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THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN BULGARIA AND YUGOSLAVIA IN 1920s AND 1930s – AN INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE¹

By Priit Rohtmets and Radmila Radić

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Abstract:

This article addresses the role of the ecumenical organization, the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, in the complicated process of religious and political rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the 1920s and 1930s. It argues that the Bulgarian and Yugoslav National Committees of the World Alliance formed a diplomatic channel for tackling the problems between the two countries, predominantly the question of

¹ An earlier version of this article appeared in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Fall, 2015), pp. 583-605, titled "The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches and Religious and Political Rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the 1920's and 1930's." This expanded version is used with permission from J.E.S.

Macedonia, but ultimately the rapprochement process between the two countries failed due to the outbreak of World War II.

Introduction

In 1937, the representatives of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Tsardom of Bulgaria signed a Pact of Eternal Friendship. The declaration of friendship was a result of a process of political and religious rapprochement that had begun near the end of 1920s. In this context, the influence of the ecumenical movement, especially the peace organization World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, (hereafter abbreviated to WA), has to be highlighted. The history of the ecumenical movement briefly mentions that discussions held among the leading ecumenical representatives and Balkan religious leaders led to an exchange of visits between official delegations of the Serbian and Bulgarian churches. These visits paved the way for a similar action on the political level.² The activity of the ecumenical movement and the discussions and visits mentioned above have largely been neglected in the national histories of the two countries and in the history of international relations between the two World Wars. In this article, we aim to discuss the contribution of the WA in the rapprochement process between the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), and the states of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the 1920s and 1930s. To fully understand the chain of events and the role the WA had in the process of rapprochement, we first examine the foreign policy and the ideology of the two countries as well as the activity of the WA.

² Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds. *History of the Ecumenical Movement. Volume I, 1517–1948* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 562.

Yugoslav-Bulgarian Relations and the “Macedonian problem”³

From the middle of the nineteenth century up to the 1930s, Serbian-Bulgarian and later Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations were marked by conflicts over Macedonia: the national revival of the Macedonian population, and by wars (the Serb-Bulgarian War 1885–86, the Second Balkan War 1913, and the First World War 1914–1918). Agreements of friendship and cooperation (1897, 1904, and 1912) were only brief episodes of relief in a conflict that lasted for decades. The “Macedonian Question”, i.e. the status of Macedonia and its relations with Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, though officially settled with treaties of Bucharest, London and Paris (1912, 1913, 1919), remained a constant problem in the Balkans throughout the interwar years.⁴

³ About Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations see: Živko Avramovski, “O stavu jugoslovenske vlade prema devetojunoskom prevratu u Bugarskoj 1923. godine,” *Istorija XX veka*, IX (1968), 132–86; Desanka Todorović, “Pitanje jugoslovensko-bugarske granice na Mirovnoj konferenciji u Parizu 1919. godine,” *Istorija XX veka*, IX (1968), 63–132; Г. Васиљевиќ, *Хронологија на настаните од југословенско-бугарските односи за време на владеењето на Александар Стамболиски*, (Skopje, 1973); Desanka Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države 1918–1923*, (Belgrade, 1976); Ž. Avramovski (ed.), *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku*, I–II, (Belgrade, 1980–1982); Živko Avramovski, “Pitanje balkanskog garantnog pakta i jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi 1925. godine u svetlu britanske politike na Balkanu,” *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, 2 (Belgrade, 1984), 87–111; Živko Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta 1934–1940*, (Belgrade, 1986); Branko Pavlica, “Razgraničenje Jugoslavije s Bugarskom (1919–1922),” *Tokovi istorije*, 1–2 (2002), 16–23; Dmitar Tasić, “Prisajedinjenje Caribroda i Bosiljgrada Kraljevini SHS 1920,” *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2007), 121–31.

⁴ According to Miroslav Hroch the Macedonian national identity became relevant only in the 1870s. By 1900 some intellectuals had formulated the concept of a Macedonian nation based on the linguistic differences between the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages, the specificities of their geography and historical development. Miroslav Hroch, ‘National Movements in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires’, in John Breuilly (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2013), 192. Even today there is no agreement about roots of the Macedonian national identity. According to Bulgarian historians the Macedonian nation was created after the Second World War.

Disputes were conducted through diplomatic and academic circles, press and propaganda channels abroad, through international organizations as well as by representatives of cultural, educational, and religious institutions.⁵

In the interwar period, the relations between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, (the KSCS) and the Tsardom of Bulgaria can be divided into two periods. During the first stage, in the 1920s, the main issue on the agenda was the enforcement of the peace agreements and the curbing of the Macedonian nationalist movement. A precondition set by the KSCS for developing friendly relations with Bulgaria was that Bulgaria should shut down the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) base on Bulgarian territory and withhold logistical support to that organization.⁶ During the second stage, in 1930s, a gradual rapprochement between the two countries took place, in which the SOC and the BOC played an essential part.

After the First World War, according to the Treaty of Neuilly signed in November 1919, the Tsardom of Bulgaria had lost its border territories Caribrod (now Dimitrovgrad), Bosilegrad, the right side of the river Timok (today in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Serbia), and

⁵ Macedonia was divided between Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria according to the provisions of the London Peace Treaty signed on May 30, 1913. Vardar Macedonia was ceded to Serbia, Aegean Macedonia to Greece and Pirin Macedonia to Bulgaria. Dragoslav Stranjaković, "Srbi i Bugari u prošlosti," *Glasnik SPP*, 9 (September 1—August 19, 1946), 157–63; Andrew Rossos, "The British Foreign Office and Macedonian National Identity, 1918–1941," *Slavic Review*, 53, 2 (Summer 1994); Ivan Ristić, "Politika sporazumevanja u vreme nerazumevanja," *Teme*, 3 (2012), 1033–46.

⁶ Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija, founded in Thessaloniki 1893 (name used since 1919) rejected the partition and called for a free Macedonia – independent or autonomous, i.e. reunited with Bulgaria. This goal was not to be achieved only through peaceful means, but also by attacks aimed at the Bulgarian, Yugoslav and Greek authorities, who were considered to be occupiers. As the stronghold of the organization was in Bulgaria, the state authorities there had a profound influence on controlling the activities of the organization. Until 1924, the IMRO was led by Todor Aleksandrov and after his assassination by Ivan Mihailov. DMITAR TASIĆ, "Vojno-politička akcija 'makedonstvujušćih' u Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji 1919–1934. Godine," *Arhiv*, 3 (2002), 92–107; Ivan Ristić, "Diplomatsko-konzularna predstavnštva i predstavnici Kraljevine SHS u Bugarskoj 1920–1929," *Arhiv*, 1–2 (2012), 97–112.

Strumica (today in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia).⁷ Starting in 1919 the Macedonians organized raids into Greek and Yugoslav Macedonian territories. These raids were usually launched from Petrich, a district in South West Bulgaria, where the Macedonians had established a virtual state within the state.⁸

In the beginning of the 1920s the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the Prime Minister from 1919 to 1923, Aleksandar Stamboliyski, was prepared to control and even cooperate with the IMRO. At the same time, he denounced Macedonian extremism and declared this publically during his visit to Belgrade in 1922. In March 1923, the two countries signed an agreement in Niš and promised to fight extremism.⁹ This agreement was one of the reasons for a *coup d'état* in Bulgaria that took place in June 1923. Stamboliyski was forced to step down and was brutally murdered by Macedonian extremists. At first, the KSCS considered the coup a direct threat to its security, but the situation was eased by the mediation of foreign allies. In the following years, several Bulgarian political emigrants resided in the KSCS. The violence of Macedonian extremists in Bulgaria continued during the 'Tsankovist period' from

⁷ Peace Treaty of Neuilly between the Allied and Associated countries and Bulgaria was signed on November 27, 1919. Bulgaria as a defeated country was to pay war reparations to the winning side; its armed forces were drastically reduced and general conscription was abolished. According to the treaty, Bulgaria was obligated to punish the perpetrators for the war and recognize the KSCS, who signed the treaty on December 5, 1919. Ivan Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija u Kraljevini SHS," *Istorija XX veka*, 2 (2012), 41–62.

⁸ Macedonians levied special taxes on the peasants in their Petrich enclave. Apart from inducing fear of Macedonian terror in Bulgaria, the Macedonians fought among themselves as well. They had two main factions – the main split was between the autonomists (right) and federalists (left). Unlike the left, the right waged an armed struggle. In the beginning of 1920s, the conflict led to the occupation of the city of Nevrokop by an IMRO unit, which tried to annihilate the local federalist branch. The attacks were so fierce that the head of the BOC, Metropolitan Stefan, suggested privately that the state authorities should pay the autonomists 50 million leva to cease their attacks. R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford 2008), 229–30.

⁹ The Niš Treaty signed on March 23, 1923, allowed the KSCS to fight against IMRO on Bulgarian territory, since Stamboliyski could not rely on the weak Bulgarian army. He had created an alternative armed force, the Orange Guard. According to the Niš Treaty, the two countries agreed to keep order along the border by joint patrolling.

1923 to 1926, under the rule of Prime Minister Aleksander Tsankov. Although it was internationally condemned, Tsankov's government cooperated with the IMRO. The IMRO projected a confusing double image – it was an organization that was often fighting violently for the Macedonian national cause, but at the same time it was an instrument used by Bulgaria to overcome the losses of the First World War and to pursue the goal of a Great Bulgaria.¹⁰

Bulgarian authorities criticized Belgrade for protecting Bulgarian immigrants and demanded that Belgrade move them out of the border areas. Another issue for mistrust was the implementation of cultural and educational policy in Macedonia. Bulgaria demanded that the people living in Vardar Macedonia had to be identified as Bulgarian, primarily through changes in the local school system.¹¹ The Yugoslav side was not prepared to meet those demands. Instead, the KSCS continued a policy of assimilation, previously conducted by the Kingdom of Serbia, rather than to recognize the Macedonian identity of the local population. The KSCS quickly acted to eliminate the Patriarchal (Greek) influence in the south of Vardar and the Exarchist Bulgarian presence. In September 1920, the Macedonian Orthodox community in Vardar Macedonia was transferred to the jurisdiction of SOC.¹² The Greeks implemented the same kind of policy in Aegean Macedonia.¹³

¹⁰ A. Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians* (California, 2008), 150.

¹¹ Bulgarian nationalist ideology engaged historiography, ethnography, and *Völkerpsychologie* to provide it with arguments to lay nationalist claims on territories outside Bulgaria, such as Macedonia. They argued that all Slav-speakers in Macedonia were “Bulgarians”. Greek and Serbian nationalists supported the jurisdiction the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople over the Christian population in Macedonia, while Bulgarian nationalist ideology stressed language as the most important and visible marker on which the Bulgarian national as well as the ecclesiastical autonomy from the ecumenical patriarchate was based. Marius Turda, “National Historiographies in the Balkans, 1830–1989,” in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, (New York, 2011), 476.

¹² Unification of Serbian regional churches under one ecclesiastical authority was proclaimed in Belgrade in 1919, but it was finally carried out only after the Churches in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Old Serbia and Macedonia separated from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. As a result of negotiations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate from 1913 to 1914, Southern parts of the Church were to

The crisis between Bulgaria and the KSCS was reflected in assassinations, attacks on properties separated by the border, bomb planting, kidnapping, and disruption of rail traffic between the two countries, thus generating a general atmosphere of insecurity. In addition to violence, Macedonian cultural, educational, and folk organizations (Macedonian National Committee) in Bulgaria, as well as magazines and various nationalist organizations like *Otec Paisij* managed to cause some misinterpretations.¹⁴

After King Alexander I of Yugoslavia suspended the constitution and proclaimed a royal dictatorship in 1929, the leaders of Ustaša – Croatian Revolutionary Organization (UCRO) and IMRO reached an agreement on future actions and signed a declaration of mutual understanding known as the Sofia Declaration. This declaration envisaged the establishment of independent states of Croatia and Macedonia. Actions of Macedonians placed Bulgaria in considerable danger.

be joined to the Church of the Kingdom of Serbia, but due to the war the decision was not implemented. In late July 1919, negotiations in Constantinople began again. According to the agreement between the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the KSCS and the SOC, the unity of the SOC and reestablishment of the Patriarchate was recognized. An agreement was reached that the dioceses, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate were now transferred to the jurisdiction of the SOC. These were: Skopje, Ras-Prizren and Debar-Veles, part of the Metropolis Voden, Diocese Polean-Doiran and diocese of Strumica. Under Article V of the agreement, the Government of the KSCS was to help the Patriarchate of Constantinople financially with 1.5 million francs. The Ministry of Finance of the KSCS paid that amount in three payments in 1919 and 1922. Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima: Patrijarh Gavriilo (Dožić) 1881–1950*, (Belgrade, 2011), 146–47.

