MODERN DEMOCRACY AND RELIGION

Several events that occurred in recent years, in which the religious factor was involved, and some perceptions of political and social character that were expressed (by some parties, mass media, politicians etc) regarding the role of religion, make it necessary, on the one hand, to reconsider the relationship between religion and modern democracy, and on the other, to highlight some key dimensions of democracy, indispensable to its existence. This relates to issues arising from wider debates about religion and its role in modern society, legislation of different countries which results from adverse events associated with the religious factor or dependent on it, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, concerns that develop as a result of views expressed by "scientists" who perceive religious affairs, and religion in general, some times emotionally and other times ideologically. This means that they do not examine them on a scientific but on a confessional or apologetic basis. In this way, however, they shape wrong, non-applicable or non-utilitarian perceptions about the role of religion.

Cultural and Social Data

A key feature that played a vital role in the effective change that took place in the modern world is the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. This signified the end of an ideological and political world that dominated after the Second World War, from the mid ’40s until the late ’80s. With it, came the end of the cold war between the then two superpowers, the armament race, and particularly the division of the world into two sociopolitical systems. This gave rise to the basic question of democracy in many countries which were under undemocratic regimes.
At the same time, some fundamental questions were also raised about the role of religion in relation to democracy. More specifically, first, if religion can contribute to the realization of democracy or play a negative role, and second, what the place of religion in a democratic society actually is. Some dimensions related to these questions were considered either solved or inevitably pushed to the margin, at least in Western Europe and Northern America.

Nevertheless, there are some very important issues related to democracy that are perceived differently in Eastern and Western Europe. On those rely religious organizations that seek to exploit the disruption of "balance" that existed in the postwar period. The co-existence of people from the East with those of the West, due to recent migrations, actually provides the religious institutions of the Western world with the opportunity to "claim", usually indirectly, the restoration to their old position, in terms of authority and power within society. The most specious way of wording this claim indirectly is the debate on the position and role of religion in the public sphere.

At the same time, some of those involved with the study of religion, who promote a veiled theological approach or are simply interested in carrying out "missionary" activity for a particular religion under the cover of the study of religion or do public relations with religious institutions, present religion as the driving force behind every positive aspect of the specific culture. In this way, they expand its presence and role in the world or describe an ideal function of religion through idealistic constructions that do not correspond to reality. The same applies, to a greater extent, to many of those that deal with their religious tradition from a theological perspective.

In this context, they do not discuss in essence the issue of religious freedom, which is a fundamental individual right of Democracy, but only with the prospect of serving their own religious purposes. Moreover, they slander secularism, as they do not consider it as a social phenomenon, but claim it to be a situation imposed by the "enemies" of religion. On this issue, several Christians and Muslims, who represent religious bodies, seem to agree. In this paper, we shall examine if their view is valid. Generally speaking, though, religious bodies depend heavily on conspiracy and "persecution" theories. It is easy to promote one's own interests at the
expense of others. They adopt the position of the victim of various hypothetical enemies and dark cycles, in order to induce sympathy, or present themselves to others as their savior from situations that they themselves describe as negative. The outcome in these cases is that, in reality, they seek to impose themselves on those who were naive enough to believe that they are in risk and need a "savior".

The claims made on the part of immigrants regarding their traditions and habits, through which they seek to make those indiscriminately respected, have in some cases led certain European countries to the introduction of regulations. There have also been issued relevant European Court of Justice (ECJ) decisions or recommendations of the Council of Europe on the issue of relations between religion and Democracy¹, while at the same time an effort has been made to bring to the forefront the basic principles of democracy that have been degraded or forgotten. When there are no big problems and society is in a state of prosperity, or even relative prosperity, the younger generations in particular, who are often unaware of history, ignore or overlook the importance of rules or values and principles that were shaped through struggles and sometimes bloody attempts to address problems of political and social nature. It should be stressed here that it is not possible to have confidence in the intentions and aspirations of religious bodies as they usually act in such a way which does not reveal their actual pursuits.

