The Recognition of the Authocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church–Archdiocese of Ohrid and Reflections by the Public: A Twitter Analysis

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Abstract

The long-awaited recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid (MOC-OA), initially by the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP), and later by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), caused numerous reactions in the public. At the same time, the process itself, from the very beginning, was accompanied by ambiguities that resulted from the insufficiently clarified decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding the Church canons, as well as the confusion regarding the final name under which the Macedonian Orthodox Church will be recognized. All this was accompanied by the frequent use of terms such as T*omos,* autocephaly, and the like, the meaning of which are insufficiently known and clear to the general public. The purpose of this paper is to present the reactions of the public regarding the process of recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The enormous popularity and increasing availability have enabled social media platforms to increasingly dominate the space for public debate. Hence, in order to fulfil the objectives of this paper, we collected data from a popular social media, namely Twitter, where users' opinions were obtained from their posts. In doing so, a qualitative analysis was applied, that is a thematic analysis of the selected data from the twitter platform, particularly the tweets posted in the period following the announcement of the recognition of the MOC-OA by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Based on this analysis, in addition to the initial state of joy and excitement after the announcement of the news of the recognition of the MOC-OA by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there was evident mistrust and doubt in the final outcome of this process. Such skepticism subsided after the recognition of the MOC-OA by the SOC, but uncertainty and confusion remain over the final name under which the MOC will be recognized. In addition to such attitudes of the public, also noticeable was the highlighting of the political dimension of the process of recognition of the MOC-OA, that is, the imposition of the "inevitable" political context of this process.

Keywords: MOC-OA**,** autocephality, canons, public opinion, Twitter

Introduction

On May 9, 2022, the Ecumenical Patriarchate (hereafter EP) recognized the 'Archdiocese of Ohrid' as canonical. Through this announcement, the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized the church known as the "Macedonian Orthodox Church - Archdiocese of Ohrid," headed by Archbishop Stefan, which confirmed its validity in the Orthodox world. After many years of efforts and obstacles to resolve the canonical status of Macedonian Orthodox Church - Archdiocese of Ohrid (hereafter MOC – OA), with this recognition, its canonical and eucharistic unity with the entire Orthodox Church was established.

The publication of this news caused numerous reactions, both from the official representatives of the autocephalous Orthodox churches and from the official state representatives. At the same time, the views of some theologians from the surrounding countries were conveyed by the media,[1] which deepened the confusion regarding the process itself, which arose from the enigmatic wording, that is, the terminology in the content of the announcement on the recognition of the MOC - OA. The insufficient knowledge of the canons and acts of the Orthodox Church, as well as different attitudes of some of the official representatives of the Orthodox churches from other countries, also influenced the attitudes of the public. In this situation, the Serbian Orthodox Church (hereafter SOC) took a constructive position toward the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,[2] which certainly had a positive reflection among the public. However, the ambiguities surrounding the issue of the autocephaly of the MOC-OA, that is, the recognition process after the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the recognition of autocephaly by the SOC, still left room for different interpretations. In addition, the actuality of this issue was followed by numerous announcements by the media, where various analysts from the country and neighboring countries expressed their assumptions and views regarding this issue. All of this had its own reflection on the public, which was also reflected in the contents of posts on social media.

The phenomenon of social media is present in every sphere of social life, attracting millions of users worldwide. The ability to communicate with others, to publish posts, and to discuss various topics allows users to build relationships with a wide community of people. At the same time, the exchange of information and the expression of views regarding a specific topic or event takes place at a high speed, which for certain current and attractive topics is described by the term viral.[3] Hence, the process of forming an opinion, that is, the opinion of the community of users, is much more complicated than this same process in real society. This complexity of the process, to the greatest extent, results from the anonymity of the participants in the communication, bearing

