to defend FoRB as “a right to be exercised everywhere and by everyone”. Moreover, the Special Envoy affirmed the project to work closely with other fundamental partners such as the United States and Canada and claimed that his first regional priority is the Middle East, “where we currently witness the genocide of the Christian, Yezidi, Shia Muslim and other communities. I want to invite more parliaments and governments to speak against this ongoing genocide. We have to finally conclude the century of genocides, if we wish to live in a better time”.

In one of his more recent interviews Mr. Figel underlined the urgent need of humanitarian aid delivered to all civilians in the most affected areas and talked about other important tasks, concerning the field of education and the prevention of radicalization, in particular among young people.

Moreover, Mr. Figel affirmed his will and the imperative for the Union to work on local reconciliation and interreligious dialogue, reminding that “sustainable reconciliation presupposes justice and the rule of law in place. That is a must, because lasting peace is the fruit of justice”.

A last important point to underline is the call of the Special Envoy to remember that all the hard tasks will be carried out not only by politicians and diplomats, but also by civil society representatives, NGOs, academia and “all people of good will”. The invitation of Mr. Figel is thus in line with the EU Guidelines and the call for a closer and more intense cooperation and strong effort that come from below, as a new strategy and approach in religious engagement abroad aimed to solve and avoid conflicts.

We conclude this part of the dissertation with the words of the Special Envoy that invite everyone to care and bring into our times and societies more humanity, more responsibility and more solidarity: “This moral commitment to freedom is the starting point for both reasonable policies and effective action in field of religious freedom. In a nutshell, this is my personal approach to FoRB”<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mr. Figel, *Figel: “Action for Religious Freedom is a Moral Obligation” Interview by FOREF Europe with Ján Figel, EU Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB*

### **3. Perspective for a transatlantic cooperation: comparing the American and the European approach**

From 1998 when the U.S.A. adopted the International Religious Freedom Act, to recent years Canada, Britain, Austria, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and the European Union have adopted foreign policies of religious freedom in one way or another, showing that the promotion of religious freedom abroad is not only an “American project”.

Nevertheless, as we have seen above, the USA and the EU used different approaches in facing the issue of religious freedom. Despite a relatively similar relevance of religion in EU and US foreign policy, there are differences in how issues of religion are framed. Whereas for the EU, religion is primarily a human rights as well as a security issue, which mainly contributes to political problems, the US primarily securitizes religion but also sees it more frequently as a resource for solving problems. More generally, the United States continued to make the promotion of international religious freedom a key national security and foreign policy priority, to advocate forcefully for these issues publically and privately, in both multilateral and bilateral settings. The US and its foreign policy is often considered to be more militaristic, more coercive, less interested in issues of the environment and less self-reflective than the EU’s.

Whereas the EU’s external relations focus more on development aid, US foreign policy emphasizes security. There are also policy differences, not exclusively caused by oppositional identities but also by institutional variation in EU and US foreign policy making. US foreign policy making is highly centralized with the main decision-making power lying with the President, whereas in the EU, the common foreign and security policy is highly decentralized due to the predominance of the member states in decision-making that as we have seen in the previous chapter, characterize the European approach and represent in some cases a real obstacle.

Even though the EU is not a state like the US, both entities can be understood, and thus compared, as international actors, whose polities follow similar institutional logics (both are outcomes of the aggregation of distinct and separated territorial units and their citizens), even though they differ in their degree of ‘actorness’ and the degree of centralization of foreign policy decision-making.

Because of the different approaches of national systems in Europe, the reports and provisions on religious freedom offered by the continental countries cannot have the coherence of policies needed for a comprehensive system of religion freedom protection and respect in a broader sense. For this reason, as P. Ferrara argues “reports on religious freedom realized by international and multilateral institutions in several cases have a better acceptance, in terms of legitimacy, than the ones produced by single governments or religious bodies. In this way they reflect a convergence of different national political cultures toward a common ground in terms of a shared understanding of the fundamentals of religious freedom that are not country specific”. Also according to Daniel Philpott, through multilateral cooperation the promotion of religious freedom would be empowered and this could be a starting point “for a possible convergence between the US and the EU in elaborating common standards and common practices for monitoring, assessing, and reporting on religious freedom, in cooperation with international and multilateral bodies”<sup>30</sup>.

