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**RECOGNITION OF THE INDEPENDANCE OF THE MACEDONIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH (MOC) AS AN ISSUE CONCERNING
MACEDONIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY***

Abstract: The article analyses the relations between Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) concerning the recognition of the independence of MOC, as an issue of the Macedonian national identity. The issue of the church in Macedonia is still not solved and it is still current, but not only as a church problem but much more since it renews a number of open issues in relation to the Macedonian ethnic and national identity, dispute over ethnicity, language, nation and territory of Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia.

Key words: Macedonian Orthodox Church, MOC, Serbian Orthodox Church, SOC, autocephality, Macedonian national identity, ethnicity, language, nation, Macedonians, Republic of Macedonia

While waiting for a visa at the American Embassy in Skopje, that would enable me to participate at the scientific conference on Macedonia, where I was to present my views on the Church issue, I was greeted at the front desk by a young employee, who at the beginning, when he understood that I am traveling to the University of Chicago, proudly stated that he graduated exactly there. When he asked me about the reasons why I attempt to travel to the USA, a question followed on the topic of the scientific conference, as well on my topic of presentation.

The situation in which, standing at the front desk (the 'window', as they called it), I was supposed to talk about the topic that I intended to elaborate at the Conference, was strange, to say the least. Primarily because the conversation was in English, whereas I had not spoken a word in English in weeks or months, and also because I was supposed to talk about a subject that I was working upon for quite some time. Few questions came to my mind: What should I tell the employee? Where should I start? What does he know about the Church in Macedonia? And finally, how correct would it be from my side to start an elaboration on the topic while being in the Embassy?

However, I started making a short resume on what I would like to share with my colleagues at the conference, saying that I would like to speak about the non-recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) by other Orthodox

* The core ideas in this paper were presented at the Conference "Rethinking Crossroads: Macedonia in Global Context", organized by the University of Chicago Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies on 31st of March, 2007.

churches, especially in relation to the consequences that it has upon the national feeling and national identity of Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia.

- Is Jovan still in prison? - he suddenly interrupted my speech.

- I think he is, but the media reported that one of these days he will be released - I answered, slightly confused.

- And what are the reasons that Jovan is still in jail? - the employee asked

- This time I don't know, I said insecurely, once he was convicted for initiating religious and national animosity, another time for financial issues in his former eparchy. But, you know, I said to him quite cynically, court decisions are not to be commented.

He smiled, in an equally cynical way, I think. He agreed, thanked me and told me when to pick up the visa (end of February 2007).

Working upon the finalization of the text during this period a number of activities in relation to the church in Macedonia have happened. These events are made public mostly by the media, and it is their reporting that creates the public opinion concerning few specific issues related to the relations in the Church in Macedonia.

On the 5th of June 2007, contact show Zebra life was dedicated to the following issue: "Does MOC have its own strategy for the future?". Hosted by Eli Pesheva on TV Sitel (a national broadcaster) it included metropolitan of the MOC Petar and Mr. Zoran Bojarovski, editor in-chief of the Forum magazine, who discussed the current issues related to the Church in Macedonia. During the show the viewers had a chance to express their opinion on the following question: "Does MOC have a strategy for the future?"*

The 18h news at TV Sitel on the 6th of June reported that MOC thinks about creating church municipalities for the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece. As a possible episcopo of these municipalities the name of the archimandrite Nikodim Carknjas was mentioned, who is otherwise known to the public by his patriotic mission among the Macedonians in the Republic of Greece, due to which he was imprisoned by the Greek authorities a number of times. It is interesting to mention that this information was published only few days after the Greek, but also the Macedonian media reported that the Greek orthodox church will donate finances for the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric of the metropolitan Jovan (Vranishkovski) (TV Sitel, News, 06.06.2007, 18h).

At the 10th of June 2007 a celebration was organized in Ohrid, marking the presentation of the highest state award of the Republic of Macedonia, the Medal of the Republic of Macedonia, that the president of RM Mr. Branko Crvenkovski presented to the MOC. The celebration was held in the St. Sophia

* During the show the viewers had a chance to express their opinion on the following question: "Does MOC have a strategy in relation to its autocephaly or not?. After the second minute 56% said that MOC has a strategy, while 44% that it has not. The number of the ones that voted *pro* MOC having its own strategy during the show varied, but at the end it rose to 80%.

church in Ohrid, where 40 years ago its autonomy was proclaimed (www.president.gov.mk/info.asp, 11.06.2007).

"Our church would not be Macedonian in the true sense of the word if it would not have the same destiny as everything else that carries the adjective 'Macedonian' - national, language, identity, culture, and this means to be negated, conditioned, humiliated, things that not only belong to the past, but unfortunately are present even today. No one can 'invent' a nation, or a church. He can only invent what does not exist, and the existence of our Macedonian nation, state and church cannot be seen only those states that hold their eyes closed", said Branko Crvenkovski, President of RM. (www.sitel.com.mk/vesti_det.asp?ID=18575&kategorija=Македонија, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/default.asp?VestID=80385>, 11.06.2007)

Expressing his gratitude for the highest state recognition, the archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia Stefan emphasized that if a certain nation has a reason to be grateful to its church for its development and survival, the Macedonian nation would have a number of reasons for doing that.

"Our national history is our church history and our church history is also our national history. Through the church we got to know ourselves and we grew as nation. As a true mother it led us through dangerous times and uncertainties and watched over its nation. In the times when we didn't have our own state, our church was our state, it was everything that we had. The churches and monasteries were our centers of literacy, of enlightenment and culture, they were our schools and hospitals, they were and they still are our home and shelter for our people", said archbishop Stefan. He added that the glorious St. Sophia church is a living witness of many unhappy and tragic, but also to many happy moments (http://www.sitel.com.mk/vesti_det.asp?ID=18575&kategorija=Македонија, 11.06.2007)

This celebration of the highest state award presented by the President of the state was not attended by any Government representative.

