

## **THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ON DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN VOJVODINA**

### **Summary**

"The recognized" seven churches have faced a new challenge since the decree of the Government of Serbia in July 2001 in the conditions of not yet built institutional frame, problems regarding the enforcement of the omnibus law, interweaving of competences between Belgrade and Novi Sad and, perhaps the most important, a noticeable change of the ethnic structure of population in Vojvodina.

School religious education aided the affirmation of some nationalities and fulfilling their collective rights. The Croatian language (as a national mark for common popular language of the Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrins and ethnic Yugoslavs) was introduced in the school system through religious education. In the case of Islamic religious education and especially concerning their believers of the Roma nationality, recognizing the right to have religious education in state schools is not only favorable to development of the ethnic identity, but it often contributes to becoming literate. This is especially important for those among 80 thousand members of the Islamic religion who (according to the data of the Islamic Religious Community) live in Vojvodina and who are underrepresented among the educated and even literate people. The problems will, as it is the case with many others, occur regarding the curriculum planning of religious education and appropriate textbooks. The curriculum planning in state schools looks like teaching in a mosque, it is taken from Sandzak (it is similar to the one from Sarajevo), more children listen to the Islamic religious education in schools than in the mosques and because of that the representatives of the Islamic Religious Community think it is good that it is a compulsory (not facultative any more) subject. The problems about the curriculum planning and the textbooks are characteristic for those pupils who attend the Roman Catholic religious education in Croatian and Slovakian language, because considering the scarce domestic resources they use the teaching experiences from Zagreb without necessary modifications. Many churches have problems with educated personnel. The representatives of the Islamic Religious Community in Vojvodina are at the same time satisfied by introducing school religious education and partly distance themselves from it saying "if the Serbian Orthodox Church had not put forward the question of religious education, it would have not been introduced. When the Serbian Orthodox Church put forward the question, some parties supported it hoping to have better reputation and more voters." According to them, "by introducing religious education we have finally

got the government declared to be Serbian". On the other hand, the representatives of the Islamic Religious Community see a benefit from a particular alliance with the Serbian Orthodox Church stressing that now there are many priests (and imams) and one number would have salaries from religious education and then the church would have more money (both the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community"). The Muslims in Vojvodina, similar to the members and priests of the Slovakian Evangelistic Church, say, "it is inconvenient for the minority group to register for the official religious education. In every member of a national minority there is conscience that he is a citizen of lower order. The conscience that they should not expose themselves because of these 10 years".

Similar argumentation is heard in conversation with the Slovakian Protestant priests in those places where the ethnic Slovaks Protestants are in minority, but by their number they sometimes make a very considerable one in the total number of the population. According to the conversations it can be concluded that one of the factors, which prevent undisturbed teaching of Slovakian religious education in state schools, is a fear that the Slovaks distinguish themselves too much, since they feel different, even periled, but a major ethnic Serbs. Some of the interlocutors in places where the Slovaks make minority in population say that children will not publicly choose the religious education, to avoid having to declare themselves.

Some priests of the Roman Catholic Church, those who are the ethnic Croats above all, but also Hungarians, do not hesitate to, unlike the official opinion of their church, say that the religious education was introduced under the pressure of the Serbian Orthodox Church. According to these statements, "there was a panic among the Catholics that the Serbs would force everybody to attend the orthodox education so they hastily introduced the Catholic also." Behind the religious education is hiding the Orthodox education, and in those communities which have a considerable number of pupils in the religious education classes and in churches, accepting the school religious education can especially be accompanied by fear.

It is important to notice that the school religious education was the least needed by churches which otherwise had a great number of pupils attending the religious education in temples. In this religious communities, because of mass visiting the church education and firmer connecting of people to the church, there is remarkably less aggressiveness regarding introducing the church in the schools, or even the lack of it. A spread real religiosity prevents an offensive attitude of the church because it makes it needless. Besides, the members of the minor communities have a special insider view to the problem of the relation of majority and minority in Vojvodina: many measures favorable for ethnic institutions, organizations and communities of the majority, like the ones that suit the Serbian Orthodox Church, are interpreted as simultaneously ethnic and national, regarding turning Serbia into a state of its ethnic majority. In this sense the Serbian Orthodox Church is understood as an ally and

opponent; with those "minor" churches, which in fact do not need the state support to keep the influence within their communities, this is the most obvious.

The representatives of non-Orthodox religious communities partly distance themselves from the fact that the religious education was introduced by a decree, which means that by the decision of the executive power it can be cancelled; they see that in this sense the problem has the state as well as the Serbian Orthodox Church, and not their churches. And since the religious education has already been introduced, it is obvious that many among them would like more its position to be regulated by the law than by the decree, as it is the case now.

A special case is those religious communities, which are not allowed to teach religious education in state schools. There are about forty of them in Vojvodina, but regarding the limited number of believers, the small number of the protestant churches were mainly not interested in organizing religious education in state schools. Here it should be borne in mind that these churches are often exposed to discrimination and even to public condemnation. Those among them, which have a more active missionary activity, are often targets of physical attack. The Provincial Executive Council, an actual government of Vojvodina, a more liberal than the Serbian one, shows, at least through the efforts of some of its representatives, understanding for different unproductive consequences of the arbitrary determining of recognized churches and in this sense work on a project on tolerance. The representatives of small protestant churches mainly call for principal reasons of separation of the church and school in a secular society and say they are against introducing the religious education in state schools, because they think that that way a forced influence is made on pupils. They stress that in Vojvodina this is especially sensitive question because of the religious variety of the population. They often give instruction to the parents to register their children for civil education, and to continue with religious education in the churches where they have textbooks and educated teachers. According to the saying of the Adventists priests, after introducing religious education there was children became suspicious of the children of their believers who chose civil education, but there was no drastic discrimination or incidents that could be reported. The biggest problem for them is the attacks on churches and not questions of religious education in state schools.

