

Orthodox Diaspora in Europe: An attempt to describe a range of old and new issues

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1. INTRODUCTION: NEW “DIASPORA” CHURCHES

The beginning of the 21st century is a time of profound and multiple changes all over the world. To many, the world’s future looks full of political, social and economic uncertainties. Even as values such as democracy, freedom and security are widely accepted and proclaimed, contemporary threats and challenges are making people and countries feel more insecure and vulnerable than before. The changing dynamic of geopolitical power, and the domination of a liberal market economy on a global scale, are creating new social, economic and political challenges. Obviously, these challenges have direct implications on both the ecclesial and the ecumenical landscape of our times.

As a consequence, intra-national or inter-national migration flows increase the number of new “diaspora” churches in all countries and regions of the world. While the multiplication of Orthodox churches all over the world was a relatively known ecclesial development throughout the 20th century, today the presence of many churches of African origin in Northern countries as well as the spectacular increase of Orthodox communities in many European countries is a rather new and rapidly growing reality.

Churches for migrants, for communities in diaspora¹, have always existed; however a “qualitatively” new trend can now be discerned. This is particularly visible in large cities, where migrant churches provide cultural space, an affirmation of identity, the opportunity for religious expression, but also a haven and home for the most vulnerable, offering material support. Churches in diaspora, including the Orthodox, create radically new intra-ecclesial² and inter-ecclesial dynamics which very naturally lead to new ecclesiological and ecumenical questions³.

¹ The significance of “churches in diaspora” differs greatly among churches and denominations, depending on their ecclesial self-understanding.

² According to Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, to quote here only one voice describing the new

Diaspora experience modifies both the “host” and the “guest” churches, and their customary theological or ecclesiological approaches. This is shown by the questions raised by migrant Christians, the networks of multicultural ministries, as well as the new possibilities for ecumenical relations and dialogue.

Reference to the broader reality of diaspora is made here, as a preface, because this study intends to offer a tentative picture of the present situation and challenges in Orthodox diaspora. The latter has, to a very large extent, followed the general pattern of dispersed people and evolved very rapidly, particularly after the political changes in Eastern Europe, in the early 90s. This first part of the study will have a descriptive character, trying to demonstrate the old and new problems faced by the Orthodox Churches as a result of their dispersion all over the world⁴.

2. ORTHODOX DIASPORA: AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHALLENGE⁵

Indeed, one of the remarkable developments in the history of the Orthodox churches is the dispersion of Orthodox Christians –in different periods of history and for a variety of reasons– to the West. In fact, emigration from Asia Minor, Greece, the Balkans, the

perspectives and opportunities for the Orthodox in diaspora: *“The diaspora constitutes an opportunity for us Orthodox to transcend our geographical limitations, our nationalism, our ethnic exclusivism, in at least two ways. First, through emigration Orthodox believers of varied national backgrounds now find themselves living side by side to an unprecedented extent. This challenges us to get to know each other across national boundaries, and so to reaffirm the universality of Orthodoxy, its catholic dimension. Second, the establishment of Orthodoxy in the West makes it possible for us to share our Orthodox vision of Christian truth with the non-Orthodox world around us. We are being invited to rediscover the missionary vocation of Orthodoxy. In both these ways the fact of the diaspora is a call to dialogue -- dialogue that is both inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian -- and not just a call but a compelling invitation, a divine provocation.”* Kallistos (Ware), Bishop of Diokleia, *The Witness of the Orthodox Church*, In: *The Ecumenical Review*, January 2000 (paper presented at the 10th Orthodox Conference in Western Europe, Paray-le-Monial, 30 October-1 November 1999).

³ Two examples, certainly among many other, to illustrate the new ecclesial and ecumenical challenges: (a) Many observers in the ecumenical circles underline that the crisis within the Anglican Communion is primarily due to divergent theological positions on ethical matters, but one should not forget that the primacy of Canterbury is challenged by the churches in the South and that the jurisdiction over the African communities in diaspora, both in the USA and in Europe, also constitutes one of the major underlying issues. (b) In the Netherlands, migrant communities of Lutheran confession did not manage to join neither the Protestant Church in the Netherlands nor the National Council of Churches in the country; they have created parallel ecclesial structures and an independent ecumenical organization “SKIN: Together Churches in the Netherlands”. Similar cases could be identified and reported in most of the European countries.