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[1] 'Реакции во Бугарија, Грција и Србија за канонското признавање на Охридската Архиепископија' [Reakcii vo Bugarija, Grcija i Srbija za kanonskoto priznavanje na Ohridskata Arhiepiskopija] (10 May 2022), https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/31842658.html accessed 28 November 2022.
[2] 'Одлуката на Вселенската патријаршија за признавање на МПЦ-ОА за канонска е една од темите на Соборот на СПЦ' [Odlukata na Vselenskata patrijarsija za priznavanje na MPC-OA za kanonska e edna od temite na Soborot na SPC] (May 16, 2022). https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/odlukata-na-vcelenskata-patrijarshija-za-priznavanje-na-mpc-oa-za-kanonska-crkva-e-edna-od-temite-na-soborot-na-spc/ accessed November 29, 2022.
[3] Viral "used to describe something that quickly becomes very popular or well known by being published on the internet or sent from person to person by email, phone,   etc."   Cambridge   Dictionary https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/viral   accessed December 2, 2022.

in mind that most users do not use their real names. Also, the rest of the data for each of the users is rather scarce or non-existent, hence the partial impersonality of the users. In fact, users get to know the personal characteristics and attitudes of the other participants in the communication through the posted content. However, due to the large and heterogeneous composition of users, social media offer a unique opportunity to monitor and explore social relationships.

Recent Developments Regarding the Canonical and Autocephalous Status of the MOC – OA

Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid, which had been isolated from the entire Orthodox ecumene for more than half a century, nearly resolved the issue of its canonical status in a very short time of approximately one month. In 1967 MOC-OA unilaterally declared autocephaly, but this decision was refuted by the Serbian Orthodox Church as its "Mother Church" and that provoked the rejection, also, by all other Orthodox churches.[4] But, in May 2022, the dispute of MOC with SOC was resolved and was accepted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP).

It all started with the decision of the Holy Synod of EP from May 9, 2022, to recognize the Church known as "Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid," its ecclesiastic hierarchy, as canonical and valid in the entire Orthodox world, but only as "Archdiocese of Ohrid," excluding the term 'Macedonian' and any other derivative of the word 'Macedonia.'[5] It was considered as a "final stage of the petition of appeal of that Church to the Mother Church,"[6] clarifying however that "it cedes to the Church of Serbia the regulation of the administrative

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[4] Gj. Gjorgjevski, 'Macedonian Orthodox Church in the Context of Balkan and European Orthodoxy', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* (Special Issue on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Declaration of the Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church), 37/4 (2017) http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol37/iss4/ accessed December 5, 2022.

[5] 'The Church of Ohrid restored into eucharistic communion' (May 22, 2022), https://www.ecupatria.org/2022/05/22/the-church-of-ohrid-restored-into-eucharistic-communion/ accessed November 30, 2022.

[6] Four years ago, in April 2018, MOC-OA sent a plea for appeal to the EP, which was taken into consideration and only one month after EP "decided … to take all the necessary steps." "Most joyful annunciation from Constantinople: The Ecumenical Patriarchate recognised our historical and reinstated Ohrid Archbishopric as canonical", https://bigorski.org.mk/en/reports/events/most-joyful-annunciation-from-constantinople-the-ecumenical-patriarchate-recognised-our-historical-and-reinstated-ohrid-archbishopric-as-canonical/; Το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο δέχθηκεσεεκκλησιαστική κοινωνία την Αρχιεπισκοπή Σκοπίων. https://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/49974-to-oikoumeniko-patriarxeio-anagnorise-tin-sxismatiki-ekklisia-ton-skopion;https://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/49974-to-oikoumeniko-patriarxeio-anagnorise-tin-sxismatiki-ekklisia-ton-skopion accessed December 4, 2022.

matters between itself and the Church in North Macedonia, in the context of course of the sacred canonical order and church tradition." Another important issue underlined in the announcement was the future status of the diaspora believers affiliated with MOC-OA, "solely within the boundaries" of today's North Macedonia."[7]

In meantime, at the beginning of 2022, confidential meetings began between delegations of SOC and MOC. The first official announcement of SOC greatly astonished the public, both in Serbia and in North Macedonia, when on May 16, 2022, the Bishops' Council of the SOC published the Communiqué on the restoration of the eucharistic and canonical communion with the MOC-OA, recognizing its "canonical status of the broadest possible autonomy, that is the status of full internal independence granted as far back as 1959," as a part of the Serbian Patriarchate, without any intention "to subject the new sister Church to restrictions as to the sphere of her jurisdiction in her own country and in diaspora and recommends that the issue of her official designation be defined in a direct fraternal dialogue with Greek-speaking and other Local Orthodox Churches."[8]

