

Religion, Nationalism and Counter-Secularization: The Case of the Macedonian Orthodox Church

Introduction

It would not be wrong if claimed that politics in the region of Macedonia and the Republic of Macedonia is historically founded on religion. The region itself carries a Byzantine theocratic legacy; for centuries it has been part of the Orthodox Empire in which the laws of God were imported to serve as laws of men. Later on, the pluralistic theocracy of the Ottoman Empire took place, in which belonging to one of the three confessions of the Book (Islam, Christianity, Judaism) were a mandatory condition and the equal of citizenship. If we contemplate about the emergence of nations and national loyalties among Orthodox Slavic speakers in the region of Macedonia in the 19th century, we are again thinking about struggles between competing national projects that, into a great extent, were reflected into the competition of the respective national Orthodox Churches. If we take in account the establishment of the modern Macedonian statehood within communist Yugoslavia, then unavoidable is the paradoxical case of the Communist Party supervising and supporting the foundation of the national Macedonian Orthodox Church. If we observe the Macedonian independence and the developments during the last twenty years, again we face a period that has also been marked by political involvement of the Church. Even if we try to reflect on contemporary politics, we have to face the reality of the Church interfering the public space with the plans to build a temple on the main square in the capital of the country, and the reality of the inter-Church disputes becoming a burning political issue.

The initial idea of this paper was to examine solely the process of de-secularization, or counter-secularization in post-communist Macedonia. However, isolating the last two decades of events without an account on the history of Orthodoxy in the region might lead to only a partial conclusion about the role of religion and especially of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in contemporary Macedonia. As outlined above, religion has had a continuous importance in the major political and social developments and is inherent to the past of the region. Furthermore, another reason to look back in history is that the Church and its supporters mythologize its historical function today, and consider it to be essential for the existence of the nation. As we are go-

ing to see, that opinion is shared by the two main political parties, but also by the vast majority of the population.

That is why the paper starts from a historical overview of the events related to the genesis, or the claimed genesis of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In the section after, it focuses on the aspects of the political involvement of the Church in post-communist Macedonia. It stresses the interference of the Church within the public space as a paradigmatic case of de-secularization of the Macedonian society. Finally, the paper discusses these findings in the light of secularization theory. The question it tries to address is to which extent it is acceptable to talk about de-secularization, since the premise is that – the stately formations of Macedonia have rarely been separated from interference with Orthodoxy.

***From Ohrid Archbishopric to the Macedonian
Orthodox Church: A Critical Historical Observation
on Institutionalized Orthodoxy in Macedonia***

During the Byzantine era, until the 11th century, only one Orthodox institution existed – the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was the religious, but also the political authority in the territories under control. Although there was a temporary success with the establishment of a separate Patriarchate by the Bulgarians in the 10th century (that for a certain amount of time was even autocephalous), still it was a short-lived attempt that was mostly a consequence of the emergence of the strong medieval Bulgarian Empire. After Byzantines defeated Bulgarians, the Patriarchate was abolished.

The Byzantine Emperor Basil II has established the Ohrid Archbishopric in 1019, another autocephalous Orthodox Church, subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in order for Constantinople to gain the loyalties of the rebellious Slavic realm. Ohrid at that time has been the center of the Orthodox Slavic culture. Clement, a student and follower of the work of the Salonika brothers Cyril and Methodius, who had invented the Cyrillic script, established religious schools among which the first Slavic University. In the years to come, most of the Slavic cultural production came from artists, writers, translators and scholars educated in Ohrid. A lot of sacred objects have been constructed there too. Today, it is claimed that there are exactly 365 churches in the town (mostly in the old part), “one for each day of the year”. Being the basis for the medieval cultural advancement of the Orthodox populations of the Balkans, Ohrid is today claimed as the cradle of both Mace-

donian and Bulgarian national culture. Needless to say, these claims over the symbolic capital of Ohrid are to great extent contesting each other. According to Bulgarian historiography, the Ohrid Archbishopric was established as a sequel of the previously abolished Bulgarian Patriarchate. According to the official Macedonian version, it has been the predecessor of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.¹

In the first decades of its existence, besides Greek, Church Slavonic has become a language of service and education in the institutions under the Archbishopric. Thus, when the Ottomans established control over the formerly Byzantine territories in the 14th and 15th century, in Macedonia there was already a division of the dioceses between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the subordinate Archbishopric of Ohrid. At the same time there was the Serbian Peć Patriarchate, which was established in the 14th century and later had Skopje as its center, as Serbian rulers succeeded in putting territories of Macedonia under their control.²

The Peć Patriarchate was abolished in the 15th century by the Ottoman authorities, and the Slavic Orthodox population remained solely under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its subordinate, the Ohrid Archbishopric. However, in 1557 the Peć Patriarchate was restored with the help of the legendary Mehmed Paša Sokolović (a Slavic/Serbian born Grand Vezier), and many of the dioceses in northern and central Macedonia, previously administered by Ohrid, were transferred under Peć's jurisdiction.³

