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CHURCH AND STATE IN MONTENEGRO

FROM THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TO THE CHURCH OF SERBIA

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Abstract

The paper deals with the role of religion and the church in the post-socialist transformations of society in Montenegro, focusing on the period from the 1990s to 2022. The goal of the paper is to present the historical and sociological (non-)cooperation between the church and the state in Montenegro and their reflection on social circumstances. According to sociological expertise, secularization and atheization of the society carried out by the then political regime and aligned with Marxist reflections on religion were in force until the 1990s. Subsequently, a period of desecularization of society and revitalization of religion and religiosity followed. Accordingly, the role of the church and religion in this republic has also changed. Namely, there is an increased role of the church in the socio-political circumstances in Montenegro. The church's role and its reflection on socio-political reality is analyzed through three historical determinants: the period from 1990 to 1998, marked by a symphony of cooperation between the church and the state. Then follows the period from 1998 to 2008, when cooperation is observed with a dose of caution, and, finally, the period from 2008 to 2021, which is marked by the cooling of church-state relations, which culminated in the Law on Freedom of Religion as an essential point of disagreement between the church and the then state policy and the ruling political establishment.

Keywords: religion, church, policy, secularization, desecularization, socialism, Montenegro.

Introduction

There has long been a debate in the sociology of religion about the concept of secularization and its cause. Among the many theorists of secularization, there is no agreement on what secularization is and what we might identify as the main causes of secularization. Theoretical

discussions range from Bryan Wilson,¹ who believes that secularization is the withdrawal of religion from the social sphere and finds the causes of secularization in the modernization and urbanization of society, to Luckmann,² who finds the causes of secularization and the withdrawal of religion in the privatization of religion and religious belief.

Bearing in mind the reflections of these two distinguished religious scholars, we believe that secularization in Montenegro should also be viewed in that context. Namely, since the end of the Second World War, the secularization of society has been in force in Montenegro. The causes of that secularization should be sought, of course, in all aspects that have been detected by numerous sociologists of religion as factors of weakening of religion and religiosity. However, the causes of secularization in all socialist social orders should also be sought in the atheization of society conducted by the then political establishment. Therefore, the weakening of religiosity and the marginalization of the church were encouraged by systematically conducted and imposed atheism in Montenegro. Since this has traditionally been a dominantly Orthodox area, it should be emphasized that Orthodox Church in Montenegro was materially exhausted and without personnel, therefore demonopolized. In accordance with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which was still present in the post-war Montenegrin society, religion is perceived as a form of human alienation, or an “the opium of the people.” Considering this influence, it is not difficult to guess the treatment of all religions in the socialist social order. The administration, loyal to the then political establishment, mainly hindered and obstructed religious ceremonies and the celebration of religious holidays.³ The attitude of the then regime towards the Serbian Orthodox Church should be sought in some historical memories; the regime believed that the existing intolerance in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia would subside by neutralizing religious feelings.⁴ On the other hand, there are opinions that such treatment of the church by the socialist regime should also be sought in the internal weaknesses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, loyalty to the regime, schism

¹ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*, London C.A. Watts; 1966. Vilson, Brajan (2005): *Novi likovi hrišćanske zajednice*, u: Makmaners, Dž., *Oksfordska istorija hrišćanstva*, Beograd: CLIO.

² Tomas Lukman, (1994): *Sekularizacija – moderan mit*, u: Ćorņević, B. D. *Povratak svetog*, Niš: Gradina.

³ Vladimir Bakrač, (2013): *Religija i mladi – religioznost mladih u Crnoj Gori*, Podgorica – Beograd, Miba book.