Along with all these grave problems, they have promoted, on the one hand, by the claim put forth by fundamentalist groups² in the Arab world to impose religious law, and on the other, by the tolerant position adopted by some for political reasons, the view


² See as an example the claims of the "Muslim Brotherhood" in Egypt.
that religion can be reconciled with democracy\textsuperscript{3}, so that there can be a "religious" democracy. What is more, in the political world develop concepts and options of sympathy towards Islam that create false impressions. In particular, this is the case with some left wing politicians, who, despite the fact that they do not know a lot about the role of the religious factor, they have changed their negative attitude into the clear aim of accommodating fanatical religious groups, thinking that the defense of Muslim religious pursuits will serve their anti-American aspirations. Furthermore, the notion that when one is simply given the right to vote this constitutes a sufficient condition for democracy, functions in a misleading way.

Such or similar concepts are expressed by supporters of religion, by groups of populists, but also by those who support the expression of democracy through electronic processes. The ignorance in these cases and the short-sighted vision of those issues can prove to be dangerous for society, democracy and peaceful coexistence of people.

To all this must be added the fact that a very negative role is played by the articles of journalists and analysts who, thinking they know it all, express various "profound views" without actually delving into the essence of issues about the relationship between religion and democracy. One should add to those what is also happening in the Arab world, and particularly in Egypt over the last few months.

\textit{Modern democracy: concept and fundamental characteristics}

After all these, the crucial question that comes up is: what is modern democracy? What does it comprise of? Is modern democracy exhausted simply with the right to "elect" and "be elected", ie with the electoral process and participation in it? And from there on, one does not need to require anything else? Unfortunately, there are those who delimit "democracy" only to the voting process and do not see beyond that. Does this mean that, when

\textsuperscript{3} See the views expressed clearly for political and diplomatic reasons by the U.S. diplomacy when speaking of "Islamic democracy", which eventually proved to be outright lies.
one is elected, then they can impose whatever they wish, for in-
stance a dictatorial or totalitarian, even with religious cover, re-
gime? Is this democracy? Here lies the big mistake, usually pro-
moted by populist parties and movements, as well as sectarian and
fundamentalist groups, as it directly serves their interests. Of
course, no one can doubt that the right to elect one’s representa-
tives is a basic condition for democracy, but it is not the only one.
Instead, it is essential to observe with great precision and care
some basic characteristics and fundamental principles that define
democracy and have been configured either for reasons and proce-
dures of the genesis of modern democracy or were formed through
the passage of time in the context of addressing specific problems
that had arisen. The fact is that modern democracy came as a re-
sult of the opposition to religiously legitimated political absolut-
ism.

Due to this fact, modern democracy is pluralistic and based on:

- popular sovereignty and popular legitimation,
- the "demystification" of politics or simply the separation of politics from religion,
- the function of secular law for all, as there can be no "re-
ligious" or "divine" law in the context of democracy,
- the separation of powers,
- the safeguarding of human rights, which should be per-
ceived not only as rights but also as responsibilities of the
citizens,
- the safeguarding of religious freedom, freedom of speech
and conscience, as well as the free development of human
personality,
- the respect for various social and cultural diversities
- the fundamental principles of the rule of law.

One of the most critical questions raised on the issue of the re-
relationship between religion and modern democracy is whether re-
ligion contributed to the creation and shaping of democracy. The
answer is simple. Religion did not function positively in shaping
democracy neither in antiquity nor in contemporary reality. It is
necessary to highlight this dimension, because religious institu-
tions argue that religion has contributed positively to the shaping
of democracy either within their own internal processes, or, in some cases, they seek to support such views outwardly. This happens because they believe that all good in the world is a religious creation, which objectively does not apply. In history, religion has played and still plays both a positive and a negative role on separate occasions. Moreover, the reference to religion does not automatically mean production of positive work. That depends on how the exponents of religion perceive the positive dimension in the context of culture and what they choose to do in particular cases. The ultimate, of course, position of religious institutions, which has already been mentioned above, is part of their communication policies, designed to promote their pursuits.

There are those who reach such extremes so as to argue that their sacred texts actually delineate democracy. It is really "funny" even to attempt to overthrow such views, which of course, are not based, in any way, on the sacred texts of religions. Besides, the fact that religions do not have democratic structures and functions constitutes evidence for the opposite. It is quite "funny" to claim that one has helped shape democracy within society when their own space does not afford democratic structures and functions.

