CHAPTER 14

The European Union as a Space of (In)Securities: Analysing Political Reasoning by Lithuanian Catholics

Rosita Garškaitė-Antonowicz

1 Introduction

"Let's not delude ourselves, we have not entered paradise, nor the Gardens of Eden, but only the fair of opportunities. … This fair of opportunities is also a great moral challenge. The question will arise even more sharply, more painfully, more frequently: for what purpose do we use freedom and prosperity?" These are the words of the former archbishop of Vilnius, Audrys Juozas Bačkis, transmitted via television and radio on the occasion of Lithuania's accession to the European Union in 2004. He also expressed his joy and pride for the fact that Lithuanian people finally came back to the 'European home', which was in line with general support for integrationist ideas from Catholic bishops. The year before, in the EU membership referendum, the Catholic Church used its, at the time, authoritative voice and nationwide network to encourage citizens' participation and voting 'Yes'. However, the warning in the above quote demonstrates the defensive disposition towards the EU characteristic of official Catholic discourse. Right from the beginning, the hierarchy was cautious about the effects of integration into Europe on Lithuanian society. Another thing worth noting in the above quote is a vivid spatial imagination. The European Union is more than a political entity; it is a space simultaneously perceived as home and a challenging fair of opportunities.

Scholars have repeatedly shown that Catholics are among the 'warmest' towards the European Union compared to believers affiliated with other or no religious traditions, especially in countries where Catholicism is dominant.[1]

1 Brent F. Nelsen and James L. Guth, *Religion and the Struggle for European Union: Confessional Culture and the Limits of Integration* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015); Brent F. Nelsen, James L. Guth, and Brian Highsmith, "Does Religion Still Matter? Religion and Public Attitudes toward Integration in Europe", *Politics and Religion* 4, no. 1 (April 2011): 1–26; Brent F. Nelsen, James L. Guth, and Cleveland R. Fraser, "Does Religion Matter?: Christianity and Public Support for the European Union", *European Union Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 29, 2001): 191–217; Margarete Scherer, "The Religious Context in Explaining Public Support for

© ROSITA GARŠKAITĖ-ANTONOWICZ, 2025 | DOI:10.1163/9789004731899_015
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Although Catholicism as a confessional culture has ceased to provide support for the EU among millennials, the positive influence of religious commitment on support persists.[2] This is not surprising, considering the Vatican's pro-EU position and the historical role that Christian Democrats played in the construction of the EU.[3]

Yet contradictions arise between their religious worldview and the values of the 'secular and secularising'[4] polity regarding sexual morality and reproductive matters, the regulation of religious affairs in the public sphere, and issues of institutional memory such as the refusal to mention the 'Christian roots' of Europe in the failed European Constitution, and later in the Treaty of Lisbon. Moreover, the EU is presented as a threat to religious and national values in some Catholic discourse, most notably in Poland,[5] and right-wing populists employ references to Christianity as an identity marker to shape antagonism between their nation and the EU elites not only in the Eastern part of Europe.[6]

---

the European Union", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 4 (2015): 893–909; Willfried Spohn, Matthias Koenig, and Wolfgang Knöbl, *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*. *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Siobhan McAndrew, "Belonging, Believing, Behaving, and Brexit: Channels of Religiosity and Religious Identity in Support for Leaving the European Union", *British Journal of Sociology* 71, no. 5 (2020).

2 Brent F. Nelsen, and James L. Guth, "Losing Faith: Religion and Attitudes toward the European Union in Uncertain Times", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 909–24.

3 Petr Kratochvíl, and Tomáš Doležal, *The European Union and the Catholic Church* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015); Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, *What Is Christian Democracy?: Politics, Religion and Ideology* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4 François Foret, *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 280.

5 Agnieszka Szumigalska, "The Polish Catholic Church's Perception of the Processes of EU Integration and Europeanisation in the Context of Traditional Norms and Values", *Religion, State and Society* 43, no. 4 (October 2, 2016): 342–56; Guerra, Simona, "Religion and the EU: A Commitment under Stress", in *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon*, eds. John FitzGibbon, Benjamin Leruth, and Nick Startin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Joanna Konieczna-Sałamatin, and Maja Sawicka, "The East of the West, or the West of the East? Attitudes toward the European Union and European Integration in Poland after 2008", *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 35, no. 2 (June 4, 2020): 363–83.

6 Christian Lamour, "Orbán Urbi et Orbi: Christianity as a Nodal Point of Radical-Right Populism", *Politics and Religion*, 2021, 1–27; Andrea Molle, "Religion and Right-Wing Populism in Italy: Using 'Judeo-Christian Roots' to Kill the European Union", *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 151–68; Marta Kotwas and Jan Kubik, "Symbolic Thickening of Public Culture and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Poland", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 33, no. 2 (April 16, 2019): 435–71.

