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SMALL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract. *Most of small religious communities and groups registered in the Republic of Macedonia belong mostly to the protestant churches, while a smaller number to the islamic and Hindu religion. Except for the Evangelist-methodist church, which has existed for more than a hundred years, other small religious communities and groups are of recent origin.*

Small religious communities and groups are classified into two groups. The first group consists of the protestant communities which have existed before the disintegration of the former Yugoslav community, while the second one comprises those which are registered in the Police Department after the Republic of Macedonia became an independent state. Thus, the following small religious communities and groups fall into the first group: the Evangelist-methodist church, the Christian Adventist church, the Baptist church, the Christian community of the Jehova Witnesses, the Church of Christ-the Brothers, and the Pentacos Church. The others belong to the Evangelist church, the Congreshan church, the Prachristian church, the New Apostol Church, the General Board of the Christian Adventist Church, the Christian community-the Lighthouse, the Vajsnovska religious community, the Islamic thericats and the Islamic bectash communities, and Harry Chrishna and Satia Sai-Center.

Concerning the number of the believers, religious objects, priests and religious clarks, these religious communities are expressively smaller than the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community and the Roman Catholic church. The small religious communities and groups in the Republic of Macedonia have about 3.000 believers, together with the passive members (children and old people). Concerning the activities of the small religious communities and groups in the view of their active participation into the religious works and rituals, it can be stated that they are more active than the larger religious communities. That is especially expressed in the publishing and informing activity, missionary, visiting of the believers at their homes, care of the old people and children, development of the humanitarian activities, travellings abroad

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and the permanent visits of their hierarchy chiefs from their centres in Europe, America and Asia, distribution of printed materials, giving religious lectures and other church work.

According to the data of the 1994 Census of the Populations, Households, Dwellings and Agricultural Holdings in the Republic of Macedonia,¹ prepared and realized by the Statistical Office and the Census Commission, with international experts and the financial support of the European Commission through the PHARE program and the European Council, and in the presence of the International Census Observing Commission, the results confessional belonging are as follows.

From the total population of 1,935,034², 1,884,031 had declared their religion as being the following:

1. Orthodox	1,283,689	or	66,3%
2. Moslem	581,203	or	30,0%
3. Catholic	7,405	or	0,4%
4. Protestant	1,215	or	0,1%
5. Jewish	288	or	0,0%
6. Atheist	5,641	or	0,3%
7. Other religion	2,786	or	0,2%
8. Unknown	1,804	or	1,1%
9. Christian	28,400	or	4,9%

In the Republic of Macedonia 19 (nineteen) churches, religious communities and religious groups legally exist and act of which the Macedonian Orthodox Church predominates. This is due to the number of worshippers (1,355,415, with seven dioceses in Macedonia), religious structures (about 1,700 churches, monasteries and other structure), as well as about 70 churches and church communities in three dioceses, one in Australia, one in the USA and Canada and one in the West-European countries). The Islamic community and that of the Catholic church is also numerous, the Jewish community is one of the oldest in Macedonia, then the Protestant church and some other small religious communities and groups are present in the state.

Lately, especially after the democratic elections in the Republic of Macedonia, there has been a greater presence and strengthening of the religious communities and small religious groups. The most numerous are the religious communities of the Protestant church but there are also religious communities of the Moslem and Indy religion. Due to

¹ The data of the 1991 Census about the confessional membership of the population in Macedonia are approximate, because some of the Albanian population in Macedonia, which is almost wholly Islamic, guided by their nationalistic parties, abstained from the official Census. However, according to the data of the 1944 Census of the Nationality, 433,013 or 22.66% of the population in the Republic of Macedonia is Albanian.

² The total population is slightly lower than the official total population of the country by about 10,000 inhabitants, because the nonenumerated population of the municipality of Debar (the town is near the Macedonian-Albanian border) is excluded. No estimation was made for that population neither according to the mother tongue, religious affiliation or citizenship.

the duration of their existence and registration, the religious communities in the Republic of Macedonia may be divided into two groups. The first group includes those religious communities which existed and were registered before the disintegration of the Yugoslav community (the SFR of Yugoslavia), while those which exist and are registered with the Ministry of Internal Affairs after the Republic of Macedonia became an independent, sovereign, separate, democratic and free state belong to the second group.