Contrary to the above unsubstantiated views, it should be mentioned here that religion played a negative role in the genesis of modern democracy, not a positive one. To understand this view one should take into consideration the reasons which led to the birth of modern democracy. Modern democracy was born in Europe as a response to political absolutism. But absolutism was religiously grounded and legitimated; it was theocratic. The myth, that is, of totalitarian and autocratic power in Europe until the 18th century was religious. Moreover, the religious Reformation in the 16th century had come to challenge the role of church structure and authority. The genesis of modern democracy was combined with the abolition of political absolutism, the change in the role of the state, the demystification of state power, through the change in the method it obtained its legitimacy, and the attribution of this role to the people. Following this radical change, the political power in the framework of democracy is not legitimated religiously, as was the case in the era of imperial Rome and throughout the Middle Ages, but it is legitimated by the people, and is exercised in the name of the people.
In addition, an essential role in the shaping of modern social world and democracy was played by the turning away from the religiously-based static structure of the traditional world, the understanding of the possibility of change, the development and reconstruction of the social world, as well as the highlighting of the importance and role of human responsibility for the social world which is combined with human freedom.

*Democracy and religious freedom*

On the basis of what has been mentioned above, religion was not the origin of modern democracy, but as a matter of fact it was part of the social conditions that caused a strong reaction of man. The change in the role of the state is connected with the fact that the state is not authoritarian any more, but has transformed into an institution that has the responsibility to safeguard the rights of citizens. Such rights include as particularly important that of religious freedom. Therefore:

- democracy cannot have a religious character,
- neither can it impose any religious law or specific religious beliefs,
- nor can it afford religious legitimation.

More specifically, religious freedom necessitates the release of state from religion.

This dimension constitutes a very serious parameter, because religious institutions pretend not to understand it. They always care about safeguarding their own action and presence, but avoid understanding what applies to all others as well. And, safeguarding religious freedom can only be realized by a *religiously neutral* state.
The meaning and content of the fundamental right of religious freedom is clearly expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reads as follows: "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right comprises the freedom to change one's religion or beliefs and the freedom to manifest one's religion or religious beliefs, alone or together with others, in public or in private, through teaching, practice, worship and celebration of religious ceremonies".

A similar provision is contained in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 9 § 1). But in the case of the Convention there is a supplementary provision which specifies the limits for exercising the right to religious freedom, which cannot be abusive. More specifically, it is mentioned that there can be no other restrictions in the exercise of the right beyond the measures provided for by law in a democratic society in order to safeguard public safety, protection of public order, health, ethics as well as the protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Article 9 Paragraph 2).

This means that the fundamental right of religious freedom, just like any other right, must be exercised in such a manner so as not to infringe upon public safety, public order, health or ethics as well as the rights and freedoms of citizens.

The countries-members of the European Union, recognizing the importance of the right to religious freedom along with the freedom of thought and conscience, have included a provision in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Citizen that was incorporated in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. It states that: "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right comprises the freedom to change religion or beliefs and freedom to manifest religion or beliefs, either individually or collectively, in public or in private, in worship, education, practice of religious duties and celebrations".
Modern democracy is inconceivable without freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. It is imperative that these fundamental human rights should be thoroughly understood, especially that of religious freedom which relates to the topic discussed in the present article. Through its analysis and understanding, all the objections raised by religious institutions, but also by religious conservatives, can be answered. The right of religious freedom means that everyone is free to believe what they wish, to change their beliefs, to belong or not to belong to any religious group or community, to exercise their worship freely, both individually and collectively, to disseminate their ideas. The same applies to religious communities and groups. The modern democratic state is obliged to safeguard the rights mentioned above. It cannot impose a religion or an ideology of non-religious or antireligious character. What is more, in accordance with the general theory of rights⁴, as well as the European Convention of Human Rights, these rights, either collectively or individually, or through the action of institutional religious bodies, cannot be exercised abusively. In other words, they cannot be exercised in such a way that they violate the rights of others who either belong or do not belong to the same collectivity.

