SEVERAL ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION LAW
-A CRITICAL EVALUATION WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH –

- abstract of doctoral thesis -

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I. Summary and main objectives of the research

My research aims to provide an ethical evaluation of the actual operation and legal the construction of European integration. The public opinion accompanying the integration, both in legal terms, and at the level of politically motivated discourse is increasingly validating a values-based rhetoric in the context of the European Union. In the Lisbon Treaty amendment, the Member States ascertained in the Fundamental Treaties the values of the Union 1, and rearticulated the objective of the European integration 2 inter alia to promote the values of the Union. For the very first time in the Union’s history this obligation is underpinned with sanctions drafted in the Fundamental Treaties. 3

In the research that my dissertation is based on, I tried to assess the interpretation of the EU level experienced alteration towards the attitude regarding the values, whether it has any practical relevance and how it can be placed on legal and ethical level. With this prospect the research takes on, besides the possibility of the legal analysis, the ethical viewpoint evaluation. Given the complexity, the size and interconnectedness of the reality under examination, whose analysis from ethical standpoint arises numerous possible interpretations, I have used in my work a well-defined branch of moral theology which historically deals with the correct functioning of the society, namely the results of the social doctrine of the Church.

The objectives of the research included the drafting of the scientific evidence-reflection given as response on the empirical experiences regarding the functioning of the European Union, which through contextualization method is able to illustrate and can also develop proposals for possible resolutions concerning the challenge between practical experience and legal determinations. Accordingly, the research relies on, - up to date on relatively small scale represented in the context of integration-, legal literature tradition, which is recognizing in the case of the Union the particular importance of the examination of the law, not only close to the formal legal point of view, but placing it into its sociological and philosophical context as well. From the standpoint of the dissertation the considerable sociological reality can be grasped from the identity issue, whereas from the philosophical side the analysis of the ethical content of law, as well as it arises in establishing the philosophical argumentation of the public sphere. The latter leads to the question of how

1 TEU Article 2.
2 TEU Article 3.
3 TEU Article 7.
and to what extent, secular rationality, as well as religious preconceptions based on arguments regarding public life, can prevail in the European public opinion.

The *topicality* of the research became apparent, not only for professionals, but also to a wider public, especially after the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. The contractual crisis of the European integration could be basically traced back to the increasing crisis of affection of the citizens toward the EU. Even if the contractual reform has been successfully completed, the underlying question behind the problem – which became even more visible in the unfolding economic crisis – is still valid. How can we assess the ultimate goal of the EU (thelos) and the nature of the European identity as well as the attitude of Member States citizens relating to EU. These concepts as well as the rights and obligations associated with EU citizenship and the description of the structure of the European identity are just several topics to be examined, that may contribute to the long-term sustainability of the integration, or the need for the re-interpretation thereof.

II. Research methodology and sources

1) General methodological principles of the research

a) Holistic approach

The research methodology is based on three main pillars. First, it is a *cumulative work*, based on the compilation of the available literature. The legal requirements and solutions targeting the core of being European, the literature of the aspects of legal superstructure of European "ethos" can be considered multi-faceted. Democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are undoubtedly traits of European societies, however, how can these values appear in the European Union’s public law and what are the limitations of their enforcement, are the subject of my investigation. In addition, it is worth further investigation, that besides the already mentioned features which additional values make up the core of a common European identity and how do these appear in the body of European Union law.

The Lisbon Treaty redefines the values and purpose of the European Union. Based on its wording, the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights are all values of the Union - according to the Fundamental Treaty – and are supplemented by additional features with value content of Member States societies, such as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men. Understanding of these concepts as a value of the EU public policy has not been satisfactorily processed in the literature, and value concept in European Union law context needs further clarification, given that among the EU dogmatic notions, as founding principles, general principles of law values of the Union, boundaries are not clear. The Lisbon Treaty redefines as well the Union’s ‘telos’, stating that the Union’s objective is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of nations, whereas building a market economy enforcing social aspects, receives special emphasis.
The analysis of these new emphases and true content of the set out objectives and the framework of its effectiveness is justified.

