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Eastern Orthodoxy – An Obstacle or Stimulus to the Affiliation of Bulgaria and Greece to the European Values

The European civilization is a cultural and historical whole, sharing common historical fate, founded upon the unique heritage of ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian tradition. Through the idea of responsibility and freedom, Christianity originated the concept of human rights, traced the differences between secular and spiritual power and provided the prerequisites for the development of civil society and the exercise of individual freedom. The Schism from 1054 led to the formation of two types of cultural development, based on Orthodoxy and Catholicism. It also started the tradition of "excommunicating" the Orthodox civilization from the Catholic West. In 18th century, the idea of "Christian civilization" was replaced by the idea of "secular Europe". The national idea, understood as an idea of separate cultural identity, supplanted the religious idea.

The character and specificity of the Greek and Bulgarian political traditions are connected with the role played by Eastern Orthodoxy and its institutions.[1] The harmonization of the legislation is a comparatively easier process than the harmonization of cultural elements and national psychology. The question is whether the national political culture is compatible with the so-called European political culture and whether Orthodox traditions constitute an obstacle to the process of Europeanization of Bulgaria and Greece.

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[1] П. Китромилидис, *От кръста към флага. Аспекти на християнството и национализма на Балканите* (From the Cross to the Flag. Aspects of Christianity and Nationalism in the Balkans), Sofia 1999, pp. 77-132.

European values are not a historical acquisition, but principles on the base of which a humane society is to be built. The problem of the role played by Orthodoxy on the threshold of the third millennium is in this context, as well as the question, whether under the conditions of a general deep crisis of the spiritual values of the modern civilization, it can play an important role for its overcoming.[2] Most researchers characterize Christianity as a conservative structure, which meets globalization with heightened attention and apprehensions, acknowledging its inevitability. For example Samuel Huntington expressed his doubts as to the ability of Orthodox peoples to establish real democracy. Peter Berger, in his turn, corrected Huntington to a certain degree by defending the thesis that in spite of being unprepared for pluralism, Orthodoxy has the potential to develop new strategies in this direction. Elizabeth Prodromou voiced a more categorical opinion. She held that the Orthodox doctrine is open to pluralism, but at the same time warned that there is a certain tendency among Orthodox churches to impose restrictions with regard to differences, presumed to be a threat to their status as creators and keepers of the respective national cultures. The integration of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary society means that it should accept the existing social reality.[3]

Two main positions are to be traced in Orthodoxy on this issue. The first, the moderately liberal one, is mostly advocated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and is characterized by recognition of the primacy of universal values without rejection of the main dogmas

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[2] Д. Папандреу, *1: Ролята на Православието на прага на третото хилядолетие – проблеми и перспективи; 2: Единството на Църквата и нейната мисия според учението на тримата велики йерарси* (1. The Role of Orthodoxy on the Brink of the Third Millennium – Problems and Perspectives; 2. The Unity of the Church and its Mission According to the Teachings of the Three Great Hierarchs), Sofia 2000.

[3] С. Филатов, "Религиозная жизнь Евразии: реакция на глобализацию" (The religious life of Eurasia: Reaction to Globalization), in *Религия и глобализация на просторах Евразии* (Religion and Globalization Across Eurasia), Moscow 2005, p. 10.

of orthodoxy.[4] The other stance, which is diametrically contrary to the first one, is advocated by most of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church and is connected with the conflict between the universal values and the dogmas of Orthodoxy.[5]

The heads of the other Orthodox Churches vacillate between these two stances and look forward to an ecumenical council, which will formulate a common Orthodox stance on the most pressing issues of the modern times. Of course each autocephalous Orthodox Church, their number constantly increasing with the foundation of new independent states, has an answer of its own to this problem, in most cases tightly connected with the official stand of the respective state.[6]

In the mediaeval period the characteristic of the Orthodox states principle of a peculiar fusion of the two powers was formulated −the church being unable to exist without the state, and vice versa. Western Christians developed the theory of the two swords, i.e. the division of the secular and the spiritual power, the Catholic Church signing agreements in the form of concordats with the states, on the territories of which there were Catholic municipalities.