Even a superficial look at the Macedonian media reports shows that this event passed unnoticed - usually these types of events receive much more attention. The vent of the presentation of this highest state reward was overshadowed by information related to the visit of Mr. George Bush, President of the USA, to Tirana, Albania, that took place the same day and almost at the same time. However, the first channel of MTV (national TV) at its first channel directly covered the solemn ceremony, while at its second channel, reserved mainly for the ethnic communities in Macedonia, directly covered the visit of Bush to Tirana.

The next day (since it was a Sunday, the printed media in RM are not published during the week-end), almost all media published a relatively short information including a resume of the speeches made by the President of RM and the head of MOC. One thing that was symptomatic for the citizens, but also for us as researchers of the issues related to the Church in RM, was the fact that, first of all, there was no Government representative present at the ceremony, and

secondly, that the Macedonian media did not create a media scandal out of it, as they usually do in relation to other things. In most of the media there was one sentence repeating itself: "...attended by representatives of the diplomatic court in Macedonia, the public and political circles in the country and the local authorities from Struga and Ohrid". (http://www.mia.com.mk/portal/page?_pageid=113,160569&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&VestID=20987719&prikaz=3, 11.06.2007)

The on-line news on one of the most popular TV stations in Macedonia, A1 do not even mention who attended the ceremony. The on-line news of TV Sitel only copies the information, most probably from the Macedonian Information Agency (MIA), in an identical form: "...attended by representatives of the diplomatic court in Macedonia, the public and political circles in the country and the local authorities from Struga and Ohrid". The same sentence appears in the daily newspaper "Dnevnik", in the electronic version of the paper. (<http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?ItemID=6B6693CEE4A38941A4D39D0B98D5A50A>, 11.06.222007); (http://www.sitel.com.mk/vesti_det.asp?ID=18575&kategoriya=Македонија, 11.06.2007).

Only in the electronic version of the "Utrinski vesnik" newspaper it is mentioned that "no Government Minister came to MOC's celebration, although the Minister of Interior was at that time in Struga" (<http://www.utrinskivesnik.com.mk/?ItemID=EDEF253DDDE5FE478498453D9BDDDB967>, 11.06.2007).

The previous days Macedonia media announced the possible absence of official representatives of the Macedonian Government at the occasion "due to work overload", of most of the members of the Government, but to the citizens of RM it was obvious that such a decision has a certain background, especially due to the fact that the same day the electronic media, through video coverage, reported that two of the Ministers (Minister of Interior and the Minister of Transport) had meetings with the local authorities in Struga, only 20 km from Ohrid. (http://www.mia.com.mk/portal/page?_pageid=113,160569&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&prikaz=24&VestID=20975243&cat=6, 11.06.2007; http://www.mia.com.mk/portal/page?_pageid=113,160569&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&prikaz=24&VestID=20975192&cat=6)

According to Macedonian media, at the 17th of June 2007, in Nizopole, where the private property of Vranishkovski and the monastery Sv. Jovan Zlatoust is located, the first proclamation of a metropolitan of POA in Macedonia took place. In the presence of priests from Greece and Serbia, as well as around hundred of followers, at a solemn mass held in three languages, Macedonian, Serbian and Greek, monk David Ninov was proclaimed episcopo of Stobi. The media in Macedonia also covered the news, that is, the reaction of bishop Petar that this proclamation was illegal, since the monk was disconnected by MOC in 2004 which should have been respected by other churches, and most importantly, he had not finished his high theological education, while as bishop Petar suggests "the church laws, even those of the Serbian Orthodox Church, do

not allow anyone to be promoted to a higher position if he does not have graduated at a Theological Faculty." (<http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?ItemID=F6E120399D2FDE4786007ED6692E942B>, 18.06.2007)

Through speaking about the information published in the Macedonian media in a period of 15 days at the beginning of June 2007, we would like only to illustrate that the issue of the Church in Macedonia is quite 'hot', but also, having in mind the character of the content of the materials, that it is an extremely important and even more, an exclusively political question. Through the analysis that will follow we would like to show that this 'church issue' is in fact totally outside the domain of the theological doctrine and church regulation, and that it presents an important problem that directly refers to the Macedonian national identity.

Since the declaration of its independence in 1991, the Macedonian state, as well as the Macedonian nation, face continuous negation of their existence, both from inside and from the neighboring states and nations, as well as from the wider international public. The pressures in relation to different problematic issues and the non-recognition of the Macedonian ethnic, national, state, linguistic, religious and other types of identity is not new - it has its continuity in the frames of the recent and not so recent history of the relations between the Balkan states and the powers that used to have, or that still have their own influences in the region of South-East Europe. In 1991, when after the dissolution of the Yugoslav state most of the ex-Yugoslav republics announced their independence, Macedonia, that is, the citizens of Macedonia decided, through a referendum, to create an independent, sovereign Republic of Macedonia. Since then the pressures regarding the non-recognition of the Macedonian national identity have gained momentum, in different ways and on different basis.

