

## The Attitude of the Authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia Toward the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s

The following is the results of the research into the relations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia and the Roman Catholic Church, or more specifically the Diocese of Skopje, from 1945 to 1960. For almost a decade there were no talks or contacts with the Bishop of Skopje, Dr. Smiljan Čekada, whom the Commission for Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of Macedonia regarded as "a reactionary person and an opponent of the constitutional order". According to the analyses made at the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, Bishop Čekada's primary objective was to promote union with the Roman Catholic Church among Orthodox Christians in Macedonia. The fear of the local and federal authorities that the idea of union with the Roman Catholic Church may spread in Macedonia had a lot to do with the unresolved status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia and led to the deportation of two Catholic priests, one of whom was the archpriest of the Eastern Rite Catholics in Macedonia. The deportation aggravated further relations between the authorities and the Diocese of Skopje and gave rise to growing distrust of Bishop Smiljan Čekada.

### *Introduction*

In Yugoslavia, in the first decade of the establishment of the government of KPJ/SKJ (Communist Party of Yugoslavia/League of Communists of Yugoslavia), the Soviet ideological model was applied toward religion and religious communities. Relying on the Soviet Marxist understanding of the role of religion in society, the new authorities sought to restrict religious influence by closely controlling the activities of the religious communities.<sup>1</sup> However, unlike the Orthodox Church that the government took control of fairly soon,<sup>2</sup> the Roman Catholic Church proved a

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<sup>1</sup> BOECKH 2006: 403.

<sup>2</sup> The Serbian Orthodox Church came out of World War II devastated in terms of material wealth and clergy and the measures that the authorities carried out after 1945 weakened it even more. The authorities exerted influence on the church through certain bishops willing to cooperate. In 1950, Patriarch Vikentij was appointed with direct help from the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs. The influence of the secular authorities was even more obvious in the appointment of Patriarch German in 1958 (RADIĆ 2009: 24-33).

much stronger opponent of the official ideology and social system. Financially more independent than the Serbian Orthodox Church and run by educated and seasoned clergy, the Roman Catholic Church refused to remain on the margins of society.<sup>3</sup>

In the People's Republic of Macedonia, the attitude of the state authorities toward religion and religious institutions differed in quality from the other republics largely because of the specific status of the Orthodox Church. Since the early 1920s, based on the agreement reached between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it was the Serbian Patriarchate that had had jurisdiction over the part of Macedonia that fell under the Kingdom of Serbia after the Balkan Wars and under the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after World War I.

After the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, the parts of Vardar Macedonia where Bulgarian administration was established fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.<sup>4</sup> The holy synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church reacted to the new ecclesiastical situation in a fairly swift manner.<sup>5</sup> By the end of April 1941, there was a short project on the new ecclesiastical establishment in the areas under the dominance of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The parishes were also reorganized.<sup>6</sup> In the western parts of Vardar Macedonia that fell under Italian power, ecclesiastical jurisdiction was established by the Albanian Orthodox Church.

The status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia was brought to the spotlight as early as during World War II taking into consideration that the church issue in Macedonia was an integral part of the resolution of the Macedonian national issue.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> RADIĆ 2008: 653.

<sup>4</sup> СТОЯНОВА 1999: 263.

<sup>5</sup> ХАДЖИЙСКИ 2001: 73-74.

<sup>6</sup> ЕЛДЪРОВ 1997: 117-136; ТЕРЗИОСКИ 1965: 48.

<sup>7</sup> Upon Macedonia's liberation toward the end of 1944, the Serbian bishops that had been expelled by the Bulgarian authorities in 1941 sought permission from the authorities to return to the eparchies in Macedonia—Josif (Cvijović) to Skopje and Vikentij (Prodanov) to Štip. The new authorities of Macedonia and Yugoslavia did not let them return for they regarded the church dignitaries as advocates of Serbian nationalism and chauvinism (they believed this to be especially true of Metropolitan Josif of Skopje). In March 1945, a church and people's assembly was held, at which, in the attendance of about 300 priests and believers, a decision was passed to renew the Ohrid Archbishopric, that is to say, to form an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, this decision was revised in 1946 primarily because the position of the state authorities to the Macedonian church issue had changed and they started to see the appeals for autocephaly as an act of separatism by hostile priests. In May 1946, a priests' assembly was held in Skopje at which, after an exhaustive discussion, which reflected the differing views of the clergy on the status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia, a resolution was passed that called for appointing Macedonians as bishops in the Macedonian eparchies and for using the Macedonian language in the church administration. (The State Archives of the Republic of Macedonia (hereafter DARM) 159.12.74.509-517; РАДИЋ 2002a: 277-297; ИЛИЕВСКИ 2011: 40-105).

In 1943, the main headquarters of the People's Liberation Army of Macedonia included a so-called religious officer, who issued instructions to the priesthood;<sup>8</sup> the delegates of ASNOM (The Antifascist Assembly of the People's Liberation of Macedonia) included several priests as well. A substantial part of the priesthood was actively involved in the resistance movement. After the liberation, a part of them would become heads of the movement for the declaring of the independency of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.<sup>9</sup>

The unresolved status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia was one of the reasons for the bad relations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia and the Roman Catholic Church. The Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs feared that the Roman Catholic Church would take advantage of the unresolved church issue to promote the idea of union with the Holy See, which caused growing distrust of the Bishop of the Skopje Diocese and his activities.

The interest of the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia in Bishop Smiljan Čekada's activities grew keener in the early 1950s. From 1946 to 1951, following the death of Bishop Jozo Garić of Banja Luka, the Holy See entrusted the Bishop Čekada of Skopje with the task of administering the Diocese of Banja Luka, too, as a result of which he was often out of Macedonia.

