

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Cold War

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The recently published reports of the "Commission for the Opening of State Police Files" regarding the agent activities of church dignitaries have triggered an intensive debate among the Bulgarian public about the role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church during the Cold War. The large-scale opening of the archives gives us better insights into the history of the Church during the Cold War.

The Cold War experience of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) was a taboo for scholars under communist rule. The study of the church was triggered by the fall of Todor Zhivkov. It allowed a decodification of the Communist Party's archives that provided detailed information about its religious policy, especially during the Stalinist period (1944-1953). It also benefited from the rich collection of documents of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church kept in the Central State Archive. Their study pointed to the victimhood of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the beginning of communist rule (Kalkandjieva 1997). The discovery of some facts about the Church's development in the 1970s and the 1980s, however, revealed a different picture: it acted as a collaborator of the totalitarian state. How did this happen?

The answer to this question is hidden in the Cold War archives, Bulgarian and foreign ones. In this regard some progress was made in recent years, when scholars obtained broader access to the files of the Committee of Religious Denominations, which were kept in the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact they became the major source of a recently published study on the Bulgarian Orthodox Church during the totalitarian rule (Metodiev, 2010). Thanks to the process of democratization an enormous part of the the communist State Security archives was also declassified. Not less important are the files of the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church

(CAROC) in the former Soviet archives that shed additional light on the Cold War in the religious sphere. (Volokitina 2008, pp. 160-214) All this allowed a more systematic study of Bulgarian church history after Stalin's death.

In the light of the above described situation this article will take on the modest task of summarizing the existing studies on the subject. On their grounds two main stages in the development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church during the Cold War can be distinguished: domestic and international. The first of them was characterized by the Church's subjection to the communist state and its involvement in the orbit of the Moscow Patriarchate (Kalkandjieva 2010). Meanwhile, the second was marked by the BOC's membership in international organizations and activities in the areas outside the socialist camp (Metodiev 2010, pp. 345-375).

The Conditions

The Cold War destiny of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was conditioned by political factors such as the establishment of Soviet military control over Bulgaria and the key positions in the Fatherland Front government taken by the local communist leaders on 9 September 1944. Still there are important ecclesiological aspects that are often neglected. One of them was the BOC's peculiar status by the end of World War II. On the one hand, it

was a schismatic body and thus was unable to enter in communion of prayer and liturgy with the then existing canonical Orthodox churches. On the other hand, the isolation was partly overcome by the BOC's participation in the interwar ecumenical movements. In this way, the Bulgarian Orthodox hierarchy received moral and material support from many Western European Protestant churches as well as from Orthodox ones, e.g. the Serbian and the Romanian patriarchates supplied it with the holy oil necessary for its sacraments. In February 1945, the BOC succeeded in solving its most serious ecclesiastical problem – the schism which the Patriarchate of Constantinople had declared in 1872 was finally abolished (Kalkandjieva 1997, pp. 39-54). This new canonical status, however, determined the Cold War fate of the Bulgarian Church.

The declassified communist archives revealed important details about this act and its aims. The schism was not only a canonical problem for Orthodoxy, but also a serious obstacle for postwar politics. The first difficulty stemmed from the location of the headquarters of the Bulgarian Exarchate in Istanbul, i.e. next to those of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, while the second concerned the exercise of its jurisdiction over eparchies that remained outside the Bulgarian state territory, namely in Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia. This situation complicated the Allies' plan for dividing the postwar Balkans into zones of influence. It also impeded the realization of Stalin's idea of transforming the Moscow Patriarchate into an "Orthodox Vatican" (Shkarovskii 1999, p. 285) because no canonical Orthodox Church was able to enter in canonical communication with the schismatic Bulgarians. Therefore, the Kremlin used its military representatives in Sofia to mediate unofficial negotiations between the Russian and Bulgarian churches about the

abolishment of the schism. As a result, on 21 January 1945, when Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia was elected as the Exarch of Bulgaria, his Synod decided to move the BOC's headquarters from Istanbul to Sofia. In this way, the Orthodox Bulgarians observed the canonical regulations on Istanbul as a city reserved for the see of the Patriarch of Constantinople. They also asked the latter to abolish the schism but there was no answer until the intervention of the newly elected Patriarch of Moscow, Alexii.

