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***Serbian Orthodox Church since 1800 until after
World War II
- Abstract-***

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**Cluj-Napoca
2013**

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Key words:

Serbia, Church, Autocephaly, Patriarchy, Concordat, Organization

Foreword

Romanian historiography is rather defective in the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church. On one hand, this is due to disinterested approach to such issues, but also due to the lack of documentary sources. Without claiming complete factual reconstruction of a history, this history study for a part of the Serbian Orthodox Church can offer the chance of new readings and interpretations of sources focused or concentrated on certain local peculiarities.

History of Serbian Orthodox Church has been quite eventful, with difficulty overcoming impasses over time; making a religious and historical retrospective highlighting this fact. Christianization of the Serbs by the disciples of the two "apostles of the Slavs", Cyril and Methodius, meant many Serbians could get into contact with Christianity, to understand it better, this being due to the use of language as a means of preaching Slave Christian faith.

The key point in the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church was the era of Saint Sava and the consequences he has had over time, his spirit dominating today the Serbian Orthodox Church. Through its work, St. Sava managed to carve a new path of the Church, strengthened by the gaining of autocephaly in 1219. By the eighteenth century, Patriarchate of Ipek (Peci) was the centre of religious life of the Serbian people.

Eighteenth century began with large adjustments in the political scene of the Eastern half of Europe, as a consequence of a long Austrian-Turkish military confrontation, and the new realities which emerged in politics would have repercussions in their plenitude, on the economic, social and religious life. After the abusive abolition of the Patriarchate of Ipek in 1766, the Serbian Orthodox Church has experienced spiritual and difficult political situations. Serbian state had not existed for several centuries, however there were Serbian states and Serbian ethnic areas within the borders of the Ottoman Empire and Austrian and Hungarian Empire. It is tragic that the independence of the Church, which in 1219 has been won by St. Sava, was now lost, the people and the Church being in a situation more difficult than in the past. That is why the updating of the Serbian state and also Church independence should be planned and carried on very carefully, this being a difficult and long process that lasted for over a hundred years.

After the abolition of the Patriarchate of Ipek, the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church can be traced in several regions of the Serbs: Metropolitan of Karlovac, Metropolitan of Montenegro, Serbian Church in Dalmatia, the Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Church of South Serbia and Macedonia.

The period starting with nineteenth-century until after the Second World War represents the major subject of this paper. The approach developed was not easy at all, because the Serbian Orthodox Church in this period had to redefine its position both in terms of territory, but also legally and religiously.

This paperwork has become the natural need to fill a gap in the Romanian specialized literature. The vastness and complexity of the subject has led us from the beginning to outline a framework focused only on problem areas and key aspects of church life in Serbia, structuring the work into eight chapters.

For the first time in Romanian historiography, it has been made a summary of the History of Serbian Orthodox Church, that, without claiming the exhaustion of all sources, can be extended in future by other research studies, which will have an overview of the Serbian Orthodox Church due to this work.

Chapter I.

Preliminary

Our research started with compiling the first chapter entitled "Current status of research". Preparation of this chapter was defining, because it helped us a lot in our approach to identify and emphasize issues or facts that have not been treated before, or were not subject to interest. While researching, difficult situations can often appear, which we consider sometimes as insurmountable because of the way of choosing historiography works, which must be fair and critical. On the other hand, diversity of the information sources makes the research harder as they must be addressed in a qualitative rather than quantitative way.

The very first step made in the composition of this chapter was to identify the most important works that were written across our theme, predominantly in Romanian historiography, before 2013.

Religious life of the Serbs up to the eighteenth century refers to important moments about the becoming and the manifestation of this people as part of Balkan Christianity: Christianization of the Serbs started under Emperor Heraclius and finalized under Basil I the Macedonian, through the work of missionary Cyrillic-Metodian disciples, proclamation and recognition of the autocephaly of the Church at the beginning of the thirteenth century with the effective involvement of Saint Sava (whose work in the service of the Serbian Orthodox Church and of its spirit, installed in the life of the Serbian people have exercised a powerful influence over time), proclamation of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1346 related to the proclamation of King Dushan as Tsar, and its being over the years, with a break of nearly 100 years (1459-1557) until its dissolution by the decision of the ecumenical patriarch Samuil I Hangheris (1766).

Chapter II.