In Lithuania, far-right political actors also attempt to portray themselves as defenders of 'Christian values' inherent to the Lithuanian nation from allegedly foreign and threatening ideologies originating from the EU: globalism, multiculturalism, and 'genderism'.[7] However, they do not target the EU *per se* or Lithuania's membership thereof, because neither mainstream political parties nor the society in general are polarised on the EU issue. Since the restoration of independence in 1990, Lithuanians have been among the most supportive of EU membership.[8] Up to this day, the European project does not suffer from a lack of legitimacy, and even the 2008 financial crisis did not shake Lithuanians' confidence in the EU.[9] It is no surprise that political manifestations of Euroscepticism are marginal in a small post-communist country neighbouring the Russian Federation.[10] Because of size, historical experience, and geographic location, security concerns motivate pro-European stances among political elites and broader society.[11]

Against this background, I ask how Catholics in Lithuania perceive and navigate possible tensions around European integration. Regarding religion, most Lithuanians affiliate with the Roman Catholic Church (74%, according to the 2021 Census), but as in most European countries, the individualisation and privatisation of religion are present.[12] The description of "belonging without attending" introduced by Marko Veković in his chapter on Serbia suits to characterise religiosity among Lithuanian Catholics as well. The majority are so-called cultural or nominal Catholics, whereas active or devout believers who practise

7 Rosita Garškaitė, and Jogilė Ulinskaitė, "In the Name of the Family", in *CBEES State of the Region Report 2021: The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space. A Comparative Study of Far-Right Movements and Identity in the Region*, ed. Ninna Mörner (Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEES, Södertörn University, 2022), 140–142.

8 Cladas Gaidys, "25-Eri Požiūrio į Lietuvos Narystę Europos Sąjungoje Tyrimų Metai: 1991–2016", *Filosofija. Sociologija*, no. 4 (2016): 305–307.

9 Mažvydas Jastramskis, "Lietuvos Visuomenės Ir Politinių Partijų Nuostatos ES Atžvilgiu 2009–2013 M", in *Lietuva Europos Sąjungoje: Metraštis 2009–2013 Metais*, (2014), 18–22.

10 Ingrida Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, "Eurosceptics in Lithuania : On the Margins of Politics?" *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities* 3, no. 4 (2014): 19, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-403079.

11 Gediminas Vitkus, "Small Is Small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics", in *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering Issues, People and Stereotypes*, eds. Karlis Bukovskis and Aldis Austers (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017); Ramūnas Vilpišauskas, "Lithuania and the EU: Pragmatic Support Driven by Security Concerns", in *The Future of Europe: Views from the Capitals*, eds. P. Kaeding, M., Pollak, and J. Schmidt (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan,2019).

12 Rūta Žiliukaitė,"Religinės Vertybės", in *Lietuvos Visuomenės Vertybių Kaita per Dvidešimt Nepriklausomybės Metų*, eds. Rūta Žiliukaitė, Arūnas Poviliūnas, and Aida Savicka (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2016), 164–165.

their faith regularly constitute less than 13%.[13] In this chapter, I focus on the latter group because the more deeply one is embedded in a religious community, the more 'being a religious person' will take priority in one's social identity, and consequently in interpreting politics.

2 Theoretical-Methodological Approach and Data

To achieve an in-depth understanding of lay political reasoning about the EU and its interplay with Catholic identity, I start from two essential premises. First, religion provides individuals with cultural resources to articulate their relations to themselves, to others, and to mundane phenomena such as politics. As Ann Swidler puts it: "culture has enduring effects on those who hold it, not by shaping the ends they pursue, but by providing the characteristic repertoire from which they build lines of action".[14] Second, everyday[15] political thinking is not the internal, passive, and solitary affair illustrated by the famous Rodin sculpture 'Le Penseur'. According to Michael Billig, it is socially constructed because we employ cultural resources that are available to us and it is discursive, occurring in conversation with oneself or others.[16] Hence, drawing on the rhetorical-discursive approach in which "the words of the discourse are the thoughts, and the pattern of the argument is a record of the activity of thinking".[17]

The empirical data consists of in-depth interviews with 40 devout Lithuanian Catholics: people who attend Mass at least every Sunday, take active part in their parish life or other faith-based community and prioritise their religious identity. In *Schützian* terms, they can be positioned in the continuum between 'men (and women) on the street' and 'well-informed citizens'.[18] Although none of them were experts, some were highly interested in politics and aspired to

13 Eglė Laumenskaitė, *Krikščioniškumas Kaip Socialinių Laikysenų Veiksnys Totalitarinėje Ir Posovietinėje Visuomenėje* (Vilnius: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija, 2015), 70–98.

