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Claiming Autocephaly, Hoping for Autonomy – Legal Recognition and Self-Governing of National Orthodox Churches in Socialist Yugoslavia

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Abstract

In 1946, the Yugoslav socialist state broke-up all its institutional ties with religious communities entitled to set their own rules of self-governing that they had never had before. Furthermore, Yugoslav legislation of the time provided no specific requirements for official recognition of religious communities, which henceforth became equal in their rights and duties. The hypothesis of the article is that this apparently benevolent state attitude might have had a less evident political purpose that could be disclosed through an in-depth analysis of a legal framework of religious freedom in post-war Yugoslavia and a long-term political agenda of its socialist government: if this socialist secularism released the religion communities from state supervision, it also boosted separatist and dissident movements within them. The law made churches free, but weaker due to being subject to competition and extortion. By focusing on the evolution of Serbian Orthodox Church self-governing during socialism, the article examines the impact of formally neutral state legislation on internal ecclesial conflicts – primarily those over autocephaly of the Macedonian Church, but including also the case of the independent Priests' Alliance contesting episcopalian authority – that resulted in transformation of a once decentralized and democratic Serbian Orthodox Church into the present-day oligarchic one.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church; socialist Yugoslavia; Macedonian Orthodox Church; the Priests' Alliance; socialist secularism

Introduction

In 2018, as a prelude to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the long-awaited Ukrainian Orthodox Church autocephaly was celebrated during the fragile truce time sometime between the Annexation of Crimea and the Invasion of 24 February 2022. Granted by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as the Primus of the Orthodox World, the Ukrainian autocephaly incited an immediate and harsh reaction by the Moscow Patriarchy, as well as – unsurprisingly – by the Russian state. Across the ages, the *tomos* of autocephaly – the solemn canonical recognition of a certain regional church as an independent one, used to be seen as an act of national emancipation as well. There is seldom an Orthodox nation without its own self-standing Church. The canonical recognition does not imply an official recognition coming from the state authority, however. Therefore, a dispute over autocephaly of a given Orthodox church has often closely related to ethnic conflicts and international crisis challenging secular character of any state involved.

It seems that the easiest way for a state to face such crises is to restrain from interfering with contentions that only ecclesial courts and canon law experts are competent to resolve. In such a way, the state treats all interested parties as equal before the law, proving its own religious neutrality. The legal form of such a political approach would be unconditional recognition and free registration of all religious communities equal in their rights and duties regardless of their (un)canonical status. Simple, but rarely opted for, this secular strategy is far from being a standard in contemporary liberal-democracies (Finke, Fox and Mataic 2017). Findings of a comparative survey of European states (Flere 2010, 99–117; Robbers 2019) speak in favor of differentiated legal treatment of religious denominations *without* and those *with* official recognition, the latter, needless to mention, being usually labeled as traditional or dominant ones, with special benefits.

In sharp contrast to this contemporary experience, the 1953 Yugoslav *Statute on the Legal Status of Religious Communities*¹ (henceforth: the 1953 Statute) seemed worthy of scholarly investigation as its provisions stipulated free registration of all religious denominations in a people's democracy that was commonly associated with an anticlerical law and order. Starting from 1953, a religious community was not required to ask for its official recognition, but only to formally declare its existence before the state authorities. In a revolutionary way, Yugoslav socialist state voluntarily broke-up all remaining institutional ties with religious communities that felt free enough to set their own autonomous rules. Yet, the Yugoslav idiocracy slipped under the radar of historians so far. Losing sight of the bigger picture, Paul Mojzes (1992, 348) and Stela Alexander (1979, 146) believed that the aforementioned 1953 Statute only broke the ground for further improvement of religious freedom.² Curiously, if not paradoxically, the 1953 Statute was adopted at the peak of state-sponsored anticlerical campaigns and followed interruption of diplomatic relations with the Holy See caused by the controversial Stepinac affair. Hence, the hypothesis of this article is that such apparently benevolent legislation might have had a less evident political purpose, the one that could be disclosed only through an in-depth analysis of a broader legal framework and the long-term political agenda of the Yugoslav socialist government. If the 1953 Statute together with similar regulations such as the 1945 *Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations* (henceforth: the 1945 Act) effectively released the traditional churches from state custody, it also boosted dissident movements within them. Neutral in its form, this legislation was less impartial in its outcomes. In the long run, it produced social effects that revealed its *ratio legis*: the implementation of 1953 Statute left behind some losers and winners as a social blueprint of the legal politics it stood for. Not all of them are relevant for the purpose of this study focused on the illustrative case of the Serbian Orthodox Church, since the similar Catholic experience had already been exposed in Miroslav Akmadža's and Jure Krišto's writings, while the case of the Islamic Religious Organization of Yugoslavia was tackled in the seminal book *The Balkan Idols* by Vjekoslav Perica. On the other hand, well described in Radmila Radić's two-volume monography *State and Religious Communities 1945-1970*, internal conflicts in the Serbian Orthodox Church – such as the one over canonical recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church or the one over activities of the Priests' Alliance – have not been closely examined either within the framework of the relevant state legislation, or that pertaining to the internal evolution of the Church organization. Yet, as this study tries to show, they all make more sense only if perceived in conjunction.

Towards free registration – on losers and winners

Late in August of 1945, shortly before the elections for the Constituent Assembly took place, the Yugoslav legislators passed into law the *Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations*.³ The 1945 Act guaranteed citizens' rights to initiate establishment of political, cultural, scientific, technic, sports or *other* civil associations, but conferred on the police the full discretionary power over their official recognition *i.e.*, the final decision-making over the legality of these initiatives (Zečević 1968, 73-76; Petković 1982, 92).⁴ Designed rather to restrain than to guarantee freedom, the 1945 Act introduced administrative control over civil society subjecting

some to severe criminal penalties, including a three years' prison sentence for all those who dared to run unrecognized civil associations.⁵ It perfectly reflected the *Zeitgeist* of the late 1940s and 'Stalin-style' governing relying on administrative coercion. Nevertheless, the effective implementation of the Act had shown the human face of socialism as well. Against all odds, it improved religious freedom by granting legal personality to some so-far unrecognized religious associations contesting the authority of the several traditional churches of Ancient Regime.⁶ Not everyone was dissatisfied.

Legal framework

In the spring of 1953, Yugoslav Communists decided to disassociate religious communities from all other civil associations. Alongside the 1945 Act as a general law, they passed into law a *Lex specialis* entitled the *Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities* which defined religious communities as *legal persons under civil law*.⁷ The latter definition implied the marginalized influence and role of religion since the Yugoslav socialist legal system privileged the concept of a *social legal person* over the concept of a *legal person under civil law*. The main criterion of distinction between these two legal entities was in their respective property regimes. Whereas the latter was based on disfavored private ownership expected to eventually vanish, the former was based on social ownership as a core concept of Yugoslav socialism (Gams 1956, 188).⁸ Namely, social legal persons were those collective entities – companies, as well as public institutions – whose assets were in a nominal possession of a society as a whole, but entrusted to the workers', *aka* employees' self-management. The idea was to delegate decision-making processes to those directly concerned by them. Favorized by the state, social ownership was not the only form of possession over property in socialist Yugoslavia, though. In a restricted way and rather exceptionally, the government tolerated private initiative as well. Thus, a group of citizens in pursuit of strictly private goals of lesser importance could be registered as *legal persons under civil law*. As such, they were distinguished from civil associations such as sports clubs, professional organizations or cultural institutions grounded on individual enthusiasm, but with a recognized social aim and, therefore, subsidized by the state.⁹ On the other hand, deprived of an acknowledged social purpose, a legal person under civil law was no more than a label reserved for a few 'backward' institutions on their way to extinction, such as remaining crafts shops and religious communities.¹⁰

Verging on a stigma pertaining to churches, this second-rate legal status was paradoxically related to a lax registration procedure that allowed Yugoslav citizens to found religious communities in nearly complete freedom.¹¹ Unlike civil associations, that had to seek an official police permission in accordance with the 1945 Act, religious communities only had to inform a competent state authority – the federal state commission in charge for religious affairs – of their existence formally. The vocal absence of specific public records registering religious communities, the fact that such information was fairly informal and free of charge, as well as the fact that they could not be officially rejected (or dismissed) by any public authority, led to a conclusion that legal personality of religious communities in Yugoslavia was not the matter of an official recognition but only of a formal declaration.¹² After the constitutional reform of 1974 that turned the Yugoslav federation into a confederation composed of eight federal entities, each supplied with its own legislation, this unique federal legal framework was replaced with a series of eight statutes that did not deviate much from the earlier federal model. However, some of the federal entities' legislation specified the aforementioned declaration procedure to some extent. As has already been noticed (Božić 2020), southeastern Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces were slightly more regulative than those in the Northwest. Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro delegated competencies over this procedure to the local police offices.¹³ Vojvodina and Bosnia put municipal authorities, perceived as less demanding, in charge of it,¹⁴ while Slovenia and Croatia kept this matter in competence of their respective religious affairs commissions.¹⁵