A special case is the Romanian Orthodox Church in Vojvodina, which is today, because of the change in its organization, not recognized as "traditional" church. Its priests do not teach school religious education or they do it semi-legally. This is especially important because the Romanian ethnic group in Vojvodina, which declines by the number faster than many others, and the importance of the religious education for saving ethnic identity, is undoubted. The question of the Romanian Orthodox Church in practice is mainly a question of the ethnic identity of the east-Serbian Vlasi. Refusing of the state of Serbia to allow the religious education teaching in Romanian is justified by the canon law reasons and mainly provoked by political game about the ethnic character of the considerable part of population of the eastern Serbia. A great number of the Romanian secular

intellectuals, as well as the priests, claim that regarding this question the Serbian Orthodox Church occurs as a part of the state administration, and that the well-known tensions between the church, Ministry of Religions and Ministry of Education are pacified when it comes to the "Romanian case". This is a very entangled problem that calls for a separate discussion. The Romanians from Banat pay the price.

For some religious and ethnic communities the religious education is one of the ways towards integration in the society (for some Muslims "exit from demonizing"), and for others quickening of their assimilation. Some welcomed it, even look at it as "a shocking favorable solution", others as something imposed by force, while some are willingly or against their will excluded from it. It is necessary to carefully measure the effects of the school religious education in an area divided religiously; it is always and everywhere a factor of group integration and inter-group dividing. However, in the conditions of a stable surroundings one can live together with stressed different identities, if suitable institutional preconditions are provided.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR BRINGING IN THE LEGAL REGULATIONS:

1. The noticed effects of introducing the religious education in state schools, first as an facultative and then as an elective course, are contradictory as expected; it could be explained by a contradictory character of the social changes in Vojvodina (and Serbia); the analyses carried out in the neighboring countries, like in Croatia for example, showed primarily "the disastrous results";
2. The specific character of Vojvodina as the most developed and distinctively multi-confessional part of the country, enables a clearer view to some domains, problems and perhaps directions of searching for solutions;
3. It is quite unacceptable to introduce the religious education in state schools by a decision of the executive power (and without public debate on top of that) as this is a considerable and important act by its actual and possible consequences; what is introduced by a decree to satisfy a need of a government and a church, it could be cancelled by another decree likewise; so a wide public debate and bringing in a special law are more than necessary. A recent decision of the Constitutional Court which solved the question of compliance with the Constitution of the religious education in state schools does not eliminate this problem;
4. The tensions between the Republic and Province administration organs can be solved only by laws which represent a precondition of a serious religious education teaching (not only of it, of course); on the other hand, due to its specificities, Vojvodina can be an experimental area if these problems if conferred in its competence; the transitional period takes a long time with all its chaotic consequences;

5. If the question of relations between the educational systems of the Province and the Republic is not solved very soon, and also the division of competence, it is at least necessary to considerably improve the communication between the administration organs on all levels and the communication of both stated levels with local offices;
6. First of all it should be made totally clear whether the religious education is desirable or if it is (was) exclusively a matter of a petty political trading;
7. If the religious education, considering the statement of the Minister of Religions, is given the task to serve as a means of comprehending the identity, one's own and somebody else's, it is essential to put it into programs and to regulate it in an appropriate way; it has not been done yet;
8. This is possible to achieve if the question of introducing the religious education is separated from the problem of ethnification of the state;
9. The question of identity is multiple; it is not reduced to being determined by the religious or ethnic identity and in conditions of social turmoil and great changes in the real life of the people too, it is more difficult to fragment it in a productive way than it usually is;
10. An additional problem is a small number of active believers, those who practice ceremonies prescribed by the religious communities, which researchers and experts mark by a one figure percentage; in such conditions the religious education is for considerable number of listeners uninteresting even when it is best organized;
11. The religious education can and should have unambiguous role in education to enter the regional integrations through which the road leads to Europe; the Minister distinguishes the latter as an important objective of its introducing; therefore the religious education in state schools should offer knowledge about religions of the population living in the Western Balkans and make them closer to each other;
12. An unquestionable importance of the religious education regarding keeping and developing ethnic identities is established; cooperation of the competent republic (and/or provincial) organs with the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro appears as more than necessary;
13. The religious education, according to the results of the projects, sometimes has a role in affirming and integrating smaller ethnic and religious communities, and sometimes serves as a means of ethnic assimilation; these controversial effects ask for modification of the approach which is applied at present;
14. The religious education can be one of relatively mild ways of overcoming the ethno-nationalist orientation among the members of the major community; it is a cultural replacement for abandoned real-political ethno-nationalistic enterprises;