After this decision of the SOC, positive reaction arrived from the EP,[9] but also from Moscow.[10] The Bulgarian Patriarchate also welcomed the decision, but on the issue of the name "Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid," the Bulgarian Synod did not make a final decision.[11] However, the news was not welcomed positively in the country, considering this as complete and definitive denying of the autocephaly.[12] On May 19 a joint liturgy in Belgrade

[7] A. Bogdanovski , 'Is The Macedonian Schism Healed?' (13 May 2022), https://orthodoxyindialogue.com/2022/05/13/is-the-macedonian-schism-healed-by-andreja-bogdanovski/ accessed December 4, 2022.

[8] 'Саопштење Светог Архијерејског Сабора', [Saopstenje Svetog Arhierejskog Sabora] (16 May 2022), http://arhiva.spc.rs/eng/node/90603; Church of Serbia for North Macedonia: The dialogue is fair and realistic (16 May 2022), https://orthodoxtimes.com/church-of-serbia-for-north-macedonia-the-dialogue-is-fair-and-realistic/ accessed December 5, 2022.

[9] 'SOC approved and blessed, and Fanar should confirm the autocephaly of MOC-OA', https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/en/spc-ja-odobri-i-blagoslovi-a-fanar-treba-da-ja-potvrdi-avtokefalnosta-na-mpc-oa/ accessed December 5, 2022

[10] 'Russian church endorses the Serbian response on the dispute with Macedonia' (16 May 2022), https://english.republika.mk/news/macedonia/russian-church-welcomes-the-serbian-response-on-the-dispute-with-macedonia/ accessed December 5, 2022.

[11] 'The Bulgarian Patriarchate entered into Eucharistic communion with the Macedonian Church' (June 22, 2022),https://raskolam.net/en/54814-bolgarskij-patriarhat-vstupiv-u-evharistijne-spilkuvannya-z-makedonskoyu-cerkvoyu accessed December 7, 2022.

[12] "СПЦ ја врати МПЦ-ОА во автономија, со статус полош од Нишкиот договор. Кој ќе понесе одговорност?", [SPC ja vrati MPC-OA vo avtonomija so status polos od Niskiot dogovor] (16 May 2022), https://religija.mk/spc-ja-vrati-mpc-oa-vo-avtonomija-so-status-polosh-od-nishkiot-dogovor-koj-ke-ponese-odgovornost/ 07 December 2022

took place and it was considered as establishing of a "canonical communion of the two sister Churches." But, several days later, on May 24 the second joint liturgy was held by the primates, bishops and clergy of two Churches in Skopje, when the Serbian Patriarch announced the autocephaly, as a unanimous decision of the Holy Synod of Bishops of SOC. The proclamation of autocephaly was welcomed also by the Russian Orthodox Church,[13] and also by the Church of Greece. [14] The third joint liturgy in Belgrade was celebrated June 5, when the Patriarch of Serbia assigned to MOC a *Tomos* of Autocephaly.

Only several days after, church delegation of the MOC-OA arrived in Constantinople and received a patriarchal and synodal act for the official acceptance of MOC in canonical and eucharistic communion. The first joint service was held between the head of the MOC-OA, Archbishop Stefan and EP Bartholomew on Pentecost Sunday on June 12, in presence of a high-level delegation from North Macedonia. The *Tomos* for autocephaly was not mentioned; obviously, this will have to wait.

Public Opinion on Twitter

The unstoppable popularity of social media attracts a huge number of users. Specifically, in 2021, the number of social media users worldwide was over 4.26 billion, while the projections for 2027 are that this number will grow to almost 6 billion.[15] The attractiveness of social media stems from the ability for users to interact, discuss topics, post, and build relationships with users around the world. With the spread of its popularity, the interest and discussion about its impact on various

[13] 'Patriarchate of Moscow: The recognition by the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Autocephaly of the Church in North Macedonia is a joyful event' (25 May 2022) , https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarchate-of-moscow-the-recognition-by-the-serbian-orthodox-church-of-the-autocephaly-of-the-church-in-north-macedonia-is-a-joyful-event/ Accessed December 10, 2022.

