EU Religious Engagement Strategy: Partnership or Modern Imperialism?

M.A. Thesis
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S1628569
MA International Relations:
Global Conflict in the Modern Era
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13 August 2020
Word count: 14141

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1. Introduction

The role of religion in international affairs has for a long time been underexposed due to the overwhelming belief that religion would become irrelevant in the newly globalized world. However, religion has not left our daily lives; in fact, according to the Pew Research Center, approximately 84% of the world population identifies with some kind of religion (Pew Research Center 2012). This means that it is important to take into account the religious factor in international relations, just as ethnicity, language and gender are cultural factors that are included in political analyses. However, religion is often considered to be a factor that only hampers international development and peace, while the opportunities that the religious factor can bring to foreign policy and diplomacy are not highlighted sufficiently. Scholars have increasingly started arguing that religion needs to be taken seriously by diplomats and government officials to strengthen relations with nation-states in which religion is prevalent. Through the academic world, this idea has started circulating and has slowly but steadily spread towards the world of policymakers as well.

This thesis is concerned with the way in which the EU specifically has started considering the value of gathering more knowledge about the role of religion in other nation-states' foreign policy, even if its own foreign policy is centred around secularism. The practices that have followed from this understanding are grouped under the term 'religious engagement', defined as a form of diplomacy in which foreign ministries incorporate religion as a factor of consideration into their foreign policies to better understand the role of religion in other nation-states' decision-making processes. This definition will be described in more detail in the theoretical framework.

While this is largely considered to be a positive development in the world of foreign policymaking and diplomacy, multiple scholars have started criticizing the operationalization of the concept as well (Hurd 2015; Maggiolini 2019; Wolff 2018). The question that is being raised, is whether religious engagement, in the way it is currently being formulated as well as practiced by the EU, actually represents a new-found understanding of religion within foreign policy or whether this view is too optimistic. It can, therefore, be identified that there is a debate in the scholarly world of religious engagement in which there are proponents of religious engagement as well as opponents or sceptics who are not necessarily against the practice of religious engagement but at least believe that the current implementation is flawed. This debate is still relatively new, especially because EU religious engagement practices have only fully

been implemented since 2016, and there are, therefore, many gaps within this field of research that need to be filled.

While one way to further study religious engagement strategies would be to look at practical initiatives that are part of religious engagement and examine their effectiveness, this thesis will take a step back and focus on the discourse behind EU religious engagement. It is useful to study the language behind policies and initiatives since language can tell us a lot about the underlying motives and ideologies. That is why, in this thesis, the content of EU religious engagement will be examined, specifically the speeches and articles of Ján Figel, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) outside the EU and thereby the leading EU actor of the EU's religious engagement strategies, via Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Using CDA tools, this analysis will show that the sceptics or opponents within the religious engagement debate are right to be sceptical about EU religious engagement, since an examination of EU religious engagement discourse will demonstrate that EU religious engagement strategies carry imperial undertones with them, barring these strategies from reaching its proclaimed goals. More specifically, in this thesis, it will be argued that the discourse underlying EU religious engagement is building upon long-standing traditions of EU imperialism through which the EU can assert its superiority. Religious engagement is meant to be practiced through a mutual collaboration between the EU and third countries so the EU can expand its knowledge on religion and the religious world and can ensure that the religious factor will be taken into account in foreign affairs. However, this thesis will demonstrate that these goals can currently not be reached because the discourse behind EU religious engagement formulates religious engagement in such a way that it is framed as an imperial exercise in which the EU can hierarchically transmit its own norms and values towards third countries instead of actually collaborate and start a dialogue with these countries. EU religious engagement is, therefore, not breaking with the EU's long-standing imperial traditions but is instead reinforcing these by framing EU religious engagement as a new method through which the EU can establish and expand its power in the world.

To provide evidence of these imperial undertones within EU religious engagement discourse, the analysis will be split up into three arguments. It will be demonstrated that the EU (1) divides religion into 'good' forms and 'bad' forms based on Eurocentric standards, (2) describes interfaith dialogue as such that it builds upon a long-standing hierarchical structure with the EU on top and third countries on the bottom, and (3) securitizes (forms) of religion—all of which can be linked to behaviour from the EU during colonial times.

This research can be especially relevant to the debate on religious engagement since it will be the first to examine the discourse behind EU religious engagement strategies instead of the actual policies. Scholars such as Hurd, Maggiolini and Wolff have already formulated a more critical view on the operationalization of religious engagement, but there has not been any research done in which the scholar analyses the discourse behind it. This thesis will attempt to fill this gap, demonstrating that a critical examination of EU religious engagement discourse can result in new findings about the biases and hierarchical structures behind EU religious engagement. Moreover, the research will be connected to literature from the EU-as-an-empire paradigm in which it is argued that modern-day EU is behaving as though it is an (informal) imperial power, thereby demonstrating that there are not only hierarchical but imperial structures underlying EU religious engagement discourse as well. Lastly, this research has practical relevance as well since it will demonstrate why the goals of EU religious engagement can currently not be reached and since it will attempt to formulate recommendations on how to improve religious engagement strategies on the basis of these findings.

The thesis will be structured as follows. Within the literature review, an overview of the academic research that has already been done on this topic will be described, first in a broader sense by focusing on the role of religion in the field of International Relations (IR) and then more specifically in foreign policy and diplomacy. This will result in a clear definition of the concept of religious engagement based on the existing literature on this topic. Moreover, the literature review will include an overview of the scholars that have taken a more critical approach to religious engagement as well as an overview of the major arguments from the EU-as-an-empire paradigm, both of which will outline the literature this thesis is based on. Next, in the methodology, the details of CDA will be explained, including data selection and limitations of the research. After having established this framework, the actual analysis will consist of three sub-chapters: (1) Dichotomization of religion, (2) An unequal partnership, and (3) Securitization of religion. Following this analysis, there will be a conclusion in which possibilities for further research as well as recommendations will be provided.

2. Literature review

2.1 Religion in the field of IR

The disregard for religion within the international political system began centuries ago. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 could be regarded as a starting point, when it was decided that the international political system would be based around the power of states (Haynes 2013; Farr 2008; Thomas 2005). Correspondingly, this meant that secular authorities would in the future be superior to religious authorities, such as the Catholic Church (Haynes 2013; Thomas 2005). This change in the international political system had a significant impact on sociological theories as well. In the social sciences, there was consensus that the Age of Enlightenment made religion insignificant within society due to the rise of rationalization, scientific inventions and technology (Fox and Sandler 2004, 10). Secularization became a well-known sociological theory: as societies would grow more advanced, religion would no longer be needed since technological advances would help explain the world (Fox and Sandler 2004, 11).

These sociological theories then seeped into the world of political science and IR. Three corresponding trends that led to the demise of religion specifically within the field of IR can be discerned. First of all, following the sociological secularization theory, IR became dominated by the corresponding modernization theory in which it was argued that modernization would make religion irrelevant (Fox and Sandler 2004, 10). Moreover, political science and IR were fields in which quantitative data was often regarded as more useful than qualitative data. Since religion is an inherently immeasurable factor, it was often left out of analyses (Fox and Sandler 2004, 9). Lastly, the field of IR consists of different schools of thought or theories. Even though a variety of competing theories have entered the sector as well, the realist school of thought has significantly influenced the academic field of IR. Realists argue that the international political system consists of state actors that make their decisions based on material factors, including military power and economic development (Fox and Sandler 2004; Thomas 2005; Haynes 2013). Immaterial factors such as religion do not have a place in the decision-making process of states according to realists (Fox and Sandler 2004; Thomas 2005; Haynes 2013). Taken together, the belief in modernization theory, a focus on quantitative data and the dominance of the realist school of thought all led to a general disregard for religion within the field of IR.