14 Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies", *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 284.

15 I use 'everyday' to describe thinking and talking produced by non-experts in non-formal interactions that do not have to occur daily.

16 Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142–145; 228–229.

17 Michael Billig, *Ideology and Opinions: Studies in Rhetorical Psychology* (Sage Publications, 1991), 191.

18 Alfred Schütz, "The Well-Informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge", *Social Research* 13, no. 4 (1946): 465–467, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40958880.

have a well-informed opinion, but the level of their interest varied. I recruited informants through parishes in two small towns and through religious communities in the capital city Vilnius. They aged from 19 to 68, the median age of the participants at the time of the interview was 45. Distributed rather representatively in terms of locality and gender (23 women and 17 men), most of the informants had completed higher education, only 4 participated with secondary and 2 with vocational training. In addition, informants differed in professional profile (including students and retired people) and partisanship. All were born and educated in Lithuania; some lived abroad for educational or professional reasons and came back for good.

Interviews were conducted in 2020–2022; they were tape-recorded and lasted from half an hour to an hour and a half. I aspired to collect interviews that resembled spontaneous conversational discourse. The topic guide contained questions and prompts on the meanings of European integration, Lithuanian membership, Brexit, European identity, connection of faith to politics, etc. My role was that of a good listener, offering a topic to discuss from time to time or guiding participants back to the main subject, but mainly asking them to expand on their points, explain what they meant, give examples of generalisations they made or – vice versa – spell out the implications of examples. After the first round of interviews, I also started to bring up the positions articulated by previous informants (some people said to me that …) in order to encourage a more argumentative style of reasoning.

Inductive interpretive analysis grew out of a search for patterns across interviews. I started by closely reading the transcripts and conducting a thematic analysis to identify the main themes through which positive or negative orientation towards the EU is constructed. Following the thematic overview, I carried out a more detailed rhetorical analysis of the discourse based on the Catholic repertoire, examining the argumentative lines, tropes, and commonplaces that anchored it.

3 Interpretive Findings

3.1 *Security Dilemma*

One of the most salient themes structuring everyday reasoning about the EU was "benefit". The importance of the utilitarian dimension in popular EU support has been well-researched,[19] and the primacy of pragmatic motives in the

19 For overviews see Anders Ejrnæs, and Mads Dagnis Jensen, "Divided but United: Explaining Nested Public Support for European Integration", *West European Politics* 42, no. 7

Central-Eastern European context has been demonstrated repeatedly.[20] Individuals who perceive economic gain from EU membership on a personal or state level tend to be the most supportive. My informants illustrated this well-established finding by talking at length about "opportunities" provided by the EU for them or their milieu to travel, study and work abroad as well as the financial support their country received through membership. Closely related was a national security theme encompassing both economic and political aspects.

For instance, when discussing Brexit, informants implicitly compared the United Kingdom to Lithuania by emphasising that the former "is not going to disappear", "will survive", and "can manage on its own". The latter, on the contrary, is not big, strong, rich, and powerful, therefore "it would be afraid to withdraw". They described their own country primarily as "small", but also "weak", "insignificant", and even "poor". In addition, discussion of Lithuanian EU membership was organised around such key phrases as "sense of security" and "there is no other way for us". My interlocutors argued that we are better off "under the EU wing" because: a) small states, in general, have to "pal up" with bigger ones to persist in the hostile international arena, b) EU membership protects Lithuania from the military threat of Russia, and c) it helps to overcome the negative "heritage" of the Soviet past in many areas of private and public life. Quite often the comparison with Belarus occurred, a neighbouring post-communist country and a stark contrast economically and politically with the European path taken by Lithuania in 2004.

Even before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, some informants mentioned that, if not for EU membership, Lithuania would be in Ukraine's stead. Since 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and started an undeclared war in the Donbas region, a condition of "sovereign uncertainty" became characteristic of political rhetoric, public space and everyday life in Lithuania.[21] Although no actual armed conflict is taking place here, there is heightened insecurity. This condition was vividly articulated in

(November 10, 2019): 1390–1419; Sara B. Hobolt, and Catherine E De Vries, "Public Support for European Integration", *Annual Review of Political Science* (2016).

20 Piret Ehin, "Determinants of Public Support for EU Membership: Data from the Baltic Countries", *European Journal of Political Research* 40, no. 1 (August 1, 2001): 31–56; Matthew Loveless, "Agreeing in Principle: Utilitarianism and Economic Values as Support for the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 4 (September 1, 2010): 1083–1106.

