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ARTICLE



'Genuine' religions and their arena of legitimation in Italy – the role of the ECtHR

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ABSTRACT

In this contribution, we address the everlasting debate on the definition of religion from a multiscale perspective. Supranational courts – and, especially, the European Court of Human Rights – gained a major legitimising role in this respect. One may thus expect that religious minorities with uncertain status look at supranational courts as attractive and favourable venues. The 'local' must be taken into account, too, in the complex government of religious diversity: decentralised policies and different religious profiles make room for adapting the treatment of religious minorities at the local level, especially in situations characterised by the absence of a legal national framework. Grounded on an analysis of national and international case law, and on interviews addressing the representatives of religious minorities, our contribution explores the multiscale repertoires of action of religious minorities in pursuing the official recognition and the protection of their religious rights.

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What is 'genuine religion'?¹

In her essay, meaningfully titled 'But is it a genuine religion?', Barker (1994) addresses the never-ending issue of the definition of religion, focusing on the processes of social construction of the ideal-type of religion. Barker discusses the possible analytical usefulness of the concept in describing and analysing reality (in terms of secularisation, for example, or 'religious revival'), as well as the implicit appraising value judgement embedded in the mere act of definition. Reporting on her experience in running INFORM (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements), for example, Barker underlines how the request for information about religious movements is in fact often driven by the underlying concern about the movements' 'respectability'. In addition to the analytical usefulness and value judgement aspects, definitions of religion also bear practical consequences: 'literally millions of dollars may hang in the balance, depending on whether or not the label "religion" is officially (legally) sanctioned' (Barker 1994, 24).

Considering the official labelling process, European countries show a high degree of variation in what is defined as 'the governance of religions' (Bradamat and Koenig 2009; on the variety, see also Ferrari 2013; Temperman 2013). In this respect, the Europeanisation process has fostered both the convergence and the divergence of

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national models of religions' governance (Koenig 2007, 2015; Koenig and Claire 2014). Among the various aspects of the Europeanisation process, especially interesting is the role of international courts, which are increasingly important in managing religious freedom and are gaining the role of 'ultimate deciders' concerning controversial issues regarding religion, so much so that scholars have coined the expression 'judicialization of religion' (Richardson 2015).

Describing the role of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR or the Court) in this respect, Fokas points out that 'the Court may be considered to be in the process of developing a "theory" on the proper place of religion in the public sphere' (European Court of Human Rights 2015, 55; see also Ringelheim 2012; Beaman 2016). First, the ECtHR has developed certain criteria to be fulfilled in order to qualify as a 'religion' or 'belief' according to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR or the Convention). It must be noted that the terms 'religion' and 'belief' are not defined in the text of the Convention. As the 'Guide to article 9', published by the Court, specifies:

This omission is quite logical, because such a definition would have to be both flexible enough to embrace the whole range of religions worldwide (major and minor, old and new, theistic and non-theistic) and specific enough to be applicable to individual cases – an extremely difficult, indeed impossible undertaking. (European Court of Human Rights 2015)

For the Court, the religion or belief in question in a given case 'must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance' (European Court of Human Rights 2015). The ECtHR has therefore recognised pacifism, scientology, a belief in the teachings of the Divine Light Zentrum, druidism, veganism and vegetarianism as among the religions or beliefs worthy of protection. Second, ECtHR religion-related jurisprudence offers a guide to the place of religion in European societies: religions must be contextualised, as illustrated by the use of margins of appreciation; their right to exist must be protected (Richardson 2001).

In relation to this, in the following contribution we focus on how religious minorities in Italy actively negotiate the definition of religion, in relation to the courts, public administration and other institutions, with the purpose of improving their position in the country. In particular, we are interested in investigating the extent to which religious recognition plays a role in the religious groups' strategies. The contribution is based on data (interviews, documents, media analysis and case law) collected in the frame of the GRASSROOTSMOBILISE project. In the context of the project, we pay particular attention to the ECtHR as an international venue that religious actors may wish to address (Anagnostou and Fokas 2015; Fokas 2015, 2016).

