Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century

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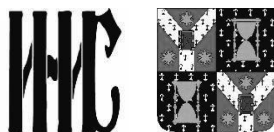

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The Relations between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches 1919–1934

Abstract: This paper examines the interactions between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches during the interwar period, emphasizing their religious, cultural, and diplomatic relations. Following the dissolution of Austro-Hungarian rule, both churches faced significant challenges in maintaining their identities amid the evolving political landscapes of Romania and Yugoslavia. The study explores the negotiations between the two Orthodox churches within a broader framework that includes the political relations between the Romanian and Yugoslav state authorities, as well as the ecclesiastical legal traditions developed over the centuries.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, Romanian Orthodox Church, Ecclesiastical Diplomacy, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Kingdom of Romania, Interwar Period

1. The Temporal Dimensions of Religious Diplomacy: Historical Narratives, Sacred Time, and Political Interactions

The relationship between religion and politics has always held a prominent place in history. As societal contexts change, this relationship has been reshaped in various ways. The interaction between politics and religion, as well as the interplay of authority and belief – particularly how religion is used for political purposes – has drawn considerable attention from social and political theorists. Critiques of the relationship between Orthodoxy and nationalism often focus on issues such as pluralism, democracy, and human rights within the Orthodox context. These critiques parallel similar analyses of Christianity in Western societies, which have offered valuable insights. To further enrich the discussion about religion and politics in the Orthodox world, it is essential to explore the relationship between the Church and the state within legislative and diplomatic frameworks. It is also important to recognize that individuals navigate these dynamics through their unique

experiences, which are shaped by their social positions and carry the legacies of previous eras. Not everyone experiences time in the same way; while individuals might share a visible present, they do not necessarily exist synchronously.[1] Philosopher Martin Heidegger, in his work „Being and Time," illustrates that temporality is not merely chronological but is deeply connected to human existence and experience. By viewing time from Heidegger's perspective, we can understand that it is influenced by cultural and religious contexts, providing a more nuanced understanding of the persistent complexities involved.[2]

Time plays a crucial role in historiography, with historians such as Fernand Braudel and Reinhart Koselleck emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between different temporal scales. Traditionally, the study of „the past" has received more attention than the boundaries separating the past, present, and future. Cultural definitions of these boundaries can vary; for example, legal time differs from historical and religious time. While many historians acknowledge these shifts, few have offered new conceptualizations of historical time. Traditional perspectives, influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity, Benedict Anderson's idea of nations as „imagined communities," and Koselleck's exploration of the evolving nature of historical time, often overlook the political implications of how time is defined. This avoidance points to a broader issue: historians often take for granted the distinctions between the „past" and the „present" without critically examining how these concepts are constructed or what power dynamics they reflect.[3] In „Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée," Fernand Braudel introduces the concept of *longue durée*, emphasizing the importance of long-term historical structures over ephemeral events. He critiques traditional historiography's focus on political events and individual actions, advocating for an approach that considers enduring geographical, social, and economic factors to reveal long-term patterns. Braudel underscores the necessity of understanding the deep historical roots of religious traditions and conflicts for their cultural and diplomatic significance. This layered understanding of time can enhance the effectiveness of religious diplomacy by placing actions and strategies within both historical and contemporary contexts, recognizing church institutions as *longue durée* structures.[4]

Victor Neumann argues that historical progress should not be seen as strictly linear or as a complete break from the past. He emphasizes the

[1] Ernst Bloch, Mark Ritter, „Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics", *New German Critique* 11 (Spring 1977), 22.

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 486–488.

[3] *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past and Future*, Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (eds.), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 8–13.

[4] Fernand Braudel, „Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée", *Annales* 13/4 (1958), 730–731.

importance of multiple perspectives in historical study. This view aligns with Peter Burke's argument about the interconnectedness of historical periods and how chronological concepts, such as „short centuries” or „long centuries,” influence our understanding of historical narratives.[5] Neumann, drawing on Reinhart Koselleck, highlights the persistent complexities and internal conflicts within historical concepts that resonate across different eras. He notes that the Enlightenment's attempts to reconcile tensions between the Church and social order were ultimately inadequate, as contradictions in 18th-century social structures continued into later periods. This underscores the idea that historical struggles and ideas, much like temporal concepts, have lasting impacts that shape both contemporary perceptions and long-term cultural significance. Exploring these dynamics deepens our understanding of history and enhances the effectiveness of religious diplomacy by contextualizing actions and strategies within both historical and contemporary frameworks.[6]

Reinhart Koselleck's concepts provide a valuable lens for understanding how religious time shapes community identities and diplomatic interactions. His idea of the „space of experience” highlights how the historical narratives and accumulated traumas of religious groups influence their perceptions and responses to contemporary issues. Simultaneously, Koselleck's notion of the „horizon of expectation” reflects how these groups envision their futures based on their past experiences.[7] By incorporating these temporal dimensions, we can develop more nuanced research strategies that align with the historical contexts and future aspirations of religious communities.

The notion of time in religious diplomacy[8] reflects a dynamic interplay between sacred and secular perspectives, historical narratives, rituals, and ethical considerations. Unlike the immediate, transactional nature of secular diplomacy, religious diplomacy often emphasizes patience and long-term engagement, prioritizing relationship-building over immediate outcomes. Religious time, as a multifaceted construct, intertwines the sacred and secular, shaping how communities perceive their existence and the passage of time. This stands in contrast to linear, secular time, and aligns more closely with Mircea Eliade's concept of cyclical or event-based religious time. For religious individuals, time is divided into sacred and profane forms, with rituals and festivals re-actualizing mythical past events and reconnecting parti-

[5] *Breaking up Time…*, 29.

[6] Victor Neumann, „The Enlightenment and the Policies of the Habsburg Empire”, *The Banat of Timişoara: A European Melting Pot*, Victor Neumann (ed.), (London: Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers Ltd, 2019), 45.

[7] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–267.

[8] Scott Blakemore, „Reconceptualising Faith-Based Diplomacy to Expand the Diplomat's Toolkit”, (doctoral thesis, Bond University, 2019), 106–118.

cipants to the original sacred time of *in illo tempore*.[9] This cyclical nature of religious time, which is both circular and recoverable, sets the religious experience apart from secular, linear time. Building on this, Christian time emphasizes moral behavior and its connection to the afterlife, highlighting the primacy of spiritual over material existence. In this way, religious time contrasts sharply with the linear, biological concept of time and the modern, empirical approach to history, aligning more closely with long-term engagement and ethical considerations in religious diplomacy.[10] The interplay between sacred and secular time in religious diplomacy offers a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics in ecclesiastical relations, particularly between the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC). The ways in which religious and secular times intersect shape how each church approaches its interactions, negotiations, and responses to conflicts. Understanding these temporal patterns is key to grasping how the two churches navigate cooperation, tensions, and efforts at reconciliation, as their historical experiences and traditions influence their strategies and decisions in religious diplomacy.