This simplified model of formal declaration remained the legal standard in contrast with the longstanding practice of the Yugoslav Kingdom. Namely, prior to 1945, legal recognition of a

specific religious denomination could be granted only by a legislative act produced by the state lawmaker – either through a parliamentary act or an act of the King's sovereign will. Strictly limited to several traditional churches – such as the Serbian Orthodox or the Roman Catholic Church, along with a few religious minorities – primarily the Jewish and Muslim Community – legal recognition of religious denominations was a discrimination issue in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its predecessor states. Thus, the great gainers of the socialist 1953 legal reform were small religious communities mostly of Protestant affiliation. Unrecognized and oppressed until then, these denominations could finally get emancipated. Put in the narrow historical context, this insight might suggest a plausible, yet unverified hypothesis regarding the political background of the 1953 lax legislation: deeply involved in an open conflict with the USSR and still strongly dependent on foreign support conditioned by further liberalization of Yugoslav law and order, Tito's Yugoslavia might have passed into law the 1953 Statute as a concession to its Western partners (Lees 1997; Bogetić 2000).¹⁶ Although the Yugoslav lawmaker felt the need to remove assumptions that the 1953 Statute had been elaborated in such a way only under Western pressure,¹⁷ the evident lack of documented sources in favor of this hypothesis opens some perspective for another one: the lost monopoly of traditional churches made them the biggest losers in a political play hidden behind the law. The Yugoslav Government report following the 1953 Statute explicitly referred to liquidation of a discriminatory distinction between recognized and unrecognized religious communities as the aim of this legislation.¹⁸ As such, the 1953 Statute surely went in favor of small non-traditional religious communities, but also approved 'schismatic' movements that cut into the body of traditional churches overtly opposing the new revolutionary regime. The early Yugoslav socialist state plan to establish a national Catholic Church independent from Rome, as well as its government's apparent intention to legalize separatist movements within the Serbian Orthodox Church, could have been implemented more easily by loosening the legal recognition procedure. Moreover, even if the Government gave up the creation of a Yugoslav national Catholic Church soon afterwards, the long and exhausting conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Yugoslav socialist government over independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church has remained an intriguing testimony of the vexing socialist model of the State and the Church separation, with the relevant 1953 legislation in the midst of it all.

The macedonian orthodox church: From autonomy to autocephaly

It is still striking that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, a revolutionary actor fighting for an internationalist and secular cause, was engaged with such a commitment in a decades long canonical conflict over emancipation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Palmer and King 1971). The explanation could be both a political and an ideological one. The socialist revolution in Yugoslavia ended in 1946 with the new Constitution that promoted a federal state concept as a solution to the so-called 'national question', *i.e.*, a series of restless, harrowing ethnic conflicts that had eventually torn apart the prewar Yugoslav Kingdom. The 1946 Yugoslav Constitution turned a highly centralized monarchy under Serbian dominance into a multi-national federation with each of the South Slavic ethnic groups counting on its own federated state – so-called republic. By satisfying claims for ethnically based internal demarcation, this model relied on nationalist sentiments rather than denying them. From the Marxist perspective, this politics was justified inasmuch as it was striving for a higher goal – to suppress Serbian hegemony as a local-scale imperialism. Its implementation faced a peculiar problem: if it was relatively easy to (re)establish the statehood of once independent and confirmed nations such as the Croats, Serbs or Slovenians, it was way more difficult in the case of ethnicities such as Bosnians, Montenegrins or Macedonians, whose 'national' identity at the time was still unconsolidated. In other words, the Yugoslav constitution of 1946 created federated states for some yet to be nations. An ideological impetus urged a resolution of this paradox. Namely, according to the logic of historical materialism, the socialist revolution was meant to happen at the very end of world history, coming only after a long series of previous events

and periods, including national state-building. There was no shortcut or bypass: a national revolution had to precede the socialist one. In the Marxist perspective, the national question, including the Macedonian one, asked to be resolved first. Although ideologically justified, the Communist agenda in favor of the Macedonian cause remained controversial in its means: in order to complete the Macedonian national identity-building process, the Yugoslav Government simply took to the well-known patterns by enlivening the linguistic, historical and religious Macedonian distinctiveness, including establishment of an independent national Orthodox Church. There were no peculiar socialist features in the given process: ethnicity-turning-nation remained the nationalists' issue, and was a mindset that the Yugoslav Communists believed they could control and manipulate. This was a tightrope walk as any action in favor of a distinctive ethnic or religious identity, in this case Macedonian, was considered restrictive towards other identities, above all that of the Serbs.

Being victim of its neighbors' long-lasting disputes over its native land, language identity and religious affiliation (Ljuljanović 2025), the Macedonian people finally got their national recognition due to Stalin's interference in dispute between Yugoslav and Bulgarian Communists over the region in 1941: Macedonia returned under the jurisdiction of the former (Mitrovski, Glišić and Ristovski 1971, 158-173),¹⁹ eventually becoming one of the distinctive units of the future Yugoslav Federation.²⁰ Being of a weak institutional basis, the new socialist Macedonia was urgently resorting to its historical continuity in local traditions and organizations, such as the ancient Ohrid Orthodox Archbishopric. The latter was abolished in 1767 becoming canonically subdued under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church²¹ as a stronghold of unbudging Serbian ethno-nationalism (Buchenau 2011, Subotić 2019). Thus, the reestablishment of Ohrid Archbishopric with the blessing of the Serbian mother church was unlikely to happen. To foster the process, the Yugoslav government prevented the return of the exiled Serbian bishops to Macedonia at the end of the Second World War and the Nazi occupation. 'Beheaded' in such a way, the Orthodox Church in the region was left to indigenous priests and the faithful self-organized within the first National-Church Assembly that officially claimed reestablishment of the Ohrid Archbishopric as an independent Macedonian Orthodox Church in March 1945.²² With a strong institutional support coming from both the Party and the Government, this enterprise was breaking the resistance of the Serbian Orthodox Church which considered this Macedonian initiative an act of schism, as well as a separatist movement against Serbian national interest.²³ The first major breakthrough took place in 1957, when the Serbian Holy Assembly of Bishops (*Sveti Arhijerejski Sabor*) finally allowed for the use of Macedonian as an official language of church administration and agreed upon appointment of indigenous clerics in vacant bishoprics in the region.²⁴ In October 1958, after a year of waiting in vain for the agreement implementation, the dissatisfied Macedonian priesthood organized another National-Church Assembly which declared the autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church headed by a renegade Serbian bishop eager to help the Macedonian cause. Having faced this unilateral act as a *fait accompli*, the Serbian Assembly of Bishops had surprisingly approved it already in 1959. It was probably so because of the Macedonian decision to remain in canonical unity with the Serbian Church by keeping the Serbian Patriarch for their pontifex too.²⁵ Less than a decade later, this last bond would be broken as well. In 1967, Macedonian Orthodox Church proclaimed its autocephaly unilaterally. In reply, the Serbian Orthodox Church promptly broke off all official relations and started the canonical procedure against the rebellious Macedonian bishops. The matter reached no resolution. The Church Court in Belgrade had never had any hearings and no Macedonian faithful had ever been excommunicated (Puzović 1997, 350 and 351). On the contrary, by the late 1970s, the Serbian Orthodox Church renewed negotiations with the Macedonian church by staying open for liturgical communication with the Orthodox people in the region as if nothing had ever happened before.

Both the Macedonian insolent acts, as well as the Serbian mild resistance to them, can be understood only in conjunction with the relevant legal framework as an avenue of state interference with the affair. If there was no doubt that the manifest support of the Communist Party and the state

financial assistance to the Macedonian Orthodox Church would have come anyway, it would surely have been way easier to invest it into – and have it spent by – an officially recognized church as a subject of legal duties and rights, including property related ones. Therefore 1953 Statute was an important milestone on the long path to financial and legal emancipation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church that has just been outlined. Moderate reaction of the Serbian high clergy, on the other hand, might disclose a refined sense of the episcopate for the Yugoslav *Realpolitik*. Rather than a result of institutional weakness, the indulgence of Serbian bishops regarding the issue of the Macedonian Church might have been a clever concession at a certain price the Socialist State was willing to pay: a growing autonomy in the interior Serbian Church organization and affairs.

Cost and benefits of self-governance on the rise

Unrecognized religious denominations were not the only beneficiaries of the new socialist legislation. The 1945 *Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations* also granted visibility to some dissenting elements within the recognized traditional churches. Following the idea that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, the Socialist State allowed official recognition of the so-called *religious association* most often gathering rebellious priests contesting the authority of the high clergy with their reactionary attitude. Hence, the Communist resorted to the long-lasting animosity between the Bosnian Franciscans and the Catholic bishops of Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka reluctant to cooperate with the Socialist State. Unlike Croatia proper where there were no strong Catholic priests’ associations with a large membership, the Yugoslav government could always count on a strong Bosnian priests’ association *The Good Shepherd* (in Serbo-Croatian, *Dobri pastir*) composed mostly of dissatisfied Franciscans as a valuable and trusted ally in a long war of attrition with the unruly Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia (Akmadža 2018, 26–30, 55 and 417–428).²⁶ There were asymmetrical experiences as well. For example, it is unlikely that the more cooperative leaders of the Islamic Religious Community of Yugoslavia (Perica 2002, 74)²⁷ could have ever applied its 1952 decision on suppression of independent mystic dervish orders and their *tekkes* effectively without the state support. According to the 1945 Act, the police could always resort to its discretionary power to dismiss any demand for registration coming from Sufi orders, while the courts could impose penalties including imprisonment on their spiritual leaders – *sheikhs*, who dared run any of such unrecognized communities.²⁸ However, nothing sheds better light on the Law than the case of Serbian Orthodox Church torn between its unyielding episcopate and defiant priesthood.