The education and the cultural (re)production among Orthodox Slavs in Macedonia, both during the Byzantine and consequently the Ottoman rule, was carried primarily by the Church institutions.⁴ This situation changed two centuries later, when in 1766 and 1767 respectively, the Sumblime Porte, because of the inefficient tax collection by the priests, abolished the Peć Patriarchate and the Ohrid Archbishopric. After their abolishment, the only Orthodox institution left on the Balkans was the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Greek priests were appointed in the dioceses that used to belong to the Slavic churches.⁵ However, the presence of predominantly Greek priests did not have very significant cultural implication, as until the late 18th century and the coming of age of the European Enlightenment values, among them the idea of the nation and national consciousness, there was none or insignificant nationalization of the role of the Christianity. Even in the period of the establishment of the Greek state and after, there were many parties that were aware of the Universalist nature of Orthodoxy and did not agree with the attribution of national Greek features to the Ecumenical Patriarchate from Constantinople.⁶

Nonetheless, the nationalist principle has been gradually adopted in the Balkans and along with that, the religious institutions became agencies

of nationalism as well. The emergence of the Bulgarian Exarchate, and the formation of the Bulgar millet (1870), inaugurated a new politics of belonging beyond religion – the ethnic/national one.⁷ Pretending to the political loyalty of the Slavic speaking population in Macedonia, the Bulgarian Exarchate was an obstacle for the Greek plans for expansion into Macedonia. Athens authorities by that time allied with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and stimulated its vivid engagement in the Greek foreign policy in Macedonia.⁸ The influence of the Churches has had an effect in terms of nationalizing the population: the ones that had accepted the Bulgarian Exarchate, became Bulgarians; and the ones that remained loyal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate became Greeks.⁹ At the same time, the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church was established in 1879 as another incarnation of the Peć Patriarchate, but its effective influence over Slavic speaking population in Macedonia was not very significant.

In the late 19th and in the 20th century, however, the society started to become more open towards secular ideas, although the importance of the churches as political actors here is not to be disputed. However, a regional Macedonian *inteleghentsia* emerged, which, since it was educated abroad, adopted the idea of nation and started seeking national elements among the people of Macedonia. Regardless of the foreign influence, authentic discourses developed. In the first place there was the national liberation idea carried primarily by various paramilitary organizations, and later by the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, but by many writers and intellectuals as well, not necessarily related to the resistance.¹⁰ An important identification stream that has emerged among Slavic speakers from Macedonia in the 19th century, based on their linguistic and cultural specifications, presented by Dimitrija Čupovski and Krste Petkov – Misirkov. This idea, designated as “Macedonist”, later became a basis for the Macedonian Slavic nationalism. The Macedonists have suggested, as interpreted by Macedonian historiography, that Slavs (Slavic speakers) from Macedonia had been a specific ethno-cultural unit, that spoke its own specific language different than Bulgarian and it was their historical right to seek an independent country of their own, under the name of Macedonia. In 1903, Misirkov published the pamphlet *On the Macedonian Matters*, in which among other things, denounced Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece as enemies to Macedonians, argued against the calculations of the European powers over the fate of Macedonia and found fault with the methods used by the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization because they were too brutal and because they had cooperated with Sofia and the Exarchate. Misirkov also proposed the use of the central idiom of the Slavic language to be used as official by Macedonian Slavs and introduced in

schools and religious institutions. Thus he argued that the Church should be “one and only and Ecumenical, but not Serbian, Greek or Bulgarian”, and the possible solution for this problem related to the Macedonian Question would have been the restoration of the Ohrid Archbishopric.¹¹

Misirkov's vision for the restoration of the Ohrid Archbishopric remained unfulfilled during the course of the next several decades, marked by wars and intense political changes. The Macedonist stream gained political power only for the first time in history after the establishment of Democratic Federal Macedonia and subsequently People's Republic of Macedonia as one of the federal units within Tito's Yugoslavia. Macedonian communist rulers at that time had adopted the Macedonist position towards the national question and started carrying out a Macedonist nation-building project.¹² The most important aspect of these efforts was the establishment of core institutions, such as the national university, Institute for National History, Academy of Sciences and Arts and among others, the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC).

While communist regimes around Europe and the world were repressing religion and destroying temples, in Yugoslavia and especially in Macedonia the case was quite the contrary. In 1958 and 1959, the dioceses that were on the territory of Macedonia and under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church, gained autonomy but remained under the canonical rule of the Serbian Patriarch. Nevertheless, it was the official creation of the independent Macedonian Orthodox Church. Later on, in 1967, exactly two centuries after the abolishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric by the Ottomans, the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), this time without the consent of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but with the support of the Communist Party, has proclaimed autocephaly. As a result, the Serbian Church has never recognized the autocephaly of the Macedonian and claimed that the Ohrid Archbishopric has been its own trademark and historical legacy. Even today, the MOC is considered to be schismatic; the dispute has resulted in its isolation in the Orthodox commonwealth, as it still struggles for the recognition of its autocephaly by other Ecclestial Churches.¹³

Nonetheless, while the MOC struggled in the Orthodox commonwealth, it was well treated by the Yugoslav state. In the 1970s, the state awarded the MOC a parcel of land in downtown Skopje for the purpose of building a representative Cathedral, and has provided support in the protection of the monasteries with legal acts on the protection of the cultural heritage. At the same time, MOC had noted an important advancement among the Macedonian Diaspora in the United States, Canada and Australia.