The situation of Serbian Orthodox Church from the Patriarchate of Ipek abolition (1766) to the acquisition of political and religious autonomy (1830)

Serbia's religious and political life in this period was not an easy one, but rather a difficult one because Belgrade and generally Serbia has been the scene of repeated wars between the Ottoman Empire and Austria. Both people and church were now in a situation more difficult than in the past. It is tragic that the independence of the Church, won in 1219 by St. Sava, now it has been lost. The updating of the Serbian state and the independence of the Church should be carefully conceived and done, this being a difficult and long process that lasted over a hundred years. The Ottoman government has not imposed new culture or a policy of integration. Largely isolating the Balkans, it prevented the development of rural areas, but it preserved the old values and maintained their survival. Lifestyle oriented to the past has blurred the reality, but it has contributed to keeping hope. Church was the intermediate between past medieval and rural culture.

In 1766, all dioceses were placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and only Greek bishops were named to lead them. Throughout the mission conducted, these bishops have left a sad memory among the Serbian people, this being forced to suffer, beside from the Turks also from these Greek bishops. In these difficult conditions, care for people comes, for the most part, to the local clergymen who managed to stand out

among the people through a clean life and a honest patriotism, gathering, helping and encouraging these people. Imposing Greek bishops created a strong national trend in order to minimize the Graecization of Serbian Church, which finally led to uprisings in 1804 and 1815. On the other hand, without Patriarchate, which ensured the unity of Serbs in administrative terms, this allowed division of Serb community in several administrative areas, the most significant being the Metropolitan of Karlovac, from the Habsburg Empire, which has considered itself as the rightful heir of Ipek Patriarchy. Throughout its existence, the Metropolitan of Karlovac had to fight a vigorous struggle against Catholic and Unite propaganda, taking also under his wings the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania.

Particular attention was given to the presentation of events related to the gaining of political autonomy under Prince Milos Obrenovic. Milos Obrenovic remained in the ecclesiastical and political history of Serbia as an emblematic figure who fought hard for the freedom of his people, playing a major role in the policy pursued by the Turks. The biggest accomplishment, both administratively and especially in terms of religious, Hatti-Cherif was obtained in 1830, a document which enacted the autonomous principality of Serbia and therefore, it has the right to choose its bishops that the Ecumenical Patriarch only had to confirm. From now on, the old pashalik of Belgrade received administrative autonomy, dignity becoming hereditary in the family of Prince Milos.

Chapter III.

Orthodox Church in Serbia gaining autocephaly

Since gaining of the autonomy, in 1832, and by acquiring the autocephaly in 1879, at the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church succeeded three major religious figures: Metropolitans Melinte Pavlovich, Petar Iovanovici and Michael Iovanovici. They have contributed their labour and dedication, both to strengthen the Serbian Church and the acquisition of its autocephaly.

The greatest success during the tenure of Metropolitan Mihailo is undoubtedly gaining autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1879. One of the factors that hastened the gaining of autocephaly for the Serbian Orthodox Church has been that the forefront of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was the Patriarch Joachim III (1878-1884 and

1901-1912), who was a close friend of the Slavs, and of Metropolitan Mihailo. In May, 1879, both King Milan Obrenovic and Metropolitan Mihailo addressed the Patriarch Joachim-III, by a document in which they exposed, with consistent arguments, the reasons that were calling for granting autocephaly for the Serbian Church. After many approaches made by political and ecclesiastical authorities, Serbian Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued, on October 20, 1879, the document granting autocephaly of the Serbian Church.

Chapter IV.

The situation of the Serbian Orthodox Church from Autocephaly (1879) until after World War

After obtaining autocephaly in 1879, Serbian Orthodox Church underwent a period of major political confrontation that resulted in the Balkan Wars and the First World War, which led to the abolition of the three dominant empires: the Tsarist, Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and the formation of independent kingdoms in South-eastern Europe.

This period has meant progress for the Serbian Orthodox Church, but it would not last long, as conflicts within the Church deteriorated after disputes between Metropolitan and the Prince. In fact, in the life of Orthodox peoples, the church history has always blended with political history. Getting autocephaly by the Serbian Orthodox Church meant a gain, but only for the part which was then included in the boundaries of the principality, which was titled "Archbishop Metropolitan of Belgrade and Serbia." Besides these, there were the independent "Archdiocese of Montenegro"¹ and "Metropolitan of Karlovac"².

