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Tomos on the Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric (2022): the Serbian Church Mission and the End of the Macedonian Schism

Abstract: The paper shows that the Tomos on the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church, was a superb decision of Serbian church mission. It resolved the half-century-long Macedonian church schism and thwarted the religious interventionism that the Patriarchate of Constantinople intended to implement in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, Patriarchate of Constantinople, Tomos on the Autocephaly, church dispute

Introduction

The Macedonian Church question has been a burden in the relations of the Serbian and Macedonian nations for more than five decades. The most frequently mentioned key years for the Macedonian Church crisis are 1959 and 1967, while it is consid-

ered that as early as 1941 the Bulgarian aggressor displaced the Serbian church hierarchy from the occupied Vardar banovina which was part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact, as of 1931, there were three dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territory of the Vardar banovina: the Diocese of Skopje with the seat in Skopje;

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the Diocese of Zletovo and Strumica with the seat in Štip, and the Diocese of Ohrid and Bitola with the seat in Bitola.

In 1945, after the victory of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia in the Second World War, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia established socialism and the federal order of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, in which the People's Republic of Macedonia became one of six federal units. According to the Comintern's plans devised between the two world wars, the separate Macedonian nation was recognized in 1945. In this way, Macedonians were separated from the Serbian nation and simultaneously from the Bulgarian nation as well.

Despite this separation from the Bulgarian nation, in terms of the church question, Yugoslav communists continued on the road tracked by the Bulgarian occupiers. In fact, in 1944, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia stood behind the "Initiative Committee in Skopje for the establishment of independent Orthodox Church in Macedonia and the establishment of the historical Ohrid Archbishopric". In March 1945, its alleged "ecclesiastical-national council" declared the Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church declined it; Josif, the Metropolitan of Skopje and the bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, said that the church separation was advocated by the priests who had formerly represented Bulgarian interests. Moreover, the communist authorities forbade Serbian bishops to return to the People's Republic of Macedonia. It enabled the "Initiative Committee" to establish separatist autocracy in southern dioceses which canonically belonged Serbian Orthodox

Church (Slijepčević, 1969, pp. 26–44; Puzović, 1997, pp. 16–33; Đurić Mišina, 2012, pp. 598–600).

In 1959, under the pressure of the government and Party bodies, the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church was forced to recognize the Constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, as two autonomous hierarchies, and thus the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church ceased to be valid in the People's Republic of Macedonia. The Macedonian Orthodox Church requested autocephaly in 1966 and the Serbian Orthodox Church did not accept it (Puzović, 1997, pp. 59–81; Radić, 2002, pp. 257, 267–291; Đurić Mišina, 2012, pp. 610–616).

The escalation began when the Church and People's Council of the Macedonian Orthodox Church self-proclaimed its autocephaly in 1967. The Serbian Orthodox Church announced that the Macedonian hierarchy was in schism and that all canonical communication with it had been suspended. Government and Party authorities of socialist Yugoslavia accepted the self-proclaimed autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Autocephalous Orthodox churches fiercely condemned the non-canonical step of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The Serbian Orthodox Church invited several times in vain the Macedonian bishops to repent. In 1977, both churches established committees for negotiations that never reached a solution (Slijepčević, 1969, pp. 70–88; Puzović, 1997, pp. 82–95, 98–104; Đurić Mišina, 2012, pp. 616–645).

As a matter of fact, the decisions of the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1959 did not even mention that the Serbian medieval churches and monasteries on the territory of the People's Republic of Macedonia – the most famous of which are Matejče, Staro Nagoričane, Marko's Monastery Saint Nikita

and Lesново – might be separated as stauropegial and thus connected to the Serbian Patriarchate.

In 1992, at the time of the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church tried to persuade Macedonian authorities in Skopje to return Serbian medieval churches, monasteries and spiritual heritage of the Serbian people in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia under the authority of the Serbian Patriarchate and that Macedonian authorities should acknowledge the work of Serbian priests (Puzović, 1997, pp. 105–107, 165–167). During the 1990s, the attempts to return the Serbian Orthodox Church to the territory of the Republic of Macedonia also failed.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church were on the verge of reconciliation when the Niš Agreement was signed in 2002. However, after returning to Skopje, Macedonian bishops withdrew their signatures from that document. In response, Jovan Vraniškovski, the Metropolitan of Veles and Povardarje, returned with the priests of his metropolis into the canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2002 (Raković, 2015, pp. 231).