Orthodoxy, Nationalism and Politics in the Macedonian Society: An Overview

According to Article 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, “religious communities and groups are separate from the state and equal before the law”.¹⁴ However, in reality, that has not been the case. The Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) has had an exceptionally salient political meaning in the contemporary Macedonian political discourse, and has acted as if not separated from state institutions, and moreover, received a treatment of being “more equal” than the other religious communities. That has been partially due to the fact that Orthodox Christians comprise the largest religious community in the country and the MOC is their representative institution. Furthermore, having in mind that there is an overlap between the ethnic and religious cleavages in the country, which on the other hand are the cornerstone of the Macedonian political system, MOC acts not only as a religious, but also as an ethnic organization. The main division along ethnic lines between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians corresponds to a great extent with the division between Orthodox Christians and Muslims, yet the equation between ethnicity and religion can be a false one. Although religion has been gradually incorporated as important aspect of the ethnic identification, Albanian national movements in Kosovo and Macedonia have been rather based on the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, than on Islamist rhetoric. On the other hand, ethnic Macedonian nationalism has been traditionally tending to connect with the Church, as in all the cases of the Orthodox Commonwealth.¹⁵ The MOC in this respect has had a defining role for the differences between ethnic Macedonians and surrounding predominantly Orthodox nations (Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks who have “their” respective Churches), as well as in relation with Muslims (Albanians in the first place).

The political role of the Church is grounded on the perception that it has played a crucial role in the formation of the Macedonian (ethno) national identity. Many people, including some of the major politicians refer to Macedonia as a “Land of the Bible”, narrative stemming from the passages in the Bible about St Paul’s activities in the region. It is also said that the Church has played a crucial role for the endurance of the Macedonian people during the so-called “Turkish yoke” (a popular phrase to describe the Ottoman rule), and that Orthodox Christianity has paved the way for the Macedonian independence. However, from the historical overview it can be seen that the Church has been an institution of the system, even during the Ottoman rule. It also seems hard to logically relate the Church to the alleged Macedonian uniqueness through the centuries, as the first autonomous Macedonian Church was

established in the late 1950s. In addition, the Church claims that it has been allegedly harmed by the communist expropriation of the private properties, which has led to the process of re-acquiring properties from the state (so called denationalization - the return of the expropriated estate during communism). The logical fallacy is that the MOC in fact has been established only after the main expropriation actions took place and therefore could not be deprived of properties. Nonetheless, the Church has yet to obtain tremendous real estate, and has gotten involved in a lot of businesses, which make it the richest, ergo very influential “non-governmental” institution.¹⁶

The rhetoric of mythologization of Orthodoxy, accompanied by uncritical equation of the religion with the religious institutions is shared both by the nationalist and social democratic party, which have in fact created the Macedonian political discourse in the last 20 years. The ruling IMRO-DPM-NU,¹⁷ in their party *Doctrine* from 2009, list faith as one of their eight core values and say that “spirituality, religion and faith are the eternal food of the Macedonian identity during all the turmoil that the Macedonian people has been going through. (...) Therefore, an exceptional place in the Macedonian state and society is given to the Macedonian Orthodox Church”.¹⁸ In a similar fashion, the opposition SDAM,¹⁹ in their recently promoted party platform beside praising secularism, state that they “see the Church as a key historical factor in the development and fortification of the Macedonian national identity”.²⁰ Therefore, both of the parties actively take measures that show their devotion to the Church. For example, the IMRO-DPMNU has initiated a Declaration for support of the efforts of the MOC to protect its unity and to demand recognition of its autocephaly that was later adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia.²¹ With this act, the state has officially backed the Church in the dispute with other Orthodox Churches that do not recognize its legitimacy and autocephaly, departing from the premise of separation of the state and the religion. The former president Branko Crvenkovski, on the other hand, now an old-new leader of the opposition SDAM, when in power in 2007 has awarded the MOC with highest honors for special achievements and contribution to the benefit of the state.²² However, the official reason for the award was that the Church at that period was celebrating its 40th anniversary from the self-proclaimed autocephaly. The particular practical benefits of the work of the MOC were never mentioned.

Another noteworthy factor that has been dialectically related to the growing importance of the religious institutions in post-communist Macedonia, most of all the MOC, is that religiosity among the population has been on the rise. Regardless of whether the political involvement of the MOC is a cause or a consequence of popular religiosity, it is important to stress that it has been

a process that corresponds with the attitudes of the majority of the people. As Cacoska shows in a sociological survey, the majority of the people living in Macedonia are religious (less than 10% have said that they are not believers), they visit the temples on a regular or occasional basis (only 7% never go to temples at all) and to an extremely high level think that humanity does need religion.²³ Cacoska in her analysis sees the growing importance of religion in people's everyday life as an indicator for the process of de-secularization of the Macedonian society, which she defines as a penetration of the spiritual into the established secular surrounding.²⁴ The roots of this process, according to her are to be looked in the transformation of the political system and its values, as a response to the secular ideal during the Yugoslav era. The premise of the actual Yugoslav secularism is highly debatable (in the Macedonian case it was the Yugoslav communists that approved the establishment of the MOC), yet, the perceptions of the Yugoslav period as a "secular" or even "anti-religious" persists. However, what Cacoska implies in the study that people are intimately far more religious after the Yugoslav break-up than they used to be before.