¹³ In September 1924, Bulgaria and Greece signed the Kalfov-Politis Agreement, in which Greece recognized Bulgarian nationals on its Macedonian territory. Thus a crisis broke out in the relations between the KSCS and Greece, because the KSCS feared that this agreement could justify Bulgaria's claims that the Vardar Macedonians were Bulgarians as well. As the KSCS threatened to abrogate its alliance with Greece, the latter pronounced the agreement void. A. Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians*, 133–50.

¹⁴ Desanka Todorović, "Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u drugoj polovini 1923. (Kriza u septembru)," in Ž. Avramovski (ed), *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku*, I (Belgrade, 1980), 179–96; Vuk Vinaver, "KPJ i jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi 1919–1939. Godine," in Ž. Avramovski (ed), *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku*, II (Belgrade, 1982), 170; Živko Avramovski, "Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-bugarskim odnosima od 1918–1925. Godine," in Ž. Avramovski (ed), *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku*, I (Belgrade, 1980), 147–76; Petar Dragišić, *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi 1944–1949*, (Belgrade, 2007), 13; D. Tasić, "Vojno-politička akcija," 92–107.

The ascension of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany encouraged the revisionist forces in Europe and increased insecurity. In particular, the situation became more difficult due to the tightening of relations around issues of disarmament and the certainty that the Conference on Disarmament would not be a success. It was concluded in London that the change in the military and political balance on the continent might lead to the outbreak of war. Great Britain took diplomatic steps to bring about reconciliation between the major powers.¹⁵

In September 1933 the Permanent Council of the Little Entente met in Sinaia to discuss the need for a Balkan pact. Bulgaria was invited to join Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, and Turkey. However, Bulgaria refused to join if in return it did not get the territorial exit to the Aegean Sea and demanded that the rights of Bulgarian minority in neighboring countries be honored. At the same time Bulgaria openly expressed the need to strengthen relations with Yugoslavia.¹⁶ Yugoslavia and Bulgaria already entered into a new phase of relations. Small signs of improvement could already be seen by the end of 1920s when the two countries signed the Pirot Agreements over minor issues like the railway connections. At the end of the 1920s an

¹⁵ In Spring 1933, Prime Minister McDonald personally attended the Conference on Disarmament, to demonstrate its importance. On the way, he stopped in Paris and tried to win over the French government for its policy of pacification, which included the reduction of the French armed forces, in order to save the Conference on Disarmament and prevent uncontrolled arming of Germany. Not having found adequate response in Paris, McDonald began to implement his campaign together with Italy. In order it to be a success McDonald was ready to make certain concessions to the revisionist countries. The result of this policy was the Four-Power Pact project also known as a Quadripartite Agreement. This had an impact on the position of the Balkan states. Countries of Little Entente – Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania – were vigorously against the Four-Power Pact and revision of the peace treaties thus undertaking a campaign in Paris to dissuade France from accession to the Pact. Turkey saw the Pact as a threat that could lead to revival of plans for the division of its territory. Ž. Avramovski, “Stav britanske diplomatije prema sklapanju Balkanskog sporazuma (1933–1934),” *Radovi*, 16 (1983), 139–80.

¹⁶ Yugoslav and Bulgarian royal couples met three times in second half of 1933. Additionally a series of cultural events were organized which contributed to the rapprochement of the two countries. Ž. Avramovski, “Stav britanske diplomatije,” 150; Vladan Jovanović, *Vardarska banovina 1929–1941*, (Belgrade, 2011), 316.

Association for the Balkan Union was established, which held its first conference in 1930.¹⁷ At the Balkan Conferences held from 1930 to 1933, in addition to economic, cultural, social, and legal cooperation, the possibility of drawing up a Balkan political pact was also discussed. The Macedonian question, again, proved to be a fundamental precondition for establishing some sort of political cooperation in the Balkans.¹⁸ Other Balkan countries interpreted the Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement as a threat of Slav hegemony in the Balkans. Already in the autumn of 1933, Turkey and Romania made preparations to sign a Balkan pact of four countries from which Bulgaria would be excluded. After the visit of Tsar Boris and Prime Minister Nikola S. Mushanov to Belgrade in December 1933 Bulgaria expressed its willingness to join the planned Balkan Pact. The Yugoslav government and King Alexander aspired to find a solution that would guarantee Bulgaria's participation thus leaving it to the Bulgarian authorities to find an acceptable platform for its participation.¹⁹

¹⁷ National groups that participated in the conference were represented by unofficial figures that were in contact with the governments of their countries and their views on the Balkan conference were in line with the official policy of the country that they represented. Živko Avramovski, "Stav britanske diplomatije," 140.

¹⁸ In an attempt to preserve the status quo in the Balkans and not allow the unresolved Balkan issues (e. g. Macedonia) in this area to be the cause of a possible infiltration of Soviet Union influence, British diplomats were very reserved towards the proposals of their own representatives in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, who asked that the British government itself or together with France and Italy, influence Bulgaria and its neighbors to reconcile. Thus, a 1933 memorandum from the Foreign Office says that it is not sure to what extent the inhabitants of the territory around Skopje, called Yugoslav Macedonia, "have a moral right to what might be called minority treatment. They are the raw materials from which, in happier circumstances, might be made, calm and loyal subjects of Bulgaria or Yugoslavia." Ž. Avramovski, "Stav britanske diplomatije," 147.

¹⁹ Italy and Hungary were dissatisfied with these developments and this visit sparked increased discontent in Greece and Romania as well. Serb intransigence towards Bulgaria's demands which treated the Macedonians as a Bulgarian national minority, on the one hand and IMRO terrorist activity on the other, allowed the Greek political circles to hope that the rapprochement cannot come in due time, thus they were surprised by the rapid development of events. The prevailing opinion was that since Bulgaria had no inclination of changing its stance towards Greece it opted to break out of its isolation by reaching a rapprochement with Yugoslavia as their most powerful neighbor. Ž. Avramovski, "Stav britanske diplomatije," 150.

The British government carefully followed the course of these negotiations and insisted that Bulgaria's inclusion in the Pact should be considered. British and French diplomacies had insisted upon it, aiming to strengthen the alliance and prevent the spread of German influence in the region. Since the Yugoslav government held similar views, British political mediation was carried out mainly through Belgrade. In the beginning of 1934, the Yugoslav government asked the Bulgarian government to present their standpoint so that it could become a member of the Balkan Pact. Instead, the Bulgarian government proposed a bilateral non-aggression pact with other Balkan countries. It was considered insufficient and therefore in February 1934 the Balkan Pact was signed in Athens without Bulgaria.²⁰

In May 1934, the supporters of the Zveno movement, the Zvenari, executed a *coup d'état* in Bulgaria.²¹ The new government, led by Kimon Georgiev, moved away from Italy, aiming to consolidate relations with France and establish closer relations with Yugoslavia, as well as with its other neighbors. For this reason, there was a need to end the conflict with Macedonians.²² Zvenari government sent the army into the Petrich enclave governed by Macedonians and

²⁰ The Balkan Treaty was signed on February 9, 1934 by Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Yugoslavia with the aim of preserving the status quo of the First World War. Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta*, 163; Fred Singleton. *Twentieth-Century Yugoslavia* (New York, 1976), 81. Nevile Henderson, British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1935), assessed the position of Yugoslavia as very difficult, because it had to take into account the wishes of Romania, Greece and Turkey on one hand. On the other, Yugoslavia had to be careful as not to do anything that would reverse the trend of rapprochement with Bulgaria. He claimed that Bulgaria, in fact, did not want to have four allies, it was interested in keeping the territorial status quo, but was trying to find one or more allies among the stronger of the Balkan countries that would help her gain compensation at the cost of weaker, or at the cost of Greece. Ž. Avramovski, “Stav britanske diplomatije,” 167–68.

²¹ In 1927, a Bulgarian supra-party pressure group called *Zveno* was founded by intellectuals like the Social Democrat Dimo Kazasov and members of the Military League, most prominently the colonels Kimon Georgiev and Damian Velchev. The group opposed the party system, government corruption, and terrorism of IMRO. Its foreign policy aim was to improve relations with Yugoslavia. In 1934 Kimon Georgiev became the new prime minister and Kazasov become ambassador in Yugoslavia. Frederick B. Chary, *History of the Bulgaria* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 77–8.

²² After signing the International Convention for the Definition for Aggression in 1933, the pressure to deal with IMRO grew considerably, because Bulgarian support for IMRO could be considered as an act of aggression. R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 247.

arrested Macedonian extremists in other parts of Bulgaria. The leader of IMRO, Ivan Mihailov, was forced to leave the country. Macedonia, for the first time in many years, was not an obstacle for the Bulgarian foreign policy.²³

In 1935 with the support of Tsar Boris III, a new cabinet was formed in Bulgaria. Its leader Georgi Kyoseivanov continued the pro-Yugoslav foreign policy. At the same time, Bulgaria tried to review the Neuilly settlement with Romania and Greece, concerning areas in the North and the South. The improvement of cultural cooperation was a clear indication of stronger relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In October 1934, while King Alexander arrived on an official visit to France, one of the IMRO members, Vlado Chernozemski, in collaboration with the UCRO, assassinated him in Marseilles. However, close cooperation between the two countries continued and was confirmed in 1937 with a signing of a “Pact of Eternal Friendship.”²⁴

At the end of the 1930s, both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria had distanced themselves from France and were moving towards a closer cooperation with Germany and its allies. In 1938 the Balkan States – Bulgaria and the Balkan Entente – signed the Salonika Agreements by which they renounced the use of war and condoned massive rearmament. Thus the agreement enabled Bulgaria to rearm itself, where previously it had been restricted according to the peace agreement of Neuilly.²⁵

²³ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945*, (London, 1999), 280–83; P. Dragišić, *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi*, 13.

²⁴ D. Tasić, “Vojno-politička akcija,” 92–107; V. Jovanović, *Vardarska banovina*, 316; S. K. Pavlowitch, *A History*, 280–283; P. Dragišić, *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi*, 13.

²⁵ Войн Божинов, ‘Пактът за ‘Вечно приятелство’, или осъществили се Българо-Югославското сближение’, *Tokovi istorije*, 1–2 (2008), 38–55; Kevin Featherstone, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Argyris Mamarelis and Georgios Niarchos. (January 2011) *The Last Ottomans*, Available at: <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doifinder/10.1057/9780230294653> (last accessed February 14, 2014), 60.

After the Salonika agreements, the Macedonian question still remained on the agenda. Yugoslavia offered a customs union, a military alliance and frontier rectifications, if Bulgaria would renounce its claims on Macedonia, but although Bulgaria did not wish to fight for territorial expansion, it was not prepared to give up its claims on Macedonia.²⁶

The Ideology and the Activity of the World Alliance

The WA was established in 1914 as a successor to an Anglo-German organization founded after mutual visits by British and German church leaders and theologians in 1908 and 1909 to promote friendly relations between the two nations.²⁷ During the accession celebrations of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1913, the initiators of the WA met industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who donated two million dollars to promote peace through the cooperation of

²⁶ Despite the terms of the treaty of Neuilly Bulgaria, in fact, had begun to rearm in 1935. R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford, 2008), 251–53.