2. The Legacy of Austrian Religious Policies

The religious policies of the Austrian Empire profoundly shaped the 19th and 20th-century relations between the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches. In the 18th century, the ecclesiastical relations between Romanians and Serbs were influenced by the Austrian Empire's legislative framework and the „Illyrian privileges." This context was significantly shaped by the emergence of secular thought and modern nationalism. Understanding this historical background reveals how their shared religious heritage continues to influence their interactions, providing essential insights into their relations during the interwar period and the ongoing cultural connections between the two churches.

In the 17th century, as the Serbian presence in Hungary solidified, the Habsburg Empire granted exclusive privileges to the Serbian Orthodox community, recognizing the strategic role of the Serbian clergy in consolidating imperial authority. These privileges, established by Emperor Joseph I and his successors, made the Serbian Church the only non-Roman Catholic community allowed to practice publicly, creating a distinct ecclesiastical identity for Orthodox communities in South Hungary and the Banat region. The privileges helped form an Orthodox bloc that served military and political purposes, particularly in countering local powers and supporting Habsburg control, with subsequent documents between 1691 and 1743 reinforcing the authority of

9 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt, 1959), 68–71.

10 William Gallois, *Time, Religion and History*, (London: New York: Routledge, 2007), 109.

the Karlovci Metropolitan Seat.[11] These privileges, however, were not extended to the local Romanian Orthodox community in Transylvania, whose position remained more precarious. Following Transylvania's incorporation into the Habsburg Empire in 1688, the Romanian Orthodox community faced significant challenges, including a leadership vacuum after the 1698 union of the ROC with Rome. This uncertainty led to the 1744 reestablishment movement led by Serbian monk Visarion Sarai, followed by Romanian monk Sofronie's efforts in 1759–1760 to rally Romanian peasants for the appointment of a Serbian Orthodox bishop in Transylvania. In response, the Habsburgs established an Orthodox diocese in Sibiu in 1761, placing it under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Metropolitan of Sremski Karlovci, thus reinforcing Serbian dominance over Orthodox religious affairs in the region.[12]

The SOC in the Austrian Empire functioned for nearly a century without a formal statute, relying on a combination of privileges, the *Nomocanon of Saint Sava*, and customary law. Radoslav Grujić emphasizes that the Habsburg authorities established a ministry for Serbian affairs in 1745, which eventually became the Illyrian Court Deputation tasked with overseeing both civil and ecclesiastical matters.[13] Despite resistance, efforts to create a formal governance structure began in 1769 with the Church-National Assembly, but Empress Maria Theresa's 1770 Regulament overrode many of its decisions, leading to unrest and the Assembly's dissolution. The 1779 *Rescriptum Declaratorium Illyricae Nationis*[14] granting confessional autonomy to the SOC, along with clergy exemptions, the right to convene a national congress, and a defined ecclesiastical hierarchy. Emperor Joseph II's 1781 Act of Tolerance expanded religious freedoms, granting Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Catholics greater rights, in line with Enlightenment ideals. Despite later challenges, the Illyrian privileges remained a symbol of the SOC's political empowerment as one of the key institutions within the Habsburg Empire.[15] Grujić observes that, after decades of resistance and political struggle, the reforms of the late 18th century provided the first comprehensive framework

[11] Nicolae Bocşan, „Illyrian Privileges and the Romanians from the Banat", *Banatica* 25 (2015), 244–245.

[12] Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan, *History of Romania: Compendium*, (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Cultural Institute, Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2006), 437–442.

[13] Радослав М. Грујић, *Православна срӣска црква*, (Крагујевац: Светлост Каленић, 1989), 122.

[14] „The archbishop and metropolitan is, during his lifetime, the supreme head only in ecclesiastical matters, but he is not the leader of the Serbian people in civil affairs; the people may choose the metropolitan, but it remains within Our imperial and royal authority to confirm that choice, to proclaim it at the National Assembly, and to bestow the dignity and power of the newly elected metropolitan through Our imperial and royal commissioner, once the metropolitan swears an oath of loyalty, fidelity, and obedience." Жарко Миладиновић, *Тумач ӣовласӣица, закона, уредаба и друӣих наредби Срӣске народне црквенеауӣономије у Уӣарској, Хрваӣској и Славонији*, (Нови Сад: Штампарија Ђорђа Ивковића, 1897), 13.

[15] Nicolae Bocşan, „Illyrian Privileges and the Romanians from the Banat", 246–256.

for the Serbian Metropolitanate.[16] As the 19th century unfolded, the rise of nationalism in the Habsburg Empire played a pivotal role in reshaping religious dynamics. The Orthodox Church, with its deep historical roots, became a critical component in the formation of modern states in Southeastern Europe. [17] This ecclesiastical separation was fraught with legal and political obstacles. The first tensions over the issue of separation were recorded as early as 1832.[18]

The rise of national consciousness with language emerging as a symbol of unity, further propelled the Romanian pursuit for ecclesiastical autonomy, which found support among both imperial and Hungarian political circles. In 1864, negotiations for the separation of the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches began, driven by religious and political factors. On August 1, Romanian deputies submitted a petition to the imperial commissioner, rejecting the authority of the Karlovci Assembly and advocating for the establishment of a separate Romanian Orthodox hierarchy. Citing distinct national and cultural interests, they sought emancipation from Serbian-dominated leadership through an imperial decree, invoking the same political authority that had originally placed them under the Karlovci Metropolitanate. [19] Șaguna's proposal for Romanian church autonomy emphasized representative governance, balancing clergy and laity, included the creation of a Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate with dioceses in Arad, Bucovina, Timișoara, Caransebeș, and Cluj, independent from Serbian Orthodox governance. While respecting Serbian rights and retaining their episcopate under the Karlovci Patriarchate, he advocated equal rights for Romanians and a fair allocation of Orthodox funds. Liberal voices from both communities urged separating church and state matters and fostering cooperation. Some Serbian leaders supported Romanian autonomy but insisted on resolving church issues without Habsburg political intervention, as illustrated by the Serbian leaflet *Vidovdan*, that supported the Romanian need for an autonomous church, claiming that the church should be national, however, the demarcation should be done without the intervention of political, Habsburg, authority. Conversely, Șaguna argued that Romanian ecclesiastical autonomy should come via

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[16] This framework integrated both Western and Russian ecclesiastical influences and helped guide the Serbian Orthodox Church well into the early 20th century. In: Радослав М. Грујић, *Православна срӣска црква*, (Крагујевац: Светлост Каленић, 1989), 122.
More on relation between Orthodox churches and nation states: Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity*, (London: New York: Routledge, 2019), 25–33.