The MOC seniors themselves promote the rhetoric of the importance of the Church too. The metropolitan Kiril, the oldest bishop among the MOC leadership, in one interview has claimed that "[w]ithout the Church, there can be no survival of the people and the state", that "the Macedonian [Orthodox] Church is our Macedonian soul", and that "we are a Biblical country and Biblical people [...] elevated by God to the highest rank because we are mentioned [...] in the Bible."²⁵ Church representatives usually have public appearances on every political issue, and are considered to be important political factors and opinion makers. According to an in-depth survey by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, in 2008 more than 65% of the population trusts the Church and the religious communities²⁶. The only institutions that have enjoyed more confidence than the religious were those of the education, by a margin of less than a half percent.

Church seniors have therefore utilized their position of people-trusted-by-the-people and gotten seriously involved in numerous political issues, becoming opinion-makers. In 2001, when the conflict between Albanian guerrillas and the Macedonian army broke out, the Church has issued several communiqués in which it has demanded heavier military action against Albanian guerrillas, referring to them as "terrorists" and using very sharp language. They had also manifested disbelief in the capabilities of the former President Trajkovski²⁷. One of the reasons the MOC seniors confronted Trajkovski during 2001 and later, was because of the fact that he was a Protestant pastor. In several occasion, the metropolitan Peter has stated that Trajkovski acts more like a Methodist, rather than as a president and that he has

led various “sects”, which has been another enemy of the Macedonian people besides “the Albanian terrorists”²⁸.

An additional factor for the public to take the opinion of the Church during the conflict in 2001 very significantly was that many monasteries under the jurisdiction of the MOC have been targets of guerilla's assaults. That has caused the MOC to promote itself as a victim of the military clashes and to adopt a position of an actor in the process. Nonetheless, instead of promoting pacifism, forgiveness and reconciliation, the MOC has insisted that the state should wipe out “the terrorists” and take revenge, and promoted anti-Western attitude although the least harmful solution for the conflict depended solely on the Western engagement in the peace process²⁹. The Church had also objected during the signing and the implementation of the Ohrid peace Accords, which were intended to be the new social contract that the Macedonian society should be built upon. The MOC's remarks were that the country should not submit to the illegitimate demands for constitutional changes and to maintain its “character” with regard to the provisions given to minorities, meaning that it should give primacy to the ethnic Macedonians³⁰.

Another important aspect of the political role of the MOC, in a way related to the military conflict was taken during the inauguration of new police commanders in 2002. Nine priests, including the Archbishop of the MOC were blessing the newcomers to the special and anti-terrorist units, who had to swear in the name of God and ask for his mercy. Additionally, they were all given medals with the face of Jesus. The minister of Internal Affairs, later accused for war crimes in 2001, Ljube Boshkoski, for that occasion stated that Muslim officers were not obliged to accept the Jesus-faced medals³¹. In fact, that has not been the only case where religion was involved in state security. The police forces of the country in the meantime have proclaimed St. Demetrius of Salonika, a Christian martyr and military saint, as their official patron. Usually, on the day of St. Demetrius, Church seniors visit the police and hold ceremonies³².

The introduction of religion, the Church and priests into the state security forces is an act against the secularism in any way. At the same time, the exclusivity of the Orthodox Christian narratives that were introduced is against the multicultural character of the state. Moreover, the police are one of the layers of the public administration that has the most direct contact with the people on the field. If the police acquired an image of an Orthodox or MOC-affiliated institution, there is a great possibility that the institution would seize to represent the diversity of the Macedonian population.

The Church has been involved in many other political issues. In 2007, they have taken action in defense of the two Macedonian police commanders

that have been accused for war crimes in 2001 and sent to the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 (ICTY), in the Hague. During the mass prayers for the savior of the souls of the two commanders, the Archbishop Stefan has made a controversial speech saying that “their trial is our trial and trial of our fatherland. They (...) have just defended their country (...) and it is never and nowhere a sin to defend your fatherland”³³. The outcome of the trial is that one of the commanders Johan Tarchulovski has been sentenced for being responsible for the slaughter of innocent civilians, while Ljube Boshkoski, a minister of internal affairs at the time of the slaughter, was released. In the public, the prayers by the Church were seen predominantly as a patriotic act. However, no matter if one sees the speech of the Archbishop as patriotic or nationalistic, it is clear that the mass prayers and ceremonies for the savior of the accused commanders had a deeply political meaning and message, and meant a direct infiltration of the Church in the political sphere.

No less important aspect of the political de-secularization is to be looked at the case of repression towards the attempt to establish another Orthodox Church in the country. Namely, in 2002, Metropolitan Jovan, a former senior in the MOC has agreed to engage in canonical unity with the Serbian Church, which was formulated as overcoming the schism that has happened with the un-canonical promulgation of autocephaly by the MOC in 1967³⁴. He soon established a so-called Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric, which has never been recognized nor by the MOC, nor by the Macedonian authorities. Quite the opposite, Jovan, backed only by several monks, was immediately said to be a traitor and schismatic by the MOC and started experiencing heavy stigmatization in the media and almost faced a public lynch. The police have immediately expelled him and his supporters from their residence with absence of the standard procedures and soon Jovan was put in front of the court, being accused for “inciting national, racial and religious hatred, schism and intolerance.” He was also arrested for “performing illegal activities” when he tried to baptize a newborn. Soon he was sentenced to eighteen months in prison, because of writing texts where he “slendered” the MOC, agreed to be appointed as an Exarch of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric, and officiated a religious service in a private-owned apartment. The police demolished the improvised places of worship said to belong to his Church³⁵. After serving almost eight months, parts of the verdict were ruled out as unconstitutional and his prison time was shortened. In the meantime, Amnesty International has proclaimed him to be a prisoner of conscience³⁶. Nonetheless, he was again sentenced upon accusations of the MOC, this time under

