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Re-Sakralisierung des öffentlichen Raums in Südosteuropa nach der Wende 1989?

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The Macedonian-Serbian Church Conflict from 1945 to the Present

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The canons of the Church, history and politics represent inseparable segments of a common corpus of issues that may frequently pose problems and cause discord in the Orthodox world. The relations among various Orthodox Churches, especially on the Balkans, have often been burdened by politics and mistrust. Church issues in the Balkan states were, as a rule, handled together with state issues. The formation of national Balkan states in the 19th century led to the emancipation of the national Orthodox Churches from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The first to separate from the Ecumenical Patriarchate was the Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Greece, and the independence of Serbia, Romania, Albania and Bulgaria also resulted in their Orthodox Churches obtaining autocephalous status.

After the Balkan Wars and WWI, the Serbian Orthodox Church, following a long period of negotiations in which Church and state officials participated, was issued the official Tomos of Autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This Tomos placed the eparchies of the part of Macedonia that had become part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the period from the Balkan Wars up to the creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1944, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches on the territory of Vardar Macedonia changed several times.

In the beginning of December 1944, following the final liberation of Macedonia from Axis forces and the partial stabilization of events, the Serbian Orthodox Church made repeated attempts to have things return to how they had been prior to 1941. The Metropolitan of Skopje, Josif [Joseph], asked the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church to take all the necessary measures among the civil and military authorities to allow the return of the clergy and the bishops to, as he called it, "southern Serbia." On this occasion the delegate of the National Committee of Interior Affairs was asked to issue the necessary instructions to the civil and military authorities to allow for their unobstructed return to the eparchies¹ in Macedonia.

In the beginning of January 1945, the priests Metodi Gogov, Nikola Apostolski and Kiril Stojanov sent Metropolitan Josif a letter in which they informed him about the conditions in Macedonia on an ecclesiastical level. They also informed him about the dissent among the clergy regarding the issue of having things return to how they had been prior to April 1941. Metropolitan Josif replied to this letter

1 The Serbian Orthodox Church in WWII (from the archives of the Holy Synod) Belgrade, 1991, 131.

straightaway, urging the clergy to retain their tact and “not to be swayed by the present and passing mood”.²

Following the First Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly that was held in March 1945, as well as the resolutions that were passed concerning the “renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric into an independent Macedonian Church”, the Organizing Committee for the creation of an Orthodox Church in Macedonia sent a telegram to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the 9th of March, 1945, informing it of the resolutions that had been issued by the Assembly.³ The episcopate of the Serbian Orthodox Church could neither accept the loss of posts the Church had held in Macedonia prior to 1941, nor the creation of a new federal unit, and did everything in its power to reclaim the position the Serbian Orthodox Church had previously held in the Macedonian eparchies.

The resolutions classified under Number 1279 and Reference 81, Transcript 471, which the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church passed during one of its regular sessions held on the 22nd of September 1945, need to be seen in this context. The second point of the minutes taken down at the session states: “The Holy Synod considers the proclamation of independence of some Orthodox Clementine Church carried out in Skopje on 4 March, 1945, by some supposed Macedonian Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly to be a fully unauthorized and uncanonical act.”⁴

However, over time and under the pressure exerted by the authorities, the movement to obtain autocephalous status weakened. In accordance with the resolutions passed at the Clerical Conference in 1946, the demand for autocephalous status was turned into a demand for autonomy with canonical ties to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The new leadership of the Organizing Committee was seeking a way to resolve the issue with a sort of compromise with the Serbian Orthodox Church. A delegation of several members paid a visit to the Serbian Patriarch towards the end of 1946, where they explained the Macedonian demands. During the meeting there was talk regarding the possibility for the creation of a Macedonian Orthodox Church within the framework of a joint Yugoslav patriarchate (an idea, which at this time was supported by various authorities in Macedonia and on a federal level, but was found unacceptable by the Serbian Orthodox Church), in which the separate Churches of the federal units would be represented by their own bishops in the Synod and the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

However, this proposal was categorically rejected by the Patriarch, as well as by Metropolitan Josif, as was the idea of creating a Macedonian Orthodox Church. Both clerics remained firm in their belief that the Serbian bishops should return to Macedonia, Metropolitan Josif to Skopje and Bishop Vikentij [Vicentius] to Stip.⁵

2 Djoko Slijepčević, *The History of the Serbian Orthodox Church*. Belgrade 1991, 169; *The Serbian Orthodox Church in WW II*, 132-133.