Italy is a particularly interesting case for the analysis of the practical effects of the 'religion' label. Like many other countries (see Richardson 2001), Italy has a pyramidal (also called 'four-tier', see Ferrari and Ferrari 2015) system. At the top of the pyramid, the relationships between the Italian state and the Catholic Church are regulated by a Concordat, as stated by Article 7 of the Italian Constitution. A second category is composed of religions with a contract with the Italian state (agreement, according to Article 8 of the Constitution), which grants political recognition and regulates some specific issues, including tax benefits. In order to be able to stipulate an agreement, religious groups must first be recognised as 'cults', according to a law still in place from the Fascist regime. And at the lowest level there are 'the others' – those who did not (or

could not) start the procedures for juridical recognition, such as Scientology or the Wicca. To be recognised as a religion entails economic benefits and facilitates the practice of religious activities, while obtaining an agreement carries a symbolic dimension of 'respectability'. However, the process of recognition is long and complex, involves a certain control by the state for a variable period of time and does not guarantee the enforcement of religious rights, which are often subject to the concurrent competence of different legal regimes, in which the municipal level plays a particularly relevant role (for a discussion, see Giorgi and Annicchino 2017). In this picture, while some religious groups pursue legal recognition, others adopt different strategies in order to be able to practice their religion without being formally recognised as such: in other words, there may be situations in which religious rights are better – or more easily – enjoyed without being formally recognised. The extent to which religious groups claim legal recognition is thus an interesting element to be investigated in relation to the analysis of religious freedom.

This contribution is structured as follows: in the next section, we consider the judicial strategies of the actors who target the complexities of formal religious recognition in order to expose the potential contradictions and deconstruct the category of 'religion', namely the atheists and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. We then discuss the advantages and disadvantages connected to being recognised as a religion in Italy, and how religious minorities selectively activate their identity as religious groups by specifically focusing on the case of Islam. In the last section we offer some concluding remarks.

Deconstructing the category of 'religion' – the case of atheists

As we mentioned, according to the Italian Constitution there are several levels and degrees of interaction with the state. The Catholic Church has signed a Concordat, while other religious groups have signed agreements (*intese*) according to Article 8 of the Constitution. For instance, among the recent agreements signed by the Italian government and approved by the Parliament are those with the Holy Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and the Exarchate of Southern Europe, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Apostolic Church and the Hindu and Buddhist communities. The fact that many religious groups have signed agreements with the government does not mean that they enjoy the same legal treatment; rather,

[...] the adoption of rules governing relations between the State and religious communities will vary in accordance with the variety of ad hoc bilateral agreements. Thus, the challenge of constitutional justice is rather a question of when and how to limit such "inequalities". (Barsotti et al. 2016, 115)²

It must be also stressed, and this is beyond the scope of this contribution, that, legally, the question of the definition of religion according to Articles 19 and 8 of the Italian Constitution can become tricky since a group can be defined as a religion for the purpose of Article 19, but not as a religious group following Article 8. In the case of Article 8, even when groups do not start the negotiations with the government to gain access to an agreement, religious groups might be interested in registering with the Italian state according to the provisions of Law 1159/29. To this end, it is necessary that

the religious nature of the group be recognised. The Italian state has had different attitudes towards this process. Initially it took a restrictive approach, influenced also by the country's Christian background – it was difficult to be recognised, especially in the case of non-Christian religions; later, largely thanks to the reflections of scholars, this approach became more capable to accommodate religious diversity.

The Union of Atheists, Agnostics and Rationalists (UAAR) is an organisation which aims to promote secularism and defend the rights of atheists, who, according to the UAAR, are discriminated against. The UAAR discourse goes as follows: the state protects religions, but the unexpected consequences of this protection result in the discrimination of atheists. Among the discriminations, the UAAR lists, for example, the absence of secular assistance in prisons and hospitals, the existence of the crime of blasphemy, or the absence of the possibility of euthanasia.³ One of the representatives illustrated this point by focusing on the work permits granted for religious reasons, such as the permits granted for spiritual or religious comfort:

If I asked for a permit because, for example, I draw my comfort from [...] I want to go to the cinema with popcorn, it is my atheist comfort... [I couldn't]. [...] I wish I wouldn't be treated as "inferior" because I have freely chosen not to be affiliated to a religion.

