The New Role of the Orthodox Church in Serbia

Abstract. After Slobodan Milošević was ousted from power, one of the first steps of the new democratic government of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was to introduce religious education in state schools. Although only one and eventually the least successful part of Đinđić’s political strategy, allying with the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) became a steady component of political rule in Serbia. While not a novelty in the Balkans or Eastern Europe, in Serbia the alliance with the Church is a significant and symbolic departure from Milošević’s rule. The confessional allegiance and faith became chief legitimizing devices, supplementing or replacing the nationalism and social populism of Milošević’s era, and filling up an ideological void. In addition to the introduction of religious education in schools, the effects of the alliance of the political elites with the SOC in the last few years have been, among other things, a new law on religious communities which secures a special status to the so-called traditional churches; privileging traditional churches in the procedure for returning nationalized property; an officially sanctioned influence of the SOC on the media; increased public spending on the churches, especially the SOC; worsening relations with Romania, Macedonia and Montenegro by following the SOC’s or individual bishops’ policies; dismissing legal proceedings against SOC clergy; as well as growing discrimination against small religious communities.

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After Slobodan Milošević was ousted from power in Serbia in October 2000, one of the first measures of the new democratic government of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was to introduce religious education in state schools. A declared atheist, Đinđić also became the head of the consortium for the construction of St. Sava church in Belgrade, often hailed as the biggest Orthodox Church in the world. After two years in office, he made his last public appearance at a fundraising event for St. Sava church among the Serbs in Germany. A couple of days later, Đinđić was killed in broad daylight in front of a government building by members of the secret police. Despite his efforts, Đinđić remained unpopular among the clergy and generally among those close to the Serbian Orthodox

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Church (SOC). This was evident even during his funeral when the Metropolitan of Montenegro, Amfilohije, who was officiating in place of the ailing Patriarch Pavle, compared in his eulogy Đinđić’s murder to all the murders in Kosovo and Iraq (sic), to the consternation of all those present. Although only one and eventually the least successful of Đinđić’s political strategies, allying with the Church has remained a steady component of and rule in political behaviour in Serbia ever since. Whether a true sign of piety or rather a pragmatic display of confessional allegiance, close contacts with the Church developed into key elements of authority building. This comes as no surprise considering the fact that for many years now the SOC has featured as the most trusted institution on all the public opinion polls.

There are two phenomena to distinguish here. With the growth of public recognition of religion in Serbia from the end of the 1980s onwards both ideational and practical religiosity undeniably rose, albeit with a considerable gap between the two. Indicative of this change is the fact that before churches often stood empty, whereas now throngs of believers cram both the old and the new sacral constructions mushrooming all over the country. Instead of a handful of elderly women hidden in the churches’ corners, now men and women in attendance are neatly separated, standing on the right and the left side respectively. Even head covering for women in churches has, after half a century, been reintroduced. Not all of this can be discarded as a fashion, a consequence of or a benefit from the Church’s alignment with Serb nationalism in recent years, as is often simplistically claimed. In order to point out that there is more to it, it suffices to consider the rising number of young men and women who take monastic vows of celibacy and dedicate their lives to God and the Church in numerous old or newly founded monasteries.

The revitalization of religion has been a dominant trend in the entire post-communist world, yet it occurred in different ways in all countries, and hence this wholesomeness as such cannot explain the socio-religious changes and the role of the different churches involved in the process. The alleged desecularisa-

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3 Research on the expectations and hopes with regard to the social and cultural role of the church shows significant differences among the post-communist countries and aptly illustrates the point, even if it unfortunately does not include Serbia. The polls, asking for religiosity and orientation towards the church, brought forth the most skeptical attitudes towards the church in Eastern Germany (27.6 %), Bulgaria (33.9 %), the Czech Republic (36.4 %), and Estonia (38.5 %). In the middle part of the scale range Hungary (42.3 %), Belarus (44.5 %), Slovenia (46.8 %), Latvia (52.8 %), Russia (55.1 %), Slovakia (59.7 %), and Croatia (60 %). Poland (62.7 %), Ukraine (63.1 %), Lithuania (74.4 %), and Romania (74.7 %) feature the highest percentage of respondents who think that the church significantly contributes to solving
tion of the Serbian (and Yugoslav) society and the subsequent reclaiming of the public space by the SOC are post-Soviet trends that have been closely studied. Developments since 2000 have received less attention. In Serbia, the alliance between the elites and the SOC marks a significant change compared to the years of Milošević’s rule. In addition, the Church’s relations with the state, political ambitions, conflicts within the Church itself as well as with other segments of society have reached unforeseen dimensions. This article looks at some of these quantitative and qualitative changes noticeable since the overthrow of Milošević.

As I will illustrate, it is the state’s representatives who, in a remarkable twist, since the end of 2000 have been seeking to establish strong links with the Church in order to consolidate and legitimate their political positions. This is quite reverse from the situation in the late eighties and early nineties, when it was the Church that sought to establish such links and when Milošević only reluctantly accepted such offers, often only to his own benefit. However, Milošević never attended liturgies or showed a high regard for the Church. Neither did he restore church property lost under the communist rule nor did he allow for religious education in public schools and religious influence in the public media. Whereas during Milošević’s rule religious resources and symbolism were mobilized only to serve clearly political purposes and to legitimize the dominant nationalist orientation, after 2000 systemic institutional arrangements were introduced with the aim of establishing a new cultural and symbolic centrality of the Serbian Orthodox Church and some other so-called traditional religious organizations. In order to achieve this, massive changes in both the legislation and policies of representative governmental agencies at all levels have been undertaken. Most prominently, government members elected after 2000 as well as all those gaining moral, family, spiritual, and social problems. The polls in the various countries also confirm that no cleavage along confessional lines exists in the societies involved in the research. Cfr. Miklós Tomka, Tendances de la religiosité et de l’orientation vers les Églises en Europe de l’Est, Social Compass 49 (2002), no. 2, 537-552.


5 In fact, he even vetoed a bill on the restitution of Church property enacted by members of Parliament of his own party, the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije, SPS).
institutional power on any political level vocally pay homage to the Church as the chief symbol of Serbian culture and national unity. Many previously explicitly atheist politicians have been seen posing awkwardly through the long hours of Orthodox liturgy and even competing in their public appearances alongside Church dignitaries. Finally, religious iconography of public events is revived together with conservative religious discourse. The changes introduced after 2000 affected other religious communities in Serbia as well, especially the ones considered “traditional” and privileged. This inevitably led to power struggles within religious communities, with far reaching and sometimes violent implications, as was the case with the Islamic community. Because of the range of issues involved, the situation of other religious communities will have to be omitted and the following article will focus on the new role of the dominant Orthodox Church in Serbian society.