[14] It was highlighted the attention for this decision "to be a 'comfort' to the Holy Clergy and the pious Greek people, as it meets the expectations both for the naming of the ecclesiastical entity of the neighbouring State without using the precious name of "Macedonia" as a constituent or derivative, and for the determination of its limits only within the boundaries of the State," expressing expectation that the "Archdiocese of Ohrid… will make constructive use of its reintegration into ecclesiastical communion …, avoiding earlier ethno-racial claims, which have indeed been condemned as heresy…" 'The Church of Ohrid restored into eucharistic communion' (May 22, 2022), https://www.ecupatria.org/2022/05/22/the-church-of-ohrid-restored-into-eucharistic-communion/ accessed December 22, 2022.

[15] Statista, 'Number of social media users worldwide from 2017 to 2027' https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/ accessed December 17, 2022

social segments has also been awakened. At the same time, the perception and analysis of the impact of social media on public opinion attracts particular attention. Through the interactive features provided by these media, in particular the possibility to share and comment on certain content in different degrees of 'publicness,' a much more inclusive opportunity for the formation of public opinion is created.[16] Here we would like to highlight the fact that despite the frequent use of the term public opinion, there is still no generally accepted definition for it. Starting from this, for the purpose of this paper, we state the definition of public opinion according to W. Phillips Davison, who points out that public opinion is: "an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community. Some scholars treat the aggregate as a synthesis of the views of all or a certain segment of society; others regard it as a collection of many differing or opposing views."[17] At the same time, he does not position public opinion exclusively in the sphere of politics but points out that the influence of public opinion can be reflected on various social spheres.

According to their layout, social media platforms create a space for the open expression of one's thoughts and views, creating an environment in which public opinion can be freely formed. Among numerous social media platforms, Twitter is recognized by the academic and journalistic community as the most influential platform in shaping public opinion. Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that was launched in 2006, on which 556 million monthly active users were recorded in January 2023.[18] Characteristic of the communication on Twitter are statements called 'tweets', which can contain up to 140 characters. At the same time, Twitter is recognized as a social media where real-time information is exchanged, and a place for debate in news, politics, business, and entertainment.[19] One of the features that sets Twitter apart from other social media is that Twitter users are an exception to other social media users when it comes to

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[16] D. Stockmann & L. Teng , 'Which Social Media Facilitate Online Public Opinion in China? Problems of Post-Communism', in M. van Klingeren, D. Trilling & J. Möller,'Public opinion on Twitter? How vote choice and arguments on Twitter comply with patterns in survey data, evidence from the 2016 Ukraine referendum in the Netherlands' *Acta Politica*, 56/3 (2021), 436-455 https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00160-w.

[17] W. Phillips Davison 'Public opinion', https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-opinion accessed January 10, 2023.

[18] Statista, 'Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2023, ranked by number of monthly active users' https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/ accessed January 15, 2023.

[19] K. Weller et al., eds., *Twitter and Society* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014).

privacy. According to Mislove et al[20] over 91% of Twitter users choose to make their profiles and communication history publicly visible, giving researchers access to the majority of content and users. Hence there is a unique opportunity provided by this platform for analyzing the public communication of a large part of the population. Gaisbauer et al[21] indicate that this popularity stems, to a large extent, from the dual openness of Twitter. So, on the one hand, through the API, researchers can easily download large datasets, while, on the other hand, the content created by users is public. The second feature is of particular importance to researchers since the activity of each individual user is visible to all users of the platform and, each user can communicate with any other user. In addition to the significantly large volume of content generated and shared by the heterogeneous composition of individuals and institutions, and the possibilities for advanced analytics, Twitter's popularity is complemented by the long-term availability of data, as well as the legitimacy of the collection and use of data specified in Twitter's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.