If one elaborates further on the topic of religious freedom several important dimensions come up. First of all, religion cannot

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be a state affair. Therefore, it cannot be associated with "obligatoriness", in the sense that people cannot be forced to accept the perceptions and authority of a particular religion. That is the reason why perceptions expressed by any religion are freely judged and evaluated. Religion in the context of modern democracy is a personal or private affair, in the sense that one chooses what they do in relation to religion. This does not mean that religion is solely an individual affair, because it can be exercised either individually or collectively. The characterization "private" relates to the fact that it is a matter of free choice of the citizen. So, it is neither "religion", nor "anti-religion" that can be imposed by the state. In this sense, the state must be religiously neutral. Yet the same applies to religions and religious institutions as they do not, or should not, have the opportunity to use state power to impose themselves on citizens. They are "forced" to converse and seek for ways to attract those, and thus probably how they maintain relationships with them. When they are faced with a big decrease in their membership numbers, especially in Europe, they are then obliged to seek for the reason why this happened, thus making self-criticism.

Religious institutions cannot gladly accept the positive aspects of religious freedom, when they face difficulties with opposing teams or non-democratic regimes, but at the same time avoid understanding that the way they function or what they require are neither attractive nor can they be acceptable – in many cases in contemporary reality. For example, both Christian churches and Islam promote their own universality through "missionary activity" or other methods of psychological influence.

In the context of modern democracy those goals do not serve any special purposes. They rather function negatively, because they correspond to concepts and structures shaped in the past, relating to the political and social situation of that time. This does not mean that religions/religious institutions did not make, to a certain extent, some adjustments to modern culture, regardless of the fact that they claim to have remained "unchanged" through the centuries. This claim is part of their building a "transcendental" identity and authority. Thus, despite the adjustments made, as is evidenced by history, they refuse to move on to a real adjustment to the present, because they feel this will necessitate a change in their structure and perception of power. This difficulty, however,
means that many people flee from them, or, more usually, show indifference towards them. This is the case mainly in Europe, where there used to be powerful religious institutions, and this situation led to centrifugal forces on the part of the faithful, whereas on the part of the Churches, conservative tendencies, ostensibly for self-protection, as well as maintenance of centralized structures. In reality, though, conservative preservation of traditional centralized structures and concepts has a negative effect in relation to the safeguarding of relationships with people. This undoubtedly leads to the search for indirect ways to secure state protection of ecclesiastical institutions. But this is something impossible in present time.

The state is obliged to ensure the rights of citizens against anyone who would like to exploit his power at their expense. The formation of citizens’ religious identity is a matter of free choice. In contrast, the U.S.A., where the situation was different due to the demographic composition of the country with immigrants and their descendants of different generations, developed the Community system and the perception that citizens are free to choose whether they belong to a religious community or not, while the state has to ensure their right and support unity on a secular basis. The religious communities in this case seek for believers and do not promote themselves as strong and firm.

Based on what has been mentioned above, particularly regarding freedom of religion, religion is, therefore, a personal or private affair that can be exercised individually or collectively in the public sphere or individually in the private one. Religion is a citizens’ personal affair, therefore it relies on free choice. But, all collective citizen activities are exercised in the public sphere. Considering religion to be a private or personal affair is actually the opposite of a state affair but this does not mean that it is exercised only in the private sphere. There is, much probably, a kind of confusion in understanding some terms, but we would not like to believe that there has been an intentional misinterpretation of the data.

The truth is that the activities of religious institutions are carried out freely in the public sphere, as long as religious freedom is guaranteed and there is no violation, on their part, of the basic principles that safeguard public order, safety, health, ethics and
respect for citizens’ freedom. Let us repeat, at this point, that when interpreting the right to religious freedom we should first accept that in the context of democratic legitimacy and the rule of law, religion is a private affair, in the sense that it is a matter of free choice and not imposed or should not be imposed on citizens by the state or any other party. Religion can be practiced both individually and collectively in the public sphere. Therefore, what is usually claimed, especially after 1989, by religious institutions, particularly in Europe, and cultivated by those who express the views of these institutions about religion acquiring a position in the public sphere, are views that are trying to break open doors. The truth is that religious institutions, on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (1950) and the constitutions of many countries, especially in Europe and North America, have the right to act freely in the public sphere. What cannot be imposed is their "obligatoriness". This means that, in the framework of modern pluralistic democracy, citizens cannot be forced into practicing or not practicing religion or choose a specific mandatory religion. Their attitude towards religion is a matter of personal choice. On the contrary, the enforcement of "obligatoriness" by any religious institution in Europe and America, and particularly in the context of modern democracy, would be a violation of religious freedom. What is more, it goes without saying that when there is no guarantee of religious freedom, but certain religious beliefs are imposed or the presence of minority religions in the public sphere is obstructed, then there is no real democracy. On such conditions should modern democracy be discussed at the global level. This means that democracy is based on tolerance of religious diversity, it cannot be reconciled with the imposition of a religion or atheism, nor with the persecution of people on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Also, as freedom of religion is a characteristic of democracy, its mandatory application is not associated with mutual claims between states.