The change in the legal status of the Church and its implications

Soon after the ousting of Milošević, Zoran Đinić was the first to realize the enormous symbolic political power inherent in an alliance with the SOC. In July 2001, after he had met the members of the SOC’s Holy Synod, the government issued a decree authorizing the SOC and six other religious communities to offer religious education in state schools as an optional subject. After more than a decade, this demand of the Church was accepted in a move widely interpreted as an attempt to appease the Church and the nationalists after Đinić’s extremely unpopular decision to arrest and extradite Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. Although religious education had been demanded by the SOC for long, it was introduced hastily, without any prior input from experts, without public or parliamentary debate, without consideration of its impact on other subjects, without a distribution of class hour funds, and, above all, without providing for properly trained teaching staff. Initially, it encountered only lukewarm acceptance. When the Ministry of

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6 According to the decree on the organization and implementation of religious education in state schools, published on 27 July 2001 in the Serbian Official Gazette no. 46, the following religious communities were proclaimed “traditional”: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, The Catholic Church, The Slovak Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, the Jewish community, The Reformed Christian Church, and the Evangelical Christian Church of Augsburg Confession. The Holy Synod is the executive body made up of five bishops who governs the Orthodox Church in practical matters, whereas the Holy Assembly of Bishops includes all bishops, usually convenes once a year, and represents its highest legislative and ruling authority.

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Education was asked to publish information on the number of students who, in the first year after its introduction, had chosen religious education over the alternative option, civic education, the Ministry replied that such information could not be published without the permission of the SOC. The following year, the Serbian Parliament agreed to change the Law on Elementary and High School Education, altering the optional status of religious and civic education to compulsory; the only option that remained was choosing between the two. Ever since, the percentage of students opting for religious education has steadily grown and overwhelmingly supersedes the percentage for civic education. A further change in educational policies occurred in 2004, when the government annulled a decree that had removed the Theological Faculty from Belgrade University in 1952. The Theological Faculty, which for half a century had been maintained exclusively by the SOC, was thus returned to Belgrade University and under the budget of the Ministry of Education, albeit with these two state institutions having no say in what is taught there and how it is done. In spring 2008, Radomir Naumov, then Minister of Religious Affairs, signed an agreement on state financing with four Orthodox seminaries (high schools). Urging the seminaries to abide by the legal requirements for high schools in terms of teaching plans, didactical programs, textbooks, and staff, the state’s actual ability to exercise supervision in religious high schools is still to be seen.\(^8\)

The introduction of religious education in state schools and the subsequent changes of laws pertaining to education policies also established a hitherto unknown legal concept of “traditional churches” for seven religious communities.\(^9\) This new concept, modelled on the Austrian Law on religious associations passed in 1998, quickly became the common device for structuring both religious policy-making and legal debate, and was clearly distinct from the previously existing notion of unlimited religious pluralism, widely criticized within the SOC as a vehicle for secular disbelief.\(^10\) In 2006, two key legal documents regulating the position of churches were adopted. While the constitution proclaimed the separation of church and state (Articles 11 and 44), both the new Law on Churches and Religious Communities and a sub-legal act on the Registry of Churches and Religious Communities legalized discrimination by attributing historical continuity and legal subjectivity only to “traditional


\(^9\) As listed in fn. 6.

\(^10\) Reinhard Kohlhofer, Away with legal discrimination – Serbia shouldn’t follow Austria, *Forum 18 News Service*, 2 September 2004, available at <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=403>. Many other Eastern European countries since then have equally modeled their laws along the Austrian example. *Forum 18* is a Christian web and e-mail initiative providing original reporting and analysis about violations of the freedom of thought, conscience and belief.
churches and religious communities” that existed since 1930 at the latest. This arbitrary act does not acknowledge all other religious communities registered in accordance with the previous law, which caused heavy protests by the smaller communities. Furthermore, the new Law on Churches permits the “traditional” churches and religious communities to perform religious rituals within schools, state institutions, institutions of social and child care, hospitals, the army, the police, prisons, public and private enterprises, citizens’ apartments as well as other places. Equally controversial, the law recognizes bishoprics to be legal units, opening up the possibility of arbitrary state interference with inner church affairs. And finally, through the provision that there may be only one Orthodox Church, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which authored the law, clearly favours Orthodox canons over European legal conventions.

What are the wider implications of these legal changes? Ever since Đinđić’s decision in 2001 to support the construction of the St. Sava Church with state funds, there has been regular and increasing financial support of the SOC from the state budget. Since 2004, in addition to some ad hoc sponsoring activities, the salaries of the SOC clergy in Kosovo have regularly been paid by the state. In 2008, the state budget envisaged 180 million dinars for church building, of which the SOC received 162, the Roman Catholic Church five, and the other recognized religious communities one or two million dinars each. The greatest share has been allotted to the interior decoration of St. Sava Church in Belgrade. In 2008, the state expanded its coverage of the salaries of the Orthodox clergy in Kosovo, now including 765 priests and monks in several border or economically deprived areas.

In 2002, a new broadcasting law was ratified, obliging the public service radio and TV broadcasters to acknowledge the traditional, spiritual, historical, cultural, humanitarian and educational importance of the church and religious communities in society. Under this law, the State Broadcasting Commission (Republička radiodifuzna agencija, RRA) was set up. It consists of nine members, featuring a representative of the religious communities, bishop Porfirije of the SOC, who was recently elected to head the Commission. Furthermore, the law exempts religious communities from paying broadcasting fees until the denationalization process will be completed (article 67). While various radio stations and at least one ecclesiastical TV station have been broadcasting semi-legally or illegally for years, the State Broadcasting Commission recently announced that

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11 The Law on Churches and Religious Communities is available at <http://www.parlament.sr.gov.yu/content/cir/akta/akta_detalji.asp?Id=349&t=Z#>. The relevant articles are nos. 11-16.
12 M. Pešić, Manastir Staro Hopovo napokon dobija struju, Politika, 23 April 2008.
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The Law on the Restitution of Property adopted by the Serbian Parliament in 2006 foresees, with regard to the church, the complete restitution of its property. According to the director of the Serbian Restitution Directorate, Vladimir Todorović, 813 requests for the restitution of land were submitted, of which 632 came from the Serbian Orthodox Church. Some requests were already processed – for example the Monastery Kovilj near Novi Sad recovered one thousand hectares of land that had been sequestrated after the Second World War. Although the restitution of property was undertaken in all previously communist-ruled countries, two issues distinguish the Serbian case. Firstly, unlike in neighbouring countries, the restitution of church property was not initiated contemporaneously with the return of nationalized property to private individuals, which is still pending. Secondly, a lack of transparency and accounting for the property once it is returned can be observed. In Hungary and Croatia, where significant property has already been returned to the SOC, the public and even most of the clergy were not involved in any decision making over its future use. In both countries rumours arose about some members of the clergy usurping their positions in order to gain privately from the transactions.