Historical framework

A collegium of powerful bishops ruling sovereignly over a community of the faithful is a common yet not quite accurate perception of the present-day Serbian Orthodox Church and its leadership. Designed along the lines of an episcopalian and hierarchical model, it has experienced decentralized and democratic governance as well. A series of National-Church Assemblies acting as supreme governing bodies gathering clergy and laics in key historical moments is a commonplace in Serbian past. On the other hand, the active role of its congregation in priests’ nominations and local church governing has almost been forgotten. This role was introduced into the Serbian Orthodox Church structure top-down, *i.e.*, by Habsburg imperial decrees, first in Vojvodina and Croatia, then in Bosnia. Although they had never removed the bishops’ supreme authority in the Serbian Orthodox Church, these imperial regulations embedded a certain presbyterian practice that eventually turned into a century-long tradition of self-supported parishes run by its own congregations (Ljubibratić 1925; Slijepčević 2018a, 205–209).

After the First World War and creation of the Yugoslav Kingdom, a patchwork of more or less autonomous Serbian church organizations from Austro-Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia (including Macedonia) had suddenly united into the present-day Serbian Orthodox Church.²⁹

Having different internal regulations and weak mutual institutional connections before 1918, these organizations struggled to reach a clear agreement upon the structure and functioning of the reunited Serbian Orthodox Church. Therefore, the latter kept tolerating regional traditions and institutions under the guidance of the Assembly of Bishops. Composed of acting Orthodox prelates coming from all over of the Kingdom, the latter had far from uncontested authority. Faced with autonomous parishes and self-confident priesthood organized in the Priests' Alliance, the Assembly of Bishops sought an ally in the authoritarian state. It was the 1928 political crises in conjunction with the economic depression that led to the King's dictatorship ready to reward Serbian Bishops' support. In 1931, the Serbian Orthodox Church was granted its first Church Constitution by the Yugoslav King.³⁰ The Constitution set the Assembly of Bishops as officially the supreme church body which promptly resorted to its *plena potestas* and abolished the unruly Priests' Alliance the following year. From then on, a priest could be associated only with his colleagues coming from the very same diocese and only under his Bishop's blessing and supervision. These so-called *diocesan priests' associations* were without real autonomy and weight. As a compensation for acting dully, all Orthodox priests could count on regular salaries and social security benefits provided by the State since 1936.

This was a short-lived settlement, though. In 1945, the new Communist government put an end to the old law and order and suspended public funding of any religious activities. However, if the priests' material condition declined, their freedom of association materialized once again. Namely, the 1945 *Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations* implicitly allowed registration of professional associations including unions, *i.e.*, priests' alliances. The stage for the revival of the old rivalry between the episcopate and the priesthood had been set once again, with the State not remaining on the sidelines this time either.

The serbian orthodox church: from autocephaly to autonomy

Bearing in mind the social capital the Church enjoyed in rural inlands as strongholds of their Partisan resistance, Yugoslav Communists were continuously striving to acquire the support of local clerics during the Second World War. One of the major outcomes of their efforts were formal assemblies that gathered all those clerics, mostly countryside priests, willing to join the fight for the Communist revolutionary cause.³¹ As trusted corps, these clergymen carried on contributing to newly-emerging socialist order, sometimes holding high positions in government after the War (Mladenović 1975, Matić 1985).³² From 1949, such clergymen were organized in the Federal Alliance of Orthodox Priests vocal in its opposition to the Assembly of Bishops resistant to the new socialist order and federal organization of the state.³³ Using the pulpit, but also an open access to the mass media – above all, their own weekly magazine *Vesnik* – the Alliance members were building an image of a new Orthodox cleric as a model of 'a people's and progressive priest' and 'socialist worker' both observing towards traditional Christian beliefs and eager to embrace a modern worldview,³⁴ including socialist values as well.³⁵ Under government sponsorship (Radić and Mitrović 2012, 68-74) and tutorial (Đurić-Mišina 2000, 1463),³⁶ *Vesnik* magazine was cultivating a politically correct religious discourse in compliance with the ruling ideology. Aligned with the official course of the Yugoslav government, the Alliance argued strongly in favor of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, risking thus allegations of betraying the Serbian national interest.³⁷ In response, the Priests' Alliance claimed a strictly evangelical purpose of the Christian religion and opposed the national and political ambitions of the senior church dignitaries reprimanded for chauvinism and clericalism.³⁸ This was in line with the Alliance advocacy for fundamental principles of the new order such as the Unity and Brotherhood conceived in the light of religious tolerance and ecumenism in the institutional memory and doctrinal teaching of the Serbian Orthodox Church.³⁹ Hence, *Vesnik* magazine never missed a chance to announce any national holidays celebrating Yugoslav togetherness, including Tito's birthday, along with various religious feast days. In a word, the Alliance tried to promote an Orthodoxy with a socialist face.

Yugoslav Communists considered the Alliance members reliable and committed ‘priests in our ranks’ (Đurić-Mišina 2000, 1473) in the struggle with conservative Serbian bishops devoted to nationalist agenda (Đurić-Mišina 2000, 1459-1461 and 1471-1474). Many prelates, often perceived as opposition leaders active home and abroad, in emigration, were subject to government smear campaigns backed by the Alliance. *Vesnik* magazine reported against notorious Anticomunists such as Bishop Josif Cvijović, a vocal opponent of emancipation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church,⁴⁰ Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, a prominent figure of the Serbian clerical-nationalism close to Nazi collaborationist Dimitrije Ljotić,⁴¹ and Bishops Dionisije Milivojević and Irinej Đorđević, unofficial leaders of the Serbian emigration in the West,⁴² was an important part of discrediting tactics pointing the disobedient top of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Furthermore, having kept their bishoprics and, consequently, their posts in the Assembly of Bishops *in absentia*, emigrant Bishops Velimirović and Milivojević made a case against the entire Serbian Orthodox Church. The actual target of discreditation was the episcopacy.

The Priests’ Alliance not only did a favor to the socialist government by doing this, but it also fought for its own cause: that is, participatory rights of the priesthood and lay members of the Serbian Orthodox Church run by an episcopacy without any bottom-up control. Ever since its foundation, the Alliance had been persistently contesting prelates’ sovereign power introduced by the 1931 Church Constitution. Even if the Alliance had never elaborated any precise agenda, nor taken any clear course of action towards challenging or amending this constitution, a series of instructive sources, such as newspaper reports and essays, working materials and proceedings of the Alliance official meetings make at least a partial insight into these alternative ideas and possible concepts of the Serbian Orthodox Church organization. Although none of these sources had ever really dared to deny there was an episcopalian character to the Serbian Orthodox Church, they mainly supported episcopal supremacy only in questions of doctrine, whereas they claimed the shared responsibility for ecclesiastical affairs between the high priesthood and other church members.⁴³ Democracy in the Church was taken seriously too. As a consequence, electiveness of church dignitaries through the reaffirmation of the National-Church Assemblies as the supreme ruling body should have been a strong guarantee against the bishops’ autocratic pretensions.⁴⁴ Strengthening the existing autonomy of parish councils elected by their lay members was another one.⁴⁵ To sum it up: the voice of priesthood and their flock was to be heard as well. Twofold argumentation justified such self-government. First and foremost, the sources refreshed a forsaken memory of more than a century long experience of church organization in the Habsburg lands.⁴⁶ Well-grounded in historical facts, this line of argumentation was seriously compromised by separatist movements that the Serbian Orthodox Church was faced with at the time, primarily the Macedonian one.⁴⁷ Such movements, by definition, used to resort to National-Church Assemblies as a way to insure democratic legitimacy for their decisions. It might have been the reason why, at some point, the Alliance started presenting democratization of the Church not only as a legacy of the illustrious past, but above all as the then present-day need, *aka* a path of reform that the Church should have followed if it really had sought for a way to fit into the new socialist order. In fact, the self-management as a Yugoslav way of socialism in economy and politics became a model for the Church governing as well.⁴⁸ The destiny of Church institution was at stake.