Moreover, regarding religion itself in the frame of pluralism, which is guaranteed by democracy and fundamental rights, the "authority" of religions is judged just like any other view. Religious beliefs and views expressed by religious institutions are subject to critical processing and can therefore be accepted or re-
jected by citizens. This is a valid reason that provides justification for the disconnection between state and religion or for the expression on the part of the state of religious beliefs in the context of modern democracy. When for reasons of political expediency and international diplomacy this dimension is bypassed or ignored the results are deplorable or even destructive. Examples can be found in the Islamic world and show that democracy cannot be restricted to the electoral process. On the contrary, one must take into account the fundamental characteristics mentioned above which determine the structure and function of modern pluralistic democracy.

Secularization of society and religious freedom

Religious institutions and their adherents have been discussing for long the issue of secularization. They dispute with those who support secularization and accuse them of actually imposing it. By the term secularization we mean, on the one hand, that the state is secular and based on popular sovereignty, and, on the other, that religion does not affect society as a sole creator of culture, as was the case in traditional society. Secularisation does not necessarily entail the absence of religion from society, neither its prohibition. The religious institutions, though, argue that there are those who wish to impose secularisation. This way of "protesting" that presents religion as "being persecuted" is a communicative means to try and hide their own pursuit to impose religion by using state power. In this case, as in many others, the truth lies somewhere in the middle, not in the two extremes. Secularisation is not imposed by anyone, but as society is pluralistic the safeguarding of freedom of religion does not justify any imposition of ideological or religious views. Secularisation is a situation that has been shaped gradually, especially after the Second World War, and is constantly expanding, no matter if religious institutions wish so or not. It is right to contend that it is not a global phenomenon.

But the global situation is more complex than claimed by those who promote religion for professional purposes. The root cause of secularisation comes from the very religions that cannot
adapt to the current circumstances and seek to have the same role they used to have in traditional society. They cannot actually play an essential role, because they seek to intervene not only in ways and with means that are outdated, but also with a sense of power that belongs to the traditional past. Furthermore, their views cannot be easily accepted by modern man. Therefore, no matter what their organic intellectuals claim in their effort to persuade people through the use of conspiracy theories, they do not manage a lot. Secularisation, however, is combined with religious freedom, which means that, particularly in Europe and North America and wherever else true religious freedom exists, people are free to do whatever they wish regarding religion.

At this point we should make note of something important. There has been use of the argument, particularly in Eastern Europe, that religion, until around 1989, was under social ban. Nevertheless, this is used by religious institutions both in Eastern and Western Europe as an argument to ask for special treatment. Their goal is to achieve any form of legal consolidation so as to be able to impose on citizens. The controversy and the ensuing great debate that took place on the occasion of the preamble of the European Constitution, which finally did not come into force, as well as the Article of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European citizen about religion, are indicative of these pursuits.5

There is, though, a clear differentiation between Eastern and Western Europe. While in Eastern Europe religion was under social ban during the period of Soviet domination, in Western Europe freedom of action was guaranteed within society throughout this period. Additionally, in Eastern Europe there was no reli-

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igious freedom due to the imposed atheist ideology. As it has already been mentioned above, freedom of religion is not compatible with imposing neither a "religion" nor an "anti-religion". In Western Europe, secularisation was the result of a gradual process and not a situation imposed by anyone; it occurred within the frame of protection of the free exercise of religion, on an individual, collective and institutional basis. This is the truth. All other claims are indirect ways used by religious bodies to stimulate the interest of politicians, and, perhaps, citizens. This, however, may work when religion is considered useful, and to those who believe that it is useful.