²⁷ The official name of the organization established in 1910 was the Associated Councils of Churches of the British and German Empires for Fostering Relations between the Two Peoples. The initiative for establishing the councils came from British liberal MPs Allen Baker and Willoughby Dickinson. The councils in Germany and in Britain were officially led by the Archbishop of Canterbury Randall Davidson and the Director of Siemens-Halske Corporation Friedrich Spiecker. In reality, Baker and Dickinson ran the organization in Britain. After the sudden death of Baker in 1918 Dickinson became the leader of the WA, serving as the secretary, the honorary secretary and for a short period in the beginning of 1930s as the President of the Alliance. In Germany, one of the leading figures, who before the First World War actively contributed in the activities of the organization, was the Professor of Church History at the University of Berlin and the director of the Prussian Royal Library, a Baltic-German Adolf von Harnack. As he had been a fervent supporter of the German national cause from the beginning of the First World War, after the war he did not participate in the activity of the WA. He had been one of the authors of Kaiser Wilhelm's speech of the declaration of war addressed to the German people on August 6, 1914. Another German, who participated in the work of the German Council and later became one of the leaders of the WA, was the minister of the Sanssouci Freedom Church and later the Professor of Social Pedagogy at the University of Berlin Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze. Keith Clements, "The Anglo-German Churches' Exchange Visits of 1908–1909. A Notable Anniversary," *Ecumenical Review*, 59 (2/3) (2007), 257–83; J. C. O'Neill, "Adolf von Harnack and the Entry of the German State into War, July–August 1914," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 55 (1) (2002), 3–5; Rudolf Linder, "Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze – Facetten einer Persönlichkeit," in Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (hrsg.), *Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze (1885–1969): Ein Leben für Kirche, Wissenschaft und soziale Arbeit* (Kohlhammer, 2007), 7–11.

all Christian churches. These funds, which were used to finance the activities of WA, were controlled and distributed by the American based Church Peace Union.²⁸

After the war, the WA gathered for its first meeting in October 1919. There was a brief confrontation, followed by conciliation between the German and the French representatives. More importantly several fundamental decisions were made at that meeting. Firstly, it was decided to support the proposition presented by the Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom to convene a global Christian conference to discuss the challenges the societies and the churches were facing.²⁹ Secondly, WA dealt with its constitution and appointed its officials into office.³⁰ Thirdly, WA declared its support to the League of Nations, proposing the League accept all

²⁸ Darril Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs* (Washington D. C., 1969), 31.

²⁹ This conference took place in Stockholm in 1925 and formed the basis for the establishment of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work. In 1919, its leader Söderblom presented the key principle for the movement, known as 'Evangelical Catholicism.' In 1930, Söderblom received the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the ecumenical movement. He was especially influential in Scandinavia and among the church leaders in the Baltic States. Nils Karlström, *Ökumene in Mission und Kirche* (München, 1962), 113–14; Wolfram Weisse, *Praktisches Christentum und Reich Gottes: Die ökumenische Bewegung Life and Work 1919–1937* (Göttingen, 1991), 123; Priit Rohtmets, Veiko Vihuri, "The Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran Church (From the Beginning of 20th Century to II World War)," in Riho Altnurme, Priit Rohtmets (eds.), *History of Estonian Ecumenism* (Tartu, Tallinn, 2009), 45–8.

³⁰ The Alliance consisted of constituent National Councils. Each National Council appointed its own officers and was represented on the International Council. In 1930s there were National Councils in 34 countries. The International Council consisted of members appointed by the National Councils (for three years) and co-opted members (not more than ten). The International Council usually met once in two or three years. In between the Alliance was administered by the Management Committee (established in 1928; from 1925 to 1928 the Administrative Board), which consisted of the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the International Council, the General Secretary, the International Secretaries, the Treasurer, one member appointed by each of the National Councils and eight members co-opted by the Management Committee (Until 1930s instead of International Secretaries there were eight Honorary Secretaries, who belonged to Committee). The usual business of the Alliance when neither the Management Committee nor the International Council was in session was conducted by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consisted of the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the International Council, the General Secretary, the International Secretaries and four members appointed annually by the Management Committee. *The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook 1935* (Geneva, 1935), 16–21.

states that had expressed their wish to join the League and called on the League to respect human rights and religious freedom.³¹

One of the cornerstones of the WA's identity and ideology was the understanding that the organization was the spiritual equivalent of the League of Nations, the 'soul' of the League. As Dickinson stated in 1920, the League of Nations was based on those principles of international Christian fellowship the recognition of which the WA was formed to encourage.³² The League of Nations was seen as a valuable piece of machinery for dealing with international troubles in a peaceful manner. But as the WA stated, a will on the part of the peoples was needed to work the machine in a peaceful way. The spirit of Christian friendship alone could ensure its ultimate success.³³

From the viewpoint of the League of Nations, the WA was one of many social organizations surrounding the League. In the beginning of 1920s, when the number of such organizations was still limited, the resolutions of WA even reached the Council of the League, but they failed to impress the diplomats and no member took any action regarding them.³⁴

The WA as an instrument for promoting peace and friendship, and was interested in general problems of the world political order. Most of these problems were the outcomes of the war, e.g., the question of disarmament and the problem of minorities, including religious

³¹ 'Minutes of International Committee 9/29–10/3/1919', *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, Minutes, documents, reports and Correspondence, Minutes of Various committees: August 2, 1914–April 16, 1923*, World Council of Churches Archives (WCCA), 212.001: 23–49.

³² *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1920* (London, 1920), 12–3.

³³ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Annual Report and Handbook 1932* (Geneva, 1932), 15.

³⁴ Due to being previously acquainted with Dickinson and out of respect for Archbishop Davidson the Secretary General of the League, Eric Drummond tried to attract national politicians, but there were no remarkable results, as the influence mostly depended on position of National Councils, which varied in each state. Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs*, 75.

minorities. Among other ecumenical initiatives, it was certainly the most political and politically orientated organization. In the 1920s, the WA played an especially important role in the Ecumenical movement. From 1925 the Life and Work movement steadily took on a leading role in the movement.³⁵ The WA reached its peak in 1928 and thereafter the organization faced a continuous decline. Its decline was accelerated by the financial crisis beginning in 1929, and the failure of the World Disarmament Conference in 1934. At the beginning of 1930s, when the political order in Europe began to shift from democracy to authoritarianism, the WA had lost its credibility and clarity in vision. Therefore, the emerging regimes, especially National Socialism in Germany, left the WA in a paralyzed state.³⁶ It did not possess methods to counter the necessary ideology and policy advanced by the totalitarian regimes.³⁷

The methods used by WA were generally those of the nineteenth century campaigns for such causes as the abolition of slavery. The aim was to influence public opinion on key issues to such extent that governments could not ignore the voice of the people. To achieve this goal debates were initiated, and declarations, petitions and appeals were passed. One cornerstone of the WA was to organize events for promoting peace, like peace-Sundays. In addition to these events material on peace-work was printed. The WA also established relations between churches representatives and politicians. Because the representatives of WA were often leading

³⁵ Harjam Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaft der Kirchen 1914–1948. Eine ökumenische Friedensorganisation* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 401.

³⁶ Although the German National Committee was one of the founders of the Alliance, the committee had already during the Weimar Republic period faced some difficulties and opposition. The German National Council only received support from the German churches in matters that offered a prospect of furthering the German national cause, e.g. war guilt, the revision of the treaty of Versailles, etc. Julian Jenkins, in describing the activity of the German National Committee, has justifiably claimed that the downfall of the German National Committee “was a precursor for the collapse of the World Alliance.” Julian Jenkins, “A Forgotten Challenge to German Nationalism: The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 37, 2 (1991), 296.

³⁷ Priit Rohtmet, “Ecumenical Peace Organization ‘The World Alliance for promoting International Friendship through the Churches’ and Resistance to Totalitarian Regimes between Two World Wars,” *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri*, 64, 1 (2013), 82–3.

clergymen, these relations were established in practice as well as in theory.³⁸ Several leading members of the WA were also politicians. Over the years, work with the youth, seen as the future public opinion leaders, gained more and more attention.³⁹

The success of the WA mostly depended on the activity of the local national councils (NC). In addition to national councils over the years the Alliance began to emphasize more and more the importance of regional conferences in order to foster relations between neighbors and to focus on issues related with neighboring societies, e.g. minority questions.⁴⁰

Harjam Dam in his book on the history of the WA correctly pointed to a misunderstanding that the WA was an organization of individual Christians and did not represent the official position of the churches. There were, in fact, two types of councils, based on the principle of individuality and councils that officially represented the churches. It is true that the principle of individuality was characteristic to the ideology of the WA and the most successful as well as the largest council of the Alliance, the National Council of the United States, represented that individualistic approach. At the same time in Finland, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Belgium, Portugal, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania the councils consisted of official church delegates. According to Dam, the council members in Yugoslavia and in Bulgaria also officially represented the churches.⁴¹ It is true, however, that the individual ideological approach was more

³⁸ Daniel Gorman, “‘Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 1 (2010), 60–1.

³⁹ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Annual Report and Handbook 1931* (London, 1931), 13.

⁴⁰ From 1923 to 1938 the World Alliance organized 23 regional conferences. Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaft der Kirchen 1914–1948*, 407.

⁴¹ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaft der Kirchen 1914–1948. Eine ökumenische Friedenorganisation*, 408.

or less evident and emphasized by local representatives in those countries as well. Yugoslavia is a good example to follow.

What has not been emphasized enough in the study of the WA is the fact that over the years the WA itself evolved. A clear shift in the rhetoric of the organization can be determined in 1928, when advocating for the establishment of the International Court in Hague and announcing that the Christian community could under no condition support the war, the Alliance claimed to represent Churches in more than 30 countries and not merely a private group of pacifists.⁴²

By the end of the 1920s, a change of WA's working methods seemed inevitable. It had not defined its dogmatic basis, and its ideology was extremely vague in formulation. The WA activity relied on the work in national councils intended to influence politicians and societies. Unfortunately, without the Alliance's necessary ideological and theological background activity it was not able to guarantee a real success. One has to agree with historians Darril Hudson and Harjam Dam, who have said that despite the fact that the WA's appeals and resolutions were often nothing more than a kind of 'Christian blessing,' the Alliance "continued its discussion and consideration of political issues on a plane once removed from reality."⁴³ The problem was, in fact, discussed and analyzed by the members of the WA. In 1932 the issue was raised at a meeting in Czechoslovakia by a German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who warned the ecumenical movement and the WA that "without a coherent theology of the Church's public role the ecumenical movement risked being at the whim of political trends."⁴⁴ Unfortunately, as far as

⁴² *Annual Report and Handbook of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches 1931* (London, 1931), 13. In fact, the Alliance did not embrace a pacifist position in discussing the question of disarmament, but supported the concept of partial disarmament.

⁴³ Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaft der Kirchen 1914–1948. Eine ökumenische Friedenorganisation*, 406; Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs*, 134.

⁴⁴ Stephen Plant, "The Sacrament of Ethical Reality: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Ethics for Christian Citizens," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 18, 3 (2005), 76–7.

the WA was concerned there were no results and therefore in the 1930s the international public largely ignored the organization. In describing the relations of the WA with the rest of the ecumenical movement, were much the same. Although in the beginning of the 1930s Henry Louis Henriod became the joint secretary of the WA and the Universal Council of Life and Work, the Alliance decided not join the initiative presented in 1937 by the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements to establish the World Council of Churches. The WA was left to pursue its aims in a world where its message of promoting peace was less and less heard. After the Second World War, due to the establishment of the World Council of Churches, the Alliance was dissolved in 1948.

The Orthodox Community and the World Alliance

The Orthodox community joined the WA after the First World War.⁴⁵ In 1919, a delegation of the Faith and Order movement visited the Balkan states. In beginning of 1920 the Chief International Relations organizer of the WA, George Nasmyth, during his visit to Greece, KSCS, Romania and Bulgaria met with church leaders and representatives who expressed their wish to join the international ecumenical movement and the WA. Nasmyth described South Eastern Europe and the tense relations between the Balkan nations, as the “storm center of international relations” in his report presented to the Management Committee of the WA. In his

⁴⁵ Orthodox principles of participation in the ecumenical movement were determined in the epistle of Patriarch Joachim III, in 1902. More importantly, in 1920 the Ecumenical Patriarch issued a letter to all Churches with the proposal for understanding, friendship, and unity. At the preliminary meeting of the Faith and Order in Geneva (August 12-20, 1920), the SOC was represented by Bishops Irinei Ćirić and Emilian Piperković and Professor Dobroslav Kovačević. From that meeting on, the SOC was involved in the movement and regularly participated in its meetings and conferences. “Izvršni odbor interkonfesionalnog pokreta (štokholmskog) ‘Za život i rad’ u Novom Sadu,” *Glasnik SPP*, 38–39 (Oct. 12/Sept. 29, 1933), 627–28; Marko Nikolić, Petar Petković, “Institucionalne forme savremenog ekumenskog dijaloga,” *Međunarodni problemi*, 63, 2 (2011), 276–96.

opinion, there was only one force – namely religion – of enormous power and almost unlimited opportunity for service, which had so far not been used for peace-promotion purposes. In countries, that claimed allegiance to the Eastern Orthodox Church as their national faith, no major conflicts between the churches existed.⁴⁶ The visit of Nasmyth paved the way for the Balkan representatives to come to Switzerland in August 1920.⁴⁷ The month of August was remarkable, because three different ecumenical organizations meetings were held in Switzerland: first in Geneva the meetings of the Faith and Order, then the Life and Work and finally in Beatenberg the meeting of the WA. The Orthodox representatives attended all the meetings.⁴⁸

The viewpoint of Nasmyth on the high importance of religion in the Balkan states was true, at the same time the opinion on the harmony between different religious groups has to be approached with some criticism, because there was, in fact, a misunderstanding between the BOC and the SOC. As the relationship between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia is inseparable from the history of the Orthodox churches in the two countries, the problems between the churches, of course, an impact on the relationship between the two countries, being a precondition and an

⁴⁶ “Minutes of the Management Committee April 30–May 1, 1920,” *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence, Minutes of Various Committees: August 2, 1914–April 16, 1923*, WCCA, 212.001: 73–4.

