The revival of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro from 1990

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THE REVIVAL OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN MONTENEGRO FROM 1990

OŽIVLJAVANJE SRPSKE PRAVOSLAVNE CRKVE U CRNOJ GORI OD 1990. GODINE

APSTRAKT Nakon pa pada komunizma 1989. godine, vjerske zajednice širom Istočne Evrope obnovljene su i oživljene. Isti razvoj se može vidjeti i u Crnoj Gori, gdje su procvjetale i tradicionalne i nove vjerske grupe. Taj razvoj bi se mogao nazvati desekularizacijom bivših komunističkih društava. Ovaj rad istražuje oživljavanje jedne od glavnih vjerskih grupa, Srpske pravoslavne crkve (SPC) u Crnoj Gori, sa ciljem da se isprati i identifikuje njen razvoj nakon pada komunizma. Ovaj rad predstavlja raspravu o tome da li je oživljavanje SPC dovelo do desekularizacije crnogorskog društva na isti način kao što se to desilo u Srbiji.

Ključne riječi: Istočno pravoslavlje, Srpska pravoslavna crkva, Crna Gora, religija, odnos države i crkve

ABSTRACT After the fall of communism in 1989 religious communities has across Eastern Europe been rebuild and revived. The same development can be seen in Montenegro where both traditional and new religious groups has flourished. This development could be called a desecularization of the former communist societies. This paper investigates the revival of one of the major religious groups, the branch of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), in Montenegro in order to track and identify the development in the particular community after the fall of communism. The purpose of the investigation is to discuss, if the revival of SOC has led to a desecularization of the Montenegrin society in the same manner, as the case is for Serbia.

Key words: Eastern Orthodoxy, Serbian Orthodox Church, Montenegro, Religion, State-church relationship.

The two newly erected Serbian Orthodox Cathedrals in Bar and Podgorica stands as strong symbols of the revival of the Church since the fall of communism. Alongside these massive buildings at least 600 churches and monasteries has been rebuild or build. The numbers of believers and supporters paint a similar picture. From 1990 until today, there has been an increase in support and approx. 50 pct. of the total population of Montenegro supports the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. However, these symbols and numbers does not reveal, if the Montenegrin society has transformed from a largely atheistic society into a desecularized one. The current constitution still proclaims the state as secularized and religion is not allowed in public schools or institutions. It seems like the major structures of the state has not been affected by the revival of religion.

This article seeks to investigate the current state of secularization in the Montenegrin society with particular emphasis on the Orthodox majority population and the Serbian Orthodox Church's branch in Montenegro – the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral and the two other Eparchies (from heron under one as SOC).

A major part of this investigation is a historical, social and political clarification of the revival of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro from the late 1980s onwards. The article is divided into four sections. The first section is a short introduction to sources, methods and concepts. The second section outlines the historical background of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Montenegro. The third and major section is focused on the revival of the SOC, which leads to the concluding discussion of the desecularization of Montenegro post communism. The final section's discussion point in the direction of the current debate about the new draft law on religion in 2019, which will only briefly be touched.

Method, source materials and main concepts

The approach to the sources and materials behind this paper is two-folded. First and foremost is the paper based on a religio-organizational mapping (Vinding 2013) of the SOC in Montenegro through field observations and informal on-site talks. This approach has been used to shape a social and historical cartography of the field – geographically, politically, socially, materially and religious – that the SOC in Montenegro inhabits. The results from this investigation are presented in the second and third section. The second approach has been a qualitative assessment of statements and communiques from the SOC supplemented with other public available materials. In combination, the field observations and the source materials has been used to describe and map the revival of the SOC in the Montenegrin society as a base to discuss the level of desecularization of the Montenegrin state.

Observations and sources

The field observations used as a base for this study has been collected in Montenegro in 2013, 2014, 2018 and 2019. The main observations are field notes describing the location and setting of churches, monasteries and other types of religious buildings, as well as the rituals and symbols attached to the sites. Secondly I have conducted informal discussions with local clergy members, NGOs and academics on the subject of religion in Montenegro. The discussions are not used as sources materials directly in this study, but instead it has been used as guidance through the field and the public available sources. The sources referred to in this study are mainly information published by the metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral and their ecclesial news service *Svetigora* (Serb. Holy Mountain). The sources range from news article, communiques or various volumes printed by the Svetigora press. The sources from

SOC has been supplemented by other external sources from newspapers, the government or other types of media outlets.