b) System approach

In this regard, my working methodology also undertakes *system components* during the research. The system component methodical approach can be interpreted from three aspects. On the one hand regarding the position of the values in the Union's public policy and legal dogmatic there is an opportunity of drawing a comprehensive system, which is possible through an examination of the role in the Fundamental Treaties, the law-and policy-making, as well as in the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). Further aspect of the system component with the usage of the results of the above-mentioned dogmatic clarification, is the examination of the role of ethical aspects and value concept in some EU policies. The fact of how solidarity is represented for instance in EU public law with different meanings, as for example general principle, values and principles of law, and how it impacts the Union’s policies, is in itself a phenomenon worth studying. Solidarity is present and has some effects on the Union’s policies. However, the systematization of different effects of meanings regarding solidarity are yet to be shown, taking into consideration that it appears as theoretical reference in certain policies, and in some cases it may be a specific legal principle with legal consequences. The possibility of similar studies arises in the case of concepts covering additional value notions, such as human dignity. The third aspect of the system component approach in my dissertation is the comparison of the dynamics of value concepts with the person-centred social outlook of the (Catholic) Church. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union recognizes the ‘special contribution’ of churches and religious organizations and practices an ‘open, transparent and regular’ dialogue with them. The frameworks of this structured dialogue are emerging; however it is still a question whether the recommendations of the Church regarding the operation of the society can be displayed, or if there is likelihood for that in the public policy of the Union to be shown in some way. The examination of the question is possible by the systematic processing of the empirical experience, checking whether the transmitted messages via communication channels, influence in some way the EU processes.

c) Interdisciplinary approach

The third major cornerstone of my working method is *the interdisciplinary approach*. Due to the complexity of the examined research topic in addition to the primary importance of the legal point of view, we have to have an insight into other disciplines as well. First, in relation to EU law, legal theory approach in domestic legal writing – except for some excellent examples – is a novel approach. Additionally, it is appropriate to use the results of ethics, which largely determines the novelty of the paper as well.

One of the central and increasingly emphasized values of the Union’s is solidarity, which impacts legislation and policy-making, the jurisprudence in the CJEU and, in addition – according to some authors – it is an effective means of resolving tensions between the legal systems of the Member States. Solidarity is one of the central conceptual references of the European Union’s *social dimensions*, however a number of questions remain with regards to the limits of its effectiveness. Individual citizens, due to the common identity
which is supported by national, cultural and linguistic ties, accept easier the additional costs related to social care of the welfare states, but in the case of the European Union, which actually aims this internal solidarity, the unsettled common identity is the limit of a cost-taking propensity realized at supranational level. The question of European identity is fundamentally linked to the disposition of identification with the common European values. It is therefore important to determine how do the additional values such as respect for human dignity, democracy, freedom, rule of law appear in the body of European law. The development of the Union is closely related to the decision of the Member States with regards to (further) development of the direction of integration. Similarly, the Union’s legal arrangements are not independent from the Member States’ ethical value choices and legal solutions crystallized in the internal traditions. Churches and denominations present in Member States, in varying degrees, but undeniably - typically from historical aspect – by enforcing their ethical and moral aspects impacted the development of public policy and legal arrangements on which they are based. The relations between certain denominations, religious practice and law of the European Union meet on a number of points.

The relationship between law and morality has traditionally been the basis for a rich discourse, in which very far positioned standpoints show up. Some authors consider that the ethical and moral considerations lead to the weakening of doctrinal substance of law, since the lack of broad consultation agreement lead to the internal structural weakening of law, while according to others it is exactly the authority of law and its effective enforcement which assumes that for the concerned community it can be a mediator of governing moral considerations. In the case of EU law the analysis of diverse identities and the difficulty of its definitions are helping us to determine the shared values (their real content) as adopted by the European societies. By the Lisbon Treaty, Member States commit that it is the European Union’s aim to promote European values, but between its appearance in the practical legislation and the effective functioning of the Union some tension exists. This conflict is one of the factors which prevent EU citizens from easily identifying to the Union’s objectives. The subject of my research expands to the study of the background of European values, the role of values in the Union and determining which areas and methods can further help filling with real content the values specified by the Union.

b) The process of realisation of the research and its concrete sources

The research programme has taken place at the Law and Political Science Doctoral School of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University. My training started in September 2007 and I have got the final exam certification in spring semester 2010/11. Taking into account that teaching activities, study courses abroad and work experience from practical life, are all necessary conditions of quality research, besides doctoral program I tried to put emphasis on the use of the approach coming from these areas during the evaluation of the results of the research program.
From the research trainings and study trips abroad some of which are worth mentioning: University of Cambridge “Diploma of Higher Education in an Introduction to Law and the Law of the European Union” (2009), Central European University, “Advanced European Union Legal Practice - Special Edition Lisbon Treaty” (2010). The academic visitor status during the visit at University of Oxford Campion Hall permanent private college (2010), as well as the research at the library of Catholic University Leuven is also worth mentioning (2011). In the context of the content of the research, among the practical experiences, working at the Ministry of National Economy within the International and EU Department is outstanding. I had the opportunity of gaining direct experience participating at ministry level coordination of pilot, and infringement procedure regarding the operations of the EU law. A non-negligible aspect of this experience is the time of occupation (2011-2013). The practical approach is also supported lately by the work at the International Office of the Hungarian Competition Authority (2013).