⁴⁷ Miloš Parenta, “Radi ujedinjenja crkava,” *Glasnik SPP*, 5 (March 1/14, 1923), 70–2; Dam, *Der Weltbund für Freundschaft der Kirchen 1914–1948: Eine ökumenische Friedenorganisation*, 144–46.

⁴⁸ In Life and Work meeting delegations from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the SOC, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian Church and semi-officially the Russian Orthodox Church were present. The main issues discussed, with the aim of bringing together and uniting Churches, were the concept of the Church, notion of a united Church, and significance of the Bible and the Creed in uniting the Churches. The representatives of the Orthodox Churches held a special meeting on 11 August to decide a common stance, presented later at the Life and Work meeting. According to the Orthodox stance, proposed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, ecumenical movement was primarily based on Christian love and solidarity. Establishment of a community or a Church League based on those principles was approved. The joint program of Orthodox Churches was adopted at the Preliminary meeting of the Life and Work conference in August. A Continuation Committee was elected on the same day. It consisted of 47 members from twelve religious groups. The Orthodox Churches had seven representatives, including Bishop Irinei from SOC and Metropolitan Stefan from the BOC. Emilijan Piperković, “Preliminarni sastanak svehrišćanske konferencije u Ženevi,” *Glasnik SPP*, 6 (September 16/29, 1920), 90–92, 7 (October 1/14, 1920), 106–8.

important factor in the rapprochement process. Furthermore, according to the principles of church and state relations in Orthodox countries, the church was considered to be an essential part of state-building and often took part in state functions, particularly in fostering foreign relations.⁴⁹ Thus, the contribution of the Alliance and its impact on the relations between the two states has to be analyzed in a more detailed manner.

Another fact, which has to be analyzed with some caution, is the membership principle of the WA's national committees in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. As stated earlier, according to Dam, the council members in Yugoslavia and in Bulgaria officially represented the churches. However, according to Yugoslav religious media the WA activity in Yugoslavia was considered to be a private initiative.⁵⁰ Having said that, it is also true that WA's national committee members held high positions in the two churches and in their societies that enabled them to conduct the church and state foreign policy in a more private and noncommittal manner.⁵¹

The WA national Committee of the Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenes, NCSCS, held its first meeting in February 1921. The committee had seven representatives from the Orthodox Church, seven representatives from the Lutheran Church and three representatives

⁴⁹ According to the German theologian Ernst Benz the basic weakness of Orthodoxy lies in the danger of losing its internal freedom, i.e. church hierarchy becoming the instruments of internal and foreign policy of the state. Another danger lies in upsetting the balance between ecumenical or supranational and national religious consciousness. Therefore, Benz says that the national fragmentation of Orthodoxy spurred the national quarrels of the Balkan peoples that resulted in the Orthodox Church very rarely being a unifying spiritual factor, strong enough to solve bloody conflicts. According to a Croatian historian Vjekoslav Perica the SOC obtained a special law by which it became the de facto state religion in the mid-1920s. He claims that the Yugoslav state was for Serbian Church leaders, "a Serbian state born in the blood of the victorious Serbian Army in World War I." Ernst Benz, *Geist und Leben der Ostkirche*, (W. Fink Verlag, 1971), 184-85; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols* (Oxford, 2002), 18.

⁵⁰ "Konferencija u Atini," *Vesnik*, 4 (March 16, 1930).

⁵¹ The honorary secretary of the WA, Henry Atkinson, had the same impression after he had visited Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in January 1930. He stated that both NCs had the support of their churches and "many individuals of influence in their respective countries." *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence. Conferences, 1924-1931*, WCCA, 212.007: Report of J. Jezequel and Henry A. Atkinson's visits to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

from the Reformed Church. During the first years, the presidency rotated between several clergymen. During the first two years, the President of the Committee was Metropolitan Archbishop of Banat, Ilarion Radonić.⁵² In 1923 Nicholai Velimirovitch, (Nikolaj Velimirović), an ecumenically minded Bishop of Žiča and the diocese of Ohrid, replaced him.⁵³ In 1924 Professor Irinei Georgevitch (Djordjević) became the President of the committee, holding the same position at the beginning of 1930s. In 1923, he had succeeded a theologian Professor Dr. Voyslav Janitch (Vojislav Janjić)⁵⁴ as a representative of the NCSCS in the Management Committee of the WA and remained in this position until 1928.⁵⁵ Janitch, an MP, had been the first secretary of the NCSCS. There had been a separate secretary for the Protestant members of the committee since the establishment of the committee. The first secretary was Samuel Schumacher, a pastor of Petrovopolje.⁵⁶ Among the vice-presidents were Serbian Bishop Irinei Ćirić⁵⁷ and Patriarch Gavriilo (Gabriel) Dožić (after 1938).⁵⁸

⁵² *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1923*. International Office, (London, 1923), 7.

⁵³ Nicholai Velimirovitch (1881–1956), Bishop of Ohrid (Macedonia) and Žiča, theologian and philosopher. He participated in the post-war peace conferences, the ecumenical Church meetings and gatherings, conferences of Christian Community of Young People around the world and the Pan-Orthodox consultation. The SOC declared him a saint in May 2003.

⁵⁴ Vojislav Janjić (1890–1994), theologian, politician and Minister of Religion in 1923. He travelled to Constantinople, Athens, and Bucharest several times to discuss the unity of the Churches. “Dr Vojislav Janjić,” *Vesnik*, 19 (September 1, 1923), 1.

⁵⁵ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1924*. International Office, (London, 1924), 12; *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1928*. International Office, (London, 1928), 13.

⁵⁶ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1923*. International Office, (London, 1923), 8.

⁵⁷ Irinei Ćirić (1884–1955), SOC Bishop of Timok and later of Bačka. He also represented the SOC in the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements. “Konferencija istočnih i zapadnih bogoslova u Novom Sadu od 3–10. avgusta 1929,” *Duhovna straža*, 4 (1929), 318–21; “Irinej episkop bački,” *Glasnik SPP*, 5 (1955), 67–70; Bishop Sava, “Dr Irinej Ćirić, episkop novosadsko-bački,” *Bogoslovlje*, 1–2 (1964), 11–3; Ignatije Marković, “Životopis episkopa novosadsko-bačkog dr Irineja Ćirića, ispovednika pravoslavlja,” *Sabornost*, 4 (2010), 237–62.

⁵⁸ “Forward to Peace, What It Is and What It Does,” *The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches*, 1923–1926.

From 1925, the President of the NCSCS was Irinei Ćirić, Bishop of Novi Sad. The Yugoslav media repeatedly stated that “the main merit of maintaining links with foreign fraternal Churches belonged to Bishop Irinei, who was the real *spiritus agens* in all such ideas and movements.”⁵⁹ From 1929 Irinei belonged to the Executive Committee of the WA, from 1930 served as Chairman of the Management Committee and from 1939 was the President of the entire organization.⁶⁰ In addition to Irinei, there were several ecumenically minded bishops and theologians who took part in the WA’s activity. Most of them were also active in the work of the YMCA and other international ecumenical organizations.⁶¹ Among the members of the NCSCS were Archimandrite Valerian Pribičević, Archpriest Gabriel Milošević, Episcopal administrator Adam Vereš, Bishop Mark Kalodera, and senior Jacob Jahn.⁶²

The Bulgarian National Council, BNC, also established in 1921, was from the very beginning led by the Metropolitan of Sofia, Archbishop Stefan (Gheorghiev), who, like Irinei, was one of the leading representatives of the entire WA.⁶³ From the early stages of the WA Stefan belonged to the Management Committee. He was an influential church leader, one of the key people representing the Orthodox community in the WA. From 1927 he served as a member

⁵⁹ “Konferencija u Atini,” *Vesnik*, 4 (March 16, 1930).

⁶⁰ *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence*. 1. W.H. Dickinson’s papers 1938–1942, Message from the President of the World Alliance The Rt. Rev. Bishop Irinei of Novi Sad, WCCA, 212.006: November 1939.

⁶¹ “Konferencija u Atini,” *Vesnik*, 4 (March 16, 1930).

⁶² “Liga crkava,” *Vesnik*, 13 (March 28, 1921).

⁶³ Exarch Stefan I (1878–1957), born Stojan Popgeorgiev Sokov, Bishop since 1921 and the Metropolitan of Sofia since 1922; was elected for the President of the BNC in January 1924. Between the wars, he actively participated in the ecumenical movement and was the BOC representative at international conferences. From 1945 to 1948 he was the Bulgarian Exarch. Даниела Калканджиева, *Българската православна църква и ‘народната демокрация’ (1944-1953)*, (Силистра, 2002), 37-45; Борис Цацов, *Архиереите на Българската православна църква*, (София, 2003); Руселена Пенджекова, *Личността и делото на екзарх Стефан в българската историческа памет*, Дигитална библиотека по архивистика и документалистика, (София 2010): Available at: <http://electronic-library.org/books/Book%200026.html> (last accessed February 14, 2014).

of the administrative board of the WA.⁶⁴ Another member, whose activity had an impact on the entire WA, was Prof. Stefan Zankov, who, at first served as a secretary of the BNC and was in 1933 appointed as a special secretary of the WA for the entire Orthodox community.⁶⁵ The vice-president of the BNC was Dr Paissiy, Bishop of Znepole. At first, there was a corresponding secretary for the evangelical denominations. Pastor D. N. Furnajiev, who filled that post, later became a longstanding treasurer of the BNC.⁶⁶

The fact that the WA appointed a secretary for the Orthodox community proves the importance the Orthodox community had in the Alliance. A precondition for achieving a stronghold within the WA was the influential position the churches had in the societies of South East European countries. There is, however, another and a more problematic side to this – the burning issues which had emerged in the same societies, for it was precisely for this reason the Orthodox community gained so much attention in the WA.

As in Western or Eastern Europe, each country in South Eastern Europe had its own problems to tackle and the internal issues of each of them had to be resolved first. They were mainly the outcomes of the national awakenings in the second half of the nineteenth century, the results of the Balkan wars, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the aftermath of First World War. These conflicts not only influenced the internal situation of each country, but had an impact on foreign relations with neighboring countries as well.

⁶⁴ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1927.* International Office, (London, 1927), 14.

⁶⁵ *Handbook of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches. Covering the Period from Chamby 1935 to Larvik 1938.* International Office, (Geneva, 1938), 9

⁶⁶ He served as the corresponding secretary until 1925. *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1925.* International Office, (London, 1925), 9.

It is no surprise that these problems were mentioned in the reports of national committees. Greece, for example, mostly dealt with the consequences of Turkish repression of Greek civilians, whereas the NCSCS tackled a problem of minorities, which according to the report of the NCSCS was a new challenge to face. Interestingly enough, the question of minorities in the context of foreign relations was not on the agenda of the national committees until the mid 1920s. Both the BNC and NCSCS since their establishment had organized public events to promote the ideas of the WA and considered it necessary to get their governments to support the aims of the organization.⁶⁷

To some extent they succeeded, so when in 1921 Dickinson made his first visit to the KSCS Dr. Janitch organized meetings with the Foreign Minister, Minister of Religion (Public Worship) and with Metropolitan Ilarion Radonić, who was the president of the NCSCS, as well as with Metropolitan Josif Cvijović. After Janjić had explained the aims of the WA, Metropolitan Josif expressed his sympathy for the movement, saying that the entire Orthodox Church would support the WA that serves to promote friendship among nations. Janjić organized a meeting with the representatives of Protestant Churches in the KSCS, who were members of the NCSCS.⁶⁸ The impression Dickinson had from the visit was twofold: on the one hand he had heard complaints from the Protestants about the violation of religious freedom and human rights of the minorities; on the other hand he had had conciliatory discussions during his visit and therefore believed that the WA was in fact doing a good thing in promoting friendly relations. He believed that the KSCS in principle respected the rights of minorities. However at the same time

⁶⁷ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1924*. International Office, (London, 1924), 59–60, 78–9, 102–7.

