

God and the Constitution

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The preamble to the EU's reform treaty will not mention God. Yet Germany's major churches would have preferred a reference, they told DW-WORLD.DE. Most EU members do not include God in their national constitutions.

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God will not be mentioned in the EU's new reform treaty

Only five of the 27 European Union member states' constitutions include the word "God" in their texts. Among them is Germany's, in which the preamble states: "Conscious of their responsibility before God and man, animated by this will [...], the German people have adopted, by virtue of their constituent power, this Basic Law."

According to the German Protestant Church, such wording would have fit well into the EU's new constitutional treaty. Nikolaus Schneider, head of the Protestant Church for Germany's Rhineland region, called the phrase referring to the responsibility before God and man "a benchmark."

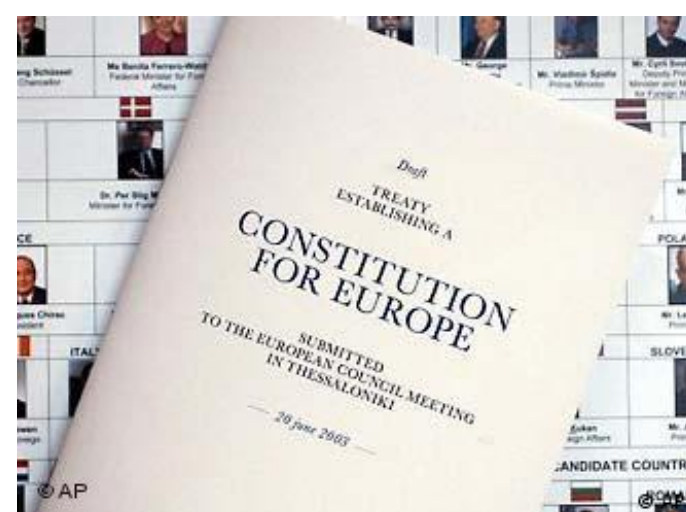
"It would not have been a problem for Muslims, and even those who don't believe in God would be able to find a point of reference through the double mentioning of God and man," Schneider said. "We cannot underestimate how important points of reference are for people and the state's development."

Christian-Democrats suggested a compromise

The Irish, Danish and Greek constitutions endorsed a so-called "nominatio dei," or reference to God. Many German Christian-Democrats considered the preamble of the 1997 Polish constitution a good compromise for the EU treaty.

"We -- the Polish nation -- that is both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such faith, but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources [...]," the preamble states.

Poland has been strongly shaped by Catholicism. German Catholics have also long advocated a reference to God in the EU treaty.



European nations differ on exactly how to separate church and state
Image: AP

"For us, the reference to God has a central meaning," said Huber Tintelott, speaker for the Central Committee of German Catholics. "Incorporating God into the preamble [of the EU treaty] would have made it clear that humans must not be free to do whatever they can, and that there are rules that lie above the human level, which make it easier for people to live together."

Another suggestion by European Christian-Democrats for the EU treaty's preamble has been a reference to a European collective cultural heritage "based on the Greek-Roman philosophy, the Christian message and Jewish-Christian values."

No God does not mean no Church



Religion will be kept separate from state affairs

Though only five European constitutions include the word "God," this does not mean that religion does not appear in the other country's constitutions. Beyond the preamble, Germany's constitution mentions "religious communities."

In some European constitutions, those communities are named, which puts them in a better position than those who are not directly mentioned.

"All religious commitments are equal before the law," says Article 8 of the Italian constitution. However, it also says that "denominations differing from Catholic confessions have a right to organize their own statutes, as long as they do not go against the Italian legal system."

The preamble of the Spanish constitution from 1987 does not mention a single word about religion. Yet, the third paragraph of Article 16 says "there is no state religion."

"The public authority respects the religious views of Spanish society and maintains the respective cooperative relationships to the Catholic Church and other confessions," the Spanish constitution reads.

France is an example of pure laicism

The French constitution is an example of absolute laicism, a political system which excludes any ecclesiastical influence or control.

"Freedom, equality and brotherliness" represent the collective ideal of the French people. There is no God involved in the preamble of the statute. The first Article explains that "France is an undividable, secular, democratic and social republic."

"Why should there be a reference to God in the preamble of the EU treaty?" said Rudolf Ladwig of the International League of Non-Religious and Atheists. "The EU is a secular institution. It should be neutral in its world-view. Those who do not have a religious world-view should feel at home in the EU. In that respect, no religious terminology should be put upon them. Any worldly treaty is secular."



One fifth of the EU member states included the word "God" in their constitutions

German Muslims disappointed by treaty compromise

One secular country knocking on Europe's door is Turkey. The preamble of their constitution says that, "holy religious sentiments, as the principle of secularism demands, should in no way be mixed with the affairs and politics of the state."

However, Islam plays a very important role in Turkish society. Secularism in Turkey is different than in France. It is not about the absolute separation of church and state, but about state control of religion. To make this clear, Article 136 of the Turkish constitution added the Committee for Religious Affairs.

"Turkey also likes to see that religion has a place in the constitution," said Aiman Mazyek, secretary general of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. He said German Muslims were disappointed that Christians, despite their strong lobby in Europe, did not manage to push through a reference to God in the EU treaty.

"There are very different systems in Europe and it would be too narrow an approach to say that we cannot accept God in our constitution because France has a secular system," Mazyek said. "In the German constitution, we included the recognition of a being that created everything, without any secularity or laicism."