21 Neringa Klumbytė, "Sovereign Uncertainty and the Dangers to Liberalism at the Baltic Frontier", *Slavic Review* 78, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 337.

the accounts of those research participants who had lived under Soviet occupation and evaluated that period negatively. One interlocuter in her early seventies told me that she was very worried about the UK leaving the EU and then about the conflict in Ukraine, because she felt "this threat of disappearance, this fear".

Another salient theme concerned the change of values in Lithuanian society due to EU integration. Informants spoke about the positive (openness, respect for self and others, various freedoms etc.) and negative aspects of this process, the latter chiefly related to sexual morality, secularity, and to a lesser extent – national culture.[22] The verbs employed were revealing, for instance, in cases of perceived positive change, the EU "recommends", "teaches", "shows example" and we "learn", "take example", "assimilate"; in the negative context, the EU "propagates", "pushes", "intervenes", "makes demands", "instructs" etc. The minority of informants celebrated all changes associated with the EU as an inevitable part of becoming more like the West and as healthy for their country; whereas the majority expressed a strong to slight feeling of unease. They emphasised that the change of values "depresses", "worries", "frightens" them, or makes them feel "animosity", "hurt" or "a sense of insecurity".

Generally, my interlocuters deplored secularity as privatisation of religion. In their view, Christianity is "diminished, pushed away" or "not respected, valued enough" in the EU. The examples given involve EU institutions not being willing to prioritise Christianity, debates around Christian symbols in public places, and a general trend in public opinion to celebrate dechristianisation. Spatial imagination was behind this discourse, as Eastern Europe is treated as less secular, with Poland being the finest example. Expressing their fears of living in secularised space, they drew on sacred-secular dichotomy, although these layers do not have to be mutually exclusive and can co-exist, as a form of transliminal space.[23]

Chronological imagination was also present when informants spoke about the importance of religious freedom by linking the possible future of Lithuania in the EU with the past in the USSR. They were afraid of being forced to privatise their beliefs or even renounce them as they or their parents and grandparents were obliged to under Soviet occupation. Some informants shared their

22 Some conveyed concerns over the status of the Lithuanian language or globalisation in general, saying that people in Europe are becoming more alike and national differences are melting away, but they were not as prevalent. Interestingly, a few informants reflected on how their worries about national culture they have had before accession were not confirmed.

23 Marietta van der Tol and Philip Gorski, "Secularisation as the Fragmentation of the Sacred and of Sacred Space", *Religion, State & Society* 50, no. 5 (2022): 495–512.

personal experiences of feeling intimidated to talk from their Christian perspectives in Lithuania already. It can be inferred that this possibility of becoming a religious minority is terrifying for the better part of them.

In recent years, as heated debates about the Istanbul Convention and the gender-neutral civil partnership bill[24] have received much attention in the media, the theme of sexual morality has anchored discontent with the EU. Here is how one informant in his mid-fifties built an opposition between the EU and Christianity while talking about the notion of family: "The EU views it in a liberal way and the Christian world – contrary to that". Many of the interlocutors were concerned that legal recognition of same-sex relationships would threaten their right to speak their minds freely about sexual morality or raise their children in line with the Catholic understanding of a family as a union of man and woman. They markedly drew on Catholic repertoire[25] in talking about homosexual acts as sinful and in stressing the importance of gender complementarity. In the interviews, the EU was often depicted as only "caring for sexual minority rights" instead of "defending the family", and LGBT+ people were defined as the collective 'other' as if their aspirations and those of Catholics are mutually exclusive. It can be said that this constructed antagonism elucidates the centrality of sexual morality norms in defining the symbolic boundaries of Lithuanian Catholic identity.

In addition, many informants were prone to present these norms as distinctive part of national culture, implying that any changes regarding sexual morality would destroy a valuable part of Lithuanian culture. One informant, a young man in his mid-thirties, put it like this: "In some countries, people do not have problems with these sensitive issues [life, abortion, family], in Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands. That's fine – let them live happily. But in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Hungary, we see that people think differently; therefore, [the EU] should not try to reconstruct their country, culture and attitudes". In his view, Lithuania can integrate into Europe in various spheres, but the 'national culture' is a red line which cannot be crossed. As observed by Petr Kratochvíl in the second chapter of this volume, the nation is seen as a "commonsensical bulwark" against liberal tendencies. It's a well-known populist strategy to "naturalise" certain conventions or communities and promise to

24 In Lithuania there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships to this day, and the Istanbul Convention, although signed, is not yet ratified.