One of the important questions concerning the identity of the Macedonian state and nation is the solution of the problem with the recognition of the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox church (MOC). As it is well known, the MOC and the Macedonian state have been facing this problem for a number of years, that is, since the MOC started the process of becoming independent, separating itself from the Serbian Orthodox Church. The roots of these processes are deeper and date from the period of the fall of the Turkish Empire and the creation of independent national states at the Balkans. Up to that moment the Ecumenical Patriarchy based in Istanbul, which was at least formally 'unprecedented', had unique, centralized power over the Orthodox world. Contrary to the Catholic Christian Church where the Pope has exclusive authority to manage the Church in the whole world, in the frames of the Orthodoxy, after the creation of the more powerful national states, where ethnic background had a crucial role in the building of national and religious identity,

other centers of political and religious power were built, that separated themselves from the influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchy, got independent, and even started to act as its opponents (Moscow, as a center of the Russian Orthodox Church started to become one of the most powerful centers of political and religious power in the region, whose influences could be easily recognized through political or anthropological analysis of certain issues concerning the relation of Russia towards the Balkans and the Balkan states). During the 19th century, after the creation of the new Balkan national states - Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Romania, local churches were set, with their name containing state and national attributes: Serbian Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Albanian Orthodox Church, Romanian Orthodox Church (Denfort, 1996: 96). It is important to note that each of these newly created local and national churches, took as their basis for maintaining the church tradition and continuity of existence some of the local patriarchies or archbishoprics (the Pec Patriarchy - SOC, Trnovo Patriarchy - BOC etc.) (Dimevski, 1965: 34).

In Macedonia, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire there was an established governance of the newly created state of the Serbians, Croatians and Slovenians, later known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but as well a governance of the Serbian Orthodox Church. After the creation of the People's Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, later the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, as a result of the state policy of equality between the federative units, contrary to the nationalistic aspirations of some of them, in 1959 the people of Macedonia and the church establishment succeeds in gaining a relative church independence. The Holly Archbishop Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued a decision that the Orthodox Church in Macedonia should separate itself as independent, governed according to its own Church constitution. After a short period of time the Serbian Orthodox Church changed its attitude regarding the church independence of MOC concluding that previously it made a big mistake. Such an attitude resulted with a church conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

The announcement of the independence of MOC happened at the gathering held 18th of July 1967. MOC was pronounced an inheritor of the Ohrid Archbishopric, following the example of other local churches in the region. That is the start of the "fight for recognition" of MOC by the SOC and the Ecumenical Patriarchy, as well as other sister-churches, that lasts for about 40 years (Dimevski, 1989: 21).

This process was especially emphasized after the declaration of Macedonia's independence in 1991, when the ethnic, national, linguistic and religious identity of Macedonia and the Macedonians was not recognized, that is the right of self-determination and choice was not given by the neighboring states, nations and local churches. This is an indicator that the issues related to the MOC are of crucial importance for the identity of Macedonians and the Republic of Macedonia. In this context we could analyze the current events

related to the attitudes and behaviors of SOC, when during a period of 40-year of existence of MOC Serbian priests were nominated as governors of administrative units in Macedonia, then the creation of the Ohrid Archbishopric by an ex-episcope of MOC, Jovan Vranishkovski, as well as the coordinated activities of the Greek Orthodox Church in relation to the non-recognition of the national name of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia. Surely, a key and decisive factor in these processes is the behavior of MOC and the Macedonian state.

Rhetoric of temptations, exile and conflicts among the Churches at the Balkans

It is generally known that the historians writing on Macedonia, as well as the ones writing on the Church in Macedonia, have different, even totally diverse interpretation of the historical events. The histories of the Church in Macedonia, no matter the authors or the sides, are clearly written under the influence of the social and political events.

They are mainly characterized with a specific rhetoric of mutual accusation between the sides, no matter if they are located in Macedonia or outside of it, always calling the others 'the discordant', 'the schismatic', while the proponents or members of the other Church are the 'so called', 'false', 'imitators', 'self-named' etc.

When it refers to itself, the high clergy of the MOC or of the Ohrid Archbishopric speaks in terms of *exile*, *temptation*, *excommunication* and *sacrifice*.

Following the contemporary history of the relations inside the Church in Macedonia many of its affiliates and members say that it is a matter of an *illness and paralysis of Orthodoxy*. However, in the frames of the theoretical discussion the high priests of the Churches in the region speak about the "uniqueness" of the Church ("the Church is one"), about its "unity", which is the "pillar and fortress of truth" (Epistyle of the metropolitan Jovan "Church is one"), as well as about its "supra-nationality" - if one has in mind the practical activities that are undertaken among the representatives of the Orthodox Churches in the region, it is surely a matter of 'political Churches'. "The Church of God is supranational. It does not mean that it is a non-national one. It is composed of different nations, but this is not its identity. Its identity lies in the liturgy unity with God, primarily of each individual with Him, and then of each individual with another individual, that is in God" (Epistyle of the metropolitan Jovan "Church is one") (http://www.poa-info.org/mk/arhiepiskop/poslanija/23_Crkvata_e_edna.pdf).

Few arguments why the Church issue in Macedonia is related to the national identity of Macedonians:

"Religion is a historic force in Balkan societies. It has defined social identities and has been used as a basis for national myths" (Ivekovic, 2002: 523). In the case of Balkan nations religion becomes a part of the process of construction of new political identities (Ivekovic, 2002: 524).

In regards to the issue of the relation between the local Orthodox churches and national identity, one can clearly note that each one of them identifies itself with nation. Even more, Orthodox churches do not only allude to the national, but also to the ethnic similarity to the dominant ethnic community, which in the cases of Balkan communities this similarity often passes state borders and includes parts or units of the 'ethnic tissue' of the communities which are in frames of other neighboring states. The process of identification of the local churches with the ethnic communities is widened and it includes the diaspora as well. Such situation of the Churches surely results with a collision in their activities in the frames of their own states, but also outside them, creating situations where they try to influence the interior affairs of the neighboring countries.