Last but not least, when discussing the changes in the legal framework and status of the Church and its clergy, the issue of legality in action comes in. Between 2001 and 2008, two important trials were carried out against clerics. In two separate cases, a bishop and a hieromonk of the SOC were charged for paedophilia and criminal sexual conduct with boys. Despite the fact that the testimonies included those of other clerics and despite unforeseen media interest, the prolonging of the court hearings saw the charges expired and the accused acquitted. Lawyers and many observers in the media attributed the acquittal to the pressure exercised on the courts by the Church or the pro-Church fraction in the government of Vojislav Koštunica. In the case of the bishop of Vranje, Pahomije, the County Court in Niš, which is a court of the second degree, upheld the verdict of the Municipal Court, dismissing the appeal from the Municipal Public Prosecution without motivating its decision. Eventually, the Supreme

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15 Cfr. the piece of news on the website of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Restitution of 1000 hectares of land to the Kovilj Monastery, 25 January 2008, available at <http://www.spc.rs/sr/restitution_1000_hectares_land_o_kovilj_monastery>.


Court denounced the judges responsible for the expiration of both charges, which however, bore no consequences either for the judges involved or for the trial outcome.\textsuperscript{18} Beyond these cases, several legal conflicts between the Church and the State Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage occurred, the legitimacy of the latter being increasingly questioned or disrespected by clergy members.\textsuperscript{19} On the other side, the State Institute’s conservationists claim that many churches listed for protection suffer damage and the destruction of their historical settings through unauthorized construction or renovation works undertaken by the clergy. Besides alterations of existing buildings and frescoes, the most disputed issue is the unauthorized construction on church grounds of so-called parish homes, usually priests’ houses. The size of these new houses often exceeds that of the historical churches, obstructing the view, not to mention the houses’ appalling architecture. What is more, the responsible local authorities simply tend to gloss over construction and civic building regulations when it comes to churches. In a widely publicized case, the Heritage Protection Institute pressed charges against bishop Filaret for building his residence and a fishing pond on the grounds surrounding the monastery church of Mileševa, one of the prime examples of medieval fresco art in Serbia. Filaret’s building mania, the conservationists claimed, seriously undermined the monastery church’s foundations and also destroyed its original appearance. Filaret’s additions were neither removed nor sanctioned in any way.\textsuperscript{20} Currently two more medieval monasteries, Žiča and Banjska, are in a process of state-sponsored reconstruction and massive extension, despite fierce criticism and opposition from the conservationists.\textsuperscript{21}

Also in other conflicts, the state and its agencies increasingly succumb to the pressure exercised by the Church. A recent telling example is the case of Dr. Predrag Ilić, lecturer at the Police Academy in Zemun and author of the book \textit{Srpska pravoslavna crkva i tajna Dahaua}\textsuperscript{22} (The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Secret of Dachau), in which he questions the Church’s victim account of the war time fate of the bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, showing that he in fact spent a very short time in Dachau and that he was awarded better treatment than other


\textsuperscript{19} For a detailed account of the conflicts between the SOC and the Cultural Heritage Protection Institute in Montenegro see Veseljko Koprivica, “Svetac” u maršalskoj uniformi, \textit{Danas}, 24 October 2005.


\textsuperscript{22} Published in Belgrade in 2006.
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prisoners. When the Holy Synod orchestrated a campaign against Ilić and especially protested against the fact that he was a state employee, the Vice Minister of the Interior, Vladimir Božović, threatened Ilić with job dismissal rather than defending him. In another controversy surrounding the canonization of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in 2003, his staunch anti-Semitism was denied and suppressed. At the same time, there are cases in which government ministers and political leaders have interfered with internal affairs of the Church. The leader of the New Serbia party (Nova Srbija) and Minister for Infrastructure in Koštunica’s government, Velimir Ilić, intervened in support of three priests in his home town Čačak who had gone on a hunger strike after the local bishop had removed them.

Of all government agencies, the one most biased in favour of the Church is the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Since 2000, it has been headed by lay men who previously or even during their times in office maintained functions within the SOC. Rather than acting as public officials indiscriminately defending and enacting government policies, they often embody the SOC’s representatives in the government, promoting the Church’s cause. The recent appointment of Bogoljub Šijaković, a professor of philosophy at the Theological Faculty in Belgrade, who already held the same post in the federal government of Jugoslavija between 2000 and 2001, to the new Serbian government led by the Democratic Party signals that no change in attitude or policies is to be expected. All the above demonstrates that the close church-state relationship that has emerged in Serbia is situated between the model found in countries like Greece and the model of separation and cooperation, as for example in Germany and Austria, where churches are endowed with a variety of social tasks. Those favourable to greater Church

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23 Nikolaj Velimirović was a theologian, popular author, influential bishop and the spiritual leader of the interwar Bogomoljci lay religious movement. After having been taken to Germany as a prisoner at the end of the Second World War, Bishop Nikolaj, a staunch anti-Communist, decided not to return to Yugoslavia. He eventually died in exile. His cult, first possible only in the diaspora, spread to Serbia in the 1980s. Canonized in March 2003 as Saint Nikolaj of Žiča, he is today venerated in the SOC and among many of his countrymen as the greatest Serb of the twentieth century.

24 The vice minister’s letter to Patriarch Pavle was published on the SOC’s official website on 23 November 2006. For the whole debate about Predrag Ilić’s book cfr. the section “Crkva i politika” of Nova Srpska Politička Misao. Časopis za političku teoriju i društvena istraživanja, available at <http://www.nspm.rs/crkva-i-politika/>.


26 G. Otašević, Prote ostaju u Čačku, Politika, 4 March 2008. The three priests opposed the bishop’s stand on liturgical and ecumenical matters, claiming that he was accepting papal primacy over the orthodox canon law.