In 1950, Serbian Patriarch Gavril, the staunch opponent of making any changes to the administration of the Macedonian eparchies, passed away. The authorities in Belgrade and Skopje believed that with the election of the new Patriarch Vikentij favorable conditions were created for fast resolution of the Macedonian church issue, that is to say, for appointing Macedonian bishops in the eparchies of the People's Republic of Macedonia. Time went on yet the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church diplomatically turned down the lists of candidates for bishops arriving from Macedonia.

The unresolved status of the Orthodox Church of the People's Republic of Macedonia and the more intense activities of the Roman Catholic Church and particularly its bishop, who was able to focus entirely on the Skopje Diocese since the early 1950s, was the reason why the Commission for Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of Macedonia started "analyzing" more frequently Bishop Smiljan Čekada's activities.

When in 1958, at a church and people's assembly in Ohrid, the Ohrid Archbishopric was renewed as the Macedonian Orthodox Church (the Macedonian Orthodox Church remained in canonic unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church through their shared head), the authorities believed that the Macedonian church issue was closed. As a result, the activities of the Skopje bishop became less relevant considering "the danger of union with Rome has passed".

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<sup>8</sup> АСНОМ – Документи од Првото и Второто заседание 1984: 537-539.

<sup>9</sup> ПРЕЗИДИУМ на АСНОМ 1994: 38.

At the time the interest in the church issue was rekindled, prior to the declaration of the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1967, Dr. Smiljan Čekada filled the office of Coadjutor Archbishop of Vrhbosna and therefore the Macedonian authorities were not much concerned with his activities.

This article seeks to shed light on the attitude of the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia toward the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Čekada in particular, in the 1950s, the key decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Macedonian authorities focused on resolving the Macedonian church issue.

*Resistance to Bishop Čekada and Caution against the Spread of Eastern Rite Catholicism*

The territory of the People's Republic of Macedonia was part of the Diocese of Skopje, which also included Kosovo, Metohija and Sandžak. Since 1940, the Diocese of Skopje had been governed by Bishop Smiljan Franjo Čekada (1902-1976). He was born in Donji Vakuf, Bosnia. In 1925 he was ordained a priest and in 1928 he defended his doctoral thesis in Rome. In 1939 he was appointed as Auxiliary Bishop at the Archdiocese of Vrhbosna in Sarajevo and in 1940 he was appointed as Bishop of Skopje.<sup>10</sup>

In the territory of the People's Republic of Macedonia, in the early 1950s, there lived a small number of Roman Catholics. The authorities estimated them at about 2,500.<sup>11</sup> However, considering the fact that the territory of Macedonia was part of the so-called missionary regions, the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Macedonia were seen by the authorities as a bid of Vatican to spread Catholicism and union with Rome among Orthodox Christians.<sup>12</sup> Eastern Rite Catholicism had had a nearly century-old tradition in the southeast part of the

<sup>10</sup> GJINI 1986: 203. Dr. Smiljan Čekada should have been appointed as Assistant Bishop to Bosnian Archbishop Šarić as early as 1935, which, however, did not occur because of the objection of the Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. According to the Ministry, Dr. Čekada "promoted religious and racial hatred that harmed the state unity" (РАДИЋ-МИТРОВИЋ 2012: 248).

<sup>11</sup> According to the official census statistics, in 1921, in the Vardar part of Macedonia, whose population totaled 798,000, there lived 2,215 Roman Catholics and 765 Eastern Rite Catholics (registered as Greek Catholics). (Definitivni rezultati Popisa Stanovništva od 31 januara 1921 godine, Sarajevo, državna štamparija 1932, 88-123). By 1931, the number of Roman Catholics increased. The census taken in 1931 revealed that there were 8,482 Roman Catholics and 1,070 Eastern Rite Catholics (Greek Catholics), and that the population had increased to 938,000. Most Eastern Rite Catholics lived in the region of Strumica (Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od marta 1931 godine, knjiga II, Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti, Beograd, 1938, 88-107; Die Gliederung der Bevölkerung des ehemaligen Jugoslawien nach Muttersprache und Konfession nach den unveröffentlichten Angaben der Zählung von 1931, Wien, 1943, 308-351).

<sup>12</sup> DARM 1.159.109.36.693.

People's Republic of Macedonia, or more specifically the region of Gevgelija, and after the Balkan Wars Eastern Rite Catholics also settled in the region of Strumica. Entering union with Rome appeared as a reaction to the Hellenizing policies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>13</sup> The Lazarists, who established their mission in Thessaloniki in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also helped spread union with Rome.<sup>14</sup>

The available archive documents suggest that as far as problems with the Roman Catholic Church in Macedonia were concerned, the Macedonian and Yugoslav authorities regarded union with Rome and Bishop Smiljan Čekada as the biggest threats. The new authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia, following Macedonia's constitution as a unit of federal Yugoslavia (during World War II), maintained no contact with the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The state and party authorities in Macedonia in the 1950s, just as the federal authorities, had extremely bad relations with Bishop Smiljan Čekada of Skopje. They considered him to be the main reason for the adverse relations of the Roman Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia with the authorities.