In May 2023 the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church gave the consent to Metropolitan Jovan, as the Exarch of Ohrid, to appoint candidates for new bishops who would subsequently establish the Holy Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric within the Serbian Orthodox Church. After the establishment of that hierarchy, the Serbian Orthodox Church issued the Tomos on Church Autonomy on 24th May 2005 and recognized the church autonomy of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric led by Archbishop Jovan Vraniškovski (Raković, 2015, p. 235).

In this manner, the dispute of the two hierarchies became the dispute of turn hierarchies: on

one side, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric and, on the other side, the Macedonian Orthodox Church in schism which in 2009. added the Ohrid Archbishopric to its name, so that its full name was: the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric. The dialogue of the churches ended up in a blind alley and, in particular, it could not be carried out during the backlog of court proceedings and imprisonment of Jovan Vraniškovski. Namely, starting from 2004, Archbishop Jovan was exposed to grave persecution and imprisonment for as many as thirteen years in the Republic of Macedonia (Raković, 2015, pp. 238–249). Therefore, the crisis became rather profound.

However, the Constantinople intervention in Kiev cast a new light on the future of the relations among Orthodox churches. The decision of Bartholomew, the Patriarch of Constantinople, of 11th October 2018 to accept into the liturgical communion two separatist Ukrainian church factions (OrthodoxChristian.com, 16th October 2018) was an overture for his arbitrary decision to grant those separatist factions – united under the name of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine – the Tomos on the Autocephaly in January 2019., thus violating the canonical order of the Moscow Patriarchate in the territory of Ukraine (*Kyiv Post*, 5 January 2019).

That is how the Ukrainian church question became as contentious as the Ukrainian government question. The Patriarchate of Constantinople sent signals about its readiness to interfere with the canonical territory of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia (Religija.mk, 16th December 2021). This suited neither the Serbian Orthodox Church nor the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric.

Tomos on the Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric (2022)

After Porfirije Perić, the Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana, was appointed Serbian Patriarch (2021), the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric negotiated for months, far from the public eye, about returning the separated Macedonian hierarchy into the canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

22 | When on 6th May 2022 the news leaked into the public about the Serbian and Macedonian hierarchies being on the verge of reconciliation, on 9th May 2022 the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople made a decision to absolve the Macedonian Orthodox Church of the schism, to recognize it under the name of the Ohrid Archbishopric, solely within the boundaries of “North Macedonia”, and to take its jurisdiction over the dioceses in the Macedonian diaspora and advise it to resolve its status in negotiations with the Serbian Orthodox Church (Mpc.org.mk, 9th May 2022). On 10th May 2023, the Macedonian Orthodox Church thanked the Patriarch of Constantinople for the resolution of the schism (Mpc.org.mk, 10th May 2022), but it did not accept other decisions.

By interfering with the canonical order of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Constantinople paved the path for the procedure of its being the first to recognize the autocephalous

status to the Ohrid Archbishopric, by applying the well-known Ukrainian scenario.

However, in line with the months-long positive course of negotiations and based on the already sent plea of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric to return into the canonical unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church, on 16th May 2023 the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church greeted the acceptance of the status of the broadest possible autonomy and full independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric (*Spc.rs*, 16th May 2022). That was a solution to the dispute which began in 1967 and the schism was resolved after 55 years.

On 19th May 2022, the reconciliation liturgy was served in the Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade by Serbian Patriarch Porfirije, Macedonian Archbishop Stefan and bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric and the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric. Special joy because of the return of the Macedonian hierarchy into the canonical order was expressed by Archbishop Jovan Vraniškovski, who also emphasized that as of 19th May 2022 all the Sacraments performed by the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric were retroactively recognized.^[3]

The public in the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia accepted the reconciliation of Serbian and Macedonian hierarchies with approval. The Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade was filled with believers who came to attend this event.