Under the influence of the ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation the figures of the Bulgarian and Greek revival strove to subject the church to the secular aspirations and interests of the nation, yet the Orthodox institutions remained of great importance in the national differentiation.[7] There is a peculiarity in this process. The unity of Bulgarians and Greeks as Orthodox Christians

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[4] Й. Майендорф, "Православното богословие в съвременния свят" (Orthodox Theology in the Modern World), *Духовна култура* (Spiritual Culture) 1 (1991), 8-17; Й. Зизиулас, "Православната църква и Третото хилядолетие" (The Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium), *Християнство и култура* (Christianity and Culture) 1 (2002), 28.

[5] С. Филатов, *op.cit.*, pp. 19-20; *Основи на социалната концепция на Руската православна църква* (Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church), Moscow 2000.

[6] Т. Уеър, *Православната цъква* (The Orthodox Curch), Sofia 1991; Б. Асенов, *Православието и България* (Orthodoxy in Bulgaria), Sofia 1992.

[7] Ю. В. Бромлей, *Этнос и этнография* (Ethnos and Ethnography), Moscow 1976, p. 63.

on the one side, and the more advanced revival processes in the Greek community on the other, led to the adoption of the "Greek national identity" (i.e. Hellenism) by certain circles of the Bulgarian society. That's why the calls of the Orthodox monk Paisii addressed the Bulgarian ethnic self-consciousness, i.e the Bulgarians were to realize that "we are Christians, but we are Bulgarians as well" without rejecting their Orthodox belief. (A similar process could be observed in the mediaeval period when the Bulgarian nationality identified itself as "Slavs, but also as Bulgarians".) Thus Orthodoxy plays a role not only as a factor differentiating the ethnic groups with regard to Islam but as a factor differentiating the nations with regard to the other Orthodox peoples belonging to the "Roum-milet".[8]

In 18th-19th century, when the formation of the Balkan nations began and their aspiration for independent political development and foundation of independent states arose, the monopoly of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was broken. The Greeks were the first ones in this respect. After the foundation of the Greek Kingdom in 1830, they posed the question for an ethnic, Greek Church, separated from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Initially the Patriarchate did not recognize the autocephalous character of the Church of Greece, founded in 1833, but refrained from denouncing it as schismatic or separatist as well. The Patriarchate recognized the autocephalous character of the Church of Greece in 1850. Thus a precedent was set, which was soon used by the Bulgarian Christians. The struggle for independent Bulgarian Church preceded the struggle for independent state and in this respect the Bulgarian Exarchate recognized by the sultan in 1870 was more of a national and political than religious institution. It was however denounced as schismatic by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1872, this act being motivated not by dogmatic differences but by political reasons. In the following decades the Bulgarian Exarchate embodied the unity of the Bulgarians, whose country was partitioned after the Berlin Congress (1878), and for this reason the seat of the Exar-

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[8] Б. Асенов, *Нация, религия, национализъм* (Nation, Religion, Nationalism), Sofia 1994, pp. 79-119.

chate up to the Balkan wars was in Constantinople. The schism was lifted as late as 1945, owing to the insistence of the other Orthodox Churches. As late as 1953 the patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian Church was restored, a status recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1961.[9]

As far as the Patriarchate of Constantinople itself is concerned, after Turkey was declared a secular republic in 1922 it has neither legally nor factually been connected with any concrete state. It is not accountable for its actions to any government, but has not changed its status in the Orthodox world and is up to now called *Ecumenical* Patriarchate and the Patriarch is "first in honor" in the structure of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Nowadays the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarch extends to some eparchies located on Greek territory, which often leads to tensions with the Church of Greece.[10]

The political position of the church depends on the conditions under which it developed and its position over time with regard to power and the values of the civil society. The interests of the Orthodox Church are tightly connected with political power in the states, in which the traditional religion is Orthodox Christianity. In Catholic states the affiliation with political values is not so manifestly expressed and they are not directly associated with the West.[11] Protestants, in their turn, were directly involved in the foundation of the modern democratic societies, and openly advocate market economy, the right to competition, and the defense of the rights and liberties of the citizens from societies, which are in a period of transition.[12]

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[9] *Държава & Църква – Църква & Държава в българската история* (State & Church – Church & State in Bulgarian History), Sofia 2006.

[10] А. Красиков, "Глобализация и православие" (Globalization and Orthodoxy), in *Религия и глобализация,* pp. 30-35, 85.