27 This refers to a scheme widely acknowledged among sociologists of religion, which groups countries into three models of church-state relations, i. e. one of strict separation (USA, France, some of the successor states to the Soviet Union, and others), one of separation
involvement in society are pressing for further changes, which would ensure more privileges for the SOC and other traditional religious communities as well as grant them a special status in decision making in many areas of life. To any criticism they reply with the argument that privileging traditional churches and providing for their social involvement might be a novelty in Serbia, but such privileging is widespread in countries with which Serbia has close historical and cultural ties, and which all are members of the EU. The foreign partners of the SOC, such as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation or the Catholic Church in Germany and Austria actively shape this view through regular training sessions and seminars, translations of German publications and transfer of ideas and models from Austria and Germany.28

The Church’s mission

The positive disposition of the authorities towards the SOC saw an unprecedented surge in church activities.29 In the years since 2000, there has been a noticeable increase in church construction, the revival of old and the founding of new monasteries, the opening of new seminaries and theological faculties, and consequently also an increase in the number of students and priests. While it is difficult to find comprehensive information on the scope of construction activities on behalf of the SOC, the available data proves illustrative enough. In Novi Sad alone, eighteen churches have been built since 1990, twelve of them after 2000. In the bishopric of the Banat currently thirty churches are under construction, and in the large Niš bishopric over one hundred, which is more than during the whole period of modern Serbian statehood in that diocese.30 Much of this church-building receives financial support either through the state budget or through municipal authorities and large state enterprises. The

and cooperation (Germany, Austria, Italy, Romania, and others), and one of a state church (Greece, Malta, and others).

28 The website of the Belgrade office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation records these activities, which in the last two years included training seminars for religious education teachers, church media representatives and young Christians, a conference with church leaders on the social role of churches and their cooperation with the state, as well as the translation into Serbian of a book on the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Cfr. <http://www.kas.de/proj/home/home/45/14/index.html>.

29 I deliberately avoid terms such as revival, resurgence or revitalization, often used to characterize recent developments within the SOC. Many of the activities discussed below simply did not exist before, so there could be no talk of reviving them. Similarly, church attendance was for various historic reasons very low among the Serbs and is probably at its highest levels at present.

remainder of the costs is covered by Church funds and private donations, the latter of which include rather dubious businessmen and war profiteers. Among the most notable donors were the leader of the paramilitary unit “tigers”, Željko Ražnatović Arkan – killed in 2000 –, and the businessmen Stanko Subotić Cane, Bogoljub Karić and Đorđe Knežević, who are all under criminal investigation or already sentenced but beyond the reach of justice. Some of the donors have received high Church decorations for their contributions. The construction zeal results in excesses such as oversized churches, church towers, and fences, or in endeavours such as the shipping of soil from Serbia to Hercegovina, in order to build a monastery there on “Serbian” soil.31

With the same pace in which hundreds of uniformly looking churches came to dot the landscape, new saints fill up the Church calendar. Much has already been written about the Kosovo myth connected to the notion of “heavenly” Serbia, i. e. the notion of the Serbian people being elected by God, a nation with a “mission”.32 Here it will suffice to point out that it was the idea of the “divine” medieval Serbian state as established by St. Sava and glorified in the Kosovo martyrdom which served the merging of the ethnic principle with the Orthodox rite. This merging was cemented in the interwar construct of Svetosavlje as the uniquely Serbian interpretation of Orthodox Christendom.33 The identification of the Orthodox Church with the Serbian nation as assumed in Svetosavlje has seen in the meantime some additions that have received less attention, if any at all. The suffering that the SOC and the Serbian people underwent in fascist Ustaša Croatia became the key proof for the church-nation symbiosis while the victimization rhetoric extended to post-World War Two communist ruled Yugoslavia up to most recent events during the wars after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. These are part of the larger wave of historical revisionism in Serbia whose target is the history of the Second World War and its aftermath, i. e. the revision of the role of the quisling regimes, collaborationist forces, and communist government after the war.34 In the last decade the SOC has canonized many martyrs of those years. The shadow on these canonizations was cast when many priests who were made saints because they were victims of communist terror were identified by witnesses as Nazi collaborators and convicted crimi-

31 Nebojša Petković, Srpska zemlja srpskoj zemlji, Pravoslavlje 969-970, 1-15 August 2007, 47.
nals of the Second World War; including cases in which the accused had been sentenced to death as war criminals.\textsuperscript{35} Another dubious practice was to refashion the suffering the Serbs experienced under the murderous Ustaša fascists. In Ledinci in the Srem diocese the execution of local Serbs by Croatian Ustašas or Nazi Germans was remodelled on the example of Glina in Croatia, where local Serbs were burned to death in their church.\textsuperscript{36} As if it was not enough for these victims to be murdered, they also had to be burned in the church in order to be remembered, or for memory to be manipulated. In addition, in connection with the recent war in Bosnia-Hercegovina, there were attempts in some bishoprics to revive the topic of martyrdom under the “Ottoman yoke”. In the village of Medna, in the Bihać diocese in Bosnia, using the Greek blueprint, the remains of supposed monks and children allegedly killed by Ottoman Turks, were excavated and a new monastery envisaged in order to advance the cult of victimhood and martyrdom under the “yoke of bloodthirsty Turks”.

None of these cases however compares to the attention the SOC dedicates to the Jasenovac concentration camp as the location of the single most tragic suffering of Serbs in the Second World War. Besides canonizing Jasenovac victims, the Church, apparently dissatisfied with the Serbian state’s engagement in this regard, has taken over the organization of commemoration practices and even research on Jasenovac. The Holy Assembly of Bishops created the Jasenovac Committee (Odbor za Jasenovac) to coordinate worship, commemoration practices, research, and public education activities. The Committee runs an elaborate website, organizes public activities, and cooperates with many research centres specializing on the Holocaust and the Second World War in Serbia, Israel, and the United States.\textsuperscript{37} This remarkable engagement is, however, overshadowed by the Church’s insistence on the number of 700,000 Jasenovac victims, despite recent tacit agreements of researchers on equally horrifying 80 - 100,000.\textsuperscript{38} What is more, the fact that the SOC continues to refuse cooperation with the memorial centre in Jasenovac run by the Croatian government, and instead promotes a centre of its own in Donja Gradina, on the Bosnian side of the Sava river, seriously puts into question the Church’s determination to keep alive the memory