[18] That year, 37 Serbs from Dobrița submitted a complaint to the Bishop of Timișoara, Maxim Manuilović, asking him „to protect them from the priest who was working to Romanize the Serbs". As Vasa Lupulović mentions in his book, this event marked one of the early documented cases of discontent among the Serbian community regarding the perceived cultural and religious assimilation efforts. In: Vasa Lupulovici, *Viața bisericească a sârbilor din Banat între anii 1865–1918*, (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2009) 49.

[19] Nikolaj Bokšan, „Jerarhijsko otcepljenje Rumunske pravoslavne crkve od Srpske pravoslavne crkve (1864–1868)", *Balkanica* XXIX (1998), 96–101.

imperial decree, mirroring their incorporation into the Karlovci Metropolitanate, ensuring imperial authority over ecclesiastical jurisdiction.[20] At the Episcopal Synod in Karlovci in August 1864, an agreement was reached on dividing bishoprics and parishes. Despite all tensions, the effort to maintain order and avoid conflicts between ecclesiastical jurisdictions is also seen in comunication between Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna of Sibiu and Patriarch Samuil Maširević. In a letter dated December 28, 1864, Șaguna explained that he wanted to prevent confusion and potential misunderstandings, stating that while the decree had been officially published in the official Viennese newspapers, the Romanian Metropolis was not yet operational, and Romanians in the region remained under the existing ecclesiastical authority.[21]

In 1868, following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the Hungarian Parliament officially acknowledged the existence of two Orthodox Churches (Metropolitanates) within Hungary – the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches – which stood out as the only religious institutions not directly subjected to state control.[22] The Romanian Church underwent a more expedited process in establishing its governance structure, culminating in the adoption of *The Organic Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania*. This statute, presented at the 1868 Congress, received official approval on May 28, 1869. The Organic Statute also represented a linguistic act of separation, evident in the deliberate use of the ethnonym „Romanian/of the Romanians."[23] In contrast, the Serbian Church faced greater challenges in formalizing a cohesive governance framework. The Hungarian government, particularly during the Dualist period after 1867, sought to undermine Serbian representation in ecclesiastical matters, which further complicated the situation.[24] The Serbian Church struggled to finalize a cohesive framework, with proposals like Samuil Maširević's statute for the Karlovci Metropolitan Church failing to gain traction. Instead, the Congress of

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[20] *Ibid*., 98.

[21] Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti [The Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts] (ASANU), PMA, Fond „B", 2/1865.

[22] Until the 1893 law (Law 26/1893) conflicted with the emperor sanctioned Organic Statute and indirectly questioned the Orthodox Churches' loyalty to the State. It fixed stripped the Church of authority over appointment or discipline of teachers and enabled the conversion of confessional schools into state institutions. The Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education could dismiss teachers suspected of anti-state sentiments without consulting Church authorities. In: Paul Brusanowski, *Reforma constituțională din Biserica Ortodoxă a Transilvaniei între 1850–1925*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), 143.

[23] Daniel Barbu, „Un Paradox Teologico-Politic: De la Atopia Creștină la Biserica Națională", *Schimbări Politice și Atitudini Eclesiale: Studii de Istorie a Bisericilor din România în Secolul XX*, Marian Pătru (ed.), (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 64.

[24] Vasa Lupulovici, *Viața bisericească a sârbilor din Banat între anii 1865–1918*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2009), 18–20; Aleksov Bojan, „The Serbian Orthodox Church", *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 67–78.

1864–1865 drafted *The Order of Organizing the Religious, Pedagogical, and Church Institutions of the Serbians and Greek Metropolitan Church*, which was later ratified by the Emperor as the *Imperial Rescript of 1868*.[25] As noted by Radoslav Grujić, served as the governing framework for the Karlovac Metropolitanate well into the early 20th century.[26]

By the end of the 19th century, both churches had carved out more defined structures of governance, with the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate assuming jurisdiction over the Diocese of Arad and Romanian parishes in Banat, including parts of Timișoara and Vršac. The Diocese of Arad oversaw a smaller segment of Banat, while a new Romanian diocese, Caransebeș, was created to administer the remainder of the region.[27] On January 23/February 4, 1873, by decree of the sovereign in Vienna, the third Orthodox metropolitanate in the Habsburg Monarchy was established, namely the Metropolitanate of Bucovina and Dalmatia, with its seat in Chernivtsi.[28] The joint synod of metropolitans and bishops to maintain doctrinal and canonical unity established by Romanian Church in 1869 never convened due to „the hierarchical separation and the lawsuits that were conducted for the purpose of this separation." Thus, the main question of demarcation and division of property, by WWI, was settled partially: Romanian and Serbian parishes in mixed municipalities will enter negotiations, after which it will be decided, and if there is a way to establish two separate parishes, each will be appointed to its national church; if there Is no way to prove the ownership, the church will go to the nation that has the majority of the population in said municipality. This phase of relations is characterized by negotiations in three-tier judicial system to address disputes arising from the hierarchical separation, established by Hungarian Parliament specifically for this purpose, and it continued until the end of WWI.[29] There were cases, such was with Lipov Serbian Community in Arad, who expressed their willingness to separate from the Romanian hierarchy in 1867 and rejoin the Serbian church, but they sought assistance to sustain their religious and cultural needs, invoking their shared Serbian heritage and solidarity.[30]

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[25] Vasa Lupulovici, *Viața bisericească*, 23–24.

[26] Радослав М. Грујић, *Православна срӣска црква*, 123.

[27] Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, Mirča Maran, Biljana Sikimić, *Rumunske verske zajednice u Banatu: prilog proučavanju multikonfesionalnosti Vojvodine*, (Vršac: Visoka škola strukovnih studija za obrazovanje vaspitača „Mihailo Palov", 2011), 16.

[28] Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, „Istoria, istoriografia și izvoarele arhivistice ale proiectului reîntemeierii Mitropoliei Românilor Ortodocși din Transilvania și Ungaria (1864)", *Îndrumător bisericesc pe anul de la Hristos 2024*, Anul 172, (Sibiu: Andreiana, 2024), 289.

[29] Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies Between Romania and Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): a6865, 2.

[30] In a letter to Patriarch Samuil Maširević, the community highlighted their role as the last guardians of the Serbian language and identity in the region, calling upon Serbian leaders to aid them in preserving their connection to the Serbian Orthodox Church and nation. In: ASANU, *Fond Samuila Maširevića*, Ad-5 1867.