suspicion for money laundering. Jovan claimed that he never used the problematic donation, and the donor confirmed that themselves. However, after initially liberating him, the Court faced tremendous political pressure and in the third attempt, sentenced him to another two years in prison. Similar processes have been carried more recently against Jovan, but the lack of evidences helped him for not being sentenced again³⁷.

The infamous Jovan case, also known as the Vraniskovski case (based on his surname before joining the Church), has attracted a lot of attention and was exposed under the scrutiny of human rights activists. Besides Amnesty International, the main role in the defense of the rights of Jovan was played by the Helsinki Committee, who have reported the Jovan case as a serious violation of religious freedom, and also violation of the secular principles, since the state intervened on behalf of the MOC, and acted against the laws in the procedure against Jovan³⁸. The issue attracts still a lot of attention, and what is noticeable is that both of the main political parties from the ethnic Macedonian campus are equally harsh in their rhetoric. As already mentioned, the Assembly has reached an agreement and voted a Declaration for support of the MOC related to the particular issue with the SOC, and the parties still try to prove which one has been more efficient in the protection of the Church.

The case of Jovan has also resulted in the adoption of a very illiberal law on religious institutions, where opposite of the European practice, the monopoly over the respective religions is assigned to the already existing institutions. The registration of a religious community from a confession from which there has already registered one is made impossible. As the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights argues, the law is discriminatory towards for example, the Ohrid Orthodox Archbishopric of Jovan, and the Bekteshi Muslim minority, while it favors the two "state faith communities" - the MOC and the Islamic Faith Community³⁹. The political involvement in the inter-Church dispute, has also affected the relations between Serbia and Macedonia. That had been flagged as a serious harm to the religious freedoms in the country. For example, Florian Bieber back in 1999 had noted that the state intervention in inner-church conflicts, and in the international affairs of the churches, as in the MOC-SOC dispute, leads to de-secularization, a condition "where the church gains a (recognized) role in the political sphere and society"⁴⁰. The Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, when marking the path do de-secularization in Macedonia in 2005 has marked several milestones related to the particular case: the Declaration for the support of the MOC adopted by the Assembly; the refusal to recognize another Orthodox Church for the protection of the MOC; the adoption of an illiberal Law for religious communities and the official rationale saying that "the case of (Jovan) Vraniskovski should not repeat";

the abuse of the police forces in the case of inter-church dispute and finally, the verdicts against Jovan, that were motivated by political interest⁴¹.

Finally, one of the most recent points when the MOC and the government have violated the secular principles was the attempt to introduce mandatory religious education in elementary schools. The Constitutional Court ruled out the attempt as being against the Constitution of the Republic. As a result, the Archbishop of the MOC, together with representatives of the ruling IMRO-DPMNU have heavily criticized the Constitutional Court, which has led to serious remarks in reports on the issue of the independence of the judiciary system. The MOC even announced that they would change the Constitution if necessary, fully backed by the government. In the case of the religious education, it was once again shown that the IMRO-DPMNU is ready to rather ally with the Church, than with the Constitution⁴².

The De-Secularization of Public Space as a Paradigm of the De-Secularization of Macedonian Society

Besides the involvement of the Church in the political and legal sphere, very typical non-secular practice in the Macedonian society is the occupation of public space by religious institutions. New temples are being built in many places, yet the MOC has had an exceptional role in this as well. While local communities, aided by private funding from locals and the Diaspora, build churches and mosques outside the capital, there have been two major cases that have interrupted this practice.

First, during 2002, the government under IMRO-DPMNU endorsed by the MOC, in joint effort erected a gigantic “Millennium” Cross on a publicly owned land on the top of mountain Vodno above the capital, Skopje. The Cross, 66 meters high, built on a twelve column platform (each of them for every one of the twelve apostles) and illuminated at night, was said to be a tribute to the “two thousand years of Christianity” in Macedonia, a narrative related to the passages in the Bible about St Paul’s activities in the region, and the already described myth of Macedonia as a “Land of the Bible”.

When visitors come to Skopje, usually one of the first images they get from the city is precisely the gigantic Millennium Cross at the top of the mountain, clearly visible from every angle and every district. It has spontaneously become the trademark of the city. However, Skopje has a very diverse demographic structure, as there are a lot of non-Orthodox communities residing there. That image of Skopje roughly corresponds with the general demographic structure of the country. In the whole Republic of Macedonia,

there are 65% of Orthodox Christians and 32% of Muslims⁴³. The image of the cross stretching above the capital, therefore might not be representative in terms of the demographic composition of the population, yet it is an evidence of the position of religions and official religious institutions in the political order. The Cross, besides the intention to make a tribute to the 2000 years of Christianity, was meant to be a political claim in the post-conflict society. It had implicit role of a territorial mark of the nationalist IMRO-DPM-NU, or, as it popularly known it was meant, “to serve as a reminder to whom the city belongs”. It has become since an important national/political symbol for the ethnic Macedonian nationalists regardless of their party affiliation.