Weakened by resolute expropriation and advanced secularization, with no foreign support, the episcopacy of the Serbian Orthodox Church demonstrated a bold resistance. In fact, the Assembly of Bishops’ hit back at rebellious priesthood by withholding its blessing for the Statutory Act of the Priests’ Alliance asking for its amendments on several occasions. Notwithstanding that the Alliance truly tried to satisfy bishops’ demands by redrafting the initial text of its Statutory Act, it had never really met the bishops’ expectations (Slijepčević 2018b, 292-302). The stumbling stone was the bishops’ supervision over priests’ association, which the Alliance could never implement without losing its own purpose – the priests’ autonomy in word and action.⁴⁹ Consequently, the Statutory Act had never received its official approval from the governing church body, which treated the Alliance as an uncanonical entity. It undermined the Alliance’s legitimacy and damaged its

reputation among faithful and clerics permanently, providing the bishops with a *momentum* in further dynamics of this rivalry. Besides, the Assembly of Bishops had always skillfully manipulated with its legislative power restored after the constitutional separation of the state and the Church. After they had passed into law the new Church Constitution in 1947,⁵⁰ bishops as law-makers kept making significant efforts towards bonding priesthood even more substantially to episcopal authority. Apparently, by the late 1950s the Serbian episcopacy abandoned its defensive strategy and started showing more initiative in beating democratic tendencies the Priests' Alliance fought for. In 1952, the Assembly of Bishops passed a highly controversial decree⁵¹ going against the idea of priest immutability – a right of a priest not to be reinstated from one parish to another solely on his bishop's decision.⁵² Besides, in 1957, the Assembly of Bishops dismissed elected parochial councils and replaced them by Bishops' Commissioners on a poor pretext that the new elections were not possible under the current circumstances.⁵³ The means of pressure was still the same: in 1961, the Assembly of Bishops confirmed its 1952 decree on priest immutability,⁵⁴ despite all protests and lobbying of the Alliance members.⁵⁵ Furthermore, on the same occasion, bishops passed into law the Penal Code of Serbian Orthodox Church⁵⁶ providing new penalties against disrespectful priests in order to tighten the church discipline and restore episcopal authority. Two penal provisions in focus of the critical reviews and polemics are still useful for understanding the living and doing in the Serbian Orthodox Church of the time. Article 17 of the Church Penal Code threatened priests disobeying their bishop and other ecclesiastical authorities by laicization and excommunication. The same provision incriminates priests publicly or secretly turning faithful people against ecclesiastical authorities and their decisions. Building on this, Article 44 penalized priests who questioned, criticized or mocked the acts and orders of ecclesiastical bodies before their flock or other clerics, both by preaching or in writing. This may explain why most of critical articles in *Vesnik* were published unsigned all from the early 1960s. The fear was real, moreover, the second provision did not contain any precise disciplinary measures, but left it to the Church courts to exercise their discretionary rights over punishment of the most disrespectful priests.

Instant and fierce, the Priests' Alliance reaction was in vain, mostly because of the state non-interference.⁵⁷ The official government neutrality was a friendly one, though. As Radmila Radić noticed, in late 1954, the Yugoslav Government and the top of the Serbian Orthodox Church established an open line of direct communication and cooperation (Radić 2002, 335). The Socialist State had realized by then that it could have achieved much more by negotiation than confrontation with the Serbian bishops. This shift in the government strategy might have had more than one cause. Namely, it came at the peak of state-sponsored anticlerical campaigns in schools and mass media paving a way to a more moderate state and party position towards religion in general from the early 1950s. It also coincided with the outbreak of a practically open war between the Yugoslav State and the Roman Catholic Church caused by the Cardinal Stepinac trial that urged prompt cooling of relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church in return. The Government could not afford waging a war on two fronts. It sought a compromise instead. The rising assertiveness of Serbian bishops ready to consent to the official use of the Macedonian language in 1955 and to an autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church four years later apparently required some counter-concessions by the State.⁵⁸ Perhaps it was not by chance that the bishops' provocative executive decrees and legislative measures aimed at rebellious clerics had been undertaken only after 1955. As any other rules of autonomous law, the above-mentioned decisions of church bodies could have been effectively implemented only with the assistance of the state coercion enforcement apparatus – the courts and the police. The Serbian episcopacy bared their teeth knowing they really could bite. Growing confidence of the Assembly of Bishops clashing with the priesthood fighting for their rights might have been grounded on the new state and church collaboration and reasonable expectations stemming from it.

Subsequent developments indicate the same conclusion. During the 1960s, the Serbian Orthodox Church showed special consideration for state interests in resolving two big affairs. In 1963, the top of the Serbian Orthodox Church gave its active support to the state crackdown on

anticommunist Western emigration that escalated after Tito's official visit to the USA followed by mass protests led, *inter alia*, by Dionisije Milivojević, the Serbian Orthodox Bishop of North America. This provoked a serious schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church in the West and a later condemnation and dethronement of Bishop Dionisije by his colleagues at home. Only four years later, the Serbian Church faced its biggest challenge ever after the autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church had unilaterally declared its autocephaly. It was a shocking strike to the authority and integrity of the Serbian Church that generated only a mild bishops' reaction, however. If the Assembly of Bishops remained firm in its opposition to the Macedonian Church independence, it is interesting to note that the Church Court procedure against Macedonian "schismatics" had never resulted in their conviction or any other canonical epilogue. The issue remained pending for decades. Curiously, within the very same session of the Assembly of Bishops discussing Macedonian schism, two capital amendments to the 1947 Church Constitution had been passed as well: that concerning abolishment of electiveness of parish councils⁵⁹ and the one regarding debarment of priesthood from the Serbian Patriarch election procedure.⁶⁰ The debate over democratization of the Serbian Orthodox Church was over.

A sharp contrast to this Serbian Church evolution into an oligarchy, was the organization of the contemporary Macedonian Orthodox Church. With a doubtful foothold in canon law, its establishment must have been an attempt at gaining democratic legitimacy and popular support. Hence, all the way from its early 1945 drafts (Ilievski 2014) to its first Constitution of 1975, the normative framework of the Macedonian Orthodox Church clearly differentiated the episcopalian supreme authority in matters of religious teaching and liturgical issues, from administrative governance and financial control over parishes and dioceses delegated to church self-governing bodies – a series of elected assemblies and committees. The composition of the latter reflected a carefully balanced proportion of clergy, monks and lay members' representatives elected in full observance of secret ballot principles and with limited mandates.⁶¹ Moreover, Article 27 of the 1975 Macedonian Orthodox Church Constitution explicitly recognized the priests' right to associate into autonomous professional alliances that had distinctive institutional roles within the Church organization and governance.⁶² Nearly an echo of Priests' Alliance petitions and appeals, these provisions clearly illustrated that there had always been a democratic alternative for the Serbian Orthodox Church too.

The parallel drawn between a progressive rise of the bishops' internal power over the Serbian Church and their external assertiveness towards the government expectations is not the only indication of a peculiar and unconventional state-church relationship in the socialist Yugoslavia. Long before 1967, the Government turned a deaf ear to the Priests' Alliance call for help with the amendments on 1947 Church Constitution, leaving the priesthood – or at least its rebellious part – pretty much alone in the fight for their rights. By the late 1960s around 90 percent of public money reserved for the Serbian Orthodox Church was being paid to its governing body run by episcopacy.⁶³ Pushed to the sidelines, with less money and a fading influence,⁶⁴ the Alliance faced divisions and membership fatigue,⁶⁵ even more so after the 1968 Assembly of Bishops had prohibited appointment of the Alliance members to high positions in church administration.⁶⁶ The Alliance resisted for some more time, but at its 1974 Congress it was already only a shadow of what it used to be in the past.⁶⁷ By that time, its critique of Church hierarchy resonated as a hollow mantric incantation that produced no echo. Left to itself, the Alliance could only denounce the power of the episcopacy 'as a growing cancer that took control over the Serbian Orthodox Church'⁶⁸ and blame 'bishops that had never had such a power before socialism'.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Right after the Second World War, the Serbian Orthodox Church in socialist Yugoslavia acquired an autonomy from state interference that it had never enjoyed before. Privileged, yet surveilled throughout its long history, the Serbian Orthodox Church adopted its first Constitution all by itself

in 1947. Ever since then, the Church legislative and executive bodies have been passing interior regulations and running ecclesiastical affairs free of any government intervention. The separation between the State and the Church, proclaimed by the 1946 socialist Constitution, was not a dead letter but a living experience. However, the newly gained freedom was challenging as well. Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom were equally granted to all dissenting religious movements that tore into the body of the Church. In fact, the 1945 *Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations* provided for a legal existence of the earlier forbidden Priests' Alliance disputing episcopal supreme authority within the Church, while the 1953 *Statute on the Legal Status of Religious Communities* enabled official registration of separatist movements, such as the Macedonian one. In other words, the socialist secular state made the Church free, but subject to competition and extortion.

In subsequent years, the Serbian episcopacy proved skillful in an almost five-decades-long struggle for power within and control over the church. All from the mid-1950s, bishops were a reliable partner of the state that initially relied on ideologically compatible 'people's and progressive' clerics from the Alliance. A curious parallelism is worth disclosing: ready to lose some and to win some, Serbian bishops eventually started showing more consideration for the emancipation of the Macedonian national church, getting less government meddling with their own, internal church affairs in return. Without the prior state sponsorship, the influence of the Alliance declined before proliferation of autonomous church regulations boosting bishops' power to the detriment of priesthood autonomy. Thus, the liberalization of Yugoslav state during the 1960s – a hesitant affirmation of individual rights, its decentralization and market economy – coincided with a decreasing democracy within the Serbian Orthodox Church, progressively leaving behind its long tradition of elected parochial councils and Church-National Assemblies. The final outcome of this bishops' *Realpolitik* has been a present-day oligarchic organization of the Serbian Orthodox Church headed by its omnipotent episcopacy, leaving the priesthood and its lay members with barely any room in church self-governing. A parallel institutional development of the Macedonian Orthodox Church evolving towards internal democratization and self-governance involving its lay members in Church decision-making bodies, as well as the recognition of priests' autonomous rights, confirms, on the whole, that there had always been another way for the Serbian Orthodox Church framing too.