15. The effect of introducing religious education that is worth mentioning is public recognition of some communities which had the impression, justified or not, that they are stigmatized;
16. Objectively regarded, the members of the minority communities are in the ethnificated society most often twice as stigmatized, by their ethnic and religious orientation which very often overlap;
17. Considering the above mentioned, the program of the religious education in schools must be changed and must not be a set of "anonymous material";
18. Since the programs of individual religious communities differ in quality, a cooperation is needed as well as using experiences of the successful ones;
19. If we want to strengthen a social - integrative effect of the religious education in state schools, it is necessary to prescribe a part of the program which will treat other religions, primarily those present in the Western Balkans;
20. This and other reasons point to the solution that specific parts of the programs are proposed by specific religious communities which will be verified by the competent Ministry (or Secretariat at the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina) and that the common part of the program is determined by the mentioned organ of the executive power on the grounds of the coordinated proposal of the religious communities (which even now have a common Commission that just should be broaden);
21. Since a significant number of relevant participants from the major religious community included in the religious education in state school do not notice existence of other religious communities (with the exception of Roman Catholic Church) the education of teachers is needed here; it should be organized by the Ministry of Education (or the Secretariat at the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina); the statements of the Minister of Religions show the insufficient information about non-Christian religious communities and their contribution to the European culture in which we want to integrate; on the other hand, this will intensify a desirable direction of development which is to "make relations between churches and religious communities closer and filled with understanding" according to what the Minister said;
22. This applies also to recognizing all forms of religiosity once widely present in this region (Judaism, Islamism, etc.);
23. Related to this there is a need to make a synthesis of teaching experiences in here relevant field; since Roman Catholics and Protestants, but not only them, have a rich experience from other countries usable in teaching, some religious communities should have the obligation to cooperate more intensively and to exchange experience if they want to continue with the religious education in state schools;

24. School religious education implies an obligation and intensifying the existing cooperation of the involved religious communities which is worth praising, in determining the status of this education and its teaching;
25. A wider involving of religious communities in the state school system imposes a need to reconsider the old solution according to which there was a unique Ministry of Education and Religions;
26. The question of positive discrimination implies very delicate determining of the number of children for the religious education taught by teachers from particular religious communities;
27. A detailed examining of the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Serbia showed overlapping of the state and church organs and regulations; it is best to solve this by reciprocity principle; since the state left teaching religious education to the religious communities, it should make agreements with them and treat them as officially recognized; this will lessen the present and possible new tensions;
28. A closer and more precise connecting of the school religious education to the Ministry of Education (or to the Secretariat at the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina) will enable a more efficient communication of school directors with the representatives of those religious communities that hesitate to ask them to organize and teach religious education;
29. One of the problems of the members of minor religious communities in communication with the educational authorities is a fear of declaring themselves; in announcing the invitation for choosing between religious education and alternative subject we should make sure to offer religious education for all religious communities that are considerably present in the area of some local community according to the census and to avoid simple stating that there is a possibility to start the appropriate education if there is enough number of children interested; this way the mentioned fear is greatly lessened;
30. In the case of small religious communities, those that do not have a great number of members in the area of the local community, starting the education requires a demand of their representatives; it is quite unacceptable the unconstitutional division to those religious communities which the administrating organs recognize and other;
31. Final decisions about the teachers of religious education must be in competence of the administration organs; otherwise the unproductive tensions are provoked inside religious communities connected with dividing of resources which the teacher claim; regarding a very prominent deficit in teachers (and in some case in finances) in all religious communities, the question of previous and permanent training of teachers must be a concern and in competence of the administration organs; the same applies for the complete educational survey; it would be good for the beginning to inform the teachers about the contents of elementary religious

- writings of published religions, with elementary pedagogy and psychology; an arbitrary, incomplete and unclear approach in selecting the teachers for religious education opens the possibility of future similar experiments with considerably worse consequences;
32. Such a solution would lessen the influence of different informal groups in the religious communities and in organizations and informal groups related to them, as well as corruption in them both, connected with distribution of the resources, among which are those related to teaching religious education in state schools;
  33. It would be worth considering that the administration organs bring and carry out a program of support for religious education teaching for the members of non-Christian religions, with the accent on the Roma children whose parents are of Islamic religion and where religious education is a way of becoming literate and socially promoted and integrated;
  34. It is quite understandable that the administration organs cannot possibly question the manner of teaching religious education in temples, mosques and synagogues except in the cases where this education means violating the law; since the program of religious education taught in the premises of religious communities would be substantially different from the school religious education, this would indirectly but unquestionably strengthen "the church religious education"
  35. It is rather understandable that the practice in which the priests give religious services in schools or occasionally give classes in subjects they are not competent enough should be banned;
  36. The question of teaching aids, books, textbooks and other can be solved appropriately only at the expense and within competence of educational authorities; they are the only who have personnel and financial resources for translating and other work;
  37. Only the educational authorities dispose of financial, organizational and personnel resources for providing school buildings, time-table, coordination between all teachers and a real integration and improvement of religious education in educational system; this integration eliminates the fear that the religious education in state schools will be fundamentally modified or abruptly revoked by a decision of the executive power;
  38. The salaries for the teachers which are a very painful question of their professional existence, as well as other payments that belong to them, like social and old age security and health care, traveling expenses, professional training, etc. should be at the expense of the educational authorities, i.e. the budget; this is how some illegal transactions of religious communities will be stopped or at least made more transparent, which will weaken their internal tensions;
  39. The suggestions of the religious communities regarding the textbooks, curriculum planning and teachers who will teach religious education should be verified by the school authorities that have to make final decisions on the grounds of the principle of professionalism and public interest;

40. It is understandable that religious teaching in state school should be mainly of an informative and not ritual or convincing character;
41. It is necessary to consider specific solutions for small and extremely multi-confessional communities where, due to the small number of pupils, there is no possibility to have religious education according to the curriculum planning suggested by particular religious communities verified by the competent organs;
42. The changes in educational system and introducing the curriculum ask for a permanent, additional analysis and finding of transitional solutions; and
43. A permanent public debate about school religious education is a necessity in society which undertakes considerable reforms; it comprises further continuous monitoring and evaluating.