¹ Diocese Montenegro (Zeta) has been strengthened since the time of St. Sava, whose seat of residence was Archangels Michael and Gabriel Monastery, founded by Stephen Nemanja. It remained here for 185 years. During Tsar Dusan, it was raised to the rank of Metropolitan. After 1405, the Metropolitan headquarters location changed several times until finally settled in Cetinje. For 336 years, Montenegro was a theocratic state, the bishops and metropolitans exercising, along with church functions, also political functions. Of these the most distinguished themselves Danilo I (1697-1735) and Petar I (1784-1835), the well-known family Niegos. Successor Bishop Petar II Petrovich (1830-1851), Danilo Petrovich, known in the literary world as a poet, was proclaimed prince and the Church affairs have been entrusted under the leadership of Metropolitan Nikanor Ivanovich (1858-1860). Thus, theocratic regime in Montenegro ended. Metropolitan of Montenegro has been a long time in the composition of the Patriarchate of Ipek, until it was annexed to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. During the tenure of Metropolitan Petar I, it became autocephalous Montenegrin Church and was recognized as such by most Orthodox churches, cf. Professor John Ramureanu, Fr. Professor dr. Milan Sesan, Fr. Prof. Theodore Bodogae, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p 477, Fr Nicholas Chifar, *op. cit.*, Vol IV, p 318, Dr Alois Hudal, *op. cit.*, p 31-38, Constantin Jireček, *op. cit.*, volume II, p 240-241.

² Metropolis of Karlovac was established within Austrian-Hungarian Empire, after the great migration of the Slavs of 1690. The first organization of the Serbian Church in Austria was made by first Patriarch Arsenius Cernoievici III (1647-1706), under the privileges of the Serbian people from the emperor Leopold I (1640-1705). Its first name was the title of Metropolitan Church of Krusedol because it had been established (between 1708

After the Metropolitan Mihailo was dismissed by Prince Milan, his place was taken by Theodosius (1883-1889)³, who dealt mainly with the inner reorganization of the church life.

The Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 against the Turks, and then against the Bulgarians, have caused great human and material losses. The only positive result was that, after the war, the Metropolitan of Belgrade and Montenegro increased their territories. The ancient territory of Serbia and Montenegro became part of new Serbia and due to this, the bishopric of Prizren Rasca from old Serbia and those of Skopje and Velesko-Debarska, in Macedonia, came under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Belgrade. Also Montenegro, after the Peace from Bucharest received a part of Sangeak (Plieva Bielo Palie), Ipek and Melohia, Rajai, Plav and Gusivie) and as a result the Ipek diocese has been renewed, which came under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan of Montenegro. With greater intensity, the Serbian people and Church have had to face the horrors of the First World War. This time, not only Serbs in Serbia suffered, but also those from Bassarabia and Austria-Hungary. In Bosnia, the persecution against the Serbs and Orthodox Church started immediately after the bombing of Sarajevo, June 28, 1914.

The interwar period was a difficult one for the life of the Serbian Church, many of the wounds of World War yet being unhealed, and the Serbian people together with their Church had also to face the painful wounds of the Second World War.

Chapter V.

Unification of Serbian Orthodox Church

The ending of the First World War in 1918 brought the completion of the territories for Balkan states. Creating the United Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on December 1 1918⁴ that included almost all Serbs living in historical provinces, facilitated the

and 1713) at the monastery Krusedol. The title of Metropolitan of Karlovac occurs after 1713 when its headquarter moved to Karlovac. After a further mass exodus (1737), Empress Maria Theresa appointed city of Karlovac as Metropolitan residence, which because of Stephen Sratimirovici (1790-1836) and Joseph Raiacici (1842-1861) had a political and cultural ascent and in 1848 became Patriarchate, Ph.D. John Rămureanu, Fr. Professor dr. Milan Šesan, Fr. Prof. Theodore Bodogae, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p 479-480, Fr Nicholas Chifăr, *op. cit.*, Vol IV, p 320, Dr Alois Hudal, *op. cit.*, p 38-49; Deacon Silviu Anuichi, *op. cit.*, p.901-915, R. Janin, *Les Eglises et les rites orientaux orientalis*, ed. to IV, Paris, 1955, p 213-214.