3 Radmila Radić, *The State and the Religious Communities 1945-1970, Part 1: 1945-1953*. Belgrade 2002, 284-285.

4 *The Autocephalous Status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Documents)*. Skopje 2004, 13.

5 Dragan Kljakik, *Lazar Koliševski's Time*. Skopje 1994, 307-308.

Following the return of Patriarch Gavril [Gabriel]⁶ in 1946, the Macedonian Church issue featured as a regular topic of discussion at numerous meetings of top management bodies of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It was dealt with at numerous Synod sessions in May, 1947. In essence, the resolutions which had been passed by the Synod as early as 1945 remained unchanged. The majority of the bishops were of the opinion to keep the Macedonian Church issue open, and there were proposals to have Metropolitan Josif and Bishop Vikentij return to their eparchies in Macedonia.⁷ At a meeting held in May 1947, the Patriarch informed the Assembly of Bishops about Lazar Kolishevski's visit to the patriarchate. The Assembly expressed full support of his opinion that "under no circumstances should there be any leeway given concerning the issue of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia, and that the Church order must remain as it had been for centuries". At this time, Metropolitan Josif for the first time expressed his willingness to leave the Skopje eparchy if his remaining there presented an obstacle for the resolution of the issue, but the Patriarch felt that there was no need for any discussion regarding Josif's withdrawal.⁸

In the same year, some changes were made in the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Some of them could be seen as minimal concessions with regard to some of the demands put forward by the Organizing Committee.⁹ It is indisputable that these changes did attempt to satisfy some of the demands that the Organizing Committee had put forward, but they never came into force. These changes also marked the three eparchies in Macedonia as an integral part of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In September 1947, a delegation of the Organizing Committee once again paid Patriarch Gavril a visit, at which time they put forward some demands which would, under the given conditions, guarantee the autonomous rights of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia.¹⁰ The Patriarch said that he could not discuss the issue regarding the choice of bishops in the Macedonian eparchies while Metropolitan Josif and Bishop Vikentij were still living. The demands put forward by the Macedonian clergy were for the most part tied to various self-government rights, essentially concerning the use of Macedonian, as well as in connection with the election of bishops, who would be chosen from the Macedonian clergy. The proposals of the First Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly for the creation of an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church were laid ad acta.

6 The Memoires of Patriarch Gavril. Belgrade, 1990; Predrag Ilic, *The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Dachau Secret*. Belgrade 2006, 294.

7 *The Serbian Orthodox Church in WWII*, 154-156.

8 *Ibid.*, 158-159.

9 In accordance with Article 4 of the Constitution: "The official language of the Serbian Orthodox Church is Serbian, with its Cyrillic alphabet. In special justified cases allowances may be made concerning this provision with regard to the use of language for internal use, in which case the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church passes a special resolution, in accordance with this provision", *Bulletin of the Serbian Orthodox Church*", No. 7-8, Belgrade, 1. August 1947, 193.

10 Radmila Radić, *A Life in Time: Patriarch Gavriilo Dozic (1881-1950)*, Belgrade 2006.

This state of affairs remained unchanged until the death of Patriarch Gavril in May 1950. Following the election of the new Patriarch, Vikentij, the resolution of the Macedonian Church issue entered a new stage, with a new spark in the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state. The new Patriarch was at least rhetorically more moderate in his views regarding the issues that were still unresolved at that time. His statements and his behavior brought hope in Macedonia that the leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church might now take a different approach concerning the Macedonian Church issue. Following the election of Dositej [Dositheus] as bishop in the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1951, the Organizing Committee turned to Patriarch Vikentij to ask him that Bishop Dositej make an unofficial visit to Macedonia because he was seen as a possible candidate for bishop in Macedonia. He visited Macedonia in December 1951, and just before he set out he requested permission from the Patriarch to hold services in the eparchies in Macedonia. Bishop Dositej was welcomed by the governing authorities of the People's Republic of Macedonia, as well as by the Commission of Religious Affairs. He also held a liturgy in Skopje.¹¹

In October 1945, Patriarch Vikentij informed the president of the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs that apparently the main obstacle in resolving the issue was the fact that "the Macedonians do not have their own suitable candidates", and therefore he made some suggestions. By the beginning of 1955 the Organizing Committee set off for Belgrade with the intention of continuing talks regarding the resolution of the Macedonian Church issue. The meeting was held in the Serbian Patriarchate, in the presence of Patriarch Vikentij, the Bishop of Buda, German [Germanus], and the vicarian Bishop of Toplica, Dositej.