Within the framework of modern pluralistic democracy people are free to practice religion in any way and to any degree they desire. But the state itself cannot have religious characteristics or function on the basis of religious requirements and data. This dimension is difficult to be understood and accepted by religious bodies and religious conservatives. But the state is obliged, in the context of pluralistic democracy, to safeguard the freedom of all citizens before the aspirations of any organization or interest group. This issue relates to religions as well. The state must safeguard their freedom of action, but at the same time it is obliged to remain religiously neutral and ensure citizens' freedom before religious institutions.

Churches complain because people are moving away from them. But still they avoid making any self-criticism. For instance, the Catholic Church cannot demand, even in modern times, a particular role for the Pope and consider that this power structure should be discussed and accepted by other Christians as well, considering that in this way a role is attributed to Christianity in the modern world. The mere thought of such a thing sounds funny. But there are similar issues that are raised by other Christian Churches pertaining to their structure as well as the perception of their power and role. Therefore, it is only true that even people who maintain good relations with the Churches are either skeptical about these concepts and structures or simply reject them and just make a selective use of their services. Those, of course, who accept the function of these structures and concepts, are those who are part of the institutional mechanism of Churches and religions and it is understandable why they adopt such a position. The invoca-
tion of any arguments regarding the human need for religion, is again part of their "professional" interests. Although it is considered "unfamiliar" for religions to accept such terminology, reality contradicts their objections. But on the other hand, it is up to a citizen to decide what is to one's personal interest and to what extent and in what way to make use of the services offered by religious institutions.

_Religion, social practices and public sphere_

After all the above, it should be mentioned here that there are other serious issues arising in modern democracy and democratic societies of the developed world either on the part of religions or based on affairs involving religions. Firstly, the structure of Christian Churches and other religions is not democratic, but oligarchic, no matter what the religious institutions themselves maintain. It can, of course, be argued that it is their right to choose what kind of structure they will have. In that case, though, they cannot expect to influence the political and public life, nor can they label as democratic their apparently oligarchic structure. Their influence and involvement in public life will bring changes and create problems in democracy. What is more, it is very wrong to invoke religious or theological concepts to define political practices, as those relate to traditional authoritarian structures and are contrary to human freedom and political democracy.

In recent years, due to migration, there have been raised issues related to religions and their role in the public sphere. It has been argued that the practices of migrants, which they have brought from their countries, are "religious matters" and they should be free to practice them in the public sphere. The most typical example is the headscarf, and in general the special attire of Muslim women that involves covering their entire face. Such claims sometimes find support by religious institutions maintaining that those are "religious traditions" and therefore fall within the frame of religious freedom. What is obvious, of course, in this case, is the selective use of the right to religious freedom. But then, the opposite should also be accepted, i.e. the freedom of choice not to keep such a tradition. Yet the most important thing in this case
is how to understand and characterize these practices. Are they religious affairs or traditional practices, and hence social affairs, even when they are labelled as religious?

The headscarf, and generally the covering of the head of women, was a practice in all traditional societies in both East and West. It is a purely social practice that showed the subordination of women to the superiority of men. But as all affairs in traditional societies denoted a link between the social and religious dimension, this also appears to have a “religious” character. The religious bodies are trying to salvage whatever they can from the traditional practices claiming them to be religious. This happens because they are trying to salvage their influence on society through symbolic actions, clothing habits, and whatever else could be seen as "religious"; in this way they make their presence, and the “obligatoriness” of religion through traditions deemed as religious, felt in society, which actually means maintaining their power. But it is a mistake to regard all these elements of the dress code, in this case the headscarf, as a religious affair. It is a symbol of social oppression and subordination of women, and as such it does not come under the issues pertaining to the freedom of religion. But the headscarf is a totally different case compared to the issue of prayers and religious ceremonies and celebrations that clearly belong to religious affairs. It seems only necessary to distinguish between the purely religious affairs, practices and symbols that are covered by religious freedom and those that are purely social matters and cannot be covered with claims for their safeguarding through religious freedom.