As a result of the national movements in the region of South-Eastern Europe during the 19th century the first national states were formed - one of the important elements in the creation of national, local Churches. The infamous status of the Churches during the time of the Ottoman administration, when they were under the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchy, which implied a dependence, as well as the fact that the Church as an institution had a key role in the process of raising national awareness of the Balkan nations, resulted with more intensive efforts for establishing new, local Churches based upon nationality.

In the frames of the revival processes in Macedonia, in the second half of the 19th century, a more defined fight and activities have started pointed towards the creation of a Macedonian national church or church that would 'fit' the needs of the religious folk in Macedonia and the national ideology. Krste P. Misirkov at the en of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, elaborating his own program on the specificities of the Macedonian nation, with complete awareness points towards the church propaganda that happened at the territory of Macedonia (Crvenkovska-Risteska Ines, 2005: 106-107), that strongly influenced the ethnic identity and national self-recognition. "Orthodoxy, the oldest, most common and basic religion of all Macedonian nationalities, unfortunately has lost from its sight its main goal, to spread fraternity among nations (...) Instead of these noble tasks, orthodoxy spreads only conflict and lies (...) The Orthodoxy in Macedonia is now so distorted that one can not say that it is a matter of one Orthodox Church only - now there are 3 churches, not orthodox ones but Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian" (Krste P. Misirkov, 2003: 62).

Thus, Misirkov proposes a creation of a unique Orthodox church in Macedonia: "While religious propaganda try to destroy the unification of Macedonian intelligence and of Macedonian people, then the first thing to do is to create, in Macedonia, a 'unique Apostolic church', i.e., to establish the Ohrid Archbishopric, that will be an 'Archbishopric of all Macedonians'" (Krste P. Misirkov, 2003: 64).

Still, even during the Second World War, which in Macedonia has a character of a national and social movement, led mainly by the Communists, an

Initiative Board was formed for organizing the Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1994 in the village of Vranovci. This type of 'self-organization' of the population, that should be understood as a social and national movement, was the only possible form of organization, having in mind that the high priesthood in Macedonia served the Serbian Orthodox Church and was loyal to its church, national and state program goals. One should note that one of the documents sent to the Presidium of ASNOM dated 1945 is signed by three priests from Macedonia, in the name of the Initiative Board.

From today's perspective it is clear that when looking at the "spontaneous" social events one has to search for an appropriate center of political power that generates these events, and in this case those were the activists of the Macedonian national movement that worked upon the creation of a Macedonian state in which the proletariat, led by the Communists, would fulfill the goal concerning the creation of one's own national state. The Episcopo of the Ohrid Archbishopric Jovan in his discussions on the "ecclesiological heresy present in the schism of the religious organization in Macedonia" focuses upon the two most important criteria which according to him are relevant for the unity of the Church. The first argument is that after the establishment of the people's governance in Macedonia in the frames of the federative people's community of Yugoslavia, when Macedonia was an equal Republic, Joseph (representative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church), who was then the metropolitan, was not allowed to continue with the administration of the church in Macedonia, and the second argument are the requests of the Church Councils related to the creation of a national Macedonian Orthodox Church. These events are interpreted by the metropolitan as "disruption of the relevance of the local Church, since it is clear the without an episcopo there is no Church; and second, the requests of the above mentioned Church Council, which were confirmed at the all following Councils, for the creation of a national (Macedonian) Church. This is an easily recognizable ethno-phyletistic heresy" (Metropolitan Jovan, The Ecclesiological Heresy, 8).

Concerning the connection of the national programs and the Churches at the Balkans, it is interesting to mention that during the first years of socialistic set-up of Yugoslavia the issue of how to organize the Church in the state was discussed. Primarily, the Church was separated from the state and the state was highly secularized. However, through establishing a secular state the church problem was not closed, and this was not related only to the initiatives for organizing the MOC but also to the Church in Yugoslavia in general. On the 4th and 5th of March 1945 in Skopje the first Church Council, issuing a Resolution on "renewing the Ohrid Archbishopric as a Macedonian independent church, which would not be subordinated to another local national Orthodox Church... When a Yugoslav Orthodox Church - Patriarchy would be created, our Macedonian Orthodox Church will enter into its frames as well as the other Orthodox Churches in Federative Yugoslavia..." (Priest Council, Interview with

Done Ilievski, part II, 1-2, <http://www.svpetaripavle.org/new/history/XXc/voa2.html>)

In the period of early socialism the society had a reserved attitude towards the Church - as an institution it still had the most conservative and nationalistic elements. This was especially felt in the frames of SOC. This is why the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia thought that the title "Serbian Orthodox Church" should be changed into Yugoslav Orthodox Church or simply Orthodox Church. (Lazarov, 1988: 139-140). Such tendencies, analyzed from today's position, could be understood as attempts of the Yugoslav wing in the Federation to establish a unique church for the whole Yugoslav nation and in this way to become a sister-church with other Orthodox Churches in the region. On the other hand, this could be understood as a silent elimination of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the church, but also and most importantly from the political and national scene in Yugoslavia and in the wider region.

Two stand-points existed in relation to the organization of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The first promoted the idea of an independent Macedonian orthodox church and the second the idea of an autonomous Macedonian orthodox church that would have a canonic relation with the **Orthodox Church of Yugoslavia**. The Central Committee of the Communist party of Macedonia in this period recommended the party organizations in Macedonia to solve the church issue on the basis of autonomy and canonic unity with the Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia. The head of this church would be a Macedonian, that would be selected by the priests, and would thus become a member of the Archbishop Assembly of Yugoslavia (Lazarov, 1988: 140).