However, the theories of secularization and modernization started to crumble in the 1980s and 1990s when it became clear that religion was still relevant to society and international politics. While there are discussions over whether we are currently seeing a resurgence of religion or whether religion has never truly disappeared from society at all, it could be said that

there is consensus that in the current age, religion plays an important role (Fox and Sandler 2004; Haynes 2013; Farr 2008; Petito and Thomas 2015; Hurd 2015; Thomas 2005). This idea gathered momentum in the 1990s already, following Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis and the publication of Johnston and Sampson's *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, one of the first works on the role of religion within foreign policy. This belief gained even more momentum in the 2000s after the 9/11 attacks since this event demonstrated that religion was an important factor to take into consideration when studying conflicts (Hurd 2015; Farr 2008). Moreover, it can be argued that more recently there has been a shift in the field of IR to include normative values and ideational factors as relevant variables, transforming religion into a relevant factor as well (Thomas 2005; Fox and Sandler 2004). These interconnected changes have led to a more prominent role for religion within the field of IR, as is reflected in the exponential increase in the number of publications on the role of religion within foreign policy in the last decade (Petito and Thomas 2015, 41).

2.2 Religion in foreign policy and diplomacy

Moreover, according to many scholars, it is important that the role of religion is not only considered in the academic field of IR but in the practical field of diplomacy and foreign policy as well. It should be understood that, even though Western nation-states are mostly organized secularly, in many non-Western nation-states, the religious and the political are not separated but heavily intertwined (Keiswetter and Chane 2013; Baker 2016; Albright 2006; Johnston 2011). This means that their decision-making process will be influenced by religious factors, and if this is not taken into account in the bilateral relations, this can lead to wrong judgements and misunderstandings according to these scholars (Keiswetter and Chane 2013; Baker 2016; Albright 2006; Johnston 2011). Still, it has taken much longer for actual policymakers to incorporate these academic arguments into their policies. Why this is the case, is related to the same reasons why religion was for so long not included in the academic field of IR. Even though there are many nation-states in which religion plays a significant role, many Western bureaucratic, policymaking institutions remain representatives of secular, realist values (Mandaville and Silvestri 2015; Johnston and Sampson 1994; Farr 2008). Many Western diplomats have been trained within the realist school of thought and are raised with the belief that the church and state should remain separated (Mandaville and Silvestri 2015, 3) These assumptions are, therefore, deeply internalized within large foreign ministries. In order to

change these, the concept of religious engagement has started to become important, a concept that will be explained in more detail in the following paragraph.

2.3 Definition of religious engagement

Even though there has been a rise in the number of academic articles and policy documents that have argued for the inclusion of religion within foreign policy and diplomacy, there is no consistency in the definition of this concept. Articles use different terminology and include different aspects. Before moving further into the analysis of religious engagement, it is important to have a clear view of the way in which this concept is defined and interpreted.

The belief that the role of religion should be included in foreign policy has been referred to in many different ways. Johnston uses the term 'faith-based diplomacy' and is herein followed by Madeleine Albright—former US Secretary of State—and Blakemore (Johnston and Cox 2003; Albright 2006; Blakemore 2018). Others have defined the concept more broadly by naming it 'religious engagement' (Mandaville and Silvestri 2015; Appleby and Cizik 2010). The term 'religion-attentive foreign policy', as coined by the Institute for Global Engagement, has also been used sporadically (Birdsall, Lindsay and Tomalin 2015; Baker 2016). Other terminology includes 'cultural' or 'spiritual engagement', or 'interfaith dialogue' (Johnston 2011; Blakemore 2018). To ensure clarity throughout this thesis, the term 'religious engagement' will be used but this will not only be based on the definitions by Mandaville and Silvestri, and Appleby and Cizik, but will include characteristics from other scholars' terminology as well.

The interpretations of this concept show similarities as well as differences. Scholars agree that religion should be considered a relevant component across all foreign policy decisions and diplomatic issues, not only in specific thematic cases (Mandaville and Silvestri 2015; Baker 2016; Birdsall, Lindsay and Tomalin 2015). Secondly, it should be seen as a new form of diplomacy that does not replace traditional diplomacy in any way, but only complements it (Johnston and Cox 2003; Albright 2006). However, the ways in which the interpretations differ, are striking. Firstly, while some scholars and policymakers consider the promotion of international religious freedom to be part of the concept, others are vehemently against this (Farr 2008; Hurd 2015). Many consider the promotion of international religious freedom to be an imperial method through which Western nation-states try to force their own values and norms onto other nation-states which would go against the goal of religious engagement of listening to and learning from other cultures (Hurd 2015, 38).

Another key difference is related to the actors that should be involved. Johnston, and other scholars that have written about faith-based diplomacy specifically, argue that government actors should not be the main actors in this type of diplomacy, but that the responsibility should lie with non-government actors such as religion attaches, military chaplains, religious leaders or NGOs who will be supported by government practitioners (Johnston 2011; Blakemore 2018). They believe that government practitioners are too attached to the political agenda of the state and will only use the newly acquired knowledge on religion as instruments to broaden their own power (Johnston 2011, 57). However, many other scholars do believe that government practitioners should be the main actors to implement religious engagement, targeting their reasoning especially towards changing the foreign policy institutions from the inside to be able to better deal with the role of religion in external issues (Albright 2006; Mandaville and Silvestri 2015; Baker 2016).

Both of these distinctions are important for the discussion that will follow in this thesis, since they highlight the fact that there seem to be two opposing views in the academic field of religious engagement: on the one hand the proponents who view religious engagement as a positive development, and on the other hand the scholars who are more sceptical or pessimistic about the aims of religious engagement. The critical perspective on religious engagement will be described in more detail in the following paragraph.

For now, it is important to conclude that, after having taken into account the above-mentioned similarities as well as differences, religious engagement in this thesis will be defined as a form of diplomacy in which foreign ministries incorporate religion as a factor of consideration into their foreign policies to better understand the role of religion in other nation-states' decision-making processes.

2.4 Critique on religious engagement

Within this thesis the positive sides of this concept have so far been extensively highlighted, but, as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the rise of literature on and practices of religious engagement has more recently resulted in critical views as well. One of the main scholars within this critical discussion is Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. In her works on religious engagement and international religious freedom, mostly focused on the US, a common thread can be found regarding her critique on these concepts. She argues that the practice of religious engagement gives governments the power to define what religion is, who can be identified as religious actors and who cannot, and which (parts of) religion are 'good' and which are 'bad' (Hurd 2015, 30-

35). In this way, not only is religion being oversimplified but it enables foreign policy makers to utilize and manipulate religious engagement to advance their own national interest (Hurd 2015, 35).

Other scholars have expanded on Hurd's work by indicating the risks of religious engagement within the EU specifically that Hurd has described before in a broader sense. Maggiolini and Wolff are two of these scholars who, first of all, demonstrate that religion continues to be associated with conflict in religious engagement strategies instead of with more positive possibilities such as humanitarianism and development aid (Maggiolini 2019; Wolff 2018). Religious engagement is, therefore, still most often practiced in relation to crisis management and counterterrorism, even though it is meant to demonstrate that religion should be taken into account as a relevant factor in foreign policy decisions that are not related to security as well (Maggiolini 2019, 5). This has resulted in another downside of religious engagement according to these scholars, namely the fact that this inherent securitization of religion in religious engagement has further strengthened stereotypical dichotomies related to religion (Maggiolini 2019; Wolff 2018). By using the term 'moderate Islam', as they argue is often done in religious engagement in the EU, foreign policy makers start defining types of 'good' religion and 'bad' religion (Wolff 2018, 175). By reproducing these old dichotomies of the West vs. Islam or 'moderate' religion vs. 'extremist' religion, practices of religious engagement are seemingly undermining the goals of religious engagement which were in the first place meant to look beyond these assumptions and study the positive and useful aspects of religion in foreign policy (Maggiolini 2019; Wolff 2018).