In 1912, Emperor Franz Joseph suspended the autonomy of the SOC in Austria-Hungary to limit the influence of Serbian clergy, a move further destabilized by the 1913 murder of Patriarch Lukijan Bogdanović. This left the church without clear leadership and deepened tensions between Serbs and Hungarian authorities. The suspension disrupted the church's structure and role in community life, creating widespread insecurity. This situation lasted until 1919, when the administrator of the Karlovci Metropolitanate, Georgije Letic[31], Bishop of Timișoara and administrator of the Bačka Diocese, announced in the meeting of the Bačka Eparchial School Council on July 12, 1919, that „His Highness Regent Aleksandar Karadjordjević had declared illegal the suspension of ecclesiastical and educational autonomy issued by Emperor Franz Josef on July 11, 1912," and restored the autonomous provisions of the ecclesiastical and educational bodies that had existed before that date. [32]

3. Post-War demarcation process and Orthodox Church

World War I's aftermath transformed Southeastern and Central Europe, creating new successor states divided between Allied victors and defeated Central Powers. The Paris Peace Treaties established political, economic, and military frameworks to secure these nations' postwar stability.[33] The partition of the Banat region, as formalized by the Paris Peace Treaty, heightened tensions among Romania, Serbia, and Hungary while raising concerns among the local populace regarding centralist policies and the implications of emerging ethno-nationalist priorities. In the aftermath of World War I, the complexities of integrating regions with diverse historical legacies became increasingly apparent. New authorities were tasked with balancing multicultural and intercultural heritage, accommodating religious diversity, and addressing the coexistence of multiple historical narratives within a changing political and social landscape.[34]

In November 1918, the Serbian army crossed the Sava and Danube, capturing key cities such as Novi Sad and Timișoara, while Romania occupied parts of Transylvania. This led to a diplomatic dispute between Romania and Yugoslavia over control of the Banat. The Paris Peace Conference resolved the issue in June 1919 by dividing the Banat, with about two-thirds allocated to Romania and one-third to Yugoslavia; Hungary re-

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[31] More in: Саша Јашин, *Архијереји Темишварске епархије*, (Темишвар: Савез Срба у Румунији, 2020), 250–259; Сава Вуковић, *Српски јерарси од деветог до двадесетог века*, (Београд: Подгорица: Крагујевац: Еуро, Унирекс, Каленић, 1996), 120–122.

[32] Vasa Lupulovici, *Viața bisericească*, 98, 254.

[33] Здењек Сладек, *Мала Антанта 1919–1938: њене привредне, политичке и војне компоненте*. (Београд: Службени гласник, 2019), 13.

[34] Victor Neumann, „Timişoara between 'Fictive Ethnicity' and 'Ideal Nation': The Identity Profile during the Interwar Period", *Balcanica* XLIV (2013), 392.

tained a small area near Szeged. Significant minorities remained on both sides, with the 1921 Yugoslav census recording 12% of the Serbian Banat's population as Romanian, while the 1930 Romanian census showed Serbs and Croats making up 4.3% of the Romanian Banat. In Vojvodina, now part of Yugoslavia, Serbs held only a relative majority[35], as many municipalities were predominantly Hungarian, German, or Romanian.[36] The Yugoslav state, along with other countries like Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Greece, was required to uphold minority rights under League of Nations treaties to prevent ethnic violence and stabilize borders, though in Yugoslavia, these protections applied only to territories acquired after 1914. While the Great Powers mandated successor states to protect racial, religious, and linguistic rights, enforcement relied largely on the states themselves, with minimal intervention from the Permanent Court of International Justice. Yugoslavia, viewing these guarantees as infringements on sovereignty, resisted their full implementation.[37] The Yugoslav 1921 constitution however, guaranteed elementary education in citizens' native languages.[38]

After the division of Banat, Timișoara joined Romania, while Velika Kikinda, Vršac, and Bela Crkva became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SCS). Žombolj, initially under the Kingdom of SCS, was ceded to Romania in exchange for Serbian-majority villages. Most Romanian parishes in Kingdom of SCS remained under the Diocese of Caransebeș, with six under Arad. Romania's recognition of the Serbian Diocese of Timișoara was conditioned on establishing the Romanian Diocese of Vršac. Following the division, 52 parishes (38 from the Timișoara Eparchy and 14 from Vršac) and the monasteries of Bezdin, St. George, Zlatica, and Bazijaš now form the Serbian Orthodox Eparchy of Timișoara in Romania.[39]

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[35] Significant minorities remained in both regions: the 1921 Yugoslav census recorded 67,897 Romanians (12% of the Serbian Banat population), while the 1930 Romanian census found Serbs and Croats making up 4.3% of the Romanian Banat. In: Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies Between Romania and Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77/4 (2021), 2.

[36] Andrej Mitrović, *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunijom 1919–1920: prilog proučavanju jugoslovenske politike na Konferenciji mira u Parizu*, (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1975).

[37] Srđan Mićić, „Minority Petitions Against Yugoslav Authorities Before the League of Nations", *Tokovi istorije* 3/2020, 29.

[38] Љубодраг Димић, *Културна полирика Краљевине Југославије 1918–1941,* III, (Београд: Стубови културе, 1996), 15; Зоран Јањетовић, „Школство националних мањина у Југославији 1918–1991.", *Без школе шта би ми?! Огледи из историје образовања у Србији и Југославији од 19. века до данас*, Зборник радова, ур. Александра Илић Рајковић, Сања Петровић Тодосијевић, (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2005), 219–220.

[39] Слободан Костић, Шематизам православне српске епархије Темишварске у Краљевини Румунији за 1924. годину, (Темишвар: Управа православне српске епархије Темишварске, штампарије браће Чендеш, 1925), 18.