The Patriarch championed his acceptance as the administrator of the three eparchies in Macedonia, and then to form eparchial Church bodies whose representatives would participate in the work of the Executive Board and Council of the Patriarchate, while in the meantime the issue regarding the choice of bishops for the Macedonian eparchies would remain open until suitable candidates could be found. These talks ended without any concrete conclusions being reached. After its return, the delegation of the Organizing Committee wrote a report, which contains the following sentence: "the Patriarchate has no intention of making any concessions concerning this issue, but would rather resolve it in the spirit of the former laws, which is evident from the fact that they are treating the whole issue as one solely of eparchies whose posts need to be filled, instead of dealing with it as an issue of a Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia."¹²

The Organizing Committee reached a decision in the matter and informed Patriarch Vikentij about it. They decided that the Church issue in Macedonia needed to be resolved constitutionally, i.e., that in Article 14 of the Constitution of the Serbian

11 Done Ilievski, *The Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia*, Dositej, Skopje 1995, 34; Kljakik, as in footnote 5, 310.

12 Archives of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, F: Lazar Kolishevski, K 45: A Note from Patriarch Vikentij's visit.

Orthodox Church, which stated that the Serbian Orthodox Church is made up of the Skopje, Zletovo-Strumica and Ohrid-Bitola eparchies, there should be an amendment stating that the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the People's Republic of Macedonia and its aforementioned eparchies also fall within its framework. Furthermore, they wanted Macedonian to be proclaimed as the official language to be used in the eparchies in the People's Republic of Macedonia, while the church services would be carried out in Church Slavonic. The Organizing Committee saw these demands as their final proposal, and would not accept any changes or modifications.¹³

Following all these events, in February 1955 the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church passed a resolution to have Macedonian used in the eparchies located on the territory of Macedonia.¹⁴ This was the first decision ever reached by the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church in which a demand from the Organizing Committee from Macedonia had been accepted. After this turn of events, ever greater hope soared in Macedonia that the remaining issues regarding the Macedonian Orthodox Church would be resolved quickly.

A part of the Serbian Orthodox Church episcopate felt that this issue should be finally taken off the agenda, while the Patriarch and some other bishops, such as the Bishop of the Braničevo district, Hrizostom [Chrysostomus], were of the opinion that Metropolitan Josif should finally retire because he presented the greatest obstacle to the resolution of the status of the Church in Macedonia.¹⁵

Patriarch Vikentij maintained particularly frequent contacts with the representatives of the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs. In April 1957 he informed these bodies that the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church was prepared to accept those suggestions and proposals that would lead to a solution of the Macedonian Church issue. He felt that rather than choosing bishops in Macedonia right away, the Church should first be organized in such a way as recommended by the Assembly and the Synod. Only then the Patriarch, as the administrator of the eparchies in Macedonia, together with representatives from the Organizing Committee, could look for potential candidates for bishops. He asked that the Organizing Committee put forward some names, which he would make deputy bishops for the Macedonian eparchies, and they would then be in charge of organizing the eparchial Councils and eparchial Executive Boards.¹⁶

Finally, in April 1957 an agreement was reached between the Patriarch and the Organizing Committee, in which the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church was recognized as administrator of the eparchies in the People's Republic of Macedo-

13 State Archives of the Republic of Macedonia (DARM), F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K1: Information from the Organizing Committee, 1955.

14 DARM, F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K1: The Serbian Orthodox Church's Resolution to the Church Issue in Macedonia, 17.02.1955.

15 DARM, F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K1: A Meeting in the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs with the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

16 DARM, K: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K1: A Meeting with Patriarch Vikentij, 02.04.1957.

nia.¹⁷ On the 27th of May 1957 the Holy Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church passed the resolution concerning the Patriarch's administrative rights in the Macedonian eparchies.