In this perspective, one of the strategies adopted by atheist groups focuses on the definition of religion as essential in order to be granted certain rights. As another representative of UAAR pointed out, 'Besides, if you wish to protect religions: who determines what is a religion? Who says that the Flying Spaghetti Monster does not exist? Who takes this task in state institutions?'. Atheists and nonbelievers in Italy have tried for several years to obtain the same treatment of religions, but the government has always denied this request. These denials touch directly on the issue of the definition of what religion is for the purpose of the application of the law. Replying in December 2003 to a request submitted by UAAR, the government argued that

the profession of atheism should have the same treatment as the profession of a religious faith for the purpose of its free exercise either individually or in community, it should not be in violation of Article 19 of the Constitution, but cannot be regulated in the same way as foreseen by Article 8 of the Constitution which only deals with religious denominations. (UAAR 2003)

According to the government, religious denominations should be considered 'a fact of faith in the divinity shared by society' (UAAR 2003). UAAR went to court before the Administrative Tribunal, which sided with the government in supporting the argument for political discretion in not making this kind of decision subject to judicial review. UAAR then appealed to the Council of State, which in 2011 decided that the decision was to be subject to judicial review, thus reversing the previous judgement of the Administrative Tribunal. The government appealed the decision to the Court of Cassation which sided with UAAR, explaining that, from a procedural point of view, the government cannot exercise total discretion in deciding which organisations are admitted to the negotiations of the agreements. Finally, in 2016, the case went before the Constitutional Court which decided that there is no inherent right to start a negotiation with the government, which maintains a wide discretion in deciding when, and with whom, to start and eventually finalise the agreement. It must be

noted that over the years, however, the Constitutional Court has contributed to the debate on the criteria to assess what qualifies as a religious denomination. In 1993 the Constitutional Court framed a four-part test to be used to assess if a group qualifies as a religious denomination. As Marco Ventura summarises,

The court ruled that the identity of “religious denomination” (*confessione religiosa*) could be deduced first, from the fact of having entered an *intesa* with the state or, second, from a previous recognition of the relevant community as a religious denomination by any local or central civil authority (*riconoscimento pubblico*); third, the nature of religious denomination could emerge from the examination of the community’s statutes; and fourth, it could emerge from the assessment of the “common knowledge” (*comune considerazione*) of public opinion. (Ventura 2013, 74)

The criteria established by the Constitutional Court, and the development by legal doctrine, have not settled the criteria but have contributed to clarifying the situation. The litigation, however, as can be seen from the UAAR case, has developed before many courts paving the way for a next decision to be issued by the ECtHR.⁴ The problem in defining a religious denomination within the Italian legal order is also the result of the religious demography of the country which has shaped the approval and the interpretation of the laws. In fact, a representative of UAAR argues that the entire *intesa* system needs rethinking, specifically because of the presence of new religions in the country:

It is also true that there is a problem with “new religions” because they are less well known. Our legal system is not used to their structure because it is formatted on the Catholic Church. There is a problem of structure and a problem of mentality. We have to learn how to use our laws for “new religions” and “non-religions” such as atheism.

In the same vein, the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster is starting the local process of recognition in order to be able to stipulate an agreement with the Italian state. When asked to comment on the possible concerns of ‘nonauthenticity’, one of the Church’s representatives we interviewed replied,

‘you have to start discussing what is meant by “true”, right? What is it? Because all the other religions are as true as ours, in that they are based on the act of faith’. ‘Secularism [*it. Laicità*] should be protected’ – the interviewee continued – ‘and religions should not affect state laws, [*but*] as long as this is the state of affairs, we want the same rights, because we want to be like everybody else’.

A category with strings attached – the case of Islam

Broadly speaking, legal recognition is a goal for the majority of the religions present in Italy (Giorgi and Annicchino 2017). As one of the interviewees, a scholar working on law and religion, pointed out: ‘the religions with an agreement have, symbolically, a better status than the religions without an agreement’. Indeed, representatives of minority religions often underlined during the interviews the importance of ‘respectability’ that recognition implies, regardless of the rights’ enforcement. This was the case, for example, of the Italian Neo-Pagan Union, or the Chiesa Vecchio-Cattolica in Italia⁵ whose representative commented,

in the cauldron of the churches that do not yet have the agreement there is everything, in the sense that there are churches, like ours, that have an official canonical recognition and everything else that makes it reasonable to hope to someday have an agreement. And there are also para-churches quite – how to say? – improvised, in which there are perhaps questionable people, who have been expelled from the official churches [...] very often you encounter dangerous and unpresentable individuals.

Being formally included in the category of ‘religion’ through an agreement, then, bears a symbolic significance of public legitimacy.