⁴ The study will only deal with the Eastern (Byzantine) Orthodox Churches and their diasporas. Oriental Orthodox Churches too (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Indian, Ethiopian and Eritrean) have large and growing diasporas in many countries.

⁵ A selective and only indicative bibliography on the matter would include:

Actes de la Commission Interorthodoxe Préparatoire (Novembre 1990), Chambésy, 1990. Allen, Joseph, *Thoughts of Metropolitan Philip on Missiology*, In: <http://www.antiochian.org/node/17687>.

Daldas, A.N., *Le Patriarcat oecuménique de Constantinople et le statut canonique de la “diaspora” orthodoxe de langue grecque: le cas de la France*, Athènes: Epektasis, Coll. Bibliothèque nomo-canonique 6, 2001.

Middle East and Russia created a sizable Orthodox presence in Western Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. People from virtually all the traditional Orthodox lands –Albanians, Arabs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Russians, Serbians, Ukrainians– established in the Western world. The traditional ecclesial and cultural borders of Orthodoxy were profoundly modified. Millions of Orthodox –generally known and usually defined as “Eastern”– began a new life, in most of the cases on a permanent basis, in countries in the West.

Obviously, this historical development had consequences on Orthodox ecclesial life and organization. A number of complex issues deeply influenced the search of pastoral and canonical solutions to what became one of the most serious ecclesial and ecclesiological problems. Therefore, “Orthodox diaspora” was included in the list of subjects for consideration by the Pan-orthodox Council. New canonical structures for Orthodox diaspora, together with the ways of granting autonomy and autocephaly were the three major ecclesiological challenges included in the agenda of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church.

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, presiding the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission in 1990 as Metropolitan of Chalcedon, described the imperative of a canonical solution to the problem of diaspora, as follows: “It is hardly necessary to underline the importance of the question of diaspora. In a final analysis, the very credibility and dignity of the Orthodox Church is at stake. Every Christian, particularly those members of other churches and confessions who are familiar with Orthodox theology, ask the question: how is it possible that so many ‘canonical’ jurisdictions exist and coexist in various regions, with a multitude of bishops, despite of the fact that

Damaskinos (Papandreou), Metropolitan of Switzerland, Orthodox Diaspora – Report to the Interorthodox Preparatory Commission (1990), In: *Ορθοδοξία και Κόσμος*, Katerini, Tertios, 1993, pp. 299-334 (in Greek).

Hilarion (Alfeyev), Bishop of Vienna and Austria, Orthodoxy in a new Europe: Problems and Perspectives, In: *Religion in Eastern Europe* 24, 3 (June 2004), pp. 18-26.

Kiskhovsky, Leonid, Orthodoxy in America: Diaspora or Church? In: *Religion in Eastern Europe* 24, 3 (June 2004), pp. 35-46.

Meyendorff, John, Mission, Unity, Diaspora, In: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 17/1 (1972), pp 41-50.

Maximos, Metropolitan of Sardeis, The Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Orthodox Church, Thessaloniki, 1991.

Panteleimon (Rodopoulos), Metropolitan of Tyrol and Serention, An Ecclesiological and Canonical View of the Orthodox Diaspora, In: *Μελέται* (Collection of his works) Vol. I, Thessaloniki, 1993.

Pheidias, Vlassios, Ecumenical Throne and Orthodox Diaspora, In : *Ορθόδοξος Μαρτυρία και Σκέψις* art. 19, 1979 (in Greek).

Paul, Archbishop of Karelia and Finland, Suggestions for Solutions to the Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora, In: *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 1979, vol. 23, n°3-4, pp. 186-204.

Papathomas, G. D, Essai de bibliographie (ad hoc) pour l'étude des questions de l'autocéphalie, de l'autonomie et de la diaspora : (contribution bibliographique à l'étude des questions : essai préliminaire), Athènes : Epektasis, Coll. Bibliothèque nomo-canonique 7, 2000.