On the other hand, it is not possible to deal with the dress code as if it were a state affair. Of course, no one can interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. But one can surely notice that such decisions, when they come from the state, make it impossible to characterize the specific state as democratic and modern. Such decisions are incompatible with democracy. The same is true when the state allows the use of specific dress codes in public services. As those reflect social perceptions of oppression and discrimination against women, the ban, in this case of the headscarf, was a positive intervention to remedy such discrimination. On the contrary, the lifting of the ban again promotes discrimination, regardless if it is considered meaningful by a part, large or small, of
the electorate. Democracy affords some basic principles that cannot be reconciled with the promotion of discrimination and reproduction of backward practices. For sure, no one can force a society into accepting modernization. But in that case, this society cannot claim the title of democracy.

Respect for the other and human rights

This topic has been extensively discussed at a global level over the last decade. In the context of social and cultural pluralism, where a variety of concepts and practices are acceptable in society, the idea of respect for the other and otherness has been cultivated. Of course, respect is not a unilateral but a reciprocal relationship. When one asks the other to respect their traditions and habits, this does not mean that one can impose them on the other. Apart from that, traditions are not infallible truths that do not change, but are subject to change as well as influence of the traditions and beliefs of others. Within the framework of modern pluralistic democracy it is understood that people, indigenous and immigrant, have the right to maintain as well as alter various traditions. Yet, this dimension of respect for the other has some limits that cannot be exceeded. These limits, according to the perceptions that have been formulated by UNESCO as a global fundamental principle, have to do with the protection of human rights. More specifically, Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Bioethics mentions: "One should pay special attention to the importance of cultural diversity and pluralism. However, such considerations cannot be used to infringe upon human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, neither against the principles established by this Declaration, nor to delimit their pursuit". Thus, the invocation of traditions, whatever they may be and whatever nature they may have, socio-cultural or religious, cannot justify the violation of fundamental human rights.

All the above means that one actually helps migrants by helping them adapt to the requirements of modern society, and not by helping them maintain as big a part as possible of their traditions.
Can religions function positively in the context of democracy?

As a final question we should consider whether religions can function positively within the context of modern pluralistic democracy. If one examines their history through the centuries, one understands that it was a story of continuous adaptations. They employed a variety of ways to adapt to the social and political reality. They have always been "flexible" as their leaders have always had aspirations to exercise power or for survival reasons when facing difficulties that necessitated adaptation. Taking all this into consideration one can see that they can contribute positively as long as they wish to pursue this direction. But a feature of modern politics is the secular dimension. So, towards this direction, they should make clear what they wish to say and not seek to impose religious "laws" or religious beliefs as ways of function and legitimation of the principles and structures of democracy. If this is the case, they will not offer positive work but bring back problems which were overcome with a lot of fights and efforts by modern man.

Modern pluralistic democracy respects and safeguards diversity. It allows everyone to preserve their perceptions and traditions, provided that they do not attempt to impose them on others. What is meant by others is not only people outside the family but also members, ancestors and descendants, of one’s own family. The same applies in cases where religious institutions use particularly conservative strata from provincial areas through whom they seek to impose traditional perceptions and attitudes that may favor them. This means that within democracy religious bodies have to respect people’s choices. This attitude towards the claims of religious leadership, an attitude that should not be tolerant towards their occasionally irrational claims, may help them adapt to the reality of modern democracy: it does not impose anything; it allows everyone to express themselves as they wish. As a matter of fact, it is obliged by the Constitution and the universal principles to safeguard civil liberties as well as the free development of citizens’ personality. Thus, it cannot, in any way, encourage the aspirations of religious leaders and their structures.
As everyone is free to believe as they wish, religions are not obstructed. The problem arises from the fact that religions are connected with "religious absolute", which in reality proves to be "relative", as it comprises elements that vary in time. But this is something that religious leaders refuse to admit, as the acceptance of this reality will call into question the notion that each one of them promotes, i.e. that only they represent the "absolute" truth. Ultimately, one may respect their view, but that does not mean that one must accept it or even provide them with the means to impose it. For this reason they are obliged to accept the basic principle shaped in the context of modern pluralistic democracy, that every man is free to accept or reject, partly or as a whole, religious beliefs. Democracy, however, while it safeguards the free exercise of religious duties and worship, at the same time it guarantees that it will not provide religious institutions with state means to impose on society the religious perceptions they represent. Nor can religion define democracy. Modern pluralistic democracy is religiously neutral.

