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Le développement économique de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare depuis la libération de la Bulgarie (1878)

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The Economic Development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church since the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878)

The economic development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) has never been a subject of systematic investigation. Established by a Sultan's decree (1870) and before the restoration of the Bulgarian state (1878), this religious institution did not rely on the support of an Orthodox political authority as the contemporary Orthodox Churches in Russia and Greece. The BOC's situation was additionally aggravated by the schism, which the Patriarchate of Constantinople declared on it in 1872. Under these circumstances, the BOC was not able to survive without the support of its laity. Especially important was the role of the lay councils, set up at a central, diocesan and parochial level, for the management of the church material and social affairs (1871 Exarchate Statute, 2001, Articles 8, 12, 65). No other contemporary Orthodox Church had allowed such lay participation in its economy.

After the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, the BOC's dioceses occurred under different political regimes: those in the north entered the new Bulgarian state, while the southern ones remained in the Ottoman Empire. Under these circumstances, church economy developed differently on both sides of the Bulgarian-Turkish border. In this regard, the present study deals only with the BOC's economic development within the Bulgarian state territory. It also employs an inductive approach where the analysis of sources precedes the theoretical considerations. This choice aims at avoiding confusion about the Bulgarian case and specifically regarding the use of some religion-related concepts. Especially misleading could be the view about the key role of the state in the process of secularization. In the Bulgarian case, however, this process started before the restoration of Bulgarian statehood, and the advent of secularization did not undermine the social significance of religion (Kalkandjieva, 2010: 87-88). The reference to the original meaning of the term "secularization" as an act of expropriation of church properties (Rémond, 1992: 62-64) also does not work. Targeted mostly at the regular clergy of the

Roman Catholic Church, i.e. at a group of churchmen directly subjected to the Holy See, this type of secularization is not applicable to Eastern Orthodoxy where such a category of clergy is absent. Neither has the BOC experienced the mode of secularization of monastic lands which took place in Russia between 1762 and 1786. By including the revenue from these possessions in the state budget, Catherine the Great not only established control over the church economy in her empire, but also blurred the difference between Orthodox churchmen and state officials, as both received their salaries from the imperial treasury (Kartashev, 1992: 453-456). In the nineteenth century, this example was also followed by Greece and Romania, where the state authorities confiscated a significant part of the church lands and introduced state salaries for Orthodox churchmen (Schifirnet, 2013: 186-187).

Furthermore, the chosen inductive approach recons with the lack of a coherent overview of the historical development of the BOC's economy. In general, the existing literature mainly focuses on the BOC's material status between the two World Wars (Zankow, 1939: 303-317) and the destruction of the church's economy under Communism (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 145-184). In this way, it does not address quite important issues, such as the organization of church economy, its religion-oriented goals, its beneficiaries, the major policy makers in the field of church economy, or the relationship between church, state and secular economy. To overcome this gap in the knowledge on the BOC's economy, this article seeks to present a more systematic overview of its historical development, based on archival sources that have not been explored before. By giving priority to the proceedings of the Holy Synod, the analysis reveals the key principles and specific features of church economy, as well as its role in the public sector, its driving forces, goals and the mechanisms used. As the archives do not cover the post-1989 changes in church economy, alternative sources are also used; for example, official statistical data, institutional press releases, and investigative journalistic publications.

Finally, the article traces four periods in the development of the BOC's economy: 1878-1912, 1913-1944, 1944-1989, and the post-1989 one. The first of them is characterized by a duality in the church's functioning on both sides of the Bulgarian-Turkish border. This state of affairs was a product of the discrepancy between the territory of the Principality of Bulgaria and that of the BOC, as the latter also had dioceses in the near abroad. Correspondingly, the BOC's two sections differed in their organization and modes of functioning. The one in Bulgaria was administrated by the newly established Holy Synod, while that in the Ottoman provinces was run by an Exarch and the Council of laymen at his office. The former was based in Sofia and consisted of bishops, who were also Bulgarian citizens. In its turn, the BOC's administration in the near abroad had its headquarters in Istanbul and included only subjects of the sultan. The two BOC's sections also differed in their legal status: Orthodoxy was proclaimed as the dominant religion in the Principality (Bulgarian Constitution, 1879, Article 37), but

remained a tolerated minority faith in the Ottoman territories. In addition, the BOC's structures on both sides of the Bulgarian-Turkish border observed different statutes. In 1883, the Bulgarian government adopted an "Adapted Exarchate Statute" (1883), applicable only to the territory of the Principality, while the original "Exarchate Statute" (1871) remained valid only for the BOC's administration in the Ottoman Empire. In 1895, an amendment of the Adapted Statute increased further the divergence between the BOC's two sections. In particular, it excluded the lay Bulgarians in the Principality from the management of the local church economy, while their compatriots in the Ottoman territories continued playing a key role in this sphere of church life (Zankow, 1939: 137; 1895 Exarchate Statute, 1904).