Papathomas, G.D., Le droit canonique d'appel (ekkliton) au sein de l'Eglise orthodoxe, In: *Année canonique* 48, 2006, 219-233.

fundamental principles of the Orthodox Church categorically forbid such a practice? It is only because of ‘economy’ that the situation was tolerated for a long period. However, it cannot continue *ad eternam*, particularly in view of the Holy and Great Council of our Church. We must look for a solution to this problem in conformity with our ecclesiology and not in response to apparent opportunities”⁶.

The importance given to the canonical implications of Orthodox diaspora can also be seen through the quantity and the quality of the reports written by Orthodox Churches. Indeed, contributions to the theme of “Orthodox diaspora”, as an agenda item of the Holy and Great Council, were prepared and submitted to the Secretariat for the Preparation of the Council by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Romanian Patriarchate, the Church of Greece and the Church of Poland. Later on, the Moscow Patriarchate responded to the contribution of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Romanian Patriarchate offered a second contribution. All these studies were translated by the Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council and constituted folders (in Greek, Russian, and French) which were submitted to participants in the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission in 1990 and 1993⁷.

Because of the ecclesiological importance of the matter, the second part of this study will focus on the search for canonical solutions and the emerging convergence within Orthodoxy.

3. SOURCES OF COMPLEXITY

(a) History. Before entering the canonical implications of the new ecclesial reality of Orthodox diaspora, here is an attempt to offer a preliminary account of the complexity created by a number of successive parameters. Each and all of them have influenced the situation and have their role in the search for pastoral and canonical solutions.

The dispersion of Orthodox faithful all over the world has followed successive waves due to socio-political and economic developments at different moments of history.

Under the difficult political circumstances of the Ottoman domination, Orthodox populations resettled over a wide area inside and outside the empire. To give only one example, over 80,000 Greek families moved into the territories of the Habsburg Empire⁸. As a result of the continuous exodus of Orthodox Christians from Ottoman territories, important Greek colonies –mainly of merchants, but also of intellectuals, scholars and

⁶ *Discours du Président*, in Actes de la Commission Interorthodoxe Préparatoire, pp. 14-15.

⁷ Cf. Damaskinos (Papandreou), Metropolitan of Switzerland, op. cit., p. 299; a summary of the presentation in French, In: *Textes de la Commission interorthodoxe préparatoire*, Episkepsis No 452, pp. 13-14.

⁸ One of the problems inherited from this period is the complex situation in Hungary, where parishes belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Russian, Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches coexist and there is a serious dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church over the ownership of St Georges’ cathedral in Budapest.

students— were founded in Trieste, Venice, Livorno, Naples, and Marseilles. Other European cities, such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, London, Liverpool, and Paris, also received sizeable Orthodox populations.

Since World War I, millions of East Europeans were dispersed in various areas where Orthodox communities had never existed before. The Russian Revolution in 1917 provoked a massive political emigration, predominantly to Western Europe and particularly France⁹, while the Asia Minor catastrophe in 1922-23 led to a dramatic acceleration in the movement of Greek Orthodox westwards.

In 1922 Patriarch Tikhon appointed Metropolitan Evlogy to head the émigré churches, with residence in Paris. The authority of the metropolitan was challenged, however, by a group of bishops who had left their sees in Russia, retreating with the White armies, and who had found refuge in Sremski-Karlovci as guests of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Despite several attempts at reconciliation, the “Synod” of Karlovci, proclaiming its firm attachment to the principle of tsarist monarchy, refused to recognize any measure taken by the reestablished patriarchate of Moscow. This group transferred its headquarters to New York and is also known as the “Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia” (ROCOR). Recently the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (ROCOR) proclaimed their unity and full communion. However, this very fortunate development did not solve the problem of parallel jurisdictions in diaspora. In the USA, for example, parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate run parallel to the structures of the ROCOR, without forgetting the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) which was granted autocephaly by the Moscow Patriarchate in order to ensure Orthodox unity in the Americas.

From this same period, an “Ukrainian Orthodox Church in exile” finds itself in a similarly irregular canonical situation, particularly in the USA and Canada. In this case, not only a serious complication is added to Orthodox churches and communities in diaspora, but also back in the country where parallel jurisdictions coexist today in Ukraine, one of them representing Ukrainians in diaspora. This is a totally new form of ecclesiological complexity for the Orthodox, since a diaspora community is at the origin of a parallel jurisdiction in its own country of origin.

