

FELLOWSHIP RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Democratic Structuring and Development of the Sphere of Religion in Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia: Monopoly or Market Relations

1. The Problematic Situation as Background of the Analysis

Globalization has a complex and ambivalent impact on the social role of religion, particularly on the relationships between traditional Churches and the state /Berger, P., Beyer, P., Casanova, J., etc./. This influence is especially intense and dramatic in the Balkan post-communist countries (Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria) where the Orthodox confession is prevalent, but other religious communities are permanently situated, particularly Muslims, but also Roman Catholics, Protestants, and new religious movements. In these countries the dynamic relationships between the state, the Orthodox Church, and other religious confessions serve as a clear and convincing indication of the problems and the evolution/involution of democratic processes in the region. In all three countries over the last decade there has been a rapid process of religious-ethnic identification, a trend particularly strong in Serbia and Montenegro and since recently gaining momentum in Macedonia. In Bulgaria this process is under political control, but although in a state of calm at present, the basis of conflict, created by the Communist regime with the forcible changing of the names of Bulgarian Turks, could easily be activated.

In the context of this problem, I would formulate the following thesis regarding the problem field and the regional significance of the research project. **The relationships between the Orthodox Church and the state /political, legal, economic, and cultural/ in these countries are an indicator and criterion of the social quality of the statehood project, whether this project is civic or ethnic, liberal-democratic or nationalistic.** The maintenance by the state of a monopoly and privileges for the Orthodox Church over other religious confessions is a trend more or less valid for all Orthodox countries, including Greece, a member-state of the European Union. **The wider cultural-theoretic aspect will serve as the conceptual nucleus of the project; in this aspect current trends reflect a more fundamental cultural conflict in these countries: the conflict between traditional culture /marked by unity, authoritarian attitudes, ethnic-religious synthesis/ and modern culture /pluralism, tolerance, civil society/. This conflict has been made visible and dramatic by the process of globalization.**

2. The Research Project Objectives

The research project is aimed at analyzing the state and prognosticating the near prospects of the structuring and democratic development of the sphere of religion in Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia in terms of:

- The legal status of the separate confessions as laid down in the respective Constitutions and Laws of Religious Confessions in these countries – **whether these legal regulations contain clauses giving privileged status to any of the confessions, in this case, to the Orthodox Church, and thereby are discriminative against the other confessions;** the role assigned to the

state in solving the issue of legal registration of confessions; under what conditions a confession can be deprived of legal status and its activity stopped /whether these conditions are precisely defined or legal regulations leave room for loose interpretation and application, including subjective and arbitrary judiciary decisions/; how these issues are regulated in the developed democratic countries, specifically in Spain and France, countries with a rich and finely nuanced experience in this sphere, particularly with regards to the Islamic community;

- **The political interests and political will of which parties, represented in Parliament, are reflected in the Law on Religious Confessions** /for instance in Bulgaria this law was sharply criticized and contested before the Constitutional Court by the oppositional Union of Democratic Forces/; **what the attitude of ethnic parties is toward the Law**; what the political profiles are of the parties supporting the Law; the answers to these questions would enable us to characterize this important law as democratic and tolerant, or as ethnocentric and discriminatory;
- **What the public social-psychological environment is, out of which this legal regulation of state-church relationships stems and in which it operates**; what public opinions and attitudes are, as registered in sociological studies, towards: 1/ the Orthodox Church – in terms of trust, authority, expectations, its role in education; 2/ Islam and Islamic communities – in terms of tolerance or intolerance, rights and liberties, the role in education; 3/ the new religious movements /the so-called sects/ - public perception of them in terms of tolerance/intolerance; 4/ other confessions;
- **The causes for the observed public and political attitudes (with various intensity in various countries – they being most tolerant in Bulgaria and least so in Serbia and Montenegro) towards a synthesis of religious and ethnic identity**, toward a privileged status for the Church, towards inequality in the status of the separate religious confessions, and toward religious intolerance: 1/ cultural and historical reasons for these attitudes – strong Orthodox traditions and the role of Orthodoxy for the preservation of the ethnos; traditional dependence of the Orthodox Church on the state; historical connection of Islam with the Turkish imperial domination; 2/ national psychology: a lingering traditional, enclosed type of consciousness and a mentality that is reluctant to accept pluralism and innovation; 3/ current economic and political trends: growing momentum of inherited stereotypes and economic hardships of the transition; globalization and political interests of and manipulation by political circles;
- **The basic subjects of and conditions for democratic orientations in the development of the religious sphere and the relationships between state and Church.**

In carrying out the **main objective** of the project, and as a result of it, a **data base will be created, comprising legal documents, the results of sociological research, analyses and recommendations**; all of these will be made available to interested **parliamentary committees, state organs, political parties, diplomatic missions, non-governmental**

organizations, etc., in the form of 1/ a site in Internet; 2/ a collection of materials published in Bulgarian and English /eventually in Serbian and Macedonian as well/.

In the course of work on the project, articles will appear in academic publications in Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia.

3. Procedure for Fulfilling the Project Objectives

The project objectives will be achieved using the following empirical material and theoretic methods:

- **Comparative analysis of legal documents** regulating the relationship between state and Church in the studied countries with reference to the democratic project and its principles: religious tolerance, equality before the law, pluralism;
- **Comparative analysis between the spirit and contents** of these legal regulations in the **studied countries** on one hand, and the **two countries with rich democratic experience in this sphere**, Spain and France, on the other; registering the similarities and differences and preparing recommendations for democratic improvement of the legislature in our countries;
- Analysis and interpretation of the **parliamentary debates and documents** relevant to the passing of the laws regulating state-Church relationships in the studied Balkan countries;
- **Analysis of the findings of sociological researches on public opinion** relevant to religious tolerance and pluralism, religious-ethnic synthesis, state-Church relationships, etc.; if necessary, ordering a specialized sociological study;
- **Overview of authoritative works on the cultural-historical causes and current circumstances determining the problems and difficulties in the democratic structuring and development of the religious space in the studied countries;** on the basis of these analyses, preparing recommendations and a strategy for political and legal support for the democratic project in state-Church relationships;
- **Preparing an electronic data base and printed materials** containing the results and recommendations of the research project; publicizing the results among interested subjects – parliament, political parties, and state organs.

As my scientific research over the last 20 years is closely connected with this field, I feel the proposed objectives are fully achievable and particularly relevant to the democratization of religious relations in a region of Europe marked by crisis and where future developments are hard to predict.

4. How the Results of the Research Might Be Utilized to the Countries and to the Region

The research project will be important for the surveyed countries and the Balkan region in the following ways:

- **Creating transparency of information and providing a basis for comparison** between the researched countries and other Balkan countries on the one hand, and the mature democracies on the other; contributing helpful information and recommendations to further legal and political work in this sphere;
- **The basic trends** in this sphere, established through analysis and explication of the situation, **will serve as indicators of the democratic qualities of the political process in general in the researched countries;** the analysis will therefore provide **a possibility for penetrating behind the political façade** and self-publicity in these countries;
- **Determining the connection and interaction between political populism in this field and the prevalent mass attitudes; preparing helpful recommendations** with regard to this trend; tracing the borderlines and determining the consequences of populism, defining the political responsibility of circles supporting populism;
- **Facilitating the work of Parliament and state organs toward democratization of the religious sphere in the studied countries,** providing these institutions with an easily accessible and practical empirical and analytical data base.