25 This does not mean that the resources mentioned are the only ones provided by Catholicism. As do all real cultures, it "contain diverse, often conflicting symbols, rituals, stories, and guides to action" (Swidler. "Culture in Action", 277). For example, few of my informants while talking about same-sex unions drew on the principles of human dignity and charity backed by stories from the life of Jesus.

defend them because they are allegedly under attack. This stress on the natural resonated well among many Catholics I interviewed.

Hence, despite the manifested EU support, latent scepticism lurks in connection to perceived threats to their Catholic identity. Against the backdrop of the concept of ontological security, increasingly used by International Relations scholars to analyse the European polity,[26] I argue that the EU is simultaneously understood by my informants as providing existential safeguards and posing ontological threats. Borrowing from Giddens,[27] who defines ontological security as a subjective sense of order and continuity in regard to an individual's biography, IR research extrapolates a state's need for it from the individual level and introduces additional dimensions to security (in this academic field traditionally understood as physical). A sharp distinction is drawn between "security as survival" and "security not of the body but of the self".[28]

Existential security may be seen by my informants as having been achieved through EU membership. Still, the normative threats associated with it are viewed as undermining the capacity to maintain a sense of continuity and certainty. A fragment from an interview with a young, educated woman in her late twenties vividly illustrates this security dilemma:

> Sometimes we talk with friends that the Soviet Union,[29] the Russian side, is to be feared, but the same is true of the European side. We are cautious about it [EU] because it brings its beliefs, and you have to obey. That is the feeling. … The fact that we are physically free is fantastic, thank God. But whether we are spiritually free, I don't know. And which of the captivities is worse – that is a good question.

---

26 Christian Kaunert, Joana de Deus Pereira, and Mike Edwards, "Thick Europe, Ontological Security and Parochial Europe: The Re-Emergence of Far-Right Extremism and Terrorism after the Refugee Crisis of 2015", *European Politics and Society* 23, no. 1 (2022): 42–61; Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen, "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: 'Ontological (in)Security in the European Union'", *European Security* 27, no. 3 (2018): 249–6; Vincent Della Sala, "Homeland Security: Territorial Myths and Ontological Security in the European Union", *Journal of European Integration* 39, no. 5 (2017): 545–58.

27 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Modern Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 311.

28 Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma", *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (July 24, 2006): 344.

29 The informant was well aware that the Soviet Union no longer exits; mentioning it should be interpreted as negative labelling of contemporary Russia.

3.2 *Navigating Security Dilemma*

Despite this prevalent security dilemma, only 2 out of 40 research participants were hard Eurosceptics, insisting that economic and security benefits are inadequate compensation for the perceived harm to Christian and national values and no longer seeing any point in EU membership. The more significant part of my interlocutors who considered pros and cons during the interviews could be described as more or less critical supporters. One commonplace which structured their observations (and also their support) was the founding narrative of Europe. Some informants referred to the abstract "Christian roots" or "Christian foundation" of the EU, while others expressed knowledge either about the founding fathers – Christian Democrats (Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer) or about the Christian symbolism of the EU flag. Moreover, the EU was represented as acting in accordance with Christian principles (such as taking care of the weaker, going beyond self-interest, living peacefully and in communion).

I argue that this narrative about the EU as a Christian project circulating among active Catholics strengthens their identification with a polity and allows them to 'own it'. Even if confusion or outright disappointment was expressed about the EU renouncing its Christian roots, the foundation was still appreciated, and the concern about the future was deeply ingrained. The economic and security benefits, together with this narrative from the Catholic repertoire, function as the primary sources of support for the EU. For instance, an informant, 63, convinced that Europe is collapsing as a consequence of low morality and religiosity, also expressed a strong attachment to this polity. He sees himself as a peacemaker who has a responsibility to calm down his own peers in criticising the EU. In his mind, one has to fight for "Christian values" but in a peaceful manner to avoid destruction. The Polish example is inspiring for him:

> I will support [the EU] no matter what because I will always find people who think alike. Now I see Poles. Most of them want to remain in the EU. … I am truly for us living in the united Europe, but our distinctiveness should not be touched. I don't know how to say it … I certainly feel European, and I support being a part of the EU. Because … What can you do alone? You would not be able to show yourself. No withdrawal. By no means. We need to communicate …

To navigate between existential and ontological needs, informants also drew on the Catholic repertoire. The belief in a world supposed to be hostile to

the followers of Christ was very useful because, if Christians 'do not belong to the world', challenges to their faith or even persecutions are inevitable. In the interview material, ontological threats linked to the EU are interpreted as consolidating and purifying their own faith and preventing a comfortable Catholic life, even referred to as a "gift". In Western Europe, the faith is challenged – a parish priest told me – therefore, it can be more 'authentic'. The following excerpt from a conversation with a young woman working in a Catholic institution demonstrates how spiritual benefit shines through the negative political trends:

> Christ has already won, His victory is already here. That brings peace [to my mind]. It's very difficult with a Christian – you can kill him, but he will still enter eternal life and even gain a crown of martyrdom. The challenge is not what keeps you away from believing. On the contrary, a challenge is something that strengthens your faith. You have more work to do. And sometimes, it is even easier this way. I think the very bad times were when the Church had lots of power. Hypocrisy was present. The challenge, I think, purifies us, and you see more clearly where you have to go to be an apostle, where you have to go to speak to people because they don't know Christ, they don't know the way.