Following these events, relations took on a much smoother course. As their administrator, Patriarch Vikentij ordained theologians for the eparchies in Macedonia, in this way relieving the problem of a lack of clergy. In April 1958 Patriarch Vikentij together with the Bishop of Nis, Jovan [John], the Bishop of Branicevo, Hrizostom, and the Bishop of Toplica, Dositej, all visited Macedonia. They were welcomed by Lazar Koliševski, the President of the Parliament of the People's Republic of Macedonia, on which occasion they were all in agreement that the resolution of the Macedonian Church issue must not be delayed further. During their several-day stay, they visited numerous towns in Macedonia and gauged the mood of the people for themselves.¹⁸

Nevertheless there were some bishops who, despite everything, felt that a pro-Bulgarian feeling had a share in the Macedonian Church's attempt for independence. Before the Serbian Orthodox Church delegation set off for Macedonia, the Bishop of Timok, Dr. Emilijan (Piperkovik) sent a letter to the Bishop of Nis, Dr. Jovan (Ilik), a member of the delegation, in which he advised him to "accurately assess the situation in the South", with an emphasis to "speak less and listen and observe more". Bishop Emilijan says in the letter that "most of the Macedonian priests have pro-Bulgarian tendencies and that the issue of sending bishops must not be delayed".¹⁹

Finally, when the Assembly convened in May 1958, instead of reaching a positive decision as everyone had expected, the whole process was set back. Once again there was no decision regarding the choosing of bishops for the eparchies in Macedonia. The agreement that had been reached in 1957 between the Patriarch and the Organizing Committee was therefore not fulfilled.

Following this course of events, it became clear in Macedonia that the situation was absolutely unacceptable on an ecclesiastical level and preparations commenced for the organization of an Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly. Soon after this Patriarch Vikentij passed away in July 1958.

In September 1958 the Bishop of Žiča, German, was elected to be the new Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Serbian state authorities helped him in being chosen, as they had done for his predecessor. He was faced with the new ecclesiastical reality in Macedonia straightaway. This reality envolved the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the shape of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which had remained canonically tied to the Serbian Orthodox Church solely through having the same Head. The resolutions of the Second Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly,

17 Radmila Radić, *The State and the Religious Communities 1945-1970*, Part 2: 1954-1970, Belgrade 2002, 219.

18 Ilievski, as in footnote 11, 41; Kljakik, as in footnote 5, 318-320.

19 DARM, F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K1: Information from the Department of State Security, A Letter from the Bishop of Timok, Emilijan, to the Bishop of Niš, Jovan, 28.03.1958.

held between the 4th and 6th of October 1958 resulted in different reactions among the episcopate of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Some bishops even demanded that there be a special session of the Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as an official condemnation of the Assembly held in Ohrid.

On 5 June, 1959, the legislative body of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church convened, and five possible solutions were put forward for the resolution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church issue: 1) to express condemnation for Metropolitan Dositej and to proclaim the Assembly uncanonical; 2) to resolve the problem by issuing autocephalous status to the Macedonian Orthodox Church; 3) to issue autonomy; 4) to adopt the current state of affairs with some changes to the constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church; 5) to delay making a final decision until the issue had been more carefully analyzed. The first and the last suggestions were rejected straightaway by the legislative body and were not discussed at all. The legislative body presented these proposals to the Bishops' Conference, where more moderate opinions prevailed in the search for a final resolution of the issue. Only two bishops supported the proposal to condemn the Assembly in Ohrid – the Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina, Vladislav, and the Bishop of the Rashka-Prizren district, Pavle [Paul].²⁰ There was great opposition from one part of the bishops, especially regarding the ordination of the future bishops in Macedonia, and in particular, opposing the ordination of the chosen bishop Naum.