Certain French diplomatic sources, analyzing the disputes between the SOC and MOC point towards the interference of the Serbian state and party leadership in church issues. This is especially valid in relation to the decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church, announced by the Serbian Patriarch Vicente through Yugopress Agency, that they accept: a) the utilization of Macedonian language in sermons and administrative correspondence, b) utilization of a stamp with "Republic of Macedonia" written on it, c) the three episcopos for Skopje, Ohrid and Strumica-Zletovo would be chosen by the Macedonian priesthood (French Embassy in Belgrade, 30th of April 1957, vol.3, According to Lazarov, 1988: 140). This, according to French estimations "implies formal recognition of the Macedonian church in 1945, so even though the SOC counted these decisions as its success, de fact it could not stop the Macedonian path to independence. The religious issue of the church independence is extremely important question for the history of Macedonia (Lazarov, 1988: 140).

An important step forward in the development of Macedonian-Serbian church relations, and especially in terms of realization of the aspirations of the Macedonian people for independence, that is, renewal of MOC, was taken immediately after the replacement of Alexandar Rankovic, in 1966, in spring 1967. Lazar Lazarov, in his study on MOC mentions Krste Crvenkovski's statement that: "the very replacement of Rankovic created good opportunities

and climate for organizing a meeting of high state officials from Macedonia and Serbia, and some from Yugoslavia, in spring 1967. Present at this meeting were: Petar Stambolic, Dragi Stamenkovic, Veljko Vlahovic, Edvard Kardelj and Mijalko Todorovic, and from the Macedonian side me (i.e. Krste Crvenkovski) and Nikola Minchev. Although some people, especially Dragi Stamenkovic and Petar Stambolic, were reserved, still there was an unanimous decision to support the creation i.e. the renewal of the Macedonian autocephalous church as an independent one (Lazarov, 1994: 2; Peric, 1998: 253, 254).

In the case of Macedonia, if we analyze the activities of SOC in the past 40 years, and due to the non-recognition of MOC, this could be exemplified through cases where SOC formally established church jurisdiction upon church administrative units in Macedonia, appointing a responsible metropolitan from SOC for the Macedonian eparchies. Such behavior of SOC, according to the analogy of identification of the Church and the ethnic community, could be interpreted as marking the political and ethnic space of "Big Serbia" or "Serbian lands" (Ivekovic, 2002: 524). As a proof of the 'historical facts' on the 'Serbian Orthodox character' of the Macedonian territory, data that refer to the sacral objects (monasteries, churches) built in different periods and rules of the Serbian state on the territory of Macedonia are being presented. (Iveković, 2002: 524)

Hypocrisy of the Church 'kinship terminology'

The terminology, and most probably the hierarchy of the Church as an institution, are based upon the concept of kinship relations, that had, as a social network, an extreme importance for the societies and cultures of many communities. The Church, as an icon of a traditionalistic concept, is still strongly respecting and using this 'kinship terminology'. Having in mind that the utilization of this terminology in the frames of the Church is so obvious, we would here note just few examples. It is widely accepted to speak about the Church as a 'mother'. In this context its maternal character alludes to the folk, the believers. The head of the Catholic Church is the 'father', and similar expressions are often used for the heads of the Orthodox churches. The local Orthodox churches, when speaking about the relations between each other and also as etiquette call each other 'sister-churches'. According to this analogy the members of the folk, the believers, are named, by the higher clergy, as 'one's own children' (disciples), while the priests call them brothers and sisters'. The newly established local churches are called "daughter-churches' or just 'daughters'.

It may sound strange, but it is a fact that this type of relation in the Church and among the churches throughout history creates tension even today. Usually 'mother-churches', consider themselves 'responsible' for the behavior of the newly created 'daughter-churches', that according to their own will proclaim autonomy and/or independence and in this way 'separate' from the mother-church. As a result of the utilization of this type of kinship network and terminology in the frames of the Church, for a period of over 100 years there are

disputes between the Churches in the Orthodox world aiming to prove who is the 'mother' church, and thus prove the domination upon other churches. From the perspective of anthropology, today it is extremely difficult to establish which is a mother-church, which are the daughter-churches, and which are the sister ones. This issue is mentioned here due to the fact that the dispute between MOC and SOC is based on the act of self-proclamation of MOC without the permission of the mother-church. In this case SOC finds that it holds the right of being the mother-church, while MOC does not only oppose this claim, but finds itself a mother-church of SOC. The literature concerning this issue notes a huge number of arguments that supports the first or the second claim. What is without any doubt at this moment is that this 'kinship terminology' is a basis of the inter-church conflict.

State-Church-Nation-Diaspora

Even the most superficial review of the historiographies covering the creation of the contemporary Balkan nation-states from the end of the 19th century reveals their connection to the creation of local autocephaly churches. In fact, a number of researches (Batalden, 1997: 185, 186) of the political and national history of Balkan states relate the processes of creating of contemporary nation-states at the Balkans and their autocephalous Churches that have a national character, supporting the so called theory of autocephaly as a function of national identity (Sanderson, 1995: 12).

“The equation of religious unity with political unity and later with national identity became the *raison d'être* for autocephaly in the Orthodox world. Especially with the growth of nationalism in the nineteenth century, to be a nation meant to have a church of one's own, and to be entitled to one's own state. By contrast, subject peoples, such as Macedonians, Byelorussians, and Ukrainians, were described as “lacking a true history”; they were said to speak the “dialects” of other “historical” nations and were denied the right to have their own autocephalous churches” (Ramet, 1988: 4-5)

Sanders, in his dissertation dedicated to the autocephaly of Orthodox Churches tries to argument it as an organizational change that happened due to institutional pressures, as an alternative theory versus the 'nationalistic theory of autocephaly' (Sanders, 2005). His theory, in spite the detailed elaboration of many of the supporters of the 'nationalistic theory', seems superficial.