⁴ Mirko Blagojević, (2005): *Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva*, Beograd: Filip Višnjjić.; Mirko Blagojević, (2008): “Religiozna Evropa, Rusija i Srbija juče i danas argumenti empirijske evidencije: slučaj Evropa,” *Filozofija i društvo*, Vol. 19. No.3. pp. 275-294.

within the church, etc.⁵ The very rigid attitude of the socialist regime towards religion⁶ lasted until the beginning of the 1970s. In the mid-seventies, however there was a certain relaxation of the political attitude towards religion and the church.⁷

Although not overly extensive, empirical evidence testifies to secularization in the Montenegro area. For example, according to the Census of 1953, about 32% of the population did not want to declare their denomination, which is also the highest score in comparison with the other republics of Yugoslavia. According to Dragomir Pantić's research from that period⁸ a turn towards atheism is clearly visible. It is noticeable that this turn was particularly pronounced in the areas of Serbia and Montenegro where Orthodoxy was dominant. According to empirical evidence, the level of non-religiosity in Montenegro was very high, and scientific circles concluded that this was an area where religious deadness reigned.⁹ According to the research from 1974 to 1984, Montenegrins were the most non-religious--77% in comparison with other nations and confessions.¹⁰ From that period, the research of Srđan Vrcan¹¹ on the youth population is worth mentioning. According to his research, only 12% of young people declared themselves as religious and 73% as non-religious.

Since the end of the 1980s or the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a desecularization of society and a revitalization of religion in almost all parts of the world,¹² and therefore in Montenegro as well. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the attitude of the socialist political order towards religion loosened. In Montenegro, it came to the so-called "delayed revitalization" in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The processes of desecularization and the return of religion coincided with the fall of the socialist socio-political order. A return to traditional religions within the social scene followed. Religion again attributed identity and legitimacy to the

⁵ Milan Vukomanović, (2001): *Sveto i mnoštvo-izazovi religijskog pluralizma*, Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

⁶ Vladimir Bakrač, Danijela Vuković-Čalasan, Predrag Živković, and Rade Šarović. (2020): "Adventists in Montenegro—From the Atheistic Psychosis of Socialism to the Post-socialist Individuation of Adventism" *Religions* 11, no. 5: 233. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050233>

⁷ Milan Vukomanović, "Karakter religijskih promena u zemljama u tranziciji: primer pravoslavnih crkava u Rusiji i SR Jugoslaviji," in: *Promene postsocijalističkih društava iz sociološke perspektive*, (Beograd: IDN, 1997).

⁸ Dragomir Pantić, *Klasična i svetovna religioznost*, (Beograd: Centar za politikološka i javnomnjenjska istraživanja, 1988).

⁹ Dragoljub Đorđević, *O religiji i ateizmu-prilozi sociologiji religije*, (Beograd-Niš: Gradina-Stručna knjiga, 1990).

¹⁰ Sergej Flere, *Religija i religioznost u jugoslovenskom društvu*, (Kultura, 1984), pp. 65-67.

¹¹ Srđan Vrcan, "Omladina, religija i crkva," in: V. Iličin i saradnici, *Ogledi o omladini osamdesetih*, (Zagreb: IDIS, 1990).

¹² Piter L. Berger, "Desekularizacija sveta: opšti pregled," in: Piter, L. Berger, *Desekularizacija sveta*, (Novi Sad: Medi Terran., 2008).

community, integrating the individual into the collective. Theologian Radovan Bigović described it as the period when the Orthodox renaissance occurred at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.¹³

The revitalization of religion is also evident according to empirical indicators. According to the Census of 1991, 2003, and 2011, an increase in those who declare to belong to one of the religions¹⁴ is evident. According to research from 1996,¹⁵ about 93.7% of respondents in Montenegro self-identified denominationally. According to research from 2000, only 1/5 of respondents show a low level of religiosity, 57.1% show a medium level of religiosity, and 22.2% of respondents are actively religious.¹⁶ The research on young people from 2013 has already shown a kind of stabilization in religiosity, so about 90% declared that they are religious, and about 70% of respondents believed in God.¹⁷ Therefore, a number of respondents consider themselves religious, without believing in God as described in the Bible. They believe that there is some mystical power, but that it is not God in the Judeo-Christian sense. Also, a certain number of believers self-assess themselves as religious, but they do not follow religious and liturgical practices, and do not go to church.

The return of religion to the social scene and religiosity in society was also marked by a symphony of religion and politics. Since Montenegro is a predominantly Orthodox country, we will focus our attention only on the relationship between politics and the Orthodox Church.