As the regime stands, ‘any group with religious aims may be founded without the necessity of any authorisation or prior registration and may operate within the Italian legal system’ (Ferrari and Ferrari 2015, 455), and the Italian Constitution grants freedom of faith and association and the right to nondiscrimination. However, as the extract highlights, obtaining an agreement grants a better status and entails both cultural and political recognition.

The process of agreement, though, could take years (12 years), as in the case of the Italian Buddhist Union. Moreover, the negotiation process takes place between a representative of the state and the representative of the religion, which means that religious groups need to appoint a spokesperson. The agreement must also be approved by the Parliament, which means that either an MP or the government has to take care of presenting the agreement to the chambers. Hence, symbolical and political recognition involves multiple strings: time, money, connections, a specific internal organisation and the willingness to be subjected to careful state control. One of the interviewees commented that it is a discriminatory situation which could be brought to the attention of the ECtHR:

we had evaluated the issue, but of course going to the ECtHR to ask to condemn Italy for, say, the backwardness in dealing with religious phenomena, would be extremely expensive: it is something that presupposes an action in conjunction with many other churches.

In addition to the complexities of the process of recognition, even having an agreement with the Italian State does not necessarily mean the enforcement of religious rights, which, on the ground, are often subjected to concurrent legal regimes, such as in the case of places of worship regarding which municipal zoning laws come into play.⁶

In this picture, religions established only recently in the country with low finances and poor connections, are in a very precarious situation. This is especially the case with Islam, whose presence in the Italian Republic dates back to the 1970s, but whose visibility has increased dramatically over the last decades, as a result of immigration and international events such as the refugee crisis and international terrorism. Precise data are not available but Islam is now the country’s second religion after Catholicism with more than 1.5 million followers (see, for example, the data provided by CESNUR⁷). The discussion around Islam is extremely polarised in the political sphere; certain political parties capitalise on electoral consensus around an open hostility against immigrants and Muslims (Cousin and Vitale 2012; Ozzano and Giorgi 2016). As Alessandro Ferrari has argued, ‘Islam is still perceived in Italy as a foreign religion, and its integration into the Italian civic and institutional landscape is mainly left to the “good will” of local practices, often promoted by civil society actors’ (Ferrari 2015–2016, 371). If atheism represents the quintessential problem of a ‘nonreligion’ that demands recognition according to the

rules which were developed *ab initio* with certain religions specifically in mind, Islam is a world religion that finds it difficult to comply with the Italian legal order in order to get full recognition and the status (and benefits) of a religion.

As mentioned above, religious groups have the option to obtain legal status as 'allowed cults' under the fascist law of 1929. This recognition confers specific religious rights (chaplaincy, ritual practices), but also entails a high degree of control by state institutions over the activities of the group and the preachers have to be individually approved by the authorities. This is a very restrictive law which includes highly detailed checks and surveillance by the state on the activities of the different religious denominations. As far as Islam is concerned, the *Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia*, which controls the Rome mosque, is the only legally recognised Islamic institution. It was founded by the Muslim World League and led, for many years, by an Italian convert. The Italian state and representatives of the different Islamic associations have so far not been able reach an agreement. The state has tried to handle Islamic issues through the creation of ad hoc committees and a council, which have produced guidelines and soft laws. An example of this kind of initiative is the Council for Italian Islam, established by ministerial decree in January 2016 by the Minister of Interior Angelino Alfano.⁸

The problem with the legal order currently in place is underlined by a lobbyist that coordinated the efforts of several religious minorities to get an agreement with the state:

according to Italian law any group in order to sign an agreement needs to have a certain "structure". So, who is representing Islam in Italy? We still have to understand it. When we will be able to determine that, only at that point could we be able to regulate the relationships of Islam with Italy.

This issue of fragmentation (across ethnic, national, or religious lines), making unified representation difficult, is a common challenge for Muslim migrant communities all over Europe (Nielsen 2013). This argument, though, is rejected by the Muslims themselves. For instance, a lawyer who has followed controversies against Muslim associations for years offered this rebuttal:

Can we really think that when you are going to make an agreement (*intesa*) you should have the agreement of all the members of the community? What does it mean? Even from a logical point of view. Does it mean that if there is an association in a small town we need to ask the permission of that association? Or there is a public interest and the state says: "I have an interest in having certain rules. So, I am the state and I decide who represents the community. If I decide that a given association represents the interest of that community, I can pick it as representative".