Nevertheless, Maggiolini and Wolff seem more positive about the future of religious engagement than Hurd. While Hurd believes that religious engagement could never be usefully practiced due to the hegemonic power relations that are inherent in this structure, Maggiolini and Wolff argue that these downsides could be reduced by implementing certain changes in these policies to overcome these assumptions, such as by moving beyond these long-standing dichotomies and encouraging collaborative projects as well as equal dialogue (Maggiolini 2019, 7-8).

The arguments from Hurd, Wolff and Maggiolini on religious engagement demonstrate that it is important to study religious engagement from a critical viewpoint as well, especially now that many governments have started to implement these practices. However, there remain gaps in this area of study, since religious engagement has only in the past few years been operationalized by policymakers. Even though the abovementioned scholars have studied the way in which foreign ministries have translated the academic concept of religious engagement

into practical policies, no scholar seems to have critically examined EU religious engagement discourse to uncover hidden biases or hierarchical power structures. Especially in light of the abovementioned debate within the academic field of religious engagement, new research on the discourse behind these practices would be a valuable addition to the field since it could further uncover these supposed inequalities that opponents have alluded to.

The thesis will, therefore, be focusing on the discourse behind EU religious engagement practices to demonstrate how this discourse specifically brings certain shortcomings of the approach to the foreground. In this way, this thesis will, therefore, add to the existing critical literature by presenting new evidence about the hidden biases and hierarchical structures that can be found through an analysis of the discourse instead of the policies.

Moreover, in this thesis a newly found connection will be made as well, combining literature on and practices of religious engagement with the broader literature on EU-as-an-empire to demonstrate that EU religious engagement discourse does not only carry hierarchical undertones but imperial undertones as well. The literature that is a part of this EU-as-an-empire paradigm will be examined in more detail in the following paragraphs.

2.5 Religious engagement and EU imperialism

Before demonstrating how this thesis fits into the literature on modern EU imperialism, the main arguments from this paradigm will be outlined here. For a long time, there used to be agreement around the idea that the EU was a *sui generis* entity with characteristics that had not been seen before in any other entities, but in the 1990s scholars increasingly started to question this statement. They believed that the EU needed to be historicized, arguing that the EU is not an ahistorical entity but has to be imagined as part of a historical and political continuum (Pänke 2019; Zielonka 2013; Behr 2007). In doing so, it could be established that the current form that the EU has taken post-colonialism fits into the EU's tradition of an empire (Chandler 2006; Pänke 2019; Del Sarto 2016; Zielonka 2013; Stivachtis 2018; Behr 2007). While the times of overt European colonialism have ended, the way in which the EU is currently establishing and expanding its power in the world is still reminiscent of imperialism. This European empire might not take the exact shape of an empire that we know from history but does fit into the definition of an informal empire in which mechanisms of control are not formalized but are more subtle (Chandler 2006; Hobson 2012).

Examples that are often used in literature to illustrate these informal mechanisms of domination in EU foreign policy include the process of EU enlargement, the European

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and, more specifically, the forms of conditionality on which membership is based (Chandler 2006; Stivachtis 2018; Zielonka 2013). In 1993, the EU formulated the so-called Copenhagen criteria which would lay the base for membership of the EU (Zielonka 2013, 42). Nation-states would only be able to become a part of the EU if they adhered to certain normative conditions related to, amongst others, rule of law, democracy, human rights, and economic rights (ibid.). This represented the beginning of EU enlargement in which the EU defined which nation-states were eligible to become a part of the EU and which were not. Moreover, when the ENP was introduced in 2003, the process of enlargement was further extended by inviting the EU's eastern and southern peripheries to cooperate more closely together and become more integrated within the EU on the condition that these nation-states adhered to the above-mentioned political and economic criteria (Del Sarto 2016, 219).

Both of these are methods through which the EU has tried to expand its power by spreading its norms and values across other nation-states through the mechanism of conditionality (Stivachtis 2008; Chandler 2006). While this is not the same as the overt EU colonial strategies from the past, the process is strikingly similar in the sense that it gives the EU the power to expand its control as well as determine the hierarchical relations with the EU at the top and third countries below (Stivachtis 2008, 81). The language that is used in these new practices, such as 'partnership' and 'empowerment', might be different from the colonial terminology but the content remains the same since it builds on old forms of hierarchy and asymmetry (Chandler 2006; Zielonka 2013; Behr 2007; Buzan 2014).

As will be argued throughout this thesis, EU religious engagement discourse fits into this picture that scholars have painted of these modern forms of EU imperialism. Since EU religious engagement discourse is largely framed in terms of EU norms and values, specifically religious freedom as will be demonstrated in more detail in Chapter 4, the EU is seemingly trying to advocate these norms in third countries in order to expand its own control, similar to what the EU did with other norms related to democracy and rule of law in its enlargement process . In making this connection, this thesis will, therefore, provide a valuable addition to the debate on religious engagement since this argument has not been made before. Sceptical opponents such as Hurd have identified the hierarchical power relations that underlie the EU's religious freedom campaign, but there has been no research done identifying the connection to modern EU imperialism as well. These are necessary additions to this research field since this will strengthen the arguments of the sceptics of religious engagement.

2.6 Overview of EU religious engagement strategies

This thesis will specifically focus on the role of the EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of FoRB outside the EU, a position that was created in 2016, but the framework for EU religious engagement strategies was outlined earlier on already. Before 2013, the importance of FoRB as a human right was already named in multiple EU policy documents and strategic frameworks but it was not considered to be a priority. This changed in 2013 when the EU published its guidelines on the promotion and protection of FoRB which included FoRB as a new EU priority and lay down the framework for other aspects of religious engagement such as interfaith dialogue and the importance of religious literacy amongst EU policy makers and staff (Council of EU 2013). However, it can be argued that the EU's religious engagement strategy had its breakthrough when Figel was appointed in 2016. This appointment signified the EU's goals to not only protect FoRB but make religion and religious knowledge part of its diplomacy "with the mission to reinforce an effective, visible and strategic EU engagement in the area of FoRB within the human rights and international cooperation policies of the EU", as Figel himself later phrased (Figel 2019, 3). Since his appointment, the European Parliament has adopted a resolution in 2019 as well in which it was argued that a boost is needed to ensure the inclusion of religion in the broader framework of EU foreign policy (European Parliament 2019). While the position of Figel expired in November 2019, his position was recently renewed on 8 July 2020 which could represent the EU's readiness to broaden and strengthen its religious engagement strategy. This has, therefore, shown that Figel was a key actor in EU religious engagement from 2016 to 2019, a period in which he visited 17 countries to start a dialogue with religious actors, gather more knowledge on the role of religion in foreign policy in these countries, and signify the EU's interest and willingness to learn about religion.

3. Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to uncover the underlying discourses that are inherent in the EU's religious engagement documents. A fitting research method for this project is CDA. Even though there is no homogeneous research method of CDA, the overarching goal of CDA—to reveal the social relations, power structures, ideologies and discourses that are encoded in language and texts—fits the goals of this thesis perfectly (Machin and Mayr 2012; Van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 1993; Lê and Lê 2009). The 'critical' aspect as well as the term 'discourse' are central to CDA and need to be explained in order to understand this methodology. First of all, the term 'critical' shows that CDA researchers concern themselves not only with describing linguistic features but with analysing how choices of words and grammar can in turn reveal underlying assumptions and ideologies (Fairclough 1993; Machin and Mayr 2012; Lê and Lê 2009). Moreover, the concept of 'discourse' can be described as language-in-use or "the broader ideas communicated by a text" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 20). Language is not simply text, but it can act as a vehicle through which ideas, identities and power structures become naturalized (Machin and Mayr 2012, 2-3). Taken together, this is what CDA concerns itself with.