The Period of the Symphony in the Relationship between the Church and the State

The desecularization of society in Montenegro was followed by the collapse of the socialist regime and the coming to power of some new political figures. In the early 1990s, when the first post-war parliamentary elections were held and a multi-party system was established, three, conditionally speaking, dominant options crystallized in December 1990: the League of Communists, the People's Party, and the Liberal League; the latter was the only political party that

¹³ Radovan Bigović, , "Pravoslavna crkva i evropske integracije," in: *Religioznost građana Srbije i njihov odnos prema procesu evropskih integracija*, (Beograd: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Centar za evropske studije, Hrišćanski kulturni centar, 2011).

¹⁴ www.monstat.org

¹⁵ Vera Vratuša-Žunjić, , "Mogućnost anketnog istraživanja uloge religije u raspadu Jugoslavije," in: *Religija, crkva, nacija*, (Niš: JUNIR, godišnjak III, 1996)..

¹⁶ Miloš Bešić, and Borislav Đukanović, *Bogovi i ljudi: Religioznost u Crnoj Gori*, (Podgorica: CID, 2000).

¹⁷ V. Bakrač, *Religija I mladi – religioznost mladih u Crnoj Gori*, (Podgorica – Beogra, Miba Book, 2013).

advocated the independence of Montenegro.¹⁸ The League of Communists changed its name to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) at the 1991 congress. Along with changes in the political scene, the changes in religion also coincided. Namely, during 1990 there were personnel changes in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Pavle was elected at an extraordinary session of the Assembly in December in place of Patriarch German, who had occupied that position for a full 32 years (1958-1990). Amfilohije (Radović), the former bishop of Banat, was elected by the Assembly as the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral. On December 30, 1990, Amfilohije Radović was enthroned as the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral, Zeta, Brda, and Skenderija and Exarch of the Holy Throne of Peć by the Metropolitan Danilo Dajković. Since his enthronement in the Cetinje monastery, Metropolitan Amfilohije was in harmonious relations with the then authorities in Montenegro.¹⁹ Conversely the then authorities also had a harmonious relationship with the church. “This educated, spiritual, and rational man belongs to the very top of Orthodox thinkers,” said the president of Montenegro Momir Bulatović for the Metropolitan Amfilohije.²⁰ The cooperation between religion and politics in Montenegro was particularly visible at the ethnic, religious, and linguistic levels. The Metropolitan Amfilohije, as a spiritual shepherd, tried to neutralize all those changes and ruins that the real-socialist regime left behind. He restored the spiritual wasteland in Montenegro, increased the number of priests, restored many churches, monasteries, and temples, and restored ancient dioceses.²¹ He was also an opponent of the Montenegrin language, considering it non-existent. “Some say that we should change our language and introduce a new, non-existent one that no one has ever spoken in Montenegro. We can do that, but that does not restore the soul of Montenegro, its memory and intellect.” On an ethnic level, the Metropolitan denied the existence of Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness, saying that such attempts were the product and legacy of the decades-long communist regime. “May God grant that there will be as few of those who worship the pagan Emperor, the cursed Diocletian, as possible, and may every Montenegrin nail him with a hammer to the Vizier bridge.”²² Denying the Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness and considering that Montenegrins are Serbs in a wider ethnic group led to certain discord in Montenegro. It caused

¹⁸ Živko Andrijašević. *Nacrt za ideologiju jedne vlasti*, (Bar: Conteco, 1999).

¹⁹ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/mitropolit-amfilohije-in-memorial/30919884.html>

²⁰ <https://www.vreme.com/vreme/ratnik-u-mantiji/>

²¹ <https://www.novosti.rs/crna-gora/vesti/931003/vratio-narod-obnovio-650-crkava-dolaskom-amfilohija-tron-mitropolita-1990-godine-pocela-duhovna-obnova-preobrazaj-crne-gore>