The construction of the Millennium Cross was one of the most visible actions of de-secularization, as the government not only put itself into a position of promoter of religion, but it also marked a highly visible public space with a religious symbol. Furthermore, as Daskalovski points out, it was constructed without consulting the public and without having any sensitivity for the differences as it promoted exclusively only one confession, which makes this move of the government illiberal and harmful for Macedonian multiculturalism⁴⁴.

In a similar fashion, in the last few years of the second term of the IMRO-DPMNU in power has produced another idea, which has started coming true – building an Orthodox temple on the central square in Skopje. The decision divided the public and was marked by protests. In March 2009, the opponents of the idea of constructing a temple were labeled in a television show as ‘a bunch of gays and atheists’. Such a description was a reaction on the effort of the opponents to organize a demonstration against the construction. The next day an allegedly spontaneous crowd of several thousands supporters of the MOC gathered (led by Church seniors) and attacked the young protestants. Since then, there is an ongoing clash between the government and the urban social movements. Yet, the square has been recently set for construction and the works for the building of a church have started. As in the case of the Millennium Cross, the will of the people residing in the area was not taken into account, and the multicultural structure of the city population has been neglected during the planning⁴⁵.

The violation of public space is probably the most obvious act of de-secularization of the Macedonian society. While the de-secularization of politics is a discursive one, and therefore can be reversible and can be discussed and sanctioned, the construction of buildings is in many ways leaving a permanent trace, meaning a permanent loss for secularism. Although many experts in the field, domestic and foreign, point to the violation of secularism, probably a few would dare to intervene *a posteriori*, by removing the Cross from the top

of mountain Vodno or by demolishing the Church on the city square. These places, central for the urban landscape, have been turned from public into sacred, and illustrate the best the process of the MOC taking over the physical space that used to belong to everyone. While the Church seniors and the Orthodox population might feel very pleasant with these developments, the state puts the rest of the population, not just members of other confessions, but also non-believers, into a de facto subordinated position to the MOC.

Concluding Remarks

It is undisputable that the Orthodox Church still plays a major political role in Macedonia. However, while there can be a case of so called clericalization of the public sphere (a term very popular in Serbia, referring to the increasing role of public personae of the Church seniors), it remains unclear to what extent there has been a de-secularization, or counter-secularization of the Macedonian society? One of the impressions from the overview of the history of the political significance of the Orthodox Church is that in fact, there was never a case when religion was totally absent from the public sphere. Even under Communism, falsely portrayed as a period of imposed antitheism, there were incentives provided for the religion, and by religion I refer primarily to Macedonian Orthodoxy. The initial hypothesis of the paper was that there is a case of counter-secularization, meaning return of the religion in the public and political domain. The outcome of the research has led to the conclusion that there is an assertive tendency of overriding secular norms.

It seems that 2001 and the military conflict can be considered to be a break-through point in assessing the political role of the Church. Before the conflict, the interference of the MOC in the public domain was not as flagrant as it became afterwards. Starting from the political campaigning against Albanians, but also against the Methodist president Trajkovski, the Church adopted a position of radical nationalism, and soon found itself blessing newcomers to the special units and later praying for the officers accused of war crimes. Furthermore, the case of the renegade bishop Jovan has unmasked the intolerant and combative character of the MOC, which organized a hoax against him. The same case has demystified the political interest of the ethnic Macedonian parties behind the MOC too, as it has caused them to bring the intra-church and the inter-church disputes to the political institutions. As well, it was a demystification of the counter-secular tendencies of the state in general, as both the political and the judiciary system allied in the war against the “schismatic traitor”. Finally, the IMRO-DPMNU proneness

to mark public spaces with capital religious objects, such as the gigantic Millennium Cross on the top of mount Vodno, or the planned cathedral at the main square in Skopje, and its willingness to bring religion into schools, can serve as an evidence that behind the counter-secularist tendency there is a steady political force that is pushing religion deeper and deeper in the public domain.

The final conclusion is that, although defined as secular, the post-communist Macedonian society is in practice very de-secularized one, with the possibility of becoming a clerical one very soon. As religion is here not considered as inherently good or bad in advance, what is quite worrying about the Macedonian case is the intolerance, the monopolistic attitudes and the nationalistic sentiments demonstrated by the MOC. In fact, with the counter-secularization process, the MOC has acquired a political role, and lost its ecclesiastical, ecumenical and charitable dimension. By turning towards nationalism, it has committed the sin of ethno phyletism, and has lost its universalistic Christian purpose – to spread love and compassion among humanity.