Regarding public opinion research via Twitter, van Klingeren et al[22] point out that despite the fact that Twitter users cannot be considered as representatives of a given population, still through the analysis of the process of public opinion formation on this platform, it can give insight into the general process of public opinion formation. According to them, this results from the fact that the opinions expressed on Twitter are in themselves part of the process of public opinion formation. In researching the formation of public opinion on Twitter, Xiong and Liu[23] found that public opinion on Twitter often evolves and quickly levels off into an ordered state, with one opinion remaining absolutely dominant. At the same time, this kind of consensus is usually encouraged through the support of larger groups, which tend to leave the greatest impact. But, despite the emergence of dominant opinions, Xiong and Liu state that they tend not to achieve full consensus. According to them, this results from the finding that Twitter users prefer to express

[20] A. Mislove, 'Understanding the Demographics of Twitter Users', *Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media,* 5/1 (2021).

[21] F. Gaisbauer et al., 'Ideological differences in engagement in public debate on Twitter', *Ideological differences in engagement in public debate on Twitter. PLoS ONE,* 16/3 (2021) https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0249241 accessed January 21, 2023.

[22] M. van Klingeren, D. Trilling & J. Möller,'Public opinion on Twitter? How vote choice and arguments on Twitter comply with patterns in survey data, evidence from the 2016 Ukraine referendum in the Netherlands' *Acta Politica*, 56/3 (2021), 436-455 https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00160-w.

[23] F.Xiong & Y.Liu, 'Opinion formation on social media: An empirical approach', *Chaos: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Nonlinear Science*, 24/1 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4866011.

their opinions and attitudes, rather than change them, that is, they are more engaged in changing the opinions of other users than accepting a change in their own attitudes. Even when the users, who are a minority according to their views, face huge opposition from the majority of users; there is still no probability that they will change their views. In addition, Xiong and Liu[24] state that once the public opinion formed on Twitter is stabilized, it will hardly change. Finally, on the question of the applicability and relevance of public opinion research on Twitter, van Klingeren et al[25] point out that "Twitter can provide us with an imperfect, but reasonably reliable proxy of public opinion." At the same time, they point out that despite certain limitations, we can conclude that Twitter shows both "an accurate and a distorted mirror of public opinion."

For this research, we would like to state that according to the data of the State Statistical Office of Macedonia in the first quarter of 2022, 86.6% of households had access to the internet from home. Also, in the first quarter of 2022, 88.3% of the total population aged 15 to 74 used Internet, while 73.9% used it several times during the day.[26] Moreover, according to the latest data on the portion of individuals in North Macedonia who participated in social networks in the period from 2013 to 2018, 65 percent of Internet users in 2018 used social networks.[27]

Methodology

This survey is based on a thematic analysis of conversations that occurred on the Twitter platform in the period between May 9, 2022, to September 1, 2022. The beginning of the survey overlaps with the date of recognition of Macedonian Orthodox Church–Archdiocese of Ohrid by the Holy Synod of Ecumenical Patriarchate, which was the initial motive for the creation of series of tweets following that date. The choice of the final date is the period of one week after the recognition of the MOC-OA by the Russian Orthodox Church, while in the following period there are no other significant events related to the process of recognition of the MOC-OA. It is

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[24] Xiong & Liu, 'Opinion formation on social media: An empirical approach.'
[25] van Klingeren,'Public opinion on Twitter? How vote choice and arguments on Twitter comply with patterns in survey data, evidence from the 2016 Ukraine referendum in the Netherlands', 443.
[26] State Statistical Office, "Usage of information and communication technologies in households and by individuals, 2022' (18 November 2022), https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie.aspx?rbrtxt=77 accessed 25 January 2023
[27] Statista, 'Share of individuals in North Macedonia participating in social networks from 2013 to 2018', https://www.statista.com/statistics/708775/social-network-penetration-in-macedonia/ accessed January 20, 2023.

significant to note that the research design of this paper is cross-sectional,[28] and the collection of tweets is performed in precisely defined time interval. According to Braun and Clarke,[29] thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data … it also often goes further than organizing and describing the data set in (rich) details and it interprets various aspects of the research topic."[30] Additionally, they point out that "Thematic analysis involves a number of choices which are often not made explicit, but which need explicitly to be considered and discussed. In practice, these questions should be considered before analysis of the data begins…". Based on the objectives of this study, we cite the clarification by Brown and Clark that "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." At the same time, we indicate that themes can be identified in one of two primary ways in thematic analysis: in a theoretical or deductive or "top down" way, or in an inductive or "bottom up" way.