However, there is not one specific research method to perform CDA but there are multiple. One of the leading scholars in this field, Norman Fairclough, for example, introduced a three-dimensional framework for CDA (1993, 136). He divided discourse into three dimensions: discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice, and discourse as social practice. Respectively, a CDA researcher needs to describe the linguistic patterns of a text that can reveal the underlying discourses (including vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure); interpret the text by looking at it in its context and how it relates to societal structures; and explain the broader ideological and hegemonic structures that this discourse is a part of (Fairclough 1993; Lê and Lê 2009). Teun van Dijk is another prominent CDA scholar who concerns himself specifically with uncovering inequality and dominance in language-use (Van Dijk 1993; Van Dijk 1995). He argues that ideologies are underlying language through 'us' versus 'them' representations in which people try to frame themselves positively, while framing the 'others' negatively (Van Dijk 1995, 18). This dominance can be asserted through syntax, lexical style, rhetorical strategies or semantics (Van Dijk 1995, 23-32).

The methodology of this thesis will be mainly based on Van Dijk's ideas of CDA, since this thesis will be concerned with uncovering the inequality and dominance structures that underlie language as well. I will be analysing five speeches and one article that were written by Ján Figel, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief from 2016 to 2019 and

therefore one of the leading actors of religious engagement within the EU framework, to demonstrate how unequal power structures and discourses of imperialism related to the EU and religion are manifested in these texts.

I will be using multiple tools from CDA to demonstrate how the language used in these speeches and articles is covering up multiple discursive themes. These tools include paying attention to the usage of rhetorical tropes and metaphors, and the way in which actors and actions are represented by studying the concepts of transitivity and structural oppositions (Machin and Mayr 2012). These are important tools because, first of all, rhetorical tropes and metaphors can be used to transform concrete processes into abstraction and can simplify these in order to persuade the audience of an argument (Machin and Mayr 2012, 164). However, these tropes and metaphors are often filled with underlying power relations, making them a useful linguistic tool to study in CDA to uncover these discourses (ibid.). Secondly, the study of linguistic tools such as transitivity or structural oppositions are relevant because they can demonstrate what the author wants the audience to know about and think of the participating actors and their actions. Both of these linguistic tools can be used by the author to manipulate the audience' understanding of the actors in a positive or negative way, thereby marking the hidden power structures the author creates (Machin and Mayr 2012, 77; 104). Within each chapter, these tools will be explained in more detail by demonstrating how Figel specifically makes use of them.

Due to the scope of this thesis, the analysis will be limited. It was necessary to make a selection of the available content on EU religious engagement, which means that a significant part will be left out of the picture within this thesis. However, it can be argued that the arguments that will be made in this thesis are indicative of the broader EU religious engagement discourse since the speeches and articles that are analysed, are written by one of the leading actors in this policy and can, therefore, be considered representative of the broader EU religious engagement discourse.

4. Analysis

In the following analysis, EU religious engagement discourse will be analysed on the basis of Figel's speeches to demonstrate to what extent this discourse has imperial undertones. Religious engagement is based on the idea that the EU formulates a more open and understanding view on the role of religion in other countries' foreign policy, but, after having studied the literature on EU enlargement and its imperial origins, the emphasis on partnership, cooperation and universalism in religious engagement seems to be hiding imperial practices that underlie this strategy. The analysis is split up into three parts. The first argument is focused on the idea that Figel's framing of 'good' and 'bad' religion is similar to the 'standard of civilization' that used to be widely used to justify colonialism. The second argument is tightly linked to the first since it demonstrates that Figel's description of the participating actors and their actions are reminiscent of civilizing missions which were normalized in colonial times to justify colonialism on the basis of the aforementioned 'standard of civilization'. Lastly, Figel's framing of religious engagement signifies the securitization of (forms of) religion, which is problematic because securitization can be used to justify intervention in other nation-states. How these findings are all intertwined will be analysed in more detail in the conclusion.

4.1 Dichotomization of religion

In this chapter, it will be demonstrated that Figel's framing of EU religious engagement creates a dichotomy between 'good' religion and 'bad' religion which is reminiscent of the 'standard of civilization', a standard that was widely used to justify EU colonialism. By demarcating 'good' forms of religion from 'bad' forms of religion on the basis of EU models of 'civilization', Figel steps into the imperial tradition of identifying 'civilized' societies from 'uncivilized' societies. This dichotomization is mainly created by Figel through his usage of the moderate/extremist religion trope, a narrative that originated in the War on Terror. Before demonstrating how the usage of this trope can be linked to the historical 'standard of civilization' and explaining in more detail why this is a sign of EU imperialism, the origins of the 'standard of civilization' will be outlined.

4.1.1 Theory of 'standard of civilization'

The 'standard of civilization' is a concept that is strongly linked to colonialism. It originated in the legal world, but later became widely used in the political world as well, and it was used as a legal mechanism to demarcate 'civilized' society from 'semi-civilized' and 'uncivilized' society (Gong 1984; Bowden 2004; Behr 2007). This idea started to arise in the 19th century when European society started to expand, and Europe needed to have a set of rules that could be used to make other nation-states qualify for membership or not (Stivachtis 2018; Gong 1984; Behr 2007; Bowden 2004; Stivachtis 2008). However, these rules were based on a European model of civilization in which European nation-states held the power to define which qualities a nation-state needed to have in order to be regarded as 'civilized', which automatically meant that European nation-states were regarded as the perfect example of 'civilization' (Pitts 2019, 447). This 'standard of civilization' was consequently used to justify colonialism, or civilizing missions, since this was regarded as a process through which Europe could spread its knowledge to 'uncivilized' nation-states to save them from backwardness and instead move them towards modernization and progress (Pitts 2019; Stivachtis 2018). This concept of civilizing missions will be explained in more detail in the next chapter as well.

Even though the 'standard of civilization' as it was known from the start died down after the Second World War due to the rise of self-determination and even though it became unfashionable to use the terminology of 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' due to the connotation of colonialism, there are many signs that this 'standard of civilization' continues to be used albeit in different forms (Stivachtis 2018; Behr 2007; Gong 1984; Buzan 2014). When looking at the

Copenhagen criteria that were discussed in the introduction of the analysis, for example, it can be concluded that the EU is still trying to transmit its own values through the process of conditionality—values that are largely based on European ideas of modernization and progress (Stivachtis 2018, 93). It is only the language that has shifted: terms such as 'civilization' or 'barbarism' are not explicitly used anymore, but similar, more bureaucratic terms such as 'modernity', 'good governance' and 'development' have been normalized instead (Hobson 2012; Buzan 2014; Behr 2007). At first sight, these terms might not be controversial, but they are reminiscent of the 'standard of civilization' and, consequently, of colonialism since they create an implicit distinction between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' peoples based on EU norms and on EU assumed superiority. In the case of Figel's speeches, this distinction becomes evident as well through the usage of the moderate/extremist religion trope, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.

4.1.2 Moderate/extremist religion trope

During the War on Terror, terms such as 'fundamentalist', 'moderate', 'radical', or 'extremist' became common words in the vocabulary of Western politicians when discussing topics in relation to religion or, more specifically and frequently, in relation to Islam (Gutkowski 2015; Coen 2017). These markers, however, were never clearly defined but they nonetheless became widespread and were soon regarded as an indispensable part of people's vocabulary through politics and media. Referring to someone as 'moderate' could mean anything from tolerant or democratic to modern or socially progressive, while 'radical', 'extremist' or 'fundamentalist' equalled something along the line of violent, intolerant and socially backwards (Gutkowski 2015, 10). In practice, these markers were also often used in terms of a religious community's relation to the West: are they an ally of the West ('moderates') or are they rejecting the West and are thereby an enemy of the West ('extremists') (Gutkowski 2015, 3)? However, since the specific characteristics of this dichotomy are not clearly defined, it gives Western actors the power to designate who is 'moderate' and who is 'extremist' based on a narrow view of religion as well as Western ideas of modernization and progress. They become discursive markers in which 'moderate' equals 'good' or 'civilized' and 'extremist' equals 'bad' or 'uncivilized', a distinction that is strongly linked to the imperial 'standard of civilization'.