However, despite these objections, the opportunity arose of having the Assembly pass resolutions, as well as having Patriarch German visit Macedonia. At its session held on the 17th of June 1959 the Holy Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church passed a resolution in connection with the Second Macedonian Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly, which, among other things, stated the following: "The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church confirms that: the eparchies of the Skopje, Ohrid-Bitola and Zletovo-Strumica districts separated *into an independent Macedonian Orthodox Church* during the Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly held in Ohrid on 4-6 October, 1958, following the Constitution passed during the said Assembly, yet continues to retain its canonical ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church through their joint head, his Holiness, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church". Finally, the Assembly of the Bishops concluded that "this resolution makes the regulations stated in the constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church null and void with regard to the eparchies and the bishops on the territory of the People's Republic of Macedonia."²¹

Immediately after the resolution was passed by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, there was a visit to Macedonia by its delegation, headed by Patriarch German who, together with Dositej, the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, was supposed to ordain the bishops that had been elected during the Assembly in Ohrid. On the 19th of July, Archimandrite Kliment [Clement], who had been elected

20 DARM, F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K2: A Document from 5. June, 1959.

21 Slavko Dimevski, *The History of the Macedonian Orthodox Church*. Skopje 1989, 1067-1068.

Bishop of the Prespa-Bitola district during the Assembly in Ohrid in 1958, was ordained. The ordination was carried out by Patriarch German, assisted by Metropolitan Dositej as the Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as by the Bishop of Backa, Nikanor, in St. Mina Church in Skopje.²²

With the ordination of the bishops, the Serbian Orthodox Church recognized the Macedonian Orthodox Church as a separate subject, an act with which all the disputes that had existed between the two Churches were seen as having been overcome. This meant that the Macedonian Orthodox Church would be able to assume normal relations with the other Orthodox Churches.²³ However, the development of events would prove that the affirmation, i.e., the presentation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to the other Orthodox Churches that the Serbian Orthodox Church should have carried out, would not be as simple as had been expected. Despite the compromise that had been reached during the Second Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly to not completely break off ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church, but rather to remain in canonical unity with it through the Patriarch, who was also recognized as Patriarch of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, there would be difficulties.

Because the Macedonian Orthodox Church was not formally presented as legitimate to the other Orthodox Churches, and as such was not recognized by them, it could not communicate directly with them, and in cases where there were issues concerning the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the other Churches would refer to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The delegations that would visit the other Churches, regardless of the fact that they consisted of members from the Macedonian Orthodox Church, would be treated as though they were part of the Serbian delegation, and would, as a rule, act in that capacity.

In order to deal with everything that was going on with the Serbian Orthodox Church and under pressure from state authorities, in December 1960 the Church Assembly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church convened with the aim to make various changes and additions to the Constitution. However, apart from the numerous changes that were made during this Assembly, changes based on the recommendations of the Serbian Orthodox Church, some essential issues that touched upon the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church were not adopted, such as the Archbishop's insignia, as well as the governing body with regard to the election of new bishops.²⁴

Following the convention of this Assembly Patriarch German frequently expressed his displeasure at the fact that not all the changes that had been recom-

22 Bulletin of the Macedonian Orthodox Church 1959, I/5, 17 - 18; Milan D. Jankovic, Patriarch German's Life and Battle for a Memorial Cathedral. Belgrade 2001, 417.

23 DARM, F: Republic Commission of Relations with the Religious Communities, K2: New Problems in the Relations between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church, 18.12.1959.

24 DARM, F: Executive Board, 159.109.36/688-698, A: Report on the Work of the Republic Commission of Religious Affairs, 20.02.1963.

mended in 1959 had been adopted in the Constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Disputes in the relations between the Macedonian and the Serbian Orthodox Churches also arose in connection with the need to form a Macedonian Orthodox eparchy abroad.

The formation of a new eparchy required obtaining prior consent from Patriarch German. Even though essentially the Serbian Orthodox Church was in no way affected by the formation of this eparchy, since it involved the Macedonian emigrant community, which practically had no contacts with the Serbian Orthodox Church abroad, there were negative vibes emanating from the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding this issue. Despite the fact that the activities of the Macedonian Orthodox Church were never officially hindered within the Macedonian emigrant community, Patriarch German publicly expressed his displeasure.