However, the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church was not a unique one. With some variations in tactics, the Yugoslav government applied the same strategy in order to establish sustainable influence on other religious organizations as well. Having less chance for reaching compromise with the Catholic high clergy, the Communists used the long-lasting division among the Catholic clergy in Bosnia and induced a creation of the government-friendly *The Good Shepherd Priests' Association* composed mostly of dissatisfied Bosnian Franciscans as traditional opponents to bishops' authority. On the other hand, the leaders of the Islamic Religious Community of Yugoslavia had been rewarded for their notorious cooperation with government assistance in their attempt to suppress independent dervish orders and *tekkes* – places of worship related to heterogenous forms of Islamic religious practice spread all over Yugoslavia. In both cases, the Socialist State counted on internal conflicts and autonomous religious regulations. It is only that in the case of the Islamic Community the socialist Government sponsored the mainstream against a dissenting minority, whereas in the case of the Catholic Church it was the other way round. The case of the Serbian Orthodox Church was a specific one inasmuch that it resembled the latter more at first, only to get progressively closer to the former, leaving the distinction between *cohabitation* and *collaboration* of an officially secular state with a supposedly unsubdued church confusing and obscure.

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Notes

- 1 Zakon o pravnom položaju vjerskih zajednica [Statute on legal status of religious communities], *Službeni list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 22/1953, pp. 209-210.
- 2 Although Mojzes was ready to admit that the 1953 Statute allowed the formation of new religious communities which number reached about fifty, he also thought that Yugoslav Communist Party simultaneously sharpened its ideological attacks against religion, so 'this was a classic case of taking away with one hand what was given with the other'. According to Stella Alexander, the law 'sowed the seeds of a slow – very slow – but nevertheless growing confidence in the possibility of obtaining justice under the law'.
- 3 Zakon o udruženjima, zborovima i drugim javnim skupovima [Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations], *Službeni list DFJ* [Official Gazette of DFY], No. 65/1945, pp. 635-637.
- 4 *Ibid*, Art. 16
- 5 *Ibid*, Art. 26. The later 1946 Amendment (Zakon o potvrdi i izmenama zakona o udruženjima, zborovima i drugim javnim skupovima [Law on Confirmation and Amendments of the Act on Civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations] *Službeni list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 51/1946 pp. 587-590) and of 1947 (Zakon o potvrdi i izmenama zakona o udruženjima, zborovima i drugim javnim skupovima [Law on Confirmation and Amendments of the Act on civil Associations, Assemblies and other Public Manifestations] *Službeni list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 27/1947, p. 329) reduced the penalty to a one-year prison sentence, but did not affect the core of the 1945 Act. This model was abandoned only two decades later, probably as a result of liberal reforms that the Yugoslav government implemented by passing the 1965 *Basic Law on Civil Associations* that removed the discretionary power of the police, (Osnovni zakon o udruženjima građana, *Službeni list SFRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 16/1965, pp. 732-734, Art. 13). After the constitutional reform of the early 1970s, this legislation shifted to the competence of the eight Yugoslav federated entities.
- 6 Archival sources explicitly testify on such an implementation of the 1945 Act, e.g., Archives of Yugoslavia (AY), Fund 144 – Savezna komisija za verska pitanja [the Federal Religious Affairs Commission], Folder 107, Unit 395/67 – Odgovor vojvođanskoj pokrajinskoj komisiji za verska pitanja [Reply to the Vojvodina Province Religious Affairs Commission], pp. 395/67. Despite of it, legal recognition of religious denominations on this basis was likely restrictive since all small and still unrecognized Protestants communities, such as Baptists or Adventists, were still treated as enemies of regime in 1952. AY, Fund 144, Folder 6, Unit – Izveštaj o neprijateljskom delovanju verskih sekti u Beogradu [Report on Hostile Activities of Religious Sects in Belgrade], 22 April 1952, pp. 6-105.
- 7 1953 Statute, Art. 8. The same legal status is reserved for the various management and organizational entities within religious communities themselves.
- 8 Apparently, the classification was made by the mainstream in the Yugoslav legal doctrine. It was grounded partly in court practice (especially the decision of Supreme State Arbitration, No. 371 of 1953, in *Zbirka odluka Glavne državne arbitraže*, Vol. VIII [Collection of decisions of Supreme State Arbitration Vol. VIII], p. 54), and partly on relevant legislation which relied on inconsistent use of terminology and, consequently, being susceptible to different interpretations (Stupar 1962, 77).
- 9 It seems that the Yugoslav legal doctrine was divided over the definition of a civil association. Since the assets of these entities were in private property of their members, most authors consider them a specific kind of legal persons under civil law. On the other hand, there were strong opinions in favor of their classification as social legal persons, claiming that the main

distinctive criterion should be whether a legal person had a recognized social purpose in a socialist society or not, regardless of its property regime (Vedriš 1971, 37; Vizner 1966, 106 and 107; or Klajn 1986, 112–113). Such a standpoint would have made the legal status of religious denominations as legal persons under civil law even more idiosyncratic and stigmatizing. This debate surpassed its purely academic significance: the social legal persons of the time were not framed by civil law, and their disputes were to be litigated before special, commercial courts and not before courts of general jurisdiction in civil matters.

- 10 An important court practice defined which church bodies could be considered as legal person more precisely (e.g., parishes) and which were only internal bodies of a church (e.g., a church board). For more on this jurisprudence see Finžgar (1967, 87, f. 62). A seminal case in this respect is that in the Yugoslav Supreme Court ruling of 21 November 1958 related to the legal status of religious fraternities, AY, Fund 144, Folder 36, Unit–Imovina bratovština u Dalmaciji [Property of Fraternities in Dalmatia], p. 158.
- 11 1953 Statute, Art. 2, Alinea 1. In its second Aline, the same Article stipulates: ‘All confessions enjoy equal rights and all religious communities have equal legal status’.
- 12 More precisely, this mode of declaration had never been explicitly provided by any law or bylaw. It was implicitly introduced by the practice of competent administrative bodies based on their interpretation of the 1953 Statute in line with the intentions of the lawmaker. Namely, the government report following the draft statute of 1953 stressed no need for any state authorization pertaining to the newly-established religious communities, 1954, *Šesto redovno zasedanje veća naroda i saveznog veća – stenografske beleške* [Proceedings of the 6th Session of the Federal National Assembly], pp. 48 and 49. Examples of these declarations are accessible in AY, Fund 144, Folder 35, Unit – Prijava Kristove pentekostalne crkve Saveznoj komisiji za verska pitanja [Christian Pentecostal Church Declaration to the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs], 12 March 1959, p. 56.
- 13 Закон о правном положају верских заједница [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службени гласник СР Србије* [Official Gazette of SR Serbia], No. 44/1977, pp. 2233–2236, Art. 7 and 8; Закон за правната положба за верските заједници [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службен весник на СРМ* [Official Gazette of SR Macedonia], No. 39/1977, pp. 860–862, Art. 8 and 9; Закон о правном положају вјерских заједница [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службени лист СР Црне Горе* [Official Gazette of SR Montenegro], No. 9/1977, pp. 102–104, Art. 2; Закон о правном положају верских заједница [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службени лист САП Косова* [Official Gazette of SAP Kosovo], No. 10/1977, pp. 255–257, Art. 4.
- 14 Закон о правном положају верских заједница [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службени лист САП Војводине* [Official Gazette of SAP Vojvodina], No. 18/1976, pp. 615–617, Art. 4 and 8; Закон о правном положају вјерских заједница [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities], *Службени лист Босне и Херцеговине* [Official Gazette of SR Bosnia and Herzegovina], No. 36/1976, pp. 1202–1204, Art. 2;
- 15 However, only Slovenia did it in an explicit way. Закон о правном положају верских skupnosti v Socialistični republiki Sloveniji [Statute on Legal Status of Religious Communities in Socialist Republic of Slovenia], *Uradni list SR Slovenije* [Official Gazette of SR Slovenia], No. 15/1976, pp. 794–796 and No. 42/1986, p. 2908, Art. 6 and 7. In fact, unlike most of Yugoslav federated states who adopted more formal procedure including rules on application content or some deadlines, Slovenian and Croatian statutes stayed silent and in such a way implicitly loosed any further formalities.
- 16 In her book, *Keeping Tito Afloat, The United States, Yugoslavia and the Cold War 1945–1960*, published in 1997, Lorraine M. Lees mentioned that, all the way from January 1950, the Yugoslav government had been facing religious freedom improvement requests, mostly due to activities of the Catholic lobby in the US Congress. Dragan Bogetić’s study *Yugoslavia and the Western World 1952–1955: Yugoslavia Approaching NATO*, confirmed that the Western political