On 7 February, he persuaded the heads and representatives of the patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem who attended his elections to sign an agreement about the conditions that had to be fulfilled by the Bulgarian Exarchate in order for the schism over it to be abolished. According to them, its hierarchy had to apologize to the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the unwarranted schism, to accept the subjection of the Bulgarian clergy in Turkey to Constantinople jurisdiction, and to restrict the territorial jurisdiction of the Synod in Sofia within the postwar borders of Bulgaria. In case of their fulfillment, the document also foresaw the grant of full autocephaly to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (GARF, f. 6991, op. 1, d. 16). Finally, on 22 February 1945, the Patriarchate of Constantinople abolished the schism by proclaiming the Bulgarian Exarchate as a canonical autocephalous Orthodox Church with a territorial jurisdiction fixed within the Bulgarian borders. This solution of the gravest ecclesiological problem of the Orthodox Bulgarians, however, exempted their Church from the control of such Orthodox powers as the Patriarchate of Constantinople and facilitated its involvement in the orbit of postwar Soviet politics. Nevertheless, until the Paris Peace Treaty (10 February 1947) when the sovereignty of Bulgaria was guaranteed, the Bulgarian

Synod successfully resisted the pressure from the Moscow Patriarchate as well as the local communist authorities to take an anti-western stand and particularly its efforts to interrupt its contacts with the ecumenical movement. This balanced position was broken in the summer of 1948 when a Bulgarian church delegation took part in the Moscow Pan-Orthodox conference. This event became a turning point that bound the Bulgarian church leadership with the Cold War politics of the Soviet Union and the Bulgarian Communist Party (Kalkandjieva 2010).

THE COLD WAR AND THE BOC: DOMESTIC STAGE (1948-1961)

The effect of the Cold War on the Bulgarian Orthodox Church between 1948 and 1961 was a function of the consolidation of communist power in the country as well as within the socialist camp under Moscow's guidance. Initially the Fatherland Front government avoided direct anti-religious attacks. Its measures seemed justifiable from the point of view of the common struggle against fascism, i.e. the trial of some Orthodox clerics by the People's Court (1944-1945), or of a democratization of society by the means of its secularization that reminded the French *laïcité*, e.g. the separation of church and state, secularization of church lands or the replacement of church wedding with civil marriage. In 1948, however, the Bulgarian Communist Party stopped hiding its ambition for establishing political monopoly in the country and for building an atheist society. With the help of the Kremlin, it secured the participation of a Bulgarian church delegation in the Moscow Pan-Orthodox Conference (8-18 July 1948), whose resolutions against the Vatican and ecumenism brought the polariza-

tion of the Cold War to the Christian world. In this regard, it is important to mention that their texts as well as those of the other documents and papers presented and adopted by this forum were approved in advance by the Soviet party leaders (Kalkandjieva 2004, pp. 355-384). At the same time, the CAROC took measures on the spot to secure the signatures of all heads of the Orthodox churches from the so-called people's democracies, including Exarch Stefan – one of the founders of the ecumenical movement. During the conference he was also announced as the author of one of the concluding documents of the Moscow Pan-Orthodox Conference – its "Appeal to All Christians." The recently declassified archival documents, however, reveal that every detail of that forum has been preliminary discussed and approved by the Kremlin. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that the Soviets allowed the Bulgarian Exarch to draw up the discussed appeal alone. In 1948, however, they had full control of information and succeeded in their efforts to discredit this hierarch in the eyes of his western friends. In this way, Stefan's future attempts to join the World Council of Churches were blocked. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian communist authorities organized a Synodal coup against him (Kalkandjieva 1997, pp. 210-241). As a result, on 8 September, on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the communist overthrow in Bulgaria, the Synod removed Stefan from his office as Exarch of Bulgaria and Metropolitan of Sofia. Two days later this act was approved by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. On 17 September 1948, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers issued a decree that confirmed Stefan's overthrow and recommended the Sofia Synod to start negotiations with the patriarchates of Moscow and Con-

stantinople for the restoration of the ancient patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. This initiative was justified as a necessary countermeasure in the fight for “democratic Orthodoxy” with the religious allies of western imperialists – the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (TsDA, f 1466, op. 5, a.e. 605).

The church interregnum (1948-1953) was used by the Bulgarian communists to select a hierarch who would accept the new rules of state-church relations, including a new BOC’s Statute drawn by the state officials. He also had to observe the Moscow line in the religious sphere. In this regard, they consulted their decision with the CAROC. The Moscow Patriarchate also played a role in this process (GARF, f. 6991, op.1, d. 988). It highly appreciated the active stance of Metropolitan Kiril of Plovdiv in favor of the church peace movement initiated by the Russian Orthodox Church. Within the Bulgarian Church his promotion was resisted by many metropolitans, but had the support of the Union of Orthodox Priests whose leadership was dominated by the Communist Party’s members. In parallel the Bulgarian State Security began to recruit its first agents among the Orthodox clergy and church officials. It is interesting that the nomination of the candidates for the Bulgarian patriarchal throne, held in the Synodal Palace in Sofia on 10 May 1953, was also attended by the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate that had arrived in Bulgaria for this event (GARF, f. 6991, op. 1, d. 1101). In this way, all undesired developments were prevented and despite some internal resistance Metropolitan Kiril became Patriarch of Bulgaria.