[11] А. Юдин, "Католический ответ на вызов глобализации в Евразии" (The Catholic Response to the Calls for Globalization in Eurasia), in *Религия и глобализация,* pp. 126-135.

[12] Р. Лункин, "Протестантизм и глобализация на просторах Евразии" (Protestantism and globalization across Eurasia), in *Религия и глобализация,* pp. 90-124.

At the beginning of the 1990s the idea of the unification on parliamentary and social level of the peoples and governments of the states from South-East Europe on the basis of the traditional Eastern Orthodox and ethno-cultural values began to take shape. The first step to this end was the meeting of the International Organization Committee of the *Conference of the Spiritually Close Peoples* held in Moscow in May 1993. Representatives of twelve states and regions following traditional Eastern Orthodoxy, including Bulgaria and Greece took part. The next step was the International European Conference on *Orthodoxy and the New European Realities,* held in Greece in the summer of 1993. The necessity of joint actions on the part of the representatives of the Orthodox states in international organizations with a view to achieving equality of all confessions was accentuated in the declaration that was endorsed at the meeting. The participants in the conference discussed the idea put forward by some of the representatives of Greece to establish a satellite telecommunication company *Revival of Orthodoxy* which was to be under the aegis and funded by the European parliament. The seat of the company was to be in Athens with branches in all Orthodox states. In addition the participants in the conference called upon Greece, which at that time was the only Orthodox state to be a member of the European Economic Community, to take all steps possible to ensure that the European community recognizes the progressive role played by Orthodox traditions in shaping European culture and values.[13]

According to the advocates of Orthodoxy man is the main value, because he was created in God's image[14] and the principal goal of the Orthodox Church in a democratic society is the defense of the liberty and dignity of human personality, and above all the defense of the individual human rights −right to work, just remuneration,

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[13] *К сотрудничеству восточно-христианских (духовно близких) народов. Сборник документов и материалов* [Towards Cooperation of Eastern-Christian (Spiritually Close) Peoples. Collection of Documents and Materials], Moscow 1993.

[14] *Православно догматическо богословие* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), Sofia 1947, pp. 85-198; *Православна християнска етика* (Orthodox Christian Ethics), Sofia 1955, pp. 193-236.

economic freedom, etc. In order to achieve this goal the church should collaborate with legitimate structures, defending social rights, which will ensure a special civil status of the church and the recognition of its specific role and authority in the social sector.

The role played by Orthodox tradition in Bulgarian history was vividly illustrated by the way the 135th anniversary of the foundation of the Bulgarian Exarchate was celebrated. The celebration of the anniversary in 2005 was under the motto "Freedom in order, variety in unity". It is under this slogan that the Bulgarians obtained their ecclesiastical and national independence.[15] May be by chance, may be not the second part of the slogan is one of the mottos of the European Union proclaimed by the European Assembly on 9 May 2000 −the 50th birthday of the united Europe. In the declaration endorsed by the Bulgarian parliament for this occasion it is accentuated that the events connected with the Exarchate strengthen Bulgaria's deep European roots, hence the duty of the Exarchate to preserve Bulgarian national identity and Bulgaria's position as an equal and worthy member of united Europe.

The last censuses and the normative documents, dealing with confessional matters and church institutions related to them show to a certain extent the state of affairs in Bulgarian society. In practice, state policy is directed toward honoring international agreements, which Bulgaria has entered into, related to secularization and equality of all confessions. At the same time the Bulgarian legislation proclaims the "special position of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church". In addition a tendency can be observed in the practice of a part of the state administration to tolerate Orthodoxy and the institutions related to it.

Nowadays Orthodoxy coexists with democratic as well as with non-democratic regimes, but the mingling of national and religious concepts leads in most cases to restriction of individual human rights. Thus these citizens of Bulgaria and Greece who do not follow Orthodoxy are not always accepted as part of the "spiritual community", i.e. the ethnos and face obstacles following their con-

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[15] Ил. Тодев, *Доктор Стоян Чомаков. Документи и материали* (Dr. Stoyan Chomakov, Documents and Materials), Sofia 2000, p. 241.

fession. They may even be deprived of some rights, which the 'real', i.e. orthodox Bulgarians and Greeks enjoy.