The Bishop of Skopje was involved in all the activities of the Diocese, which the authorities deemed as "hostile actions". Bishop Čekada and four other bishops held

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<sup>13</sup> ДИМЕВСКИ 1988: 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> Under the influence of the Lazarists, in 1859, a part of the Orthodox Christians in the town of Kukuš (Kilkis), not far from Thessaloniki, entered into union with the Roman Catholic Church. From 1883 until the Balkan Wars, based on a decision of Pope Leo XIII, the Eastern Rite Catholics of Ottoman Macedonia had been under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicariate seated in Thessaloniki. Immediately before the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, in the region of Gevgelija (Gevgelija and eight nearby villages), there were 362 families professing Eastern Rite Catholicism. Ten priests took care of the population's religious needs, as there were ten schools with six male and eight female teachers and 375 students. On establishing the Serbian rule in this region, based on the provisions of the Treaty of Bucharest, the number of families professing Eastern Rite Catholicism dropped. By 1915, in the region of Gevgelija, there were only about eighty such families left. In 1915, the Holy See put the Eastern Rite Catholics in the region of Gevgelija under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Lazar Mjedija of Skopje. In 1919, the Eastern Rite Catholics of the region of Strumica, which fell under the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Treaty of Neuilly, were also placed under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Skopje. Based on a report of Archbishop Lazar Mjedija of Skopje, in the region of Strumica in 1921, there were 218 families and five priests professing and preaching Eastern Rite Catholicism. They were refugees from the surroundings of Kukuš (Kilkis), which fell under Greek rule in the Balkan Wars. However, a portion of this population immigrated to Bulgaria to flee the violence of the Serbian authorities. In 1923, the Eastern Rite Catholics in Macedonia were placed under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Križevci. When the Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed, most of Macedonia fell under Bulgarian rule and the Eastern Rite Catholics were therefore placed under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Exarchate of Sofia. After the end of World War II, based on a decree of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, the Eastern Rite Catholics of Macedonia were again taken over by the Diocese of Križevci. (STOJANOV 1990: 18-38, 60-83). In 1914, the Kingdom of Serbia and the Holy See concluded a Concordat that Serbia immediately ratified (VATIKAN I JUGOSLAVIJA 1953: 137; ЈАГОДИЋ 2013: 513).

a meeting in Ljubljana in July 1947, at which they decided to file a submission to the Presidency of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRY), in which, *inter alia*, they spoke about the problems related to religious instruction in schools. The bishops complained that the Roman Catholic Church in the FNRY was denied the opportunity to take care of the religious upbringing of the young and that secular schools sought to undermine the foundations of faith.<sup>15</sup> In September 1952, the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia passed a statement, also known as *Non licet* (it is forbidden), that harshly condemned the Catholic priests' associations and banned their formation because they were established without the bishops' prior consent and under the authorities' dictate. Shortly after this statement was passed, the Prosecutor General of the People's Republic of Croatia summoned several bishops for questioning, including Bishop Čekada of Skopje.<sup>16</sup>

In an analysis drafted by the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs in October 1954, it is said that: "Bishop Čekada of Skopje is very active in promoting union with Rome and takes every opportunity in his communication with the Orthodox clergy to make sure his operation succeeds".<sup>17</sup> The Macedonian and Yugoslav authorities brought the role of the Roman Catholic Church in promoting union with Rome in Macedonia in direct connection with the unresolved Macedonian church issue, that is to say, the attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church to Macedonia and the issue of appointing bishops in Macedonia's eparchies. At the counseling of the presidents of the local commissions for religious affairs at the Federal Commission held in October 1954, it was said that: "Čekada's diocese has only four Catholic priests and considering there is not much religious business to conduct there, the main task that Vatican has entrusted him with is to promote union with Rome".<sup>18</sup> The issue of the Eastern Rite Catholicism in Macedonia was paid special attention to at the counseling of October 1954. The President of the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Macedonia, Elisije Poposki, expounded on the position of the Macedonian authorities to the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in certain regions of Macedonia, primarily the region of Strumica where priest Alojz Turk<sup>19</sup> was assigned. Shortly after Turk left for Strumica, where, according to the authorities, he proved quite successful in attracting believers, the Commission for Religious

<sup>15</sup> AKMADŽA 2008: 777.

<sup>16</sup> AKMADŽA 2007: 104.

<sup>17</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, κ.1 Odnos verskih zajednica prema državi, 5.10.1954.

<sup>18</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, κ.1 Zapisnik sa savetovanja Savezne komisije za verska pitanja sa pretsednicima republičkih komisija, 19. X. 1954.

<sup>19</sup> Alojz Turk (1909-1995) was ordained a priest in 1934. From 1980 to 1986, he served as a Bishop of Belgrade (<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bturk.html>).

Affairs even considered staging demonstrations against the activities of the Roman Catholic Church. However, they then handed the issue over to the association of the Orthodox clergy and entrusted it with the task of following the work of the Roman Catholic priests in the region of Strumica.

The President of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, Dobrivoje Radosavljević,<sup>20</sup> emphasized that the Initiative Board for the organization of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia could organize a visit of Bishop Dositej to Macedonia in order to improve the reputation of the Orthodox Church.<sup>21</sup> In a conversation between a delegation of the Initiative Board for the organization of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia and Patriarch Vikentij of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in January 1955, a member of the delegation of the Initiative Board, priest Klime Maleski, used the threat of spreading Eastern Rite Catholicism as an occasion for putting pressure on the Serbian Orthodox Church for accelerating the resolution of the church issue in Macedonia. He stressed that priest Alojz Turk “tells the locals that under the Ottoman rule, the Roman Catholic propaganda played the role of a guardian of the national spirit of the Macedonians when neither the Serbs nor the Bulgarians nor the Greeks let them be independent”. Union with Rome was also mentioned in the talks that Lazar Koliševski,<sup>22</sup> as Chairman of the Assembly

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<sup>20</sup> Dobrivoje Radosavljević (1915-1984) participated in the National Liberation Movement of 1941. For a certain period during World War II, he served as KPJ (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) instructor at KPJ's Macedonian committee. He was a member of AVNOJ, a minister of finance in the Government of the FNRY, a deputy in the Federal Assembly and, from 1953 to 1962, a president of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs (РАДИЋ, МИТРОВИЋ 2012: 186).