Main concepts: religion and desecularization

The definition of religion is always a problematic one and entails many discussions and blind ends, as Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta (2017: 34–49) notes. Within the empirical study of religion in sociology, a functionalistic or pragmatic definition has often prevailed, because it creates some objective and outwards criteria to be used. This provide a base for a working definition, which allows the separation of different forms of human activity. The classical functionalistic definition is that religion should be seen in a broader societal context. Religion plays a role in societies as a system of belief, a base for identity creation – belonging – and finally how human behaves in certain situations. Each aspect of a religion is seen here as bound to human social active, identity creation, the formation of communities and finally the determination of right and wrong behavior. Such a definition has it flaws (se Pollack and Rosta 2017: 44–46), but will be used in this paper in order to distinguish between religion and secularization as well as between different form of religion (Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism etc.).

Closely connected to the empirical definition of religion is the idea of secularization. It is a main theory and finding of sociology of religion in the 21th century. Several studies showed how urbanization, industrialization, globalization and other modern transformation of societies would eventually affect the adherence to traditional religions and churches and led to the demise of religion. This is called the „secularization" theory and idea of a „post-Christian Europe", which seem for long certain, but has in the past twenty years been challenged substantially – both in Western and Eastern Europe were religion have reemerged on the societal scene (Pollack & Rosta 2017: 66–67). In the case of Serbia, Mirko Blagojević (2008) has noted that the Serbian society and other post-Yugoslav one has been characterized by the reemergence of religion and a line of changes in the population's attitude towards religion. Blagojević notes that:

> The tendency manifested itself in several ways: as a reaffirmation and a revitalization of the church, as a retraditionalization and a retotalization, as a revival of religion and church and the return of the holy, even as a reconquista and a religious renaissance. Sociologists were in favor of terming this tendency „desecularization" (Blagojević 2008: 39)

This tendency is according to Blagojević not a short expulsion of religious fewer, but rather a:

> a relatively stable and steady attachment of people towards religion and the church, and as a very tight intertwining of the religious (ecclesiastical) and the political (social), the process, which certain religious and social scientists tend to regard as clericalization of the contemporary Serbian society. (Blagojević 2008: 39)

At the heart of Blagojević analysis of the desecularization is a series of closely link features that points to or reveals to what extent a society has been affected by the revival of religions. Blagojević (2008: 41–43) highlights the following features as crucial:

1. The extent of religious (de-)monopolization or marginalization
2. The separation of the church and the state
3. The social significance of a religious community and if it is „politicized“
4. The adherence to conventional religious beliefs
5. The attendance to religious and church rituals

This description of the main features of desecularization will used as a point of departure for the final discussion of the level of desecularization of the Montenegrin state and society in broad terms.

Historical background

This part of the article will shortly contextualize the Serbian Orthodox Church's history in Montenegro, before returning to the main discussion of Orthodoxy in Montenegro. This contextualization provide a broad idea about the position of Orthodoxy and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Montenegrin society.

In general Eastern Orthodoxy in Montenegro is a central part of the country's historical and cultural legacy. The Montenegrin predecessor states were governed for centuries as one of Europe's few theocratic states, which is one of the many reasons for the close historical relationship between the state and the Church before the communist takeover.

Christianity in Montenegro dates back to Roman or Byzantine times in the fifth century. From the eighth to the tenth century, Slavs slowly migrated to the Montenegrin coastline and hinterland, which were under Byzantine control. Slavic magnates assumed the leading positions and were elevated to governors or princes under the tutelage of Byzantium or the emerging Bulgarian Empire – and became slowly Christianized. A Slavic dynasty, the Vojislavljević, succeeded in fighting off Byzantium and the Bulgarians and thus formed a short-lived Christian Slavic kingdom, Duklja. In 1089, Constantin Bodin Vojislavljević (ca. 1072–1108) was elevated to king and the Bishopric of Bar was promoted to an archbishopric under the Catholic Church. The kingdom, however, crumbled after Bodin's death in 1108, paving the way for the Serbian dynasty of Nemanjić that formed the Serbian medieval kingdom controlling most of today's Montenegro. A local Eastern Orthodox Church was founded in Serbia under St. Sava (1174–1236), a brother of the first Serbian king. The Eastern Orthodox Church sought to counter the Latin influence along the coast and therefore established the Eastern Bishopric of Zeta with its seat at a monastery on Prevlaka Island. In 1346, the Serbian Archbishopric was elevated to a patriarchate and in turn, the Bishopric of Zeta turned into a metropolitan seat (Fine 1991: 36–38).