²² <http://www.srpsko-nasledje.rs/sr-l/1998/11/article-12.html>

numerous polemics, conflicts, and divisions. Already in 1991, on St. Peter's Day (July 12), there was a confrontation in front of the Cetinje monastery between the parties close to the Liberal League, which has inherited the view of Montenegrin ethnic distinctiveness, and the supporters of "the pro-Serbian parties," the believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It was a conflict between pro-Montenegrin and pro-Serbian political concepts because the diversity stemmed from the present political ideologies, not church dogmas.²³ When it comes to ethnicity, the then political establishment had similar views to the church. Milo Đukanović, the current president of Montenegro, gave an interview to TV Politika in the early 1990s in which he emphasized: "Montenegrins are proud of their Serbian origin and Montenegrin statehood, of the glorious history of the Serbian people. That is why we believe in a common future and prosperity."²⁴ The fact that a referendum for Montenegrin independence was held in Montenegro on March 1, 1992, also showed that there was an agreement between the church and the state regarding ethnic issues. In the referendum in Montenegro, most citizens who went to the polls voted for a common state with Serbia. The leaders of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists and other pro-Yugoslav political parties said at the time that the people of Montenegro and Serbia were connected by ethnic, economic, cultural, historical, and other ties, which referred them to the common interest to live in one state. The results were as follows: 95.96% of all regional voters chose the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro, i.e., Yugoslavia.²⁵ On April 29, 1992, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović said for the Belgrade magazine "Duga," "The backbone of those united countries is already known and, despite all the troubles, it is again taking shape, and that is Serbia and Montenegro."²⁶ Judging from the above the cooperation between sacred and secular authorities in Montenegro can be clearly seen, while it was pointed out with dignity that the Orthodox Church in Montenegro is the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The beginning of the 1990s was marked by political pluralism; the one-party system was replaced by a multi-party system. However, a kind of religious pluralism also occurred in that period. Namely, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC) was formed in October 1993. The issue of the CPC has become the subject of numerous debates in the political and intellectual public, not

²³ Živko. Andrijašević, *Nacrt za ideologiju jedne vlasti*, (Bar: Conteco, 1999).

²⁴ <https://www.espreso.co.rs/svet/crna-gora/508521/crnogorci-su-ponosni-na-srpsko-poreklo-i-slavnu-istoriju-srpskog-naroda-da-li-se-djukanovic-danas-stidi-ovih-reci>

²⁵ <https://www.nedeljnik.rs/vecina-gradana-crne-gore-se-izjasnila-za-zajednicku-drzavu-sa-srbijom-na-danasnji-dan-odrzan-je-prvi-referendum-za-nezavisnost/>

²⁶ <https://www.vijesti.me/zabava/36140/vrijeme-kad-je-ljubav-cvjetala>

only in Montenegro, which reflects on the political and identity reality. One or another church will become the positioning point of the political elites that will (mis)use the religious moods of the followers depending on their daily political interests.

Period of Partial Cooperation

The level of cooperation slowly began to change after almost a decade of cooperation between the church and the state (from 1998 to 2008). This second decade, which we have analyzed, was marked by rather turbulent relations between the church and the state. In 1997, conflicts erupted in the strongest political party in Montenegro at that time, and the main point of disagreement was cooperation²⁷ with the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPS) and Slobodan Milošević²⁸ in Serbia.²⁹ The split in DPS resulted in the removal of Momir Bulatović from the position as president of DPS, who founded the People Socialist Party of Montenegro (SNP) in 1998; since then, different political circumstances commenced in Montenegro. During that period, the ruling establishment enjoyed the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Metropolitan Amfilohije. That was the period when Milo Đukanović needed the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the Metropolitan's indisputable authority among the people, to suppress demonstrations and riots that supporters of Momir Bulatović and Slobodan Milošević would cause. The event when President Đukanović burned the *badnjak* tree³⁰ with the Metropolitan Amfilohije in Cetinje on Christmas Eve in 1998 was recorded historically. Metropolitan saw in President Đukanović a person who would work on further strengthening the two fraternal nations - Serbs and Montenegrins and the community of Serbia and Montenegro. President Đukanović visited the Cetinje monastery, kissed the relics of Saint Peter of Cetinje and the cross, and the Metropolitan addressed him with the following words:

²⁷ Radenko.Šćekić, *Politička previranja u Crnoj Gori 1996 - 1998. Godine*. (Prizma, 2012). pp. 121-166.

