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**Institutional religious symbols, state neutrality and protection of minorities**

The last years have witnessed an increasing litigation in Europe concerning the use of religious symbols in the public space or in the working place, and some of these cases have arrived to the European Court of Human Rights. Among them, *Lautsi v. Italy* is one of the decisions that have attracted most attention by scholars and the media. As is well known, the applicants complained about the Italian law that provides that a crucifix must be displayed in the classrooms of public schools, arguing that it violates the parents' right under Article 2 of the Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. This paper compares the solution reached by the Grand Chamber of the ECtHR with the decisions adopted by Spanish courts in some similar cases, all of them relating either to the presence of Christian symbols in public institutions. The paper addresses two main questions. First, if it is possible to derive an obligation of state religious neutrality from Article 9 ECHR and, in that case, which would be its meaning and consequences in comparison with the principle of neutrality or secularity that inspires the Constitution of some European countries, such as Spain or Italy. Second, to what extent this European notion of neutrality would grant religious minorities, or people with agnostic or atheistic beliefs, the right to demand that the visibility of majority religion is removed from the public space, so that this is shaped in a way non offensive for their beliefs. The author argues in favour of an inclusive concept of state neutrality, based on the notion of impartiality rather than on the exclusion of visible signs of religion, and rejects that Article 9 ECHR guarantees any individual right not to be exposed to religious symbols with which one profoundly disagrees, as far as there is no state indoctrination or coercion to manifest—or not manifest—one's religion or belief. For the same reason, the author criticizes the *Leyla Şahin* decision of the ECtHR—inspired by an exclusive notion of state neutrality—and maintains that an analogous approach should be used with respect to the wearing of personal religious clothing or symbols in public places, including state educational institutions.