Following the defeat of the Slavic rulers and magnates by the advancing Ottoman and Venetian armies, the metropolitan seat was moved from the coast to the mountain, first to the Monastery of Kom and later to newly founded one in Cetinje. Ivan Crnojević (1442–90), the Duke of Zeta, founded the city of Cetinje in 1482 and a monastery, which since then has been the center for Eastern Orthodoxy in Montenegro. The clans of the Montenegrin Mountains resisted Ottoman control and were from 1516 onwards led by their Metropolitan, who also became their military leader since the Battle of Lješkopolje in 1604. The Metropolitan became known as the *vladika*, assuming both secular and religious power. Formally, the Metropolitan was under the rule of the Serbian Patriarch of Peć, which was brought down in 1766 after several failed Serbian uprisings (Roberts, 2007: 116). The Metropolitans of Montenegro were since then often consecrated in Russia, which became a close ally to the Montenegrin rulers. The Metropolitan office was held by the Petrović-Njegoš clan from 1697 until 1855, when the Petrović-Njegoš heir chose to become prince so he could marry and thus left the ecclesial office to others. However, the prince and king of the Montenegrin Principality from 1855 onwards held great powers over the metropolitan seat, which was effectively a prolonging of the state (Roberts, 2007: 218).

In 1885, Metropolitan Mitrofan Ban (1841–1920) assumed office and was also consecrated in Russia and not Serbia, despite the fact that the Serbian Belgrade Patriarchate has just been formed. At the beginning of Mitrofan Ban's tenure, the Orthodox Church of Montenegro consisted of two Dioceses, 159 parishes with roughly 200 churches and 15 monasteries. The Montenegrin Mountain state was internationally recognized in 1878 and incorporated several provinces from the crumbling Ottoman Empire. It expanded to include new territories won in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 amongst which was the historical seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch in Peć and Decani in today's Kosovo. The Orthodox Church in Montenegro founded a new diocese under Bishop Gavrilo Dožić (1881–1950) to oversee all the new Northern provinces (Pavlovich, 1989: 141–42).

The Montenegrin Kingdom succumbed in the First World War and the Orthodox Church of Montenegro was subsequently dismantled in 1920 in order to be incorporated into the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate of Belgrade in the same manner as Orthodox Churches throughout what was about to become Yugoslavia. Bishop Gavrilo Dožić had in 1920 just become Metropolitan of Montenegro, which he remained until 1938 when he became Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church until his death in 1950. Gavrilo Dožić's elevation from Bishop of Peć to Metropolitan and later Patriarch reveals the close integration of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro into the Serbian Orthodox Church after the formation of the Kingdom of Croats, Slovenes and Serbs (later Yugoslavia) in 1918–20. Montenegro was abolished as a province within Yugoslavia in 1921 and the region was incorporated into the larger municipality (oblast) of Zeta. The Metropolitan seat persisted in the period.

When Nazi Germany invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, Patriarch Gavrilo Dožić sought refuge in Ostrog in Montenegro where he remained until he was arrested by the Germans on 23 April after which he spent the rest of the war in prison. He refused to co-operate with the Germans during the war and was therefore allowed to reassume office by the communist authorities after the end of the war. The Metropolitan of Montenegro from 1939 to 1945, Joanikije Lipovac, was not so fortunate. He was executed by the communists for collaboration (Stella 1979, 10), and was later canonized by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2001 as a neo-marthyr. In 1945, after the end of the war, Arsenije Bradvarević (1883–1963) was promoted to the office of Metropolitan of Montenegro, which he held until 1960. He was imprisoned by the communist authorities from 1954 and the church was consequently leaderless until 1960. The metropolitan seat was under great pressure and 3.547 hectares of land were confiscated during the Agrarian Reform of 1945–48 all the while Montenegrin separatism was encouraged to the clergy by the local authorities. In 1957, serious unrest spread among the clergy in Montenegro. They were too few, too poor and not very well educated, and had been left without a Metropolitan. The Patriarch visited the metropolitanate in June 1957 to meet with the leaders of the newly formed Socialist Republic of Montenegro in order to end the unrest. The government promised to improve things (Stella, 1979).