³ Slobodan Iovanovici, *Vlada Milana Obrenovici*, col. II, p.417-418

⁴ Proclaiming the kingdom formation of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in December 1918 marked the culmination of negotiations that had taken place during the war and the culmination of the evolution of Serbian politics. In July 1917, the Serbian government acknowledged for the first time, by Declaration of Corfu, it was formally decided to the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in one state. Political form of this state would be a

unification of all regional churches where, for centuries and decades, there have been specific historical conditions, some under foreign rule. Church Unification of Serbs under one default led to raising their church to the rank of Patriarchate in 1920, being among the patriarchates stated earlier. This goal was achieved during Patriarch Dimitrios Pavlovich. An important aspect of this period was the enactment of the two laws: the Law on the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1929 and the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1931.

Law of the Serbian Orthodox Church was enacted on November 8, 1929. For many years the Serbian Orthodox Church has sought to revise its Organic Statute and thus it has developed such a statute, which it published in an *oukaze* (decree), on November 8, 1929, which contained 27 items. By this law, the Church was separated from the state. This splitting had more a financial aspect. Nevertheless, in several compartments, very important to the life and activity of the Church, the State continued to maintain its control. Thus, the church property, funds and foundations remained further under the state control, which kept for itself the right of expropriation (Article 2). The king kept the right to confirm or not the elected bishops (Art. 8).

On April 6, 1930, at an advanced age, Demetrius, the first patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church since restoring the dignity, has passed away. He enjoyed great popularity due to piety, prudence and dignity of his life. The greatest achievement of patriarch Barnabas was preparation of a Regulation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, namely the Constitution by which to govern the Church. The new law of the Orthodox Church of September 3, 1931 was promulgated on November 16, 1931 and it has entered into force on November 24, 1931. It was published in "Službene novine" (Official Gazette), official newspaper of the Yugoslav kingdom⁵.

Chapter VI.

The Concordat of Serbian state with the Vatican

Among the multiple problems that the Serbian Orthodox Church was forced to clarify after church unification, a new difficult one arose, which seriously affected the relationship of

constitutional monarchy headed by Karadjordjevic dynasty, cf. Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *op. cit.*, p 348; Nicholas Ciachir Peter Galateanu, *SFR Yugoslavia*, Bucharest, 1969, p 77; Dimitrije Djordjevich, *The Creation of Yugoslavia, 1914-1918*, Santa Barbara, Clio Books, 1980, p 10-39.

⁵ *Službene novine*, 275/24. November 1931 and G.S.P.Ț, no.22, 23 and 24, Belgrade, 1931

Church with state. This problem was to regulate relations between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, and between the state and the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. Relations between states with Roman Catholics inhabitants with the Vatican were usually established by a special agreement which is commonly called the "Concordat". The problem of Serbian Concordat with the Vatican State is an extremely thorny one, because in reality, between the Serbian and the Vatican has never concluded a concordat. Although a first attempt for an arrangement in the Yugoslav Kingdom was made in 1914, it was doomed to failure.⁶ The main cause for which most of the Serbs have not wanted to take a concordat with the Vatican was the fact that this encouraged separatism and irredentist movements in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Then, in Yugoslav state only two Catholic countries existed, Slovenia and Croatia, while Bosnian Muslims, by their leader Mehmed, worked to close Catholic Muslims in order to remove Serb rule.

However, on June 20, 1935, the government of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović was formed and he already found a text prepared by the previous government of Prime Minister Bosko Jephthah. According to the draft developed and finalized by the Ieftici government in 1933, it was established to be signed at Rome on July 25, 1935. As the Prime Minister Stojadinović's office was formed, as mentioned before, on June 20, 1935, it did not have anything left to do but continue the work set. As the Prime Minister Stojadinović himself said "at the time, the arrangement was not a thorny problem. I was assured that all this important issue could be done without any trouble or hardship. Nothing foretold the storm that started later, on the contrary ..."⁷

Opposition to the Concordat was of two kinds: political and religious. Stojadinović's opponents have skilfully used the Orthodox attachment to their religion. Making the masses believe that ratification of the Concordat was a betrayal of predecessor's faith seemed an excellent way to destroy the prestige of the Minister. Besides, the Orthodox Church could not listen to purely political concerns, but it revolted mainly because the Roman Catholic Church created a privileged position, which it has never had before, although it was the State Church. The political opposition allied with the masses and the atmosphere created became one that was about to explode. Trying ratification of the concordat settled in 1935 not only seriously affected the Orthodox relations with the royal state, but resulted in protests and street fights, such as the procession of July 19, 1935. Things became more complicated when in the midst

⁶ Gioko Slepčević, *op.cit.*, p.579.