²⁸ "The victory of the "Let's Live Better" coalition has actualized the issue of the relationship between all federal units of the FRY because the ruling "red-black" coalition in Serbia (SPS-JUL-SRS) persistently opposed the practice of Montenegro's equality in the federation, market reforms, democratization, and resolutely refused to fulfil the conditions for the return of the FRY to the international community. It is not an exaggeration to conclude that the results of the May elections have intensified the need for the two ruling coalitions in Serbia and Montenegro, which are essentially different, to find a modus vivendi at the federal level." https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_13542/objava_70781/fajlovi/Vladimir%20Goati%20_%20Partije%20i%20partijski%20sistem%20Crne%20Gore.pdf

²⁹ <http://www.maticacrnogorska.me/files/49/05%20radenko%20scekcic.pdf>

³⁰ Balkan Orthodox custom at Christmas time.

Mr. President, among other joys, we have waited for this blessed day to happen that the newly elected President of Montenegro comes for a blessing and kisses the relics of Saint Peter of Cetinje. It is a blessed day for Montenegro because Montenegro has been waiting for more than 50 years for its first man to come and kiss the relics of the first and greatest Montenegrin. Saint Peter of Cetinje is the measure of every metropolitan and every lord, every president of Montenegro. President Đukanović, you have realized and understood that, and that is why you are here today. May this day be blessed, may you be blessed in carrying the heavy burden of the first man of Montenegro and the leader of this nation.³¹

Not long after, the Montenegrin political establishment changed its political course. The idea of Montenegrin independence from Serbia began to heat up already in 2001. Hence, the church directed the first criticisms at state politics. The first accusations of the authorities in Montenegro that the Metropolitan interfered too much in politics were launched. The Metropolitan responded to accusations in an interview for the newspaper *Glas javnosti* with the following words:

People who were brought up in the previous system are now surprised that someone besides them can dare to worry about the destiny of people because, for God's sake, they are the only authentic interpreters of the people's wishes, the people's will, and the resolvers of the people's destiny. What would those gentlemen or comrades say if the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral began to engage in politics the way Bishop Danilo Petrović or even St. Peter of Cetinje did?³²

The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral did not look at the referendum on the independence of Montenegro with enthusiasm. That was confirmed by the Metropolitan Amfilohije's words in the interview for *Glas javnosti* when he said that the separation of Montenegro would only happen if Serbia and Montenegro separated from the common mind, historical being, language, etc.³³ In an interview for the German *Der Spiegel* Milo Đukanović announced the referendum in 2006 and the victory of independent Montenegro.³⁴ Metropolitan Amfilohije and the priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro followed the referendum on the restoration of the independence of Montenegro with restraint; they did not propagate the survival of the state union with Serbia, nor did they at least influence the final choice

³¹ <https://www.vijesti.me/zabava/36140/vrijeme-kad-je-ljubav-cvjetala>

³² <http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.rs/arhiva/2002/02/03/srpski/I02020201.shtml>

³³ <http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.rs/arhiva/2002/02/03/srpski/I02020201.shtml>

³⁴ <https://www.gov.me/cyr/clanak/17961--6936>

of citizens with public statements. After the referendum, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral recognized independent Montenegro.

I have already told to our politicians that the moment when the majority of citizens voted for the independence of Montenegro in the referendum, that moment the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and our dioceses located here, fully recognized and fully accepted Montenegro within the limits in which it has existed and with all respect for it, its structure, laws, and everything that belongs to a state.³⁵

By its actions, the Metropolitanate helped to maintain and preserve peace and stability after the referendum, which pretty much polarized the citizens of Montenegro. Milo Đukanović's words in November 2021 about the late Metropolitan Amfilohije confirm this:

When we talked about the referendum, I spent hours convincing him why it was good, and he convinced me why it was not good, and we agreed that it would not be wise for him as the Metropolitan and the church to talk about that topic, and he kept his word.³⁶

Apparently, the Serbian Orthodox Church was ready for any outcome of the referendum. After the referendum in 2006, there was a certain adaptation of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the new situation regarding the state organization and independence of Montenegro. Accordingly, the Cetinje metropolitan department remained the first type of primate with the Metropolitan as honorary archbishop. It was defined that the Orthodox Church in Montenegro consisted of dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church: Montenegrin and the Littoral, Budimljansko-Nikšićka, and parts of dioceses Mileševska and Zahumsko-Hercegovačka by the decision of the Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church on 26 May 2006, five days after the restoration of the state independence of Montenegro.³⁷