The imprisoned Metropolitan Arsenije was succeeded by Danilo Dajković in 1960 (1895–1993), and his tenure lasted from 1960 to 1991. Dajković, a Montenegrin by birth, had to face an immense challenge with few priests and a church falling apart. There were 184 parishes in Montenegro and only 18 full-time priests were able to serve the community according to figures from 1973. His powers were extremely limited and in 1971–72 the significant chapel devoted to the Vladika Petar II Petrović Njegoš' at Mount Lovćen was destroyed by the local authorities, who replaced it with a modernist mausoleum. There were no monks left in Montenegro in 1973 and several historical and symbolic monasteries fell into ruin (Stella, 1979: 302).

The revival of Serbian Orthodoxy

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Metropolitan Radović Amfilohije (1938–) took office in Montenegro in 1991. He faced a challenge much similar to his predecessor, but he arrived at a watershed. As Blagojević (2008) has highlighted, religious communities across Yugoslavia became revitalized during this intense period – perhaps most noticeable in the SOC that assumed a stronger position in Serbia and those republics with a majority of Slavic speaking Orthodox population. Amfilohije has become one of the leading figures in this revitalization – not only in Montenegro, but across the lands in which the SOC are present.

A major outwards sign of this change is that around 50% of the population of Montenegro has backed the SOC since the early nineties (Saggau,

2017). Vladimir Bakrač's studies of religion in Montenegro (2012, 2011) shows that the number of believers are as well on the rise from the 1950s till 2011.

Table 1: Religious communities in Montenegro (believers in total of population in %)

Religious community	1953	1991	2003	2011
Orthodox	45,84	69,12	74,23	72,07
Islam	17,65	19,18	17,74	19,11
Roman Catholic	4,81	4,41	3,54	3,44
Atheist	31,46	1,60	0,96	1,24

Source: Bakrač 2012, p. 116

A recent study (Džankić, 2014) indicates that the Orthodox population of Montenegro is divided into three different „camps". At the surface 2/3 support the Metropolitan and the SOC, while 1/3 supporting the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church founded in 1993. However, a poll suggest that almost 58% identify themselves as just „Eastern Orthodox" without a national name (Serbian or Montenegrin), which indicates that they are perhaps not that occupied with the national affiliation of their local church they traditionally use. A conservative estimation is that around 50 pct. – roughly 300.000 – of the total population of Montenegro adheres to the SOC.

The revitalization of the SOC in Montenegro followed the same trajectories as other religious communities. An indication of this trend is found in Bakrač's (2011) study, which indicates that around 60 pct. of all Montenegrins accept all teaching of their religious community and almost 90 pct. think that one should believe in God. Bakrač' and Blagojević's other study (2013) indicates however, that the attendance to religious services and other sort of religious activities is not at the same high level. It is rather well below 50 pct. for all communities and especially for the Orthodox were very few attended Liturgy weekly. It seems to be that religion is a mode of „belonging" rather than a mode of „behaving". In the total numbers, the level of belonging has sky-rocked: numbers of believers rose from 45% of the total population of Yugoslavia in 1985 (Perica, 2002) to 91,6% of the Montenegrin population in 1991. The trend has as well affected the two other „traditional" (as they are called in the old Montenegrin constitution prior to 2006) communities, The Muslim community and the Catholic Church. As table 1 show, the revitalization was not in a rise of adherence, but more in outwards activity and public practice for these two communities (see Pačariz, 2015)

The following section will go into details about the revival of the SOC in Montenegro, focusing on the revival of various parts of the SOC and how its position in the Montenegrin society has changed since 1991.

The role of the Metropolitan in Cetinje

The Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral as well as the SOC in general in Montenegro are first and foremost associated with the current Metropolitan Amfilohije, who has an immense influence in the Church and in Montenegro. In every aspect of the Church, he has played a crucial role – in different fields such as theology, politics, education and rebuilding of the church's infrastructure in Montenegro. In order to understand the revival of the SOC in Montenegro, one need to understand Amfilohije, his background and his role in SOC and the Montenegrin society.