After World War II, economic reasons led a very numerous Greek, Serbian and Arab emigration to Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. European countries invited foreign workers to reconstruct their industry and rebuild their economy. Only a few years after the massive arrival of these faithful to their new countries, new pastoral and ecclesial structures were inaugurated, most of them evolving into well organized dioceses —as, for example, the dioceses of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Great Britain, Germany,

⁹ Russian Orthodox diaspora included eminent clergy, theologians, and Christian intellectuals, such as Bulgakov, Berdyayev, Evdokimov, Zenkovsky, who established in Paris the theological school of St Sergius, of great repute, but also contributed significantly to Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement.

France, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, to mention only the European reality¹⁰.

These ecclesial structures created a particularly promising and productive ecumenical potential, but also obliged the Orthodox Church to consider seriously the ecclesiological challenge of parallel jurisdictions in the same city and country. Though Orthodox presence in the USA had a longer history, the most recent developments in Europe during this post World War II period, prompted the Orthodox Churches to look for conciliar solutions to the problem of diaspora¹¹.

A new wave of migration movement started since the 90s. Economic transition, political and social liberalization, and the breakup of federal states provoked massive emigration of citizens of the former USSR, Yugoslavia, Romania¹² and Bulgaria to Western Europe. One of the most characteristic features of this new emigration is that sizeable Orthodox communities had now established in countries where there was practically no Orthodox presence. Countries like Portugal, Spain, and Ireland, until recently numbering among countries with high rate of migration of their own population, now had become countries receiving migrants, including large Orthodox communities.

The other serious complication resulting from developments during this same period is the fact that in the newly independent states of Europe, parallel Orthodox communities emerged. In Estonia, for example, there is the small community of Estonian Orthodox (Autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate) and the large Russian Orthodox "diaspora" in Estonia (Autonomous Diocese of Estonia, under the Moscow Patriarchate). There is also the case of Moldova, where Romanian and Russian communities and ecclesial structures coexist, Russian "diaspora" in both Estonia and Moldova being a new form of Orthodox diaspora in Europe. These new challenges have created new tensions within the Orthodox Church, particularly between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as the Moscow

¹⁰ The Ecumenical Patriarchate has the most widespread and the most organized diaspora. Together with the above-mentioned dioceses in Europe, it has an Archdiocese in the USA (with dioceses in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New Jersey, Pittsburg, San Francisco), an Archdiocese in Australia, and dioceses in New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, and Hong Kong. The Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe is an exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada is under the canonical authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Theological institutions in France, the USA and Australia, organized Christian education and charity, as well as a continuous dialogue of "truth and love" with Christian churches and communities in all countries where the Ecumenical Patriarchate is present through a diocese, are only some of the main features of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's presence all over the world.

¹¹ The 1st Preconciliar Panorthodox Conference, gathered at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, Geneva, November 1975, had reduced the agenda of the Great Council into ten issues, one of them being "Orthodox diaspora".

¹² The structures of the Romanian Orthodox Church in diaspora evolved quite rapidly, to include today: the Autonomous Metropolitan See of Bessarabia (with more than 1000 parishes in Moldova), the Metropolitan See for Western and Southern Europe (including dioceses in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal), the Metropolitan See for Germany, Central and Northern Europe, the Archdiocese in the two Americas, and the Diocese of Australia and New Zealand. More recently, the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate has inaugurated its first parish in Japan.

Patriarchate and the Romanian Orthodox Church. At this stage, these new tensions on the canonical and ecclesiological ground are dealt with mainly on bilateral basis.

Last but not least, this latest wave of Orthodox Christians arriving in countries in Western Europe where communities existed for decades has created a serious tension within the “older” and “most recent” Russian Orthodox diaspora. This new development has affected the faithful in Great Britain and in France and has become an additional source of tension between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate¹³.

(b) Numbers. Numbers are, by and large, at the origin of serious uncertainties and sometimes even conflicts. In our case, there are two major difficulties with regard to figures.

