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**INFORMAL ALLIES ON A COMMON MISSION:  
THE SERBIAN STATE AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH  
IN RECENT NATION-BUILDING PROCESSES**

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**Abstract:** With the aim of exploring in detail Serbia's modern nation-building, this paper reveals and examines three stages in the relationship between the state and the Church. Their interaction was first observed in the late-1980s, when the Church leadership began to interfere in the state affairs, offering religious solutions to a wide range of national issues. Following the collapse of Serbian society during the 1990s, the Church has become an ideology supplement to the state-driven national project. As such, the Church was embraced by the state authorities, and after the fall of Milošević in 2000, nationalism continued to exponentially increase in Serbia. Following the assassination of the Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003, the Church emerged as the key factor of nation building, thus substituting the disoriented state structures. A significant part of our conclusions are based on primary quantitative sources.

**Key words:** Church, Serbia, nation-building, state-building, religion, nationalism

If it is indisputable that Serbian society was decaying while levitating on its own national and cultural boundaries in the last three decades, then a thesis of Anthony Cohen becomes quite applicable in this case. He says that the importance of symbolic expression of a community and its boundaries increases “as the actual geo-social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise weakened” (Cohen 1985, 50). In other words, people become most sensitive to their culture/religion when they stand at its boundaries, or when they encounter other cultures (Ibid, 69-70). With Serbian self-identification, the national identity prevails over all the other identities that in modern societies have already become ‘increasingly symbolic and optional’ (Smith 2001, 20-21). Throughout their history, Serbs have inclined towards the idea of a nation seen as a religious category, due to the strong ethnification of Orthodox symbols and dogmas (Nedeljković 2006, 176).

This article argues that the absence of a fundamental break with the Milošević regime, especially with his understanding of nationalism, has led to a strengthening of the influence of conservative religious circles and their interweaving with civil authorities in Serbian society. The Serbian Orthodox Church (*Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva*, SPC) has entrenched itself within the new democratic political system, seeking to carve out for itself a position in the new post-Milošević Serbian society. As a result, a broad anti-Western mood of Euro-skepticism has developed in Serbia, especially among members of the younger, educated generation. That was one of the main conclusions to emerge from our survey study (Jovanović 2016, 87-114). Further, this article also discusses how the religious and secular state structures in modern Serbia are interwoven, examining their mutual interactions and the consequences of this for national identity. Special attention is paid to the ‘new religiosity’ that has overwhelmed postwar Serbian society, with true religion being reduced to a matter of folkloric symbolism and ethno-national identification.

The Serbian literature on this topic is quite polarized, since it has been written by either opponents of the Church, or by the most loyal supporters of its active role in society. There are very few Church representatives who believe that Orthodoxy cannot be conditioned by state, or nation, or a certain type of culture (Bigović 2000, 313). Some younger dignitaries of the SPC tend to justify the interference of the Church in politics by referring to the experience of other European countries which recognize no less than three different secular models of State-Church relations (Subotić 2009). Former Serbian Minister of Religion, Bogoljub Šijaković, has expressed the same viewpoint, asserting that both institutions have to be accommodated because they have common public interests. Other sociologists of religion were convinced that the Serbian state and Orthodox Church are already in an ‘indissoluble love embrace’. Similar assessments towards the problem have been

displayed by ethnologist Ivan Čolović (1997, 2007) and sociologist Milan Vukomanović (2005), while Mirko Blagojević (2006, 2008) has followed a middle way, insisting on the need for exact field research. The noted historian of religion, Radmila Radić, has written several excellent books on the relationship between Church and State in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia (Radić 1998, 2002).

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The process of secularization, as a kind of liberation from mythical delusion, has been held to take root especially in urban and industrial communities (Blagojević 2008, 276-279). Seeking to disprove the paradigm in which secularization is a prerequisite for tolerant societies and thus automatically leads to democracy, Jose Casanova attributes all the terrible conflicts in the modern world to secular ideologies (Casanova 1994, 5-6). Either way, relations between European states and religious communities have always been intense, alternately cooperative and antagonistic – but never irrelevant (Ferrari 1988, 535-545).