According to the above-quoted interlocutor, this type of mindset is the first of two things allowing her to accept the undesirable change of values in Lithuanian society. The second is also substantiated by referring to faith. Only God can rule justly and faultlessly, but Jesus did not try to rule over an earthly kingdom. Consequently, it is impossible for human governments to be perfect. As another informant, a father of four, put it:

> I support the EU, but I keep my identity, I have my own opinion, I want to be part of the process, I want to vote, I want to be able to have a different opinion, I want to raise my children according to my moral values. But still, there is my support … Because this is not a paradise where everything is perfect.

The remaining strategies for mitigating ontological threats were of a different kind. Some participants counterbalanced their concerns by affirming that the EU itself should not be blamed for changing values, as responsibility is borne by part of the elite or by particular political powers. Furthermore, some blame was put on the modern world itself, referring to "the spirit of the times"

or the "West". One more strategy was to emphasise the agency of the Lithuanian elite. Here are examples from three separate conversations:

> (*Sighs*). But aren't the same things happening *elsewhere in the world*, not necessarily in the EU? I think there is some kind of global problem in the world where people want to be very free.
>
> It is not the European Union itself, but *certain trends* [that are hostile]. After all, the European Union was founded on Christianity. Its founding fathers were also Catholic. And that flag, as far as I understand it, is also a sign of the Virgin Mary.
>
> Today I am pro-EU [...] As for these threats and fears, I think *I am more afraid of my government* here than I am of the government there. The Poles, for example, they can still ... If the local government has the backbone, they can stand up for their own things.

Finally, the security dilemma was navigated by weighing the economic and security benefits and other opportunities that the participants personally or the country received against disappointments and concerns. The following examples demonstrate two different modes. The first informant chose existential security over ontological because in her (and some others) thinking such a small and poor state is always a part of a bigger state's sphere of influence. If one does not want to "return to Russians" or "become dependent on China", one has to prioritise EU membership. The second interlocutor also spoke a lot in these geopolitical terms as well as economic benefits. In her opinion, the "value change" is a price Lithuania has to pay for all the goods received. By employing a logic of exchange, she stayed ambiguous towards the EU. Yet at the end of the interview, when asked whether she would vote in a hypothetical membership referendum 'Yes', as she did two decades ago, her answer was affirmative.

> I think it is very easy to say 'no' [to the EU], but to whom to say 'yes'? Since I don't have anyone to say yes to, I don't resist. And I teach my children that. They tell me: 'I don't want that, I don't want that.' And I say: 'So what do you want?' That's bad, that's bad, and who knows what's good. You have to have a proposal. Give me an alternative. *I don't know what the alternative is* ... You still *have to be united with somebody*.
>
> I think the value change is invisible, but it is happening intensively. This is the downside of the European Union. *It's like an exchange*: you want the benefit, the support, but you are forced to follow the rules of the game that ... are not good. You wouldn't say that you sell your soul, but fundamentally it is like that. You sell your values.

4 Conclusions

The bottom-up perspective invoked in this chapter enables one to go beyond the discourse of far-right populists who claim to speak on behalf of 'ordinary people' and target the EU by referencing to Christianity. It also challenges simplistic explanations for citizens' political opinions and inclinations which assign them to clear-cut categories of 'euro-optimists' or 'eurosceptics'. In fact, people who participated in this study weaved quite varied combinations of views – critical as well as appreciative – into intelligible perspectives.

The interpretive analysis of in-depth interviews with active Lithuanian Catholics suggests that their faith can both generate normative concerns related to the EU and contribute to the mitigation of perceived threats. On the one hand, integration into Europe is blamed for the shrinking status of Christianity and sexual freedom at odds with religious morality. On the other, a narrative about the Christian roots of Europe creates a strong attachment to the EU despite the disappointment with the EU 'turning its back' on it. The understanding of Christians as not of this world also contributed to a more moderate view towards some of the political concerns. These are just a few examples from the Catholic repertoire employed in everyday political reasoning.