As demonstrated, this rhetoric is clearly used as a linguistic tool to simplify a complicated situation in order to persuade the audience of the Western actors' argument and is in this sense hiding underlying power relations (Machin and Mayr 2012, 167). Studying the usage of this rhetorical trope in Figel's speeches, as will be done in the following paragraphs,

can, therefore, reveal many of the hidden power structures that are presented in Figel's speeches.

Returning to the documents that are studied within this thesis, there are many instances in which Figel does make use of this rhetorical trope. He uses this trope by describing it as a structural opposition, a widespread linguistic tool that is often studied in CDA since it can highlight an author's underlying thoughts (Machin and Mayr 2012, 39). A structural opposition is created when the author paints the picture of two opposing sides with the goal of demonstrating, without overtly stating, that one side is good while the other is bad (Machin and Mayr 2012, 41). Most often only one side of the equation is explicitly named to ensure that differences between the two sides are only subtly implied (Machin and Mayr 2012, 39). This is the case in Figel's speeches as well in which he regularly uses the terms 'extremist', 'fundamentalist' and 'radical' and equates these with negative qualities. At the same time, he describes a world without the former powers in a more positive way—implying, without naming the word 'moderate' once—that a world in which 'moderate' religion prevails, is better for all. This structural opposition will be explained in more detail with specific examples from the text. First of all, when using the terms 'extremist', 'fundamentalist' and 'radical', he refers to these as a threat to a democratic and free, and thereby progressive, society. He makes the argument that freedom of religion is necessary within every society because without protection of this human right, extremism and radicalization will prevail, as demonstrated in the examples below:

> "Religious leaders have a crucial role to play in reducing the extremism narrative in the society…"[1]
>
> "…in an interconnected world where religious radicalization and violent extremism are a threat for many."[2]
>
> "…so that they [youth] cannot be easily fooled by radical messages…"[3]
>
> "FoRB is threatened by religious extremist movements…"[4]

It can be seen that Figel corresponds these terms with violence, ignorance, oppression, and conflict, arguing that chaos will prevail if these movements are not countered. On the other hand, he starts to describe a world view that the EU is striving for, putting more emphasis on

[1] Figel 2 May 2018, speech 'Citizens Round Table: Charting Pathways for Pluralism', Islamabad, Pakistan.
[2] Figel 2019, report 'The Mandate of the Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union: Activities and Recommendations (May 2016-November 2019)', p.4.
[3] Figel 12 November 2018, speech 'Universality of Human Rights in the Context of Religious Freedom', Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
[4] Figel 2019, p.7.

his argument that extremism should be considered bad. Even though he does not use the word 'moderate' to describe this world view, the contrast is clear:

> "…a stable, progressive, peaceful and open-minded, openhearted Middle East."[5]
>
> "…a peaceful Islam with a harmonious cohabitation with Christians and other religious and ethnic communities."[6]
>
> "…to actively support objectives of tolerance and peace in Muslim societies."[7]

By describing the goals of the EU as striving for progressive, harmonious, open-minded and peaceful religious communities, he further stresses the belief that extremism or radicalism are not. Lastly, this structural opposition comes together in the few instances in which Figel names the two opposite sides within the same sentence, perhaps most clearly demonstrating the moderate/extremist trope:

> "…to design jointly new forms of pluralism in an interconnected world where *religious radicalization* and *violent extremism* are a threat for many."[8]
>
> "We need to foster among youth a solid understanding of democratic values, so that they cannot be easily fooled by *radical* messages…"[9]

Figel clearly states that 'radical' religion needs to be countered by forces of pluralism and democracy, thereby implying that 'radical' religion should be considered bad while the other side of 'moderate' religion is something to strive for. Through these examples, it has, therefore, been shown that Figel plays into the moderate/extremist trope of the War on Terror which means he portrays religion in a binary sense with one side being prone to violence and backwardness, while the other side is peaceful and progressive, even though the actual situation might be more complicated and cannot be divided into two contrasting sides.

4.1.3 Conclusion

To conclude, the widespread usage of the discursive trope of moderate/extremist religion has resulted in the dichotomization of religion into 'good' religion, that is often based on European values of democracy and modernization, and 'bad' religion, that is linked to backwardness and

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[5] Figel 18 September 2018, speech 'Human Dignity: a Privileged Path towards Religious Freedom', Beirut, Lebanon.
[6] Figel 2019, p.15.
[7] Figel 2019, p.16.
[8] Figel 2019, p.4.
[9] Figel 12 November 2018.

violence (Coen 2017; Hurd 2015; Gutkowski 2015). This distinction not only makes it easy for the EU to manipulate the audience' view on religion according to their own national interest, but it also demonstrates that the 'standard of civilization' from imperial times has not gone away but has instead been reinvigorated in religious engagement discourse to distinguish between 'civilized' forms of religion and 'uncivilized' forms of religion on the basis of Eurocentric norms and values. The central message of such a discourse is that the EU is not practicing religious engagement because it wants to fight stereotypes about religion, but because it wants to apply its own views on religion to these regions to ensure that they are as 'civilized' as EU nation-states. This civilizing power might even escalate into disciplining power, which is reminiscent of the practice of securitization, but this aspect will be discussed in more detail in the Chapter 4.3. All in all, it has been demonstrated that Figel's usage of the moderate/extremist rhetoric within his speeches is not as unproblematic as it might seem at first sight, but is in fact indicative of an underlying 'standard of civilization' in which 'good' or 'civilized' forms of religion are demarcated from 'bad' or 'uncivilized' forms of religion based on Eurocentric standards.

4.2 An unequal partnership

After having established that Figel's framing of EU religious engagement creates a distinction between 'good'/'civilized' forms of religion and 'bad'/'uncivilized' forms of religion, similar to the age-old 'standard of civilization', it can be observed that this distinction has given rise to another imperial concept: civilizing missions. Even though religious engagement is meant to break down long-standing hierarchies and to engage in an open and understanding dialogue about religion, there are many signs that the discourse underlying religious engagement is still based on a reproduction of old power dynamics (Malmvig 2005; Gutkowski 2015; Saeed 2016). Within this discourse, the EU is often regarded as the perfect example of 'civilization' and is, therefore, using religious engagement to hierarchically transmit these values about 'civilized' religion to the 'uncivilized' peoples, based on the distinction discussed in the last chapter. This imperial connotation becomes especially clear in Figel's choice of words in his speeches, in particular through two textual strategies:

1) How the EU is identified as an actor within religious engagement in comparison to how the other actors are identified;
2) How the actions of the actors are described.

4.2.1 Theory of civilizing missions

The concept of civilizing missions is closely related to the already explained 'standard of civilization' since the latter gave rise to the former. 19th century imperialism was not only characterized by the European distinction between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' nation-states, but also by the corresponding belief that the EU had the sole responsibility to 'civilize' the 'uncivilized' nation-states (Hobson 2012; Pänke 2019; Zielonka 2013; Gong 1984; Stivachtis 2018). It was a widely held belief that the EU needed to uplift 'inferior' peoples in order to teach them about the EU values of modernization and democracy, which meant that these civilizing missions took on the form of colonialism as they were based on EU domination over its imperial subjects (Hobson 2012; Pänke 2019; Zielonka 2013).