The following churches belong to the first group:

- the Evangelical-Methodist Church
- the Christian-Adventist Church - the Seventh Day Adventist
- the Christian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses
- the Baptist Church
- the Church of Christ's Brothers, and
- the Pentecostal Church.

The following churches belong to the second group:

- the Congregational Church
- the Head Committee of the Christian-Adventist Church
- the Evangelical Church
- the Pra-Christian Church
- the New Apostolic (Evangelical) Church
- the Islam Taricates Community
- the Islam Bectash Community
- the (Ancient) Vishna Religious Community - "Hare Krishna")
- the Satya Sai baba - Centre (Universal life)

Macedonia is religious by a democratic country, where side by side with the Macedonian Orthodox Church other Christian confessions (the Catholic Church, as well as various Protestant denominations), then Islam and Judaism coexist. In the period from 1945-1991 religion in Macedonia was formally allowed to some extent, but it was always under state control, while after 1991 religious communities gained total freedom.

In that period (1945-1991) freedom at religion in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as in the other republics of Yugoslavia differed greatly, which compared similarly with other Eastern European socialist countries. However, changes that have taken place in the Eastern and Western parts of the world, with the liberation from political oppression, freedom of conscience and religion, integrational processes and other contacts are now a reality.

After the democratic elections on September 8, 1991 and after the new Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia went into effect religious life and freedom of religion got a constitutional basis. Thus, according to Article 19 of the Constitution: freedom of religious confession is guaranteed: and the right to express one's faith freely and publicly, individually or with others is guaranteed.

The Constitution also states that the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious communities and groups in the Republic of Macedonia are separate from the state and equal before the law, and that the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious communities and groups are free to establish schools and other social and

charitable institutions through a procedure regulated by law.³

Taking into consideration these determinations, the importance of religion, as well as the number of religious communities and religious groups in the Republic of Macedonia, the need for a new law, which would regulate all questions connected with freedom of religion, appeared.

One of the main aims of preparing such a Law is to regulate the relations within the sphere of the confessions in the Republic of Macedonia, according to civilisational achievements and international standards which regulate this subject.⁴ Thus, it is expected that this Law will regulate the freedom of religious confession and its expression within the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other churches, religious communities and groups. The new Law is further intended to regulate their registration, operation, religious instruction and religious schools.

In addition a Law for the establishment of important religious holidays, prepared by the Ministry of Labour of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is also in procedure. In the last few years, this Ministry has set aside, as a non-working day one day for Christmas and one for Easter for the Christians, and one day for Bayram and Ramazan, for the Moslems.

According to the number of worshippers, religious structures, priests and religious administrators, the so-called small religious communities and religious groups in the Republic of Macedonia are considerably smaller than the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community and the Catholic Church. However, they are more active in publishing religious materials, missionary work, visiting their fellow believers in their homes, care for old people and children, developing humanitarian activities, recruiting new believers, organizing seminaries, meetings and other religious manifestations.

In the Republic of Macedonia the so-called small religious communities do not have schools for the training and education of preachers; therefore they send their students to school and faculty centres out of state. Then, the graduate students are immediately employed as preachers, professionals, or laymen. They are very active and often travel and attend various international meetings held both in the state and abroad.

Concerning interconfessional coexistence and collaboration among the Christian churches, it should be mentioned that the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church maintains good relations with all existing Christian churches and other religious communities. This is especially realized in the joint work on the revision of the Macedonian translation of the Bible. The translation of the New Testament into the standard literary Macedonian language, published by the British and Foreign Bible Society began immediately after World War II and appeared in 1951. In 1990 the Bible was printed in its entirety in the Macedonian language by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

This paper also refers to the role, characteristics and historical development of a certain number of religious communities which are to be found in the Republic of Macedonia. That concerns, first of all, the Evangelical-Methodist Church, the Christian-

³ The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, NIP "Magazin" 21, Skopje, 1991.

⁴ (Draft) Law for religious communities and religious groups, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 1997.

Adventist Church, the Cristian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Baptist Church.

1. THE EVANGELICAL-METHODIST CHURCH

The Evangelical-Methodist Church in the Republic of Macedonia is an independent church and is a part of the World General Chirstian Church, believing that God, as the Master of the church, calls for all Christians to be together in the spheres of church life. It is organized and works within the frames of the World Association of the Methodist Church, the number of its believers being 50 million on a global scale.