- conditioning reached its peak in the early 1950s, but reported nothing on specific Western requirements related to affirmation of religious rights in return for the economic and military support received. According to Bogetić, the main focus of negotiations was on progressive accommodation and inclusion of Yugoslavia into the Western economic block.
- 17 *Šesto redovno zasedanje veća naroda i saveznog veća – stenografske beleške* [Proceedings of 6th Session of Federal National Assembly], pp. 86–103.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 38. Government report was presented by the ‘almighty’ Secret Service Chief and Minister of Interior Aleksandar Ranković who explicitly pointed out that ‘for the establishment of a religious community no previous permission of competent state authority is necessary’, *Ibid.*, pp. 48 and 49.
 - 19 Shortly after the occupation of Yugoslavia, most of Macedonia was occupied and annexed by the Tsardom of Bulgaria, so the Central Committee of Bulgarian Communist Party took measures to incorporate the Party Organization of Macedonia into the Bulgarian Party. This led to a disagreement between Bulgarian and Yugoslav Communists that was settled through an arbitrage of the Comintern, whose Executive Committee made a decision for the Party Organization in Macedonia to remain under the Communist Party of Yugoslavia ‘for reasons of practicality and appropriateness’. Odluka Kominterne od avgusta 1941 god. o kompetenciji CK KPJ za partijsku organizaciju Makedonije [Decision of the Comintern from the August of 1941 on Yugoslav Communist Party Central Committee Competence over the Macedonian Party Organization], in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda*, Vol. VII, p. 15.
 - 20 According to some specialists in the field, such as Sabrina Pedro Ramet, the independent national church was an important phase in the emancipation of Macedonian nation from the Bulgarians, rather than from Serbia (Ramet 1988, 313).
 - 21 From 1767 on, the Orthodox Church and the faithful of the region were under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. From the second half of the 19th century, this jurisdiction was disputed by the Bulgarian Exarchate, which invested serious efforts to push out the Greek and settle Bulgarian priests and schools in the region. As a result of the two Balkan Wars and the First World War, Macedonia become a part of the newborn Yugoslav Kingdom which successfully reclaimed the jurisdiction over the region from the Ecumenical Patriarch in favor of the Serbian Orthodox Church. During the Second World War, the region was divided between Bulgaria and Albania and the jurisdiction of their respective Orthodox Churches.
 - 22 Nevertheless, there was a strong collaboration between Communist resistance movement and the local priesthood dating back to October 1943 when the High Command of the Partisan Liberation Army in Macedonia ordered the formation of the Religious Affairs Bureau that had all priests and parishes in the region under its control (Ilievski 1973, 70).
 - 23 Most of Serbian bishops were struggling to accept the idea of a distinctive Macedonian nation that Serbian nationalists considered Southern Serbs. Nevertheless, there were some dissidents, such as bishop Dositej Stojković, who will become the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Irwin 2024). Besides, the Serbian Orthodox Church was facing similar challenges in Montenegro during the 1960s. For more details see Papović (2017, 209–270).
 - 24 There are some testimonies that this compromise was suggested in 1945 by the Delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church which, at the time, guaranteed the same scope of autonomy to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine by being placed under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchy (Živojinović 1998, 21 and 22). According to the same source, it seemed that the Serbian episcopacy started considering this sort of settlement seriously sometime around 1949 (Živojinović 1998, 123).
 - 25 This was not only a symbolic expression, but a political maneuver. As Doné Ilievski pointed out ‘by proclaiming the Serbian Patriarch as the highest authority in the Macedonian Church, the Assembly wanted not only to express openly its canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox

Church, but that through such unity it was united with all autocephalous Orthodox churches' (Ilievski 1973, 94). Besides, according to canonical rules, the investiture and consecration of any new Macedonian bishop could be performed only with the assistance of at least two other ordained bishops. Since the newly established Macedonian Church had only its archbishop, at the time, the problem could be solved only with the assistance of Serbian bishops. (Ilievski 1973, 98).

- 26 According to some authors, most of Bosnian Franciscans were blackmailed in order to agree to cooperate (Krišto 2014, 91).
- 27 As Vjekoslav Perica pointed out in his seminal book *Balkan Idols*, until 1989, the Islamic Religious Community of Yugoslavia, with its headquarters in Sarajevo, was notorious for its open and honest collaboration with the Party and the State due to the fact that its top leaders were all Partisan veterans dedicated to Tito's ideology of brotherhood and unity.
- 28 This model was abandoned as a result of broader liberal reforms that the Yugoslav government applies by passing the 1965 *Basic Law on Civil Associations* that removed the discretionary right of the police, Osnovni zakon o udruženjima građana, *Službeni list SFRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 16, pp. 732-734, Art. 13. The new Basic Law allowed remaining dervishes, mostly Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia, to establish the ZIDRA Organization (Zajednica islamskih derviških redova Alije) in 1974. On mixed relations with the 'later-period' Socialist State and ZIDRA dervishes see Novaković (2002, 103-115). On rising interest for mystic orders and their suspicious social influence, especially in Kosovo during the late 1980s see Jevtić (1987, 200-208) and Ukela (1988, 74-77).
- 29 More precisely: the Church of the Kingdom of Serbia, the Church of the Kingdom of Montenegro, the Patriarchy of Karlowitz, which was the jurisdictional center of the Orthodox in Southern Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia, the Orthodox Church in Dalmatia and the Orthodox Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina officially under the jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople.
- 30 Ustav Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve [Serbian Orthodox Church Constitution], in: 1933, *Crkveno zakonodavstvo Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, Vol. III [Church Legislation of Serbian Orthodox Church], Beograd, Izdavačka knjižarnica Gece Kona, pp. 19-123.
- 31 Similarly to this, Bulgarian Communists hoped to subvert the Orthodox Church with a left-wing League of Orthodox Priests of Bulgaria, so the Yugoslav experience was not a unique one. For more on this see Ramet (1987, 116-123).
- 32 Probably the most prominent Serbian Orthodox Priests were Vlado Zečević and Milan Smiljanić, both active members of Partisan Resistance. The former was a fierce opponent of ecclesiastical autocracy before the Second World War and became the first Minister of Interior of the Socialist Yugoslavia in 1945. The latter, a long-lasting President of the Priests' Alliance lost his son and two brothers, all three Partisan fighters, and was a member of the Serbian State Presidency from 1947 to 1953.
- 33 In fact, the Priests' Alliance was organized as a federation of national priests' associations established in all Yugoslav federated unites – the so-called republics (except Slovenia), with significant proportion of Orthodox population (These associations were founded in Montenegro in 1945, and in Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia in 1947). The Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church disapproved of such a federal structure of the Alliance and asked for its internal reorganization that would take into consideration the Church administrative boundaries among the dioceses (Radić 2002, 306).
- 34 Unlike mainstream religious press, *Vesnik* magazine grew an openminded profile by publishing reports and essays on various topics involving interconnection of faith and science and their mutual intellectual exchange, such as papers on confession and psychoanalysis, Christianity and technical civilization, a dialogue between Marxists and theologians, or reports on discoveries of gnostic evangelical texts such as the Gospel of Thomas. The Alliance members advocated for important reforms advancing the modern image of the Serbian Orthodox Church, such as laxist

- rules on wearing cassock in public or the liturgic use of contemporary Serbian language instead of the Old Church Slavonic incomprehensible to majority of the faithful attending church services.
- 35 E.g., articles such as Barović, M., 1952, Istinska služba narodnog sveštenika [On True Role of a People's Priest], *Vesnik*, No. 87, p. 1; Radeka, M., 1949, Zadaci i dužnosti narodnog sveštenstva u vreme izgradnje socijalizma [Tasks and Duties of People's Priesthood in Socialism Under Construction], *Vesnik*, No. 7, pp. 1-2; Štrbac, D., 1959, Udruženo pravoslavno sveštenstvo i naša stvarnost [The Orthodox Priests' Alliance and Our Reality], *Vesnik*, No. 251, p. 1; Trebješanin, R., 1956, Putem aktivizacije [On a Way of Action], *Vesnik*, No. 170, p. 1; R.N., 1957, Pred novim zadacima [Facing New Tasks], *Vesnik*, No. 186, pp. 1-2. Representative samples of a discourse praising priests as 'social workers' could be found in conference speeches of the Alliance high officials as well, AY, Fund 651 – Savez udruženog pravoslavnog sveštenstva Jugoslavije [Yugoslav Federal Alliance of Orthodox Priests], Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština [The 4th General Assembly], 20 February 1963, p. 60.
 - 36 Editorial board of *Vesnik* magazine explicitly asked for instructions from state and party officials in charge of religious affairs.
 - 37 From the very beginning, *Vesnik* magazine used to publish at least one article in Macedonian language per issue.
 - 38 'Orthodoxy in general, and especially Serbian Orthodoxy implies freedom of spirit and feelings, so per definition, it is far from any narrowness of mind, and especially far from such a narrow-mindedness as chauvinism', Radeka, M., 1967, Oprez, pažnja [Caution, Attention], *Vesnik*, No. 421, p. 5. Consequently, clericalism as an inadmissible political engagement of Church members was denounced, e.g., Radeka, M., 1968, Klerikalizam spoljašnji i unutrašnji [External and Internal Clericalism], *Vesnik*, No. 446 p. 5 or Editorial, 1968, Naš osnovni problem [Our Fundamental Problem], *Vesnik*, No. 458, p. 1 and No. 459, p. 1.
 - 39 There is abundance of highly ideological articles published in *Vesnik* magazine such as Lazarević, B., 1957, Duhovno jedinstvo naših Naroda [Spiritual Unity of Our Peoples], *Vesnik*, No. 197, p. 1; Bijeljac, K., 1959, Širenje bratstva i jedinstva – jedan od osnovnih zadataka udruženja [Spreading Brotherhood and Unity – one of the Main Tasks of the Alliance], *Vesnik*, No. 233-234, p. 5; Popovski, S., 1960, Pastirska uloga pravoslavnog sveštenika u razvijanju bratstva i jedinstva među našim narodima [A Shepherd's Role of an Orthodox Priest in Advancing Brotherhood and Unity Among Our Peoples], *Vesnik*, No. 259, p. 3 or reports on personal and historical ecumenical experience testifying in favor of religious compatibility with the idea of Yugoslav togetherness such as in Nedeljković, R., 1952, Svedok bratske ljubavi i verske tolerancije [A Witness of Brotherly Love and Religious Tolerance], *Vesnik*, No. 87, p. 2. Bugarin, M., 1967, Zajednički čas veronauke hrišćanske dece u selu Pačir [Christian Children Learning Catechism Together in the Village of Pacir], *Vesnik*, No. 431, p. 4; Roca, S., 1967, Tri primera verske snošljivosti [Three Examples of Religious Tolerance], *Vesnik*, No. 424, p.1, or Soč, 1956, O našoj verskoj toleranciji [On Our Religious Tolerance], *Vesnik*, No. 173, pp. 1-2. Traces of Brotherhood and Unity discourse as a mission of the Priests' Alliance could be found in samples of speeches given by the Alliance high officials as well, e.g., AY, Fund 651 – Savez udruženog pravoslavnog sveštenstva Jugoslavije [Yugoslav Federal Alliance of Orthodox Priests], Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština [The 4th General Assembly], 20 February 1963, p. 61.
 - 40 E.g., Anonymous Author, 1950, Kome ne ide u prilog da Srpska pravoslavna crkva nađe svoj pravi put [Who Does Not Want Serbian Orthodox Church to Find its Own Way], *Vesnik*, No. 29, p. 1.
 - 41 E.g., Kostić, Ž., 1949, Onima koji žele da našu veru stave u službu imperijalizma – kad episkop služi dolaru a ne Bogu i narodu – odgovor episkopu Nikolaju [To Those Who Want to Put Our Religion in Service of Imperialism – When a Bishop Serves the Dollar and Not God and its People – A Reply to Bishop Nikolai], *Vesnik*, No. 4-5, p. 3.