Even though civilizing missions became less explicit over time due to the rise of self-determination mid-20th century, it can be said that they continued under the guise of humanitarian intervention and development aid in the 1990s and onwards (Bowden 2004, 63). As was the case with the 'standard of civilization', the language surrounding civilizing missions has changed over the years and has become less explicit, but the practices have often continued in some way or another. Whenever the idea is brought up that the EU is an example for

modernization, progress and democracy and is, therefore, the most suitable actor to spread this expertise towards less ‘modern’ or ‘democratic’ regions, however implicitly framed, it is reminiscent of the colonial civilizing missions through which the EU tried to assert its superiority (Chandler 2006, 49). Even though the language might consist of terminology such as ‘partnership’ or ‘empowerment’, analysing the underlying discourse often results in the uncovering of asymmetry and inequality.

This is the case for Figel’s speeches as well where the concept of ‘dialogue’ is regularly emphasized. This is a typical term that, at first sight, seems to suggest the presence of equality but can later on turn out to be replete with hierarchical structures and associations of domination and control. One of the leading scholars who has written about this concept, Foucault, argued that any kind of dialogue will always be ingrained with power structures (Malmvig 2005). This is the case because it is not a neutral concept, but instead includes actors who either have the power or do not have the power to decide, amongst others, who is included in the dialogue and which arguments are considered valid and which are not (Malmvig 2005, 353). As a result, dialogue can quickly become a monologue in which the actor who holds the most power can control the conversation in such a way that his/her own voice is heard, while others are silenced (Gutkowski 2015; Saeed 2016). It ultimately gives one side of the equation the power and opportunity to present itself as the lead actor within the dialogue (the ‘dialoguer’), while the other side becomes a passive and responsive actor (the ‘dialoguee’) (Lähdesmäki and Wagener 2015, 27). The ‘dialoguer’ can, therefore, be seen as equal to the ‘civilizer’ in the civilizing mission, while the ‘dialoguee’ is the ‘civilizee’ in this equation.

4.2.2 Description of actors

Now that it has been established that an emphasis on dialogue within discourse can remind us of the civilizing missions of colonial times, it is interesting to see how the dialogue is described by Figel within EU religious engagement discourse. Specifically, it is important to study how Figel describes the different actors that are supposed to come around the table for (interfaith) dialogue. Since Figel has the power to choose the words that he uses to describe these actors, he can easily manipulate the audience’ point of view on the actors by describing one side in a more positive sense and the other in a negative way (Machin and Mayr 2012, 77). Studying the characteristics that Figel attributes to the actors is, therefore, a relevant CDA method through which Figel’s framing of the actors can be highlighted.

On one side, this would be the EU. The dominant position of the EU is immediately established by Figel due to his framing of the EU as a nearly perfect example of religious

freedom as well as the chosen actor to carry out religious engagement to educate others. While there are moments in which Figel assures the audience that the EU is not perfect by stating that this challenge is global, Figel regularly hints otherwise when you read between the lines. This is evident in the way in which the EU is referred to as an actor within religious engagement and dialogue:

> "Europe, as the 'cradle' and protector of democracy, must be the main stakeholder of global FoRB's destiny, and unite around its mission of universal solidarity, demonstrating humanitarian leadership."[10]
>
> "The EU is seen as a respected neutral broker…and has a historical responsibility to speak up…"[11]

Europe is not only seen as an example of a region in which values related to democracy and (religious) freedom have been perfected but is also presented as the destined actor to spread this message. It is framed as if Europe holds a pre-destined and historical responsibility to step up as a leader to protect these values in other parts of the world. This description is indicative of the idea of a civilizing mission, since it essentially gives the impression that Europe has nothing to learn in this department anymore but will now spread its own interpretation of religious freedom to third countries (Hurd 2015; Stivachtis 2018; Hobson 2012).

Moreover, this sense of hierarchy is further strengthened when studying the description of the third countries that the EU will engage with in its religious engagement strategies. It can be seen from Figel's activities as a Special Envoy that the EU religious engagement strategies are primarily focused on the Middle East and Asia, and, interestingly, on Muslim-majority countries[12]. In his speeches, he mainly discusses the Middle East. Even though this is the region that holds the actors he wants to start a dialogue with, he does not paint a picture of equality when referring to this region. He primarily describes the Middle East as a region in which there are many crises and troubles as well as frames it in the sense that the EU needs to respond to these issues:

> "My nomination was a response to crisis and mass atrocities in Middle East."[13];

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[10] Figel 2019, p.13.
[11] Figel 2019, p.1.
[12] Complete list of foreign visits by Figel from 2016 to 2019: Jordan, United Arab Emirates (2x), Iraq, Sudan, Senegal, Pakistan (2x), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nigeria, Lebanon, Burkina Faso, Malaysia, Egypt, India, Israel and Palestine, Bahrein, Russia, Northern Macedonia, Morocco, Thailand, South Korea, and Vietnam.
[13] Figel 18 September 2018.

"…in a troubled region [when referring to the Middle East] …"[14];

"Middle East suffers..."[15];

The Middle East is illustrated as a region that is in crisis, is troubled, and is suffering with regards to its religious situation, and, therefore, needs help in this department. The fact that Figel states that his nomination was a response to these issues is indicative of an approach in which the EU sees itself as a superior actor to the Middle East and, correspondingly, as an actor that needs to bring 'civilization' to the Middle East. Even though there are some instances in which Figel acknowledges that Europe is not without its problems, the focus remains on the Middle East as a region that needs to improve with the help of the EU. The characteristics that Figel, therefore, ascribes to the EU in comparison to the third countries are clearly different, demonstrating Figel's belief that the EU should be seen as superior to the third countries the EU wants to have a dialogue with.

4.2.3 Description of actions

Besides studying the way in which actors are described, hidden meanings can also be revealed by studying how people are depicted doing something and who does what to whom, a process that can be referred to as transitivity (Machin and Mayr 2012, 104). Some actors might be described as actively doing something, while others are presented as passive actors who only receive a certain action (ibid.). This can reveal a lot about the power relations that are constructed by the author. In the case of Figel's speeches, the contrasts between the actions of the EU and the actions of third countries are striking.

First of all, the EU's actions are described in an active way by linking the EU to the following descriptions:

"…demonstrating humanitarian leadership."[16];

"We must be prepared to defend and promote FoRB outside the EU too."[17];

"[The EU]…has a unique role in promoting FoRB worldwide."[18]

[14] Figel 18 September 2018.
[15] Figel 18 September 2018.
[16] Figel 2019, p.13.
[17] Figel 11 April 2018, speech 'Article 17 Dialogue Seminar with Non-confessional Organisations', Brussels, Belgium.
[18] Figel 2019, p.1.

This paints the picture that the EU actors are leaders within religious engagement processes, as they are actively demonstrating leadership, sharing their knowledge, and defending and promoting freedom of religion. On the other hand, even though the third countries are consistently described as having a responsibility to be "duty bearers as well as right holders", it is notable to see that the description of these actions is always preceded by sentences such as "I remind them that…" or "I remember them of…"[19]. This gives the illusion that third countries need to be reminded of their role within this process by the EU instead of having their own identity and opinions with which they can decide for themselves which actions they need to take. This is, therefore, a sign that Figel approaches EU religious engagement as a new type of civilizing mission in which third countries need to be given tasks they need to carry out by the EU since they cannot independently become 'civilized'.

4.2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been identified that the EU's main approach for religious engagement with its focus on dialogue is formulated in similar ways as civilizing missions used to be described. The ways in which this approach and this dialogue are currently framed, have turned the dialogue into a monologue in which the EU hierarchically transmits knowledge to third countries in order to 'civilize' them instead of collaborating with these countries on equal footing. This underlying discourse can be found in the way Figel, first of all, describes the EU as the 'civilizer' that can act as an example to other countries due to its historical experience as a civilized organization that values democracy and freedom, and then frames the EU's actions in an active way in contrast to third countries that need to follow orders as though they are 'civilizees'. This comparison between EU religious engagement discourse and the civilizing missions of colonial times, therefore, has shown that Figel steps into age-old traditions of imperialism.

[19] Figel 18 September 2018; Figel 12 November 2018; Figel 6 December 2018.