In conclusion, one might say that various changes that occurred in modern society over the last two decades, such as the end of the global dipolism, the democratization processes of various countries, the population movements, the claims of religious bodies for their place in the public sphere, brought up, amongst many others, the question about the relationship between religion and modern pluralistic democracy. Religion, as it was connected with traditional autocracy and its legitimation, was not among the factors that contributed to the creation of modern pluralistic democracy. The basic elements of modern democracy are its foundation on popular sovereignty and fundamental human rights, religious freedom and free development of human personality holding a central position. These rights cannot be exercised abusively. They are exercised as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. The state must be religiously neutral and safeguard citizens’ and human rights, religious freedom included. The activity of religions in the public sphere is ensured but it cannot be connected with “obligatoriness” as citizens are free to make use of religious services or not. The same applies to religious perceptions. Respect for religions and traditions is delimited to the point that it does not
violate human rights. Elements of the dress code, such as the headscarf, belong to social traditions and not to religious ones. What is more, it is a symbol of social discrimination against women that existed and still exists in traditional societies. Therefore, it cannot be seen through the perspective and guarantee of religious freedom. Moreover, it is religion that is obliged to adapt to democracy and not vice versa, as there can be no democracy based on religious legitimation nor democracy imposing religious principles.
ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Διάφορες αλλαγές που επήλθαν στη σύγχρονη κοινωνία κατά την τελευταία εικοσαετία, όπως το τέλος του παγκόσμιου διπολισμού, διαδικασίες εκδημοκρατισμού διαφόρων χωρών, μετακινήσεις πληθυσμών, αξιώσεις θρησκευτικών φορέων για τη θέση τους στο δημόσιο χώρο, έθεσαν μεταξύ πολλών άλλων και το ερώτημα της σχέσης της θρησκείας με τη μοντέρνα πλουραλιστική δημοκρατία. Η θρησκεία συνδεδεμένη με την παραδοσιακή απολυταρχία και τη νομιμοποίησή της δεν ήταν από τους παράγοντες που συνέβαλαν στη δημιουργία της μοντέρνας δημοκρατίας. Βασικά στοιχεία της σύγχρονης δημοκρατίας είναι η θεμελίωση της στη λαϊκή κυριαρχία και τα θεμελιώδη δικαιώματα, στα οποία κεντρική θέση κατέχουν η θρησκευτική ελευθερία και η ελευθερία ανάπτυξης της προσωπικότητας του ανθρώπου. Τα δικαιώματα δεν μπορούν να ασκηθούν καταχρηστικά. Ασκούνται μέχρις εκεί που δεν θίγονται τα δικαιώματα άλλων. Το κράτος πρέπει να είναι ουδέτερο θρησκευτικά και να διασφαλίζει τα δικαιώματα των πολιτών, μεταξύ των οποίων και η θρησκευτική ελευθερία. Η δράση των θρησκειών στο δημόσιο χώρο είναι διασφαλισμένη, ενώ δεν μπορεί να συνδέεται με τη δράση αυτής υποχρεωτικότητας για τους πολίτες, που είναι ελεύθεροι να κάνουν χρήση ή όχι των θρησκευτικών υπηρεσιών. Το ιδίο ισχύει και για τις θρησκευτικές αντιλήψεις. Ο σεβασμός των θρησκειών και των παραδόσεων οριοθετείται μέχρις εκεί που δεν παραβιάζονται τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα. Ενδυματολογικές συνήθειες, όπως η μαντίλα, ανήκουν στις κοινωνικές παραδόσεις και όχι στις θρησκευτικές. Είναι σύμβολο κοινωνικών διακρίσεων σε βάρος των γυναικών που υπήρξαν και υπάρχουν σε όλες τις παραδοσιακές κοινωνίες. Γι’ αυτό και δεν μπορεί να αντιμετωπίζεται μέσα από την προοπτική και τη διασφάλιση της θρησκευτικής ελευθερίας. Ακόμη, η θρησκεία είναι υποχρεωμένη να προσαρμοστεί στα δεδομένα της δημοκρατίας και όχι το αντίστροφο. Δεν μπορεί να υπάρξει δημοκρατία με θρησκευτική νομιμοποίηση και επιβολή θρησκευτικών αρχών μέσω αυτής.
LITERATURE