Specific to many Lithuanian Catholics is a security dilemma in which the EU is simultaneously perceived as a space of existential security and ontological insecurity. Although the financial aspect of EU support is not very sustainable (the Lithuanian economy is growing, and from 2028, the country is supposed to transition from net beneficiary to net payer to the EU budget), the security aspect will remain relevant. EU as existential safeguard is expected to anchor Lithuanian political thinking because neither the size of the country nor its geographical position is going to change. Moreover, in the face of global challenges such as pandemics, rapid technological advancement, climate crisis, growing inequalities, etc., a politically unified Europe may be trusted more to solve constantly emerging new issues.

As long as Catholics do not choose the "Benedict Option" (a defensive withdrawal from contemporary society proposed by influential American Christian and far-right thinker Rod Dreher), we can expect them to prioritise existential needs of their fellow citizens over their own unease with the EU values. While currently their views on sexual freedoms coincide with the majority of society, the young generation in Lithuania is much more liberal-minded[30] and much

30 Ainė Ramonaitė, "Laisvės Partijos Fenomenas: Naujumo Efektas Ar Naujos Vertybinės Takoskyros Pradžia?" *Politologija* 102, no. 2 (October 18, 2021): 23–24.

less religious.[31] Even if the dominant mode of Catholicism does not change, believers will definitely find themselves in a very different political landscape in two decades or so.

Finally, this particular Lithuanian case illustrates a broader temptation for defensive attitudes vis-à-vis the EU that many Christians in Europe face. Although it does not necessarily convert to explicit Euroscepticism, a political imaginary of 'Christian Europe' is strongly lamented together with normative superiority. My analysis shows that a good deal of Catholics are not ready to adopt a new minority status in transliminal European space, which is neither sacred nor secular but layered with "various ascriptions of meaning, even inherently incompatible ones".[32] In this chapter, the analysis focused on what I believe is a rather dominant security dilemma regarding the EU among Catholics in Lithuania. Nonetheless, alternative voices, more open to the idea of different layers of meaning co-existing in the European space, are by no means to be explored in further research. It is worth deliberatively examining the diversity within the Catholic tradition.

Bibliography

Accetti, C.I. (2019). *What Is Christian Democracy?: Politics, Religion and Ideology*. Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and Opinions: Studies in Rhetorical Psychology*. Sage Publications.

Billig, M. (1996). *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ehin, P. (2001). "Determinants of Public Support for EU Membership: Data from the Baltic Countries". *European Journal of Political Research* 40, no. 1 (August 1): 31–56.

Ejrnæs, A., and M.D. Jensen. (2019). "Divided but United: Explaining Nested Public Support for European Integration". *West European Politics* 42, no. 7 (November 10): 1390–1419.

31 According to Pew Research Center, adults younger than 40 in Lithuania still highly affiliate with religion, but the percentage of them praying daily is 4 times smaller and the share attending the Church weekly is 6 times smaller compared to older generations. As in many other nations, the age gap in religious commitment is rather large. See Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World", 13 June 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

32 Van Der Tol and Gorski, "Secularisation as the Fragmentation of the Sacred and of Sacred Space", 508.

Foret, F. (2015). *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy*. *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy*. Cambridge University Press.

Gaidys, V. (2016). "25-Eri Požiūrio į Lietuvos Narystę Europos Sąjungoje Tyrimų Metai: 1991–2016". *Filosofija. Sociologija*, no. 4: 304–12.

Garškaitė, R., and J. Ulinskaitė. (2022). "In the Name of the Family". In: N. Mörner (ed.). *CBEES State of the Region Report 2021: The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space. A Comparative Study of Far-Right Movements and Identity in the Region*. Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEES, Södertörn University. Pp. 106–14.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Modern Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Guerra, S. (2017). "Religion and the EU: A Commitment under Stress". In: J. FitzGibbon, B. Leruth, and N. Startin (eds.). *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hobolt, S.B., and C.E. De Vries. (2016). "Public Support for European Integration". *Annual Review of Political Science*.

Jastramskis, M. (2014). "Lietuvos Visuomenės Ir Politinių Partijų Nuostatos ES Atžvilgiu 2009–2013 M". In: *Lietuva Europos Sąjungoje: Metraštis 2009–2013 Metais*. Pp. 9–32.

Kaiser, W. (2007). *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*. *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaunert, C., J. de Deus Pereira, and M. Edwards. (2022). "Thick Europe, Ontological Security and Parochial Europe: The Re-Emergence of Far-Right Extremism and Terrorism after the Refugee Crisis of 2015". *European Politics and Society* 23, no. 1: 42–61.

Kinnvall, C., I. Manners, and J. Mitzen. (2018). "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: 'Ontological (in)Security in the European Union.'" *European Security* 27, no. 3: 249–65.