⁷ Milan Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt. Jugoslavia izmegin dva rata*, Buenos Aires, 1963, p. 519.

of this conflict patriarch Barnabas got ill. Among the people, news were spread that the Patriarch was poisoned, which further agitated spirits. Throughout the disease of Patriarch Barnabas, Church affairs were conducted by Bishop Dositei. In the same night of 23 to 24 July 1937, the Patriarch Barnabas passed away. Death of Patriarch Barnabas in the day when most lawmakers gave their vote in favour of the conclusion of the Concordat gave a special significance among the clergy and the people, in whose memory the Patriarch remained as a martyr. Passing away of Patriarch produced a new mood that created a seemingly irreparable rift between the Church, the government and the political class.

Tough stand of the Church has determined the legislative steps of the Concordat to be stopped, and so this Concordat was cancelled.

Chapter VII.

Serbian Orthodox Church during World War II

Chapter VII presents the Serbian Church life during the Second World War, highlighting the atrocities endured by the clergy and faithful Serbs in territories fallen under fascist occupation. Serbian Orthodox Church has faced the most difficult situations in history. This was emphasized in Easter Blessing of the Holy Synod on March 16, 1942. "Never, even in the most difficult days of our past, our people's fate was not in such a crucial moment: to be or not to be, as at present. Therefore, all of us are required to act wisely and not die stupidly, also it is required from us that every thing and any action we take to dominate the spirit of a healthy mind and a cool temperance as always and in every place to keep peace and order as foundations of our personal and national survival. "

As stated in a document issued by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the death toll and material losses of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Second World War, was impressive. Out of 8.5 million believers, 1,200,000 were killed. Property damage suffered by Serbian Church exceeded 7 billion interwar Gold Dinars. Among the priests, around 700 were killed, 400 imprisoned and only a quarter could develop their work. The historian Dusan Kasic said that during of the World War II there were killed 409 priests, 97 monks and nine religion teachers. In terms of monasteries, a quarter of them were completely destroyed and robbed. Only in diocese of Karlovac, 175 churches were destroyed and only 14 remained in whole, from 189 existing.

The end of the World War II meant for most people in Serbia, and also for the Serbian Church "a ray of light, peace, tranquillity and liberation." Communist regime, however, affected the mood created once with the end of the war and the state of peace has turned into one of concern and indignation. The communist regime has hit hard the Serbian Orthodox Church and it was not only the consequence of the separation between church and state, but especially the way in which this principle has been achieved, as the financial resources have been limited for all churches. Some of the measures imposed by communist regime that affected the Church were: liquidation of the pension fund, the introduction of land reform which stripped the church of 70,000 hectares of land and forest, and stopped any financing from the State to the Church. In addition, the Church suffered from various forms of nationalization. In this way buildings which belonged to the Church were nationalized in 1180. At that time, the Serbian Orthodox Church had 3148 parish priests, 537 non-clergy employees and 1,000 pensioners, widows and orphans of priests.

Church had to face this new situation, since it no longer expected help from anywhere, but we should not overlook the fact that national and religious conscience of the believers remained alive. On December 18, 1945, Church board, headed by the Patriarch, issued a decree on the organization and functioning of the Church in each diocese. The most serious situation that church had to face was the subsistence of its priests. In this respect, the fourth paragraph of the Ordinance provided that poor parishes should be aided by the richest and also the believers to be presented this situation and to call upon them to support the Church. Although, formally, communist regime agreed to support the clergy by fees collected from believers, yet, though a decree of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, dated April 22, 1946, they prohibited the collection of such taxes for maintenance of old buildings of the Church or rectories. They motivated that "the Serbian people could incorrectly perceive the Church and its ministers." Construction of new churches was prohibited. Everywhere there were churches and monasteries in ruins. In some places, local authorities were preventing or prohibiting conducting religious services.

By human sacrifices and material losses that suffered during the Second World War, Serbian Orthodox Church has once again proved his love for God and genuine Christian Orthodox values. In the face of suffering, its believers and hierarchs chose a martyr's death rather than denial of the true faith.

Chapter VIII.