Non-Cooperation between the Church and the State

After the referendum, the relationship between the church and the state cooled even more, and everything culminated in 2008 when Montenegro recognized the independence of Kosovo. Metropolitan Amfilohije considered the recognition of Kosovo the most shameful betrayal of Montenegro and the dignity of the people.³⁸ The ruling political establishment created the policy at an increasing distance from Serbia and Serbian ethnicity, and the recognition of Kosovo was

³⁵ https://rtv.rs/sk/region/amfilohije-mitropolija-priznaje-nezavisnu-crnu-goru_259158.html

³⁶ <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/dukanovic-o-amfilohiju-koliko-god-negirao-svoj-crnogorski-identitet-zapravo-je-bio-tipican-crnogorac>

³⁷ <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/614492/sta-su-o-temeljnom-ugovoru-napisali-akademici-canu>

³⁸ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/mitropolit-amfilohije-in-memoriam/30919884.html>

only one of the political moves of the official policy of Montenegro. The church condemned the distance between Montenegro and Serbia, which started a little earlier and was based on introducing the Montenegrin language as an official language. The ever-closer cooperation with the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, as the guardian of the ethnic distinctiveness of Montenegrins, was not hidden. The phrase Church of Serbia, not the Serbian Orthodox Church, could be heard more and more in the political establishment. In fact, the political establishment and Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC) of the time claimed that the Church of Serbia illegally usurped the churches, monasteries, temples, and property of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro and placed them under its jurisdiction.³⁹ Preparing for the party congress, the leader of DPS, Milo Đukanović advocated for the unification of the Orthodox believers in Montenegro, which would affect the affirmation of the Montenegrin state, national, and cultural identity.

Hence, we are interested in overcoming this division, and that is why we are advocating that, if possible, some reasonable approach is used to unify the Orthodox believers in Montenegro. It is obvious that the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral as an autonomous but still part of the Serbian Orthodox Church is not sufficiently in agreement with the state interests of Montenegro.⁴⁰

The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral interpreted this statement with wonder, considering it inappropriate to include topics concerning the canonical structure of the church in the program of a party that has been considered socialist and civil.

The following political step performed by the ruling elite was membership in NATO, which the church did not accept benevolently as well. At the DPS Congress held on 30 November 2019, the president of the party, Milo Đukanović, emphasized stability, harmony, and further development of Montenegro as the main priorities. Accordingly, the further development of Montenegro implies hard work towards achieving the main foreign policy goal, which is reflected

³⁹ In Montenegro, especially after the dissolution of the state union Serbia and Montenegro, a kind of disintegrative function of religion is present. It is more noticeable after the attainment of Montenegrin independence and efforts to form a national distinctiveness, where the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC) represents as a basic or key factor of the Montenegrin nation, i.e. she introduces herself as a fundamental factor of national existence and as a privileged guardian of tradition and culture of the Montenegrin people. On the other hand, the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral as part of Srpska of the Orthodox Church (which is the canonically recognized Orthodox community in Montenegro) strives to marginalize the Montenegrin national distinctiveness and to preserve the unity of the SPC and Serbian people in these areas. Hence, religion, according to the principle of *volens nolens*, functions disintegratively on Montenegrin society, often departing from the framework of spirituality, and universality. Due to contesting canonical rights, the rivalry between the two Orthodox churches continues even today.

⁴⁰ https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/djukanovic_se_zalozio_za_objedinjavanje_spc_i_cpc/24177582.html

in Montenegro's membership in the EU. The harmonious relationship is disturbed by religious divisions among the Orthodox believers, which questions Montenegrin national identity. The solution is found in "the restoration of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church."

Our primary interest is strengthening the state identity of Montenegro. DPS understands the needs of all national communities. We must suppress the denying of the Montenegrin identity. We have an obligation to restore the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.⁴¹

Bearing in mind that this statement came from the president of a party that is democratic and socialist in terms of its political and ideological orientation, The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral reacted to this speech with concern. It was interpreted to be inappropriate that the self-proclaimed atheistic president of a republic dared to influence and interfere deeply in the church's internal structure. His behavior violated the secular character of the state.⁴² Such announcements culminated in the Law on Freedom of Religion adopted by the Parliament of Montenegro on 27 December 2019. According to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the law was harmful, especially the article stipulating that religious communities must prove ownership of church property that was built or was in state ownership since 1918. If they could not prove this, the property would be registered officially as state property. The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral and other dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro said it was gross discrimination. The Metropolitanate reacted with amendments to the mentioned law, calling for the correction of three articles of the law for the sake of peace and love in Montenegro.⁴³ The ruling structure later rejected it and passed the Law on Freedom of Religion, which put an end to the already disturbed cooperation between the church and the multi-decade ruling structure in this state.