- 42 E.g., Anonymous Author, 1949, Osvrt na nenarodni rad episkopa Dionisija u SAD [A View of Bishop Dionysius Activities Going Against the People in the USA], *Vesnik*, No. 1, p. 2; Kostić, Ž., 1950, O nekim lažima preosvećenog Dionisija episkopa američko-kanadskog [Some of Lies Coming from Bishop Dionysius of America and Canada], *Vesnik*, No. 23, p. 4. In 1963, *Vesnik* magazine published a series of articles blaming bishop Dionisije Milivojević for leading a schismatic movement in Northern America emigration and acting against national interests of Yugoslavia such as Anonymous Author, 1963, Od lažnog bogomoljca do vladike raskolnika – Dionisijada [From False Piety to a Schismatic Bishop - Dionysiade], *Vesnik*, No. 339, p. 3; D.K., 1963, Pravda je spora ali dostižna [The Justice is Elusive but Attainable], *Vesnik*, No. 342, p. 2; or Anonymous Author, 1963, Raskolnik – Raspućin srpski – Dionisije [Schismatic – Serbian Rasputin - Dionysius], *Vesnik*, No. 351, p. 5.
- 43 AY, Fund 651, Folder 25, Unit – Drugi kongres, Izveštaj Komisije za crkveno-staleška pitanja [The 2nd Congress, Report of the Commission for Church-Class Issues], 1955, pp. 54-55 and 119-123.
- 44 There are plenty of newspaper articles on this issue, e.g., Ilić, M., 1955, Za izbornost i odgovornost [In Favor of Electiveness and Responsibility], *Vesnik*, No. 154, pp. 1-2; Ilkić, S., 1957, Princip sabornosti u našem crkvenom životu [The Principle of *Sabornost* in the Life of Our Church], *Vesnik*, No. 195, pp. 1-2; Ilić, M., 1950, Ustavna borba u SPC [Constitutional Polemics in the Serbian Orthodox Church], *Vesnik*, No. 25, p. 4 and No. 26, p. 4; Starović, B., 1951, Naš današnji crkveni ustav [Our Present Church Constitution], *Vesnik*, No. 63, p. 2. Many working papers from the Priests' Alliance meetings and conferences criticizing lack of democracy and the need for dispossession of bishops, such as: AY, Fund 651, Folder 26/II, Unit – Treći kongres, Izveštaj glavnog odbora, [The 3rd Congress, Report of the Governing Board], 24 and 25 September 1958, pp. 15-16. There were also those demanding active participation of priesthood and lay members in church legislative, executive and judicial bodies constituted on elective basis e.g., AY, Fund 651, Folder 26/II, Unit – Treća generalna skupština, Izlaganje njegovog preosveštenstva Milana Ilića o crkvenom zakonodavstvu sa pratećom diskusijom [The 3rd General Assembly, Presentation of Reverend Milan Ilić on Church Legislation with the Subsequent Discussion], 24 and 25 September 1958, pp. 18-19 and 30-32; AY, Fund 144, Folder 50, Unit – Primedbe Svešteničkog udruženja na Ustav SPC iz 1947 [The Priests' Alliance Remarks on the 1947 Church Constitution], 1960, p. 425. Accusation of bishops' absolutism that resemble the Roman Catholic Church organization and the National-Church Assemblies as an alternative approach were also tackled, e.g., AY, Fund 651, Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština, Komisija za crkveno zakonodavstvo [The 4th General Assembly, Commission for Church legislation], 20 February 1963, pp. 50-78.
- 45 E.g., Opančar, S., 1957, Kakva treba da bude crkvena opština [What Should a Church Parish Be Like], *Vesnik*, No. 187, p. 3; Novaković, R., 1957, Našoj crkvi potrebna je aktivna crkvena opština [Our Church Needs an Active Church Parish], *Vesnik*, No. 189, p. 2; or Editorial, 1968, Izbornost samoupravnih organa crkvene opštine [Electiveness of Parish Self-Governing Bodies], *Vesnik*, No. 451, pp. 1-2.
- 46 In 1967 and 1968, *Vesnik* magazine reprinted a long series of old newspaper articles on this issue going back to the late 19th century. The same line of argumentation was often emphasized in the Congress proceedings and documents such as: AY, Fund 651, Folder 26/II, Unit – Treća generalna skupština, Izlaganje njegovog preosveštenstva Milana Ilića o crkvenom zakonodavstvu sa pratećom diskusijom [The 3rd General Assembly, The Presentation of Reverend Milan Ilić on Church Legislation Followed by Discussion], 24 and 25 September 1958, pp. 9-18; as well as: AY, Fund 651, Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština, Komisija za crkveno zakonodavstvo [The 4th General Assembly, The Commission for Church Legislation], 20 February 1963, pp. 16-20.

- 47 Moreover, this was explicitly mentioned in the Alliance Congress discussion: AY, Fund 651, Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština, Komisija za crkveno zakonodavstvo [The 4th General Assembly, Commission for Church Legislation], 20 February 1963, pp. 66-67.
- 48 Nevertheless, self-management entered this discourse relatively late, at the very end of the 1960s. Its first mention is likely to be that in the article published in *Vesnik* magazine under the title Olbina, J., 1967, Shvatanje autoriteta i vlasti u crkvi kao preduslov dijaloga na relaciji episkopat sveštenik [Understanding of Authority and Government in the Church as a Precondition for a Dialog between Episcopacy and Priesthood], *Vesnik*, No. 464, p. 1, and Savić, A., 1969, Od razgovora do saradnje [From Conversation to Cooperation], *Vesnik*, No. 473, p. 1. Self-management was also evoked as a leading principle in elaboration of a new Statutory Act of the Alliance: AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Peta generalna skupština, Izveštaj Komisije za pravna i organizaciona pitanja, [The 5th General Assembly, Report of The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues], 24 September 1969, pp. 7/26 and 7/27.
- 49 A certain compromise was attempted at in 1955. The Priests' Alliance followed the instructions of the Assembly of Bishops and had amended its Statutory Act provisions on its internal organization with respect to the Church Constitution. Since the latter permitted only professional organizations of priests from the same diocese, these 1955 statutory amendments turned the Alliance into a federation of *diocesan*, i.e., regional associations. However, this accommodation was far from enough to satisfy the episcopacy since the modified organization did not reintroduce bishops' supervision over activities of such basic diocesan associations which went against the expectations of the episcopacy. For more on this: Tanasijević (1969, 43-44). It is noteworthy that *Vesnik* reports from that time did not consider these amendments as a concession to the episcopate (Slijepčević 2018b, 292).
- 50 Ustav Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve [Serbian Orthodox Church Constitution], *Glasnik - Službeni list SPC* [The Messenger – The Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], No. 6-7/1947, pp. 193-224. The contents of the Church Constitution passed into law in 1947 corresponded largely to the previous one of 1931, but unlike the latter, granted by the Yugoslav King, the former was an expression of an autonomous Serbian Orthodox Church legislation resulting from the separation of the State and the Church introduced by Art. 25 of the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution.
- 51 Uredba o parohijskom sveštenstvu i odluke Svetog Arhijerejskog Sabora ASbr. 74/zap. 57 iz 1952 [Holy Assembly of Bishops Decision Decree on Parish Priesthood] according to an Anonymous Author, 1957, Jedna odluka koja nije objavljena u Glasniku [A Decision that was not Published in the Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], *Vesnik*, No. 199, p. 3.
- 52 The immutability of priest was guaranteed by Art. 164 of the 1931 Church Constitution, and confirmed by Art. 172 of 1947 Church Constitution as a right of priest to be removed or replaced only on its own initiative or on the basis of the Church court ruling, in both cases without losing sacerdotal rank. However, the principle was seriously endangered by the Assembly of Bishops abovementioned 1952 decree that did not guarantee immutability to the priest who had been already removed once before. The decree was justified by difficulties Church faced in aftermath of Second World War related to shortage in available human resource (Tanasijević 1969, 61-63).
- 53 The given decision had never been published in Official Gazette of the Serbian Orthodox Church and it was *Vesnik* magazine that printed a copy that circulated in church administration, Anonymous Author, 1957, Jedna odluka koja nije objavljena u Glasniku [A Decision that was not Published in Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], *Vesnik*, No. 199, p. 3.
- 54 Odluka Svetog Arhijerejskog Sabora ASbr. 29/zap. 39 iz 1961 [Holy Assembly of Bishops Decision], *Glasnik - Službeni list SPC* [The Messenger – The Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], No. 6/1961, p. 146. Shortly before the Assembly of Bishops annual session of 1961, the Priests' Alliance sent a highly critical letter demanding the abolishment of 1952 decree. The letter was published in a form of an unsigned article titled as: O radu Svetog arhijerejskog sabora [About the Work of the Holy Assembly of Bishops], *Vesnik*, No. 286, pp 1-2.