We would focus upon the analisis of few authors who find that there are strong connections between the Church and State-Nation in the Orthodox world (Batalden, 1997: 222-223). P. Ramet, for example, identifies three basic models of Church-State relations: nationalism, copptation and rejection, and opposition, variables that could be combined in different ways (Ramet, 1988 : 18). V. Roudometof, speaking about the situation in South-East Europe at the end of the 19th century sais: „The institutions of the distinct national churches (Greece 1832, Serbia 1832, the Bulgarian Exarchate 1870) provide the means through

which the traditional ties of Orthodox Balkan peoples could be severed, and new national ties constructed. (Roudometof, 1999: 240). Loring M. Denfort, speaking on the creation of national identities at the Balkans, writes: "one of the most important steps in building nation at the Balkans is establishing an autocephal national church..." (Denfort, 1996: 95).

One of the most important functions of local churches in South-Eastern Europe is the establishing of church ties with the diaspora. It is especially important to speak about the ties of the Church with the overseas diaspora, the diaspora in Europe and in the neighboring countries. Thus, the issue of the relation of the Church with the diaspora should be examined as an important national question due to the fact that all states, immediately after their consolidation, tried to establish church jurisdiction over their own diaspora. In fact in most of the cases the diaspora reflected the unsolved issues at the Balkans, from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The influences and propaganda of the local churches are reflected in the frames of the diaspora. The best example of these processes are the analysis of V. Roudometof on the diaspora in Macedonia and Australia (Roudometof, 2003).

In his theological-political discussions, metropolitan Jovan, speaking about the autocephaly of the Church in Macedonia has stated, many times up till now, that it has been done by "the Communist authority, so that a pseudo-history of Macedonian nation would be built, that has not been revised up till now, and it (meaning, the autocephaly - Lj. R.) was not an interior need that resulted from the maturity of the Church" (Metropolitan Jovan, Ecclesiological heresy, 9)

"Authorities in ex-Yugoslavia had two goals in relation to the Church. One that was directly implemented by the Executive Council of Macedonia was that the Church was to serve political goals. Through the Church to control the diaspora..." (Metropolitan Jovan, Theological and Historical Aspects...40).

On the other hand in the same text metropolitan Jovan, speaking on the activities of MOC during the first years of the proclamation of autocephaly in the diaspora, notes the reactions of the rest of the local Churches in relation to the opening of the first Macedonian church in Windsor, Canada and Columbus, Ohio in 1960 and the church in Melbourne, Australia by metropolitan Dositej and episcopo Naum. This act resulted with a prompt reaction of the Constantinople Patriarchy and Patriarch Atinagora, who sent a letter to the Serbian Patriarch asking "who is that episcopo who consecrated a church to the Christians, almost all of them from Greece, thus due to one more reason a part of the canonic jurisdiction of the Greek archbishopric for Australia and New Zealand" (Act. Sin. N. 515 from 22.02.1960) (Metropolitan Jovan, Theological and Historical Aspect...39). Reading these arguments it is normal to pose the question if in this case, when the State origin (almost all are from Greece) and Church are defined as similar, the canonic rule invoked by all priests in the Orthodox world is not broken. Also, here we should not forget the fact that this is a population mainly from the northern parts of Greece, Aegean Macedonia,

which identified itself differently than the diaspora did, and a part of the population had a feeling of belonging to the Macedonian ethnic community and wanted to go to Macedonian churches.

The Church and the utilization of a liturgical language

"Faith and language, those are the soul of a nation" (Misirkov, 1903: 36)

If faith was the basic element of social and ethnic differentiation during the time of the Ottoman rule with the major part of the Balkans (Jezernik, 2004 : 180), then with the withdrawal of the Turks from this territory and the creation of the first national states a more complex system of differentiation starts where besides the Church the language and the theories of the local ethnographic characteristics played much bigger role in the processes of creation of public opinion (Panev, 2000: 5). Concerning the formation of the public sphere and opinion in Macedonia, A. Panev emphasizes that "in spite other European experiences, the public sphere of the Slavs in Macedonia starts in the church circles, through a transformation of the existing and legally recognized church bodies" (Panev, 2000: 9). Thus, this author points towards the meaning and strong influence of the Church at the territory of Macedonia. Surely, these processes have been generated and assisted by a number of Western-European imperial forces as well as USA (the Catholic Church, the Bulgarian national movement, the Bulgarian Exarchate, Greek Patriarchy, Serbian Patriarchy (Panev, 2000: 9). In such a context the population of Macedonia, depending on the proximity in terms of space and power of the Church influences, continues to join some of the above mentioned Churches. The influences of the Greek Patriarchy were stronger in the South and South-west parts of Macedonia, holding sermons in Greek, and not only during church events but also in the first church schools (Trajanovski, 2001: 57). These influences were especially effective upon "the Hellenized Macedonian conservative wealthy men " that started to increasingly adopt Greek language, while 'expressing contempt for their own mother tongue calling it primitive" (Trajanovski, 2001: 58). Up to the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870-1872, the main fight of the Slavic population in Macedonia and in the wider region was pointed towards the 'Greek fanariots'¹, that is, the Greek Constantinople Patriarchy (Freedman, 2003: 250). "Thus, Greeks and Greek Patriarchy presented the main threat for the Macedonian language and identity in the middle of the 19th century, that is, after the Slavic national awareness was well developed" (Freedman, 2003: 251). In other parts of Macedonian the population 'had a chance to choose' between the churches of the Bulgarian Exarchate or the churches of the Serbian Patriarchy. Surely, the most important element of the implementation of the different national programs was the language of the sermons, and at the same time the