Scholars in the field of religious freedom, in particular in a transatlantic perspective, found some other characteristics of the two approaches. As Cole Durham argues, “From a comparative perspective, American and European systems are often contrasted because of the absence of an establishment clause in the constitution of European countries and within the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. There is convergence on both sides of the Atlantic, however, in the importance afforded to the autonomy of religious institutions. One of the things that our non-establishment principle does is protect separation of religion and the state, which protects the autonomy of religious institutions. By the same token, the autonomy principle in Europe protects distinctions between state and religious power”. On this point, P. Ferrara claimed that “In the US the Establishment Clause sounds more like a negative principle of non-intervention by the state in religious affairs than like a concept of pro-active political neutrality as in the case of France. In Europe itself, however, there are different political and institutional arrangements regarding state-church relations, from *laïcité* to simple recognitions to compacts. Overall, institutional secularization is for sure a common feature in Europe”. Indeed, an important point in which the US and Europe differ is the type of secularism they adopted.

We can identify two kinds of secularism: the assertive and the passive one. The kind of secularism that has been dominant in France and in other countries of Europe was the assertive one,

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<sup>30</sup> P. Ferrara

according to which the state is supposed to play an assertive role to eliminate religion from the public square. On the other hand, in the United States has been dominant the passive secularism, in which the state is supposed to play a passive role by tolerating religious or secular discourses if they appear in the public sphere. This latter kind of secularism ensures a more inclusionary understanding of state-religion relations and gives more space for both religious majorities and minorities, not imposing itself a comprehensive doctrine.

In this perspective, it could be interesting to underline the interest of the Americans in religion and particularly in religious freedom, since the notion of freedom has generally come from Western Europe and France in particular. As Mustafa Akyol argues, ideas from the French Enlightenment were transferred to the US. In the European tradition freedom always sounded like freedom *from* religion and from God, as it is manifested and embodied by French policy in this field. From the American point of view instead, the concept is the freedom *of* religion, considering religion as a value. As Thomas Farr claims, “The French model of religious freedom tends to discourage religious arguing in politics, while many argue that the American model has traditionally encouraged religious arguing”.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the role of religion in foreign policies of states and supranational organizations has remained relatively unexplored in the past and this is particularly true for EU foreign policy.

While the role of religion results different on both sides of the Atlantic, American and European societies face similar challenges to religious liberty. The United States model of high levels of religious practice, denominational competition, and non-establishment contrasts with European models of low religious participation and either state churches, as in the United Kingdom example that we have already seen, or the state-state-enforced privatization of religion as in French case.

There is another element that differs in the two approaches, it concerns the so called “Countries of particular concern”. The EU Guidelines do not include a list of countries of this type, while as we know, we can find it in the US system of reporting. According to Sofia Lemmetyinen, from the European Commission, there is no aim of including such a list. There are EU delegations working on the ground and in their regular reporting of what it is called “human rights country



strategy”, they analyze how the situation regarding freedom of religion and belief is evolving in a given country.

On the other hand, a point of convergence of the two approach is the increasing importance given to the training for diplomats and civil servants on freedom of religion or belief. As we have seen before, in order to understand the dynamics on the ground and to engage with religious communities abroad in the most effective way it is necessary to have a deeper comprehension of the centrality of religion and religious freedom to the kind of the world we want to live in.

The USA provided a programme of training for its officials and diplomats a couple of years before the EU that just in the last year started to think about the great utility of a project like this. This is just one of the measures that are bringing the USA and the EU toward a model of Transatlantic Cooperation aimed to engage religious community abroad, going beyond the mere activities of monitoring and reporting related to the previous strategy of religious freedom promotion.

Thomas Farr argues that “ we need a transatlantic covenant on the meaning and value of religious freedom so that we can agree on what it is we are attempting to advance”. In addition, according to Sue Breeze there is a slight difference between the United States and Europe which prevent the governments today from working effectively together and it is not a matter of fundamental disagreement it is just an enormous task.