Being the most insightful for an understanding the BOC's economy in a broader historical perspective, the second period occupies a central place in this analysis. It starts with the Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) and ends with the communist takeover (September 1944). The Treaty had a profound impact on the BOC's economy, because the changes in the political map of the Balkans caused a reduction of the BOC's territory. More importantly, it brought about the first overlapping of the church with the state borders in the modern history of Bulgaria. The loss of the BOC's structures, possessions and flock in the near abroad swept away the duality in church economy. Therefore, the analysis of this particular period provides grounds for comparison with the Ottoman and the communist modes of church economy. It also allows a more precise assessment of the post-1989 developments in the BOC's economy from the perspective of their continuity with the pre-communist times. Finally, the article dedicates less space to the last two periods. In the case of the communist one, it is determined by the fact of the destruction of the BOC's economy by the communist regime. Meanwhile, contrary to the previous periods, the post-1989 revival of the BOC cannot be analyzed from a long-term perspective. Instead, it is discussed through the prism of the restitution of church possessions and the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union.

Church economy from the liberation of Bulgaria to the Balkan Wars

The Holy Synod, established in Sofia after the liberation of Bulgaria, introduced a series of changes in the management of the local church assets. They started with the removal of laymen from this sphere of church activities and its transfer under episcopal control. The decision making process was also put in agreement with the BOC's hierarchal structure: the parochial economic and financial reports, draft budgets, and decisions had to be approved by the corresponding diocesan council, while the diocesan ones and those of the Stavropegial monasteries – by the Synod (Zankow, 1939: 304-305). These procedures ensured a down-top accountability (1895 Exarchate Statute,

Articles 137, 138 and 148), which assisted the concentration of considerable material resources in the hands of the Synod. The lack of transparence on the expenditure of church capitals, however, provoked some negative tendencies, as well as tensions between the BOC's leaders and the state authorities, bishops and priests, laity and clergy.

At the same time, the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria directly benefited from the liberation of the country. For the first time since its establishment in 1870, Bulgarian Orthodox hierarchs had their salaries paid from the state budget (1883 Exarchate Statute, Article 99). The salaries of the Synod's administration and the costs for its consumables and utilities were covered by the state (1895 Exarchate Statute, Article 113). On some occasions, Orthodox priests, whose main means of subsistence continued to come from church taxes and fees, were eligible to receive limited aid from the state budget (Article 144).

The BOC's revenues in the Principality also registered significant growth. If under the Ottoman rule, the church's main income consisted of religious taxes, fees, donations and wills (1871 Exarchate Statute, 2001: 449-456), now they came from church agriculture and farming, candle and timber industry, and rents from real assets (Zankow, 1939: 303-304). In this regard, the 1895 Exarchate Statute defined as eligible owners of church assets not only the Holy Synod, metropolitans and parishes, but also various autonomous church-related societies. The ultimate control over the management of all church assets, however, belonged to the Synod. The other owners of church properties were forbidden to sell, exchange and lend them without its knowledge and permission. Neither had they the right to buy or rent properties, to take loans and to sign contracts without the Synod's blessing (Articles 149 and 156).

At the same time, the Sofia Synod began to develop a vision of church economic autonomy. In particular, it regarded the revenue from the BOC's assets in the Principality as an entirely church domain and thus claimed an exclusive right to take ultimate decisions on their management. Correspondingly, it insisted to be the last instance of approval of the budgets and financial reports of the church's dioceses, Stavropegial monasteries and the various lay and clerical organizations. Yet, this understanding of church autonomy did not exclude the right of the state authorities to examine the BOC's financial activities. The 1895 Exarchate Statute obliged the Synod to submit to the Ministry of Foreign and Religious Affairs draft budgets for the required state subsidy and to report its expenditures (Articles 137 and 138). They had to be approved by the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, in 1901, the Law on Financial Inspection empowered the Ministry of Finances to review the financial documentation of all religious organizations, which spent money on charity, education, and other public causes (Tanchev, 1904: 100). In this case, however, no financial inspector had access to the Synodal and diocesan documents without a certificate signed by the chairman of the Synod or the corresponding metropolitan (Tanchev, 1904: 103-105).