## A PARTICULARLY INTERESTING CASE OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Romanians from Vojvodina are an ethnic group the number of which declines faster than of any other. Their number has declined by nearly one fourth since the last census eleven years ago. Their rapid assimilation is considerably less in the focus of the public attention when compared to the case of the declining number of the Croatians or Hungarians in Vojvodina. Even the Romanian diplomats avoid discussing this problem in the informal contacts, finding the excuses in the traditionally good relations between Romania and Serbia. On the other hand, the Romanians in Vojvodina are in many aspects the sacrificed pawns in various games of the Balkan and of the Danube countries in their ethnic and state-nationalistic engineering. Having populated the territory of Vojvodina and being recognized as a "nationality" or national minority since long ago they are nevertheless mainly rural population (about three quarters of them) occupied with agriculture (more than two thirds). Their intellectual elite is seated in Novi Sad, Pančevo and Vršac and in their creative acting they have remarkable results. Regarding its number and lack of territorial concentration, it is liable to rapid assimilation. Their not numerous, reproductive sub-elite, particularly the one from Uzdin, Begejci (Veliki and Mali Torak) and Alibunar, also tries to save the ethnic identity of this ethnic group in Vojvodina which is together with the Yugoslav one, perhaps the most jeopardized.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has a totally special position in today's Serbia and its activity is in many aspects a "deviant" case. Although being an orthodox church, it is a "sister" church of the Serbian Orthodox Church, it does not have its place among the seven "recognized", i.e. "traditional" religious communities permitted to teach religious education in state schools. Explanations of the reasons for this situation do not differ depending on the affiliation of the informants. The question of impossibility for the Romanian Orthodox Church to teach religious education in state schools is related to various interests. In this sense the lack of possibility for the Romanian Orthodox Church to teach

religious education can be seen as an impulse to more rapid assimilation of the Romanians in Yugoslavia, even more if we accept the opinion of the Minister of Religions in the Serbian Government ("Politika", 26, 27 and 28 of April 2003), Professor Vojislav Milovanovic, PhD, that "religious education is a way to know the identity, your own and of the others".

The question of the Romanian Orthodox Church in practice is rather a question of ethnic identity of the east-Serbian Vlasi, a group considered to be the ethnic Romanians deprived of the national identity, others think that they are Romanized Serbs, while some think that they are an autonomous ethnicity. These discussions are related to the tensions about distribution of the resources, as well as the understandable involving of the interested foreign factors. Hungary interpreted the lack of interest of Romania for Vlasi in the east Serbia until recently as an expression of the Romanian attempting to make a model regarding this question, which Bucharest would use to defend itself from the interest of Budapest to interfere in the Romanian-Hungarian activities in Transylvania (Erdelj). Those foreign factors, interested in further weakening of Serbia, worried until recently because of its destabilizing potential in the Balkans, have also shown interest in this problem. The popular press in Belgrade "detected" in the attempts of the ethnic (self)organizing of Vlasi the elements of preparations for the armed uprising in order to weaken Serbia even more. In reality it was just about the usual snatching that occurred after the 5th October in Serbia for the sinecures in national organs, which the new Law of national minorities made possible. In the spring of 2002 different organizations of Vlasi from the east Serbia required using the Romanian language in education, informing and religious service in the east Serbia. Naturally, this provoked a reaction of the local Serbian ethno-nationalists.

The state refusing to permit religious education in Romanian was greatly provoked by the political game regarding the ethnic character of a considerable part of the population of the eastern Serbia. A great number of the Romanian secular intellectuals as well as the priests claim that the Serbian Orthodox Church here acts as a part of the state administration and that the well-known tensions between this church, Ministry of Religions and Ministry of Education were pacified regarding the "Romanian case". Using the weakness of the state of Serbia at the time of the NATO bombing, the Romanian Orthodox Church raised the rank of vicariate to the rank of eparchy and sent the episcopo to Vršac. Referring to the canon law by which two orthodox episcopos cannot be seated in the same town, the Serbian Orthodox Church refused to recognize this together with and the state administration.

Tending to ensure the monopole of religious education of the orthodox believers in state schools, the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in their statements show that they think that "in villages where the Romanians live, the Romanian priests have to get a decision from the Serbian Orthodox Church". According to what people engaged in religious education in Banat say, "Vršac is a pulpit of the Orthodox creed and Zrenjanin of the Catholic one". In this sense the Romanian Orthodox Church is regarded as sister if organized in the form of vicariate. The attitude

towards the non-Serbian Christians is marked by an arrogant half-tolerance ("there are no problems among the confessions in Zrenjanin...nobody is guilty because he was born Hungarian...") or the real or pretended ignorance (the answer of the Serbian priest to the remark that the Romanian Orthodox Church did not have the right to teach religious education in state schools: "They have ("as if bewildered by the question"-the interviewer's remark), they are the orthodox after all. There are no Romanians, there are no place where they could form a class for religious education").

The Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat is involved in activities of the social and political organizations of the Romanians in Vojvodina. It would be strange if they were not. However, unlike some other ethnic groups in Vojvodina, as for example the Slovakian one, the Romanians have their political organizations, too. While the Slovakian Evangelistic Church helps the work of the Matica Slovačka (Slovakian Center) and "don't mess with the parties", the Romanians have their political organizations, which make different contacts with factions within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The political fragmentation of the Romanians in Vojvodina is known outside their community. As the Slovakian priests say, "The Slovaks are not very much interested in politics and there is nothing going on among them as it is among the Romanians". A high official of the administration organ says that the Romanians are politically fragmented, "that they are somewhere in-between". In Vojvodina full of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts the Romanians are known for no good in this aspect.

The Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat is divided in a non-transparent way for the public. According to the statements of the members of the Romanian cultural elite and sub-elite, the consequences of reorganizations of the Romanian church in the Western Banat are various. The Romanian layman intellectuals sometimes interpret the replacement of vicariate for eparchy as if "there were conflicts between the priests about money. The distribution in villages ("which priest has which villages, somewhere there are many believers with no priest, somewhere there is a church with no people. The priests go where there is more money"). The inhabitants themselves, who live in the poor country of Serbia, are sometimes not satisfied and sometimes they are envious. ("It happened, like in Vršac, that people didn't want to let the vicar in the church (because he has a huge multi-storied house)").

The conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church, which is in tight relations with the administrative organs in Serbia, and the Romanian Orthodox Church, is explained with the canon law reasons. The Serbian Orthodox Church once had four bishops on the territory of, at that time, united Austro-Hungarian Banat. Now it has the Vršac bishop and calls for the canon according to which two Orthodox bishops cannot be seated in the same place. On the other hand, the state organs of Romania, which is also involved in the conflict, claim that the Serbian Orthodox Church has its episcopate in Timisoara. The President of Romania, Iliescu, when visiting Belgrade at the beginning of 2003, asked Mr. Kostunica, the President of Yugoslavia at that time, why the Romanians in Vršac did not have their own eparchy when the Serbs in Timisoara had theirs. The Serbs, i.e. the Serbian Orthodox

Church, deny it. Iliescu claims they do, that only the board is removed-and the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church insists on it-and, according to the statement of some Romanian respondents, the Serbian Orthodox Church insists on reciprocity and since there is no episcopate of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Romania, there could not be the episcopate of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat (regardless of the conflict about the canon laws). The episcopate of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Vršac has been coming to Vršac for two years already because, according to some statements, he has only a tourist visa and according to the others, a diplomatic passport. Either option serves no good for the states involved. According to the statements of the interlocutors, in the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church there are two factions, an unyielding and a yielding one, regarding the negotiations with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Beside all this, and we can see here how the questions of the ethnic and the state policy determine the possibility of teaching religious education in mother tongue, more important thing is that this Romanian episcopate would encroach into the territory of the eastern Serbia and thus enable re-Romanization of the numerous and ethnically rather unconscious Romanian-Vlasi population. In relation to this, the idea of building a church and the seat of the bishop on the other side of the Danube, in eastern Serbia occurred among the supreme circles of the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, there are already two episcopates of the Serbian Orthodox Church there, so the Romanian bishop is not welcomed there either. And the bishop who does not live among his priests has neither direct control over them nor the possibility to efficiently influences their work, either regarding the religious activities or the work on strengthening the ethnic identity. Because of this all, the Romanian Orthodox Church is not registered as a recognized church in the state of Serbia.

The Serbian Orthodox Church in these circumstances maneuvers on the ecclesiastical-diplomatic level, relying on the support of the Serbian Government. When the episcopate came, the Serbian Orthodox Church demonstrated resistance. In Banatsko Novo Selo there was once a common religious procession for Easter (both Easters are on the same day). Later it was cancelled. The Serbian Orthodox Church induced it; the believers say that performing two orthodox processions instead of the previous common one provokes a harmful separation. In 1999/2000 the bishop from Gyula read in Romania the letter that the Romanian Orthodox Church sent to the Serbian Patriarch and the answer came a few months later. However, the Serbian Orthodox Church is not interested in solving this conflict beyond the conditions it imposes, which is evident by the fact that they suggested forming of two committees, which in the practice would never meet, to solve the problem in Vršac. According to the above said, it is clear that there is a discrimination of the Romanian ethnic group, that there is a clear collusion of the church and the state where the two otherwise quarreling and not akin Ministries of Religions and of Education step forward together (the ethnic interest erases the usual tensions) and that all that is happening is in the conditions of more and more rapid assimilation of the Romanians in Vojvodina.

This assimilation is of unequal intensity depending on the concrete place. In Deliblato, Mramorak, Dolovo, Kovin, shortly, in the area around Pančevo, the Romanians are mainly assimilated. According to the statements of the interlocutors, Uzdin and Torak scraps by, but there is no danger of a more rapid assimilation since those are ethnically homogeneous places. In Ečka, where the director of the school was a member of the Serbian Radical Party for years, after changing of the personnel they formed a Romanian class in the first year of school instead of the mixed classes.