The church responded to the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion with the famous processions--peaceful and quiet resistance to the mentioned law. The law was opposed by a large number of citizens, who expressed their dissatisfaction with a peaceful walk. Citizens were

⁴¹<https://www.novineniksica.me/djukanovic-sa-kongresa-dps-a-moramo-suzbiti-osporavanje-crnogorskog-identiteta-imamo-obavezu-da-obnovimo-cpc/>

⁴² <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/388959/amfilohije-zapanjen-sam-dukanovicevom-izjavom-prvi-put-da-ateista-stvara-crkvu>

⁴³ <https://mitropolija.com/2021/12/26/dan-kada-je-usvojen-diskriminatorni-zakon-o-slobodi-vjeroispovijesti-sve-prolazi-samo-crkva-opstaje-i-ostaje/>

motivated not only by the Law on Freedom of Religion but also by other reasons, which were reflected in rising crime rates, corruption, unemployment, nepotism, obedience to the ruling party, economic crises, etc. Also, the multi-decade rule of a political oligarchy called into question democracy; the democratic transition of power was unthinkable. Individuals loyal to the ruling establishment alternated in various political positions and functions for many years and even decades, regardless of educational or intellectual ability. Depending on the assignment by the Government, individuals changed five ministerial departments each, and each had several activities in other bodies and Management Boards, for which they received special fees. All of this could have been the reason for the dissatisfaction of the people, which culminated in the Law on Freedom of Religion. The privatization of the Montenegrin economic system carried out on the waves of the neoliberal economy and the collapse of socialism, left the people at the mercy of the private sector. These owners were mainly individuals who emerged overnight from the underbelly of the newly created political-economic social order. The law was the cause of protests. It effectively targeted church property, as interpreted by the Serbian Orthodox Church, and which still remained beyond the reach of emerging businessmen and non-domestic sales, was the cause of protests. Also, the people believed that attacks on the church, their identity was being attacked and threatened too, increasing motivation for the persistent processions in protest. The first processions were held on December 31, 2019 and continued throughout the state. Believers in almost all cities, led by priests, first attended church ceremonies in the church sanctuaries in the evening and then went for a walk along the main city streets; the Metropolitanate filed a constitutional complaint, expecting the decisions of the Parliament to be declared unconstitutional.

The Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral considered the mentioned law fratricidal, while, on the other hand, the canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church and the head of that church Mihailo believed that Montenegro passed the Law on Freedom of Religion that was in accordance with the most modern European standards.⁴⁴ It should be emphasized here that the Montenegrin Orthodox Church presents itself as the guardian of the Montenegrin identity and language. Almost no ceremony, reception, or event of state importance could happen without the leaders of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church being in the front row. That has left the impression that the ruling political establishment used the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Amfilohije until the beginning of the new millennium to

⁴⁴ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/godinu-dana-zakona-o-slobodi-vjeroispovijesti-u-crnoj-gori/31022713.html>

preserve power and political positions. In the new millennium, the ruling political establishment used the canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church to homogenize the electorate based on identity, language, and religious issues, all in the absence of economic arguments. Therefore, the political rhetoric was based on ethnic and religious divisions with the aim of securing another election victory on those anachronistic and tried-and-tested tactics since the elections were scheduled for 30 August 2020.

It was a period full of events, from the COVID-19 pandemic that stopped the processions for a short time to the arrest of people and clergy for gathering in religious buildings or in front of them. All the events had an even greater impact on the people's dissatisfaction, and the government persisted in its decisions. President Milo Đukanović said on May 18, 2020, that he would not give up on the formation or restoration of the Orthodox Church or the return of part of the church buildings to the state property, as stipulated by the Law on Freedom of Religion.⁴⁵ The processions continued, and the epilogue of the months-long protests resulted in a narrow victory of two coalitions close to the Serbian Orthodox Church—"For the Future of Montenegro"--the Democratic Front, and "Peace is our Nation,"-- Democratic Montenegro, and one civic movement "Black on White"--United Reform Action (URA). Metropolitan Amfilohije died on October 30, 2020, after seeing the fall of the decades-long rule of the DPS and the will of the people expressed at processions.