First, it seems to be quite difficult to estimate the exact numbers of Orthodox living in various countries¹⁴. Indeed, estimating an ecclesial –and one might even say religious– population is generally an extremely complex and delicate issue¹⁵. When it comes to Orthodox faithful living abroad, numbers are blurred not only because of the old dilemma of who should be counted among the faithful, but also because quite often numbers refer to nationals in general, rather than to members of the community.

There is also the element of fluidity, as in this latest period, since 1990, the situation in some countries has evolved quite rapidly. For example, due to the fact that Portugal’s economy has slowed down in recent years, the number of Romanians working in the Iberian country dropped from 80,000 in 2006 to around 60,000 in 2008¹⁶. Another example would be the Bulgarian Orthodox community in the Ireland. While there was no mention of such a community in the records, it was recently reported that, in 2008, the first Pascal liturgy was celebrated in Dublin with ca 200 faithful present.

Second, in certain cases, numbers take significant proportions reversing the demographic –as well as the ecclesial and ecumenical– profile of the receiving countries¹⁷. To give only a few examples; it is reported that nearly 400,000 Romanians

¹³ Cf. Kishkovsky, Leonid, UK diocesan crisis tests Church’s mission to all. <http://www.oca.org/News.asp?ID=1013&SID=19>.

¹⁴ According to data provided by Orthodox Churches in 2004, in view of the seat allocation for the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, there are 1’500’000 faithful under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate living in Europe; 40’000 the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch; 28’100’000 the Russian Orthodox Church; 500’000 the Serbian Orthodox Church, and 400’000 the Romanian Orthodox Church. Compared to the figures reported more recently one may easily observe how quickly the numbers may evolve (or lead to misunderstandings).

¹⁵ In an article published in 2004, Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev estimates that ca 2 million Orthodox live in the main Western European countries, and provides the following analytical data: Germany 800.000; United Kingdom 350.000 France 250.000; Austria 150.000; Sweden 100.000; Switzerland 80.000; Spain 20.000; Belgium 40.000; Italy 250.000; the Netherlands 10.000 in: Orthodoxy in a new Europe: Problems and Perspectives, Religion in Eastern Europe XXIV, 3 (June 2004), pp. 18-26.

¹⁶ http://www.thediplomat.ro/features_0608_5.php.

¹⁷ According to data included in the report of Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad at the Bishop’s Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, in June 2008, Russian-speaking diaspora in the world, including Ukrainians and Moldavians, exceeds 30 million people. 8 bishops and 354 clerics provide pastoral

live and work in Spain, constituting the third-largest foreign community, after Moroccans and Ecuadorans¹⁸. Another 560,000 Romanians are living in Italy¹⁹. From the “new” Bulgarian emigrants in Europe, who left the country after democratic changes in 1989, a majority –ca 100,000 people– lives in Spain²⁰. Meanwhile, it is assumed that the number of Russians in Ireland could be estimated to nearly 100’000 or more²¹.

(c) The term “diaspora”. On the usual understanding of the word, the term “diaspora” would normally refer to people driven from their homeland and dwelling abroad on a temporary basis, and who hope to return eventually to their country. This does not seem to be the situation of most Orthodox living today in the West, particularly those constituting a third (and sometimes even a fourth) generation. They expect to remain permanently in the country where they are now living, and of which, very often, they are now full citizens.

Orthodox theologians in the USA, for example, have asked the question in a very direct way: “Is Orthodoxy in America Diaspora or Church?”²², challenging the most common image of Orthodoxy in America as immigrant communities, parishes and dioceses gathered according to the organizing principle of cultural and linguistic heritages. The key message this rather provocative question wanted to address was the view of Orthodoxy built on the “immigrant model” which obviously had more in common with sociological interpretations and cultural categories than with ecclesiology.

In a more official and ecclesial level, the hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in Americas (SCOBA) convened, in 1994, a conference of the canonical Orthodox episcopate in Americas. Some forty bishops met at the Antiochian Village in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, the conference and retreat center of the Antiochian Archdiocese. The hierarchs issued two documents – a “Statement on the Church in North America” and a “Statement on Mission and Evangelism”. The first statement was a respectful and humble appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to the Primates of the other mother churches. It referred with gratitude to the “love and concern exhibited by the prominence given to the ‘diaspora’ on the agenda for the forthcoming Holy and Great Council evidenced by the “Adopted Texts of the Preparatory Commission in 1993”; underlined the fact that the Church in North America should be directly and concretely represented in future meetings in order to share two hundred years of experience of preaching the Gospel and living the Orthodox faith outside of those territories that have

care for 316 parishes and 16 monasteries of the Moscow Patriarchate in 51 countries. Eighty-nine Sunday schools are opened in the diaspora. The metropolitan noted that this statistics did not include the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia.