<sup>21</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, к.1 Zapisnik sa savetovanja Savezne komisije za verska pitanja sa predsednicima republičkih komisija, 19.X.1954. It pertains to Vicar Bishop Dositej (1906-1981), who visited Macedonia in 1951 in the capacity of a vicar of the patriarch and held several religious services. In 1922, he enrolled at the Orthodox Seminary in Sremski Karlovci. In 1924, he entered a monastic order at the Monastery of St. Bogorodica Precista (Immaculate Mother of God) near Kičevo and left for the Hilandar Monastery. Eight years later, he returned to Yugoslavia and on completing his theological education at the Seminary in Bitola started climbing up the ladder of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He graduated from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and in 1946 he was assigned as the head of the Patriarchy Court in Sremski Karlovci. In 1951, at the proposal of Patriarch Vikentij of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Dositej was appointed as an auxiliary bishop. At the Second Church and People's Assembly held in Ohrid in October 1958, Bishop Dositej was appointed as the first Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and was bestowed the title of Archbishop of Ohrid and Skopje and Metropolitan of Macedonia. In 1967, he declared the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (DARM 147.59.70/514-535; ИЛИЕВСКИ 1995: 32-33).

<sup>22</sup> Lazar Koliševski (1914-2000) was one of the most significant political officeholders in Macedonia after 1944. He spent most of his youth in Serbia and joined KPJ in 1935. In 1941, he was arrested by the Bulgarian authorities and sentenced to death but his death sentence was later replaced with a life sentence. From 1943 to 1963, he was the President of the Central Committee (CK) of the Communist Party of Macedonia/League of Communists of Macedonia (KPM/SKM) and filled a number of significant offices in both Macedonia and Yugoslavia.

of the People's Republic of Macedonia, held with Serbian Patriarch Vikentij in Skopje in March 1958. Koliševski, as a form of putting pressure, suggested inter alia that Vančo Mihajlov,<sup>23</sup> too, "has recently raised the Macedonian church issue. He is well known to have nothing in common with the interests of the Macedonian people. Throughout the occupation, he lived with his like-minded friend and war criminal Ante Pavelić. In fact, it is typical of him to support the idea of union with Rome. This is a result of his inclination to Vatican, which also pays him for what he does, and his intention to use union with Rome for carrying out his devious plans concerning the People's Republic of Macedonia and the FНРY".<sup>24</sup>

However, in Macedonia, after the end of World War II, there were only four Eastern Rite Catholic priests, three of whom were very old. As there were no priests in the region of Gevgelija, believers were occasionally visited by priest Georgi Kapsarov who lived in Skopje.<sup>25</sup> Due to not being able to train local priests over a short period of time, the Bishop of Križevci, Dr. Gabriel Bukatko,<sup>26</sup> under whose jurisdiction were the Eastern Rite Catholics in Yugoslavia, assigned priests Branko Sodja, a Lazarist, and Alojz Turk, a vicar general of the Diocese of Skopje, to the region of Gevgelija and Strumica. The two priests accepted the eastern rite, whereupon Sodja was sent to Bogdanci<sup>27</sup> near Gevgelija and Turk to the village of Nova Maala near Strumica.<sup>28</sup> In August 1954, Alojz Turk, the vicar general of the Diocese of Skopje, was relieved of duty and on 1 September 1954 the Bishop of Križevci assigned him as the archpriest of the Eastern Rite Catholics.<sup>29</sup> At the ceremony of his appointment as archpriest, he addressed the Eastern Rite Catholic

<sup>23</sup> Vančo Mihajlov (1896-1990) was the President of VMRO. He lived in Zagreb during World War II and emigrated after the war.

<sup>24</sup> КЈАКИК 1994: 317-319.

<sup>25</sup> STOJANOV 1995: 84.

<sup>26</sup> Dr Gabriel Bukatko (1913-1981) was a Bishop of Križevci, and from 1961 to 1980 he was the Archbishop of Belgrade (РАДИЋ-МИТРОВИЋ 2012: 194).

<sup>27</sup> The Eastern Rite Catholic parish in Bogdanci was formed in the 1860s by the Lazarists from Thessaloniki. In 1877, there were 290 families professing Eastern Rite Catholicism in Bogdanci, 200 in Bogorodica and 22 in Paljurci. Immediately before the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912, in Bogdanci there were 90 Eastern Rite Catholic families, two priests, one chapel, two female Eucharistic teachers and one male teacher. For a number of administrative reasons and obstacles set by the local authorities, there were no priests in Bogdanci for nearly two decades. Finally, between the two World Wars, in 1935, Bishop Dionisij Njaradi of Križevci assigned a priest who stayed in Bogdanci until 1944 before emigrating (ДИМЕВСКИ 1988: 104).

<sup>28</sup> The parish in the village of Nova Maala near Strumica was formed in 1914 by refugees who came from the surroundings of Kukuš, (Kilkis) a region that was annexed by Greece following the Balkan Wars. During the Balkan Wars, a few thousand refugees from the region of Kukuš (Kilkis), some of whom were Eastern Rite Catholics, settled in the region of Strumica, which belonged to Bulgaria until 1919.

<sup>29</sup> STOJANOV 1990: 85.



priests saying inter alia that the Macedonian people strongly believed they would find the protection they lost when the Ohrid Archbishopric was disbanded in the universal Catholic Church and would thus have their own national awakening.<sup>30</sup>

*The Deportation of Priests Alojz Turk and Branko Sodja  
from Macedonia*

Relations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia and the Roman Catholic Church became strained in late 1954 when two priests were driven out of Macedonia. On 23 December 1954, priest Branko Sodja, a parish priest in Bogdanci and Stojakovo near Gevgelija, was summoned to UDBA's local office in Gevgelija where he was accused of spreading religious intolerance and was told that he must leave the place within 24 hours and that he could file a complaint only outside of Macedonia's territory.