⁶⁸ Branko Bjelajac, “Hrišćanska zajednica studenata kao model saradnje i tolerancije među crkvama s početka XX. veka”, *Religija i tolerancija*, IX, 16 (July–December, 2011).

he remained cautious because of the centralizing policy of the state, i.e. a policy that claimed Serbia to have a central position in the state.⁶⁹

To maximize the effect of the WA's work in the region, the Alliance initiated regional conferences, the first of which was organized in Novi Sad in July 1923. Delegates from the NC's of the KSCS, Romania and Hungary attended it; however representatives of Bulgaria did not participate, because they could not obtain passports.⁷⁰ The conference adopted a resolution on the racial, religious, and linguistic rights of minorities and the tasks of the Church in the protection of these rights.⁷¹ Dickinson, who in the 1920s chaired the International Federation of League of Nations Societies and promoted the ideas of the League of Nations all over the world, visited national councils from Constantinople to Athens in 1926. On that occasion, he wrote in a report: "The two chief danger spots of Europe lay in the Balkans and on the German-Polish frontier and every action which tends to remove misunderstandings between the peoples of these countries has undoubted value in the preservation of world peace."⁷²

⁶⁹ *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence. The British Council. Willoughby Dickinson's papers. Yugo-Slavia. Report by Sir Willoughby Dickinson on his visit, Aug. 6–21, WCCA, 212.015: 1921.* Pieter Troch in his recent study argues that the Yugoslav elite between the two world wars could not "create incentives for further interactive, negotiated and dynamic redefinitions of Yugoslav national identity." During the royal dictatorship, from 1929 several measures were taken toward Yugoslavization, but as the political system left little room for discussion, the Yugoslav national idea became linked with conservatism, centralism and for non-Serbian elites with Serbian hegemony. The Yugoslav, Croatian and Slovene national ideas became competitors. After the death of King Aleksander the Yugoslav idea became one of the national ideas in a multinational state. Pieter Troch, "Yugoslavism between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation building," *Nationalities Papers*, 38, 2 (2010), 227–44.

⁷⁰ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance 1925.* International Office, (London 1925), 50.

⁷¹ A similar conference was held in Budapest the same month between delegates of the Councils of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where among other subjects the conditions of minority churches of Slovaks and Serbs in Hungary were discussed. "Konferencija Nacion. Saveta Lige Crkava u Novom Sadu," *Glasnik SPP*, 11 (July 1/14, 1923), 172; 14 (July 15/28, 1923), 221.

⁷² *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through Churches, Propaganda and Information, Reports, Notes, Folders, Flyers; Report on Visits to the National Councils in the Year 1927 by Rt. Hon. Sir Willoughby Dickinson, K. B. E.* (October 1927).

A resolution, first adopted in Athens, was once again presented at a Balkan regional conference held in Sofia in 1927, to emphasize the need to foster friendly relations between the Balkan countries. It was suggested that a real achievement would be to organize Orthodox conferences, cooperation between Balkan theological faculties and even publish a journal for the Orthodox community.⁷³ These statements were, however, overshadowed by the growing tensions between the churches and states of Bulgaria and KSCS.

Relations between Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches in the Early 1920s

After the First World War the Tsardom of Bulgaria and its church were put in isolation. Along with other Central Power countries Bulgaria had lost the war, and the foreign relations of the BOC were limited because of its tense relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.⁷⁴

The SOC, at the same time, gained a stronger foothold in the Orthodox community than before the First World War. After the war the SOC, in principle, supported the stance of the

⁷³ 'Konferencija Svetskog Saveza', *Vesnik*, 36 (October 16, 1927).

⁷⁴ The liberation movement of Balkan nations against Turkish domination began early in the nineteenth century, when at first semi-dependent and then independent states of Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria were established. A process of establishing new local churches followed it. The Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople first granted autonomy and later full autocephaly to churches in Serbia, Greece, and Romania. The borders of the newly established churches coincided with the borders of the new states. Bulgarians had lost their church independence in 1767. However, the Bulgarian Church declared its separation from the jurisdiction of Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1860 and in 1870 established an Exarchate. The Ottoman Sultan recognized it the same year, but the Patriarchate of Constantinople did not and at a council meeting in 1872 condemned the BOC as schismatic and broke off all contacts with it. It was a complex issue because Bulgaria was not, at that time, an independent state. The church, however, wished to consolidate its position in Bulgarian society and fought for an independent Bulgaria, although its position was not always positively recognized. As the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not recognize the BOC a part of the Church worked under a parallel hierarchy. M. Mazover, *Balkan – kratka istorija*, (Belgrade, 2003), 114; James Lindsay Hopkins, *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Evolving Relationship Between Church, Nation and State in Bulgaria* (New York, 2009), 129–141; Momchil Metodiev, "The Ecumenical Activities of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: Reasons, Motivations, Consequences," *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXXII, 3 (2012), 4.

Ecumenical Patriarchate and considered the BOC as a schismatic church.⁷⁵ In 1921, during the first council meeting of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad [ROCA], where Metropolitan Stefan represented the BOC, Serbian Patriarch Demetrio did not allow Stefan to prolong his stay in Sremski Karlovac. It was Nikola Pašić, the prime minister of the KSCS, who orchestrated this policy towards Metropolitan Stefan.⁷⁶

Stefan's visit had a follow-up in the Serbian press, where a number of critical articles were published. Most importantly the articles criticized the decision to accept Bulgaria as a member of the League of Nations. The Bulgarians were seen as war criminals and therefore the decision to accept the Bulgarian Metropolitan on the soil of the KSCS was criticized. It was said that the Bulgarian Church had not deserved the invitation from the ROCA hierarchy and that Stefan had come to the KSCS without the invitation and approval of the Serbian Patriarch.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Nevertheless in 1921, the SOC decided to acknowledge the sacraments (including marriage) and clerical work carried out by priests during Bulgarian occupation of Serbia as "valid and legally performed." "Izveštaj o radu Sv. Arh. Sabora Kraljevine Srbije," *Glasnik SPC*, 2 (July 16/29, 1920), 23–4.

⁷⁶ From 1921 to 1944, the Synod of the ROCA was the spiritual center of the whole Russian Diaspora on the territory of Yugoslavia. The first ROCA Church Council meeting was held in Sremski Karlovci in 1921. It was chaired by Metropolitan Anthony Chrapovitsky with 24 Bishops, 72 priests and 67 laity representatives from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland, etc. Representatives from the army and the navy were also present. It is important to mention that Russia had broken off diplomatic relations with Bulgaria in September 1915. The relations between the BOC and the Russian Orthodox Church were also severed. After 1920, when Russian refugees, including priests, began to arrive to Bulgaria, Russian clergy in exile continued to support the Church policy that had been approved by the Russian Orthodox Church. Цветомира Антонова, "Отношението на Българската православна църква към болшевишката революция в началото на 20-те години на XX век," Available at: <http://dveri.bg/346ku> (last accessed February 14, 2014); Miroslav Jovanović, "Ruska pravoslavna zagrančna crkva u Jugoslaviji tokom dvadesetih i tridesetih godina 20. Veka," in B. Šijaković (ed.), *Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku, istraživački problemi i rezultati*, 3 (Belgrade 2008), 160–178, 164; Иван Снегаров, "Отношенията между Българската църква и другите православни църкви след провъзгласяването на схизмата," para. II. Руската църква. Available at: http://pravoslavie.domainbg.com/03/http://pravoslavie.domainbg.com/03/snegarov/snegarov_shizmata.html (last accessed February 14, 2014).

⁷⁷ "Neispunjena dužnost prema izginuloj braći našoj," *Vesnik*, 14 (April 4, 1921), 1; "Bugarska hoće mir sa susedima," *Vesnik*, 27 (1921), 3; "Bugare grize savest," *Vesnik*, 36 (September 5, 1921), 2; "Nova sveštenička kosturnica," *Vesnik*, 37 (September 12, 1921), 1; "Vićentije, mitropolit skopljanski," 39 (September 26, 1921), 1; Dr Voj. M. Subotić, "Od Bugara poubijani predsednici odbora srpskog Crevnog krsta," *Vesnik*, 39 (September 26, 1921), 2; "Naši sveštenici-narodni mučenici," *Vesnik*, 41 (October 10,

The leaders of SOC and ROCA suffered consequences as well. The Russian Metropolitan Anthony (Антоний – Алексѣй Пáвлович Храпови́цкий) was attacked on the basis that he had no right to receive visitors on the territory of the Serbian Patriarchate, especially those whose hands were covered with the blood of Serbian priests. The press emphasized that Stefan, as an envoy of the Bulgarian government, came to S. Karlovac to plead with the Russian Synod to intervene for the removal of the anathema pronounced against the Bulgarian Church by the Patriarchate of Constantinople while the Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliyski “openly flirted with the Communists in Bulgarian Parliament.” In conclusion it was stated that conciliation with Bulgarians depended on the Bulgarians themselves and sincere repentance from the BOC was needed.⁷⁸ It is fair to suggest that because of conflicts that had taken place in the recent past the Serbian Patriarchate and the KSCS felt offended. Having become more influential in the Balkan region after the First World War, they used the influence to put pressure on Bulgaria and its church to demand repentance.

The attitude had a more personal touch as well. Namely, the KSCS Ministry of Foreign Affairs was very suspicious of the activities of Metropolitan Stefan. As Stefan was the leader of the BOC, it affected bilateral relations in general. According to a report from May 1923 these suspicions were caused by the alleged activities of the Metropolitan during the war in Switzerland, including his connections with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁷⁹

1921), 1; “Štipski prota,” *Vesnik*, 44 (October 31, 1921), 3; “Naši rodoljubivi mučenici,” *Vesnik*, 50 (December 12, 1921), 1.

⁷⁸ Daily news *Politika* posted a strong “protest in the name of national pride and victims of Serbian clergy,” on November 24, 1921. The article reminded the public that the Bulgarians had killed 154 Serbian priests and the Metropolitan of Skopje Vikentije Krdžić (1853–1915) during the war. “Bugarin u Karlovcima,” *Politika*, (November 24, 1921), 1.

⁷⁹ Archive of Yugoslavia (AY), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Political Department (PD), 334–26–1053, May 1923. Archimandrite Stefan opposed the policies of Tsar Ferdinand during the First World War. After the death of his protector and mentor Exarch Joseph of Bulgaria, he moved to Switzerland in

Criticism and suspicions varied with reconciliation and willingness to establish friendlier relations. In an article, published in the official newspaper of the SOC, *Glasnik Srpske Pravoslavne Patrijaršije*, Glasnik SPP, in 1923, it was stated that the BOC had not been entirely in agreement with the Bulgarian government at the time of the Balkan wars. The newspaper referred to an article published in a Bulgarian religious magazine, *Pastirsko delo*, where the church had distanced itself from the atrocities in Serbia, declaring that they had been against the war and asked for forgiveness. Here, Stefan's escape from Bulgaria and stay in Switzerland during the war was mentioned in a positive context.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, a year later, *Glasnik SPP* bluntly declared that the Bulgarian people had in the past and were in the present acting against the Serbian people with the blessing and support of Bulgarian priests.⁸¹

The World Alliance – a Mediator in the Rapprochement Process between Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox Churches

The BOC managed to end its isolation by joining the ecumenical movement. In doing so, it helped to establish diplomatic relations with some of Bulgaria's neighboring countries.⁸² This can be considered as one of the two major achievements of the WA. The other was that the WA created a forum for Balkan churches to negotiate issues related to the outcomes of the Balkan

1915, continuing his studies at a Protestant university in Geneva until 1919. According to Bulgarian sources, he actively participated in diplomatic affairs through contacts with representatives of the Entente and different Bulgarian emigrant and student groups, as well as the Bulgarian embassy. His complex diplomatic activity during the war was the main reason for him to be distrusted. Allegedly he was one of the agents of the military attaché of the Bulgarian embassy in Bern to whom he passed information on the plans of the Entente countries towards Bulgaria, as well as information on military operations. His information was particularly valuable in 1916 when the idea on concluding a separate peace treaty between the Entente and Bulgaria was discussed. He was also involved in secret negotiations between Bulgaria and the Entente in 1917. P. Пенджекова, *Личността и делото*, para. I, 1.1.