The first Evangelical movements on the Balkan Peninsula, as well as in Macedonia, date from the previous century. These were the first Protestant activities on a religious basis when Macedonia was under Ottoman rule. In fact, Evangelical activity in Macedonia began with the opening of "Rofert's College" in Constantinople (Istanbul) in the mid 1800's, a round 1850 to be more exact. Evangelical missionaries of the Protestant college spread throughout Macedonia, in the beginning their activities centered on visiting prisons and on negotiations with Turkish officials for the release of prisoners. Thanks to a number of Evangelical missionaries led by Dr. Albert Long, many prisoners were released Turkish prisons. The missionary activity of the Evangelists in this period also included the delivery of sermons and the distribution of the Bible and other Christian literature.

With spreading of the Evangelical religion and its help given on the territory of Macedonia, a few hospitals, elementary and high schools, such as the High schools in Thessalonika (Solun) and Bitola, were established. In fact, the Evangelical mission started in Thessalonika and began to spred to gruner part of Macedonia, where Evangelical church communities were soon organized in the villages of the Strumica and Radovish district, as well as in some towns.

The activity of the legendary Miss Helen Stone, who was kidnapped by the detachment of Jane Sandanski in Pirin Macedonia in order to call the world's attention to the activities of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Liberation Organization, is also worth mentioning. This case served as a starting point for the publication of number of articles all over the world, and for writing of the screenplay for the famous Macedonian film - Miss Stone, which has been shown all over the world during the last twenty years.

The first Conference of the Methodist Church in Macedonia was held on May 11 and 12, 1895⁵. After the Balkan Wars and the division of Macedonia among Greece, Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as after the First World War, the activity of the missionaries of the Methodist Church on the territory of Macedonia became more difficult because politics was interwoven into their work. In that period the Evangelical missions who were working in Macedonia joined with the missions of the Methodist Church in northern Yugoslavia in 1922 at the annual conference in Vrbas. Since then the united church in Macedonia has been called the Evangelical-Methodist Church.

Today, the Evangelical-Methodist Church in Macedonia consists of eleven religious units (churches) located in Skopje, Prilep, Bitola, Kochani, Radovish, the village of

⁵ The data is provided by the Evangelical-Methodist Church in the Republic of Macedonia, 1997.

Raklish (the region of Radovich), Strumica, as well as the villages of Veljusa, Murtino, Monospitovo and Koleshino. The preachers who work in the Evangelical-Methodist Church are employed in the churches, and they give sermons, do the baptizing, perform marital and funeral ceremonies. The preachers are educated in the centres of the Church, mainly in Austria, Germany and England, because the Evangelical-Methodist Church in the Republic of Macedonia is a part of the Conference of Middle and Southern Europe, with its headquarters in Zurich, which has about 2,500 believers.

Concerning the activities of the Evangelical-Methodist Church, its good cooperation, with the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other churches and religious communities should be emphasized. Within the Church Sunday school for children special programs for young married couples and choir are organized. The Church also publishes a monthly magazine "The Way of Life", a women's magazine "Charisma" and the annual calendar with quotations from the Bible.

2. THE CHRISTIAN-ADVENTIST CHURCH

The Christian-Adventist Church in the Republic of Macedonia is a part of the International Adventist family, with a joint head office in Washington, the USA.

Adventism in Macedonia began to spread at the end of the 19th century, as a second Protestant movement, after the Evangelical one. In 1880 Mr. Andreas Zefrid, as a representative of the British and Foreign Bible Association from America together with his wife arrived in the city of Skopje. He was the first Adventist preacher, while his son Johannes, who was born in Macedonia, was the first student to enroll at the Adventist Theological Faculty in the City of Friedensau, Germany.

While the preacher Zefrid was in Skopje in 1880,⁶ Dr Garabeth Yeram, a doctor of medicine, Armenian by nationality, also started his Adventist activity in Strumica. He worked there several years as a doctor, with the military where he did charity work for the poor. Dr Garabeth Yeram lived in Macedonia for about thirty years. During that time he made many friends in Strumica and Radovich, where he had spread Adventism with the help of a young group of Adventist. He is considered the founder of the first Adventist Church in Thessalonika.

Dr Garabeth Yeram had impressed a larger group of young people in the region of Strumica, who accepted the Adventist religion. Among them was a young teacher from Strumica, Miss Atina Dimova. According to the documents of the Christian-Adventist Church in Macedonia, in 1990 Atina Dimova had decided to leave the teaching profession and to take up medical work. That same year she was baptized according to the Adventist rules and then she started to study medicine at the Adventist Medical Faculty in Battle Creek in the USA. Then in 1907 she returned from the USA where she was one of the most respected Adventists of the Adventist Church in Skopje during her life.