The new Government adopted and submitted the amendments to the Law on Freedom of Religion to the parliamentary procedure on December 17, 2020. Amendments to the Law on Freedom of Religion implied the deletion of disputed articles of the existing Law that referred to the potential transfer of property of religious communities to state ownership in case religious communities did not have adequate evidence that they were the owners of that property. The article of the Law related to the registration of the religious community operating in Montenegro was also deleted, and the term "religious community records" was introduced. The amended Law on Freedom of Religion was adopted on December 29, 2021, exactly one year later.

Almost the entire year of 2021, at least when it comes to relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state, was spent dealing with issues of the Fundamental Agreement, which would bring the legal regulations to an end. It is expected that the new government will bring that process to an end. Bearing in mind the statement of Bishop Irinej Bulović to the

⁴⁵ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/godinu-dana-zakona-o-slobodi-vjeroispovijesti-u-crnoj-gori/31022713.html>

newspaper *Pečat* that “the Serbian Orthodox Church will not sign the Fundamental Agreement with the Government of Montenegro as long as Zdravko Krivokapić is at its head,”⁴⁶ we can conclude that the new ruling establishment did not meet the expectations of the Serbian Orthodox Church either. Not long after, the government fell, and a minority government was formed. One of the main promises of the minority government was the signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state of Montenegro. The new Prime Minister Dritan Abazović articulated this intention in an interview for *Deutsche Welle*.⁴⁷ The promise was formalized on August 3, 2022, when Patriarch Porfirije, on behalf of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dritan Abazović, signed the Fundamental Agreement in Podgorica. Prime Minister Abazović said that with this signature, a new leaf had been turned over in the relations between the church and the state.⁴⁸

Conclusion

We have tried to illustrate the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state, i.e., the decades-long political establishment in the analysis presented in the main part of the paper, which is descriptive in its methodological character. Bearing in mind the rather long period from 1990 to 2022, we can conclude that the relationship between the church and the state was very meaningful. It ranged from close cooperation and syncopation of the church with the state, to a complete cooling of the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the ruling political structure. As we indicated previously, there was close cooperation between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state in the first period from 1990 to 1998. Cooperation was mainly based on corresponding identity issues in the context of the ethnic affinity of Serbs and Montenegrins. The Serbian Orthodox Church provided support for the ruling political structure of the DPS, which resulted in a convincing victory for that party in the parliamentary elections. With the split in the DPS, the church, led by the Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović, took the side of the then Prime Minister Milo Đukanović, which led to the victory of the DPS again in the parliamentary elections. The cooling of church-state relations began at the beginning of the new millennium when the

⁴⁶ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-srpska-pravoslavna-crkva-temeljni-ugovor/31676481.html>

⁴⁷ <https://www.dw.com/sr/abazovi%C4%87-za-dw-nemam-problem-da-potpisi%C5%A1em-temeljni-ugovor-sa-spc/a-61810329>

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.me/clanak/potpisan-temeljni-ugovor-abazovic-saljemo-poruku-mira-tolerancije-i-okrecemo-novi-list>

official political establishment began to change ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations in Montenegro. The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral did not look at the referendum in 2006 with enthusiasm. However, the recognition of the outcome of the referendum undeniably contributed to peaceful relations in the state. The non-cooperation between the church and the state culminated with the recognition of Kosovo by official Montenegro. Nevertheless, the influence of the church on political circumstances was once again confirmed in 2020. Namely, the ruling structure adopted the Law on Freedom of Religion, which caused strong disapproval of the church and resulted in the fall of the ruling regime after a silent protest in the form of processions. After that, the church reclaimed relevance in the public sphere, an influence quite significant for the political circumstances in Montenegro. In other words, with the collapse of the church's role in political life, revitalization of its influence returns, and with the signing of the Fundamental Agreement, a new period in the relationship between the church and the state begins.