In accordance with these opinions and following the suggestions put forward by the Commission of Religious Affairs of the Executive Council of the SR of Macedonia, a Metropolitan Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly convened on the 24th of November 1964. This time a resolution to adopt all the proposals that had been put forward by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1959 was passed. The Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church informed Patriarch German of this in writing, presenting him with a refined form of the Constitution. Even though the Assembly of the Bishops was in session, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church decided that it did not have enough time to check whether the Constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church did indeed contain the proposals put forward by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and as such, did not include this point on the Assembly's meeting agenda. The Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was of the opinion that it was high time to resolve the issue concerning the final status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. To that aim the Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Dositej, went to Belgrade in the beginning of March 1966 in order to meet with Patriarch German and the members of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church in order to negotiate the resolution of the issue concerning the Macedonian Church during the convention of the Assembly of the Bishops in May 1966. It was concluded that the Synods of the two Churches would hold a joint session. Such a meeting did indeed take place on the 16th of March, during which the members of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church emphasized the importance of maintaining the unity of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and, furthermore, openly admitted that they had made a mistake in 1959.

On the 26th of April 1966 the members of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Patriarch German were approached in the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs and asked to confirm at the convention of the Assembly of the Bishops that the resolution passed by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1959 had indeed been acted upon. They were also asked to inform the other Orthodox Churches of this, and to inform them of the existence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which would retain its canonical ties with the Serbian one through "the

Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church who is also recognized as Patriarch of the Macedonian Orthodox Church".²⁵

The aim of the Federal Commission of Religious Affairs to maintain the unity between the two Churches at all costs can be seen clearly here, even though it was evident that the Serbian Orthodox Church would not give up on what it had on many occasions publicly expressed, "we will not give up that which we have acquired throughout history". The Macedonian Orthodox Church was placed in an unenviable position with these attitudes expressed by the federal organs because it was not granted full independence, nor was there a resolution concerning its final status with the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Bishop of Šabac and Valjevo, Jovan (Velimirović), publicly stated that the Serbian Orthodox Church could not inform the other Orthodox Churches because that was done only with Churches that had autocephalous status. He was opposed by one of the most notable Serbian bishops of the 20th century, the Bishop of Branicevo, Bishop Hrizostom (Vojinovic), who stated that granting the Macedonian Orthodox Church autocephalous status would be the best and most lasting solution, since "then I believe that we really can live like brothers".²⁶

Even though opinions of this kind existed, on the 23rd of May 1966 the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church nevertheless passed an extremely negative resolution concerning the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The resolution, among other things, contains the following statement: "The Holy Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church ascertains that the Macedonian Orthodox Church has indeed carried out its organization, maintaining canonical ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church through the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in that it will now manage its affairs in accordance with the Constitution whose provisions are now formulated according to the proposals put forward by the Holy Assembly of the Bishops, and which cannot be altered without the consent of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church."²⁷ This resolution passed by the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church, meaning not only that the Macedonian Orthodox Church would not be presented to the other Orthodox Churches, but also that the degree of its independence was to be reduced. This made it abundantly clear that the best thing to do would be to declare autocephaly in order to get around the ongoing stalemate. On the 1st of July 1966 the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church responded to the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church with an official protest against the resolution of the 23rd of May 1966.

Making preparations to proclaim autocephalous status, the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church officially informed the leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church of its intentions. On the 3rd December 1966 the Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church was sent a letter, in which it was officially asked to

25 DARM, F: Republic Commission..., K5: Information from April 1966.

26 DARM, F: Republic Commission..., K5: Document from 16.05.1966.

27 DARM, F: Republic Commission..., K5: Resolution passed by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 23.05.1966.

recognize the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.²⁸ However, firm in their decision not to recognize the independence of the Macedonian Church, the Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church passed a resolution at its session in 1967 in which they rejected the request of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.²⁹

After proclaiming autocephalous status at the Third Ecclesiastical and Popular Assembly on the 18th of July, the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church once again approached the Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church requesting recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church's autocephalous status on the 19th of July 1967. However, the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, standing firm in its policy concerning Macedonia, passed the following resolution at its special session held on the 14th and 15th of September 1967 on the occasion of the Macedonian Orthodox Church's proclamation of autocephalous status: "Since the higher eparchy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church did not accept the legally passed resolution of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, AB no.44/ref.10 of 24 (11) May, 1967, and willfully and uncanonically did separate from its Mother Church into a schismatic ecclesiastical organization, in accordance with this resolution, all official and canonical relations must be severed with this eparchy, and the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church is hereby charged with commencing proceedings against the perpetrators of the schism."³⁰