According to Pasquale Annichino, given the current difficulties in reaching an agreement on a real agenda for the promotion and protection of religious freedom, Western states should focus their joint efforts on the issue of religious persecution. Nevertheless according to Fabio Petito, an orientation that put together the promotion of freedom of religion and the issue of inter-religious dialogue, interfaith coalition and growing inter-religious understanding could definitely help to strengthen a transatlantic common ground on how to protect the freedom of religion or belief.

In fact, even if we are beginning to see unprecedented interest in a new trans-Atlantic effort concentrated on promoting this fundamental freedom, the new efforts in Europe and North America are unprecedented but yet uncoordinated. For a meaningful trans-Atlantic partnership centering on promoting FoRB to coalesce and have impact, a lasting commitment from parliamentarians and governments will be required.

Shared values on promoting freedom of religion or belief globally present a unique opportunity for joint action between Europe and the US. Networking efforts multiply the effectiveness of this kind of bilateral engagements. Traditional bilateral engagements with countries of concern are needed and should be increased, but they can be more effective and impactful if pursued in concert with others.

The challenges of the 21st century, growing violent religious extremism, repressive majoritarian impulses, and a return of authoritarianism in countries close to the EU, call for a new approach. Europe and the USA increasingly share a common commitment to proactively support Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. From this convergence arises the possibility for increased coordination at a moment when FoRB is under renewed attack.

The two approaches differ also in dealing with religious minorities. The EU's focus on human rights makes it more likely to respond to the violation of their rights than the United States with its stronger emphasis on security.

In accordance with the assumption of a transatlantic religious divide, one could assume religion is more prominent in U.S. than in EU foreign policy. Recently, both the United States and the EU have adopted relevant institutional and policy changes in that regard. Nevertheless, while the U.S. Congress already adopted the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998 and in 2013 the U.S. Department of State released a Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement and founded the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, now Office of Religion and Global Affairs, to reach out to religious actors worldwide, the EU started this process by adopting Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief just in 2013 within the framework of its external human rights policy, and by developing an agenda of religious engagement in its external affairs.

In 2015 F. Petito, D. Philpott, S. Ferrari and J. Birdsall drafted a policy brief titled: “FoRB – Recognising our differences can be our strength: Enhancing transatlantic cooperation on promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief”. This policy brief, result of two transatlantic policy dialogues, seeks to build on current transatlantic cooperation on FoRB by suggesting a shift of policy emphasis: stressing the diversity of Europe and North America as a strategy to enhance transatlantic cooperation on the promotion of FoRB worldwide.

According to the scholars, despite the common focus on FoRB, differences in approach among Western democracies are significant. They involve varying understandings of the meaning and reach of religious freedom, especially in its public and political manifestations. As we have seen before, these different approaches derive from differing histories, views on church-state relations, and ongoing internal religious freedom controversies.

According to F. Petito “a uniformity of approach to FoRB is not possible or even necessary for effective transatlantic cooperation on this issue. Diversity is a reality and it can be an asset. But it has to be better understood and better utilized”. For these reasons the scholars offered some recommendations to enhance collaboration on FoRB among the diverse countries of Europe and North America. The first one suggests to draw upon transatlantic church-state difference as a strategic asset for FoRB promotion. Some states have established churches while others have a separation of church and state. Within Europe, the European Court of Human Rights allows states a ‘margin of appreciation’ to account for cultural, historical and constitutional differences. This principle has led to seemingly inconsistent interpretations of FoRB tailored to the local context.

We could claim that there is no singular model that all nations must embrace. Transatlantic FoRB advocacy should also take into account which state or states are best positioned to engage a third party country on a given religious freedom concern. As FoRB advocacy becomes increasingly internationalised, transatlantic partners should continue to expand collaboration with non-Western governments, parliamentarians and other actors that share a commitment to FoRB. The second recommendation regards the language and suggest to be mindful of the difference between the two expressions: religious freedom and freedom of religion or belief. Indeed, the right provided in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is typically abbreviated as “religious freedom” in North America and “freedom of religion or belief” in Europe. The terms reflect differences in religious history, politics, and demographics. For Europeans, the addition of the word “belief” in the freedom of religion formula is critical as it explicitly recall the freedom to non-religious beliefs, such as humanism and atheism, and thus put Article 18 within a wider human rights paradigm. On the other hand, in the United States and Canada, “religious freedom” is congruent with each country’s constitutional tradition and national history although recently some quarters have come to question the concept and denounce it as a partisan or sectarian agenda. At the multilateral and international level, FoRB is increasingly the standard term. So American and

Canadian policymakers and diplomats should consider increasingly adopting “freedom of religion or belief,” especially when engaging European and international partners.