4. Church-State Relations in the Interwar Period

During the interwar period, the intricate relationship between church and state persisted, marked by tensions between secular objectives and ecclesiastical authority. The unification of the Serbian Church was achieved rapidly, within two years, with the goal of restoring the Serbian Patriarchate. [40] Ecumenical Patriarchate formally recognized the United Serbian Orthodox Church on March 19, 1920. Crown Prince Alexander, representing King Peter I, ratified this union by decree on June 17, 1920, consolidating all Orthodox territories within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes into a single Autocephalous United Serbian Orthodox Church.[41]

In September 1921, the SOC's Holy Assembly of Bishops passed Resolution No. 122, instructing the Holy Synod to engage with the Romanian government to ensure the Serbian Church in Romania retained its spiritual ties to the Patriarchate, a key concern following the establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920. The Synod was tasked with drafting regulations for this purpose, to be presented to the Assembly unless urgent. In November 1921, the Ministry of Religious Affairs received a formal request from the Assembly, emphasizing that no actions proceed without the Synod's involvement. This highlights the Church's efforts to maintain autonomy while cooperating with Romania to secure its position. [42] SOC's efforts to maintain this spiritual connection were further demonstrated by a significant development in the diocesan administration. Despite Romanian military and administrative control over the Timiș-Torontal and Caraș-Severin counties in 1921, which hindered the church's activities, the intervention by the Romanian Minister of Religious Affairs allowed SOCs municipalities to hold meetings without requiring administrative permission, which highlights the state's recognition of the church's importance and its respect for ecclesiastical autonomy.[43]

A decade later, internal administration of SOC was formalized, establishing a centralized structure centered around the patriarch, supported by key governing bodies such as the Assembly of Bishops, the Permanent Synod, the Great

[40] In 1920, the Serbian Patriarchate was reestablished after the unification of Serbian Churches in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). Preparations took place at episcopal conferences in Karlovci (1918) and Belgrade (1919). A royal decree on June 17, 1920, created the „Autocephalous and Unified Orthodox Church“ and another decree on September 12 restored the Patriarchate. Metropolitan Dimitrije Pavlović was elected Patriarch on September 28, though the government annulled the election, leading to his re-election on November 12, 1920. The Church's organizational statute was developed between 1923 and 1929, approved by the Yugoslav Parliament in 1931, and promulgated by the king on November 16.

[41] *Гласник Српске православне цркве*, 1. октобар 1920.

[42] Arhiv Srpske pravoslavne crkve [Archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church] (ASPC), SASI ANEX: September 1921–1922.

[43] *Гласник: црквени, школски и друштвени лист*, бр. 2 (15. Јануар 1922.).

Ecclesiastical Court, the Patriarchal Council, and the Patriarchal Administrative Committee. The 1931 Constitution of the SOC addressed key ecclesiastical matters, including the status of the Timișoara Diocese in Yugoslavia, headquartered in Velika Kikinda. In the Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution that the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Budim, along with parts of the former Vršac and Timișoara dioceses, remain under the hierarchical and material relationship with the SOC until further regulation. Additionally, decisions regarding the establishment, abolition, and adjustments of dioceses, as well as the appointment of vicar bishops, are to be made by the Holy Assembly of Bishops in agreement with the Patriarchal Council. [44] Timișoara diocese merged with part of the Vršac Diocese to form the Banat Diocese, with Vršac as its seat. While the Timișoara Diocese was legally maintained, its administration was complicated by the unclear definition of diocesan boundaries and external state laws. On March 1, 1932, Bishop Georgije Letić issued a circular confirming the merger of the Timișoara and Vršac dioceses into a single Banat Diocese. However, the situation of the Serbian Church communities in Romania remained unresolved. The Timișoara Diocese needed formal recognition in Romania, a process complicated by Romania's demand for the establishment of a Romanian Vršac Diocese. Negotiations between the patriarchates were expected to resolve this, but the situation remained provisional.[45]

In contrast, the Romanian Church's unification emphasized internal organizational principles, with the Patriarchate established prior to the church's unification through a law passed on February 25, 1925. With near-unanimous support from the Senate on February 12 and the Chamber of Deputies five days later, the law was swiftly enacted, establishing the Archiepiscopal and Metropolitan See of Ungro-Wallachia as the Patriarchal See.[46] This law, unlike the one from May 6, 1925, did not provide for the patriarch's powers, which were only defined later, on October 22, 1931, by a decision of the Holy Synod.[47]

The centralization of the ROC posed significant challenges for the new Patriarchate, including unifying canon law, managing clergy salaries in newly unified provinces, and addressing growing state influence. Legislative reforms, such as the 46-article framework and the 178-article Church statute ratified on May 6, 1925, adopted a Transylvanian governance model, balancing clergy and lay representation while granting bishops Senate seats and high salaries.[48] However, these reforms also heightened tensions over state

[44] *Закон и Устав Српске православне цркве*, (Ниш: Свети Архијерејски Синод, 1931), 22.

[45] Стеван Бугарски, „Правни положај православне српске епархије Темишвара", *Темишварски зборник* 6/2011, 11.

[46] Paul Brusanowski, „Organizare bisericească și schimbare politică. Biserica Ortodoxă Română în prima jumătate a secolului XX", *Schimbări politice și atitudini eclesiale: Studii de istorie a bisericilor din România în secolul XX*, ed. Marian Pătru, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 27.

[47] Paul Brusanowski, „Organizare bisericească", 28–29.

[48] Ionuț Biliuță, „The Ultranationalist Newsroom: Orthodox 'Ecumenism' in the Legionary Ecclesiastical Newspapers", *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 10/2 (2018), 189.

interference in Church affairs, which was a process that begin with Cuza's 1863 decree, which mandated the exclusive use of Romanian in religious services, replacing Greek, exemplified the state's decisive intervention in this process.[49] In the Article 4 and Article 5 of the Church Constitution. of the ROC, the governance of the Holy Synod reflects the interplay between ecclesiastical autonomy and state oversight. Article 4 mandates at least one annual Holy Synod meeting, with provisions for extraordinary sessions, and article 5 allows the Ministry of Religious Affairs, acting on the King's behalf, to facilitate convocations and opening ceremonies through a royal message. The Minister of Religious Affairs may also participate with a consultative vote unless belonging to a non-Orthodox confession, in which case an Orthodox representative substitute.[50] Meanwhile, in Yugoslavia, where many Romanian intellectuals had relocated to Romania, local Orthodox priests led the Romanian minority. They initiated cultural and political initiatives, such as founding the Romanian Party in 1923, publishing Romanian-language materials, and organizing community activities. Financial struggles, worsened by the economic crisis, limited parish development, with only three new churches built (in Deliblato, Ovča, and Kuštilj), while most efforts focused on basic maintenance.[51]

Amid these challenges, relations between the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Churches also reflected the complex interplay of religious and state diplomacy in the region. The Minister of Religious Affairs referred to the

[49] While the Church had long fostered „confessional nationalism" – a sense of identity rooted in religion rather than ethnicity – it was the state's actions that finalized the alignment of Church and the nation, embedding it within the broader framework of sovereign legitimacy and modern nation-building. In: Daniel Barbu, „Un Paradox Teologico-Politic: De la Atopia Creștină la Biserica Națională", *Schimbări Politice și Atitudini Eclesiale: Studii de Istorie a Bisericilor din România în Secolul XX*, ed. Marian Pătru, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 69; The Romanian Church had long operated with a degree of autonomy under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its independence became progressively more formalized, particularly following two pivotal events: the 1859 unification of Moldavia and Wallachia, and Romania's subsequent independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. In 1864, Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza enacted a law declaring the Church's autocephaly, a decision that was met with strong opposition from Constantinople, which initially withheld formal recognition. However, after years of negotiations and a significant event in 1883 – the consecration of Romanian chrism, a rite associated with autocephalous churches – the Ecumenical Patriarchate eventually acknowledged the Romanian Church's autocephaly in 1885, solidifying Romania's ecclesiastical independence. In: Theodor Damian, „The Autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church: 125 Years Since its Acknowledgement", *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 31, no. 3 (August 2011): 38; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity*, (London: New York: Routledge, 2019), 45.