In Europe, the churches began to emerge in the public domain with obvious political pretensions in the early 1980s. The Catholic and Protestant churches raised their voices on crucial problems of the modern world, such as nuclear weapons, environmental issues, or abortion, while in the communist countries, religion began to take on more public role, trying to restrict communist totalitarianism (Blagojević 2008, 283). At the same time, religious organizations in the communist world have served as 'vehicles' for the preservation, defense, and reinforcement of national sentiment (Ramet 1989, 411).

In post-communist Serbia, Orthodoxy has been a means of social cohesion, filling the ideological vacuum. At the same time, political elites have used the Church to challenge the anxiety produced by social changes. Religion has become a sort of spiritual refuge and an institutional means for protecting local identity, but also a permanent public voice advocating religious solutions to various secular problems, despite massive resistance from among liberal intellectuals (Radić 2010, 107-111).

## 1. Latent catalyst of nationalism: SPC in socialist Yugoslavia

Ideologically, the SPC is based on Slavophilism supported by a host of historical images, including the mighty Kosovo myth. Concepts of collectivism and the so-called paternalistic ethics were promoted in the late 1930s, resisting European rationalism and materialism. The SPC has nourished an idealized Byzantine tradition, and many historians therefore argue that the Church plans to revive its mediaeval position through national homogenization and a symbiosis with the state. The end of WWII was followed by decades of 'destabilization of religious structures' and the hegemony of atheism in the socialist society of Yugoslavia. This radical

break between State and Church marginalized the SPC and its role in defining the Serbian national identity (Blagojević 2008, 240–241).

Formally, the Yugoslav constitutions of 1946, 1963, and 1974 contained articles that placed the Church outside the sphere of the State. Consequently, in the first decades of socialist Yugoslavia, the SPC found itself on the margins of society, and sought to avoid any disagreement with the authorities by reducing its public appearance to a minimum (Tomanić 2001, 15). Aside from the fact that socialist Yugoslavia ceased to fund the SPC, the state confiscated many Church properties, even prohibiting any mention of the King's name in religious prayers. Furthermore, the SPC continued to develop certain aspects of the St. Sava ideology of nationalism, a mixture of right-wing politics and Serbian Orthodox clericalism.

The years of “re-stabilization of religious structures” (Blagojević 2008, 243) followed soon after Tito's death in 1980. Although the SPC failed to build up its own political identity distinct from the state identity, its political reactivation became merely a matter of time. After the violent Albanian riots in Kosovo in 1981, the Orthodox journal *Pravoslavlje* published an appeal signed by 21 priests, who reminded their readers that Kosovo was a matter of the spiritual, cultural, and historical identity of the Serbian people. In 1982 a group of bishops gave speeches at the US Congress and the State Department, asking for intermediation in Kosovo in order to protect the Serbian minority. In the early 1980s, the SPC emphasized the suffering of the Serbian people in various parts of Yugoslavia, advocating a decisive role for itself in resolving ‘the Serbian national question’. Their petitions and appearances in the media were a new phenomenon in Yugoslav society.

In May 1987 another SPC journal, *Vesnik*, repeated that the SPC “has the legal and moral right to rise energetically to the defense of its vital interests in Kosovo,” while Albanian irredentists were seen as a common enemy of the regime and the SPC (Ramet 1989, 316–317). That same year the SPC began preparations for the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, followed by a ritual one-year transfer of relics of the medieval Prince Lazar throughout Serbia. As Ivan Čolović has noted, the graves of national heroes were presented as the ‘wombs of the nation’ and symbolic markers of Serbian territories (Čolović 2008, 70). The Serbian Church, as a catalyst of nationalism during the 1980s, served as a convenient supporter for Milošević's rise to power. The revitalization of religion in the early 1990s coincided with the spread of hatred, violence, and suffering throughout Yugoslavia, as a consequence of the social crisis, the collapse of socialism as well as of ethnic and confessional homogenization.