In 1923 the Adventist Church in Macedonia was established by the preacher Albin Moshnik from Slovenia who had come to Macedonia and baptized seven persons according to the Adventist rules in the city of Prilep. That marked the beginning of

⁶ The data is provided by the Christian-Adventist Church in the Republic of Macedonia.

organized life of the official Adventist Church.

In the period between World War II and the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991, i.e. the period when the Republic of Macedonia was a part of the SFR of Yugoslavia, the Christian-Adventist Church was organized on the level of a Secretariat as a part of the Southern Church District with its headquarters in Nish. After 1991 it was constituted as an independent organizational unit, headed by its Committee but within the International Adventist Church, closely connected with the headquarters in London and Washington. However, due to certain subjective and objective reasons, there was a misunderstanding between the preachers and the believers of the Christian-Adventist Church, and the Churches divided into two religious communities: one called the Christian-Adventist Church - the Seventh Day Adventist, led by the preacher Georgi Trajkovski and the other, the Head Committee of the Christian-Adventist Church led by the president Blagoja Nikolovski. The separation of and antagonism between the two groups, however, seem to have been the result of unsolved legal and property questions, as well as financial reasons.

The Christian-Adventist Church in the Republic of Macedonia is organized in about ten church communities. The services are performed by five or six professional preachers from Macedonia. It is supposed that the total number of believers, together with their families, is about 400, out of which 300 are baptized according to the Adventist rules.

Concerning the activities of the Adventist Church, it should be mentioned that the charitable organization ADRA, which is a part of the International organization ADRA, works within the Church. Its activities consist of collecting and giving help to the needy, especially to the poor and surviving families of various disasters. Also, the publishing house "The Signs of the Time" and the corresponding Biblical School work within the frame of the Christian-Adventist Church in the Republic of Macedonia.

3. THE BAPTIST CHURCH

The Baptist Church is one of the smaller religious communities in the Republic of Macedonia. It belongs to the group of Protestant Churches and to the International Association of Baptists as an independent, autonomous church of the Macedonian Baptists.

According to some incomplete data, the first Baptists in Macedonia, arrived at the end of the last and the beginning of this century, being active, at first in the bigger city centres, such as Thessalonika, Bitola and other places. Today, the Baptist Church has a temple of worship in Radovish, which is legal and has existed for quite some time, and one in Skopje, located in private owned house which had been bought ten years ago on the name of the Baptist Church, and was turned into a church where Dr. Ivan Grozdanov is the main preacher. Dr. Grozdanov comes from an old Baptist family; his father Strahil Grozdanov is considered to be one of the founders of the Baptist Church in Macedonia. He was a preacher for forty years, and his grandfather had done same job. The number of worshippers in the Republic of Macedonia is considered to be about a hundred.

The publishing activity of the Baptist Church is insignificant. They often receive literature from abroad, and from time to time they publish the magazine "Rainbow" in Macedonian. Among other activities of the believers of the Baptist Church is translation

work. Church and religious books are translated and later distributed among the believers in the Macedonian language in order to familiarise the members with their religion.

4. THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

In the Republic of Macedonia there also exists the Christian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses. This religion has been present on this territory since 1930 when the first group of Jehovah's Witnesses established and held a gathering in the village of Veljusa, in the region of Strumica. Then, after the World War II in 1959 a gathering was also held in the village of Koleshino (in the region of Strumica), while in Skopje the first group was established in 1969 and the first gathering was held in 1976.⁷

According to some data the Christian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Macedonia has about 200 active members. They have registered religious structures in Skopje, Kochani and Koleshino, and non-registered points in other cities and villages in the country. The services in the religious structure of these communities are performed only by laymen, as they do not have professional preachers. It should be mentioned that Jehovah's Witnesses serve in the Army of Macedonia without their employing weapons.

One of their greater activities is publishing work. They distribute the law to homes and other objects. They translate their literature into English and other languages, while the magazine "The Guard Tower" is printed in the Macedonian language.

It is believed that the Christian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Macedonia is considered to be very mysterious and a kind of confined religious group. Its members often are aggressive in the spreading of their ideas when they visit homes, schools and other public places.