Church economy from the Balkan Wars to the communist takeover

The Balkan wars (1912-1913) and the First World War (1914-1918) placed a heavy burden on Bulgarian economy. From 1913 to 1923 the Bulgarian lev depreciated 33 times (Berov, 1996: 505). Specially disastrous were the excessive reparations imposed on Bulgaria after its defeat in 1918. No less damaging were the territorial losses. The Treaty of Bucharest (1913) transferred Southern Dobrudja from Bulgaria to Romania, while the Treaty of Neuilly (1919) gave the region of Tsaribrod (Dimitrovgrad) to Serbia and Western Thrace to Greece. In this regard, it is necessary to point that the BOC was directly affected by these changes as it lost its jurisdiction over the mentioned areas. Finally, the economic situation was also aggravated by the 400,000 refugees, who sought asylum in Bulgaria between 1913 and 1923 (Ivanova, 2015). The majority were Bulgarians from Macedonia, Dobrudja, Aegean Thrace, and the regions of Dimitrovgrad and Pirot (contemporary Serbia), as well as that of Strumica (North Macedonia). But there were also about 25,000 Armenians, who escaped from the 1915 genocide in the Ottoman Empire (Mitseva, 2001: 7) and about 20,000 refugees from Bolshevik Russia (Peykovska and Kiselkova, 2013: 214). To meet their needs, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Refugee Settlement Act (1920) that envisioned the distribution of plots of uncultivated private and public lands. For this purpose, the government of Alexander Stamboliiski (1920-1923) introduced a limit of 30 hectares, defined as “labor agricultural property” (Labor Land Property Act, 1921), aimed to increase the State Land Fund. The lands above this limit had to be nationalized.

The BOC's assets were not exempted from the bill. At that time, it had 13,700.4 hectares of forests, 11,100 of meadows, 2,742.6 of permanent crops, 2,253.9 of uncultivated pasture-ground, 199.6 of vineyards, 37.5 of orchards, and 22.1 kitchen gardens (RSP, 59/1919). In an attempt to prevent their nationalization, the Synod opposed the Labor Land Property Act with the argument that it did not include the Muslim wakfs (RSP, 21/1921). Finding out that these properties were protected by the Bulgarian-Turkish agreements of 1909 and 1913 (Evstatiev and Makariev, 2010: 643), the BOC's leadership concentrated its efforts on the reduction of church lands subject to this law (RSP, 26/1921). Now, it placed the emphasis on their “sacred and immune” character and condemned their expropriation as a violation of the BOC's economic autonomy. The Synod also warned that their nationalization would undermine the church's capacity to fulfill its religious duties (RSP, 26/1921). In final terms, however, the church lost about 2,500 hectares of arable lands. But it succeeded in getting them back in the early 1930s (Zankow, 1939: 169).

Meanwhile, the agrarian reform had a positive effect on the BOC's economy. The Labor Land Property Act's ban on the nationalization of modernized monastic farms stimulated the Synod to undertake measures for the modernization of this sector of church economy. In April 1921, it adopted the Statute

for the Cooperation of Monastic Farms (RSP, 26/1921). This act placed all monastic agrarian movable and immovable assets under the supervision of a newly-created Monastic Agrarian Union, responsible for their effective management and the economic progress of monasteries. It also introduced detailed rules for the registration, report and spending of the revenues from these farms. According to them, each monastery was allowed to use 65 percent of the profit for its own needs, while the rest 35 percent had to be deposited in a special bank account of the Synod. The accumulated amount had to be spent for charity (10 percent) and for the intensification of monastery agriculture (25 percent). Another novelty concerned the professionalization of the activities at the monastic farms. For the first time, the Synod prescribed the appointment of agronomists, foresters and other professional staff and defined their duties (RSP, 40/1921). In this way, the Statute laid the grounds for the modernization of monastic agriculture in Bulgaria.

At the same time, its implementation revealed the insufficient capacity of monastic councils to deal with economic and financial issues. In this regard, the Synod paid special attention to the three Stavropegial monasteries (Rila, Troyan and Bachkovo). To optimize their management, in 1929, it ceased to approve secretaries and treasurers, proposed by the monastic councils, and started appointing its own nominees on these positions. This innovation was justified by the Synod's general responsibility for the BOC's welfare (RSP, 55/1929). In the next years, the stavropegial monastic farms made significant economic progress (Zankow, 1939: 310-311). Their example was also followed by diocesan monasteries; for example, the Preobrazhenski Monastery became famous for its vineyards, the Krichimski for its fruit orchards, and the Asenovgradski for its poultry farm (RSP, 91/1934).

The post-Neuilly church economy was also affected by the financial difficulties experienced by the Bulgarian state. In an attempt to find alternative resources, Stamboliiski's government decided to place church finances under the direct control of the state. The Law on Budget, Accountancy, and Deals (1921) authorized the Minister of Finances to set up a department at the Holy Synod to supervise not only the execution of the state subsidies, but also that of the BOC's own revenues (Articles 44 and 45). The Synod responded by adverse criticism against the expansion of state control over the revenues from church assets and their spending (RSP, 32/1921; 41/1921). In its view, it had an exclusive right over the management of these capitals. It also protested against the replacement of the original Synodal Financial Department with a new "Budget Control Department at the Holy Synod", headed by an appointee of the Minister of Finances, as a grave violation of church autonomy (RSP, 79/1921).