[3] Holy Hierarchal Liturgy in the Church of Saint Sava, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjNpyWUhZWg>), 19th May 2022

However, the public was not familiar with the fact that the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church had already decided unanimously at its session in May 2022 that the Serbian Orthodox Church should recognize the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric (Tomos, 23rd May / 5th June 2022). This decision was announced by Serbian Patriarch Porfirije at the joint liturgy of the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric and the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric respectively in the Church of Saint Clement of Ohrid in Skopje on 24th May 2022 (Radio-televizija Srbije, 24th May 2022).

According to Patriarch Porfirije, the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church “unanimously accepted the plea” of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric and “the Council of our [Serbian Orthodox] Church approves, blesses, accepts and recognizes the autocephaly of this [Macedonian Orthodox] church” (Radio-televizija Srbije, 24th May 2022).

In fact, the Serbian Orthodox Church observed the decision regarding the procedure of granting autocephaly which was made at the Council of Crete in 2016. According to that decision, the Mother Church decides about whether the conditions have been fulfilled for granting autocephaly to the Daughter Church, and then it proposes to other autocephalous Orthodox churches to acknowledge and recognize the new autocephalous church. However, the Patriarchate of Constantinople had already ignored the decision of the Council of Crete about granting autocephaly although it had convened that Council itself, by intruding into the territory of the Moscow Patriarchate in the territory of Ukraine.

Regarding this historical decision, the Serbian Orthodox Church consulted the Russian Orthodox Church and other autocephalous Orthodox churches, which congratulated Serbian Patriarch Porfirije and let him know that they were glad about the decision made by the Serbian Orthodox Church on the recognition of the autocephalous status to the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Sputnikportal.rs, 5th May 2022).

As a matter of fact, there were no external pressures on the Serbian Orthodox Church to make this decision. The Serbian Orthodox Church did not keep its decision secret in order to hide it from the Serbian people, but in order to prevent interventionist sabotage and the scenario similar to the one in Ukraine (Sputnikportal.rs, 25th May 2022).

In the event of a foreign intervention in its canonical territory in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Serbian Orthodox Church would have been forced to cease the communication with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

On 5th June 2022, Serbian Patriarch Porfirije delivered the Tomos on the Autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric to Archbishop Stefan in the Cathedral Church in Belgrade (Radio-televizija Srbije, 5th June 2022). The Tomos states as follows: “Holy churches and monasteries, particularly the great shrines from the period of the Nemanjić dynasty and subsequent periods of Serbian presence, church construction and cultural creation in the territory of today’s North Macedonia, as well as the overall movable and immovable property of the Serbian Orthodox Church within its boundaries, are granted for use to the new autocephalous sister Church” (Tomos, 23rd May / 5th June 2022).



Serbian Patriarch Porfirije and Archbishop of Ohrid Stefan during the presentation of the Tomos of Autocephaly,
5 June 2022, Skopje, North Macedonia

Photo: Tanjug/Miloš Milivojević

Therefore, the text explicitly states that the Serbian shrines in the Republic of North Macedonia will be given for use to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric, but they will not be in its ownership. This means that the Ser-

bian medieval shrines in North Macedonia, as well as all others made by the Serbian people in recent times, will remain in the ownership of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This is interpretation advocated by the Serbian Orthodox Church.^[4]

[4] From the author's notes.

The Tomos also states that the Serbian Orthodox Church recognizes the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric, under this name. Moreover, the Tomos also states that the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric will grant its full autocephaly after being recognized by all other autocephalous Orthodox churches (Tomos, 23rd May / 5th June 2022).

Reactions of other Orthodox churches

The announcement of the cabinet of Macedonian Archbishop Stefan (7th June 2022) noted that the delegation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric, which was to pay an official visit to the Patriarchate of Constantinople for Pentecost, hoped “to finalize our Church question by the issuance of the generally recognized Tomos by His Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in compliance with his legal and historical authorities” (Mpc.org.mk, 7th June 2022). On 10th June 2022, during the official visit to Constantinople, Bartholomew, the Patriarch of Constantinople, delivered to Archbishop Stefan the Patriarchate’s and Synod’s act by which “the Ohrid Archbishopric” was accepted into the liturgical and canonical unity (Makedonska radio-televizija, 10th June 2022). On 12th June 2022, Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Stefan served the first liturgy together in the Church of St. George in the Phanar (Orthodoxianewsagency.gr, 12th June 2022).