Notes:

1. See Andrew Rossos, “Medieval, Slavic Macedonia (c. 600 – c. 1400)” in *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2009, 19-40; Dimitar Bechev, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 163-164.
2. The most successful of them was Tsar Dušan, who has been crowned as Emperor Serbs and Greeks in Skopje in 1346 and managed to contest Byzantine supremacy. This year is taken as the approximate year of the foundation of the original Peć Patriarchate. The Peć Patriarchate has an important role in Serbian national mythology since it is related to the Medieval Serbian statehood and Medieval Serbian culture. Its symbolic capital is especially significant with relation to the Kosovo issue. The fact that most of the monasteries of the Patriarchate are now on the territory of the Kosovo, is a reason that Serb nationalists claim that “Kosovo is the heart of Serbia”. In fact, the Peć Patriarchate Monastery, the place that is regarded the offspring of Serb Orthodoxy itself, is located in the Kosovo Pejë region.
3. See Rossos, op.cit. and Bechev, op.cit.

4. It is important to mention that in those times there was basically no secular consciousness. The only alternative to the churches were the Christian sects and movements, such as the Bogomilism that emerged in the 10th century and lasted until the expulsion of the Bogomils by the Bulgarian and later the Ottoman authorities. The Bogomils basically stood for the restoration of early Christianity and abolishment of the Orthodox institutions. Bogomils have an important role in the Macedonian national culture as well. Kočo Racin, a famous Macedonian interwar Marxist poet and activist, has written a pamphlet on the history of the Bogomils, in which he suggested that the people of Macedonia should be proud of the Bogomils, because they were very enlightened and acted against the oppressive agency of the Church. Racin also points to several Slavic tribes that have adopted Christianity before the missions of the Salonica Brothers Cyril and Methodius as an example of anti-church Christian culture. See Kočo Racin, "The Bogomils", *Verses and Prose*, Kultura: Skopje, 1966, available at <http://www.marxists.org/makedonski/racin/1939/bogomilite.htm>.
5. In fact, even before the abolishment of the Peć Patriarchate, Greek priests were appointed in the higher clerical ranks.
6. See Vangelis Kechriotes, "Greek-Orthodox, Ottoman Greeks or just Greeks? Theories of coexistence in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution", *Etudes Balkaniques* 1, (2005): 51-71.
7. See John R. Lampe, "Balkan States and Borderlands Before the Balkan Wars", in *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: a century of war and transition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. See also İpek Yosmaoğlu-Turner, "Church Conflicts in the Making of the National Identity" in "The Priest's Robe and the Rebe's Rifle..."; *op. cit.*, 147-205
8. See Aleksandar Panev, "Orthodoxy, Modernity and Nationality in Macedonia, 1800-1875", *PhD Dissertation* (University of Toronto), Evangelos Kofos, "Dilemmas and Orientations of Greek Policy in Macedonia: 1876-1886", *Balkan Studies*, 21/1 (1980): 45-55; Germanos Karavangelis, *The Macedonian Struggle (Memoirs)*, Kultura: Skopje, 2000, and Roudometof, Victor, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict. Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question*, London: Praeger, 2002.
9. See Mazower, Mark, "Introduction to the Study of Macedonia", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 14.2, (1996): 229-235. The author suggests that one of the reasons for switching Church loyalties was the tax discount. As people were forced to choose a religious institution to which they would belong, and the Church institutions among other things were tax collectors, it was important for people to take in account the economic side of their religious affiliation.
10. For a detailed analysis of the debates on Macedonian identities see Dragan Taškovski, *Towards the birth of the Macedonian nation*, Skopje: NIP Nova Make-

donija, 1967. For analysis of the resistance movements see Vlado Popovski, *The Macedonian national liberation movements before SMORO*, Skopje: Makedonska kniga, 1989 and Aleksandar T. Hristov, *IMRO and the Macedonian statehood*, Kultura: Skopje, 1993.

11. See Krste Petkov – Misirkov, “What have we done and what we have yet to do?” in *On the Macedonian Matters*, Sofia, 1903, 25-35
12. For the Communist nation-building in Macedonia see Anastas Vangeli, “De-mythologization of the Yugoslav memories”, *Globus* #136, November 24, 2009 at <http://www.globusmagazin.com.mk/default.asp?ItemID=A2FD9811F26BB8489D6D4E48505DD053>.
13. Information about the foundation of the MOC can be found on the official website: <http://mpc.org.mk/MPC/istorija.asp>. See also Dimitar Bechev, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 136-137.
14. The text of the Constitution can be found online: <http://www.sobranie.mk/en/default.asp?ItemID=9F7452BF44EE814B8DB897C1858B71FF>.
15. For the relationship between Orthodoxy and religion in general and nationalism in the Balkans see Neophytos Loizides, “Religious Nationalism and Adaptation in Southeast Europe”, *Nationalities Papers* 37:2, 203 — 227; Ivan Ivekovic “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States”, *Social Compass* 49 (2002): 523-526.
16. At the same time, it has been scattered by allegations of corruption and illegal financial operations. Yet, the politicians and the public seem to oversee that because of the national, mythologized role attributed to the Church.
17. Standing for Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
18. “Doctrine: Values of the IMRO-DPMNU”, p. 21, at http://IMRO-DPMNU.org.mk/Dokumenti/Vrednosti_IMRO_DPMNU.pdf.
19. Standing for Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia.
20. “Solutions for Macedonia: Party Programme of the SDAM”, p. 125, at http://www.SDAM.org.mk/upload/PROGRAMA_PDF_Web.pdf.
21. N/A, “Agreement on the Declaration for the support of the MOC”, A1 News, January 21, 2004, at <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=28262>.
22. N/A, “The president Branko Crvenkovski has awarded the MOC with the honor “Republic of Macedonia””, MOC official website: <http://www.mpc.org.mk/MPC/SE/vest.asp?id=2064>.
23. Cacanaska, Ruzhica, “The Process of De-Secularization in Macedonian Society”, *New Balkan Politics*, Issue 5 (2001), at http://www.newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/OldSite/Issue_5/cacanovska.proces.eng.asp.