Amfilohije is a well-trained theologian. He took his Master of Theology at Belgrade's theological faculty in 1962 and studied abroad, both in Paris at the famous St. Sergius institute, Bern, Rome and Greece. One of the leading conservative Serbian theologians of the twentieth century, Father (later St.) Justin Popović (1894–1979), taught Amfilohije and influenced both his theology and his political views on Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbian politics and history in general (Buchenau, 1999: 11–15; Louth, 2015: 147). Amfilohije's theology can best be described as an Orthodox neo-conservatism influenced by the Neo-Patristic school (Paris-school) and he inherited ideas about slavophilism, sobornost, patrism, svetosavlje from Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956) and Popović (Buchenau, 2006). His views on theology and politics are aligned with what has often been characterized as the „pro-Russian" wing of the Serbian Orthodox Church that sees Russia as a close spiritual and political ally and is skeptical of the „decadent" West. An essential part of his academic and ecclesial life has been bound to Kosovo. Amfilohije was a leading member of the young and up and coming generation of theologians of the SOC in the 1980s. During this period he took part in the reawakening of the Serbian national continuous. He was one of the 21 priest that signed the plea for Kosovo in 1982. Years later he signed the letter of support for Kosovo in 1985. Both documents were essential in the renewed focus on Kosovo amongst the Serbs. Amfilohije took as well upon him a role in the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, and was characterized as one of the three leading members of SOC determining its position during the Milošević years (Tomanić, 2001).

However, the Metropolitan has often shown a pragmatic approach to political issues outside of Kosovo and to the language of the liturgy, and therefore doesn't fit into a strict characterization of the conservative wing of the Orthodox Church. An example is his support for the Montenegrin Prime Minister Đukanović during his and Montenegro's initial alienation from the Milošević regime in 1996–97 paving the way for Đukanović's control of the state apparatus (Morrison, 2009: 134–135). But Amfilohije's relation to Đukanović and his various governments is complex. Today Amfilohije is seen by many pro-Montenegrins as a controversial figure speaking for Serbian nationalism and threating Montenegrin statehood. Đukanović and Amfilohije have become alienated from each other (Ramet, 2006: 264–268). In opposition, many Serbian-oriented Montenegrin citizens, parties and newspapers regard Amfilohije as

beacon for SOC and a protector of the Serbian cause in Montenegro (Morrison, 2009). A quick media search in Montenegrin Medias will quickly reveal that Amfilohije name and statements often reach the front pages and more than once has been the center of national attention or controversies in both Montenegro and Serbia. The current debate on a new law on religion in 2019 being a case in point.

Passing on the tradition: organization, education and media

During Amfilohije's tenure the organization, media outlet and the continual efforts of SOC to pass on its tradition through education has been strengthen. In this section the focus will be the on these parts of the Church.

The Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral lead by Amfilohije is the main Orthodox Eparchy or Diocese in the state of Montenegro. It is divided into seven organizational units. These are a sort of Deanery, which in Serbian are called „Archpriests" (Serb.: Arhijerejski protoprezviterijat) each led by their own Presbyter, Deacon or Archpriest. Besides the Metropolitan there exist two other Serbian Dioceses or Eparchies in the Montenegrin state. One of them is the Eparchy of Budimljansko-Nikšićki (Budimlje-Niksic) centered arround the cities of Berane and Nikšić, which was made independent of the metropolitanate in 2001 and has been led by Bishop Joanikije (Јоаникије) since 2002. This eparchy covers most of the northern parts of Montenegro. The other is the Eparchy of Mileševa, seated in Prijepolje in Serbia, which was restored in 1992, but includes just a few parishes in the Montenegrin border region. It is currently led by Bishop Atanasius. Since 1991, the SOC in Montenegro has been reorganized to create a more linear network and relation between priest, monks, bishops and other offices, which is partly done in order to function more smoothly with a greater number of clergy. The revival of the two „old" Eparchies beside the metropolitanate is partly due to the same reason, but does as well reveal a symbolic „resurrection" of bishoprics long gone. A practical side is that the number of high-ranking SOC clergy in Montenegro has risen.

In relation to the Church's educational efforts in Montenegro the actives are threefold. The church run a network of Sunday schools, a religious secondary school, and apply constant political pressure on the state in order to have religious education introduced in Montenegrin schools. In Montenegro „education is secular", as the 2013 Montenegrin General Law on Education (Mng. Opšti zakon o obrazovanju i vaspitanju 2013) states in article 5. The metropolitanate has been advocating for a more traditional religious education system in which each denomination is allowed to teach pupils about their parents' faith. The government has so far refused this (Ramet, 2006). SOC runs a secondary school in Cetinje, next to the seat of the Metropolitan. This school was reopened in 1992, after being closed down during communism, and is today the main center for Eastern Orthodox education in Montenegro. It holds close ties to the Serbian Orthodox Church and is one of nine of this type of „theological school" (Serb.: *Bogoslovija*) that are run by SOC. The school is a part of the

Serbian school system and it is therefore under the supervision of the Serbian government's office for churches and religious communities (Saggau et al 2020). The students' educational qualifications can be used inside Serbia and provide access to the theological faculties at Serbian Universities. On several occasions, the school, its pupils and teachers have been harassed and the school damaged by opponents of the SOC in Montenegro. (Saggau et al., 2020).