The research work had as direct source the mapping of the literature, in the available time, of the visited libraries (Budapest-Oxford-Leuven), including as well the possibility of access to the electronic library databases. Basic direct sources were the electronically available databases of the European Union legal texts, in particular the jurisprudence of European Court of Justice as well as the communication of the institutions. From the source gathering procedure I would like to emphasize the personal conversations and interviews done in Brussels with officials of some institutions as well as with representatives of Catholic lobbying organizations working next to the institutions. From this perspective I would like to underline the added value of practical work, regarding the enforcement of the contextualization method of this paper.

III. The results of the research and possible uses

1) The structure of the thesis

My thesis consist of five main chapters. In the first chapter I intend to identify the importance of the ethical claim with regard to the EU law altogether. I venture upon the fact that the complex EU law phenomenon – as the resultant of human actions – is a possible subject of ethical surveillance, especially the following of the descriptive characteristics thereof. Establishing a deeper legitimacy it is necessary for the EU to represent a more just institutional ethos with that the citizens of the union are able to accommodate with in a more inward manner. The amendment of the Lisbon Treaty is indicating an intention for an advancement in this regard, since the new Article 2 and 3 promoting the values of the Union.

In the second chapter I am investigating this new ethical perspective and evaluating the position of these values in the legal establishment in line with the logic of the Article 2. In this chapter I put a special emphasis to the human rights development within the EU law which is a clear indicator of the approach of the EU law in general and of its ethical level. Similarly, I put emphasis ascertaining the conceptual significance of the solidarity within the EU law, since its importance seems to heighten recently. The meaning of the second
chapter that the EU law in conjunction with the human rights and the values of the union may lead to a more just European Union, and that aim seems to be more attainable after the Lisbon Treaty amendment.

Since the Lisbon Treaty mentions the values of the Union, and in the same time it is recognising the "special contribution" of the churches and confessional organisations and declare to maintain an “open, transparent and regular” dialog with them, this feature opens a door before the churches in order to be able to articulate their standpoints deriving from their special ethos. The churches do have some saying regarding the value content which originates from their particular mission and experiences over the times. In the third chapter I examine the possibility of this conversation from philosophical approach by setting the place of religion in the recent European public sphere, and on the other hand I demonstrate the realisation thereof from practical point of view.

In the fourth chapter I try to accentuate some significant elements of this special contribution from the Catholic Church’s side that is found in the social doctrine of the Church. In this chapter I briefly review the nature, its sources and the main emphasis of some determinative documents, and the principles of the social doctrine of the Church.

In the fifth chapter I examine the context of the values of the Union, the aim of the Union, and some salient general principles together with the social doctrine of the Church and deducting some conclusions thereof with regard to the standard ethical level of the Union.

We may note that the dissertation is overloaded by different terminological concepts, since there is no clear distinction to be drawn between the certain conceptions from a dogmatic point of view, like the values, general principles or the principles of law. These conceptions have a slightly different meaning in different regime-types. To underpin the solution of the interpretation problem and to follow the construction of my thesis the next tabling tries to provide some assistance.

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<tr>
<th>values of the European Union</th>
<th>TEU</th>
<th>TFEU</th>
<th>CFREU</th>
<th>ECHR</th>
<th>SD Church</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>(human) dignity</td>
<td>A. 2., 21.</td>
<td>Pream., I. cím (1-5. cikk)</td>
<td>Komp. 84., 105., 144., 153.</td>
<td>Basic concept in both regimes, but with a different grounding.</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>tolerance</td>
<td>2. cikk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blurred concept, however buzzword. In the EU means neutrality, acceptance. The SDC uses different notions.</td>
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<td>justice</td>
<td>2., 4., cikk</td>
<td>A. 31.</td>
<td>Komp., 198., 201., 202., 303., 332., Not (enough) emphasised concept in the EU. In the SDC it is regarded as a salient value.</td>
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<td>(general) principles of law</td>
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<td>proportionality</td>
<td>A. 5.</td>
<td>69., 276., 296. cikk, Rot. no.2.</td>
<td>A.49., 52. Important (ethical) principle of the EU. For the purpose of the SDC not significant.</td>
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2) The possible usage of the research