## 2. Tacit arrangement or true desecularization?

In the years of social collapse, poverty, and despair in Serbia of the 1990s, the SPC became an important social factor. The unusual collaboration between Milošević and the ideologically fundamentally opposed representatives of the SPC was based on a common denominator—the injection and dispersion of nationalism. However, the Church was not satisfied with its formal position. According to the Serbian Constitution of 1990, the state was under no obligation to give financial support to the churches, or to return their nationalized property. Furthermore, the SPC harbored doubts about the sincerity of Milošević's nationalism. When he landed with five helicopters in the tomato garden of Serbian monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos in Greece in April 1991, most the monks fled to nearby Kakovo to avoid 'the Pharaoh', as they called him. Allegedly, after he left, the monks set about cleaning out the traces of his visit with detergent.

During the enthronement of Patriarch Pavle in December 1990, many bishops expressed their belief that the Church would do everything it could to protect the Serbs in other Yugoslav republics from the enemy (Tomanić 2001, 23–24). From that point, the Church became increasingly involved in politics. In May 1990 clerical circles aggressively interfered in the sphere of freedom of expression, when the play *St. Sava* at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade was violently interrupted by a group of theology students and the radical nationalist politician Vojislav Šešelj. In response to this blasphemous play, in which the most popular Serbian saint was allegedly presented as a lecher, one of the most influential SPC bishops, Amfilohije Radović, derided artistic freedom and democracy, pronouncing an anathema on the West and Europe (SPC 2006, 3–4). Eight months later, the SPC bishops announced that no one had a mandate to act on behalf of the entire Serbian nation without the consent and blessing of its spiritual mother, the SPC.

Indications of active participation of the Church in fostering the spirit of war were rapidly multiplying. The consecration ceremony of the newly elected bishop Atanasije in July 1991 was marked by pomp: for the first time the enthronement of a bishop was attended by deputies from the Parliament, party leaders, writers, and ministers. Atanasije's epic speech was full of hatred against Croats and the Muslim crescent (Tomanić 2001, 45–46).

During the wars of 1990s the role of the SPC was controversial, to say the very least: its representatives would often bless politicians and leaders of (para)military forces, who all considered the Patriarch their 'supreme commander'. For his part, Patriarch Pavle could barely restrain his most warlike bishops. Finally, the SPC militantly rejected all peace plans, even when the Bosnian Serb leaders were ready for a truce.

When Milošević refused to return nationalized Church property, as well as to declare Christmas a national holiday, he was strongly attacked by Bishop Atanasije, but the conflict was a brief one. Then renewed conflict with Milošević culminated in early 1997 when the Patriarch provided support to the students who demonstrated in the streets of Belgrade, by leading a procession through the police cordon. Some of the younger Hilandar monks, supporters of anti-Milošević protests, decided to send students a Christmas tree (*badnjak*) “to keep alive the already blazing spiritual fire.”

The most high-profile Church representative in the media at that time was Father Filaret, who went to the Croatian war-zone to encourage Serbian volunteers. A photo of him carrying a machine-gun, which was spread around the world, provoked fierce criticism, yet he was later made Bishop of the Diocese of Mileševa. And Bishop Amfilohije of the Montenegrin Diocese participated in the siege of Dubrovnik in the autumn of 1991, when he encouraged Montenegrin soldiers by presenting them with crosses and icons and playing the *gusle* for them. He allowed Arkan and his paramilitary forces to enter the monastery in Cetinje.

After Milošević's `betrayal` of the Bosnian Serbs, the SPC began to glorify Radovan Karadžić, comparing him with medieval Prince Lazar. Before the signing of the Dayton Agreement, Milošević received the blessing of Patriarch Pavle, but the Synod overturned it at the end of 1995. Two years later, the Serbian Patriarch signed a declaration calling for the suspension of the proceedings of The Hague tribunal against Karadžić. Blurring the real character of the wars in former Yugoslavia, Milošević's propaganda emphasized its religious nature, using the SPC as one of the pillars of homogenization. The SPC remained consistent in its promotion of radical national ideas, even pronouncing a curse on the Drina River as a state border (Đorđević 2001).