The metropolitanate also founded their own information center called „Svetigora" (Holy Mountain) named after the sacred waterfall at the Morača monastery. This center publishes both information letters and books on issues pertaining to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. In 1998 the information center launched its own radio station and its website is today the main source for all communication from the metropolitanate. Svetigora has become the central coordinated outlet for the metropolitanate and SOC in Montenegro.

The rebuilding of the Metropolitan

A major part of the revival of the SOC is the rebuilding and renovation of churches and monasteries. According to biography of Metropolitan Amfilohije, his tenure has been „the most important architectural epoch in the history of these areas" (Svetigora, 2019). In the book *Renewal and construction of monasteries and temples in Montenegro 1990–2010* (Svetigora, 2010*)* a detailed guide of the renovations is available and it is estimated that 569 church buildings have been restored. According to the church, the figure has today risen to 650.

Perhaps the two most central and visible of these building projects are two new cathedrals, the first of which was built in the capital Podgorica and opened in 2013, and the second in the port city of Bar, which was inaugurated in 2016. These two major buildings have become symbols of the SOC's visible strength in two central cities and are often used for open-air services. Likewise, the metropolitanate restored several central monasteries, many of which are now once again populated by monks. According to the church, the metropolitanate alone has 23 monasteries for women and 34 for men without counting the two other Eparchies in Montenegro. An essential part of this ever-growing religious infrastructure are the monasteries of Cetinje and Ostrog, which are regarded as the most sacred. Cetinje, which is the metropolitan's seat, is where the casket of the canonized Montenegrin Metropolitan and ruler Petar I's is open for the public and a large museum with many religious artifacts can be visited. The main artifacts are from the Montenegrin Metropolitans, but the museum also has other historical artifacts on display such as the Cetinje Octoechos, which is a printed Orthodox liturgy and one of the first Cyrillic scripts ever printed, dating from 1494. In Ostrog, the home of the canonized St. Basil of Ostrog or St. Vasilije (Sveti Vasilije Ostroški 1610–71), the metropolitanate has enlarged the lower parts of the monastery and made the upper part more accessible so that it can welcome a larger crowd of pilgrims. Ostrog is regarded as one of the sacred places in Eastern Orthodoxy and draws pilgrims from the entire Orthodox world.

Besides these two centers, monasteries like Ćelija Piperska, Ždrebaonik and Donji Brčeli in central Montenegro, Stanjevići and Podmaine monasteries near Budva and the ones on Lake Skadar (Kom, Beška, Moračnik, Vranjina, Kosmač) as well as many others, such as Dajbabe outside the capital, have been rebuilt or restored, and also draw pilgrims and tourists alike. These sites all play a part in attracting more pilgrims (and funds) thus enlarging the religious, cultural and political power base of the metropolitanate. This has also entailed a modernization of monastic life, which is visible in the renovation of the isolated monastery Kom that now has its own solar plant, souvenir shop and speedboat. Other more traditional parts of monastic life have been revitalized as well, such as being able to provide for oneself. In Donji Brčeli, the monastic buildings are surrounded by fruit and vegetable gardens in order to feed the clergy. The traditional production of local honey and wine are often also a part of monastic life and provide sources of income when the produce is sold to pilgrims and visitors.

Several hundreds of minor churches have been restored. Some of this restoration has been strongly criticized by Montenegrin nationalists and the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church. The main criticism levied against the metropolitanate is that the many renovations are destroying the authentic Montenegrin part of the shrines. An example of this is the events in Tivat in Kotor Bay in 2018–2019, where the metropolitanate renovated the baptistery in the Monastery of Holy Archangel Michael in Prevlaka Island. This renovation became a governmental issue in 2018–2019 and on 2 April 2019, police officers, a demolition crew, clergy members and Montenegrin nationalists met face to face in front of the monastery. The standoff ended without the demolition of the renovated baptistery taking place, but on 4 April 2019 the minster responsible published an open letter in which he declared the renovation illegal (Montenegrin Government, 2019).