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Today, in the Republic of Macedonia the so-called small religious communities, such as the Church of Christ's Brothers, the Congregational Church, the Pentacostal Church, the Evangelical Church, the Pra-Christian Church and the New Apostolic Church, which are part of the Protestant churches, exist as of recently. They are registered and legally function on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The number of their believers is very small and ranges from 5 to 50 members.

Together with the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, the Christian religious communities and religious groups are members of the Biblical Association of the Republic of Macedonia through which a number of editions are printed. Such is the case with the Bible printed in the Macedonian language and used by all the Christian communities and religious groups.

Concerning the Islam religious communities, besides the Islam community of the Republic of Macedonia, the largest is the Taricates religious community - Dervishi, where

⁷ All data has been given by a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses.

about 40 Gypseys are members, while the number of believers of the Islam Bectash community is about 50 believers, whose headquarters is in Tetovo.

In addition, the Vishna religious community - Hare Krishna and the Satya Sai Baba - Centre have been reistered very recently in the Republic of Macedonia as a part of the Oriental religion. The number of believers in these two religious communities is very small (10 to 20 believers).

МАЛИТЕ ВЕРСКИ ЗАЕДНИЦИ И РЕЛИГИОЗНИТЕ ГРУПИ ВО РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА

Slave Nikolovski-Katin

Pogol emi ot broj od mali te verski zaednici i religi ozni grupi registri rani vo Republ ika Makedoni ja im pri pa_ aat prete` no na protestantski te crkvi , a mal broj na i slamskata i na indu religi jat a. Osven Evangel sko-metodi sti -kata crkva, koja vo Makedoni ja dejstvava pove, e od 100 godi ni , postoeveto na drugi te mali verski zaednici , odn. religi ozni grupi e od ponovo vreme.

Mali te verski zaednici i religi ozni te grupi se del at na dve grupi . Vo prvata grupa spa_ aat protestantski te zaednici koi postojat od pred raspa_ aveto na porane_ nata jugosl ovenska zaedni ca, a vo vtorata grupa spa_ aat oni e religi ozni grupi koi se formirani i pri javeni vo Ministerstvoto za vnatrerni raboti po osamost ojuvaveto na Republ ika Makedoni ja. Taka, vo prvata grupa spa_ aat sledni - te mali verski zaednici : Evangel sko-metodi sti -kata crkva, Hrist i janskata adventi sti -ka crkva, Bapti sti -kata crkva, Hrist i janskata zedni ca na Ehovi - ni te svedoci , Hrist ovata crkva-Bra_ a i Pent akosnata crkva. Vo vtorata grupa, pak, spa_ aat : Evangel skata crkva, Kongr_ anskata crkva, Prahrist i janskata crkva, Novata apost ol ska crkva, Gl aven odbor na Hrist i janskata adventi sti -ka crkva, Hrist i janskata zaedni ca-Svet i l ni k, Vaj_ navskata verska zaedni ca, I slamskata tari kat na zaedni ca, I slamskata bekt a_ ka zaedni ca, Hari Kri_ na i Sat ja Sai -Cent ar.

Po brojot na verni ci te, verski te objekti , sve_ teni ci te i verski te slu` be ni ci ovi e verski zaednici se i zrazi to pomali od Makedonskata pravosl avna crkva, I slamskata zaedni ca i Rimokat oli -kata crkva. Mali te verski zaednici vo Republ ika Makedoni ja imaat okol u 3.000 verni ci , zaedno so pasi vnot o -l enstvo (mali te deca i stari te lu_ e). Dokol ku pak, ni vnot o dejstvavave se gl eda od aspekt na akti vnot o u-estvo vo verski te raboti i obredi , toga_ za ni v mo` e da se istakne deka se mnogu poakti vni od pogol emi te verski zaednici . Toa e osobeno i zrazeno vo i zdava-kata i i nformati vnata dejnost , mi si onerstvoto, poset uvaveto na verni ci te vo ni vni te domovi , gol emata gri` a za stari te lu_ e i decata, razvi vaveto na humani tarnata dejnost , -estite patuvava vo stranstvo i katadnevnoto pri mavena ni vni hi erarhi ski stare_ i ni od ni vni te centri vo Evropa, Ameri ka i Azi ja, steknuvaveto so novi verni ci , rasturaveto na pe-ateni raboti , odr` u- vaveto na verska pouka i drugi crkovni raboti .