On the other hand, while the Romanians from Banat get assimilated rapidly, there is a growing interest to re-Romanize the eastern Serbia. The respondents correctly notice that there are no Romanian schools, churches, media, and institutions for cherishing the national identity. According to what they say, those who can ask the question (media) do not do that (neither does the member of the Assembly who is a Romanian). In 2002 in Bor there was a conversation but the people talked in Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian language. Those who are familiar with the problem say that some people in eastern Serbia are not at all aware that they speak the Romanian archaic language. They do not know that there are Romanians in Vojvodina, and the same applies for many Romanians from Banat who are not informed about their compatriots across the Danube. The statements of the respondents belonging to the Romanian layman intellectuals sometimes present a clear example of the ethnic arithmetic, characteristic for the Eastern Europe. It is claimed that the eastern Serbia has 300,000-600,000 inhabitants who are the ethnic Romanians. They say that the problem is that at census the Romanians do not declare themselves as Romanians, i.e. among them they declare themselves as Romanians and among the Serbs, as Vlasi. Such attitude is explained by the influence of the state institutions and petty corruption of the local intellectuals who should be leaders of the ethnic conscience.

In the Eastern Serbia Vlasi declare as it suits them. The press in Romanian was cancelled in the area between the Morava and the Timok in the 50s, and those who are in favor of Romanian identity of the majority of the population that lives here, notice that the Romanians are partly guilty themselves for this situation because the state has recently permitted forming of national council and everybody could become a candidate. At the elections for the Romanian National Council for the eastern Serbia there were more than 30 electors. However, since 2001 when the Democratic Movement of the Romanians was formed, there hasn't been done much in this sense, so it could be seen on the grounds of the results of the census that the municipality of Bač (near the border with Croatia) has more Romanians than Zaječar. The respondents who are in favor of more active appearance regarding the ethnic coming to awareness (for example, the journalists from "Libertatea") reproach the state of Romania for giving scholarships for the students from Serbia, but later it does not take care of whether they are assimilated into the Serbian community or not. At the same time, in playing with the forming of the national council of the Romanians there is the influence of the party factors from Vojvodina, a very visible one, above all of the Social Democratic League of Vojvodina, which makes direct

pressures, but also the Coalition Vojvodina through its personnel in the Romanian organizations and in the Provincial Government.

Beside that, the respondents among the secular Romanian intellectuals highly respected in the Romanian community in Vojvodina, notice that the national councils do not have the right to have budget, and people expect them to solve the problems. The national councils, according to these statements, do not have the right to require introducing the religious education in Romanian language and they do not have a real power. According to this opinion, they serve more as an ornament. The state of Romania, which is more interested in Serbian Vlasi (Romanians), required through the Federal Minister for National and Ethnic Minorities, Mr. Rasim Ljajic, to annul the results of the voting for the national council in Vršac because a group of the Romanians from the Eastern Serbia gathered around very influential Jon Cizmas, in the time of publishing of this report, a very close associate of Minister of Agriculture and the head of the Coalition of Vojvodina, Mr. Dragan Veselinov, PhD, left the session.

The Romanian priests of Banat, very divided among them, react in their manner. They, when it comes to the religious education, as well as the priests from other ethnic groups and churches, think that nobody fights better for the church than the priest himself. Some of the priests in their distrust in the political organizations stand for the attitude that the Community of Romanians was founded to divide the Romanians in Vojvodina. The heads of the Romanian organizations in Serbia are reproached for having converted and for having the communist or the JUL (Yugoslav Left Wing) past. In this context, related to the basic topic, some of the respondents notice that at present it suits the Romanians the least to be involved into the religious education because they cannot find the way out from their own problems.

It is noticeable that the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church use administration organs of their states to ensure their particular aims. In the attempt to re-Romanize the Eastern Serbia, the states, at the same time, realize the mutual competition through the churches, which thus act as the state churches. This main line of division is through mediation of many small ones; the coming of the bishop from Romania has essentially changed the division of the resources in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat. Among the priests (in the group interview in Vršac) there are statements that the new bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Vršac (who, since the episcopate has not been registered, in a way acts) illegally, has a diplomatic passport, a salary of 600 or 1000 EUR, that he takes \$50 per month from every priest that they allegedly receive from Romania and he keeps it for himself, that he took over the position of a cashier, that the suggestion that all income that enters the cashbox of the episcopate is registered came across such a resistance, etc. ("it's all right for him, he's got money, nobody controls him, he has his salary, he printed calendars and sold them for the price he determined, etc."). The division between the higher and the lower priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat is noticeable. With the coming of the bishop and the more aggressive ethnic

policy of Romania, the first were deprived of the privileges, while the others are kept under control either by flattering or by conditioning.