Suppression of pan-Yugoslav sentiments was a common strategy used by nationalist regimes in all post-Yugoslav states, and the myth of *brotherhood and unity* was replaced by a myth of `eternal conflict` between the South Slavic nations. Serbian society became an object of a re-traditionalization in which the continuity with the pre-communist past was re-emphasized. A wave of new religiosity led to the rapid construction of dozens of new churches. Public and private spaces received new symbols of identification, while old value-systems not sufficiently flexible to absorb the new content were suppressed. Since the nationalist demeanor of the SPC has always been important enough, many influential intellectuals, among them the writer and former dissident Dobrica Ćosić, also known as the `Father of the Nation`, were directly involved in the selection of SPC prelates in the early 1990s.

### 3. Alternating between rivalry and alliance

Although the Church was an unofficial keeper of nationalism during the Milošević regime, it had to wait until October 2000 before its position was legalized, and the last formal ideological barriers were removed under the new anti-communist government. Contrary to widespread expectations, this was followed by a rapid institutional abandonment of the secular principles of life at all social levels. Orthodoxy now became a 'community emblem', and religion turned into a tool of community identity and self-affirmation (Bogomilova Todorova 2005). Comparative European data show that Serbian levels of religiosity began to approach those of countries traditionally rooted in Roman Catholicism: a 're-stabilization of religious structure' was in progress (Blagojević 2008, 254–255).

Since religion in the Yugoslav successor states, where ethnic identity is intertwined with religious affiliation, is often used as a tool for ethno-political strategies, some authors see the problem as resting in the awkward combination of two principles: achieving European legal standards in the sphere of religion, while also restoring the situation that preceded the communist regime (Bogomilova Todorova 2005). The current law on churches and religious holidays in Serbia replaced the former communist legislation, at the same time establishing the legal continuity with pre-communist legal practice in order to achieve social stability (Živković 2006). According to Article 11 of the Serbian Constitution and Law on Churches, the Republic of Serbia is a secular state in which the Church has played a significant historical, civilizational, and nation-building role in shaping, preserving, and developing the identity of the Serbian people.

After October 2000, the political activity of the SPC has been aimed at promoting clericalism, nationalism, and the monarchy, as well as combating the EU integration process and gender equality. This has contributed to the development of xenophobia and ethnocentric sentiments. As in the other former communist countries, nationalism has served as a means of protecting local culture, and a projection of a 'modernity' opposed to Western culture and values (Utz 2005, 630–631).

After the ouster of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000, the SPC began to receive strong support from the highest state authorities, the erstwhile president, Vojislav Koštunica, in particular. In the September 2000 election campaign he promised to change the country 'in accordance with the laws of God and the people'. It sounded like an announcement of a fight against the atheist past, just as when Serbian Minister of Religion Milan Radulović stated that atheism was the real cause behind wars, poverty, and moral collapse in Serbia. Soon after becoming president, Koštunica visited the Hilandar monastery with a huge entourage,

including the prime minister of the federal government. The first 'president-believer' to visit the monastic communities on Mt Athos, as the Greek press reported, participated in a paternoster ceremony, followed by a symbolic speech on 'the imperative of a spiritual renewal' and 'the gathering of strength' (Glišić 2000). Shortly before the adoption of the 2006 Constitution, Koštunica, then the prime minister, along with several ministries and 'national workers', visited Hilandar again in order to invite the people there to participate in a referendum.

The Church had its own requirements as well. In November 2000 the Synod demanded the introduction of religious education as a compulsory subject in state schools. This was met with strong opposition among members of the Serbian public, whom the SPC duly labeled 'followers of Satan'. The Serbian government led by Prime Minister Djindjić, a declared atheist, opposed the idea but relented under persistent pressure from the SPC and the political forces around Koštunica. Therefore, the introduction of religious education in Serbian schools in 2001 was a symbolic concession to those who had approached the anti-Milošević coalition as sworn anti-communists. On the other hand, two high-ranking officials in the Ministry of Education resigned because they disagreed with the hasty introduction of religious education without any public debate, and in the absence of textbooks and trained teachers (Janjić 2001). Many aspects of religious teaching were left to the Commission for Religious Affairs, as institution not under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (Aleksov 2003, 126). Obviously, Djindjić wanted to curry favor with the Patriarch, while also drawing public attention away from the extradition of Milošević to The Hague, and towards his own patriotism that had been contested in the previous decade. It was also a way of reducing the contrast between himself and Koštunica who already enjoyed the favor of the SPC.