As in the case of the agrarian reform, this pressure stimulated the BOC's leaders to develop specific policies in the sphere of church finances. On the one hand, they took measures for their boosting. In 1921, the Synod introduced church revenue stamps that had to be stuck on all administrative documents issued by or addressed to the BOC's central, diocesan and parochial bodies (RSP, 119/1921). The revenues from them were used for charity, as well as

for the renovation of old churches or the building of new ones. The BOC obtained the right to issue such stamps in return for an annual contribution of 100,000 leva to the War Orphans National Fund (RSP, 64/1934).

On the other hand, the Synod optimized the BOC's financial capacity by developing a system of funds. Until 1919, it had about 20 funds set up by personal wills of Orthodox churchmen, which were used mainly for the religious commemoration of their donors. After World War I, however, the Synod began to develop policy oriented funds. The most important of them was the Fund for Religious Enlightenment, Church Charity and Material Support of the Clergy. Established in 1919, it raised its capital from the revenues of monastic timber industry (10 percent), the rents from monastic properties (10 percent), the sales of monastic lands (10 percent), the annual profit from the candle industry (8 percent), the revenues of diocesan monasteries and urban churches (5 percent), the takings from village churches (3 percent), and a fee on the beeswax sold (RSP, 67/1919). Stamboliiski's attempts to spread the state control over the BOC's finances, however, provoked the Synod to transform this fund into the General Church Needs Fund (RSP, 79/1921). Aimed to secure the BOC's normal functioning during the time of financial crisis and speedy inflation, this fund received additional tasks; for example, to ensure the growth of the salaries of Synodal officials, to disburse grants to poor students, to furnish the BOC's administrative buildings, to sponsor the seminaries and clerical schools, and to pay state and municipal taxes (GCAP, 3/1929).

This example was also followed by the diocesan councils, who set up their own funds used for the religious enlightenment of believers. Their capital was made out of 50 percent of the price of the church revenue stamps sold in the corresponding dioceses, 40 percent of the profit from the diocesan candle industries, 10 percent from the revenues of diocesan monasteries, and 2 percent of the takings of the parochial churches (RSP, 64/1934; 91/1934). Finally, this practice was adopted at a parochial level. In 1929, the BOC had 2,794 Orthodox parishes while 2,074 of them had own bank accounts (GCAP, 3/1929). As a result, by 1 April 1929, the church had over 111 million leva in bank deposits:

15,827,348 leva from the Holy Synod's funds;
 16,020,431 leva from the Diocesan Councils' funds;
 66,808,256 leva from the parishes;
 1,000,537 leva from the diocesan monasteries;
 5,637,633 leva from the three Stavropegial monasteries;
 5,870,193 leva from the candle enterprises (GCAP, 3/1929).

In July 1929, the BOC's leadership adopted the Statute of the Funds at the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Offices in Bulgaria, which defined three types of funds: the Church Needs Funds, funds for specific purposes, and funds established by personal wills or donations. The main aim of the General and the Diocesan Church Needs Funds was to facilitate the religious, moral, cultural, educational, charity and other activities of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria. Only the funds from this group were allowed to lend loans, while the funds

for special purposes and the personal ones were strictly forbidden to do it. Another important novelty was the alignment of the bookkeeping of church funds with the principles of civil accountancy. As a result, the boards of church funds were obliged to submit annual financial reports to the corresponding central or provincial audit offices (RSP, 60/1929).

In 1929, the world economic crisis and the debts, which Bulgaria owed to its international creditors, posed a new challenge to the country. To meet it the state adopted a policy of active regulation of economic life (Berov, 1996: 506). Some of these measures, however, clashed with the BOC's interests. In particular, the Budget Law for the financial 1929/30 year authorized the Minister of Foreign and Religious Affairs to approve not only the statutes and budgets of the Synodal and diocesan funds, but also those of the Stavropegial monasteries, the candle enterprises, and the monastic schools, i.e. of church bodies that received no state subsidies (RSP, 1/1929). The Synod opposed these legal innovations. In its view, they violated the BOC's autonomy as guaranteed by the 1879 Constitution and the 1895 Exarchate Statute (RSP, 40/1929; GCAP, 4/1937). Finally, a church-state agreement was reached. It respected the Synod's right to approve the budgets of the BOC's structures, whose income came entirely from church resources. But in the case of the bodies that were subsidized by the state, the Synod only was allowed to endorse their draft budgets before submitting them for state approval (GCAP, 7/1937). In its turn, the Synod agreed with the duty of the diocesan councils and monasteries to submit reports for their financial activities to the respective provincial audit offices (Proceeding 40/1929). All this brought a new understanding of the BOC's structures and funds as being public.