Twin churches in Raičevići village, Njegushi, March 2018. Author's photo.

Another contested area is the churches of the Njegushi region (the villages of Raičevići, Kopito, Njeguši, Erakovići, Dugi Do, Vojkovići, Vuči Do,

Kućišta). Njegushi is the historical home of the Petrović-Njegoš rulers and one of the Montenegrin nationalist movement's strongholds. There are several old churches in the villages of Njegushi and the metropolitanate has renovated some churches while the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church has put up metal signs in order to stress their ownership of other churches. The twin churches in Raičevići clearly bear such a sign. Despite the pro-Montenegrin sentiment of the local population, the Metropolitan holds frequent services in the area, but the ownership and access to the churches are disputed. A peculiar case in point is the village church Sveti Đorde in Erakovići just across the street from Njegoš', Montenegro's famous poet and ruler, childhood home. The church bear a sign claiming the church as a Montenegrin Orthodox One, while other sources speak of it as SOC's property. Despite the controversy over the church, the church was abandoned, on the brink of ruin and the Iconostasis falling apart when visited in 2018. It seemed unused. The dispute seems to be more on paper than on the actual property in this case.

The revival of communities and rituals

Alongside the rebuilding of churches, cathedrals and monasteries as well as the strengthening of religious infrastructure, the metropolitanate has also revived and instituted Orthodox rituals across the country. These rituals have become the central place for the believers to meet and for the clergy to maintain their societal position. The rituals serve both to strengthen the community and as visible signals to broader society stressing the renewed role of the Metropolitan.

One of these new rituals is the commemoration at St. George's Church (Sveti Đorđe) in Momišići on a hillside in the capital. On 26 March, the Metropolitan serves a liturgy commemorating the death of 40 children and two priests that were burned alive by the Ottoman forces in 1688 as retribution for the Montenegrin clan's killing of Ottoman troops. These neo-martyrs were canonized in 2012 and the church was restored in 1995 (Novosti, 2012). The church is rather small so the main part of liturgy takes place outside of the church and on the street in front of it. In 2018, more than a hundred people attended the liturgy. In events like this, the renovation of the

A parade for St. Jovan Vladimir in front of St. Jovan Vladimir Cathedral, Bar, 4 June 2019. Author's photo.

church, the commemoration of the deaths and the revival of the ritual pertaining to them all reinforce each other.

The most extensive ritual revival and rebuilding is related to St. Jovan Vladimir (d. 1016) and the area around the port city of Bar. In the eighties, locals revived a ritual devoted to Jovan Vladimir in which the Andrović family from the village of Velji Mikulići carried a holy cross to the top of Mount Rumija on Pentecostal day. The ritual had been discouraged by the communist authorities between 1959 and 1984. But from the early nineties, the ritual was extended and gathered an increasing number of people with the help and participation of the Metropolitan. In 2005, the metropolitanate built a small metal church at the top of the Rumija, a controversial building which led to the so-called „Rumija affair" between the state and the various religious communities (Kuburić, 2014, SOC, 2005). In short, several national and religious groups has claims on Rumija and the government tried to maintain a balance by simply decaling the site unfit for buildings, which means that the metropolitanate's church should be dismantled. It is after almost 15 years still standing and being a visible symbol of the SOC's ability to claim public space in Montenegro.

The celebration of Jovan Vladimir reached its height in 2016 when the new cathedral in Bar was opened and devoted to him on the 1000 year anniversary of his death. Prominent members of other Eastern Orthodox Churches took part in its inauguration, as the case was with the Cathedral in Podogorica back in 2013. Since 2016, there has been a yearly liturgy in Bar with the revealing of the Andrović cross and a parade with icons through the city on 4 June veneration Jovan Vladimir (Svetigora, 2016). Part of the expanding celebration of Jovan Vladimir are newly revived liturgies held on 7 July at the former episcopal seat in the city of Šas ruins and at the Prečista Krajinska monastery ruins. Both sites were essential parts of Jovan Vladimir's historical realm, but are today ruins in predominantly Albanian and Muslim areas. The local inhabitants see Metropolitan Amfilohije's liturgies as intruding on premises that belongs to them. Jovan Vladimir is also celebrated by the Albanians as one of their saints, and he is even held in high regard by the local Muslims. Consequently, in July 2018, the Metropolitan was met by Albanian protests in Šas (SOC, 2018).