His elections were followed by an official declaration about the restoration of the Bulgarian patriarchal dignity that had been lost during the Ottoman conquest in the end of the

fourteenth century. This act, however, was rejected by the Orthodox churches on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The Patriarch of Constantinople accused the Bulgarian Church of “deviating from the existing canonical and ecclesiastical order to arbitrarily ascribe to itself patriarchal dignity and honor” and breaking the promise made during the abolishment of the schism to ask the blessing of the Patriarchate of Constantinople – the mother-church of Orthodox Bulgarians before initiating any elevation to patriarchal dignity (Kalkandjeva, 1994). As a result, the patriarchal status of the Bulgarian Church was recognized only by the Orthodox churches in the Soviet bloc as well as by the Patriarchate of Antioch. This new isolation well served the Kremlin’s plan for the incorporation of the BOC’s into the Soviet orbit and enhancing the influence of the Russian church leadership over the Bulgarian one. The situation changed in 1961, when Khrushchev’s detente brought relaxation in the religious sphere. Hence, the Bulgarian Patriarchate was recognized by the churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Greece and Cyprus.

Meanwhile, the initial rigorousness of the Cold War left its imprint on the domestic development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Despite the 1951 Statute that preserved the Synod as a collegial body of church government, it was de facto suspended by the communist authorities who secured an unofficial monocacy of Patriarch Kiril. Meanwhile, they used the state security agents in the Church to prevent the establishment of stable alliances between the synodal members (Metodiev, 2010). Despite these efforts, it turned out that the BOC’s collaboration with the communist regime had certain limits. The initial reading of documents of the declassified archives of the communist state security services points

that even the most loyal Orthodox hierarchs were not able to grasp the socialist understanding of “freedom of religion.” Their obedience to the Party’s orders did not block their efforts to rescue the parochial life and care of clerics thrown in jail by the communist state. The reason for this behavior was rooted in the upbringing of this generation of Bulgarian metropolitans whose religious and world views were shaped before 1944. Therefore, the State Security preferred to control rather to re-educate them. At the same time, it concentrated its efforts on the preparation of the next cohort of Bulgarian bishops. In this regard, the totalitarian government faced a serious difficulty: it was not able to intervene directly in the production of new Orthodox bishops because their consecration was a sacrament and only canonical bishops were able to do it. Therefore, the State Security had to elaborate special methodology able to control the pre-selection of the potential bishops. Much easier were the elections of metropolitans or patriarchs where the non-sacramental nature of these acts and the participation of civil people allowed a direct intervention of the communist state.

THE COLD WAR AND THE BOC: INTERNATIONAL STAGE (1961-1989)

The study of the international stage of the BOC’s Cold War development is still in its very early stages. In January 2012, the declassification of documents previously kept in the Archives of the Ministry of Interior revealed that 11 of the 15 current metropolitans of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church collaborated with the communist State Security. Some earlier investigations in the same archive indicate that by 1989 almost all Synodal members were agents. This discovery provoked acute debates in Bulgarian society and inspired new research on

this issue. By this moment, the existing publications allow some preliminary conclusions to be made that are subject of further investigation and precision.

In ecclesiastical terms, the 1961 recognition of the BOC’s patriarchal dignity by all canonical Orthodox churches facilitated its activation on the international scene. At the same time, the newly accessible archival sources indicate that the State Security received the task to prepare Orthodox clerics and lay activists for work abroad in the late 1950s. Generally, these foreign activities of the Bulgarian Church were channeled in two main directions that can be defined as ideological and national.

The ideological direction concerned the restoration of the BOC’s ecumenical activities by joining the World Council of Churches (WCC) and participating in such organizations as the Christian Peace Conference and the Conference of European Churches (Metodiev, 2010). Within their framework it had to assist the efforts of the Moscow Patriarchate to prevent the attacks of Western Christianity against the persecution of religion in the socialist countries. These memberships were also used for the aims of the propaganda of socialism and the fight against socio-economic inequalities, especially in the Third World countries. Not less important was the BOC’s contribution to the relaxation in the military sphere. As in the pre-communist period many Bulgarian hierarchs considered ecumenism as incompatible with true Orthodox Christianity and thus resisted the BOC’s participation in the WCC. Similar tensions appeared in 1965 when the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sent its observer to the Second Vatican Council. Such international contacts, however, were important for the communist rulers as they assisted the communication of the socialist Orthodox

churches with those on the other side of the Iron Curtain. At the same time, the Bulgarian Synod also benefited from these contacts, especially from those with the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Greek Orthodox Church. Thanks to them, it restored communications with the Bulgarian monastery in Mount Athos after its interruption in 1947 when several Russian and Bulgarian monks were tried in Thessaloniki. The restored intra-Orthodox dialogue facilitated the discussion of some ecclesiological problems within the framework of the Rhodes Orthodox conferences (1961-1964) and the later Inter-Orthodox meetings at Chambésy, Switzerland (1968-1986) (Metodiev 2010, pp. 384-387; Eldarov 2002, pp. 74-81).