These regulations had a positive effect on the BOC's savings that reached the amount of 370,156,356 leva on the eve of World War II (Zankow, 1939: 317). Part of these resources was invested in new churches, soup kitchens for the poor, orphanages, and other activities. Another part secured the stipends of students enrolled at the Sofia and Plovdiv Seminaries and at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University (RSP, 91/1934). The last part covered the salaries and wages of the officials and professionals working at the BOC's administration, estates and industries. By the end of World War II, they counted 3,297 persons (Annuaire Statistique, 1947: 439). At the same time, despite its active economic policy the BOC continued to depend on state subsidies. On the eve of the communist takeover, the state budget covered the salaries of 11 metropolitans and 5 bishops, and since 1932 of 2,480 priests (Zankow, 1939: 317).

Candle industry is another sector of the BOC's economy, which undergone a process of modernization. Facing a rapid growth of the price of beeswax after World War I, the Holy Synod decided to cut the costs for the production of candles by introducing a centralized purchase of wax, which had to be resold to the church candle workshops at reasonable prices (RSP, 20/1921). This measure, however, turned to be insufficient during the World Economic Crisis, which increased not only the wax price, but also the personnel costs. At the same time, the church candle industry had to compete with the secular manufacturers, whose low quality candles made of paraffin and ceresin were much cheaper.

To solve these problems, the Synod reorganized the existing 50 candle workshops unevenly spread across its eleven dioceses into a joint church enterprise (GCAP, 3/1929). To optimize the BOC's candle industry, it also set up the Beeswax Supply Fund (GCAP, 3/1929). Finally, the BOC's leadership elaborated and adopted the Statute on Diocesan Candle Enterprises. Its primary aim was to improve the competitiveness of the BOC's candle industry (RSP, 106/1928). It stipulated all church candles to be made of pure wax and obliged every diocese to have one candle enterprise in the metropolitan city. The Statute also envisioned guarantees for the BOC's monopoly on the candles used for religious ends: they had to bear a stamp with the Holy Synod's initials. Furthermore, it defined in detail the whole candle making process, the management of the diocesan candle enterprises, the responsibilities of their boards and controlling committees, as well as the duties of the professional and assisting personnel. The Statute also arranged related financial issues, such as the accounting principles and procedures, the control over the execution of the budget of candle industry, the management of the profit from the candle industry and the methods of inspection. Finally, it required only candles produced by certified diocesan enterprises to be used in religious services, forbade the use of candles made of non-pure beeswax, paraffin and ceresin, and declared the producers of fake candles as criminals (RSP, 3/1931). These measures turned the candle industry into the BOC's second major source of income. In 1944, the Synod expected to receive only from candles an income of 120 million leva (BSP, 37/1943).

The communist assault on the BOC's economy

On 9 September 1944, the power in Bulgaria was seized by a coalition of anti-fascist political forces, where the communists played a key role. Until the Paris Peace Treaty (10 February 1947), however, they avoided initiatives that could be perceived as attempts for the Sovietization of the country. Instead, the new rulers skillfully used the wartime conditions to seize various church premises as necessary for the medical treatment of soldiers or the accommodation of refugees from the civil war in Greece. Yet, when the war was over, these properties were not returned to the church (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 150-153).

In the first years of their rule, the communists also encroached upon the BOC's charity premises. In 1945, they suspended the state subsidy to religious charity and placed the staff of the BOC's charity institutions under the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In the next year, many charity premises of the Orthodox Church were taken away under various pretexts; for example, the Plovdiv diocesan orphanage was transferred to the local University Psychiatry. Finally, the Constitution of 1947 left no room for religious charity (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 110-117). In addition, it separated the church from the state (Article 78.2) in a manner that enabled the taking away of the BOC's properties by decrees of the Council of Ministers or their "rent" under administratively enforced contracts (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 163-167).