\textsuperscript{38} The two key studies which questioned the official Yugoslav number of victims in Jasenovac appeared in the 1980s. Cfr. Bogoljub Kočović, \textit{Žrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugosloviji}. London 1985; and Vladimir Žerjavić, \textit{Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu}. Zagreb 1989. Recent studies by Dragan Cvetković from the Museum of the Victims of Genocide in Belgrade, based on the revised official census “Victims of War 1941-1945” conducted in the 1960s, confirm the above given number of victims.
of the victims of Jasenovac. Instead of uncovering evidence and keeping up the memory of the suffering, the exaggeration of numbers and glorification of suffering epitomize what is usually described as a martyrrium myth.\footnote{For a short overview of the SOC’s martyrological approach to Jasenovac and its victims see <http://www.jasenovac-info.com/biblioteka/Sveti_srpski_novomucenici_jasenovacki.pdf>. This approach is also widely promoted through the circulation of icons that have been newly created in regard, cfr. <http://www.jasenovac-info.com/ikone/?lang=en>. For a discussion of the definition and function of myths as instruments of identity formation cfr. Pål Kolstø, Introduction, in: Idem (ed.), Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe. London 2005, 1-34.} To use the words of Vjekoslav Perica, the Kosovo sacrifice together with the martyrdom of the Jasenovac concentration camp have come to form a sort of “Jerusalem Myth”, whose function is to boost “national pride and cohesion [and to] strengthen the status of the SOC as a partner in the national leadership”.\footnote{Perica, Balkan Idols (above fn. 4), 228.}

Many bishops and priests see themselves at the forefront of the defence of Serbian interests, which means that they often are to be found at the core of current conflicts, especially in bishoprics where Serbs live alongside other confessions or other, non-Serb Orthodox. Thus, bishop Justin of Timok is at odds with the Orthodox Vlachs in eastern Serbia, bishop Filaret with the Muslims in southwestern Serbia, the bishops Vasilije and Irinej with the Hungarians in northern Vojvodina, not to mention the bishops in Bosnia, Croatia, and Montenegro. The church reports about incidents tend to exaggerate and always victimize the Serbian side. For example, when in January 2005 Bishop Filaret reported and the Church media disseminated the information about a great commotion among the Serbs caused by a Muslim attack on a priest in Pljevlja, it eventually turned out that some youngsters had called a young local priest “big head” as he was passing by.\footnote{The reports are available at the Church’s official web site, <http://www.spc.yu/Vesti-2005/01/28-1-05-c.html#fil>.} On a few occasions, the conflicts involving the clergy led to the worsening of interethnic and even interstate relations, notably with Montenegro, Macedonia, and Romania. The problems with Montenegro began when its authorities banned the entry of bishop Filaret to its territory following the directive of the ICTY that marked him as an associate of fugitive war criminals. The Serbian Minister for Infrastructures and close associate of Prime Minister Koštunica, Velimir Ilić, suspended his visit to the country, and the Serbian Radical Party threatened a traffic blockade. The Montenegrin authorities eventually succumbed and allowed the controversial bishop to enter.\footnote{Ugroženi odnosi Srbije i Crne Gore, Danas, 8-9 September 2007.} In 2005, the conflict over the status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia had escalated beyond the ecclesiastical level when the above mentioned Minister Ilić ordered the withdrawal of two Serbian aircraft rented by Macedonian Airlines. The action was reported to be...
in retaliation for the jailing of a Serbian Orthodox Church priest in Skopje for allegedly inciting religious hatred.\textsuperscript{43} Finally, the conflicts over canonical territory continue unabated with the Romanian Orthodox Church, as the SOC does not recognize the Romanian Church’s pastoral rights in the territories south of the Danube among the Vlach (Romanian dialect) speaking Orthodox, and objects to the Romanian bishop residing in Banat, where there is a recognized Romanian Orthodox Church curacy (vicariat). The above discussed Law on Churches and Religious Communities and the Registry of Churches, however, do not recognize the Romanian Orthodox Church as “traditional”.\textsuperscript{44} Submitting to the SOC’s canonical interpretation, the state in this case is clearly violating the principles of church-state separation as well as that of non-discrimination.

It should not go unnoticed, however, that in some instances conciliatory actions replaced what previously had been conflict provoking attitudes within the SOC, the most notable being the SOC’s decision in 1999 to appoint new bishops for the bishoprics in Croatia and Bosnia, which had been vacant after their bishops had fled during the wars of 1991-1995. Then, the Church had issued a communication to the international mediators stating that “victims of genocide cannot live together with their past and perhaps future executioners,” thus justifying armed upheaval and violence perpetrated by Serbs in Croatia and supported by the Yugoslav Federal Army.\textsuperscript{45} Not without opposition within the Church, this move considerably eased the return and reintegration of Serbs, as is the case in Dalmatia with its agile bishop Fotije. Another example is the cooperation of the SOC with the international administration in Kosovo over the reconstruction of destroyed and damaged Orthodox churches, here despite the harsh opposition of the local bishop Artemije.\textsuperscript{46}

Motivated by its acquired freedom and privileges, the Church has become very active in setting up humanitarian and also women’s organizations, publishing houses and electronic media, travel agencies and other businesses, none of which had existed for almost half a century or, in some cases, had not existed at all. Expanding its social involvement and allowing also for lay involvement, the SOC is struggling to keep its grip on these activities. In many dioceses, the

\textsuperscript{43} Jedan avion vraćen u Beograd, o drugom se pregovara, \textit{Danas}, 3 August 2005.
\textsuperscript{44} Vladimir Ilić, \textit{Priznata i nepriznata}, \textit{Danas}, 20 November 2007.
\textsuperscript{45} Radić, The Church and the Serbian Question (above fn. 4), 255-262, cites the Synod’s Official Letter to the International Peace Conference held in the Hague in November 1991.
\textsuperscript{46} In order to counter the accusations of Bishop Artemije, the SOC displayed all documents concerning EU funded reconstruction of churches in Kosovo on its official website, proving how successful its cooperation with the Kosovo and EU administrations was, available at <http://www.spc.yu/st/o_obnovi_porusenih_svetinja_na_kosovu_i_metohiji_17_marta_2004_godine>. Bishop Artemije had implied that accepting the involvement of the international community and the Kosovo authorities meant a tacit approval of Kosovo’s independence, and that those responsible for destruction of the churches were now involved in their reconstruction.
lay Bogomoljci movement has been revived, yet unlike in its heyday during the interwar period it is now strictly controlled and supervised by the SOC.\textsuperscript{47}
Likewise over sixty Orthodox youth organizations have emerged since 2000. They are all geared to function under the Church’s umbrella and strictly reflect church structures. Among the most active of these lay organizations are the Otačastveni pokret Obraz (Fatherland Movement Dignity), the student association Sveti Justin (Holy Justin), and in particular the influential youth organization Srpski Sabor Dveri (Serb Assembly Dveri). Obraz had its first public appearance in March 2001 with its so-called “Announcement to the Serb enemies” (Srbskim neprijateljima) referring to Jews, Ustašas, Muslims, Albanians, democrats, fake peacemakers (read: NGOs), sects, drug addicts, and homosexuals.\textsuperscript{48}