24. *Ibid.*
25. Kokan Stojchev, "Mega-interview with mitropolitan Kiril: Without the Macedonian Church, the state and the people will not survive", *Makedonsko Sonce* #666/667 (April 2007), 8-13, at http://www.makedonskosonce.com/broev-vis/2007/sonce666_667.pdf/08_13_intervju.pdf.
26. See MCMS, "Confidence in the Civil Society", at <http://www.mcms.org.mk/images/stories/Docs/Doverba%20vo%20GO%202008-prv%20del.pdf>.
27. Several news articles about the communiqués of the MOC during the conflict in 2001: <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=216>, <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=560>, <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=743>.
28. Branko Gjorgevski "The Church did not invite Trajkovski to the Christmas event", *Dnevnik Daily*, #1746 (January 10, 2002), <http://star.dnevnik.com.mk/default.aspx?pbroj=1746&stID=8974&pdate=20020110>, and N/A, "The attacks for sectarianism are personal attitudes of the bishop Peter", *Dnevnik Daily*, #1744 (January 8, 2002), <http://star.dnevnik.com.mk/default.aspx?pbroj=1744&stID=8845&pdate=20020108>.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. See N/A, "Comical inauguration of the police generals", A1 News (January 9, 2002), <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=5024>.
32. See N/A, "Mitropolitan Ilarion of Bregalnica attended the day of the patron of the police", MOC official website (November 11, 2008), <http://www.mpc.org.mk/vest.asp?id=3287>.
33. As cited in Gordana Duvnjak, "Whom are the prayers helping?", Editorial, *Utrinski Vesnik Daily* (April 17, 2007), <http://www.utrinski.com.mk/?ItemID=C7A95CE47D397D4789545BE4E346ADC8>.
34. For the perspective of Jovan and his supporters see St. Herman of the Alaska Brotherhood, "A 21st Century Confessor", *The Orthodox Word*, #242/243 (2005), http://www.poa-info.org/mk/istorija/resavanje/21st-Century_Confessor.pdf.
35. The verdict can be found online at http://poa-info.org/archbishop/testimonies/verdict_racial_hatred.html. See also Drasko Djenovic, "Macedonia: New Law fails to solve building problems", *F18News* (March 31, 2008), http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1108.
36. Document – Europe and Central Asia: Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns in the Balkans (January-June, 2005), 19, <http://amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR05/001/2006/en/28018728-d44a-11dd-8743-d305bea2b2c7/eur050012006en.html>.
37. For a general overview of the case of Jovan, see Zelimir Bojovic, Tamara Causidis, «Church rivalry threatens to brim over», *BIRN*, <[96](http://www.presson-</div><div data-bbox=)

- line.com.mk/default-en.asp?ItemID=BEA2B8DBAFBD9047BB4A0653D50DD61B> the official page at the Orthodox Wiki - [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Jovan_\(Vraniskovski\)_of_Ohrid](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Jovan_(Vraniskovski)_of_Ohrid).
38. Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, *Report of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights On the Condition of Human Rights in Macedonia in 2005*, available at <http://www.mhc.org.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=0C7B6D68D764284A8E51B7E1C1750302&arc=1>.
 39. Drasko Djenovic, "Official Discrimination Continues", *Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights*, <http://www.mhc.org.mk/default-en.asp?ItemID=B2BE940452E15B48B97EF02B232D0174&arc=1>.
 40. Florian Bieber, *Minority Rights and the Freedom of Religion in Balkan Countries, Seminar Report, A Multi-national Program of NGO Human Rights Cooperation In the Framework of the Royaumont Process*, European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (1999), 19.
 41. Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, *An Overview of the Issue of De-secularization in the Republic of Macedonia* (August 9, 2005), <http://www.pressonline.com.mk/default-MK.asp?ItemID=7491232F9FF4B143B655046988E9AE20>.
 42. For the issue of religious education and the pressure against the Constitutional Court see the remarks of the European Commission, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2009 Progress Report", 14. Also see Sonja Kramarska, "Archbishop Stefan is going to change the Constitution", *Globus* #106 (April 28, 2009), <http://www.globusmagazin.com.mk/?ItemID=9844CC03C9FBFE419D53E9E9F0DD1D3E>.
 43. See Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor International Religious Freedom Report 2009, available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127323.htm>.
 44. Zhidas Daskalovski, "Liberal Theory and Challenges of Multiculturalism – the Case of Macedonia" in *Multiculturalism in Macedonia: An Emerging Model*, ed. Ivan Dodovski, 115 – 128.
 45. See Ana Petruseva, "A Very Un-Holy Affair", *Balkan Insight* (March 28, 2009), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/blogs/17760/>; N/A, "Violence Disrupts Student Protests in Skopje", *Balkan Insight* (March 30, 2009), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/17763/> and N/A, "Macedonia Becoming More Intolerant, Sociologist", *Balkan Insight* (April 2, 2009), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/17894/>.