To the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the church in the Republic of North Macedonia, under the name of the Ohrid Archbishopric, is an auton-

omous church. Moreover, no Greek church has recognized the Tomos on the Autocephaly granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric.

At the session on 8th June 2022, the Holy Synod of the Archdiocese of Athens accepted the decision of the Patriarch of Constantinople to return “the Ohrid Archbishopric” into the canonical order of Orthodox churches, while at the same time it expressed “serious objections and reservations” about the Tomos on the Autocephaly granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric. The Archdiocese of Athens. took a position that granting autocephaly was the exclusive authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, that the name of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was already the name of the Ohrid Archbishopric, under which the Patriarchate of Constantinople had recognized the church with the seat in Skopje as canonically autonomous within the Serbian Orthodox Church and that the Patriarchate of Constantinople had properly decided to leave out the Macedonian diaspora from “the Ohrid Archbishopric” which is limited solely to the Republic of North Macedonia (Romfea.gr, 8th June 2022).

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have a different stand regarding this question.

Namely, on 25th August 2023, the Russian Orthodox Church restored the canonical unity with the Macedonian Orthodox Church and, at the same time, recognized the autocephaly of this Church under the name of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric, and the title of its head as the Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia

(Patriarchia.ru, 25th August 2022). Namely, the Russian Orthodox Church thought that the Serbian Orthodox Church had properly granted the Tomos on the Autocephaly.

Based on the Tomos on the Autocephaly, on 13th December 2022, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church made a decision to recognize the autocephaly of “the Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia” and the title of its head as “the Archbishop of North Macedonia” (Bg-patriarshia.bg, 16th December 2022).

On 4th February 2023, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided – based on the Tomos on the Autocephaly granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church – to recognize the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but under the name “the Archbishopric of Ohrid and North Macedonia, with the seat in Skopje”, and its head under the title of “the Archbishop of Ohrid, Skopje and North Macedonia” (Basilica.ro, 10th February 2023). However, on 13th February 2023, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church issued a clarification which noted that it was waiting for “the Ecumenical Patriarchate to initiate consultations and issue the final Tomos on the Autocephaly in order to reach the pan-Orthodox consensus about the question of recognizing the autocephaly” for “the Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia” (Basilica.ro, 13th February 2023). Namely, the Romanian Orthodox Church recognized the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church under the name “the Archbishopric of Ohrid and North Macedonia” and then – regarding the tomos that might be granted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople – it named it “the Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia”.

On 25th October 2022, the Synod of the Polish Orthodox Church received the information sent by Serbian Patriarch Porfirije about “the independence of the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia”. In that respect, the Polish Orthodox Church “acknowledges prayer ties” with “the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia” (Orthodox.pl, 25th October 2022). Namely, the Polish Orthodox Church accepted the canonical unity with the Macedonian hierarchy, but did not state clearly whether it recognizes the autocephaly of – as it was named – “the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia”.

On 7th February 2023, the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia received the information about the decisions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople about “restoring the Eucharistic communication with the dioceses in North Macedonia” and the decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church about “granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia”. The conclusion stated the following: “These canonical decisions of the sister Orthodox churches have been accepted with the gratitude to God for abolishing the years-long schism” (Eparchiapo.sk, 7th February 2023). Although the Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia considered both decisions canonical, it did not state clearly whether it recognized the autocephaly of – as it was referred to – “the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia”.

On 18th October 2023, the Holy Antiochian Synod announced “its gratitude to God and joy due to the return of the Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia into the Eucharistic unity with the whole Orthodox Church” and “expressed its intention to reach the pan-Orthodox consensus regarding the name and the legal

status of this Church” (Holy Antiochian Synod, 18th October 2022).