Church Romanian-Serbian relations by twentieth-century

Viewed as a whole, throughout history, religious Romanian-Serbian relations have been some Orthodox brotherhood and solidarity. Even if in some historical context they found themselves in a small impasse (as the hierarchical separation in 1865), Christian brotherly love and Orthodox solidarity prevailed and imposed in these relationships.

Two Balkan peoples of different ethnic structures, one of Daco-Roman origin, the other one Slavic, developed their destiny and mutual understanding, throughout their history. Favoured by the geographical position where the Danube was the linking border, Romanians and Serbs found a permanent reciprocity. Peaceful spiritual structure of both nations together with love for their countries and respect for other nations assured, from the beginning, their closeness and communion. Over time, this natural approach for constantly, enriched with new meanings, to a natural symbiosis destinies, as a consequence of hard times they had to suffer along centuries. Invasions violence, instability, political cataclysms and facing the great empires united the two nations in the common effort to fight for survival, to protect their supreme values, independence and national sovereignty and, not least, the ancient Church Unity.

Serbian Orthodox Church today enjoys the fruits gained through many hardships of its predecessors. It is now independent and autocephalous and has the dignity of "Patriarch". The diptych Orthodox Patriarchate (under the current diptych Patriarchate of Constantinople) Serbian Orthodox Church stands on sixth place, after the Russian Patriarchate, before the Romanian Patriarchate.

The seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate in Belgrade is the patriarchal palace, creation of Patriarch Barnabas in 1934. Here, the Holy Synod regularly meets once a year. In the same building, the Steering Committee of the Patriarchate and the Church Consistory also have their headquarters. The large library of Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church and treasure museum, printing and editorial offices of the Church are also situated there. The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church has the following title: "Peci Archbishop, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovac and Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church."

According to the Statute of church organization in 2008, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate consists of 35 dioceses, which are both at home and abroad.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, wars wounds that have occurred over time were not fully healed. One of them concerns the Macedonian Orthodox Church. On December 3, 1966 it has submitted a request to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, urging its approval of the "autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church." Holy Synod did not agree with this and, during the meeting in May 11, 1967, they rejected the request, arguing that the Church of Macedonia does not have the necessary number of dioceses or parish communities or theological schools. However, the Macedonian Orthodox Church proclaimed "autocephalous" on July 18, 1967 and this disagreement could not be solved even nowadays, although the other autocephalous sisters Churches did not recognize its autocephaly.

Another deep wound of the Serbian Orthodox Church, unhealed even today, is the Orthodox believers in Kosovo. In 1999 NATO bombed Serbia, international forces occupied Kosovo and Metohija. Most of the Serb population left Kosovo and Metohija, where more than 80 churches and monasteries were burnt and destroyed, including some dating from the XIV century on the territory of the Diocese of Ras and Prizren. Many Serbs were killed and many of their houses were destroyed.

In recent years many Orthodox believers in Kosovo began to leave their home lands, despite all the exhortations of the local bishops not to leave these lands. Serbs consider Kosovo their spiritual cradle of the Middle Ages. This was strengthened by the presence of over 1,200 places of worship here. On the other hand, Kosovo Albanians claim that Kosovo belong to them, that they are the only indigenous population of the Balkans.

Independence of Kosovo, dated February 17, 2008 was a heavy stroke to Orthodoxy. In his speech at the installation on the Patriarchate of Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irenaeus said that "Kosovo is our Jerusalem. Serbia without Kosovo is not Serbia ", pledging to support the claim for these provinces, a region regarded as sacred by the 12 million Serbs, spread throughout the world.

In the context of Serbia's joining the European Union, EU requested, among other clauses, normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. On April 19, 2013 an agreement was signed in Brussels under EU auspices, between the Serbian prime minister and the one of Kosovo.

Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic , addressing MPs, said that Serbia “ does not own Kosovo any longer, someone had to commit to the task" to conclude an agreement with the Kosovo Albanians, "to put an end to the past, poverty and defeats, "he said.

The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church declared, in a press release, that the agreement to normalize relations with Kosovo is "a betrayal of the most important territory that belongs to Serbia for centuries and it is actually the recognition of Kosovo authorities," (wrote on 22 April in the electronic edition of the Belgrade daily Politika, via Agerpres.) The message signed by Patriarch Irenaeus reported that "after I paid so high a price to begin negotiations with the EU, no doubt the price for EU membership will be official recognition of Kosovo's independence."