¹ During the 18th century there were two opposed wings in the frames of the high clergy of the Ohrid Archbishopric - fanariot and autochthonous. Their activities were remarkable during the period that followed (Trajanovski, 2001: 42).

language used in church schools organized by both of the above mentioned churches. "In the second half of the 19th century, all neighboring nation-states had ambitions to rule this region, and used the educational system and the local Orthodox churches as instruments of assimilation of the population, each in its own imagined community" (Roudometof, 2003: 12). In his study "Culture, identity and the Macedonian question" V. Roudometof, following the research done by A. Karakasidu, concludes that "the utilization of the Orthodoxy for expressing national identity helps the nations in their transfer to contemporary statehood" (Roudometof, 2003: 13) (Denfort, 2003: 19).

From today's perspective, I tend to understand better the disputes of some of my older relatives concerning the church that they belong to. In Prilep there are a number of churches. One of them, the church "Sv. Blagoveshtenie" was built in 1838 and is also called "The Old Church". Near it there is another church, "Sv. Perobrazenie", also called "Greek Church". I remember well that at major holidays one could not come close, not even think of entering the Old Church, while the Greek one was attended by few. On the web-site of the municipality of Prilep, in the chapter dedicated to the cultural and historical monuments of the city, this church is mentioned as follows: "It is known as the 'Greek Church' since the Greek speaking and the Vlach population of Prilep succeeded to obtain a document for its construction from Constantinople" (<http://www.prilep.gov.mk/?jazik=1&id=02040203>, 15.06.2007). Most probably the Greek speaking or the Helenophilic population, together with the Vlachs, not only succeeded in its construction, but also belonged to it. The rest of the population in Prilep went to the Old Church, whose name does not imply an ethnic background. Although the Old Church, in the years after the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, became one of its churches, still in the collective memory of the population of Prilep it remained known as 'the Old Church', since the period when it was built and the sermons that were held in church-Slavic and folk language strongly influenced the 'fight against the fanariotic Greek Church', and the return of such sermons which are held in a language that is understandable for the population (Denfort, 1996: 98).

In Macedonian historiography there are many concrete examples in which the local population, expressing their revolt against the priests that hold sermons in a foreign and non-understandable language (mostly Greek), threatened the Constantinople patriarchy that their church municipalities will conclude a union with the Roman Catholic church (Trajanovski, 2001: 123). Seen through the prism of the history of church relations in Macedonia, at micro level, one could note more than a dozen examples when local church and school municipalities, led by local leaders, and wanting to implement some of their church rights, mainly related to the language of the sermons, threatened the Patriarchy in Fanar that they will conclude a union with Rome (Written reaction of the Veles church and school municipality dated 1862; Letter of the population of Kukus from 1859 to Pope Pius IX, in relation to negotiations for accepting a union with the Roman Catholic church, where one of the conditions, i.e. in the

5th point, they request the Pope that 'the main language and basis for the education of youth should always be folk language, with Cyrillic alphabet' (Ristovski, 1975: 84-85).

In relation to the importance of the utilization of a certain language during sermons and in the frames of the Church administration, and in correlation with the construction of national self-awareness of Macedonians, we note the information connected to the conclusion that was issued at the Priests' Council held in the village of Izdeglavje, Western Macedonia, in 1943. Besides other points, one of them says that "during sermons the church-Slavic language will be utilized, while the administration should use Macedonian language". Also, all priests, participants at this Council, made themselves available as teachers of Macedonian at the liberated territories (Priests' Council, Interview with Done Ilieski, p. 3).

Today, in contemporary Macedonian society, the Church is still seen as traditionalistic oriented institution, due to its support of the values of the past, and due to its influence upon creation of public opinion in relation to some important social and political issues. The utilization of language still can be considered as instrument of mythologization and mystification of contemporary social context since besides the every-day literature Macedonian language the ancient Slavic is used. For many today in Macedonia the church-Slavic language is not understandable, but the priests are still using them during sermons. Most probably the Church, on one side, wants to show that it respects old values and does not let them be changed so easily, but on the other hand it creates for them a pleasant exotic atmosphere, due to the usage of language that the listeners cannot understand. Parts of the sermon that is dedicated to the folk are always in Macedonian, so that they would be understood by the faithful. However, the discourses of the utilization of language (languages) in sermons in Macedonian orthodox churches gives us the right to note that they are used for successful manipulation aiming, i.e. in order to create a special image of the church, but also of contemporary Macedonian reality. "Today's Eastern Churches (...) have a homogenous bilingualism: during sermons they use, and they loyally keep, a language or language form of the past: for example Church-Slavic instead of Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian, Russian or other Slavic languages, Classical Greek instead of modern Greek... This means that the nations over which Orthodox churches have big influence (...) practically live bilingually" - concludes Liliefeld Fon Feri in her study "Orthodox Churches at the East and the Differences in Their Culture in comparison to Western Christianity" (Batalden, 1997: 218-219).

Following the above mentioned program goals for the activities of the Church organizations in Macedonia, one could appropriately interpret the sermon at the solemn liturgy of the metropolitan Jovan during the appointment of the new episcopo of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric in three languages: Macedonian, Serbian and Greek.