The archpriest of the Eastern Rite Catholics, Alojz Turk, was exiled in a similar way. He was the parish priest of the Strumica village of Nova Maala, which had long been without a priest. On 30 December 1954, Turk was urgently summoned to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs in Strumica where he was told that he must leave Macedonia within 48 hours. However, he refused to sign the deportation order arguing it was in breach of the constitution. On 1 January 1955, he was taken to the railway station in Strumica with police escort and all the way to Niš he was accompanied by a representative of the Secretariat of Internal Affairs. In Niš, he was told that he could continue his travel at his own expense.<sup>31</sup>

Immediately after the expulsion of priest Sodja, Bishop Smiljan Čekada of Skopje sent a letter to the Chairman of the Macedonian Assembly, Lazar Koliševski, asking him, in a very harsh tone, based on what law or regulation the priest was deported and, if priest Sodja's deportation was in adherence with the law, then why he was not issued any written decision. The Bishop also inquired what the objective reasons were that made the Secretariat of Internal Affairs take this unusual administrative measure. He then addressed the authorities' allegations concerning the Catholic propaganda among Orthodox Christians, saying: "Catholic propaganda. A threat of religious discord? The fact that certain religions are allowed means that they are also entitled to spread propaganda. A religion that does not defend and promote its ideas is not alive. While priest Sodja served in the place of his assignment, he had no contacts with any Orthodox Christians and had no problems with anyone. If the Initiative Board for the organization of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia regarded the presence of a Catholic priest in Bogdanci as

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<sup>30</sup> РАДИЌ 2002а: 299.

<sup>31</sup> Archives of Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (hereafter MANU Archives) F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 38.

a threat to the Orthodox Church, the Board could have sent there a zealous priest to defend with spiritual means the “threatened” positions of Orthodox Christianity...”<sup>32</sup> The Bishop then directly addressed Koliševski with the words: “Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to warn you of the consequences that this illegal act may lead to. First and foremost, the Roman Catholic Church of Yugoslavia will not simply overlook this injustice. We are going to use all legal means to defend our rights recognized in the Constitution. We have already taken some action in this regard. On the same day priest Sodja was deported (on the 24<sup>th</sup> of this month), we filed a complaint to the Yugoslav President, Marshal Tito, and two days later another complaint to the Federal Government. In addition, in a few days, the Episcopate of Yugoslavia, via the Presidency of the Bishops’ Conferences, is going to take further action at the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of the FNRY in Belgrade. We are confident that our right to religious freedom will be recognized to the extent to which we are capable of defending it before all forums, the law and the authorities”<sup>33</sup>.

Bishop Čekada’s letter to Lazar Koliševski obviously did not bear fruit considering two days later priest Turk was also banished from his parish. Shortly after, Archbishop Josip Ujčić of Belgrade, too, sent a letter to the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs, arguing that the deportation of the two priests from Macedonia breached the Constitution and the law on the legal status of religious communities and demanding that priests Turk and Sodja should be allowed to return to their parishes in Macedonia as soon as possible and that such incidents “which are de facto discriminating against Catholics” should be averted in the future.<sup>34</sup>

On 5 January 1955, Alojz Turk, the archpriest of the Eastern Rite Catholics in Macedonia, sent a letter to the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs urging it to take all measures to “right the injustice of violation of the fundamental civil rights and of religious discrimination” and to make sure the two deported priests returned to their parishes. Priest Turk underlined in his letter that the parishes in which the deported priest served were not “new centers of religious propaganda” and that they were formed even before the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was constituted.<sup>35</sup>

This course of events reinforced the enmity of the authorities toward Bishop Čekada. The Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs believed that although

<sup>32</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 39.

<sup>35</sup> Priest Alojz Turk also said that the President of the Macedonian Government, Lazar Koliševski, said in his pre-election speech held in Skopje in late 1953 that the Catholic priests of the People’s Republic of Macedonia forged such a strong friendship with the Orthodox priests and the people of the People’s Republic of Macedonia that union was looming unless the Serbian Patriarchate immediately undertook to resolve the issue of the Macedonian church hierarchy (MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 48/1).

the Roman Catholic Church posed no particular threat by the number of believers, it merited special attention because of the mission it executed, the form of its activities and the fact that it was spearheaded by “one of the most reactionary bishops in the FNRY. There is no communication with the Commission because Čekada considers any relation, let alone cooperation, as betrayal of Catholicism and as kneeling down before atheists”.<sup>36</sup> The member of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs in Croatia, Petar Ivičević, regarded Bishop Čekada as “one of the most reactionary members of the Episcopate, but also capable and intelligent”. The long-standing secretary of the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs, Done Ilievski, said at the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs in 1956: “Čekada never did anything to establish any contact with the authorities and the religious commission... Neither did we seek to make any contact with him. It is a fact that his views have remained unchanged...”<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the deportation of the two priests from Macedonia and not letting priest Joakim Herbut hold Christmas services in Gevgelija in 1954-1955, the Macedonian authorities kept a close watch on Bishop Smiljan Čekada's reactions. After sending the aforementioned letter to Lazar Koliševski, Bishop Čekada was summoned to the Macedonian Government for questioning where he was received by the Government Secretary. Considering he refused to renounce the positions he laid out in his letter to Koliševski and, according to the President of the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs, Elisije Poposki, still upheld his union ideas, the Commission believed that Bishop Čekada should be taken to court. The Bishop also turned to the Public Prosecution arguing that the deportation of the priests from Macedonia was against the law.<sup>38</sup>

Bishop Čekada's activities, even his talks with believers who came to wish him a merry Christmas, were closely followed by the security agencies at the time. In an analysis of Bishop Čekada's reaction to the priests' deportation entitled “A report on Čekada's reaction to the deportation of his priests and the warning he was given at the Government of the People's Republic of Macedonia”, the state authorities took note, inter alia, of the Bishop's reaction to the summons he received from the Government, on which occasion he said: “A few days ago, the Secretariat of the Government of the People's Republic of Macedonia requested my presence over a certain announcement, underlining that I should comply at

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<sup>36</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 81. The Macedonian authorities regarded Bishop Čekada as “a fascist, a reactionary man, a staunch enemy and a foreign agent” (РАДИЋ 2002b: 440).