⁸⁰ "Pitanje bugarske šizme," *Glasnik SPP*, 9 (May 1/14, 1923), 134–6; "Bugarska crkva u 1923. Godini," *Hrišćanski život*, 4 (1924), 180–2.

⁸¹ "Bugarska crkva," *Glasnik SPP*, 21 (November 1/14, 1924), 348.

⁸² P. Пенджекова, *Личността и делото*, I, 1.2.

Wars and the First World War. The latter, however, at first managed to worsen even further the relationship between the two churches, but in the 1930s these dissensions were overcome.

In 1924, Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, as a leading member of the NCSCS said in connection with a plan to convene an ecumenical meeting, that the Bulgarian schism was a bilateral problem between Constantinople and the BOC. It had nothing to do with other Orthodox churches. In fact, while some members of the Orthodox community took notice of the dispute, the rest of the community had a neutral stance concerning the matter. Nikolai referred to the SOC as being among the neutral churches. As the churches worked together in the WA, Nikolai considered it impossible for the WA to justify its name without the participation of the BOC.⁸³

Publically the SOC considered the BOC as their equal.⁸⁴ In reality, however, the SOC was rather cautious and therefore bilateral relations remained modest until the end of 1920s. At a council meeting of the SOC in 1928, after analyzing the activity of the WA, it was decided to monitor the BOC and although speeches were delivered to promote cooperation between the two churches, in the end it was stressed that cooperation should be informative in the present state of affairs.⁸⁵

Still, there were a few occasions, when the two churches established contacts. For example, after an earthquake in southern Bulgaria in April 1928, Patriarch Demetrius of the SOC

⁸³ Episkop ohridski Nikolaj, "Vaseljenski sabor i Bugarska crkva," *Vesnik*, 7 (March 1, 1925), 1. The Archpriest and the President of the SOC Priests Association, Miloš Andjelković shared the same view and advocated for the settlement between Constantinople and the BOC in an article, published in 1925. Miloš Andelković, "Šta treba rešiti pre Vaseljenskog Sabora?," *Vesnik*, 8 (March 10, 1925).

⁸⁴ In 1927 Miloš Parenta the editor of the *Glasnik SPP* expressed his high regard for the Bulgarian Church and desire is to establish fraternal communion between the two Churches. Miloš Parenta, "Srpsko-bugarsko bratstvo," *Glasnik SPP*, 6 (March 15/28, 1927), 86–8.

⁸⁵ Archives of St. Synod SOC (ASSOC), Council's register of 1920-1934, 105, 158/263, 52/272; AY, Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople, 411–8–324 and 411–21–42–45.

sent 1,000 dinars as aid for the victims. Another 100,000 was collected by the SOC church members and delivered to Bulgaria by a special envoy. On that occasion the Synod of the BOC and Demetrius briefly corresponded.⁸⁶

Most importantly, the representatives of the two churches met at the WA meetings. In September 1927 a regional conference of the WA took place in Sofia, with participants from three Balkan countries – Bulgaria, the KSCS and Romania. The Greek delegation did not participate because of a conflict on the Greek-Bulgarian border. The conference was presided over by Willoughby Dickinson, who remained in Sofia after the conference to discuss the question of minorities. A clear sign of openness for friendlier relations was the fact that Bulgarian clergy served a solemn liturgy together with Bishop Irinei Ćirić.⁸⁷ In general, the conference advocated for a deeper commitment to foster friendly relations between the Balkan states and societies. To achieve this goal an idea was presented to establish an organization of National Orthodox Churches, based on common faith and Orthodox Christian canonical principles. In an article, published after the conference in the newspaper *Vesnik*, the BOC was praised for its work and for educating young scholars.⁸⁸

Willingness to cooperate was mutual, though it did not mean that the KSCS had overcome the umbrage of the past, or that Bulgaria and its church were prepared to give up claims on Macedonia and to tolerate the policy of its neighbors in areas which they considered to be their territory. Another issue regarded the refugees who were staying in Bulgaria.⁸⁹ As the

⁸⁶ И. Снегаров, “Отношенията,” para. III. Сръбската църква.

⁸⁷ “Svetski savez za jačanje međunarodnog prijateljstva pomoću crkava,” *Duhovna straža*, 1 (1928), 64–71.

⁸⁸ “Konferencija Svetskog Saveza,” *Vesnik*, 36 (October 16, 1927).

⁸⁹ The BNC raised the issue of refugees in Bulgaria in 1926 during the Management Committee meeting in Lausanne, but as it did not provoke interest among the other Balkan National Councils, who were authorized by the Management Committee to discuss the matter, the issue was postponed and was

WA saw itself a defender of minorities, it did not come as a surprise that Bulgaria raised the question of protecting their minorities in neighboring countries in the WA. Already presented in the mid-1920s, the demands of the BNC had become louder since 1929. They had a profound impact on the bi- and multilateral relations of Balkan countries and their churches in the following years.

The NC reports published in 1928 allude to the emerging conflict over minorities. The KSCS report praised its own policies—minorities were represented in the parliament— while at the same time criticizing the Bulgarian government for supporting illegitimate activities on the territory of the Kingdom of SCS. According to the report, this issue was a serious obstacle for WA to gain a broader reception of its work. The BNC mentioned that it had dealt with Bulgarian minorities living in neighboring countries and stated that the work had unfortunately showed no results.⁹⁰

A regional conference, which was to be held in the spring of 1929, might have eased the situation, but because the constitution was suspended and a personal royal dictatorship was introduced by King Alexander of Yugoslavia, the conference was postponed and tensions escalated. In the summer of 1929 Metropolitan Stephan submitted a memorandum to the WA on violence against the Bulgarian minority in Yugoslavia. He saw it as a threat to peace in the Balkans. It is fair to suggest that he represented the views of the Tsardom of Bulgaria. The WA as an instrument for peace was therefore obliged to find a peaceful solution to the conflict

discussed during the debate, which started in 1929. It did not have any positive effect on the relations between two Churches.

⁹⁰ *The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Handbook of the World Alliance* 1928. International Office, (London, 1928), 117.

through its network. At the same time, the Serbian clergy were criticized for their views and activities during the Ottoman rule in the Bulgarian journal, *Cърkoven vestnik*.⁹¹

The appeal was put on the agenda of the Management Committee session in September 1929 in Avignon. Before the discussion a private meeting had been organized, where the representatives of the SOC and the BOC decided to remove the memorandum from the agenda of the Alliance until further notice, and instead organize meetings of the two NCs to resolve the situation.⁹²

According to a report by Bishop Irinei Ćirić, sent after the meeting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav side as an act of friendship agreed that the first meeting was to be held in Sofia. The meetings were supposed to result in a decision on convening a regional conference that was to be held in Belgrade.⁹³

Returning from France to Bulgaria Metropolitan Stefan passed through Belgrade, but there is no indication that he met the SOC representatives. A few weeks later he invited a Yugoslav diplomat, Ljubomir Nešić, for a meeting and according to Nešić complained that he was in a very difficult position because the memorandum had been withdrawn in Avignon. The withdrawal had been a result of an agreement with Yugoslav delegates, but now Bishop Irinei wished to go back on the agreement. Nešić advised him to negotiate directly with the Yugoslav

⁹¹ Bishop of Štip, Venjamin, was criticized because of his speech at the funeral of the victims of the Macedonian Committee in Štip and Skopje; the SOC Patriarch Varnava was criticized because of his anti-Bulgarian activity during the Ottoman rule. "Bugarska," *Glasnik SPP*, 15 (August 1/14, 1929), 237.

⁹² *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence. Conferences, 1924–1931. Avignon, September 19–21, 1929*, WCCA, 212.007.

⁹³ AY, KY Embassy in Romania, Bucharest, KY MFA, November 13, 1931, No. 20258, 395–23–577–583.

delegates and avoid public controversy. Stefan trusted Nešić to deliver his letter to Yugoslav delegates.⁹⁴ Postponing the planned Yugoslav visit to Sofia made the Bulgarians anxious.

As there was no settlement and the regional conference had been postponed, the WA discussed the question once again in 1930 and decided to interfere by sending the leading representatives of the WA to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to reach an agreement between the two sides. In January 1931 honorary secretaries Henry Atkinson and Jules Jézéquel first visited Yugoslavia, and later Bulgaria and Yugoslavia for the second time. During their first stay in Belgrade they had meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as with the representatives of the local NC. It was agreed that the regional conference of four neighboring countries should take place in May of 1931. However, during their visit to Bulgaria, the BNC refused to accept the decision to organize a regional conference before a bilateral meeting. Therefore, a preliminary meeting was agreed upon, to take place at the beginning of May 1931. The Yugoslav National Council (YNC) accepted these terms and the honorary secretaries left Belgrade with an agreement to summon the regional conference after a private meeting between the two parties. Both meetings were to be held in May 1931.⁹⁵

By March, all the necessary arrangements for the conference, beginning with the invitations and ending with a program, had been made. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the YNC refused to visit Bulgaria, because it felt insulted by a speech, delivered by Metropolitan Stefan at a funeral in Sofia, where he had mentioned that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was oppressing the Bulgarians on its territory. In fact, it was the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign

⁹⁴ AY, KY MFA, PD, Conf. no. 1480, 334, f. 8–28.

⁹⁵ “Report to the Management Committee on the Postponement of the Regional Conference at Belgrade by Willoughby Dickinson, September 1931,” *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence. Minutes of Various Committees: August 22, 1930–November 3, 1933*, WCCA, 212.003.

Affairs, who had cancelled the authorization for the visit to Sofia. Although it had grudgingly approved a conference in Belgrade, the decision not to go to Sofia meant that the regional conference in Belgrade was meant to be a failure, because the Bulgarians could not accept the invitation.

The YNC was now in a difficult position because they had promised to send their representatives to Sofia twice, but had failed to do so. At that moment there appeared to be tensions between the WA and the YNC. When Jézéquel in his letter to Bishop Irinei mentioned the decision of the YNC not to go to Sofia, the Bishop of Bačka in his answer considered the statement insulting and even questioned the future membership of the YNC in the WA. However, at the same time more constructive opinions were presented. Irinei Ćirić in a letter to Willoughby Dickinson and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze pointed out that the YNC was willing to ignore Stefan's speech, as long as the same attitude was not practiced as the general line of Bulgarian policy. Dickinson and Siegmund-Schultze expressed their hope to find a peaceful solution.⁹⁶ In June 1931, the WA meeting of the Executive Committee discussed Bishop Irinei's letter that explained that the YNC had intended to go to Sofia, but were prevented by 'certain events'. Irinei asked Dickinson, whether he should resign from the Executive Committee. The committee decided that there was no need for him to do so and that the question of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia should be put to the agenda of the WA Cambridge International Committee conference in September 1931.⁹⁷

In this context it comes as no surprise that the bilateral relations between two churches worsened at the beginning of the 1930s. There were a few signals of relief, and the conflict

⁹⁶ AY, KY Legation in Romania, Bucharest, MFA KY, November 13, 1931, No. 20258, 395–23–577–583.

⁹⁷ "Note of the decisions arrived at an informal meeting of certain members of the Executive at Hamburg, June 1st, 1931," WCCA, 212.003.

between the two churches escalated in general.⁹⁸ In 1930 the question of bilateral relations was on the agenda of the SOC Council, where it was once again decided to monitor the BOC.⁹⁹ At the same time, a debate on the history and the relations of the two countries began on the pages of Bulgarian religious journals *Tserkoven Vestnik* and *Pastirsko delo* and Yugoslav journal *Vesnik*.¹⁰⁰ In August 1930 Archpriest Bogoljub N. Milošević, who claimed to be a supporter of Serbia's rapprochement with Bulgaria, wrote in *Vesnik* that the final goal of the rapprochement had to be a complete unification of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and the creation of a powerful state, 'whose hips will be leaning on the Julian Alps and the Black Sea and the shoulders on the Morava and Vardar valley.' In order to achieve this the churches had to join forces. He criticized the attacks on Bulgaria by his fellow countrymen in connection with the crimes committed in the past and appealed not to open old wounds.¹⁰¹ The Bulgarian media described his views on the full-scale unification as chauvinistic and patronizing. The Bulgarians accused the Yugoslav side for oppressing Bulgarian minorities and other ethnic groups in Yugoslavia. Milošević wrote in

⁹⁸ For example: the journal *Vesnik* published an article on the anniversary celebration of the Metropolitan of Varna; Bishop of Niš, Dositej, attended the funeral of the Bulgarian Metropolitan Kirill as a representative of the SOC; the BOC delegation attended the funeral of SOC Patriarch Demetrios. "Dvadesetogodišnjica Varnskog Mitropolita Simeona," *Vesnik*, 15 (August 24, 1930), 2–3; "Delegacija Bug. crkve na pogrebu," *Vesnik*, 4 (April 13, 1930), 4.