For our respondent, a major criterion for the state to decide should be the capacity of the selected organisation to be representative; in the Italian case, the most obvious candidate would be the UCOII (*Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia*), which is the largest Muslim organisation

It is the state that decides. If it is unable to do so it can resign from being the state. You see what the most representative organisations in the country are. The UCOII has been there for 20 years, it is present in many regions. It is useless to deal with organisations like the one headed by Pallavicini who has the ultra-chic, ultra-Sufi mosque in Meda street with 30 followers.

In this picture, some religious groups decide not to start the recognition process because its worship needs are sufficiently met otherwise. The majority of Muslim groups opt to be recognised only as ‘cultural associations’, obtaining legal status through registration at the local prefecture. Indeed, cultural associations enjoy a number of group rights, making this type of legal recognition a useful tool for organisation. In relation to the freedom of association, for example, Muslim groups can come together in places where the security standards would not meet the requirements for places of worship. As Alessandro Ferrari explains well:

While recognised “religious associations” are subject to heavy regulation and highly discretionary procedures, “private associations” enjoy simplified procedures for gaining recognition of their legal status as well as new types of advantageous and flexible organisational forms for the exercise of non-profit activities (Ferrari 2013, 378).

Often, local authorities close an eye, adopting an informal ‘don’t ask/don’t tell’ policy (see Allievi 2003; Angelucci, Bombardieri, and Tacchini 2014; Bombardieri 2012). However, this situation leaves the communities at the mercy of local politics. In the case of Islam, for example, controls appear to increase during electoral campaigns or in relation to media attention.

A clear example of the selective treatment of Islam is the case of places of worship: in some cities, such as Milano and Bologna, the requests of the local Muslim communities to build a mosque triggered a huge political debate (see, for example, Conti 2016), while in other cities this was not the case. As one of our interviewees, working specifically on Muslim places of worship in Italy, explained, commenting on the differences between the North and South of Italy:

There are fewer conflicts in the South of Italy, and this is related to political factors: namely, the lower presence of the “entrepreneurs of fear” [...] In the Northern regions, due to the presence of centre-right parties, and especially Lega Nord, conflicts around mosques are far more frequent. And the local press was involved, too. In the South, instead, this was not the case.

Regional laws specifically aimed at making it more difficult to authorise the construction and opening of mosques were approved in the regions of Lombardia (Law 2/2015) and Veneto (Law 12/2016). For instance, according to the new regulations, certain architectural requirements had to be respected or, according to the regional law approved in Veneto, Italian was supposed to be the only language allowed in religious premises. In the case of Lombardia, as Giancarlo Anello highlights: ‘the Court recognized the alleged discrimination between denominations and acknowledged the prevailing power of the State over the regional power in matters of religious freedom’ (Anello 2017). However, the possibility for the region to intervene remains within the competence of urban government and zoning laws. In the decision against the Veneto regional law, the Court stated that regions can enact law within their field of competence and that the laws should not discriminate against religious groups; however, ‘the principle of using Italian for all those activities of common interest for religious services is unconstitutional’ (Anello 2017).

Although these laws implicitly targeted the Muslim communities and were to a great extent repealed by the Constitutional Court, their symbolic and practical effects on other religions should not be underestimated. First, some of the laws’ provisions are still in

place, such as the possibility of establishing a minimum distance from another place of worship. Second, these laws make other religions feel unwelcome. The approval of this kind of law has signalling effects and taints the public debate by hyper-politicising it in terms of constitutional rights which should be guaranteed to everyone. More broadly, these laws signal a process of ‘racialisation of religions’: non-Christian religions are dealt within the semantic universe of immigration and culture (see Joshi 2006; Meer 2013).

At a practical level, faced with these complex legal entanglements, even officially recognised religions and religions with an agreement sometimes selectively mobilise the ‘religion’ identity: while in some cases they call themselves religion because it grants advantages, in other instances they prefer not to because it would be disadvantageous. These disadvantages relate mostly to the length of institutional processes involving religions. The clearest example is connected to places of worship: as one of our interviewees, a representative of the Italian Buddhist Union, clearly explained, once religions have an agreement, in order to open new places of worship they must notify the Minister of Interior: ‘and it takes a year and a half [...] We have some centres that have decided instead to become cultural centres recognised by the region because it is faster.’ Likewise, in the case of chaplaincies, it is faster to obtain permission to enter a prison as a ‘friend’ of the inmate, rather than a prison chaplain.