Although the constitutions of the two countries guarantee the freedom of religious confession, there are some legal, judicial, and administrative restrictions imposed on the religious non-Orthodox groups, which violate the European human rights convention.[16] In Greece, for example, there exists a requirement for teachers and high-ranking state officials, especially those serving in the judicial system and the officer corps to follow Orthodoxy. In addition the attempts to bolster European identity are conceived by some Greek Orthodox circles as a loss of the national one, which is related Orthodoxy. This is illustrated by the violent reaction to the decision of the Kostas Simitis government from 2000 not to include the religious affiliation of the Greek citizens in their identity cards. The protests were led by the Greek Orthodox Church. Archbishop of Athens and all of Greece, Christodoulos and the Holy Synod organized mass demonstrations in Athens and Thessaloniki. The demonstrators in Athens flourished not only the Greek national flag but the two-head eagle of the Byzantine Empire. The protesters claimed that this measure was aimed at the heart of Greek identity, which in Archbishop Christodoulos' words was shaped by the East, whereas the West wanted to undermine traditional Greek values. The emphasis on ethnic minority rights laid by the EU in the Archbishop's opinion could lead to the dechristianization of Europe.

Unlike his predecessors Archbishop Christodoulos has strong influence over state policy and his stance on this question concerns the Greek government, which strives to demonstrate the pro-west, European affiliation of Greece.

Nowadays when the unification of Europe is referred to, what is alluded to is above all the formation of a new European identity or the transformation of the "Europe of fatherlands" into a "European

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[16] О. Хрисимова, *Предизвикателства на XX век: Равноправие в многообразието* (Challenges of the XX c.: Equality of Rights in the Diversity), Varna 2006.

fatherland".[17] This process does not entail any loss of cultural individuality, but on the contrary preservation of national identity within the boundaries of a common state formation. At the same time each citizen is to acquire the self-consciousness that he is a European and the sense of common European affiliation.[18] Such a tendency can be observed in both Bulgaria and Greece, which differ in many characteristics from the other European states. This refers especially to Orthodoxy, followed by them as a 'traditional' religion and to the expressly manifested national ethnocentrism, characteristic of the Balkan region as a whole.[19] The European identity of the Greeks is more advanced than the European identity of the Bulgarians, and this is easy to explain. Greece has been a member of the European structures for decades and this accelerates the process of europeanization of the Greek consciousness. The traditional feeling of pride they take in their nationality, connected with Orthodoxy and the rich cultural heritage on the one side blends in an amazing way with the self-confidence of being a European on the other.

The connection between political power and Orthodoxy and the mingling of religion and nationality, which can be observed nowadays, make the Orthodox Church a fervent defender of the status quo in the name of ethnos and religion.[20] Man as a spiritual entity, his attitude towards God and the attitude of the Church toward the state lay at the core of the Orthodox dogma. In order to help Bulgaria and Greece on their way to accepting the European values, Orthodoxy should recognize 'earthly life' by even more fervently defending human rights on the basis of early Christian values

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[17] В. Тодоров, *Етнос, нация, национализъм. Аспекти на теорията и практиката* (Ethnos, Nation, Nationalism. Aspects of the Theory and Practice), Sofia 2000, p. 243.

[18] И. Димитров, "На границата на две хилядолетия" (On the border of two millenniums), in *Балканите и европейската интеграция* (The Balkans and the European Integration), V. Tarnovo 2000, p. 15.

[19] *Историческа злина ли е националната държава? Дискусионни тезиси* (Is the National State a Historic Evil? Discussion Theses), Sofia 1998.

[20] И. Недева, *Кризата в Българската православна църква* (The Crisis in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church), Sofia 1993, p. 44.

which lay at the core of the European civilization model.[21] It is to this effect that calls are made for reformation of the Orthodox thought, which should make Orthodoxy open to contemporary realities and the europeanization of Bulgaria and Greece.[22]

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[21] Д. Николчев, "Българската православна църква и съвременният свят – актуални проблеми и перспективи" (The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Contemporary World – Actual Problems and Perspectives), in *Националната идентичност в диалога между културите* (National Identity in the Dialogue Between Cultures), Pleven 2002, pp. 85-94.

[22] А. Полис, "Източното православие и човешките права" (Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights), *Международни отношения* (International Relations) 3 (1994), 110-144.