It is important to point out that only tweets in the Macedonian language were extracted for the purposes of this study. While doing so, an advanced Twitter search function was used to filter (a set of predefined search terms) all tweets that contained the words: "МПЦ", "Вселенска Патријаршија", "СПЦ", "автокефалност", "томос", and the phrase "признавање на МПЦ". We would also like to mention that this study focused solely on the message content of the tweet.

Data Analysis

After performing the search according to the previously mentioned keywords and phrases, the identified tweets, that is, their content, was copied and imported into Excel tables. In doing so, demographics of Twitter users, links or metadata were not transferred to the Excel spreadsheet. In the final sample of this study, a total of 258 tweets were extracted, with each tweet analyzed independently, while all attached images were reviewed, and a brief description of each image was formulated. At the same time, all the "retweets" were treated separately, while multiple entries

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[28] A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (4th edn, Oxford University Press, 2012).
[29] V. Braun & V. Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3/2 (2006).
[30] R. E. Boyatzis, *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code Development* (Sage Publications 1998) cited in V. Braun & V. Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3/2 (2006).

from the same user, that contained the search keywords or phrase, were aggregated to form a single entry.

The extracted tweets were used to form samples, from which the main topics were identified through the application of keywords. During this process, numerous difficulties arose regarding the recognition of the main keywords in a tweet, that is, the way in which the tweet was transmitted. But such difficulties contributed to the classification of tweets in the most appropriate category. In addition, we would like to point out that, in the analysis, each tweet was grouped into only one category, after which the categories were grouped into themes. In analyzing the data, an inductive approach was applied, that is, categories and topics were derived from the tweets. Thereby, from the thematic analysis of the data, the following themes have been defined: enthusiasm for the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church, highlighting the involvement of political actors in the process of obtaining autocephaly, skepticism due to insufficiently explained decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and ambiguities regarding the retention of the name "Macedonian Orthodox Church."

The analysis of the specified themes that emerged from the sample of tweets, was in accordance with the stated objectives of this study which related to contextual consideration and understanding of the mentioned themes.[31] In addition, despite the presentation of the themes as discrete, there is overlap among them.

Enthusiasm Due to the Decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church

The tweets from which this topic arose are concentrated in the period from May 9, 2022, to the end of June 2022. The exchange of tweets begins immediately after the announcement of the decision of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to receive into Eucharistic communion the hierarchy, clergy, and people of the church known as "Macedonian Orthodox Church–Archdiocese of Ohrid," recognizing it as canonical and valid in the Pan-Orthodox world, but naming it as "Ohrid Archbishopric." At the same time, the tweets state congratulations and delight

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[31] A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (4th ed, Oxford University Press, 2012).

at this long-awaited decision. Within these tweets, the largest number of users mention the news, as well as a link to the news transmitted by some media and portals. Within these tweets, the majority of users state that the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized the MOC-OA, without going into details about the content of the decision of the Holy Synod of the EP. Even then, in the following days, there were tweets in which the doubt regarding the return to autonomous status within the Serbian Orthodox Church was highlighted. Within these tweets, concern and mistrust in the entire process of recognition of the autocephaly of the MOC is highlighted, as well as mistrust and criticism towards the media that published the initial news about the recognition of the MOC by the EP. In addition, this attitude had been encouraged by certain users with the posting of the text from the Religija.mk portal, where it is pointed out that the return of the autonomous status of the MOC within the SOC represents a "scandalous end to the negotiations." After this, a small number of users criticized the management of the MOC, emphasizing the doubt in the justification of such a decision and the disappointment of the subordinate attitude towards the SOC.

With the announcement by Patriarch Porfirij, on May 24, 2022, during the common liturgy in the Orthodox Cathedral in Skopje about the decision of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church to approve the autocephaly of the MOC, the dynamics of the exchange of tweets increased. At the same time, in the largest number of tweets, congratulations and enthusiasm for such a decision were mentioned again, while in some of these tweets, criticism was directed towards malicious users who were skeptical of this whole process.