Religious identity is also related to the broader issue of being a minority religion in a context dominated by a majoritarian tradition. As Lori Beaman explains, a trend can be identified in western countries for which majoritarian religions are turned by judicial decisions (and/or by law) into a nations’ culture and heritage (Beaman 2016). Indeed, many national and international courts’ decisions go in the same direction as in the case of Italy (starting with the *Lautsi v Italy* case). In this sense, ‘this religion turned culture and heritage is validated as essential to the moral fabric of the nation. Thus, challenging it is seen as unreasonable’ (Beaman 2016, p. 31).

The label of religion is, therefore, complex to obtain and its benefits are ambivalent. Legal recognition is not necessarily coupled with political and cultural recognition. In the case of Islam, the issue of recognition may be more a result of increasing political polarisation around the issue, rather than relating to a specific request by Muslim communities. Moreover, the research results show evidence of a selective activation of religious identity; this is a relevant factor in the analysis of the potential role of international organisations such as the ECtHR.

Religion in Italy – the complexities of a category

In this contribution, we have approached the role of the ECtHR in the protection of religious rights by specifically focusing on the complex definition of what ‘religion’ is and who has the authority to decide. We know that the text of the Convention does not offer a definition of religion and the Court has developed within its own case law a very open-minded approach. Definitions at the national level and within the context of national law may, however, differ.

This is especially true in the case of Italy, in which multiple legal regimes intervene in defining the legal framework in which religions operate. Different religions have different rights and different opportunity structures. While some religions (notably Catholicism, but also Hinduism, for example) have easy access to different arenas, others,

such as Islam, do not. Sometimes religious groups, and this is again the case with Islam, simply prefer to resort to national law instead of turning to the ECtHR. In analysing the different strategies adopted by religious groups to protect their rights, the selective activation of the 'religion' label emerges as an interesting element: religions try to navigate the legal system and strategise on how to obtain formal recognition as a 'religion'.

In principle, being recognised as religion offers symbolic and practical benefits to religious groups, and many religious minorities try to obtain the status of an officially recognised religion. To be included in the category of 'religion' means to be respectable actors in the public sphere, thus allowing the enforcement religious rights.

However, as the cases of Islam and Buddhism exemplify, in some circumstances, the status of a recognised religion is premised on standards and requirements that are difficult to meet. Moreover, although recognition is the first step in enforcing religious rights, it is often not enough, due to the legal complexity of the Italian legal context, discrimination and the wide discretion of state institutions. In addition, while in some cases – such as access to funding – religious identity is mandatory, in others – such as the building of places of worship – it may well be an obstacle. Hence, depending on the context, these groups may be reluctant to activate official recognition as a 'religion'.

Finally, groups like the atheists and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, directly engage with the concept of religion, trying to stretch the definition to its ultimate logical consequences, in order to point out its contradictions. The atheists are particularly knowledgeable of ECtHR case law and able to frame their arguments in the wider context of supranational norms.

Broadly speaking, the courts – and especially the ECtHR – are crucial players in promoting and defending religious freedom. This, of course, depends on the country involved and its relationships with the European legal system, and on the choices of the individual, institutional and religious actors in their legal strategies. However, in certain circumstances, religious groups find better protection of their religious rights in the absence of legal and formal recognition or by activating national laws. Thus, the issue at stake seems to be cultural and political – rather than legal – recognition.

Notes

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2. It must be also added that the most important inequality is the one perceived vis-à-vis the Catholic Church and its privileged legal status.
3. See, for example, the article 'The hurdle race of the Italian Atheist', by one of the UAAR members (Orioli 2013).
4. UAAR has appealed the decision of the Constitutional Court before the European Court of Human Rights.
5. The Chiesa Vecchio-Cattolica in Italy change its name from Orthodox Church in Italy to Old Catholic Church in Italy in 2013, and it is a vicariate of the Nordic Catholic Church.
6. Another interesting case concerns preachers: According to a recent judgment by the Council of State, preachers' appointments are connected to the size of religious communities (at least 500 members) – regardless of the agreement – as explained by an interviewee with the Evangelical Federation Legal Support team.

7. See <http://www.cesnur.com/il-pluralismo-religioso-italiano-nel-contesto-postmoderno-2/>.
8. For a detailed description of these initiatives, see Ventura (2013, 85).

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