¹⁸ <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/02/16/news/spain.php>.

¹⁹ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/03/content_8306191.htm.

²⁰ http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=69849.

²¹ <http://www.nashgazeta.com/>.

²² cf. Kiskhovsky, Leonid, *Orthodoxy in America...*, p. 35.

historically been Orthodox; and, finally, made it clear that the term ‘diaspora’, as used to describe the Church in North America, is unacceptable because it is ecclesiastically problematic as it obviously diminishes the fullness of the faith lived and experienced by the Orthodox in America for the past two hundred years.

Though there are no signals of a widespread acceptance of these views among most of the “mother Churches”, particularly after the most recent wave of dispersion, the question keeps its pastoral—and, to some extent, its ecclesiological— validity.

(d) Europe’s boundaries today. The term Orthodox diaspora “*in Europe*”, serving as title to the present study, could very easily become ambivalent and lead to misunderstandings. Before even providing any tentative explanation of this fact, it would be better to clarify that while the descriptive part this study does cover the broader European reality, its canonical part shall rather be limited to the Orthodox diaspora “*in Western Europe*”.

Indeed, the geographical spread of autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox churches demonstrates that only three of these churches (the ancient Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) are not established on European territory. Orthodoxy as a whole is very closely associated with and, in fact, is integral part of the European religious and cultural heritage.

Speaking from a political perspective, after its most recent expansion, the 25-nation European Union now has five member states with Orthodox Christian population and local autocephalous Orthodox Churches (Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland), compared to only one before.

Understanding Europe in its wider sense would lead to the conclusion that there are 11 European countries where most believers belong to the Orthodox tradition (Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, FYROM, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Ukraine) while there are significant Orthodox minorities in other European countries (Albania, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic and Slovakia) where the Orthodox Churches, despite their minority situation, are part of the national religious reality, being also autocephalous or autonomous (Churches of Poland, Albania, Czech Republic and Slovakia, Finland, and Estonia).

(e) “Canonical” Orthodoxy. In addition to Orthodox faithful from the canonical Orthodox Churches, there are sometimes alternative structures that call themselves Orthodox. Some of them are “schismatic”, in the sense that they are break-away groups (as, for example, “Old-calendarist” factions from Greece), and some of them simply use the term “Orthodox” in all possible ways to mask marginal groups often gathered around one person.

This particular case is simply mentioned here for the sake of clarification: communities called—or known as- Orthodox in Western Europe may not have any link of communion with the Orthodox Church. Therefore, this study will not dwell on this case.

4. THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Since 1975, when the issue of Orthodox diaspora was included in the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, Orthodox Churches have systematically dealt with the subject and, as it is already mentioned at the beginning of this study, some Orthodox Churches prepared and submitted comprehensive reports.

One of the most eloquent examples might be the report submitted by the Patriarchate of Antioch. His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatios, as Metropolitan of Lattakia, had largely contributed to this reflection process. His initial thoughts had later constituted the official report of the Patriarchate²³. The following lines summarize the essence of the emerging convergence among the Orthodox, to which reference will be made later in this study. With the exception of the point suggesting that autocephaly should be granted to Orthodox Churches in diaspora, all other points reflect the direction towards which the whole subject started moving slowly but steadily:

The Orthodox diaspora has reached such a maturity that it is necessary to consider it from a new viewpoint in such a way that leads to resolution;

We must see it as the vocation of the Orthodox diaspora, not only to preserve the present, but to become a dynamic and creative element in its own environment;

It is desirable that the Council should recognize all the Orthodox churches in the diaspora, provided there is no serious cause not to do so;

It is desirable that local synods should be created, comprising the bishops of the Orthodox churches of the area in question and their members. This should be realized especially in Western Europe, America, Australia and also elsewhere, as far as necessary;