In the process of analyzing the selected tweets, it was evident that part of the content of the tweets categorized within this topic overlapped with a large part of the tweets from the other topics. For instance, some of the tweets from which this topic arose include praise for certain politicians and political parties, as well as criticism of other politicians and parties. In addition to highlighting the political context of the process for obtaining the autocephaly of the MOC-OA, a large number of tweets within this topic also highlight skepticism towards the whole process. Hence, the content of these tweets was analyzed in the other topics as well.

Highlighting the Involvement of Political Actors in the Process of Obtaining Autocephaly

As already pointed out, within a large number of tweets from which the previous topic arose, the highlighting of the political context of the entire process of acquiring autocephaly of the MOC-OA was noted. At the same time, the influence of certain political parties, as well as politicians, was highlighted by the majority of users who emphasized this dimension of the process. Within these tweets, by the largest number of users, the merit of the efforts of the current government of Macedonia, that is, the political party SDSM, was emphasized. Also, in most of these tweets, the success of the process of obtaining autocephaly of the MOC was correlated with the Prespa Agreement, NATO membership, as well as the Open Balkans initiative. This content of the tweets that followed immediately after the announcement of the decision of the Holy Synod of the EP, initiated an increased dynamic of exchanging tweets with similar content in the following days. At the same time, in some of the tweets that followed, and most of the tweets were replies to the previously mentioned tweets, the political merit of the current government was denied. In such an exchange of tweets, the influence of political parties and politicians who were or are in power in Macedonia was highlighted and criticized. In a small number of these tweets, the influence of the foreign factor on this process was emphasized, by highlighting assumptions about the involvement and support in the process of obtaining autocephaly, that is, the influence on the Ecumenical Patriarchate, SOC, and others.

There is a noticeable change in the content of some of the tweets from this topic that follow in the period after May 24, 2022, that is the announcement of the patriarch of the SPC on the approval of the autocephaly of the MOC. Moreover, in the content of these tweets, politically impartial comments are made about the redundancy of the discussion about the involvement and merits of politicians. On the part of these users, the secular character of the state is emphasized, as well as the initiatives that were launched in the past years by the MOC. In addition, in a certain part of these tweets it is indicated that this joyful news for the Orthodox believers should be an occasion for unification, as opposed to the discussion of political influence that leads to divisions.

Skepticism Due to Insufficiently Explained Decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

As with the previous topic, in the content of a large number of tweets from which the topic of congratulations and enthusiasm for the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Serbian

Orthodox Church emerged, the emphasized skepticism towards the decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church was evident. Such content in tweets was noticed immediately after the publication of the initial decision of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of May 9, 2022, but the dynamics of tweets with such content increased significantly after the announcement of the re-establishment of the autonomous status of the MOC within the SOC. An overview of the content of these tweets is given in the first topic.

The tweets from which this topic arose are also represented in the entire subsequent tweet stream that was covered within the framework of this analysis. Moreover, in the content of these tweets, the events that followed the initial announcement of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are reflected. After the announcement of the decision of the Holy Synod of the SOC dated May 24, 2022, the reactions of the users that arose from the confusion, uncertainty, and skepticism about the recognition by the SOC subsided, but in the tweets in the following period, restraint and ambiguities about the course of the further procedure continued to prevail. Within these tweets, the questions regarding the church canons regarding the recognition of autocephaly, as well as the meaning of the term '*tomos*' were noticeable. At the same time, in the content of these tweets, questions related to the next stages in the process for recognition of the MOC, as well as questions about the church hierarchy, prevailed. In addition, such confusion was influenced by the announcements in the media made by MOC representatives, which were shared by certain users, in which no clarifications were given about the church canons and the further course of the process of obtaining autocephaly. This confusion intensified after June 9, 2022, with the announcement regarding the issuance of the patriarchal and synodal act by the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the acceptance of the Archdiocese of Ohrid into liturgical and canonical unity with the rest of the Orthodox churches. In the tweets that followed during this period, the question regarding the *tomos* of autocephaly, which users noted was not mentioned in the announcement of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's decision, was the most common.

In some of the tweets from which this topic arose, concern and confusion regarding the retention of the name 'MOC' was constantly highlighted, that is the question of whether the name MOC would persist or the obtaining of autocephaly is conditional on changing the name of the church.