Moreover, on 14th February 2023, the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church decided that the Georgian Orthodox Church “should enter the Eucharistic unity with the Orthodox Church in North Macedonia” led by “Archbishop Stefan” (Orthodoxchristian.com, 16th February 2023). On 14th February 2023, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Albania announced that it had accepted the decision of Bartholomew, the Patriarch of Constantinople and that it entered the Eucharistic unity with the Ohrid Archbishopric led by Archbishop Stefan. Subsequently, the Orthodox Church of Albania took a stand that only the Patriarchate of Constantinople was entitled to grant the tomos on the autocephaly and determine the name of the new church (Orthodoxalbania.org, 24th February 2023).

Therefore, the Macedonian Orthodox Church has been in the canonical unity with all other Orthodox churches since 2022. However, its status within the pan-Orthodox church hierarchy has not been completely resolved (autocephalous or autonomous), which also refers to its name (the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric, or only the Ohrid Archbishopric, or even a third version of the name).

Integration of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric into the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric (2023)

At the joint session, the Holy Synods of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric

and the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric (25th April 2023) agreed that the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric should be integrated into the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric. However, in order to achieve this, the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church needed to make a decision about the canonical dismissal of the bishops of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric (Tanjug, 25th April 2023).

At its session held from 14th to 20th May 2023, the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church “made a decision about granting the canonical dismissal to the bishops of this autonomous Church by the Serbian Orthodox Church and its integration into the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in line with the sacred canons and Constitutions of our two local Churches, as well as the formerly reached agreement of the Synods of all three church structures” (Spc.rs, 20th May 2023).

Based on this decision of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, on 20th June 2023 the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric decided to accept four bishops of the former Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric into the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric: Kruševo and Demir Hisar diocese was granted to Jovan Vraniškovski, who had formerly had the title of the Metropolitan of Kruševo and Demir Hisar, and this marked the end of his duty as the archbishop; Deljadrovci-Illinden diocese was granted to bishop Joakin with the title of the metropolitan of Deljadrovci and Ilinden; Delčevo-Kamenica diocese was granted to bishop Marko with the title of the metropolitan of Delčevo and Kamenica, and bishop David was appointed the vicar bishop of Dremvitsa in the Metropolis of Skopje (Mpc.org.mk, 20th June 2023).

On 28th June 2023, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric informed the public as follows: “The Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric fulfilled the meaning of its administrative existence as an autonomous Church in the canonical territory of the Serbian Orthodox Church, witnessing the unity of the Church for the past 20 years, mostly spent in persecution and humiliation”, and “by the Serbian Orthodox Church granting autocephaly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric and accepting all the bishop of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric under the jurisdiction of the mentioned [Macedonian Orthodox] Church”; the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric “entirely transfers into the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric” (Poa-info.org, 28th June 2023). This is the last document of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric.

Conclusion

The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have recognized the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric;

the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox under this name, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church under a different name. Greek churches do not accept the autocephaly granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric. In fact, Greek churches believe that only the Patriarchate of Constantinople is entitled to grant autocephaly and they follow this Patriarchate’s decision about the recognition of the autonomous Ohrid Archbishopric.

Other Orthodox churches accepted the return of the Macedonian hierarchy into the canonical unity while also acknowledging the decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the autocephaly and of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on the autonomy. The tomos granted by the Serbian Orthodox Church states that the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric will get full autocephaly after the approval of all autocephalous Orthodox churches.

The decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church to grant autocephaly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric was an excellent move. Since 2022, Serbian Patriarch Porfirije has often performed service in the Republic of North Macedonia, just as other Serbian bishops, monks and priests.

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Appendix

TOMOS

on the autocephaly Of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric

PORFIRIJE

By the grace of God,

Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovci, and Serbian Patriarch,
with the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church,
to His Beatitude Stefan, Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia

In compliance with the sanctified and established canonical order of the Most Holy Orthodox Church of Christ and, in particular, with Rule 34 of the Holy Apostles,