4.3 Securitization of religion

The link between Figel's speeches and the process of securitization was already alluded to in Chapter 4.1 and will be explained in more detail in this upcoming chapter. It will be shown that the concept of security is prevalent throughout Figel's speeches, a sign that he is taking part in the securitization of (forms of) religion. It could be argued that this securitization of religion has imperial connotations since securitization can serve as a way to legitimize outside intervention (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998, 151). By arguing that an issue is a threat to security, extraordinary measures, such as outside intervention, can be legitimized (ibid.). These imperial connotations of the securitization of religion that Figel partakes in within his speeches will be outlined in the following chapter, after having explained the concept of securitization in more detail.

4.3.1 Theory of securitization

The theory of securitization originated in the Copenhagen School when scholars tried to change the course of the study of security by arguing that security as a concept is not only related to military and political processes but cultural processes as well (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998). Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, the leading scholars of this new theory, studied the way in which language could influence the process of classifying something as a security problem. This process is referred to as securitization in which an issue is presented as a security threat that can only be solved by implementing extraordinary measures that are outside the standard political realm (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998, 24). Presenting an issue as part of the security realm can be done by using speech-acts, which are statements that are not only pronounced but that in fact result in the undertaking of certain actions or performances (Balzacq 2005, 175). This means that not only the actor pronouncing these speech-acts is important, but the audience as well since the audience has to believe the actor for securitization to be successful (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998, 32-33). Once a topic has been successfully securitized, it follows that extreme measures are implemented to respond to the issue.

The process of securitization of religion has become especially prevalent since the War on Terror. By framing certain religious groups, especially Muslim communities in the case of the War on Terror, as synonymous with violence and presenting them as a threat to national security, Western nation-states including the EU were able to implement extraordinary measures to respond to this apparent security threat. Since this securitization has been focused mainly on Islam, it has created a discourse in which Muslims are inherently seen as violent and

‘radical’ beings. You would, therefore, expect that religious engagement discourse would step away from these stereotypes which would be in line with the goals of religious engagement: creating a more understanding and less stereotypical view on religion, and turning religion into a relevant factor within other areas of foreign affairs besides security areas. However, Figel’s framing of religion and religious groups within his speeches is not only reminiscent of the long-standing discourse surrounding the securitization of religion but can even be argued to actively work to further securitize religion. This securitization happens through three different strategies: (1) Figel continually links (forms of) religion to violence, (2) he recycles terminology and rhetoric from other actors that have in the past been used to securitize religion, and (3) he continuously refers to the urgency of the situation to argue that the EU should act fast.

4.3.2 First strategy: linking religion to violence

One of the most common ways in which an issue can be securitized, is by repeating that this issue is not only a political threat but a security threat as well (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998, 24). This can be done by emphasizing the violent character of this issue to demonstrate to the audience that this issue needs to be dealt with on a security level (ibid.). In the case of religion, and again especially in the case of Islam, this tactic has been applied throughout the last two decades by painting the picture of violent religious communities that are threatening Western society and the values it is built upon.

One way to apply this method is through the usage of the moderate/extremist religion trope, a rhetoric that has been introduced in the last chapter already. As was stated in Chapter 4.1, this linguistic trope paints the picture of religion being binary with one side being considered ‘moderate’ and the other side ‘extremist’, ‘radical’ or ‘fundamentalist’ (Coen 2017; Saeed 2016; Gutkowski 2015; Maggiolini 2019; Wolff 2018). Even though there is no consensus on what the characteristics on both sides include, it has become clear that ‘moderate’ is the equivalent of peace and tolerance, while ‘extremist’ is characterized as violent and war-like (Coen 2017; Maggiolini 2019). This embedding of certain religious communities in instability and violence effectively securitizes forms of religion because it creates an atmosphere of insecurity around these religious communities (Saeed 2016; Coen 2017). Instead of correcting this ambiguous binary about religion, Figel further builds upon this securitizing discourse within his speeches by using the moderate/extremist trope and continuously referring to supposed violent religious groups that need to be transformed into peaceful religious communities. Multiple examples of his usage of this rhetoric have already been named in

Chapter 4.1, but a few specific examples have been selected here to particularly demonstrate the linkage of religion to violence that Figel creates in his speeches:

> "…in an interconnected world where religious radicalization and violent extremism are a threat for many."[20]

> "The EU stands ready to support Jordan to counter religious extremism and support Jordanian traditional role of champion of a peaceful Islam with a harmonious cohabitation with Christians and other religious and ethnic communities."[21]

4.3.3 Second strategy: recycling securitizing terminology

Besides studying Figel's usage of the rhetorical trope of moderate/extremist religion, it is useful to analyse another rhetorical strategy, namely the usage of metaphors. CDA analyses have shown that metaphors are often used to hide underlying ideological meanings and power structures (Machin and Mayr 2012, 164). Using this CDA tool, it becomes evident that Figel reworks metaphors that have been used in the past by other actors with the goal of securitizing religion. In this way, he builds upon the tradition of securitizing religion instead of breaking with it. This can, first of all, be seen in the fact that he refers to Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations:

> "The risk today is not a clash of civilization but a clash of ignorance, and non-believers do suffer from ignorance, lack of critical thinking and conservative reading of religious texts."[22] [23]

Huntington's theory, in short, is based on the idea that conflicts will rise in global politics due to the different cultural and religious identities of communities and this theory, therefore, places religion on the security agenda (Huntington 1996). Figel argues here that there is not so much a clash of civilization but instead a clash of ignorance. While this argument is important and at first sight in line with religious engagement goals, since he is arguing here that people from both sides—religious people as well as non-believers—need to become more knowledgeable about and understanding of religion, he is still framing this development in terms of security by referring to this process as a 'clash'. In this way, he still uses a metaphor that is reminiscent of

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[20] Figel 2019, p.4.

[21] Figel 2019, p.15.

[22] Figel 6 December 2018, speech 'Persecuted for Non-believing in God: A Worldwide Perspective', Brussels, Belgium.

[23] This quote needs some explanation since it is placed out of context of the rest of the speech. This speech was made at a conference about discrimination against non-believers. What I believe Figel argues here, is that there are still religious people who are ignorant, do not think critically and rely on conservative interpretations of religious texts, and these people, therefore, often do not understand people who do not believe in any religion. Non-believers suffer because of this since they are then discriminated against by the aforementioned people.

past securitization of religion and, therefore, does not move away from this tradition but instead emphasizes it.

Furthermore, to strengthen his argument that there is a clash of ignorance, Figel refers to 'allies of evil', a term that is heavily reminiscent of George W. Bush's 'axis of evil' metaphor:

> "…we should focus more towards elimination of widely spread 'allies of evil' in our societies—indifference, ignorance and fear…"[24]

As part of Bush's expansive vocabulary to frame his War on Terror, the 'axis of evil' referred to governments he believed were supporting terrorist activities, such as Iran and Iraq. This rhetoric was, therefore, used to present these nation-states as well as their religious identity as a security threat to the US. One cannot help to think of this rhetoric when laying eyes on the statement of Figel regarding 'allies of evil'. Even though he uses slightly different words and refers to other supposed 'evil' powers—namely indifference, ignorance and fear—he again steps into the tradition of securitizing religion by re-using a phrase that is strongly linked to the War on Terror and the accompanied securitization of religion. Figel, therefore, gives the impression of agreeing with this metaphor, even though this would be a point of view that does not align with the stated goals of religious engagement.