The roots of this most extreme right-wing organization go back to the mid 1990s and a magazine entitled Obraz, to which many rightist intellectuals, including former Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, contributed articles.\textsuperscript{49} Today, Obraz remains the most radical youth group, last making a public appearance in the violent protests it staged in Belgrade after the arrest of war crime suspect Radovan Karadžić. They seem to be beyond control, though in close contact with some of the clergy.\textsuperscript{50}

Although all of them began as political groups, most of these associations now heavily focus on moral issues. While this is a new phenomenon for Serbian para-ecclesiastical organizations, it is hardly a novelty in the context of lay groups among conservative Protestants and Catholics around the globe. In fact, the literature of American fundamentalist Protestants proves to be a major source of inspiration for many of analogous moralizing publications in Serbia. Also in other respects, the activities of Dveri and Obraz hardly differ from those of other NGOs or civic associations, as they organize workshops, trainings, lectures, and excursions for their members. More importantly, Dveri managed to obtain financial support from the Serbian diaspora using Church channels, being now able to compete with Western funded political parties and NGOs in the scope of its activities. It boosts over 40 local branches in Serbia and is present


\textsuperscript{48} The entire text of the appeal is available at the website of the Obraz movement. Cfr. \url{http://www.obraz.org.yu/Obraz/Nacela/Srbskim_neprijateljima.htm}.

\textsuperscript{49} Koštunica pisao za Obraz, B92, 22 December 2005. Available at \url{http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2005&mm=12&dd=22&nav_id=183269}.

\textsuperscript{50} Karadžić to appeal extradition to UN court; angry nationalists lash out at Serb government, International Herald Tribune, 22 July 2008, available at \url{http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/07/22/europe/EU-Serbia-Karadzic.php}. 


at all Serbian universities. Its biggest success however was achieved when its members were asked to join the editing of the Church’s most respected and widely read weekly *Pravoslavlje* in 2004. From then on, issues previously unspoken of, such as abortion, homosexuality, the role of women, as well as articles about the alleged detrimental influence of the West dominate over traditional theological topics. The political program of *Dveri* is easily discernible from its slogans – for Orthodoxy, patriotism, and the monarchy; against communism and globalization, alternatively cosmopolitanism and mondialism – and its campaign against the so-called “white plague” – the low birth rate – and abortion. The emphasis of *Dveri*’s activities is in line with the increasing ambition of the Church to influence public morality in Serbia. In recent years, a number of interventions by clergy members on behalf of the SOC led to cancellations or public protests against “blasphemous” concerts, performances, movies, and exhibits, even sausage festivals. The Church’s interference continues despite the State’s support of some such events, or rather because of it, as was the case with youth camps organized by the Ministry of Education as a part of an AIDS prevention programme. The Holy Synod issued a statement condemning the Ministry and with it the whole concept of modern education, identifying it with sectarianism, satanism, etc. Among other things, the statement was based on a fabricated story according to which the participants of these camps were forced to strip in order to learn how to use a condom. Finally, in yet another realm, young lay activists close to *Dveri* succeeded in influencing the SOC to become the most resolute opponent of any technological inventions that encroach on privacy, such as chipped IDs or closed circuit television systems. Although usually rather on the agenda of leftist anti-globalization groups, the concern for privacy is also shared by American Christian fundamentalist groups, who, as said, heavily influence their Orthodox counterparts in Serbia. A few years ago, the Orthodox Church in Greece displayed a similar defiance towards such technologies, e. g. the new EU identity cards.


Conflicts within the Church

Having illustrated the Church’s activities and renewed position within politics and society, as well as some of the conflict potential this brought about, I will now analyze the widespread characterization of this development as a clericalization of Serbian society. In such characterizations, clericalism is generally understood as the attempt of the Church and the clergy to dominate political and cultural life. So far, there has been only one serious attempt, by the historian Slobodan Marković, to refute this claim. Marković lists three necessary conditions for clericalization:

1) The number of practicing and institutionally bound believers needs to exceed half of the population. In Serbia, while all relevant polls point to the rise of practicing believers, these are still in single digits, while all others are rather to be classified as “declarative believers”.

2) The existence of a historical tradition of clericalism. In the modern history of Serbia, the Church has never played a significant role in politics. No significant political party or grouping embodies a clericalist tradition.

3) Sufficient economic and political power of the Church to compete with the state. In Serbia, the Church does not own economic or profit making resources (industries, hotels, etc). The return of the nationalized property is changing the Church’s economic portfolio, but even with all its land and real estate returned its property will still be considerably smaller than that of many private individuals in Serbia.

Not finding any of these conditional ingredients, Marković rejects the notion of the clericalization or clericalism in Serbian society. We can add some more reasons by placing Serbia and its Orthodox Church in a wider context. In spite of clearly increased church attendance and the church construction boom in Serbia, it still seems obvious that even if these phenomena will continue for a century, they will never come near the levels of Romania or Greece. Similarly, while the above changes point to the increased power and prestige of the Church in Serbia’s current affairs, they come nowhere near the one enjoyed by the Orthodox Church in Greece, Cyprus or Romania, or by the Catholic Church in Austria, Italy or Malta, all of which are European Union countries.

A key obstacle to any substantial clericalization of Serbian society and not taken into consideration by Marković is the Church’s internal divisions. The recent historical heritage is hard to overcome. As the most serious consequences of forty years of official atheism feature a low level of religious instruction, weak religious intellectual elites, underdeveloped theological reflection, as well as the

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lack of language and flexibility within the Church to respond to contemporary challenges including competition with other confessions. As a consequence, and despite a now very supportive environment, the Church not only often finds itself in conflict with the rest of the world, but also is ridden by internal divisions. Another consequence of the Church’s increasing public involvement is exposure to media attention, which often results in a display of the Church’s actual weakness. While creating numerous media outlets of its own, many in the SOC are extremely negatively disposed toward other, non-Church media and use every opportunity to condemn their reporting. It is ironic that the SOC seems to long for the times when media coverage could be avoided or manipulated, as this was the case during the times when the Church was suppressed, if not literally persecuted.