The BOC's national activities abroad reflect one of the most specific features of the Eastern European Orthodox churches – their link with a particular nation, state, history and culture. This specificity resulted in intertwined devotion to Orthodoxy in general and to a particular nation among the representatives of one or another such Church. Therefore, some Bulgarian Orthodox hierarchs used to perceive their collaboration with the atheist regime on the international scene not so much as an ideological task, but rather as a fulfillment of their patriotic duties, i.e. to keep the national identity of Bulgarian emigrants by means of the BOC's eparchies and parishes abroad. It is interesting that this tendency was stronger in the United States than in Australia (Metodiev 2010, pp. 399-491). To a great degree it was result of the greater number of Bulgarian émigrés in the former, as well as their longer traditions and better organization. In the case of the Bulgarian eparchy in America, the BOC's collaboration with the communist government was also motivated by the specific interest of this religious institution in restor-

ing property rights over the local temples and buildings of the Bulgarian church communities that had been under the jurisdiction of Sofia Synod before the Cold War.

In this respect, the situation in Western Europe was quite different as the BOC had neither permanent émigré structures nor such properties before World War II. Therefore, the Sofia Synod developed a special policy for Europe. It made use of the parishes established by Bulgarian gardeners in interwar Hungary. In the late 1979, Patriarch Maxim sent Bishop Simeon as his vicar to Budapest. This hierarch had an important advantage: as a vicar of the Bulgarian Metropolitan in America he obtained US citizenship that allowed him to travel freely across Europe (Metodiev 2010, pp. 492-501). It facilitated his efforts to establish Bulgarian churches mostly in capital cities that attracted many Bulgarian émigrés. In comparison with the USA, however, this process was a more diplomatic than religious enterprise as it needed separate negotiations with each European government in accordance with its legislation. As a result, about a dozen parishes were created in Western Europe. In 1986 they were united in one Western European Eparchy of the Bulgarian Patriarchate.

In this way, the BOC not only restored its pre-1945 jurisdiction but expanded it over new areas, namely Australia and Western Europe. In turn, the communist state received an opportunity to exercise more effective control over its opponents among the Bulgarian émigrés. The collapse of communism shook this church-state collaboration on the international scene, but did it close the Cold War page in the development of the BOC?

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GARF, f. 6991, o. 1, d. 1101, pp. 83-85 - Recorded conversation of the Chairman of the Council of the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, G. Karpov, with Moscow Patriarchate's delegates who attended the elections of Metropolitan Kiril as Patriarch of Bulgaria, 19 May 1953.

ARCHIVES CONTAINING MATERIALS ON THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

- Архив на Комисията за разкриване на документите и за обявяване на принадлежност на български граждани към Държавна сигурност и разузнавателните служби на Българската народна армия [Archive of the Committee for disclosing the documents and announcing the affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security and intelligence services of the Bulgarian National Army]
- Централен държавен архив [Central State Archive]
- Архив на Министерство на Външните работи [Archive of the Ministry of For-

eign Affairs]

- Църковно-исторически и архивен институт [the Church, Historical and Archival Institute of the Bulgarian Patriarchate]

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The Turkish minority in Bulgaria

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The Turks constitute the largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria. The Turkish minority is well represented in politics and public administration, but it only marginally takes part in social and economic life in Bulgaria. In the public perception of the ethnic Bulgarians negative attitudes towards "the Turks" and Islam prevail, which can be traced back to the Ottoman era.

According to the results of the last census in 2011, there are 588,318 ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria. This corresponds with 8.8 % of the entire population. However, the significance of Turkish population in Bulgaria should be measured not only by its size, but also by its important role in the political, economic and cultural relationships between Bulgaria and Turkey.

The ethnic Turks primarily inhabit the regions in the North-East and South-East of Bulgaria. The latter directly borders Turkey. Until 1989 this area was very significant: in geopolitical terms it formed not only the international border between Bulgaria and Turkey, but also the border between two socio-economic and political systems: Until 1989 Bulgaria be-