4.3.4 Third strategy: emphasizing urgency

Another important linguistic strategy to convince the audience that an issue needs to be securitized, is invoking the urgency of the situation. By arguing that an issue is urgent and needs to be dealt with immediately, otherwise disasters will happen, the actor tries to convince the audience that normal political responses to this issue are not sufficient, but instead extreme measures outside the political realm are necessary (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998; Malmvig 2005). This rhetoric can be found in Figel's speeches as well. On the more obvious level of analysis, it can be seen that Figel consistently brings up the fact that the situation regarding religious freedom is quickly deteriorating. In general, he paints a negative and, more importantly, declining image of the state of religion and religious freedom in the world today, as can be seen in a selection of quotes below:

> "The situation is bad, and trends are negative…"[25]

[24] Figel 2019, p.6.
[25] Figel 18 September 2018.

> "…FoRB is a human right under pressure. Religious persecutions and discriminations appear to be on the rise in many parts of the world…Social hostilities and governmental restrictions on religion have risen steadily…Pluralism is increasingly threatened."[26]

Moreover, again using the widely known tool within CDA of analysing the metaphors within the text, it can be seen that Figel regularly uses metaphors that amplify his framing of religion and religious freedom as an issue that is quickly worsening. He uses metaphors such as "religious global warming" and the "FoRB crisis", as well as referring to religious intolerance and violence as a "bomb"[27]. The metaphor of religious global warming gives the impression that the state of religion is changing rapidly in a negative way. Moreover, presenting the state of religion in the world as a crisis or a bomb has the purpose of demonstrating that a quick response is needed to ensure that this metaphorical bomb does not go off. The metaphor of the bomb, especially, give a hint of what Figel later on describes more noticeably: the situation is urgent, and action is needed now.

> "This leads, in particular, to the urgent need to construct…a shared space between religion and human rights…"[28]
>
> "As a matter of urgency…"[29]
>
> "It is an important urgent response to the religious global warming we are observing these days."[30]
>
> "There is an urgent need to challenge religious traditions…"[31]

4.3.5 Conclusion

It has been shown in this chapter that Figel builds upon the tradition of securitizing religion by regularly emphasizing the violent character of religion, repeating long-standing metaphors and tropes that in the past have been used to securitize religion, and highlighting the urgency of the situation. Securitization has been used as a tactic of Western nation-states to justify implementing extreme measures such as intervening in other nation-states. By following into this tradition of securitizing religion, the discourse of EU religious engagement strategies, therefore, not only is not in line with the proclaimed goals of religious engagement but it also associates itself with imperialism due to the connection between securitization and outside intervention.

[26] Figel 2019, p.7.
[27] Figel 12 November 2018. Figel 2019, p.8. Figel 2 May 2018.
[28] Figel 18 September 2018.
[29] Figel 2019, p.9.
[30] Figel 12 November 2018.
[31] Figel 18 September 2018.

5. Conclusion

The textual analysis has shown that the discourse underlying EU religious engagement creates a stereotypical distinction between 'good' and 'bad' religion, is formulated as a modern civilizing mission in which third countries have to learn from the EU, and results in the securitization of religion. While each of these are separately important arguments that demonstrate in one way or another the shortcomings of EU religious engagement strategies, they can all be linked together as well since these arguments all point towards an underlying discourse of imperialism. When the EU was still a colonial power, concepts such as the 'standard of civilization', civilizing missions, and outside interventions became normalized. However, these are present in new forms in current EU religious engagement discourse as well. By distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' forms of religion, Figel recreates the Eurocentric 'standard of civilization'; by presenting the EU as a superior actor that carries the responsibility to 'civilize' third countries, he reminds us of the colonial civilizing missions; and by presenting (forms of) religion as a threat to international security—thereby effectively securitizing religion—he seems to justify outside intervention, reminiscent of the colonial days. It can, therefore, be concluded that the discourse underlying EU religious engagement strategies is building upon long-standing traditions of EU imperialism through which the EU can assert its superiority.

While this research was not necessarily focused on proving the effectiveness of EU religious engagement, these findings do highlight something about the differences between the goals of religious engagement and the actual implementation of religious engagement. In fact, the evidence that EU religious engagement discourse is framed in terms of EU imperialism has significant consequences in terms of the goals of religious engagement. As described in the literature review, religious engagement was brought into this world by scholars who claimed that religion needed to be considered by foreign ministries as a valid factor in international relations, thereby arguing that foreign ministries needed to improve their institutional knowledge of religion to better understand its importance in foreign affairs. Two broad goals of religious engagement were, therefore, identified: (1) transforming stereotypical views of (EU) foreign ministries on religion into a more open and understanding perspective on religion, and (2) turning religion into a relevant factor within all areas of foreign affairs, not only in terms of security. These goals would have to be achieved by, respectively, creating a dialogue with and learning from third countries about religion in order to gather more knowledge on this

subject, and by studying the positive aspects of religion such as its humanitarian side instead of only concentrating on its potentially violent side.

However, the textual analysis of EU religious engagement discourse has shown that both of these goals as well as related activities cannot currently be achieved. This is, first of all, the case because the imperial undertones of the discourse have demonstrated that the EU still does not create an equal dialogue with third countries on religion but instead takes on the role of the superior actor that will hierarchically transmit its own norms and values to these countries. If the EU frames the dialogue that is supposed to take place in terms of modern-style imperialism, as it does in its re-branding of the 'standard of civilization' and the colonial civilizing missions, then a truly equal dialogue will never take place, thereby standing in the way of the initial goal of religious engagement to gain new and less stereotypical insights about religion from third countries.

Moreover, current EU religious engagement discourse also goes against the second goal of moving past the framing of religion in security terms. Even though the humanitarian aspects as well as the positive possibilities of religion and religious dialogue are named in Figel's speeches, it has been demonstrated in the analysis that the underlying discourse surrounding religion is still framed in terms of security. By continuously linking forms of religion to violence and thereby securitizing religion, the EU seemingly is still heavily concentrated on the role of religion within international security. Consequently, the goal of moving beyond this framework can currently not be achieved. The findings from this research, therefore, demonstrate that the current imperial undertones that are present in EU religious engagement discourse are going against the goals of religious engagement as described by scholars in the first place.

Nevertheless, this thesis is not meant to disregard the importance of religious engagement as such because it has been demonstrated by other scholars that it has the potential to lead to a better understanding of the role of religion within foreign affairs. This research has, however, demonstrated that the sceptics and opponents of religious engagement are correct in being critical of the current implementation of EU religious engagement. While Hurd, Maggiolini and Wolff already identified that EU religious engagement practices resulted in dichotomization and securitization of religion, this thesis dived deeper into the specifics of EU religious engagement discourse to demonstrate how Figel created this dichotomization and securitization. Moreover, the findings from this research resulted in the argument that EU religious engagement practices are not only hierarchically framed, as was already argued by the abovementioned sceptics, but can be even said to be part of the EU's imperial ambitions. This

thesis has, therefore, built upon their arguments but also has presented new ones based on this unique analysis of the discourse behind EU religious engagement.

Building upon the aforementioned shortcomings of the current practices of EU religious engagement, it is important that these are taken into account before the new EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of FoRB outside the EU will begin its assignment. The main lesson following from this research should be that religious engagement needs to be based on equality and actual partnership to demonstrate that the EU wants to learn from other nation-states about religion. This process begins by changing the discourse of EU religious engagement in such a way that the EU does not dichotomize or securitize religion, and this should thereafter be incorporated in every step of the implementation. As long as this is not the case, religious engagement is simply another tool for the EU through which it tries to establish its power over third countries.

While this thesis has tried to add to the already existing critical literature on the practices of religious engagement as well as tried to present a new critical argument by connecting it to literature on the EU-as-an-empire, further research on this topic is still necessary. Literature on religious engagement has existed since the 1990s but actual implementation of the concept has only relatively recently started. Now that implementation has been developed, it is especially important to further examine the effectiveness of these practices to see whether religious engagement is as useful a tool as it is claimed to be. The appointment of a new EU Special Envoy will, therefore, be a good starting point to continue this research and to hopefully further develop this concept to ensure that the religious factor will be taken seriously in foreign affairs throughout the future.

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