Internal divisions are especially evident in the most pressing issue plaguing the SOC, which is the election of the successor to the aged and fragile Patriarch Pavle who has spent most of the last year in hospital. Commentators see the Metropolitan of Montenegro, Amfilohije, as the most likely successor to the Patriarch’s throne. Amfilohije chairs the Synod, the Church’s government, and is thus currently acting as the head of the Church. He is largely to be held responsible for the unforeseen growth of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which had been close to extinct. During his time in office, Amfilohije literally ordained hundreds of priests, monks and nuns, and consecrated hundreds of restored or newly built churches. Furthermore, relying on the sympathy he enjoys in Rome, where he pursued part of his graduate studies, as well as other international support, Amfilohije was behind the “traditional” religious communities’ model in Serbia, which he strives to introduce in Montenegro as well. Finally, it was he who urged to accept European aid for restoring damaged churches in Kosovo, a matter which the local bishop Artemije opposed, as mentioned earlier. To crown his successes, the Holy Assembly of Bishops in 2008 approved of Amfilohije’s initiative to raise the Metropolis of Montenegro to the rank of Archbishopric. Having gained many enemies especially in his native Montenegro for his radicalism and outspoken Serbian nationalism, Amfilohije has recently adopted a conciliatory attitude, especially towards the inimical political leadership in Montenegro. In an interview in May 2008 to the Montenegrin daily Vijesti, Amfilohije expressed his wish to continue his mission in Montenegro, rather than be elected the new Serbian patriarch. These

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57 Ibid.
statements came as a surprise to less informed Church observers who for long considered Amfilohije the leader of the so-called hawks among the bishops. Yet unlike hardcore nationalists, Amfilohije and his followers eagerly establish links with the Vatican and many other European and Western institutions. However, seeking such contacts usually means finding possible allies in their anti-secular struggle without changing their normative stands on how the society and church state relations should be. Furthermore, Amfilohije remains a fervent Serbian nationalist, as was recently evident when he branded the arrest of Radovan Karadžić as treason and hurried to praise Karadžić’s courage after he visited him in prison.58

Nevertheless, close contacts with the Roman Catholic Church and international organizations make the Montenegrian Metropolitan a thorn in the eye of the more hawkish and nationalist bishops, or the so-called Bosnian lobby within the SOC. For many years now, the regional balance in Serbian seminaries and among both white (married) and black (celibate) clergy has been swaying towards a Bosnian domination. Similarly, the Catholic Church in Croatia is increasingly dominated by the clergy originating from Bosnia, or more precisely, from some of its remote and poorer corners, where religious upbringing and schooling flourished even in the heyday of socialist atheism. Furthermore, the interplay of ethnicity and confession in Bosnia has influenced many to pursue a religious vocation when this was not popular elsewhere. The communist authorities were never able to uproot this phenomenon and could apply repression only in cases of nationalist excesses. Bosnia was the last part of the former Yugoslavia where priests even in the mid 1980s were sentenced to prison terms for what they said in funeral sermons or for what they sang at family patron saint celebrations. Once out of prison, these Bosnian priests were rewarded with the most influential positions in Belgrade or parishes in the diaspora. The war in the 1990s only strengthened the trend among the Bosnian youth to join the clerical ranks, so that now they make up the relative if not absolute majority among seminarians and newly ordained priests in almost all dioceses. Their domination is obvious in higher ranks as well. In addition to those heading the Bosnian dioceses, most of the bishops in the diaspora and even some in Serbia and Montenegro, such as the controversial Pahomije, accused of paedophilia, and Filaret, known for war mongering, originate from Bosnia. Together, the Bosanci (Bosnians) form the strongest and most numerous lobby in the Assembly of Bishops. Their most vocal and powerful member is the bishop of Tuzla,
Vasilije Kačavenda, known for his luxurious palaces and extravagant life style.\textsuperscript{59} According to press speculations, bishop Vasilije’s doubtful moral credentials and his involvement in the war in Bosnia, which had put him under the spotlight of the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, led the Bosnian lobby to look for a more suitable candidate.\textsuperscript{60} They have agreed on Sarajevo’s Metropolitan Nikolaj, the eldest and most respected of the Bosnian bishops, who has refrained from radical gestures or statements. Yet his old age makes him an unlikely candidate. What further undermines any prediction is the peculiar election procedure whereby the Patriarch is chosen by straw among the three candidates with the most votes. In any case, the most outspoken and prominent bishops hardly stand a chance to be among the first three, as they are not favoured by the silent majority. This is also the fate of the popular bishops exposed in the media, such as Grigorije of Hercegovina, who is the obvious favourite of the Serbian President Boris Tadić and the liberal elites in general.

The struggle over the patriarch’s successor has, over the last couple of years, acquired additional dimensions through a dispute among some bishops over what at first glance seem to be minor liturgical matters.\textsuperscript{61} Little known to outside observers, internal wars are waged in the Church over a calendar and liturgical reform, the regulations of fast and the contacts with the Catholic Church or the ecumenical movement. A zealot style movement emerged in the two biggest dioceses (Šumadija and Žiča), targeting their bishops Jovan and Hrizostom and turning them into unlikely successors to the patriarch’s throne.\textsuperscript{62} Inspired by Igoumen Veniamin and the historian Miodrag Petrović among others, the zealots struggle to preserve what they hold to be the old liturgical order and the true Orthodox faith.\textsuperscript{63} The opposition to the local bishop amounted to violent


\textsuperscript{61} Among the matters in dispute are silent or loud reading of some prayers, the lifting of the curtain on the main gates of the iconostasis as well as the perennial issues of children’s communion without previous fasting and of the general frequency of communion.

\textsuperscript{62} A parallel could be drawn to the Old Believers in Russia in the seventeenth century, or more recently to the Old Calendarists in Greece, who constituted as a reaction to the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, a move the SOC rejected for the very fear of such internal splits.