Another point of the policy brief recommends to seek collaboration between “religious freedom” and “religious engagement”. We have analyzed in the first chapter of this thesis the concept of religious engagement and its development in the USA starting from the concept of religious freedom. The scholars affirm that among officials who work on issues of religion and foreign affairs on both sides of the Atlantic there is something of a divide between ‘religious freedom’ and ‘religious engagement’. There can be mutual suspicion between those who focus on one or the other. FoRB advocacy is viewed by some as a narrow human rights agenda that misses the complexity of the role of religion in society. On the other hand, religious engagement can be seen as little more than feel-good interfaith dialogue that avoids the urgency of fighting persecution.

While the two activities have their distinct contributions, they also overlap and need to be coordinated. As we have seen, the “added value” of religious engagement is its broad-based analysis of religious dynamics and dialogue with diverse religious actors on a wide range of issues in a given context and the promotion of freedom of religion or belief could be much more effective if it takes advantage of this kind of analysis and dialogue, helping all parties involved to better understand the different ways the right to FoRB is or can be expressed. This implies the necessity of a new promotion strategy that comes from the bottom of the society and that goes beyond the mechanism of ‘naming and shaming’ and top-down diplomacy. Following the suggestions of the scholars, the European External Action Service and North America should ensure that officials involved in religious engagement and religious freedom are in regular communication because if they are coordinated, their approaches can be mutually reinforcing.

The fourth recommendation recalls one of the main innovations introduced by the US government and a common ground for cooperation between the two approaches: courses of training for diplomats and civil servants in order to enhance the knowledge of freedom of religion or belief, based on a deep process of listening to the religious communities on the ground.

According to F. Petito, improving the general knowledge of the world religions is foundational, as well as strengthening the knowledge of the different ways in which the universal human right of FoRB is understood and implemented in the various cultural and religious traditions

of the world. This suggestion come from the necessity to avoid “an ideologisation of FoRB and to contextualize its application without relativizing the principle that protects religious minorities from brutal repression”. In addition, FoRB promoters must start and make efforts to listen to local needs. Within this framework, training and awareness-raising can catalyse improved implementation of FoRB promotion strategy. This needs to cover not only Foreign Service staff, but actors back in national capitals and third party actors in countries of interest.

Another recommendation deals with the violators of freedom of religion or belief. The scholars suggest to build coalition and new multilateral strategies to engage with them. This recommendation is direct above all to fight and avoid persecution and discrimination perpetrated under traditional authoritarian or nationalist regimes. Here, traditional coalition building and government-to-government engagement can be particularly effective. The policy brief reports a concrete example of a recent case in which a letter from the International Panel of Parliamentarians for FoRB to the foreign minister of Sudan was instrumental in securing the release of two Presbyterian pastors who were facing the death penalty on trumped up charges.

The last two recommendations provided by the authors of the policy brief suggest to: support the nascent multinational and transnational freedom of religion or belief and share stories of struggling with religious diversity. In the first case are welcomed the creation of the inter-governmental International groups on FoRB such as the International Panel of Parliamentarians for FoRB, and the Commonwealth Initiative for FoRB, recalling the important role that both foreign ministries and parliaments have to play in advancing FoRB globally. Of course also Diplomats play a strategic role in weaving FoRB into their engagements with foreign governments and foreign publics. Nevertheless, some are afraid that the involvement of these new actors may excessively politicize the issue of FoRB and increase the risk of tension and conflict. On the contrary the involvement of political actors can just strengthen FoRB promotion and for this reason these coalitions should receive ample resources and support. About the last recommendation regarding the share of struggling stories with religious diversity, the scholars report some historical examples of discriminations when the people of Europe and North America did not enjoy of the protections of FoRB. In particular the stories of some Protestant countries discriminated against Catholics into the late nineteenth century and some Catholic countries suppressed religious minorities up until the Vatican Council II declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* in 1965.