In the frequent contacts Patriarch German had with the political leaders on a republic (Serbian) and federal level towards the end of the 1960s, the issue of the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was constantly brought up and discussed. The issue was also discussed at Assembly sessions, on which occasions the Patriarch would inform the most important Serbian leaders at that time, stressing that a quick resolution to this issue should not be expected.³¹

During the early and mid 1970s, no official talks between the representatives of the two Churches took place. It was only in 1978 that there was a meeting between commissions from the Serbian and the Macedonian Orthodox Churches in the St. Prohor Pčinski monastery. The commissions also met up in September 1979 in the St. Bogorodica [Mother of God] monastery in Kalishta near Struga, but the talks were once again unsuccessful, the attitudes remaining unchanged in line with those from the previous decade. When Archbishop Dositej passed away on the 20th of May 1981, not a single high-ranking representative from the Serbian Orthodox Church

28 Slijepčević, as in footnote 2, 244.

29 T. Cepreganov and P. Shashko. *The Macedonian Orthodox Church, Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-91*. Ed. Lucian N. Leustean, London and New York: Routledge 2010, 182-184.

30 DARM, F: CK KPM/SKM, 427. 142. 8: Resolution passed by the Assembly of the Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church with regard to the issue of the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, 15.09.1967.

31 Milan D. Janković, *Patriarch German's Life and Battle for a Memorial Cathedral*, Belgrade, 2001, 424.

attended the funeral, while only the current Bishop of Slavonia, Emilijan³², sent a telegram expressing his condolences, which said a lot about the relations between the two Churches. After the death of Dositej, the current Metropolitan of the Debar-Kičevo district, Angelarij [Angelarius], was elected as the new Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. At the beginning of February 1982, the Archbishop asked the Serbian Orthodox Church to recognize the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The request was rejected at the regular Council session in May 1982.

During the 1980s relations between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Churches acquired a political connotation as well, entering the sphere of international relations. In an interview he gave to the influential weekly journal "NIN" in March 1982, Patriarch German stated that the Macedonian Orthodox Church's proclamation of autocephaly was a willful and aggressive act. Archbishop Angelarij³³ quickly responded to this statement in the Belgrade newspaper "Politika" in July of the same year, stressing that the Church's rejection could also be seen as a rejection of the people, challenging the aspirations they had had for centuries, and at the same time offending their national feelings.³⁴ Following this development of affairs, the Bishop of Žiča, Stefan, in a conversation he had with the Serbian political leaders in June 1984, pointed out that the Serbian Orthodox Church in no way touched upon the issue of the Macedonian nation, but that they (the Macedonian people) had gone too far, while the Serbian people fought and died for their freedom.³⁵

The end of the 1980s marks the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav federation. The old, at first glance forgotten differences among the different ethnic groups rose to the surface. At the end of 1990, just before the break-up of the state, the Serbian Orthodox Church got a new Head, the Bishop of the Rashko-Prizren district, Pavle. This signified the beginning of numerous changes in the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as in their attitude towards Macedonia and the Macedonian Orthodox Church. After Macedonia proclaimed its independence in the spring of 1992, delegations from the two Churches met for talks in Belgrade and in the monastery in Kalishta. Both sides remained firm in their opinions at this time as well, at a time of deep changes in the political state of affairs in the Balkans.

From 1993 the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church began electing administrators for the eparchies in Macedonia. The first to be elected was the Vicar Bishop of the Tetovo district, Jovan Mladenovik, and after he was elected bishop for North America, the Bishop of Vranje, Pahomije [Pachomius], was elected administrator of the Macedonian eparchies.

32 From the Orthodox Churches, telegrams expressing condolences were sent by the Heads of the Romanian and the Polish Orthodox Churches. Ilievski, as in footnote 11, 236.

33 Head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from 1981 to 1986.

34 Radovan Samardžić, *Religion and the Place of the Religious Communities in SFRY*. Belgrade 1984, 100.

35 Janković, as in footnote 22, 425.

Following the long negotiations between the two Churches, in 2002 relations between the Macedonian and the Serbian Orthodox Churches became strained once again, after the Metropolitan of the Povardarie district, Jovan, accepted the invitation issued to him by the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pavle, to join the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, Metropolitan Jovan's decision was neither accepted by the clergy nor by the congregation.

This issue remains unresolved to the present day.