⁹⁹ Issues related to the Bulgarian schism were discussed at Pan-Orthodox Conference in Vatopedi. During the visit of the SOC bishops to the Patriarch of Constantinople Photius in December 1930 the issue was also on the agenda. ASSOC, Council register 1920–1934, 105, 158/263, 52/272; AY, Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople, 411-8-324 and 411-21-42–45; "Predsborna svepravoslavna konferencija u Vatopedu," *Duhovna straža*, 4 (1930), 308–309; "Naši arhijereji u Carigradu," *Vesnik Srpske crkve*, 1 (January 1932), 60; "Vaseljenski pokret hrišćanskih crkava," *Duhovna straža*, 3 (1930), 238; F. Granić, "Problem saziva Vaseljenskog sabora," *Bogoslovlje*, XII, 1 (1937), 33–9.

¹⁰⁰ The SOC press strongly criticized the wedding of the Bulgarian royal couple according to the Catholic rite and described it as a "loss of Orthodox identity." Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria married in Assisi (Italy) in a Roman Catholic ceremony in 1930. His bride Giovanna was one of the daughters of King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy and Queen Elena, former Princess of Montenegro. At the second ceremony in Sofia they were married according to the Eastern Orthodox rite. The bride was a close relative to the Yugoslav King Alexander Karađorđević. Dimitrije Najdanović, "Sa najnižih stranica bugarskog apokalipsisa," *Vesnik*, 20 (November 9, 1930), 1.

¹⁰¹ Bogoljub N. Milošević, "Bugarsko-Srpsko Bratstvo," *Vesnik*, 14 (August 10, 1930), 1.

his reply that the Yugoslavs did not see the population of Macedonia as an ethnic minority. Macedonia was a province of Yugoslavia, where the people were of same blood and faith as all other Yugoslavs. Furthermore, he opposed the Bulgarian accusations of ‘Serbian chauvinism’ as a greatest impediment to the Bulgarian-Serbian rapprochement. According to him the biggest obstacle for rapprochement was the activity of “Bulgarian protégés’ from Macedonia – ‘makedonstvujušči’, who were responsible for the hatred, disorder and killings.”¹⁰² The language used remained the same, as it had been in 1920s.

There were no signs of tension between Yugoslav state authorities and the representatives of the SOC,¹⁰³ but it seems that the steps of the state authorities, i.e. withholding permission for the church to participate in a meeting with the BOC representatives, had put the clergy in an uncomfortable position. In August of 1931, the Bishop of Niš, Dositei, in his letter to the Patriarch of the SOC, Varnava (Rosić), mentioned that he had met Bishop Irinei, who was confused, because state authorities had not yet given him permission to travel to the WA conference in Cambridge.¹⁰⁴

Metropolitan Stefan of the BOC planned to issue a statement in Cambridge on the discrimination of Bulgarian minorities in Romania, Greece and Yugoslavia. The latter received the strongest criticism. The first contact in Cambridge clearly signaled a clash ahead, however,

¹⁰² Bogoljub N. Milošević, “Srpsko-Bugarsko bratstvo,” *Vesnik*, 18 (1930), 1.

¹⁰³ According to the constitution of KSCS/Yugoslavia and the church laws, the SOC was an autonomous and independent organization. In practice, however, the SOC was under the supervision and monitoring of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (until 1929) and thereafter the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the SOC was financially dependent on state. The SOC did not have a Department for Foreign Affairs, so the clergy worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970*, I–II (Belgrade 2002), I/23.

¹⁰⁴ Bishop Irinei had been informed by Yugoslav diplomats on the discussion in the Bulgarian media before the conference. He said: “Personally, it would be embarrassing for me not to be able to go to London. Surely, you have read in the newspapers who is coming to London from Sofia. It should not be underestimated.” AY, Embassy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bucharest, MFA KY, November 13, 1931, no. 20258, 395–23–577–583; *Hristu veran do smrti. Sveštenoisповедnik Dositej zagrebački i vavdenjski*, (Belgrade, 2008), 14, 82, 173.

after private talks between the parties the situation was once again eased, so that the discussions that followed could be described as more constructive than emotional. However, it did not mean that the conference reached an agreement, which would have been satisfying for both parties. After an overview of events surrounding the Balkan regional conference and the statement by Bishop Irinei, in which he on behalf of the YNC expressed readiness to visit Sofia, it was again decided that the regional conference was to be held in Belgrade as soon as possible, but only after the YNC had visited Bulgaria. The Yugoslav delegation opposed the idea that the visit should be marked by a specific deadline. There was, however, a significant proposal added to the Balkan regional conference resolution—the Greeks offered a solution by proposing that the next Balkan regional conference could be held in a country other than Bulgaria or Yugoslavia, if the two countries should in the nearest future fail to come to an agreement.¹⁰⁵

As it was thought to be a good solution to end the status quo, the WA proposed to organize the next Balkan regional conference in Bucharest. The Bulgarians and the Yugoslavs were willing to accept the decision, although it managed to cause unrest. In the annual BNC report for 1931, the committee described the WA's reputation in Bulgaria as 'of pessimistic character', because in analyzing the two major issues the WA focused on—disarmament and minorities—Bulgaria in both cases felt that the WA had failed them. The Bulgarian committee also expressed its deep regret that the question of minorities was removed from the agenda of the Bucharest meeting, although it had been accepted at first.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Bishop Irinei also noted that he fully understood what the postponement of the Yugoslav visit to Sofia meant for Metropolitan Stefan (this visit would more or less justify the Bulgarian withdrawal of the memorandum in Avignon), however the position of the Yugoslav NC was not easier (he was referring to Metropolitan Stefan's speeches). "Međunarodne konferencije crkava u Londonu," *Duhovna straža*, 3 (1931), 234-6

¹⁰⁶ The report noted that in accordance with the peace treaties Bulgaria had already been disarmed and the military forces were not even big enough to keep public order. *The World Alliance for Promoting*

Since 1929 Metropolitan Stefan had aimed to present a memorandum to attract public attention to the violation of human rights of Bulgarian minorities in the neighboring countries. However, the Yugoslav delegation had managed to remove the issue from the agenda through negotiations. Nevertheless, the memorandum was once again put on the agenda at the WA Management Committee meeting in Geneva in August 1932.

According to the minutes of the meeting the memorandum was followed by an extensive discussion. Although Bishop Irinei and the Yugoslav representatives did not agree with the estimates of two million Bulgarians, who had lost their ecclesiastical independence outside of Bulgaria and whose civil rights were violated, the Bulgarian delegation managed to achieve for the first time, what they had come for—after a discussion the WA decided to appoint a minorities commission of seven members to discuss the matter. The Management Committee admitted that the decision was in fact a result of the incompetence and lack of solid information about the matter. However, it did not mean that the issue was forced to become a subject of endless discussions at committee hearings. Concerning the regional conference the Management Committee expressed its hope that the conference would take place in Bucharest in spring 1933.¹⁰⁷

The Yugoslav reaction, presented in newspaper *Glasnik SPP* was predictable—the information presented during the meeting had in their opinion been misleading. They went even so far as to ask whether they should remain in the WA.¹⁰⁸ Yugoslavs firmly opposed to any kind of activity that could have had an effect on their stronghold in Macedonia. For example in January 1933, Professor Sergei Troicki of the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade,

International Friendship through the Churches. Annual Report and Handbook 1932. International Office, (Geneva 1932), 38.

¹⁰⁷ *Minutes of the Management Committee*, August 19–22 1932, 4–5, WCCA, 212.003.

¹⁰⁸“Svetski savez za međunarodno prijateljstvo crkava,” *Glasnik SPP*, 3 (Jan. 19/Dec. 6, 1933), 46–7.

published an analysis of the BOC Constitution project, criticizing their claim of jurisdiction over dioceses in Macedonia, Southern Serbia and for the Diocese of Niš—all now belonging to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the SOC. Troicki argued that from the canonical point of view the BOC had no right to present such allegations, because the unity of Macedonian provinces had been confirmed by the official acts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. There was no need for consent from the BOC to pass these acts and as the BOC was officially considered schismatic, thus it was impossible for the SOC to negotiate with the BOC. Having said that, Troicki admitted that the Slavic Orthodox churches had not accepted the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the BOC nor had they declared the decision wrong. He called upon the BOC to drop the demands and initiate negotiations with Orthodox churches to end the schism.¹⁰⁹

Only a month later the public statements changed considerably. For example, in an article “We and the Bulgarians” published in *Glasnik SPP*, the national unity of Bulgarians and Yugoslavs and the ecclesiastical union between the two churches was hailed.¹¹⁰ It was an implication of the events to come. In early May 1933 a delegation of the SOC—Bishop Nikolai, Irinei Ćirić, Voja Janjić and priest Milivoj M. Petrović – finally visited Bulgaria, with the aim of negotiating on issues of peace and friendship between the two churches. In view of earlier events the visit was most certainly approved by the Yugoslav state authorities. During the talks in Rila monastery, presided over by Metropolitan Stefan, it was confirmed that a WA regional conference should be organized in Belgrade. A resolution of mutual interests was passed to foster the friendly relations between the two churches and countries.¹¹¹ The council of the SOC

¹⁰⁹ Sergei Troicki, “Projekat Ustava Bugarske crkve,” *Glasnik SPP*, 5 (Feb. 2/Jan. 20, 1933), 74–5.

¹¹⁰ Protá Milivoj M. Petrović. “Mi i Bugari,” *Glasnik SPP*, 10 (March 9/Feb. 24, 1933), 157–9,

¹¹¹ “Iz Bugarske crkve,” *Pregled crkve eparhije žičke*, 6 (1933), 174. A couple years later Bishop Nikolai wrote extensively about the visit. He said that it was of key importance in promoting friendly relations between the two churches and the two states. Vladika Nikolaj Velimirović, “O zbliženju našeg i

acknowledged the initiative officially, but at this state it was advised to proceed with private consultations.¹¹² The same month in cooperation with the Life and Work movement, the Balkan regional conference finally took place in Bucharest.¹¹³ The correspondence continued between church representatives with the aim of signing a resolution of mutual interests, but unfortunately a meeting, which was planned for that purpose in Rila, was postponed. In the fall of 1933, the rapprochement of the two states began, when in September the visits of the Bulgarian and Yugoslav royal couples took place.¹¹⁴ On the arrival of the Bulgarian royal couple to Belgrade the Yugoslav media emphasized the contribution of the Orthodox churches in the rapprochement between the two states.¹¹⁵ In September the representatives of the Yugoslav delegation attended an international meeting of the WA in Sofia.

After the first steps of reconciliation the SOC was still cautious in its actions. The SOC General Assembly recommended in the spring of 1934 to continue monitoring the work of the

bugarskog naroda,” Available at: <http://www.rastko.rs/rastko-bg/istorija/vlnikolaj-zblizenje.php> (last accessed February 13, 2014).

¹¹² ASSOC, Council register of 1920–1934, AS, No. 69 and 110/152, May 26/June 8, 1933.

¹¹³ At the WA Secretaries’ meeting in January 1933, it was proposed to discuss the minority issue not as part of the official Balkan regional conference, but at a private meeting during the conference. “Minutes of the Secretaries’ meeting.” (Berlin, January 29 and February 2, 1933), WCCA, 212.003: 3.

¹¹⁴ The Orient Express with the Bulgarian royal couple arrived at the Belgrade station on September 18, 1933. King Alexander and Queen Mary travelling on the destroyer Dubrovnik arrived at Varna on October 3. Early in December 1933, Tsar Boris and Queen Giovanna, accompanied by Prime Minister Nikola S. Mushanov, arrived for an official visit to Yugoslavia. King Alexander said in his welcoming speech that only “the consolidation of the existing order could guarantee a better future for the two nations.” Tsar Boris spoke of peace and friendship, but avoided the subject of consolidating the status quo in the Balkans. “Mogućnost nove orijentacije u Sofiji,” *Politika* (September 20, 1933), 1; “Bugarski kraljevski par otputovao za Evksinograd da dočeka kralja Aleksandra i kraljicu Mariju,” *Politika* (September 30, 1933), 1; “Ka boljim danima na Balkanu,” *Politika* (December 11, 1933), 1; Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918–1943*, (Rowman & Littlefield 1998), 189–91.