<sup>37</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, к.1 Zapisnik sa savetovanja sa predsedenicima verskih komisija narodnih republika u Saveznoj verskoj komisiji 15. V. 1956.

<sup>38</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, к.1, Zapisnik sa savetovanja Savezne verske komisije, 3.02.1955; РАДИЋ 2002b: 440.

my convenience, within two or three days. I was surprised to see that they, too, could be polite. I immediately obeyed taking Jože Fidler with me and while he was waiting in the lobby, I went to see the secretary. In a purely police manner, giving me a stern look, he pulled out a sheet of paper, which was, in fact, the response set out in six items to my submission to President Koliševski. That didn't frighten me. Instead, I demanded to receive it in writing and started discussing with him what he had just read to me. He refused to give it to me in writing and to discuss it with me, saying he was not authorized. In fact, he was incapable of discussing it with me for he felt weaker. This is evidence that things in our relations have gone from bad to worse and will keep worsening. I have no intention of yielding in this battle. As a man of Vatican, I will fight until the end".<sup>39</sup>

It goes without saying that the Macedonian authorities did not deport the priests without prior consultation and consent from the federal authorities. The President of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, Dobrivoje Radosavljević, stressed at the Commission's counseling in February 1955 that "all political stakeholders agreed that the priests should be deported and that if any other union priests were sent from Croatia and Slovenia they should also be deported". Radosavljević said during the discussion that the Prosecutor General should be notified of the Commission's position and that the Prosecution should make sure the whole affair dragged on.<sup>40</sup>

Deported priest Alojz Turk sent a letter to Lazar Koliševski in March 1955, in which he said that he regretted having wrongly cited parts of his speech and that he would withdraw his complaints.<sup>41</sup>

One more reason for the tension between the state authorities and the Roman Catholic Church in Macedonia was the expropriation of the land of the Roman Catholic Church in Skopje, on which the construction of a students' dormitory was planned. Bishop Čekada turned to the People's Board of Skopje suggesting that the Catholic Church should be allowed to build a cathedral on that location. His suggestion, however, was turned down. A little later, Bishop Čekada sent another

<sup>39</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 49/4.

<sup>40</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, к.1, Zapisnik sa savetovanja Savezne verske komisije, 3.02.1955.

<sup>41</sup> The letter was very short, hand-written in Macedonian and sent to the President of the Government of the People's Republic of Macedonia, Koliševski, from Novo Mesto, Slovenia, on 15 March. It read: "Mr. President, it is only now, in the course of the investigation, that I realized how big a mistake I have done by wrongly citing your speech in my complaint. I do not know how this happened. I admit I was wrong and I ask your forgiveness. I hereby withdraw my complaints and plead with you to do all it takes so peace would be restored as if nothing happened. I will never seek to go back. As for those few Catholics, let them be. I am sick and so is my 80-year-old mother. Have mercy. Let the whole affair be forgotten. Please. It is urgent. Kind regards, Alojz Turk, former archpriest for the People's Republic of Macedonia (MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е50).

letter asking for a permit for building a bell tower next to the Roman Catholic Church in the heart of Skopje. This request, too, was rejected. The Bishop then protested, saying the authorities intended to displace the Roman Catholic Church from the center of the city.<sup>42</sup>

*The Trial against Bishop Smiljan Čekada and the Other Indictees  
in Skopje in 1960*

Unlike the Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church in Macedonia did not receive any payments from the state.<sup>43</sup> In the late 1950s, Bishop Čekada was among those few Roman Catholic bishops in Yugoslavia who were not issued travel documents. He was allowed to leave the country for the first time in the early 1960s.<sup>44</sup>

The Macedonian authorities kept a close eye on the religious life of the few Roman Catholics in Macedonia, especially the religious literature they used and the ways in which they carried out religious instruction in schools. In 1958, religious instruction was organized only in Skopje, for about 40-50 students.<sup>45</sup>

In 1959, the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs established that the Roman Catholic Church conducted regular and very intense religious activities. "They seek to make full use of the rights granted by the authorities, yet they also try the best they can to shun responsibilities." The authorities watched particularly closely the remittances and assistance the Roman Catholic Church in Macedonia received from abroad. According to the incomplete information of the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs, in 1957 and 1958, the Church received some 2,300 dollars, 6,520 dinars and over 400 parcels of aid.<sup>46</sup> The Yugoslav and

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<sup>42</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, к.1, Molbe i zahtevi verskih zajednica za izgradnju ili oporavak bogomolja i drugih verskih objekata.

<sup>43</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, k. I Zapisnik sa savetovanja sa predsednicima verskih komisija narodnih republika u Saveznoj verskoj komisiji 15. V. 1956.

<sup>44</sup> РАДИЋ 2002: 434, 468.

<sup>45</sup> DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, k.1, Информација од идеолошката комисија при ЦК СКМ – Скопје до идеолошката комисија на ЦК СКЈ – Белград 28. 10. 1958. The report says that the Catholic Church sought to attract as many young people as possible on the church boards that would engage in church affairs.