The influence of the state of Romania is more than clear, as well as the disturbances made by the Government of the Republic of Serbia under the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church ("the believers were worried because the children did not have religious education in schools, so the director called him, but the priest did not want to teach it illegally, because he did not have all the necessary papers to enter the school legally"). "As for the support of Romania, when they did not have the episcopate, they received books, magazines from Romania, now if they get something (and they do not), the bishop takes all." "In Torak a Romanian priest has \$820 received by the Romanian Government"-statements of the priests). Some respondents among the Romanian clergy notice that "the cooperation between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church is equal to zero, the biggest mind of all Serbs, Justin Popovic, says that the church does not have to be put on the national level." "The Serbian bishop of Vršac, Hrizostom (in the meantime he changed his episcopate- remark of Vladimir Ilić), ordered the priests not to give service together with the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church because the Romanian Orthodox Church violates the canon law. That is why there was a situation that "during the orthodox week the Catholic priest can go with the Orthodox one and the Romanian cannot". "The bishop Hrizostom says that due to the occurrence of the non-canon situation in the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church priests cannot have the services together (in both churches in Banatsko Novo Selo they have the same patron saints and the same Easter and this makes a very inconvenient situation -one procession goes this, the other, that way)". The problems are sometimes cruelly practical ("the Ministry requires that each church has its bank account and they had problems with it because the Romanian Orthodox Church was not recognized as the episcopate... ") According to the statements of the Romanian priests, "the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church asked for forming a committee for settling conflicts (but the Serbian Orthodox Church asked that this priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church is not in the committee)". This is violating of the law and the state is turned into a service provider of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Apparently, according to the law, the church does not have to allow founding the episcopate but only to register it, and the Romanian episcopate of Vršac is not registered so it is illegal. Unsatisfied by the relation of the "sister" Serbian Orthodox Church, the Romanian priests notice that the " Serbian Orthodox Church let 100 sects be registered in the territory of Serbia and they do not let the Romanian Orthodox Church have its episcopate", referring to the words of the bishop Hrizostom that "the Orthodox Church is unique in the Orthodox territory".

This leads to spoiling the ethnic relations ("there were some tensions after some articles appeared in the newspapers"), ("when a delegation comes to a village where there are two churches (here) then either one is showed (if a delegation is for the minorities rights then they show the worse

one and say it is the Romanian one and if it is any other delegation then they show the same church and say it is the Serbian one,...depending on the delegation). A part of the Romanian clergy deprived of the privileges by forming of the Vršac episcopate of the Romanian Orthodox Church, i.e. by a more aggressive ethnic policy of Romania towards Serbia, think that "some hotheads from Romania (some old ones) say that in Serbia live 2,000,000 of Vlasi which is a lie" and that although "the assimilation by the Serbian Orthodox Church, Ministry of Religions and Ministry of Education - exists" "you should ask Iliescu and the priests from Romania what they got) here) by founding an episcopate (nothing except what they already had)". Spoiling the relations between the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church ("before founding of the episcopate when they went to Belgrade and Novi Sad they did not have to announce themselves before the visit to the Ministry of Religions because the relations were excellent." During the conversations with the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church it was mentioned that they "had problems about the advertisement given by the Ministry for Minorities and they need a seal of the vicariate so they can not apply for it". It is claimed, "If it weren't for the communication of some priests, the Romanian Orthodox Church would not be present anywhere in the (western) Banat." To the question of the interviewers "Who forbids the Romanian priests to go to school?" it was answered, "The state neither forbids not approves. We talked with the state authorities which say that it is a church question (it turns out then that the Serbian Orthodox Church is an administering organ because it determines such things)". A distinct division is clear between the layman and clergy Romanian intelligence ("Democratic Community of Romanians, National council, Čizmaš, all think differently and all who think differently are Romanians but are not Orthodox"); ("many of the above mentioned regard their interests, all those cultural institutions don't give a dime for the Romanians") In the conditions of a poor life in poor Serbia there is a dissatisfaction by the distribution of the positions conditioned by a more aggressive policy of the Government from Bucharest which, like any other change, makes losers and winners. A part of the Banat Romanian clergy claims "the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has not found an eparchy here because of the people who live in Serbia". "That they "do not see the way out of it, they live illegally (the Romanian Orthodox Church here), the priests cannot solve all the problems because the church organs do not function", that "the believers thought that by founding the eparchy they could get aid from Romania, that there would be more discipline among the priests, and it turned out that now the priests are not regarded responsible to anybody, even to the council, regarding the number of the death, married,.. " that "the children attend the religious education in Serbian, they have the Serbian Orthodox Church program and the believers are not satisfied and they complained to the bishop and that he told them to bring the children to the church."

This entangled network of the state, ethnic, ecclesiastical and narrow-groups interests confirms that there is not ethnic, let alone the orthodox solidarity. The Serbian Orthodox Church and Romanian Orthodox Church are in service of their countries and the countries are in their service. In such a

situation the parts of the Romanian clergy from Banat have more or less (in)formal meetings. "Last year the clergy made a decision to function again as a vicariate (for the state of Serbia) and for Romania to be an eparchy, however, the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church would not accept it". The aggressive attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church meets the like answer in the Serbian Orthodox Church, "so the bishop Hrizostom won't receive even his friends among the Romanian priests when they come with the Romanian bishop". Such an attitude of Mr. Hrizostom "irritates" the Romanian clergy, regardless of its internal divisions. This episcopo ordered that the priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church do not serve together with the priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church (the reason is the appearance of the non-canon situation in the Romanian Orthodox Church). The additional problem is that the Serbian Orthodox Church requested that the Romanian bishop from Vršac be excluded from the committee for the dialogue, which his opponents in the Romanian Orthodox Church consider a non-diplomatic gesture. Even the opponents of Mr. Danilo see the Serbian Orthodox Church as one ministry in the Government of Serbia and for all Romanian priests in Serbia they say, "We live underground".