Name-State-Church-National identity

The main element in disputing Macedonian national identity, culture and language is the negation of the neighboring countries and nations of the name "Macedonians", and the terms "Macedonia", "Macedonian". Thus, one of the main critics pointed towards MOC in RM is the utilization of the name "*Macedonian* Orthodox Church". Surely, in many occasions and through different aspects we already pointed towards the implications that such critics have. They mainly refer to the negation of Macedonian national identity. In reference to the church dispute this problem culminated with the proposals for recognition or acceptance of the autonomy or autocephaly of MOC by SOC and by the other local Orthodox churches if it denounces the attribute "Macedonian". There were different suggestions, that it should be called "Ohrid Archbishopric", "Orthodox church in Macedonia" etc., but in all of them the signifier of the national background of the Church, that is, of its followers, is missing.

After the creation of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric of the metropolitan Jovan this issue became even more emphasized. In his theological discussions, metropolitan Jovan says that he does not deal with the daily political problems, and expresses his opinion on few extremely important issues as for example the ethnic and national characteristics and feelings of Macedonians. Namely, in his text "The Theological and Historical Aspects of the Church Conflict in Macedonia and its Solution" he says that his people "have not solved an important dilemma which is 'what is the relation of Macedonians with the Slavs'? In other words, could you be indigenous Macedonian and a Slav who settled-in later on, or there is something which is contradictory in this combination? (Metropolitan Jovan, Theological and Historical Aspects...31). Without going into details, metropolitan Jovan tries to express his attitudes on the relations between indigenous Macedonians and the Slavic population which settled at this territory later on, saying that "that one wants only the name of the ancient Macedonians without participating into their culture, which from the time of Alexander the Great, and most probably even before him, was exclusively Greek, seems unreasonable and without any realistic basis. Not to take into account that the Gospel at the territory of current RM that arrived in the time of Apostle Paul was in Greek, to be ignorant on the fact that at the time of birth of the tsar Justinian in Skopje the Greek language was used, not to speak about Bitola (Iraklion) or Stobi, not to be aware that the archeological monuments found at the territory of RM from the beginning of Christianity to the arrival of the Slavs testify on the utilization of Greek language by the population that lived there, is called ignorance in science, and bias in politics. It is fact though that the culture that was created on the above mentioned territories from the beginning of Christianity, and even before that, was Greek. Surely not Greek from the aspect of the rigid current understanding of nation and its culture, but Greek from the aspect of the wideness of the church experience of God and the world, that is from the aspect of theology, which was closely linked

to Greek language in the frames of the Eastern Roman Empire from the beginning of the Christian era. The territory of today's RM has been for centuries in the frames of this Empire. During that time high culture was built. However, a minimal doses of honesty is needed to admit that this culture, which expressed itself in different forms until the arrival of the Slavs at the territory of today's RM, was of Greek origin, again mentioning that the Greek nation, creation in the 19th century is a totally different thing from the Greek culture which is a product of the spirit of different ethnic groups that even though were different were united by the same language, the Greek, since the time of Alexander the Great. The arrival of the Slavs results with certain mixture of the ethnic groups at the above mentioned territory. The Slavs accepted the faith and culture of the indigenous Macedonians, but it seems they had difficult time to learn the language. However, they accepted the mentality and the way of life and started to adjust the terminology and their thinking to the new values that they have accepted as faith, cult and culture. We find the presumption that there were no mixed marriages between the indigenous and the newly arrived, but that the Slavs accepted only the faith and culture biased, as well as that the 'Slavs have completely diverted the Greek character of the Macedonian population that they have found at this territories'*** (Metropolitan Jovan, Theological and Historical Aspects...33).

Concluding his discussion on the ethnic and national self-definition and feeling of Macedonians, metropolitan Jovan says: "Most probably no one has the right to ban the inhabitants of today's Macedonia to feel as Macedonians, but they themselves should solve the problem if they are Macedonians or Slavs, since to think of oneself as Slav and use the name Macedonian seems unreasonable and immature" (Metropolitan Jovan, Theological and Historical Aspects...33).

Most probably this type of statements of metropolitan Jovan are related to the dilemmas about the "historical and ethnic past" of Macedonians and deepen the tensions in the Republic of Macedonia. Also, if one checks the statistics of the utilization of the name Macedonians in his texts, he/she would notice its absence, which is a result of his above mentioned attitudes.

Based upon the above mentioned data, it can be concluded, first, that the issue of the Church in Macedonia is still not solved and is quite 'hot', not only as a church problem, but much more due to the fact that it raises many open issues

** Latest research known to us on what the names Macedonia and Macedonians or Macedonian meant in the Middle Ages is done by Prof. Tarnanidis in the book ΟΙ “ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑΝ ΣΚΛΑΒΗΝΟΙ”

ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΠΟΡΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΓΧΡΟΝΑ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑΤΑ ΠΡΟΣΑΡΜΟΓΗΣ, εκδ. Αδε λφ. Κυριακίδη, Θεσσαλονικη 2000, pgs. 25-47. analysing the places where in the whole course of Minj's Patrology where these two terms are mentioned he shows that not only in pre-Christian times but also in the time of the Eastern Roman Empire, Slavs were not called by others, nor called themselves Macedonians. Macedonians were called only those inhabitants of Byzant that spoke Greek.

in relation to the Macedonian ethnic and national identity, where ethnicity, language, nation and the territory of Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia are disputed. Due to these issues, the proclaimed Church unsolved issue (that according to our opinion was strongly politically generated even in the past) today presents an open national issue. This is why a number of 'interested parties' are still active in this process, but the most interested are the Macedonians, who hold the key to solving this issue in the future.

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