<sup>46</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 81. According to the not always precise statistics, in Macedonia, in 1956, there were six Roman Catholic and seven Eastern Rite Catholic churches. (DARM f. Macedonian Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, k. I Zapisnik sa savetovanja sa predsednicima verskih komisija narodnih republika u Saveznoj verskoj komisiji 15. V. 1956.). The Report of 1959 on the religious life in the People's Republic of Macedonia says that there were two churches, four chapels and three convents (MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45. а-е 81).

Macedonian authorities also closely followed the conduct and views of Bishop Čekada in the late 1950s. The member of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, Petar Ivičević, stressed in a conversation with Archbishop Josip Ujčić of Belgrade that certain bishops, including Bishop Čekada, could do much harm to the effort for normalization of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the state if they continued to take advantage of their position for pursuing political goals.<sup>47</sup> The Bishop remained a staunch opponent of the priests' associations, saying he would maintain discipline on any cost.<sup>48</sup>

Eventually the authorities brought charges against Bishop Čekada and four other persons, including two priests—Ivan Pavlinec from Sarajevo and Rudolf Pukljak from Zagreb.<sup>49</sup> They were indicted for smuggling, illegal trade and financial wrongdoings. The indictment said that the defendants earned some 37 million dinars (125,000 US dollars) through illegal means in 1956-1959. The President of the Judicial Council of the District Court in Skopje, Todor Anastasov, said in the course of the trial that the defendants all along maintained communication with Yugoslav emigrants and foreign citizens. They were Hans Meier, a trader from Berlin who came to Yugoslavia several times,<sup>50</sup> and Mustafa Ibrišević, who lived in Trieste. Their activities, based on the indictment, were coordinated by cleric and political emigrant Krunoslav Draganović.<sup>51</sup> Bishop Čekada did not deny the allegations. He admitted that over a period of several years he received some 15 million dinars (50,000 dollars) yet claimed it was money from the Holy See that would have been sent through legal channels had relations between the church and the state been normal. The Bishop and the other indictees stressed in the course of their trial that they had no reasons not to trust the persons that handed them the

<sup>47</sup> АКМАДŽА 2007 б: 68.

<sup>48</sup> РАДИЋ 2002: 439. Analyzing its relations with the Roman Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Serbia in 1958, the Serbian Commission for Religious Affairs said that: "Archbishop Ujčić is the best and Bishop Čekada is the worst. He is in Kosmet and Sandžak where there are 17 priests but none of them is in the association." In 1959, the Bishop sent to the priests of the Diocese of Skopje two written statements banning membership of the priests' associations (РАДИЋ-МИТРОВИЋ 2012: 690, 746).

<sup>49</sup> Nova Makedonija, 17. 03. 1960 The other two defendants were Ismet Nadžaković and Hajrija Hadžiibrišević.

<sup>50</sup> РАДИЋ 2002: 441.

<sup>51</sup> Krunoslav Draganović (1903-1983) graduated from the faculty of theology in Sarajevo and in 1928 he was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic *Archdiocese of Vrhbosna*. In 1940, he started lecturing at the Faculty of Theology in Zagreb. Toward the end of the war, Draganović was one of the organizers of the network for accepting refugees from Yugoslavia. After the war, he worked at the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome. However, he left the College because the Yugoslav authorities said they would not allow clerics from Yugoslavia to be schooled in Rome unless Draganović left the College. He then went to Austria and returned to Yugoslavia under unclear circumstances in 1967. He spent his last years in Sarajevo, studying church history and lecturing at the local seminary (АКМАДŽА 2010: 9-26).

money and the other goods because the money had been intended for the needs of the church and for the construction of the Roman Catholic cathedral in Skopje. Bishop Čekada also admitted to having maintained written correspondence with Krunoslav Draganović and to having received most of the money from Sarajevo and Zagreb via his secretary Gaspar Gjini.<sup>52</sup> The defendants were found guilty on all the counts of the indictment and were handed down imprisonment sentences of five months to two years. Bishop Čekada was sentenced to one year's probation; priest Ivan Pavlinec from Sarajevo to two years in prison; and priest Rudolf Pukljak from Zagreb to 20 months in prison.<sup>53</sup> According to the Judicial Council, an extenuating circumstance was the fact that the defendants did not use the money for amassing personal wealth but for the needs of the church.

Foreign observers trusted that the sentences, especially Bishop Čekada's probation, revealed the Yugoslav Government's intention not to aggravate further its relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Foreign correspondents in Yugoslavia covered the trial in detail sending regular reports about it. The French Catholic newspaper *La Croix* wrote that "the new brutal measure of deporting priests in Yugoslavia upset the Catholic Church", thereby calling attention again to the deportation of the two Catholic priests from their parishes in Macedonia in 1954-1955. Radio Vatican also offered a close coverage of the trial in Skopje, reporting that the persecution against the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia continued. Radio Vatican also said that the trial in Skopje was a follow-up to the trials of Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb and Bishop Petar Čule of Mostar.<sup>54</sup>

In January and March 1960, Archbishop Josip Ujčić of Belgrade discussed the search of Bishop Čekada's apartment and his trial in Skopje with representatives of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, saying that the matter should be handled in a low-key way taking into account that certain foreign newspapers, not in favor of the FNRY, could report negatively about the relations between the church and the state in Yugoslavia.<sup>55</sup>

In the early 1960s, when the first signs appeared of improving relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the federal authorities and a possibility emerged for launching talks between the Holy See and Yugoslavia for normalization of relations, relations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia and the Roman Catholic Church also began to normalize. The proclamation of the

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<sup>52</sup> Nova Makedonija, 18. 03. 1960.

<sup>53</sup> Priest Rudolf Pukljak, who served as a secretary of Archbishop Franjo Seper of Zagreb, was released from jail before the end of his sentence (AKMADŽA 2004: 271). The other defendants were sentenced to six and five months in prison.