- 55 AY, Fund 651, Folder 25, Unit – Drugi kongres, Izveštaj komisije za Crkveno-staleška pitanja [The 2nd Congress, Report of The Commission for Church-Class Issues], 1955, pp. 54-55 and pp. 129-131.
- 56 Krivična pravila Srpske pravoslavne crkve [Penal Code of Serbian Orthodox Church], *Glasnik - Službeni list SPC* [The Messenger – The Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], No. 6/1961, pp. 148-157.
- 57 All through 1961 and 1962, *Vesnik* magazine was publishing critical and polemic articles on Church Penal legislation. These are only some of more representative texts: Smiljanić, M., 1961, Osvrt na krivična pravila SPC [A View on Church Penal Code], *Vesnik*, No. 290, p. 3; Jerej M., 1961, Još jedan osvrt na krivična pravila SPC [A View More on Church Penal Code], *Vesnik*, No. 292, p. 3; Reverend J.P., 1961, Hrišćanski pogled na crkvena krivična pravila [Christian Remarks to Church Penal Code], *Vesnik*, No. 293, p. 3; Radeka, M., 1961, Pravila i život [Code and Life], *Vesnik*, No. 297, p. 3; Štrabac, D., 1961, O crkvenom zakonodavstvu na stranicama Vesnika [On Church Legislation in Vesnik reports], *Vesnik*, No. 300, p. 6; Anonymous Author, 1962, Susret života i crkvenih pravila [Encounter of Life and Church Code], *Vesnik*, No. 307, p. 3; The Priests' Alliance Adress to the Assembly of Bishops, 1962, Povodom krivičnih pravila SPC [On Church Penal Code], *Vesnik*, No. 311, p. 3; Anonymous Author, 1962, Načelo legaliteta prema krivičnim pravilima SPC [On Legality of Serbian Orthodox Church Penal Code], *Vesnik*, No. 324, pp. 1-2. The Church Penal Code was heavily criticized at the 4th General assembly of the Alliance as well. In reports and discussions, the Code was denounced as imposed, disgraceful and humiliating for priest's dignity and as a setback to open communication between priests and their bishops, e.g., AY, Fund 651, Folder 26, Unit – Četvrta generalna skupština [the 4th General Assembly], 20 February 1963, pp. 58, 82, 135, 146, 158 and 205.
- 58 However, it is also true this turning point came only after the deaths of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in 1956, and Bishop Josif Cvijović in 1957, as the main opponents to any agreement going in such a direction. Passing away of these bishops coincided with enthronement of Patriarch German Đorić in 1958, so the change in church-state relations could also have been a consequence of generational shift within Serbian Orthodox Church leadership.
- 59 Odluka Svetog Arhijerejskog Sabora ASBr. 52/zap. 9 iz 1967 [Holy Assembly of Bishops Decision], *Glasnik - Službeni list SPC* [The Messenger – The Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], No. 10, p. 220. By this decision the whole chapter of the 1947 Church Constitution on electiveness of parochial councils was suspended *en bloc*. Henceforward the members of parochial councils would be appointed directly by diocesan councils presided by bishops.
- 60 Odluka Svetog Arhijerejskog Sabora ASBr. 51/zap. 8 iz 1967 [Holy Assembly of Bishops Decision], *Glasnik - Službeni list SPC* [The Messenger – The Serbian Orthodox Church Official Gazette], No. 10, p. 220. The election of Patriarch was relegated to the Assembly of Bishops by amendments on article 42 and 43 and by abrogation of articles from 44 to 50 (including Art. 52, Alinea 1) of the 1947 Church Constitution that granted electoral rights to other clerics or lay members of the church. Before these amendments Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church was passed into law by the Electoral College that was supposed to decide among three candidates chosen by the Assembly of Bishops. The Electoral College were composed foremost of bishops, but also included representatives of monasteries, seminary schools, the Belgrade theology academy, priesthood association, etc. According to some reports, the president of the Priests' Alliance in a capacity of elector had a decisive role in voting and lobing for politically suitable candidates during 1950 and 1958 elections, e.g., AY, Fund 651, Folder 29, Unit – Sednice Glavnog odbora udruženja sveštenika tom I 1949-1951 [The Alliance Main Board Sessions, Vol. I 1949-1951].
- 61 Ustav na Makedonskata pravoslavna crkva [The Constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church], Izdanje na Svetiot arhierejski sinod na Makedonskata pravoslavna crkva, Skopje, 1975. E.g., Articles 73-75 stipulated that the supreme body of Macedonian Church, the Church-National Assembly was composed of the Macedonian high clergy – the archbishop and the

- bishops – and seven elected delegates per diocese, two of which were members of clergy, one representative of monasteries, three representatives of lay members and one representative of the Priests' Alliance.
- 62 The 1975 Macedonian Church Constitution, Article 66, Alinea 44, stipulated that the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church had to discuss priesthood issues in partnership with the Priest Alliance. The latter had its own representatives in all church self-governing bodies.
- 63 More precisely, in 1967, Serbian Orthodox Church received some 1 400 000 dinars from Yugoslav Government. The same year, the latter paid less the tenth of this sum (almost 120 000 dinars) as a regular public subsidy reserved for the Alliance members. AY, Fund 144, Folder 107, Unit – Budžet Komisije za 1967 [Commission Budget of 1967], p. 330/67.
- 64 Besides, members of the Priests' Alliance as a Federal and Yugoslav labeled association must have been affected by constitutional transformation of Yugoslavia into confederation in the early 1970's. As Klaus Buchenau has already noticed: 'If Serbian clerics really identified with Yugoslavia, it wasn't the country that was shaped in the 1960s and after. The more federal Yugoslavia became, the less the clergy identified with it, and even if sympathies continued, they were partly built on the illusion that nothing had changed since the 1950s and that all internal borders were of a purely administrative nature' (Buchenau 2005, 557).
- 65 It is noteworthy that some participants of the 5th Congress of The Priests' Alliance, as it was Reverend Stevan Opančar hardly advocated bishops' supreme power and episcopalian character of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, according to Congress proceedings, his speech was received by a loud applause and vocal approval coming from the audience. According to same source, at that time, at least half of all participants of the Congress consulted their bishops before any vote. AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Peta generalna skupština, Izveštaj Komisije za pravna i organizaciona pitanja [5th General Assembly, Report of The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues], 24 September 1969, pp. 16/3 and 17/5.
- 66 Odluka Svetog Arhijerejskog Sabora ASbr. 25/zap. 48 iz 1968 [Holy Assembly of Bishops Decision], according to Petrović, M., 1968, Čudna odluka [A strange decision], *Vesnik*, No. 460-461, p. 1. The Decree targeted members of any priest associations working without the Assembly of Bishops blessing, which *de facto* considered directly the Priests' Alliance members. This decision had never been duly published in *Official Gazette of Serbian Orthodox Church*, and it became known to broader public only through *Vesnik* magazine reporting that disapproved of Bishops' manner to operate in secrecy and keep its decision strictly confidential.
- 67 At the 6th Congress, the critical report on legal and organizational issues did not contain any recommendations or action plans. AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Šesta generalna skupština, Izveštaj Komisije za pravna i organizaciona pitanja [6th General Assembly, Report of The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues], 24 October 1974. At the 7th and 8th Congresses taking place, respectively in 1979 and in 1984, a few brief reports were presented with no following discussions. AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Sedma generalna skupština, Izveštaj glavnog odbora [7th General Assembly, Report of Main Board], 26 November 1979 and AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Osma generalna skupština, Izveštaj Komisije za pravna i organizaciona pitanja [8th General Assembly, Report of The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues], 27 November 1984.
- 68 AY, Fund 651, Folder 27, Unit – Peta generalna skupština, Komisija za organizaciono-pravna pitanja – Diskusija [5th General Assembly, The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues – Discussion], 24 September 1969, p. 6/3.
- 69 AY, Fund 651, Folder 27 – Peta generalna skupština, Izveštaj komisije za pravna i organizaciona pitanja [5th General Assembly, Report of The Commission for Legal and Organizational Issues], 24 September 1969, pp. 6/3 and 8/3.

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