The possibility of utilization of my research from practical point of view, is indirectly, but emphatically present. Shortly after resolving the contractual crisis (adoption of the Lisbon Treaty), the European Union is once again facing a serious challenge. Its most obvious form is the economic crisis. The Member States and the Union try to deal with the crisis and find solutions taking into account the economic and political processes. The crisis management response and in general visions regarding the future of Europe - in addition to the political and economic realities, or perhaps preceding them - depend on whether we can more effectively promote within the frames of European integration the important values of our societies. Thus, not only the crisis management, but the success of the joint European project depends on the sacrifices assumed by citizens of the Union, and whether the resultant of advantages and disadvantages expected from the preservation of the integration is in accordance with their perception of being European. Based on the above - even though my research contains powerful theoretical approach – it also seeks to deliver results capable of being evaluated from economic standpoint.

The research representing the basis of this thesis seeks to give a plus to the European value debate. The result of the research, besides being published in professional journals and inspiring informative journalism publications, is likely to become even more tangible in the form of university workshops and seminars of specialized permanent private colleges.

The utilization of the results of the study might manifest in the evolution of the approach towards EU law, which may contribute to the inner development of the science.

3) Summary of the research results

1) The ethical analysis of the Union’s law is possible and desirable based on the collection of all those characteristics which are carried by some aspects of implementation of the Union’s law.

2) The EU law can fundamentally be interpreted in its sociological, social, economic and political context, given that it is ultimately the intermediary channel through which the relevant decisions of current focus of the integration are enforced.

3) There is no such coherent legitimizing force behind the Union’s law as in domestic legal systems of the Member States, it is thus necessary to constantly define it for the Member States participating in the integration. This legitimizing force historically rises from economic development and standard of living, but the mostly economic legitimization has reached its limit. In this regard, the development of the law relating to Union citizenship is an attempt to capture the European identity as a sociological reality. In addition, the establishment of
proportionality between competition criteria, solidarity and social aspects would take the direction of more legitimacy.

4) For greater legitimacy of EU law in the Lisbon Treaty modification of the Fundamental Treaty contains statements about the Union’s values (Maastricht Treaty, Article 2) with particular emphasis, and for the first time in the history of integration a penalty mechanism was formulated for the cases of breaching the Union’s values (Maastricht Treaty, Article 7). Beyond the Fundamental Treaty, the public discourse surrounding the European Union is also putting more and more emphasis on the Union’s values.

5) The article describing the Union’s values makes delimitation between the Union’s values and the characteristics of the European Union member states, but the principle of the distinction is not clear, given that both categories are basically displaying concepts with value content.

6) The determination of the role of the Union’s values in its law system, on the one hand is difficult to interpret from a dogmatic point of view, on the other hand the structure component elements behind EU values can be recognized at EU law level, some interweaving policy attitudes, or displaying attitudinal determinations.

7) Between the Union’s values and characteristics, human dignity, equality, respect for human rights and pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, solidarity, equality, including equality between women and men are the outstanding ones in relation to EU law. Although the content of these values is not an objective reality, their interpretation changes according to the given situation, and thus can become the basis of opposite direction argument reference.

8) The content of individual values may not be assessed isolated from the social, historical, cultural and philosophical context. The development of the European continent has not resulted in a single homogeneous social media (demos), where the same interpretations arise concerning values, or where the inner content of values would be determined along the same emphasis. Although Member States of the European Union have developed via the same cultural and civilization path, different value priorities showing on the level of given societies can lead to tensions, and can easily support the politically motivated argumentation value referencing. Overall, the growing importance of the values is a positive trend from integration point of view; however it is worth considering the more differentiated contents appearing behind similar structures.

9) According to the general perception the evaluation criteria adopted in respect of ethical standards of the Union’s law is related to the fundamental rights (human rights) protection level realization. In this regard, from the beginning of the
integration the EU law has evolved considerably, the Lisbon Treaty amendments contain important innovations related to this process.

10) The integration’s image of humans is determined from the standpoint of the assessment of the evaluation of ethical dimensions of EU law, on which we can conclude based on the substantive emphases of law and jurisprudence of the European Union’s Court of Justice. According to that European law human beings are still considered as subjects of economy (respectively consumers), even if we experience some changes in this attitudinal approach, coming from the increasing fundamental rights sensitivity.

11) On our continent the Union’s law image of humans is ultimately determined by the interpretation of fundamental rights (human rights), with respect to specific life situations, as such view on the development of processes in this area, the jurisprudence of Strasbourg Court of Human Rights has a very big impact on the European Union, impact which is only going to exacerbate with the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights.