Unfortunately even today in Europe and North America religious minorities, especially Muslims, face a variety of challenges. Transatlantic FoRB advocacy will come across as more authentic and less arrogant if it acknowledges past and present shortcomings. “In calling other nations to respect FoRB we not only proclaim a universal right but also share lessons from our own national experiences”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Petito, D. Philpott, S. Ferrari, J. Birdsall, *FoRB – Recognising our differences can be our strength: Enhancing transatlantic cooperation on promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief*, 2016

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the purpose of this thesis has been to try analyzing the relationship between religious engagement and diplomacy through a comparison between the American and the European approach.

We started from the assumption that today religious freedom seems to have acquired the status of consensual default policy, connected from one side to the respect of religions themselves and from the other side as a species of genus, a specific liberty inside the broader context of freedoms and rights, in particular as a fundamental right to respect. Nevertheless, considering religious freedom as an absolute right brings to the necessity of building a broader international consensus on the standards, methods and criteria for evaluating the respect of religious freedom in a given country.

To achieve the aim, I have started describing in the first part of the thesis the concept of religious engagement seen as a “new frontier of religious freedom”, because it goes beyond the concern on ‘what people believe’ and the efforts to guarantee religious freedom as a fundamental rights to be exercised “by everyone and everywhere” avoiding discriminations, it aims to better understand how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they engage politically a more articulated and more comprehensive approach in which diplomats and policy makers have to be in the field, to be committed. This also means engaging religious communities on their own terms, listening to their concerns and entering into substantive dialogue about how to realize their legitimate aspirations and the reasons behind the necessity to “engage” with religious communities abroad. Also in the first part I have analyzed the evolution from the concept of religious freedom to the one of religious engagement in the USA, starting from the origin of the religious freedom principle and its first appearance in the official documents, retracing the timeline of the key national and multinational religious freedom developments and reporting some recommendations in order to define a new diplomatic strategy in this field, “taking religious engagement in foreign policy seriously”. On this point, as Sue Breeze claims “ As policymakers, I think we often don’t see things coming because we don’t understand enough of the religious mindset. It’s very tempting for diplomats based in Western secular states to dismiss religion as irrational, to rule it out as an influence, to treat it as sociology or something that you do not really need to engage with. And I think that’s a fundamental error”.

In the second part of the work I have analyzed the European experience, providing two different examples of approach on freedom of religion or belief through the French *pôle religions au Quai d'Orsay* and the Anglo- Saxon model. On an abstract level, European countries espouse a common similar notion of secular neutrality toward religion; however in practice they diverge considerably both from each other and from the United States, due to different histories, political cultures, constitutional systems and model of religion-state relations.

Also in this second part I have analyzed the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of religious freedom or belief, published in 2013, the most significant movement forward on freedom of religion or belief policy. The Guidelines, considered as the culmination of efforts began in 2009, provide EU officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief, to analyze cases and to react effectively to violations wherever they occur. With the mean of the Guidelines, the EU reaffirmed its determination to promote, in its external human rights policy, freedom of religion or belief “as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere”.

In the last section of this chapter I have described the new role of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union, assigned to Mr. Jan Figel, and the related challenges for a figure with a flexible and not yet defined role but with numerous and pressing issues to be addressed in the hybrid framework of the EU.

Finally in the third part, I have investigated the perspectives for a transatlantic cooperation looking at the similarities and differences of the two approaches under consideration: the American and the European one. We have found that the first difference between the two approaches is on the consideration of the religious issue itself, seen as a security problem from the American point of view while the EU considers the religious freedom issue more from a human rights perspective.

The contrasts continue also on the language level, with the different formulation of the concept in *religious freedom* for the American literature and freedom of religion or belief for the European one, which includes in its denomination also the atheists and the animists theories.

Despite the differences between the two approaches we join the thesis of F.Petito according to which “Diversity is a reality and it can be an asset” we just need to better understand and utilize it.