[50] Ion-Vasile Leb, Gabriel-Viorel Gârdan, Marius Eppel, Emilian-Justin Roman, Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, *Instituții ecleziastice ortodoxe. Izvoare legislative bisericești și laice (sec. XVIII–XX).* Vol. II, *Statutul pentru organizarea Românei Bisericii Ortodoxe 1925,* (Iași: Doxologia, 2022), 275.

[51] Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, Mircea Măran, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banatul iugoslav în perioada interbelică (1918–1941)*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană; Caransebeș: Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2019), 173, 179–181.

Synod's act dated October 31, 1925, which outlined that the SOC had received an invitation to attend the proclamation of the ROC's elevation to a Patriarchate. Although the Synod initially had no intention of responding, the Ministry ordered representatives to be sent, so Bishop Emilijan of Timok and Archimandrite Stefan, administrator of the Diocese of Timișoara were sent to attend.[52] The Synod later protested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' refusal to fund the delegation, arguing that it was in fact a diplomatic mission, with the support of Minister of Religious Affairs, emphasizing the visit was requested to promote Serbian-Romanian ties and urged covering the costs within the budget. This diplomatic gesture highlights the intricate balance between ecclesiastical relations and state diplomacy, further underscoring the intertwined roles of the Church and government in regional affairs.

5. Inter-Orthodox Negotiations and Cultural Exchange during interwar period

Following the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Romania, Bishop Georgije Letić of Timișoara relocated to Kikinda, Yugoslavia, and administered the Serbian Orthodox Eparchy from Vršac until 1931. On August 15, 1919, he informed the Minister of Religious Affairs about transferring the Bishopric's seat and diocesan authorities to Velika Kikinda, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' agreement. To oversee the remaining parts of the Timișoara and Vršac dioceses under Romanian control, Archimandrite Stefan Nikolić was appointed as episcopal vicar, given Bishop Georgije's responsibilities with the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and transportation challenges. Bishop Georgije explained that his duties with the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, combined with transportation challenges, made it necessary for Nikolić to act on his behalf for the Romanian territories, although he would continue to perform key episcopal duties. He also requested that the Minister, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensure the continued self-governance of the ROC in regions previously under Hungary, as was the case with the SOC in Romania.[53] This role of vicar, formally recognized by the Transylvanian Governing Council in December 1919, marked the establishment of a Serbian Orthodox Vicariate in Romania. Following the death of Georgije Letić in 1935, the Timișoara episcopal seat remained vacant and was placed under administration. Thus, proto-presbyter Slobodan Kostić, due to his position, effectively became the leading figure for both the churches and the schools, as all Serbian schools in Romania were religious institutions.[54]

[52] Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (AJ), Fond 69, Ministarstvo vera Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, fasc. 18-16, V. br. 15687.

[53] AJ, 69-8-16, K.165/1921.

[54] He was one of the Serbian leaders who actively participated in implementing the School Convention signed between Romania and Yugoslavia in 1933, and he monitored the signing of the

The shortage of clergy in the Diocese of Timișoara became a significant issue from 1919, following the exodus of Serbian teachers and priests to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, driven by fears of reprisals from Romanian authorities. In the Diocesan Assembly of February 19, 1926, Stefan Nikolić addressed this problem, underlining how he tried to refute these fears in 1919 by citing Romanian guarantees of safety and appealing for their return – a call that went unanswered. He recalled his efforts to secure protection for the SOC and its clergy through correspondence with the *Consiliul Dirigent* and local Romanian officials, who assured respect for the church's rights and promised support. Despite these assurances, unresolved issues in church and education persisted, deepening the challenges faced by the diocese.[55] The Serbian Synod, addressing the shortage of clergy in the Timișoara Eparchy under Romanian rule, decided on February 28 and March 13, 1925, that the petitioner could be ordained into the priesthood once he met all the required conditions: passing the necessary examination and committing to serve exclusively in the Timișoara Eparchy while signing an agreement not to request a change of diocese once appointed to Timișoara.[56] The documents found in the Archives of the SOC for this period also testify about the need for Serbian priests and religious teachers in the diocese of Timisoara, especially the ones who also know Romanian. We have multiple examples where the Bishop of Timișoara, Georgije, notes that this shortage remains significant, making it necessary to grant the request unconditionally.[57] In petitions, other than expressing the intention to serve in Serbian regions, particularly those under Romanian administration, there is always emphasizing „critical need to preserve Orthodoxy, national identity, and public morals," with highlighting the linguistic proficiency of the applicants in Serbian and Romanian, but often also in German, Hungarian, and/or Slovak as valuable assets for fulfilling this mission.[58]

Initial diplomatic negotiations between Romania and Yugoslavia commenced in 1921, resulting in an agreement to appoint delegates to address disputes over churches, schools, and monasteries in both regions of Banat.[59] The ROC in Yugoslav Banat remained under the jurisdiction of two dioceses, yet was organized into three deaneries: Vršac, Pančevo (centered in Banatsko Novo Selo), and Sarča. Given the limited number of Romanian

Church Convention in 1934, highlighting its shortcomings. He led the effort to open the Serbian section of the lower high school and the Serbian section of the Teacher's School in Timișoara in 1934, followed by the Serbian section of the upper high school in 1942. in: Стеван Бугарски, „Прота Слободан Костић - жижа свога времена", *Темишварски зборник* 3/2001, 30.

55 *Гласник: црквени, школски и друшѿвени лисѿ*, бр. 7 (1. април 1926.).

56 ASPC, SASI, F I, R147/925, Synod Reference 204/242.

57 ASPC SASI F 1, R14/924; ASPC, SASI, F I, No. E.D. 1924; ASPC, SASI, F I, R147/925, E.D. No. 180/1925; AJ, 69-14-37, 301/prez.1924.