Church agriculture was also affected by these developments. In 1946, a new bill on labor land property entrusted the decisions on the limit of monastery agricultural assets to locally established land councils, acting under the supervision of the Directorate of Agriculture (BSP, 10/1946). The Holy Synod's attempts to stop the nationalization of church lands by establishing a Mixed Lay-Clerical Council on the BOC's Economic Affairs did not work (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 150). Meanwhile, the Paris Peace Treaty had arranged the international status of Bulgaria, and the communists launched direct attacks against the BOC's economic foundation. On 27 June 1947, their government issued a decree for the nationalization of two thirds of all monastery lands. In short time, the Orthodox Church was deprived of about 65 percent of its arable lands. All its forests became state property, as well (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 338). In parallel, on 26 December 1947, the law on nationalization of large and medium enterprises hit the most important sector of the BOC's economy – its candle industry. In 1948, after many requests, the Synod was allowed by the Ministry of Industry to rent the Sofia candle enterprise (BSP, 68/1948). The BOC's monopoly on candles, however, was no longer protected, and the revenues from them dropped in times (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 178). Furthermore, the communist regime encroached on the BOC's finances: The Synodal, diocesan and parochial bank deposits were nationalized, and the state subsidy to the church was cut (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 171-176). In parallel, the government stopped paying the salaries of priests. The Synod, however, was not able to cover them because the BOC's own finances were severely curtailed (BSP, 10/1948). Therefore, the hierarchs appealed to the Orthodox Bulgarians to pay an annual tax to the priests (BSP, 19/1948). They also asked the government to permit the release of a new emission of church revenue stamps. The communist regime, however, refused to satisfy these requests (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 177). Instead, it used the BOC's financial crisis to overthrow the disobedient Exarch Stefan (8 September 1948). The new rulers made an allocation in the subsidy to the church only upon the Synod's decision to approve Stefan's removal (8 September 1948). In this way, the priests finally received their salaries (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 179).

In a similar way, the totalitarian regime used financial restrictions to "persuade" the Holy Synod to reduce the BOC's educational activities. Under this pressure, the latter cut off the stipends of students in the Sofia and Plovdiv Seminaries, doubled their board and lodging fees, and finally merged these Seminaries in 1949 (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 178). In 1951, the Synod was also forced to take the expenditures of the Faculty of Theology upon its removal from Sofia University and its transformation into an ecclesiastical academy (Kalkandjieva, 1997: 185-209). Finally, the drastic reduction of the BOC's material and financial resources caused a severe cutback in its religious activities. During the communist rule, the number of its priests dropped from 2,428 in 1944 to about 900 in 1989. The monastic community, consisting of 157 monks and 166 nuns in 1946, also declined (*Annuaire Statistique*, 1947: 441). The only exception was the episcopate, which membership increased from 11 metropolitans and 5 bishops in 1944 to 13 metropolitans and 11 bishops in 1989.

Church economy after communism

On 10 November 1989, a plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party stripped Todor Zhivkov of the office of Secretary General. Few weeks later, the Communist Party voluntarily denounced its leading role in state and society. Meanwhile, the process of democratization allowed the establishment of a political alternative – the Union of Democratic Forces, as well as the organization of free parliamentary elections in 1990 and the adoption of a new Constitution in 1991.

In the religious realm, the political change brought about the end of militant atheism and created conditions for an expansion of the freedom of religion. Although the 1991 Constitution has preserved the principle of church-state separation (Article 13.2), this was no longer used for suppressing the activities of religious denominations, but as a guarantee for their internal autonomy. At the same time, the laws of the restitution of ownership of land (1991) and the ownership of houses, administrative buildings and industries (1992) opened the way to the restitution of the previously confiscated assets of the religious communities. Due to struggles within the BOC's leadership, however, the restitution of the church's property did not work smoothly. In 1992, a group of metropolitans set up an Alternative Synod that did not recognize Patriarch Maxim as the BOC's lawful leader. The conflict was additionally complicated by the involvement of political parties in it: the Socialist Party supported Maxim's Synod, while the Democratic Forces – the Alternative one. As a result, the restitution of church property followed the zigzags of Bulgarian political life (Broun, 2004; Kalkandjieva, 2006).

In final terms, the Alternative Synod lost the battle, and Maxim's Synod became an undisputable owner of all church assets. Today the BOC is the second biggest landlord after the state, but does not maintain a unified register of these assets. The public tax registers also do not contain such data. According to the jurist Stefan Stoykov, by 2013 the BOC had about 120,000 hectares of lands and forests (Epicenter, 2013). In this way, the church's lands are less than 3 percent of Bulgaria's agricultural area of 3.6 million hectares (EUROSTAT, 2012). In a similar way, there is no clarity about the BOC's revenues from candle industry. Some observers estimate them at 14 million leva (1 EUR equals 1.95 leva) per year (BNT, 2014). Furthermore, the BOC receives rents from restituted administrative, residential and commercial buildings. At the same time, the BOC's income is generally exempted from state and municipal taxes. Interestingly enough, the Holy Synod does not provide official information on the management of the church assets, as well as on their revenues and utilization.