<sup>54</sup> MANU Archives, F. Лазар Колишевски, к-45, папка-2 Pisanje strane štampe. The Macedonian Government kept track of all the reports of the foreign newspapers and radio stations about Bishop Čekada's trial in Skopje largely via the Tanjug news agency.

<sup>55</sup> РАДИЋ 2002b: 441.

Macedonian Orthodox Church at the Second Church and People's Assembly in Ohrid in October 1958 and the constitution of its Synod in 1959 led the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs to conclude that the threat of spreading Eastern Rite Catholicism waned, whereupon the attitude to the Bishop and the Roman Catholic Church started changing.

Bishop Čekada participated in the Second Vatican Council and started maintaining closer communication with the representatives of the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs. The normalization of relations continued over the following years as well.

### *Conclusion*

In August 1945, the Ministerial Council of the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia passed a decision to form a national commission for religious affairs. In that same year, a religious commission was also formed in Macedonia. One of the commission's main responsibilities was to establish the state of affairs in the religious realm and maintain communication with representatives of the religious communities.

The Commission for Religious Affairs in Macedonia maintained a close contact with the Orthodox clerics in Macedonia and was actively involved in the resolution of the Macedonian church issue, that is to say, led and directed the politics toward the Serbian Orthodox Church.

On the other hand, the relations of the Commission with Catholic Bishop Smiljan Čekada of Skopje and the Roman Catholic clergy in the People's Republic of Macedonia were bad and there was almost no communication between them by the middle of the 1950s.

The state authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia feared that the unresolved status of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia could be taken advantage of by the Roman Catholic Church to spread Eastern Rite Catholicism, whose tradition in Macedonia went back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By closely following the activities of the Bishop of Skopje, the Macedonian Commission for Religious Affairs concluded that Bishop Čekada was fully supportive of the effort to promote Eastern Rite Catholicism among Orthodox Christians. In order to substantiate its claims, the Commission cited the appointment of priest Alojz Turk, a deputy to the Bishop of Skopje, as archpriest for the Eastern Rite Catholics in Macedonia.

The strained relations between the authorities and the Roman Catholic Church culminated in late 1954 with the deportation of the two Eastern Rite Catholic priests (Turk and Sodja) from Macedonia and eventually, in 1960, with the bringing of charges against Bishop Čekada and four other men, including two priests, for illegal trade. In the course of their trial, the prosecutor accused the Bishop of



maintaining contact with inimical emigrant circles. The Bishop was ultimately found guilty but was put on probation for 12 months, which foreign observers saw as a resolve on the part of the Yugoslav authorities not to aggravate further relations with the Roman Catholic Church. In the early 1960s, there began the gradual normalization of relations between the Roman Catholic Church, that is to say, the Diocese of Skopje and the authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia.

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## Stav vlasti Narodne Republike Makedonije prema Rimokatoličkoj crkvi u 1950-im godinama

U kolovozu 1945. godine Ministarski savjet DF Jugoslavije donio je Uredbu o osnivanju državne komisije za vjerska pitanja. Iste godine bila je konstituirana i vjerska komisija u Makedoniji. Glavni zadatak komisije bio je proučavanje stanja na vjerskom planu te održavanje sastanka i razgovora s klerom vjerskih skupina.

Komisija za vjerska pitanja u Makedoniji bila je u stalnom kontaktu sa pravoslavnim svećenstvom. Ona je bila aktivni činitelj u rješavanju makedonskog crkvenog pitanja. Komisija je usmjeravala i politiku makedonskog svećenstva prema Srpskoj pravoslavnoj crkvi.

Nasuprot odnosima sa pravoslavnim svećenstvom, relacije sa skopskim biskupom dr. Smiljanom Čekadom, kao i s rimokatoličkim klerom u NR Makedoniji bile su loše, pune nepovjerenja, a do sredine pedesetih godina nije bilo ni međusobnih susreta i razgovora.

Kod političkog rukovodstva u Makedoniji postojao je strah da bi neriješeni status Pravoslavne crkve mogla iskoristiti Rimokatolička crkva za razvoj unijatškog pokreta koji je u Makedoniji imao tradiciju od druge polovine XIX. stoljeća. Prateći aktivnost skopskog biskupa, u Republičkoj komisiji za vjerska pitanja su smatrali da biskup Čekada u cjelosti podržava širenje unijatstva među pravoslavnim vjernicima.

Do kulminacije loših odnosa i međusobnog nepovjerenja došlo je u prosincu 1954. godine kad su dvojica unijatških svećenika bila izgnana iz NR Makedonije. Nepovjerenje prema biskupu i kontrola aktivnosti Rimokatoličke crkve rezultiralo je sudskim procesom protiv biskupa Čekade i još četvorica okrivljenih, među kojima dvojice svećenika. Optužnica je teretila biskupa i ostale okrivljene za nezakoniti promet stranom valutom. U optužnici je bilo navedeno da je biskup održavao kontakte s neprijateljskim elementima iz emigracije, posebno navodeći Krunoslava Draganovića. Na kraju suđenja biskup je proglašen krivim, ali je bio osuđen na uvjetnu kaznu. Uvjetnu su kaznu strani promatrači ocijenili kao želju jugoslavenskih vlasti da ne pogoršavaju odnose s Vatikanom.

Već početkom šezdesetih godina XX. stoljeća počela je postupna normalizacija u odnosima između Rimokatoličke crkve, odnosno Skopske biskupije i vlasti u NR Makedoniji.

*Ključne riječi:* biskup Smiljan Čekada, unijatstvo, Komisija za vjerska pitanja, Rimokatolička crkva, Skopska biskupija, Alojz Turk

*Keywords:* Bishop Smiljan Čekada, Union with Rome, Commission for Religious Affairs, Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Skopje, Alojz Turk

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