– according to the decision of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church ASNo. 47/note 8 of 16/3rd May of the current year, by which the Council, with deepest gratitude to the Lord, in the always glorified Trinity, and with great joy, accepted the decision of His Beatitude, Archbishop Stefan of Ohrid, and the Holy Synod of Bishops gathered around him. To accept the universally recognized canonical status of the dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North Macedonia, granted in 1959, namely the status of the broadest possible autonomy, i.e., of full internal autonomy and, since ion this way all reasons for the cessation of the liturgical and canonical communication have ceased to exist, after being caused by the one-sided proclamation of their autocephaly under the name “the Macedonian Orthodox Church” om 1967, established full Eucharistic communication and canonical unity with the above-mentioned Church,

stated that the dialogue about its future, final canonical status was possible in reality, legitimate and purposeful, that the Serbian Orthodox Church accepted it, that it would be governed solely and exclusively by ecclesiological-canonical principles and ecclesiastical-pastoral needs and that, after the resolution of the status question, it would not condition the new sister Church by restricting clauses regarding the scope of its jurisdiction in the home country and the diaspora worldwide, with a fraternal recommendation to this Church to resolve the question of its official name in direct fraternal dialogue with the Greek-speaking and other local Orthodox churches,

– according to the decision of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church ASNo. 55/note 65 of 20/7, in May of the current year, which accepts the plea of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – the Ohrid Archbishopric SASNo. 65 of 18th May of the current year to grant the canonical status of the autocephalous Orthodox church to this church, autonomous within the Serbian Patriarchate, and to bless, grant and recognize the requested canonical status of the autocephalous Orthodox church, whereas the Council is obliged by duty to the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church to resolve the necessary technical-organizational matters; subsequently, the Serbian Patriarch will officially and publicly announce the relevant decision of the Council, sign the appropriate Tomos and submit it to all sister autocephalous Churches for adoption, since the Serbian Orthodox Church is not the sole factor of the autocephaly, but it is the full jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church, and that is why decisions and reception by other Orthodox churches are necessary,

– and having in mind the newly-created ecclesiastical-historical and other circumstances, with the primary aim of enabling the Christ-named People of God to have the greatest possible spiritual benefit and to advance on the road to salvation, as well as to enable the governance of church matters without difficulties, purposefully, in a canonically proper, dignified and benevolent manner,

Our Holy Serbian Orthodox Church, as the heir of the old and glorious Patriarchate of Peć, gives its Council's blessing and approval, grants and recognizes the autocephalous status to the God's Church in North Macedonia, today called the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which is the heir of the old and glorious Ohrid Archbishopric, and that is why it also includes its honourable name and encompasses the canonical space of the former eponymous Church, autonomous since 1959, within our Serbian Patriarchate.

The autocephaly of the new sister Church is full autocephaly. It means that the Serbian Orthodox Church will not condition it by the provisions restricting its canonical jurisdiction and pastoral care for its faithful Orthodox people in the home country and the diaspora. At the same time, the Serbian Orthodox Church warmly recommends that His Beatitude, the head of the new sister Church and its Holy Synod should resolve the question of the official name through a direct fraternal dialogue with the Greek-speaking and other local Orthodox churches.

Holy churches and monasteries, particularly the great shrines from the Nemanjić period and the subsequent periods of Serbian presence, church construction and cultural creation in the territory of today's North Macedonia, as well as the overall movable property of the Serbian Orthodox Church within its boundaries, are given for use to the new autocephalous sister Church.

For proof, confirmation, and lasting testimony of all that has been canonically established and determined in this manner, we hereby deliver to His Beatitude Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia, Stefan, beloved in Christ the Lord, brother and fellow minister of our humility, with all the Most Reverend, Most Reverend and God-loving hierarchs gathered around him, our beloved brothers and fellow ministers in the Holy Spirit, the following

Patriarchate's and Council's Tomos,

The original text of which, accurate and intact, is kept in the Archives of our Holy Patriarchate

We pray to the God of all grace, who has called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus our Lord, that, by the grace of His Holy Spirit and the prayerful intercession of His holy Church, He may grant our youngest sister autocephalous Church every blessing and every good spiritual fruit, in an unbreakable bond of love and unity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and with all the holy local Orthodox Churches throughout the world. To Him, who is always glorified in the Trinity, be glory, honour, power, and worship forever and ever. Amen.

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In the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade,
On the Sunday of the Holy Father, the First Ecumenical Council,
On 23rd May / 5th June of the year of the Lord of 2022

Archbishop of Peć,
Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovci,
and Serbian Patriarch

Porfirije
Chairman of the Holy Council of Bishops
of the Serbian Orthodox Church