In this perspective, the call for religious engagement abroad represents the common ground on which build an effective model of transatlantic cooperation in protecting human rights and solve conflicts. The analysis in this text bring us to the conclusion that a real commitment and a conscious religious engagement represents an absolute imperative for the foreign policy of the whole international community. The new challenges of current times call for a new diplomatic strategy that not only need to be sustained by a deepen knowledge of freedom of religion or belief, but it is also based on a bottom-up engagement strategy that starts from the society and it commits in a deep process of listening to the religious communities on the ground.

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## Abstract

Religion has been the focal point of the daily lives of individuals and communities for millennia. Recent data show that the salience of religion is growing worldwide. As Scott Appleby claims, once considered a private matter by western policymakers, religion is now playing an increasingly influential role in the public sphere on many different levels. The global resurgence of religions in international affairs has been considered by the governments as a specific policy challenge that requires strategic thinking and appropriate policy responses: this new growing policy area is now often referred to as “religious engagement in foreign policy”<sup>1</sup>.

The thesis analyzes the relationship between religious engagement and diplomacy through a comparison between the American and the European approach on this issue.

The first part of the opening chapter introduces the concept of religious engagement, trying to sketch the theoretical framework of the concept and discussing the necessity to consider it as a new imperative for the Western countries foreign policy.

This work starts from the assumption that today religious freedom seems to have acquired the status of consensual default policy, connected from one side to the respect of religions themselves and from the other side as a species of genus, to a specific liberty inside the broader context of freedoms and rights, as a fundamental right to respect. Nevertheless, considering religious freedom as an absolute right definitely brings to the necessity of building a broader international consensus on the standards, methods and criteria for evaluating the respect of religious freedom in a given country.

To achieve the aim, I have started describing in the first part of the thesis the concept of religious engagement seen as a “new frontier of religious freedom”, because it goes beyond the concern on ‘what people believe’ and the efforts to guarantee religious freedom as a fundamental right to be exercised “by everyone and everywhere”. It aims to better understand how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they politically engage. This is a more articulated and more comprehensive approach in which diplomats and policy makers have to be in the field, to be committed. It also means engaging religious communities on their own terms, listening to their concerns and entering into substantive dialogue about how to realize their legitimate aspirations and the reasons behind the necessity to “engage” with religious communities abroad. As P. Ferrara and F. Petito claim, by religious engagement we do not mean the simple diplomatic activity of reaching out in order to cultivate good relations with religious actors. These

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<sup>1</sup>P. Mandaville, S. Silvestri, *Integrating religious engagement into diplomacy: challenges and opportunities*. Issues in Governance Studies, 67, 2015, pp. 1-13.

initiatives are already consolidated and they are part of the common diplomatic culture. Rather, religious engagement implies starting a profound conversation, in which the listening is the most relevant part.

Indeed, religious engagement is not to be interpreted as the mere activity of studying the role of religion in the diplomatic process, by interfaith religious leaders on government appointed committees. Rather, it is the direct commitment of religious leaders with diplomats and foreign policy analysts, working to find solutions to the complex foreign policy challenges that undermine the international stability and the conflict-resolution process.

As P. Ferrara and F. Petito argue, the realization that religion matters in international relations can be identified in three moments. The first moment was after the end of the Cold War, when emerged a predominant view of religion in the form of a “violent-prone form of politics”<sup>2</sup>. Examples of this view can be the religious-nationalist political lines in the Bosnian conflict to the worldwide rise of radical Islamism and terrorism. The second moment was when the scholars realized to have overlooked the positive political role that religion could play in the modernization and democratization process, and also in the development field in many parts of the world. In fact, as Scott Appleby argues, we have to bear in mind that religion is “political ambivalent”<sup>3</sup>: on the one hand it could be promoter of political violence and conflicts but on the other hand it could also promote non-violent engagement, development and peace-building actions.

For this reason, there is a need for a broader understanding of the nature of religion and how it impacts on the lives of global communities. “We need to move beyond a conversation about ‘what people believe’”<sup>4</sup> to a better understanding of how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they politically engage.