Although the restitution of the BOC's property presupposes a significant growth of its wealth, the financial situation of priests improved very slowly. During the first two decades after the fall of communism, many of them used to receive their salaries in candles. In 2008, the newly adopted Church Statute

introduced new rules for the priestly wages, which should not fall below those in the civil sector (Article 135.21). This act, however, failed to include guarantees for the health and social insurance of priests. In 2010, a state financial inspection revealed that the BOC owed about BGN 2.5 million leva to the Pension Fund and the Health Insurance Fund (Kutuzov, 2010; Ivanov, 2011). In 2013, a group of Bulgarian deputies proposed an amendment of the laws on health and social insurance as to guarantee the interests of priests (Insurance, 2013). It did not bring the expected effect. Finally, an alternative solution was found. An amendment of the Religious Denominations Act, adopted by the National Assembly 21 December 2018, introduced a annual state subsidy of 15 million leva (about 7,5 million EUR) for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which to cover the salaries of its priests (Decree, 2018).

In the next place, the fall of communism triggered a steady growth of the state subsidy for this religious institution. Its amount was kept in silence until Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. The state budget for 2006 was the first one that contained a specific reference to the subsidies given to the Orthodox Church in the country and its parishes abroad (Berov, 2014, 20-25; Berov and Donev, 2016; Subsidies, 2017; Subsidies, 2018). At the same time, if the pre-communist state supported mostly the salaries of the episcopate and the clergy, the post-1989 subsidies are used for the reconstruction of churches and monasteries. It is also worthy to mention that the first audit on the expenditure of the state subsidy by the Orthodox Church after the fall of communism took place only in 2012 (Sega, 2012).

Financial years	State subsidy to the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria (in leva)	State Subsidy to the BOC's dioceses and parishes abroad (in leva)
2018	2,600,000	1,200,000
2017	2,410,000	1,350,000
2016	2,410,000	850,000
2015	2,360,000	850,000
2014	2,000,000	730,000
2013	1,660,000	700,000
2012	1,660,000	700,000
2011	1,660,000	700,000
2010	1,560,000	750,000
2009	1,900,000	800,000
2008	1,820,000	750,000
2007	1,660,000	750,000
2006	1,100,000	730,000

Finally, the EU membership of Bulgaria gave the Orthodox Church access to new funding tools, such as Measure 322 “Village Renewal and Development” of the European Rural Development Program. Its application started in 2011, when four village churches were repaired and a monastery park was renovated (Dveri, 2011). In 2012, the State Agricultural Fund allocated 5,275,898 leva for the reconstruction of other 20 churches (Agricultural Fund, 2012). At the same time, during the first program period (2007-2013), the same fund approved 182 projects for the reconstruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries at a total value of 66.5 million leva (Agricultural Fund, 2014). Until the end of 2013, the Agricultural Fund paid 25.3 million leva for the reconstruction of 91 Orthodox churches and monasteries (Agricultural Fund, 2015). According to the program rules, 80 percent of this amount are covered by the EU, while the rest by the national budget. Furthermore, in 2013, representatives of the state, the BOC and the Muslim community set up a joint committee to prepare applications for the next EU funding period (2014-2020) (Staridolska, 2013). In this regard, their major concern was the unsettled ownership status of many religious buildings that impeded their application to the Rural Development Program. Therefore, the BOC’s leadership concentrated its efforts to obtain the corresponding certificates. In 2015, the Supreme Church Council at the Holy Synod reported that all church properties have been supplied with documents of ownership (Report, 2015). In parallel, the Synod initiated seminars where clergy and church officials had to be trained in order to apply for and administrate projects supported by EU funding (Dveri, 2014).

The restoration of the BOC’s real estate, the growth of its revenues, the increased state subsidy, and the access to the EU funds, however, did not bring about a revival of the pre-communist church charity. It also had a little effect on religious life as such. The number of the regular churchgoers varies between 3 and 5 percent in various sociological surveys. Although Orthodox monkhood marked a slight progress, this community remains smaller than the pre-communist one. Having about 800 active and retired priests, the BOC is far from the numbers registered in the mid-1940s (Stefanova, 2017). Only the episcopate shows impressive growth: 15 metropolitans (i.e., diocesan hierarchs) and 14 bishops (without dioceses). At the same time, despite the church’s economic growth and the state tax abatement of its assets and debts, the Orthodox hierarchs continue to complain of shortage of financial means. In parallel, until 2013, many church bodies regularly failed to pay their municipal taxes; for example, the Holy Synod owed 969,000 leva to the Sofia municipality for waste management (Trud, 2013). In the end of 2013, however, the BOC’s arrears were cancelled. In parallel, an amendment of the Law on Municipal Taxes and Fees exempted all religious communities from the refuse fees (Article 71a). It also allowed the exemption of the BOC’s buildings and lands from other local taxes and fees at the expense of municipal budgets (Article 24.9) (State Gazette, 2013: 2).