\textsuperscript{63} Media controlled by the church largely suppress the conflict; only the debate between the proponents of liturgical reform (Atanasije) and its opponents (Jefrem of Banja Luka) was published on the pages of \textit{Pravoslavlje}. One of the programmatic texts for dissenters is the speech held by Bishop Nikanor of the Banat in the Lipovac Monastery in the Niš diocese in January 2008, which is unofficially disseminated. The dissenters established the association \textit{Zakonopravilo} (Law Codex), and mainly use the internet (www.revnitelj.com, www.novinar.de, www.ihtys.us, www.savest.org) as their forum, as most of the church media are closed
incidents, requiring police security during some church services in the diocese of Žiča. The dissenters report to have been harassed by the police. Supported most notably by the bishops Artemije (Raška-Prizren diocese), Nikanor (Banat) and Jefrem (Banja Luka), the zealots have joined forces with the remnants of the never fully reconciled Free Serbian Orthodox Church, a group that had split with the SOC in the 1960s over its alleged cooperation with the communist regime, and gathered many Serbian Orthodox communities in the diaspora. In addition, many radical right wing and nationalist intellectuals, monks and members of the Bogomoljci movement in Serbia eagerly join the ranks of what amounts to a new force against what internet sites of the “Zealots” call the “Vatican Junta”, led by bishops Amfilohije, Atanasije, Ignjatije, Irinej, Lavrentije, and some others.64

When the issue of liturgical reforms was discussed at the Holy Assembly of Bishops in 2007, only sixteen out of thirty seven bishops declared themselves in favour, and hence the old liturgical order remained intact.65 Yet the division and conflicts remain intense as illustrated by the fact that some bishops, such as Nikanor of Banat, refuse to send candidates to study at the Theological Faculty in Belgrade which is apparently in the hand of the “reformers”. The common denominator of the reformist and allegedly pro-catholic and pro-Western bishops is their following of the teachings of John Zizioulas, the bishop of Pergamon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Notwithstanding his image as one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of our times, Zizioulas is despised among traditionalists as the head of the Orthodox delegation that signed the so-called Ravenna document in 2007 in which the Orthodox allegedly accepted the primacy of the pope.66 In reality, despite their more diplomatic attitude, Amfilohije and most of those bishops branded as reformers studied in Greece and boost a profound and well-built criticism of the Catholic Church and Western institutions and society. The “Bosnians” on the other hand are much less educated, and besides


64 Other bishops favoring at least some reforms include Joanikije of Nikšić, Grigorie of Hercegovina, Hrizostom of Bihać, Fotije of Dalmatia, Maxim of Western America, Irinej of Australia, Jovan adjunct bishop of Montenegro, Porfirije adjunct of Bačka and Teodosije of Dečani, adjunct of Kosovo.


their hardcore Serbian nationalism and traditionalism lack differentiated views on the contemporary challenges pressing the Church, apart from outright rejection. Regardless of the nuances in the differing interpretations, one thing is certain – with the Holy Assembly of Bishops, the collective head of the Church, sharply divided into two camps, it is hard to foresee how they could agree on the candidates for holding the future Patriarchate. The tensions heightened even further with yet another violent incident on the 22nd of August 2008, when bishop Artemije attempted to remove his adjunct bishop Teodosije and the hieromonk Sava from the monastery of Dečani in Kosovo. Dečani boasts the most numerous brotherhood (twenty seven monks) of all Serbian monasteries; it enjoys UNESCO heritage protection and a special reverence among the people for safeguarding the holy relics of the medieval king/saint Stefan. As already mentioned, Bishop Teodosije and Hieromonk Sava, under the patronage of the Metropolitan Amfilohije, collaborated with the international and Kosovo authorities, which enraged Artemije, the canonically responsible bishop, who is known for his hard line position on Kosovo. Some ugly scenes of brawling among monks not only evidenced the sharp divisions and conflicts within the Church, but further worsened the situation of the remaining Serbs in Kosovo. In addition, the image of the Church was seriously damaged.

As this article was going to press, the Holy Assembly of Bishops met in Belgrade to discuss the plea of the Patriarch Pavle to be relieved of duties because of his poor health. The media widely speculated about the authenticity of the Patriarch’s plea and the candidates for the future Patriarch. Eventually, the meeting ended with the decision to reject the Patriarch’s plea and prolong the status quo which was an obvious sign that divisions persisted and no camp was able to gain an upper hand.67

Conclusion

While rejecting the notion of a clericalization of Serbian society, this article has drawn attention to the unprecedented rise of the SOC’s economic and political power. Initially, the SOC as the historically dominant church sought the restoration of its lost privileges from the pre-communist era and attempted to influence state authorities to limit the rights of other religious communities as well as of non-believers. The regime change in 2000 saw a reversal of actors and policies. Not capable of solving its accumulated problems and of offering real future perspectives, the new political and economic elite in Serbia felt a need to rely on the Church in order to consolidate and legitimize its power and author-

ity. Courting the SOC, the representatives of the democratic political parties since 2000 have often assigned to the Church a much bigger influence over voter choice than it actually yields. Despite the trust and respect enjoyed by the SOC, public surveys have never resulted in establishing any link between confessional allegiance and political preferences. Nevertheless, the rigid model of separation between state and church inherited from the communist period in Serbia has slowly been transformed into a new social pact between the SOC and associated traditional churches on one side and the state on the other. First of all, the legal division between traditional and non-traditional religious organizations inevitably placed obstacles in the work of the latter and privileged the former. Furthermore, the ambitions of the SOC as the biggest church with access to, a voice in, and an influence upon public life have significantly risen, as is evident through a number of legal changes and concessions. In its power drive, the SOC is now confronted with the temptation of many churches in post-socialist countries which have accepted instrumentalizations by the political forces to gain some political power for itself. This overlapping of religion and politics resulted in what Horvat refers to “politization of religion or religionization of politics”.

As has been pointed out, Serbian nationalism is still the SOC’s most powerful resource for preserving its role as the dominant factor in society. Yet, the risks this involves have become obvious, as both the clergy and the Church hierarchy prove unable to cope with the high expectations and privileges awarded to them. Further democratization and pluralization of society will bring more challenges for both the SOC and the relations between the Church and the state. Unfortunately, most voices within the Church present secular modernity and its challenges in a highly abstract way (as rootless). On the other hand, secular critics and opponents of the SOC often behave in an implacable fashion, presuming that the marriage of modernity and secularism is inevitable, and conceptualizing any church and religion in general as irremediably anti-modern, monolithic and parochial. Both sides in this ongoing conflict tend to dramatize the antagonism and to co-produce each other through mutual stereotyping and aggrandisement: a phantom of secularism against a phantom of religion. In contemporary Serbia, an old-fashioned anti-clericalism opposes an old-fashioned religious anti-modernism, which in its forms and style proves reminiscent of analogous antagonisms of the 19th century.

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