Klumbytė, N. (2019). "Sovereign Uncertainty and the Dangers to Liberalism at the Baltic Frontier". *Slavic Review* 78, no. 2 (June 1): 336–47.

Konieczna-Sałamatin, J., and M. Sawicka. (2020). "The East of the West, or the West of the East? Attitudes toward the European Union and European Integration in Poland after 2008". *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 35, no. 2 (June 4): 363–83.

Kotwas, M., and J. Kubik. (2019). "Symbolic Thickening of Public Culture and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Poland". *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 33, no. 2 (April 16): 435–71.

Kratochvíl, P., and T. Doležal. (2015). *The European Union and the Catholic Church*. *The European Union and the Catholic Church*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Lamour, C. (2021). "Orbán Urbi et Orbi: Christianity as a Nodal Point of Radical-Right Populism". *Politics and Religion*: 1–27.

Laumenskaitė, E. (2015). *Krikščioniškumas Kaip Socialinių Laikysenų Veiksnys Totalitarinėje Ir Posovietinėje Visuomenėje*. Vilnius: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija.

Loveless, M. (2010). "Agreeing in Principle: Utilitarianism and Economic Values as Support for the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe". *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 4 (September 1): 1083–1106.

Mälksoo, M. (2017). "Kononov v. Latvia as the Ontological Security Struggle over Remembering the Second World War". In: U. Belavusau and A. Gliszczyńska-Grabias (eds.). *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 91–108.

McAndrew, S. (2020). "Belonging, Believing, Behaving, and Brexit: Channels of Religiosity and Religious Identity in Support for Leaving the European Union". *British Journal of Sociology* 71, no. 5.

Mitzen, J. (2006). "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma". *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (July 24): 341–70.

Molle, A. (2019). "Religion and Right-Wing Populism in Italy: Using 'Judeo-Christian Roots' to Kill the European Union". *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 1 (January 1): 151–68.

Nelsen, B.F., and J.L. Guth. (2015). *Religion and the Struggle for European Union: Confessional Culture and the Limits of Integration*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Nelsen, B.F., and J.L. Guth. (2020). "Losing Faith: Religion and Attitudes toward the European Union in Uncertain Times". *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. 4 (July 1): 909–24.

Nelsen, B.F., J.L. Guth, and B. Highsmith. (2011). "Does Religion Still Matter? Religion and Public Attitudes toward Integration in Europe". *Politics and Religion* 4, no. 1 (April): 1–26.

Nelsen, B.F., J.L. Guth, and C.R. Fraser. (2001). "Does Religion Matter?: Christianity and Public Support for the European Union". *European Union Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 29): 191–217.

Ramonaitė, A. (2021). "Laisvės Partijos Fenomenas: Naujumo Efektas Ar Naujos Vertybinės Takoskyros Pradžia?" *Politologija* 102, no. 2 (October 18): 8–37.

Sala, V.D. (2017). "Homeland Security: Territorial Myths and Ontological Security in the European Union". *Journal of European Integration* 39, no. 5: 545–58.

Scherer, M. (2015). "The Religious Context in Explaining Public Support for the European Union". *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 4: 893–909.

Schütz, A. (1946). "The Well-Informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge". *Social Research* 13, no. 4: 463–78.

Spohn, W., M. Koenig, and W. Knöbl. (2015). *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*. *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Swidler, A. (1986). "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies". *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April): 273–86.

Szumigalska, A. (2016). "The Polish Catholic Church's Perception of the Processes of EU Integration and Europeanisation in the Context of Traditional Norms and Values". *Religion, State and Society* 43, no. 4 (October 2): 342–56.

Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, I. (2014). "Eurosceptics in Lithuania : On the Margins of Politics?" *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities* 3, no. 4: 1–21.

Van der Tol, M., and P. Gorski. (2022). "Secularisation as the Fragmentation of the Sacred and of Sacred Space". *Religion, State & Society* 50, no. 5: 495–512.

Vilpišauskas, R. (2019). "Lithuania and the EU: Pragmatic Support Driven by Security Concerns". In: P. Kaeding, M., Pollak, and J. Schmidt (eds.). *The Future of Europe: Views from the Capitals*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 69–71.

Vitkus, G. (2017). "Small Is Small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics". In K. Bukovskis and A. Austers (eds.). *Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering Issues, People and Stereotypes*. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Pp. 38–50.

Žiliukaitė, R. (2016). "Religinės Vertybės". In: R. Žiliukaitė, A. Poviliūnas, and A. Savicka (eds.). *Lietuvos Visuomenės Vertybių Kaita per Dvidešimt Nepriklausomybės Metų*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla. Pp. 135–65.