Conclusions

This empirical analysis of the BOC's economic life reveals less studied aspects of the relation between Orthodoxy and modern socio-economic development. After 1878, the economic endeavors of the Orthodox Church in free Bulgaria were motivated by broadly defined ecclesiastical interests rather than by specific theological doctrines, as in the case of Protestantism (Weber, 1992; Kalkandjieva, 2010: 87-88). Under the new conditions, the Holy Synod began to regard religious economy as a guarantee for the institutional autonomy of the Orthodox Church in its relations with the Bulgarian state. To secure their monopoly over the church's material and financial assets, the Orthodox hierarchs abandoned the old pattern of general lay participation in church economy and entrusted its management to selected lay professionals with specific expertise and skills (e.g., agronomists, veterinarians).

Furthermore, in the course of this church modernization, the Holy Synod undertook systematic steps to rationalize religious economy and to optimize its expenditures in a manner that improved the quality of BOC's religious, charity and educational activities. As a result, the church began to function as an economic board – a change that provoked twofold relations with the state. On the one hand, the Synod endorsed a nationalization of Orthodoxy (cf. Makrides, 2012a: 32) and welcomed state-granted privileges that would enhance the Orthodox Church's status as a nation-building institution. Yet, on the other hand, the Orthodox hierarchs zealously defended their rights as ultimate decision-makers on everything that concerned church properties and finances. Therefore, they condemned any state interference in this sphere as an attempt to hamper church autonomy. On the eve of World War II, such a relative modernization (cf. Makrides, 2012b: 254) turned church economy into an engine of Orthodox religious charity and an improved religious literacy of laymen.

This trend, however, was interrupted by the communist overthrow. The new rulers broke the bond between the BOC's economy and its institutional autonomy, thus paralyzing the religious life in the country. Therefore, after the end of their atheist regime, the renewal of religious life could not be achieved by a simple restoration of church properties. Among other things, it required a reassessment of the BOC's autonomy in the context of the country's EU membership, as well as clear rules for the role of the Holy Synod in the public economic sector.

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The Economic Development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church since the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878)

The article traces the economic development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church since the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878) to nowadays. Special attention is paid to the church's economic activities and status between the two World Wars. This archive-based overview offers fruitful grounds for comparison with the changes in church economy under communism, as well as with the post-1989 restoration of the economic potential of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after the collapse of this totalitarian regime. The article also outlines the major sources of church revenues and the key avenues of their spending during the modern Bulgarian state. Considering economic growth as a guarantee for its institutional autonomy in its relations with the state, the church has always tried to rationalize and modernize its economic activities and thereby keep its societal influence intact.

Keywords: Bulgarian Orthodox Church, religious economy, church assets, church industry, Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Le développement économique de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare depuis la libération de la Bulgarie (1878)

L'article retrace le développement économique de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare de la libération de la Bulgarie (1878) à nos jours. Une attention particulière est portée aux activités économiques et au statut de l'Église dans l'entre-deux-guerres. L'étude des archives offre une base de comparaison stimulante avec les transformations de l'économie de l'Église pendant le régime communiste ainsi qu'avec le rétablissement du potentiel économique de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare après l'effondrement du régime totalitaire en 1989. De même, l'article examine les sources majeures de revenus de l'Église et les modalités de leur dépense au temps de l'État bulgare moderne. Considérant la croissance économique comme une garantie de son autonomie institutionnelle dans ses relations avec l'État, l'Église a toujours essayé de rationaliser et de moderniser ses activités économiques afin de garder intacte son influence dans la société.

Mots-clés: Église orthodoxe bulgare, activité économique, capitaux de l'Église, industrie de l'Église, christianisme orthodoxe oriental.

El desarrollo económico de la Iglesia ortodoxa búlgara desde la liberación de Bulgaria (1878)

El artículo describe el desarrollo económico de la Iglesia ortodoxa búlgara desde la Liberación de Bulgaria (1878) hasta nuestros días. Se presta especial atención a las actividades económicas y a la situación de la iglesia entre las

dos guerras mundiales. Esta visión panorámica basada en archivos ofrece un terreno fértil para comparar los cambios en la economía eclesiástica con el comunismo, y luego con el restablecimiento del potencial económico de la Iglesia ortodoxa búlgara después de 1989, tras el colapso de este régimen totalitario. El artículo también describe las principales fuentes de ingreso y los ejes principales de gasto de la Iglesia durante la fase moderna del Estado búlgaro. Considerando al crecimiento económico como una garantía de autonomía institucional en sus relaciones con el Estado, la Iglesia ha tratado continuamente de racionalizar y modernizar sus actividades económicas y, de ese modo, mantener intacta su influencia social.

Palabras clave: Iglesia ortodoxa búlgara, economía religiosa, bienes de la iglesia, industria de la iglesia, cristianismo ortodoxo oriental.