The third moment was when Western governments realized that they had failed in understanding that in “collapsing states”, local mainstream religious communities played a key role in providing education, sanitation and other social services when the state structure no longer existed. In this perspective, religious actors are central players in local, national, and international life, from providing basic services and impoverished areas of the world, influencing larger social, economic, and political developments and advancing the goals of peace, justice and freedom.

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<sup>2</sup> P. Ferrara, F. Petito, *An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects*, The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs, August 2015

<sup>3</sup> R. Scott Appleby. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000

<sup>4</sup> P. Finlow, G. Fitzgerald, Conference report *Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference*, Wilton Park, March 2014



Instead, Western policy makers framed religion only in a counter-terrorism perspective, not looking at it as part of the solution to build stability but just as part of the problem of security. In addition religions, despite their dogmatic contents, represent one of the most dynamic factors that can facilitate change and mobility within large civilizations and according to F. Petito, this new religious dynamicity could be a potential asset in the field of international relations. Indeed, religion can represent a resource for diplomacy and in this perspective, diplomats should perceive religion and core religious values as an opportunity for discovering a new language for such engagement.

In this perspective, the mistakes of the past highlight the necessity of a new diplomatic comprehensive approach, based on the idea of religious engagement, in order to promote development, advance human rights, prevent and resolve conflict.

As P. Ferrara and F. Petito claim “the transition from an understanding of the political role of religion in international affairs beyond the concept of religion as a security problem, towards the concept and practice of religious engagement is not easy”. The second part of the first chapter analyzes how the U.S.A faced this challenge, focusing on the development from religious freedom to religious engagement in the USA. Starting from the origin of the religious freedom principle in the U.S.A. and its first appearance in the official documents, I retraced the timeline of the key national and multinational religious freedom developments and reported some recommendations in order to define a new diplomatic strategy in this field, “taking religious engagement in foreign policy seriously”. In particular, I examined the American experience starting from the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998 up to the State Department new “US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement” in 2013 and the birth of what is now the Office of Religion and Global Affairs. The creation of this Office marked the shift from the broader concept of religious freedom, and the question of religion as a security problem, to the one of religious engagement. In this perspective, the United States developed a new diplomatic approach avoiding direct application of military, diplomatic and political power to compel change, working at the intersection of religion and foreign policy through a strategy that prioritize the engagement of religious communities from below, enhancing their active participation as constructive change agents in their own societies.

The chapter concludes discussing some recommendations from the Report by the Chicago Council “Engaging religious community abroad: a new imperative for US foreign policy”, about the steps that can be taken inside the United States to build the capacity to engage with religious communities and guidelines for using this capacity effectively.

The second chapter of the thesis deals with the European experience in facing the challenge of religious engagement in diplomacy, considering the obstacles for a coherent and common foreign policy also in the field of religion. I started the analysis providing two different examples of approach on freedom of religion or belief, the French *pôle religions* au Quai d'Orsay and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. They represent two distinguished approaches to religion in society: the secular and civic integration view adopted by France, which considers that the universal values prevail over the rights of different communities and the communitarian Anglo-Saxon model, adopted by the UK. According to Sara Silvestri, before engaging it is necessary to clarify which kind of secularism we are embracing because, how we are understanding secularism and the boundaries between religion and politics is one of the challenge that we have to face in engaging religious actors. Despite the secularization basic thesis: the more modernity, the less religion, we can affirm that we do not live in a secular age and that in the last quarter of century religion is back at the centre stage of international politics. In this perspective, we can identify two kinds of secularism: the assertive and the passive one. The kind of secularism that has been dominant in France and in other countries of Europe was the assertive one, according to which the state is supposed to play an assertive role to eliminate religion from the public square. On the other hand, in the United States the passive secularism has been dominant, therefore the state is supposed to play a passive role by tolerating religious or secular discourses if they appear in the public sphere. This latter kind of secularism ensures a more inclusionary understanding of state-religion relations and gives more space for both religious majorities and minorities, not imposing itself a comprehensive doctrine. On an abstract level, European countries espouse a common similar notion of secular neutrality toward religion; however in practice they diverge considerably both from each other and from the United States, due to different histories, political cultures, constitutional systems and model of religion-state relations.