The ambiguous relationship to the state

The relationship between the Montenegrin government and the SOC in Montenegro is a complex one. The legal framework for SOC in Montenegro is flawed and the metropolitanate are not formally recognized by the state, but only dealt with at a practical level (Venice Commission, 2019). The current framework for religious communities in Montenegro dates back to 1977, and the only very broad legal umbrella for the religious organizations could be found in constitution from 2007. The Constitution states that there is freedom of religion in Montenegro (article 46) and that all „religious communities shall be

separated from the state“ (article 14). Velibor Džomić, the head of the Metropolitan's legal council, notes in his analysis (2009) of the legal framework for religion in Montenegro that it is only through a vast series of other types of laws, on holidays, schools etc., that religious communities is dealt with. SOC has often called for a clarification of the framework and the relationship with the state – especially on issues, such as the right to property and restitution, religious freedom, autonomy and self-determination of churches (Šijaković, 2009). The Montenegrin government has in 2016 and again in 2019 proposed two new draft laws on religion that has been heavily criticized by the metropolitanate. Negotiations in parliament and with the SOC about a new framework is currently held in the fall of 2019.

The uncertainty of the religious framework and the metropolitanate's legal position has been the center for a series of conflict between the government, SOC and pro-Montenegrin movements, NGO's and the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church. The majority of conflicts are about property rights and the recognition of SOC or the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church (se (Morrison 2009: 128–134; Morrison et al. 2014, Šistek, 2010; Saggau, 2017; Ramet 2006: 264–268). Two of the major conflicts pertain to the construction of the metal church on Rumija (Pavicevic et al., 2009) and the reconstructions of the baptistery in in the Monastery of Holy Archangel Michael in Prevlaka Island outside Tivat in 2018–2019. Another line of conflicts has been about SOC's clergy's right to mobility and residence permit, which has been intensified in late 2018 where the SOC claimed that more 50 members clergy has been either dismissed from the country or not allowed entrance (Orthodox Christians web, 2018). There has as well been clashed between the Metropolitan and the government about the recognition of Kosovo's independence. In many of these clashes, Metropolitan Amfilohije and high-ranking members of the state (president or prime minister) has been in direct confrontations, which has even led to a trial against the Metropolitan for „hate-speech“.

A desecularized Montenegro?

As showed in the previous section, the SOC in Montenegro has without doubt been revitalized in the past thirty years in all its aspects. But if we return to Blagojević's (2008) concept of desecularization it becomes clear that this revitalization has not led to a desecularization of the state as such. The state and the church is still separated and religion is still denied a place in the government, the public school system and other central aspects of administration. No religious community has been able to „monopolized“ religion in the public space in the same manner as the SOC has in Serbia, which partly can be explained by the constant confrontation between the government and the SOC as well as the rivalry between SOC and the unrecognized Montenegrin church. However, the SOC has by all means returned to the broad society as a major cultural and political player, and is a significant institution supported by half of

the total population. In terms of the SOC's more internal affairs, the religious infrastructure has been strengthen and the adherence of its members to traditional religious beliefs increased since 1991. This is perhaps not as significant in the numbers of attendance to weekly Liturgy, but at mass rallies, open air ceremonies and a wide range of church activities the number of attendance is high. It is hard to imagine the filled streets of Bar during the procession of Jovan Vladimir in June or the long line of pilgrims at Ostrog during the communist period.

In conclusion, the state of Montenegro is perhaps not desecularized in the same manner as in Serbia, but the civil society is. Religion and noticeably the SOC has returned to political life and taken an open and public visible role, such as in Serbia. There are many reasons behind this development in Montenegro as several studies has showed (Morrison, 2009; Šistek, 2010; Saggau, 2017; Ramet, 2006; Džankić, 2014), such as the continuation of the ruling elite in Montenegro from 1989 and onwards as well as the gradually alienation between the elite in Serbia and Montenegro leading to the Montenegrin independence in 2006. A central reason might also be the pluralization of religion in Montenegro and the internal divisions amongst the Orthodox community, which has hinted the monopolization of religion in Montenegro and thereby haltering the desecularization of the state. There has been no obvious „state" religion, such as in Serbia, North Macedonia and Croatia and therefore no creation of a state sanctioned framework for a majority religion. The direct opposite has happened in form of the lack of any homogenous and transparent framework for religion, despite the revival of religion in civil society.

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