58 ASPC SASI F-3, R75/922; ASPC SASI F 1, R26/925; ASPC SASI F 1, R59/925.

59 Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies", 2.

intellectuals in the 1920s, the Orthodox clergy held a significant role, influencing the socio-political, economic, and cultural spheres within the Romanian villages of Banat.[60] In July 1921, the Minister of Foreign Affairs raised a concern with the Minister of Religious Affairs, noting that Romanians were not mentioning King Peter I during church services. This omission was seen as a sign of their aspirations toward Banat, which they defended by claiming they had not received instructions from their bishop in Romania to include him in their prayers.[61]

The Ministry of Religious Affairs received a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that no definitive results had been achieved in negotiations with Romania regarding the church-school issue. Based on the supplementary protocol to the 1921 Alliance Treaty, the Government had committed to discussions with Romania to resolve these matters. Two mixed commissions worked on the issue – first in Belgrade and then in Timișoara – but no agreement was reached. Regarding schools, they sought a convention to support the development of Romanian national identity. In 1925, when the Ministry of Religious Affairs submitted a draft law on church organization and delimitation to the Assembly, the Romanian government raised the matter again, prompting a visit by the Romanian Deputy Minister to Belgrade. The Romanian government was reassured by a statement confirming that relations between Romanian church communities in the Serbian part of Banat and the Romanian episcopate in Caransebeș would remain unchanged. No formal agreement was reached, with issues resolved diplomatically on a case-by-case basis. The church situation was being addressed without a written agreement, with any arising conflicts resolved on a case-by-case basis through diplomatic channels.[62]

Two meetings between Romania and Yugoslavia took place in Belgrade (October 2, 1922) and Timișoara (November 19, 1923). During the second meeting, both sides agreed to establish Orthodox vicariates: one in Timișoara for Serbians in Romania and another in Vršac for Romanians in Yugoslavia. Each vicar would report to local bishops – Arad for the Serbians and Vršac for the Romanians – and be accountable to the Holy Synod of their respective countries for disciplinary matters. However, tensions soon emerged as Serbian representatives advocated for the reestablishment of the Serbian Diocese of Timișoara and were hesitant to support a Romanian diocese in Yugoslavia, leading to a breakdown in negotiations. The ROC also expressed dissatisfaction with the vicariate arrangement.[63] What is also interesting, even though the agreement couldn't be made at this point between the two

[60] Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, Mirča Maran, Biljana Sikimić, *Rumunske verske zajednice u Banatu*, 17.

[61] AJ, 69-8-18, Br 9303/921.

[62] AJ, 69-8-17, Pov.br. 6699.

[63] Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies", 3.

churches, from the documents we see tolerance from the Serbian church towards the Romanian minority in the Banat region, compared to political tendencies. In a response from 1925 to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, who are asking Patriarch Dimitrije for permission of the SOC to condone the Romanian Church Choir Society from Banat, based on nationalist tendencies. But Patriarch Dimitrije responds that not long ago, the Hungarian government forbade everything with the word „Serbian" in it, and how that kind of oppression is what brings out separatist tendencies among minorities. [64] In September 1927, the Bishop of Timișoara reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about his visit to a section of the diocese in Romania. His account highlighted the warm reception he received from both clergy and laypeople, across Serbian and Romanian communities alike. This positive interaction stood in contrast to the diplomatic tensions surrounding the convention, showcasing an atmosphere of mutual tolerance at the community level.[65]

The SOC, particularly regarding the Bezdin Monastery, faced significant challenges during Romania's agrarian reform. The Serbian side invoked 18th-century rights, emphasizing the 1748 confirmation diploma granted by Maria Theresa, which guaranteed the monks' right to freely use the land. An article in *Glasnik* emphasized the importance of this document, underlining the significance of the 1748 confirmation diploma as a cornerstone of the monastery's property rights.[66] The complaint of the Romanian Orthodox community in Sveti Jovan, dated June 2, 1928, was also being addressed in accordance with the provisions established while both churches were a part of Austrian Empire-in this case, the 1868 agreement, which formalized the hierarchical separation of the two churches. Additionally, settlements between Serbs and Romanians in Banat concerning funds and the division of mixed church communities are being carried out based on the 1872 agreement, ratified by Royal decree. These ongoing efforts to resolve religious and administrative matters highlight the importance of these historical agreements in managing church relations between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox communities.[67]

In 1926, negotiations resumed between Romania and Yugoslavia. On October 12, the Sibiu Metropolitan Council proposed either retaining Romanian parishes in Yugoslavia under Romanian dioceses or establishing a vicariate for Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat. The Romanian-Yugoslav Dialogue Commission met in Timișoara in February and in Bled in August 1927, where they signed a convention on education while deferring church discussions. The Bled Agreement, signed by Yugoslav Foreign Minister Vojislav Marinković and Romanian Consul Teodor Emandi, included church representatives but excluded mino-

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64 ASPC, SASI, F II, R163/925.
65 AJ, 69-18-16, Pov.br. 8865.
66 *Гласник: црквени, школски и друштвени лист*, бр. 8 (30. март 1924.).
67 AJ, 69-8-17, b.b.b. Br. 17354; AJ, 69-8-17, V.S.Br. 523/1929

rity voices. This agreement faced backlash, notably from Svetozar Pribićević of the Independent Democratic Party, who argued it undermined Yugoslavia's School Law by allowing clerical influence over education. The Timișoara Diocese of the SOC also objected, viewing it as a threat to Serbian religious educational rights. The Assembly's refusal to ratify the agreement elicited strong criticism from the Romanian press regarding the neglect of Romanian minority rights and educational institutions.[68]

In the absence of a Convention, decisions were guided by the principle of reciprocity. In March 1927, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Presidency of the Holy Synod about a request from the Romanian Royal Legation for a permanent, annual, free visa for Archbishop Ioan Bodocan of Banatski Komloš to oversee Romanian parishes in Jankov Most and Markovac. The Ministry of Religious Affairs was asked to provide its opinion and investigate whether Romanian authorities had extended a similar privilege to Mr. Letić, ensuring a balanced approach to the matter.[69] In July 1927, Victor Iamandi, the Romanian minister in Belgrade, reported to the Romanian Foreign Ministry that the Serbs had rejected the notion of Romanian ecclesiastical autonomy in Yugoslavia. Iamandi proposed the establishment of two new bishoprics in the Banat on a reciprocal basis, awaiting a response from Bucharest. The Romanian-Yugoslav committee convened from April 15 to May 3, 1929, but failed to reach an agreement. Romania suggested placing the Romanian Orthodox in Yugoslavia under the Caransebeș diocese, while proposing that the Serbian Orthodox in Romania fall under the Kikinda diocese. Romanian representatives firmly argued that they could not abandon their national church, a right preserved under Hungarian rule. Conversely, the Serbian side responded that they could not allow two Orthodox churches in one state and proposed an „extension of competence" for the Romanian Church, but only under Serbian supremacy.[70] The Sibiu Metropolitan Council vehemently rejected this notion on April 24, 1929, asserting that they would not accept ecclesiastical or national subordination for their faithful in the Serbian Banat. The legacy of Austro-Hungarian state and legal frameworks governing both churches was a pivotal factor in this inter-orthodox dialog during the interwar period.