In the meantime the scramble for the donations that come from Romania intensifies, which is followed by an inevitable mutual gossiping ("Tibiscus (from Uzdin) has got so much money from Romania that he equipped his office and of course does what he does when he has got all that money. V...says that they all have got money from Romania, others say they haven't, but only some of them"); ("some have a lot of money they get from Romania and that's why they intrigue against others"; ("\$35,000 p.a. is the salary of the bishop (that he gets from Romania)").

It is evident that in 2003 the Romanian Orthodox Church, as a weaker one in Serbia, is moderating its attitude. "The Romanian bishop allegedly says that he is facing an accomplished fact. Now they have changed the name - they are not the eparchy of the Romanian church in Yugoslavia any more but the Romanian Orthodox Church in Vršac". The pressure of the state guided by the Serbian Orthodox Church makes it impossible to carry out the religious education semi-illegally ("one priest here taught religious education during the tutorial (so the children from all other classes came), children were interested but he wouldn't carry on because he didn't have the certificate"). ("The priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church go illegally to schools and teach religious education and the director pays him from some secret reserves). "In Vršac, one priest teaches religious education "under the counter" in Romanian." "He thinks that the priests, i.e. the teachers of religious education should be reported to the Serbian bishop and he should give them a permit to do that." He just knows that in Uzdin the education is in Romanian. In Begejci, the religious education is taught by a female teacher in Serbian."

The inner-ecclesiastic tension in the Romanian Orthodox Church is made more complex by the differences in wishes of the higher clergy and believers about the replacement of vicariate by the eparchy and in this sense it occurs as one of the obstacles for teaching religious education. Those

among the Romanians who are against the state policy of Romania and the Romanian Orthodox Church say that the Romanian church community cannot financially support one bishop, ("the priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church has 300 holly waters and the Serbian Orthodox Church priest has 2300 ones and this means much more money. The Romanian believers are poorer. Their opinion is that the Romanian priests have no benefit of the eparchy although the believers request the eparchy.") The condemnation of the policy of Bucharest sometimes have an ambiguous character ("the Patriarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church should have known that the Serbian Orthodox Church would not verify their decision, the Romanian Orthodox Church presents the Serbian Orthodox Church before the accomplished fact (it was the war in 1999) and thought it would accept it immediately"), ("the Romanian Orthodox Church entered into the conflict with the Serbian Orthodox Church "-the statement of the high Romanian priests). It is important that in the fight for the ethnic control of the Eastern Serbia, which the Romanians from Banat pay the price for, the Serbian Orthodox Church said it would not cancel the relations with the vicariate but only with, allegedly, irregular body of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Serbia. As the vicariate the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat can carry out the religious education. The faction that relies on the policy of the Government in Bucharest and the Romanian Orthodox Church ("through the Community of the Romanians in Yugoslavia, through the Ministry of Religions, through the church this was also an attempt to influence Vlasi, but this influence was a minimal one"). The critic of Bucharest among one faction of the Romanians in Banat goes as far as they claim that "the national rights are not jeopardized by Serbia but from outside" that "the bishop looks like everything but the church", that "the vicariate exists legally but there is a pressure not to function like that (the pressure from Romania)", that "now dictatorship rules (of the Democratic Party) in everything, for example administration". (The statements after establishing the eparchy of the Romanian priests deprived of the privileges in the group interview in Vršac) "About the civil rights: if we talk about something which does not please the will of the Romanian state, then there is a pressure that we are illegal, Romania makes pressure on us to tell that we have no rights, but we do have them although we do not use them (the scapegoat). "As citizens of Serbia and Montenegro we have two masters in certain distance but none of them supports us".

The general impression is that the Romanians in Banat more and more look like pawns abused in skirmishing between the two governments, two states, and two churches. There is a lack of knowledge about the internal political base of at least partly changed foreign affairs policy of Romania towards the Eastern Serbia, and without it the analysis cannot be complete. All the parties in conflict in the Romanian community agree that "this situation contributes a lot to the assimilation" and some believe that "Romania thinks everything will calm down by the time and that the Serbian Orthodox Church will accept the episcopate". According to the respondents, the archbishop from Timisoara and the Patriarch from Bucharest talk out the allegedly hesitating bishop from Vršac of going back to Romania.

Generally speaking, the Romanian children in Banat learn the religious education in Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian language, with the exception mentioned before. The conflict motivated by direct financial interests of certain factions of layman and clerical intellectual elite are incomparably less important than the fact that the Romanians in Banat serve as pawns in a latent conflict between Belgrade and Bucharest over the ethnic character of the eastern Serbia. In the meantime, the Romanians in Banat disappear in Vojvodina more rapidly than any other group, with the exception of perhaps the Yugoslav and Croatian ones. Excluding the Romanian Orthodox Church from the list of recognized churches permitted to teach religious education in state schools, is one of the signals that in the Balkans there is no religious, as well as ethnic, solidarity. "The case of the Romanian Orthodox Church" very often shows collusion of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the administration organs, but also the tensions inside the latter which are easily pacified when facing the ethnic competitors. In the meantime, Vojvodina easily becomes a two-national, Serbian-Hungarian region. No third group reaches 3 per cent of its population according to the results of the last census.