Ambiguities Regarding the Retention of the Name 'Macedonian Orthodox Church'

As it was already stated, in the exchange of tweets from the previous topic, concern and skepticism regarding the retention of the name Macedonian Orthodox Church was evident. Also, tweets with this content have been noticed since the publication of the initial decision of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on May 9, 2022. In the content of the tweets, it is indicated that only the Archdiocese of Ohrid is mentioned in the decision of the EP, while in some of the tweets a link to the announcement of the decision on the website of the EP is also attached. Also, some tweets shared links from the notification of the Synod of the MOC regarding the decision of the EP, which the term 'Macedonian' was not mentioned. In addition to the obvious confusion regarding the name of the church, some of the tweets include criticism of the MOC leadership for the alleged compromise regarding the name. Also, a large number of users correlate the omission of the term 'Macedonian' with the decade-long dispute with Greece, while pointing to the national affiliation of Patriarch Bartholomew. In the period until May 24, 2022 (the announcement of the decision of the Synod of the SOC), some of the tweets within this topic highlight the political influence on the decision to omit the term 'Macedonian,' emphasizing the influence of the policies of other countries regarding the name of the state, as well as the consequences of changing the name of the state. Such a discussion was further encouraged by the announcements on the Twitter accounts of some media.

After the announcement of the decision of the Holy Synod of the SOC and the issuance of the *tomos* for autocephaly on June 5, 2022, the dynamics of tweets regarding the question of the name under which the MOC-OA will be recognized had increased. At the same time, in the majority of tweets, it is stated that the SOC recognized the autocephaly of the MOC-OA, that is, under its full name. In addition to such tweets, some of the users provide links to announcements about this on certain media, as well as statements by representatives of the MOC.

The dynamics of tweets also increases with the announcements of the recognition of the MOC by the other Orthodox churches, particularly after the announcement of the recognition by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) on June 21, 2022, in which the decision on the name had been postponed. In the content of these tweets, it is also noticeable in the confusion of the users regarding the name under which the MOC is recognized, as well as the final name under which the MOC will be recognized among the Orthodox churches.

Conclusion

The MOC-OA was unrecognized and isolated from all Orthodox churches for almost half a century. With the recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as canonical and valid in the Pan-Orthodox world, the MOC, for the first time, was enabled to establish canonical and eucharistic unity with other Orthodox churches. This kind of event, quite expectedly, caused numerous reactions in the public. Considering the popularity of social media, the reactions regarding this event caused a lot of activity on these media. At the same time, Twitter is the only platform which, in addition to the possibility to connect, communicate, and share content, that is expressing one's opinion, allows us to observe the interaction between users. Taking into account this possibility, through the analysis of the totality of announcements that belong to the topic of the recognition of the MOC and the research of the dynamic trend of public opinion on Twitter, we made an attempt to gain insight into the impact of this event on the public.

After the summing up of the findings, in addition to the expected enthusiasm regarding the recognition of the MOC by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the confusion and skepticism of the users due to insufficiently clarified segments of the recognition process itself was evident. At the same time, this skepticism was especially emphasized in the period leading up to the decision of the Holy Synod of the SOC to recognize the autocephaly of the MOC-OA. In addition, such skepticism was also encouraged by the posts of the accounts of certain media. But even after this event, in addition to subsiding skepticism among users, confusion regarding the next stages in the MOC recognition process still persisted. The constant mention of the term "*tomos*" and church canons in media releases, as opposed to the absence of related announcements by representatives of the MOC, deepened the existing confusion among users about the recognition process. Also, throughout the analyzed period, concern prevails among users regarding the retention of the name MOC, that is, the final name under which the MOC will be recognized among the Orthodox churches. At the same time, users highlighted the announcement about the recognition by the EP, where only the name Archdiocese of Ohrid is stated, as well as the later recognition by the BOC, in which the decision on the name was postponed. In addition, some users emphasized the political influence on the process of recognition of the MOC. In doing so, the recognition of the MOC is

correlated with certain previous political decisions and processes, thus tending to attribute merits to certain politicians and political parties for the recognition of the MOC.

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