In December 1932, negotiations produced a draft convention proposing autonomy for minority churches in Romania and Yugoslavia, including the election of an episcopal vicar by local assemblies and an annual Joint Synod of Romanian and Serbian bishops. The SOC's 1931 Constitution rede-

[68] Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941*, (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, Institut za istoriju, 1984), 99; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva – nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 225.

[69] AJ, 69-8-17, V. br. 2737

[70] Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies", 3.

fined the Timișoara diocese within Yugoslavia, merging it with part of the Eparchy of Vršac to form the Eparchy of Banat, while maintaining its legal status in Romania. However, on February 24, the SOC's Holy Synod rejected the Joint Synod proposal. In response, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Boguljub Jeftić and Romanian Minister Alexandru Iacovsky proposed direct talks among synod representatives. The Romanian delegation argued for ROC jurisdiction over Romanians in Yugoslavia, paralleling the SOC's authority over Serbs in Romania, and challenged the SOC's claim of exclusive national Orthodox jurisdiction, citing the Serbian Patriarchate's oversight of communities outside its borders – SOC`s jurisdiction over then Italian region of Zadar in Dalmatia, despite the existence of the dioceses of the Dodecanese within Italian territory.[71]

The Serbian bishops firmly rejected a convention proposed by state authorities, maintaining their 1923 stance. They offered the Romanian Church in Yugoslavia administrative and material autonomy but insisted on retaining spiritual jurisdiction. Furthermore, Article 31 of the Constitution of SOC emphasizes the Church's autonomy in organizing its religious, educational, charitable, and cultural activities, including the management of its property, funds, and institutions, in accordance with the Law on the SOC, church regulations, and constitutional provisions. The central issue lies in the tension between maintaining this autonomy and the need for joint ecclesiastical governance.[72] The Serbian and Romanian hierarchs both rejected the idea of a combined synod, deeming it uncanonical. Instead, they agreed to a temporary „mixed commission" to address problems and disagreements, though with the understanding that this commission would not have the authority to make permanent decisions. The agreement established autonomous dioceses for both sides, with vicars chosen by the diocesan assemblies. The Serbian vicar in Timișoara would report to the Romanian Orthodox Synod, while the Romanian vicar in Vršac would report to the Serbian Synod. The Convention also set the official languages for each church, and its implementation required approval by both churches and governments. A Joint Commission of both synods, would address theological and spiritual issues. Official languages would be Serbian (in Cyrillic) for Serbian churches in Romania and Romanian (in Latin) for Romanian churches in Yugoslavia, with all official state correspondence in the national language. The Convention would take effect upon the approval of both churches and ratification by both governments. This concept of „self-governing diocese" was vague, and issues regarding cannon law were left unresolved. While some Serbian leaders criticized the Convention, the Timișoara clergy endorsed it, seeing it as essential for preserving their national and religious identity, hoping that impractical provisions would be revised by the relevant authorities.[73] Romanian Me-

71 *Ibid*., 4.

72 *Закон и Устав Српске православне цркве*, 25–26.

73 Стеван Бугарски, „Правни положај православне српске епархије Темишвара", 11–14.

tropolitan Nicolae Bălan supported this, emphasizing cooperation between the Churches.[74]

The Holy Synod of the ROC adopted the Convention signed by the Serbian and Romanian Bishops. On May 2, 1934, delegates from the Kingdoms of Romania and Yugoslavia signed the agreement. The Romanian Parliament ratified the Convention but not the Yugoslav Parliament. The Convention of 1933/1934 never went into effect. Interestingly, this same year saw the publication of a *Serbo-Romanian Dictionary* in *Glasnik*, reflecting ongoing cultural and linguistic ties between the two nations. This publication highlights the broader context of cooperation and exchange, even as formal agreements like the Convention faced obstacles.[75]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the religious policies of the Austrian Empire and their enduring influence on the relations between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches throughout the 19th and 20th centuries offer crucial insights into the complex interplay of religion, politics, and diplomacy. These policies, which governed ecclesiastical jurisdiction, autonomy, and influence in the region, were profoundly shaped by broader shifts in secular thought and the rise of nationalism. As both churches navigated the changing political landscapes of Romania and Yugoslavia after World War I, their efforts to preserve autonomy and maintain religious ties emphasize the ongoing significance of a nuanced approach to ecclesiastical diplomacy. Ecclesiastical diplomacy moves at a slower pace than secular, operating within a long-term system of religious traditions, hierarchical stability, and deep-rooted theological principles, all shaped by its own temporal framework. Guided by cyclical and spiritual perceptions of time, ecclesiastical diplomacy demands decisions that align with religious doctrines, historical legacies, and the long-term interests of the religious institution, rather than short-term political objectives. Thus, an exploration of this historical interplay not only sheds light on the nature of interwar relations but also highlights the enduring legacy of shared religious heritage that continues to shape interactions today. This represents a delicate balance between preserving centuries-old traditions and adapting to contemporary within the evolving political landscape.

[74] Paul Brusanowski, „Inter-Orthodox Controversies", 5.
[75] *Гласник: црквени, школски и друштвени лист*, бр. 4 (октобар 1934.).

Summary

After the fall of Austro-Hungarian rule and the establishment of new national borders, both churches encountered difficulties in maintaining their influence and identity amidst the shifting political environments of Romania and Yugoslavia. The shortage of clergy further complicated the situation. Diplomatic negotiations between Romania and Yugoslavia in the 1920s and 1930s further illustrate the ongoing tension between ecclesiastical autonomy and national identity. The failure to reach a formal agreement on church organization, despite several attempts, points out to the difficulty of balancing the interests of the two Orthodox communities within the geopolitical context of the interwar period. The concept of „self-governing dioceses" that emerged from these negotiations highlights the persistent desire for religious autonomy, even as the two churches struggled with overlapping territorial claims and national aspirations. In sum, the interplay between religion, politics, and diplomacy in the region reflects the broader struggles of religious communities in the post-war period, navigating national boundaries, ecclesiastical authority, and the preservation of identity in a rapidly changing political landscape.

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