According to Peter Berger, we rather live in a pluralistic age which creates specific challenges for every religious faith and every religious tradition. In his view, this immediately relates to religious freedom, because religious pluralism and the relationship between religion and secularity need to be politically managed. In this context we consider the definition according to which religious pluralism means that individuals are constantly confronted with others whose faith is different, arguing that an effective way to avoid contrast and misunderstanding is through a conscious commitment in religious engagement.

On this point, as Sue Breeze claims “ As policymakers, I think we often don't see things coming because we don't understand enough of the religious mindset. It's very tempting for diplomats

based in Western secular states to dismiss religion as irrational, to rule it out as an influence, to treat it as sociology or something that you do not really need to engage with. And I think that's a fundamental error".

Then, I moved on to the European Union approach to the religious question, discussing the EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in June 2013. The Guidelines explain what the international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief are, and give clear political lines to officials of EU institutions and EU Member States, to be used in contacts with third countries and with international and civil society organizations. The Guidelines, considered as the culmination of efforts began in 2009, provide EU officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief, to analyze cases and to react effectively to violations wherever they occur. With the mean of the Guidelines, the EU reaffirmed its determination to promote, in its external human rights policy, freedom of religion or belief "as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere".

In the last part of the chapter, I analyzed the new figure of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union, describing the role and the mandate of the Special Envoy and also discussing the challenges that this new figure will have to face in carrying out his tasks in the field of religious engagement. This new position, assigned to Mr. Jan Figel, is characterized by a flexible and not yet defined role that could allow the Special Evoy to shape his work according to the pressing issues that need to be addressed in the hybrid framework of the EU.

The conclusive chapter examines the perspective for a transatlantic cooperation in international religious freedom, through a comparison between the American and the European approach. In this part of the thesis I focused on the differences and the common points of the two approaches, considering that even if the role of religion results different on the two sides of the Atlantic, both American and European societies face similar challenges to religious liberty. Finally, in the third part I have investigated the perspectives for a transatlantic cooperation looking at the similarities and differences of the two approaches under consideration: the American and the European one. We have found that the first difference between the two approaches is on the consideration of the religious issue itself, seen as a security problem from the American point of view while the EU considers the religious freedom issue more from a human rights perspective.

The contrast continues also on the language level, with the different formulation of the concept in *religious freedom* for the American literature and freedom of religion or belief for the European one, which includes in its denomination also the atheists and the animists theories.

The chapter concludes looking at the measures that are bringing the USA and the EU toward a model of transatlantic cooperation aimed to engage religious community abroad, focusing on the necessary skills that government officials, diplomats and civil servants need for a better understanding of the role of religion in the countries they work and to enforce common foreign policy interests.

The goal of the thesis is to analyzing the recent trend to move beyond the traditional approach of the government in their foreign policy on the relationship between diplomacy and religion, recognizing the value of religious engagement in international affairs and strengthening its role in managing the crisis and in facing the challenges of our current times.

Despite the differences between the two approaches we join the position of F.Petito according to whom “Diversity is a reality and it can be an asset” we just need to better understand and utilize it.

As Peter Mandeville argues, there was a distinctive up search on the part of policy makers both in the USA and in the European countries on the question of how and whether it might be possible to build a greater awareness and attention to the issue of religion in the context of diplomacy. In this perspective, shared values on promoting freedom of religion or belief globally present a unique opportunity for joint action between Europe and the US and, as Knox Thames claims, networking efforts multiply the effectiveness of this kind of bilateral engagements. Indeed, traditional bilateral engagements with countries of concern are needed and should be increased, but they can be more effective and impactful if pursued in concert with others.

In this perspective, the call for religious engagement abroad represents the common ground on which countries can build an effective model of transatlantic cooperation in protecting human rights and solve conflicts. The analysis in this text bring us to the conclusion that a real commitment and a conscious religious engagement represents an absolute imperative for the foreign policy of the whole international community. The new challenges of current times call for a new diplomatic strategy that not only needs to be sustained by a deepen knowledge of freedom of religion or belief, but it is also based on a bottom-up engagement strategy that starts from the society and it commits, in a deep process of listening, to the religious communities on the ground.

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