Moreover, starting from autumn 2004, the Serbian state committed itself to pay from its modest budget not only the salaries and pensions of the teachers in religious schools, but also those of monks and priests in poor Serbian municipalities. The Faculty of Theology became attached to Belgrade University, but since only nine of the thirty faculties agreed to this decision, this violated the university's autonomy (Ahtik 2004).

Very soon, the SPC gained greater confidence and power over state institutions. In August 2004, when the new national anthem was being discussed in the federal Parliament of Serbia and Montenegro, the SPC raised its voice against the Montenegrin portion of the anthem, allegedly written by an interwar fascist. The majority of MPs immediately abandoned the idea of adopting a new anthem, following the Patriarch's 'fatherly appeal'. This was the first time that the SPC had officially prevented the adoption of a law, even with no legal instruments. At the same time, the new Serbian government of Koštunica prepared a draft law which gave major concessions to the Church, including legal immunity for



its priests. After stormy public reactions, the bill was withdrawn. In any case, during this period some `progress` towards clericalization was made (Vukomanović 2005). Not coincidentally, the SPC proclaimed in 2004 its political program titled “Draft proposal for 21st century” in which it insisted on the ideologies of *svetosavlje* and `the Kosovo covenant`—which include the use of the Cyrillic script for the Serbian language, support for the monarchy, and the glorification of the values of rural life. Already in October 2004 the Synod urged to all political factions in Serbia “not to encourage Kosovo Serbs to participate in elections for the local authorities in Kosovo,” but four days later President Boris Tadić did precisely that, incurring the wrath of the SPC. Kosovo’s declaration of independence in 2008 prompted Bishop Artemije to instruct all Serbian monasteries to break off all contact with Kosovo representatives, and with all who recognized Kosovo.

Due to the success of the national and religious mobilization in the Milošević era, even the Democratic Party relied on similar tactics of flirting with the SPC, seeking to invoke religious themes and symbols as sources of legitimacy and power. Government representatives turn up at religious gatherings together with prelates, where they usually express opinions on various issues. Politicians have themselves photographed in churches in order to legitimize themselves as Orthodox believers and display their interest in religious matters (Pešić 2007). The Serbian Parliament organizes its sessions in accordance with the Orthodox calendar; presidential candidates begin their campaigns on Orthodox holidays, while ministers publicly celebrate their patron saints. Such universal celebrations of saints are included in the activities of political parties, schools, medical institutions, and local communities. Priests are widely asked to consecrate building sites, factory plants, even to bless the production of new sorts of wine. Icons, crosses, and Christmas trees are omnipresent as signs of a `new religiosity`, and an essential part of the new esthetics. Most researchers studying these issues agree that a stable trend in terms of religious change has now been established in Serbia: the number of atheists has dropped drastically, and the basic elements of religious behavior have been restored to public life (Radić 2010, 111–113). Our survey results indicate the equalization of religiosity level in rural and urban areas, as well as its significant increase among the young and educated population (IPSOS 2011).

Interestingly, the priests themselves are very suspicious about the current religious climate in the country. Scholar and theologian Vladeta Jerotić writes that the SPC has become so deviant that believers can hardly recognize its roots: believers remain lukewarm, just more traditional in terms of formal attendance (Ahtik 2004). A more recent study of religiosity in Serbia points out some dominant phenomena: ideological syncretism, amorphous religious consciousness and selectivity of belief in dogmatic Christianity (Mladenović 2011). Nevertheless, the political power of the

SPC was growing steadily. In early 2009 it managed to prevent the adoption of an anti-discrimination law, which the Church disliked because it prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation.