12) The interpretation of fundamental rights, in particular with regard to situations where competing interests of fundamental rights are defined, is a function of philosophical presuppositions. At present, only those philosophical assumptions have legitimacy in unblocking interpretative border situations, which stand on the ground of secular rationality.

13) Taking into account the above assumption (see section 9-12), we may conclude that the human rights doctrine is the tool of the European integration, which helps the whole public life to search answers in decision-making in boundary situations of human life, when the ultimate responsibility belongs to the jurisprudence and particularly the judges of the supranational adjudication forums.

14) The European Union through the church affairs article in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 17 TFEU), wanted to loosen up this interpretation monopoly (see section 13) and recorded on the basic contract level, that it maintains an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and religious organizations, though at very limited extent, but paving the way for the emergence of arguments in the European public sphere, which were guided and inspired as well by religious faith.

15) The introduction of the church affairs article in the Fundamental Treaty can be interpreted as a legitimizing effort as well, in which the EU institutionalizes at formal legal level the dialogue (structured dialogue) with churches and religious organizations, a need which became increasingly evident especially after the eastern enlargement of the EU.
16) Churches and religious organizations, while transmitting standpoints of their own 'ethos' regarding the functioning of society, should respect the secular nature of the institutions of the European Union. Accordingly, the churches have some boundaries and need to learn the specific language of the European institutions in order to realize a dialogue with the formerly mentioned institutions. This means in practice that churches should modify their specific standpoints and match into the decision making structures of the European Union, being capable of influencing some processes case-by-case.

17) We can discover common elements between Union law and the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which point in one direction. Among them are solidarity, human dignity, respect for human rights in the pursuit of social justice, religious freedom, and the subsidiarity as a social organization principle.

18) Solidarity is a very much relied on concept in the Union’s law, the attitude towards it can lead to the recognition of solidarity as a general principle of EU law.

19) One of the most striking overlapping element in EU law and the Church's social teachings is the treatment of peace as a key element. Keeping peace is a basic motive in the establishment of integration, and nowadays is still playing a central role in the European Union's common foreign and security policy implementation. The effectiveness and coherence of this policy has significantly improved as a result of the Lisbon Treaty amendment. The Union and the Church's approach regarding peace is also similar from the point of view that peace cannot be considered as an attainable condition, but a reality which requires constant effort, which may be related to (sustainable) development. The European Union's development policy makes laudable efforts for the international development, even if it is not entirely without self-interest.

20) An evident discrepant emphasis of EU law ethical aspects and the Church's social teaching is the difference between the definition of social objective of "welfare" and "common good". While the former is a fundamental objective of the Union (Maastricht Treaty, Article 3 (1)) and essentially covers economic concepts, which are tangible in financial terms for EU citizens, the common good is a much more complex concept, with stronger community attitude, and disposes of the pretensions which create the conditions for wider perception of the unfolding of a person (including the transcendent dimension).

21) Another difference between EU law and the Church's social doctrine is the different perception of equality. While the EU legislative approach focuses on an egalitarian approach, the Church is focusing on the fact that all people are equal and of inviolable dignity, not denying the natural diversity, with respect for example to men and women.
22) The most prominent difference is related to the protection of life, taking into account both the start and the end. The Church's consistent position and practices of Member States accepted by the European Union are far from each other, although in the Brüstle case, the Court of Justice of the European Union recognizes the human embryo dignity from the earliest possible point.

23) In the background of the principles that are shaping the EU law there was a legal, moral, religious cultural legacy, but in the recent times – especially after 2004 – the inherent content of these concepts have undergone such an alteration that no new organically developed or commonly accepted content replaced the originally inherently presented values thereof. Accordingly, the substantial crisis of the classical concepts articulated and accepted earlier by the Union may serve as a continuous threat regarding the politically motivated meaning of these undefined principles. Due to this, the principles originally serving as a stability component of the EU could easily become the means of rapidly changing political efforts, initiations and directions, as it happened and experienced by some Member States already during the crisis. The lucid and clear-cut principles along which the European cultural and moral establishment developed may serve as a distinct and balanced solution for the shortly outlined problem, as we have tried to point it out partially in our dissertation. The outstanding personalities whom have been working towards the establishment of the European integration were authentic representatives of these principles. Also the deeper meaning of these concepts are represented still to the present day in a special way by the eternal principles of natural law founded social doctrine of the Catholic Church that we tried to emphasis earlier in an appropriate manner.

IV. Publications on the topic


13) Constiutional Changes and the role of the Constitutional Court in Hungary with regard to the accession to the EU, Obiter Dicta, 2010. június 1, 2. évf, 26-27. E-journalism.