¹¹⁵ “Bugarska i Jugoslavija,” *Glasnik SPP*, 46–47 (December 23/10 1933), 800. Journal of the Žiča Diocese, headed by Bishop Nikolai, announced the visit of Metropolitan Stefan to Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1933, but there is no confirmation that this visit actually happened. The visit was also announced by newspaper *Politika*. “Poseta iz Bugarske crkve,” *Pregled crkve eparhije žičke*, 9–10 (1933), 269; “Konferencija crkava u Sofiji,” *Politika* (September 29, 1933), 3.

BOC, especially in the light of discussions on its new constitution. If needed, the Assembly suggested protecting the rights of the SOC with the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The decision was repeated in 1935.¹¹⁶

Interestingly enough, at the same time the SOC tried to ease the schismatic position of BOC among the Orthodox Churches. In November 1933, Metropolitan Gabriel Dožić visited the Patriarch of Constantinople and among other things discussed the issue of the Bulgarian schism. He was instructed in Belgrade to emphasize its administrative character. The Patriarch assured him that through negotiations and with good will all questions would be taken under consideration.¹¹⁷

In February 1934, the Balkan Pact was signed, but Bulgaria did not join. In May, after the coup in Bulgaria the rapprochement between the two churches and states continued. What needs to be emphasized is the fact that, even at this stage, the churches still used the WA NCs for further negotiations. It proves that there was a certain amount of uncertainty about its success and the WA was used as a third and experienced party. On the other hand, taking into account the fact that the persons who negotiated were either church leaders or senior clergy, it proves that the negotiations had to be approved at the highest possible level by the SOC as well as the Yugoslav state, as it was the state that directed the policy of the church in foreign relations. It also shows the importance the WA had gained in the region.

The conference, which was attended by the representatives of the Bulgarian and Yugoslav NCs, had been initially planned to take place in Rila monastery in 1933, was held in September 1936 in the Yugoslav city of Ohrid, in the Monastery of St. Naum. Although it was

¹¹⁶ ASSOC, Council's register of 1920–1934, AS, No. 55/85, June 4/May 22, 1934 and No. 63/1935.

¹¹⁷ AY, Embassy of the KY in Turkey–Ankara, 370–20–498; Consulate General of the KY in Istanbul, November 7, 1933, 411–8–19–21 and 8–174 (21341). After the visit Dožić went to Sofia, but unfortunately there is no information on the results of the visit.

the BNC who came, it was organized as if it was an official visit of the BOC. Before the negotiations the prominent Bulgarian delegation—Metropolitan Stefan,¹¹⁸ Bishop Paisie of Vratsa, Dr. Stefan Zankov, Archpriest Dimitar Andreev (протоиерей Димитър Андреев), secretary of the Clergy Union and George Tsvetinov (Георги Цветинов, Head of the Department of Religion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria) and Deacon Nikitin – met with Patriarch Varnava, Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović, Prince Regent Paul, and other Yugoslav officials. They attended the celebration of King's birthday, participated in the parade of troops at Banjica, and during their tour in Yugoslavia gave speeches on the cooperation between the two nations. It was hoped that the contacts between the intellectuals would help to achieve the desired peace and overcome the prevalent suspicions towards the Balkans among West-European countries.¹¹⁹

Before the meetings in the Monastery of St. Naum, Stefan and Irinei celebrated the Holy Eucharist together. The meetings concluded with an eight-point resolution, where both sides stressed the need to continue work on deepening the relationship between the two churches and nations. It was stated that the Rila resolution from 1933 had been acknowledged by bishops and clergy in both countries and it had become the cornerstone for the process of strengthening the mutual understanding between government leaders, as well as church leaders and social organizations in both countries. The NCs praised the late King Alexander I and Tsar Boris III for their contribution in re-establishing a friendly relationship between the two countries and prayed that the same kind of enthusiasm would continue to characterize their relations in future. The

¹¹⁸ Before the Bulgarian delegation's departure for Yugoslavia, Metropolitan Stefan had paid a month long visit to France and England, "where he probably participated in the preparations for the rapprochement between the two Balkan countries." Р. Пенджекова, *Личността и делото*, para. I/1. 2.

¹¹⁹ "Bugariski velikodostojnici u Jugoslaviji," *Glasnik SPP*, 24–25 (September 13/26, 1936), 551–8; "Bugariski Prvojerarh o Jugoslaviji," *Glasnik SPP*, 28–29 (October 30/November 12, 1936), 670–1.

resolution ended with an emotional statement of the two nations of same blood and same faith standing together in unity. Dr. Vojislav Janjić presented an official statement, emphasizing the importance of the visit in achieving “our common objective,” meaning an agreement of mutual trust. The media coverage was, in general, positive. Only *Glasnik SPP* still emphasized the informal character of the visit.¹²⁰

Rila and the Ohrid meetings were one of the most important prerequisites for the ecclesiastical, as well as political rapprochement of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.¹²¹ Bulgarian Prime Minister, Georgi Kjosivanov, wrote in an article published in 1936 which argued that rapprochement had begun three years ago and that there were still some unresolved issues between the two countries. At the same time the two countries started negotiations to finalize a non-aggression pact.¹²²

From 1936 onward, the Orthodox churches in the Balkan countries united their forces against Western spiritual influence in all of its positive and negative aspects such as secularism, materialism, and capitalism, and against the Western concept of the separation of church and state. The ecumenical movement, which significantly expanded after World War I, was also discussed. They initiated a new form for the meetings—an Orthodox Theological Congress. The first such meeting was organized in 1937 in Athens and the next gathering was planned for 1939 in Bucharest.¹²³ At the same time, the WA, representing the Western liberal spirit, objected to

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Р. Пенджекова, *Личността и делото*, para. I, 1. 2.

¹²² *Samouprava*, 198 (October 13, 1936), 222 (November 10, 1936), 266 (December 31, 1936).

¹²³ “Prvi teološki kongres pravoslavnog Istoka u Atini,” *Duhovna straža*, 1 (1937), 44–9.

signals of violation of religious freedom regarding the activity of minority religious associations in Yugoslavia.¹²⁴

Bilateral relations of the BOC and the SOC were normalized in next few years. In 1937 discussions were held on the recognition of the ordination of the Anglican Church. In April 1939, students from the Faculty of Theology in Sofia visited Belgrade.¹²⁵ In a speech held in Novi Sad in 1939 Professor Zankov described the Serbs and Bulgarians as fellows sharing a spiritual kinship and blood.¹²⁶ Yugoslav media advocated for the lifting of the schism.¹²⁷ The cooperation continued in the first year of the Second World War, when in March 1940 a Committee for printing common liturgical books held a meeting in Sofia. Tsar Boris III met the SOC delegation.¹²⁸ When Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact in March 1941, it changed the position of Bulgaria in the region considerably and nulled the 1937 Bulgarian-Yugoslav Pact.¹²⁹ Bishop Irinei and Metropolitan Stefan, now Exarch Stefan I, after the BOC autocephaly was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1945, met for the last time in Bulgaria in May 1946, where the delegation of the SOC attended the celebration of Holy John of Rila.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ “A Report by W.H. Dickinson of his visit to Balkan countries in 1938,” *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches Minutes, Documents, Reports and Correspondence, W. H. Dickinson’s papers 1938–1942*, WCCA, 212.016.

¹²⁵ “Srpska Pravoslavna Patrijaršija,” *Duhovna straža*, 1 (1939), 41.

¹²⁶ Ljubomir Ivančević, “Svetosavlje i Bugari,” *Pastirski glas*, 8 (June 25, 1939), 1.

¹²⁷ “Za skidanje šizme sa Bugarske crkve,” *Hrišćanska misao*, 4 (1939), 49–50.

¹²⁸ “Preosvećena g. g. episkopi Irinej i Nektarije u Bugarskoj,” *Glasnik SPP*, 6 (March 15/2, 1940), 221–3.

¹²⁹ В. Божинов, “Пакът,” 38–55. Interestingly enough an International Service of the German Evangelical Church issued a statement in December 1942 addressed to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a Bulgarian theologian Stefan Zankov protested on behalf of the entire Orthodox world against the “cruel persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia.” Михаил Шкаровский, ‘Создание и деятельность Хорватской Православной Церкви в годы Второй мировой войны’, *Вестник Церковной истории*, 4 (Москва 2006), 221–62.

¹³⁰ “Delegacija Srpske crkve na proslavi Sv. Jovana Rilskog u Bugarskoj,” *Glasnik SPP*, 8 (August 1/July 19, 1946), 122–4.

Conclusion

During the interwar period, the relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were characterized by conflicts and mutual distrust. The dissensions were the consequences of the Balkan wars and the First World War. Bulgaria was among the countries that had lost the First World War, which meant reparations, an obligation to reduce its army, and the loss of territories. The latter was the reason for future conflicts, because Bulgarians had to give up a large part of Macedonia, where according to their estimates over ninety percent of the population were Bulgarians. The Kingdom of SHS carried out a policy of assimilation, claiming that in terms of the ethnic origin the population of Macedonia was mostly Serbian. They were strongly opposed to the activity of IMRO, whose representatives resided in Bulgaria and often violently fought for an autonomous or independent Macedonia. IMRO was a threat to Bulgarian stability as well, but at the same time it enabled Bulgaria to re-establish their influence and regain their lost territories in the region.

The Macedonian question made it difficult for the two countries to normalize bilateral relations. There were several stages in the rapprochement process that were mostly influenced by the internal politics of the two countries. However, there was a religious dimension as well, which has not yet been analyzed. Most importantly it involved the activity of an ecumenical peace organization the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

The WA was the most influential ecumenical organization in the region. It did not officially represent the churches, but at the same time the leading and senior clergy of the two churches represented the organization. The key roles in the activity of the national committees

and in the entire WA were played by bishops Irenei Ćirić and Nikolaj Velimirović from the SOC, and by Metropolitan Stefan and Professor Stefan Zankov of the BOC.

As the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not canonically recognize the BOC, the ecumenical movement was seen as a possibility to end its isolation. In addition to regaining its position in the Orthodox community, the BOC in its foreign relations activity represented the Tsardom of Bulgaria. For this reason it raised the question of the violation of the rights of Bulgarian minorities in neighboring countries.

The WA became a diplomatic channel for negotiations between the SOC and the BOC representatives. In 1928 the BNC raised the question of minorities at a WA meeting in Avignon. The NCSCS managed to avoid public discussions in the WA through private negotiations for several years. At the same time the SOC expressed its willingness to support the BOC by calling the BOC to drop the issue of minorities and start negotiations to achieve the canonical recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Despite the fact that the BNC refused to remove the question from the agenda and refused to participate in the WA regional conference in Belgrade until the Yugoslav delegation privately visited Bulgaria to negotiate on the minorities' issue, Yugoslav state officials refused to grant permission for the NCSCS to go to Bulgaria, which was the reason for the continuance of the conflict in the following years. No regional conference took place until 1933. During that time the members of BNC and NCSCS met regularly at WA meetings.

In 1932 the BNC finally managed to discuss the matter at a WA meeting in Geneva. Although the representatives of the Yugoslav NC opposed any kind of interference concerning Macedonia, the WA, with its lack of knowledge about the issue, decided to establish a Minorities

Committee. Although the Yugoslav delegation was not in favor of such a decision, it nevertheless managed to ease the situation in the long run.

In 1933 the Yugoslav delegation finally visited Bulgaria. During the talks in Rila monastery a resolution of mutual interests was passed to foster friendly relations between the two churches and countries. Both heads of states exchanged short official visits the same year. The visit of 1933 and the negotiations conducted through the WA have to be considered as vital diplomatic channel in the rapprochement process. The WA offered a suitable alternative to church and state officials for negotiations. Even more important is the fact that the talks among WA representatives were carried on even when state support was not granted.

The rapprochement process between state and church representatives continued in the next years. In 1936 the WA members met in the Monastery of St. Naum of Ohrid in Yugoslavia. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia signed a pact of eternal friendship in 1937. The SOC supported the removal of the schism from the BOC and the two churches were engaged in several cooperation projects.

In general, the WA paved the way for the SOC and BOC for a deeper commitment to foster friendly relations between the Balkan churches and societies to overcome the historical and political differences between the two states. Although there were obstacles to achieve that goal, the aim of the WA, and especially the idealistic stance of the WA representatives in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, has to be highly valued. Although their work in the rapprochement process between the two countries was curtailed, their contribution in reaching a mutually satisfactory resolution and friendly coexistence between the two states has to be acknowledged.