According to the results of the 2011 IPSOS survey, 40 per cent of Serbian citizens think that the Church and State were sufficiently distanced from each other. Interestingly, the same percentage wants them to become more separated. Despite this, many controversial businessmen and politicians appear as patrons and benefactors of the Church, while bishops perform wedding ceremonies of political leaders. Using the adulation of civil authorities, some priests behave inappropriately: for instance, a bishop from Vojvodina stated that he would not respond to the summons of a local court, since “the Church is older than the Court” (Rajić 2009). In January 2002, Bishop Irinej of Bačka organized an anniversary commemoration of WWII victims separately from the state. Ten years later, at the same commemoration, the security guard hired by the SPC prevented state authorities accompanied by foreign diplomats from attending the event. At the end of the year, the same bishop accused the Assembly of Vojvodina for not being sufficiently ‘Serbian’ enough. These surreal examples are only a selection.

#### **4. Achieving primacy in shaping the symbols of national identity**

The interaction with the state involved matters of particular symbolic importance, such as relations with the army, commemorations, the monarchy, language, and media. The Kosovo myth is, along with the cult of St. Sava, the central segment of Serbian national identity. More than 75 per cent of the citizens interviewed in our survey in September 2011 still considered Kosovo a ‘Serbian sanctity’. It is not surprising that the symbolic significance of the religious holiday Vidovdan (28 June) is based on various events from Serbian history that occurred on that day, from the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 to the extradition of Milošević to The Hague in 2001.

The national-political pretensions of the SPC became evident with the establishment of a conspicuously successful collaboration with the army. After the SPC had taken the shortest route to recruiting believers through the educational system, the regime introduced the participation of priests in military institutions. Chaplains became military personnel and a kind of ‘commissars for ideological questions’. On the symbolical level, this collaboration reflects the newly established rule that the highest military representatives shall participate in every important Church ceremony—from the consecration of monuments and churches, to the inauguration of Church leaders.

In the absence of ideological shrines from the socialist era, even the Military Academy on its website started to promote pilgrimage journeys to Hilandar. In June 2009, almost fifty cadets visited the monastery along with army officers who expressed their happiness because their students were now finally able “to perceive the historical and spiritual values of the Serbian people” (Vojna akademija 2009). In February 2012, Bishop Atanasije Rakita held a lecture at the Military Academy, titled “Security in the Balkans—the contribution of the Church.” Interestingly, however, almost half of the persons interviewed in our survey believe that the SPC should not participate in state and military institutions (IPSOS 2011).

In 2008-2012 period the Church was more present in Serbian media than ever before. All major religious holidays could be viewed on live TV broadcasts, while almost every television channel had a special show devoted to religious matters. The culmination of religious influence on government policy in the field of culture and information came with the inauguration of Bishop Porfirije as President of the National Broadcasting Agency, which was established in July 2003 by the Serbian Parliament.

The SPC supports all events that celebrate the Serbian monarchist past, even at the expense of distorting the historical facts. In the 1990s the SPC often cast Milan Nedić and Dimitrije Ljotić, the two main quislings of the Nazi occupation of Serbia, in a positive light. A similar attitude was shown when the Chetnik commander Draža Mihailović was pictured on a fresco composition titled ‘Heavenly Serbia’ in the newly built church of St. Jovan Vladimir in Belgrade, provoking many negative reactions.

Since collective memories are suitable for political manipulation (Kuljić 2006, 88), both the Church and the State have promoted different interpretations of history. The SPC’s representations of Serbian history on their well-visited websites project mythologized images of the past. For example, the Catholic Church is usually viewed through the prism of the Ustaša movement and the Jasenovac concentration camp. However, such nationalist tendencies of the SPC have been subjected to criticism even from some of their own representatives who are critical about equating religion and the nation. Equal damage to the Church was done by its concealment and denial of war crimes committed by Serbs in the war in the 1990s (Vukomanović 2005).

Another area where politics and religion overlap is attitudes towards the language, “one of the most powerful agents of nationalism, alongside the army” (Todorova 1997, 176-177). In the past two decades, language has become a kind of para-religious cult, or ‘invisible church’ and ‘the last shelter’, as nationalist poet Bećković metaphorically claimed (Čolović 2008, 37-38). During the political supremacy of Koštunica, a campaign to protect the Cyrillic alphabet was initiated, resulting in specific constitutional provisions in 2006. The SPC was involved in these activities, issuing proclamations as well as participating in ‘days of Cyrillic script’, and other similar manifestations. The Bishop of Banja Luka, Jefrem, even

said that Serbs should not be afraid of centralization in Bosnia because they have their own Great Wall—the Cyrillic script.

After such an extensive account about the intentions and activities of secular and spiritual authorities for the primacy in nation-building process, let us turn to the results of our broad sociological survey in the form of an epilogue. From the answers given by respondents to questions regarding attendance at religious services, as well as feelings of distance towards other ethnic and confessional entities, we can measure and compare loyalty scores with various expressions of religious beliefs. The results of this analysis show a kind of dichotomy that may seem surprising at first sight. Whereas in Croatia, Albania, and Kosovo, loyalty towards one's own religion exceeds loyalty to the state, in other post-Yugoslav states, including Serbia, the situation is quite the opposite. However, if we compare results where both religion and country were indicated as 'objects' of loyalty, then it becomes clear that the crisis of loyalty to one's own religion and state, as well as national exhaustion and despondency, are most evident in Bosnia and Serbia.

## 5. Conclusions

After the disintegration of the Yugoslav state, religious communities—the Serbian Orthodox Church in particular—accelerated the process of 'de-legitimizing atheism', serving at the same time as a spiritual support for the nationalistic plans of the Milošević regime. As the most trusted institution in post-Yugoslav Serbia (due partly to the immaturity of other social subjects and institutions), the Church was assigned a crucial role. The SPC leadership directed its activities towards state policy, offering religious solutions to a wide range of national issues (Kosovo, territorial claims, educational system, media control, military and foreign affairs, choice of alphabet, preserving tradition, etc.). On the other hand, the state authorities needed the SPC as a source of alternative ideology and as a provider of emotional compensation for the collapse of Serbian society during the 1990s.

Since the authoritarian state structure remained untouched after 2000, nationalism has continued to gain strength, especially after the assassination of Djindjić in 2003, when the Church was imposed as a key factor instead of the disoriented Serbian government. In the absence of adequate institutional support, Kosovo Serbs invested all their hopes in the SPC. Similarly, the disoriented army sought a new 'object of worship' — and found it in the de facto state religion. We could say that the SPC draws its power from the ongoing collapse in which Serbia has found itself for more than twenty years.

Two main features of the SPC since 2000 have been the idealization of Byzantine Orthodoxy/Slavophilism, and a narrow sectarian attitude

towards outsiders. Behind the formal alliance, there was a smoldering struggle between the Serbian state and the Church for primacy in the nation-building process. Our survey has found that loyalty to the nation, country, and religion varies with educational levels and age structure: lower levels of education correspond with higher level of loyalty, just as senior citizens are almost unquestioningly loyal to the nation-building projects. The degree of loyalty varies in territorial terms as well. Unlike the previous two decades, the level of religiosity in rural and urban areas became almost equal. Interestingly, there has been a significant increase in religiosity among the young and educated population though with general decline in the number of regular believers. From our survey results, which disagree somewhat with the otherwise-prevailing belief in unconditional support to the SPC, we may conclude that the people are more loyal to the Christian faith in the spiritual sense than they are to God's 'earthly administration' as embodied in the SPC. Despite their bad experiences, Serbian citizens have remained more receptive to the influence of the state than to religious ideology, which is one reason why a significant majority give primacy to their 'citizenship identity' and not their ethnic identity. However, in comparison with other post-Yugoslav states, Serbia along with Bosnia-Herzegovina emerges as the country with the lowest self-reported level of loyalty among the population to their own religion and state.

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