Autocephaly should be granted to all the churches of the countries mentioned above. The local synods of the autocephalous mother churches should decide on it and determine its boundaries;

The traditional apostolic and catholic regulations of the Orthodox Church should be followed so that in each city there would be one metropolitan;

The relationship between the mother churches and the diaspora churches are to be kept brotherly and cordial, as is natural to the Orthodox spirit and to the extent that all is for one and one is for all;

Within the churches, there should be preserved the cultural, linguistic and other national elements, insofar as they do not disrupt the unity of the local church or the wholeness of the local diocese²⁴.

When it was felt that the process of receiving responses from Orthodox churches was somehow completed, the matter was referred to the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission for the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that met twice at the

²³ Cf. Metropolitan Damaskinos, *op. cit.*

²⁴ In: Allen Joseph, *op. cit.*

beginning of the 90s': first, in November 1990²⁵ and, second, in November 1993²⁶. Both meetings were held at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, Geneva. The first meeting was presided by Metropolitan Bartholomew of Chalcedon, who soon after was elected to the Ecumenical Throne, and the second by the late Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus. Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland assumed the responsibility of the Secretariat. The Commission, first explored the search for a canonical solution, second, recorded the emerging consensus on some fundamental principles and, third, elaborated a proposal for a temporary solution respecting the canonical praxis and ecclesiological tradition of the Orthodox Church.

(a) Towards a canonical solution. In their responses to the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Church of Greece agreed that there was a response to the problem of Orthodox diaspora grounded on the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council (451) confirms the long tradition which was already prevailing with regard to the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. According to this very canon, the geographical extent of the Church of Constantinople was expanded to the then administrations of the Roman Empire in Pontus, Asia and Thrace, as well as to the “barbarian” lands, i.e. those areas which were outside the boundaries of the then Roman Empire: “The metropolitans of the Pontic, Asian and Thracian dioceses shall be ordained by the aforesaid Most Holy Throne of the Most Holy Church of Constantinople and likewise the bishops of the aforesaid dioceses which are situated in barbarian lands”²⁷.

As a consequence of this canon, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has a canonical jurisdiction over the Orthodox faithful in the “barbarian lands”, meaning the communities that were in diaspora, outside the borders of the Empire and outside the jurisdiction of other Orthodox autocephalous Churches, these borders being clearly defined either by the canons of Ecumenical Councils (in the case of the ancient Patriarchates) or by the founding documents (i.e. the “*Tomos*”) of each autocephalous Orthodox Church. By virtue of canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council, the exercise of the canonical rights of the Patriarchate of Constantinople over all Orthodox in these countries does not, in any way, constitute an action considered as being an interference “beyond boundaries” (i.e. “*υπερόριος*”). Canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council offers the first canonical

²⁵ *Textes de la Commission interorthodoxe préparatoire* (Chambésy, 10-17 novembre 1990). In: *Episkepsis* 22, No 452, 15 Janvier 1991, pp. 6-22. *Orthodox Diaspora: Adopted text*. Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy, November 10-17, 1990. In: *OTSA Bulletin*, Fall/Winter 1994, p. 4.

²⁶ Réunion de la Commission Interorthodoxe préparatoire (Chambésy, 7-13 Novembre 1993). In: *Episkepsis* 24, No 498, 30 Novembre 1993, pp. 8-25. *Communiqué*. Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy, November 7-13, 1993. In: *OTSA Bulletin*, Fall/Winter 1994, p. 4-5.

²⁷ For the interpretation of this canon and, more specifically, the analysis of the term “barbarian” and its ecclesial implications, cf. Maximos, Metropolitan of Sardeis, *The Ecumenical Patriarchate...*

consideration of and solution for the communities in diaspora, prescribing that any region beyond the pre-determined canonical territories of any Orthodox jurisdiction, comes under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Furthermore, a combined reading and interpretation of canons 2 and 3 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381), canons 9, 17 and 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451) and canon 36 of the Council in Trullo (692), make it clear that only the Ecumenical Patriarchate has a canonical right of exercising a jurisdiction beyond its canonical borders.

This canonical solution, however, was seriously challenged by the Russian Orthodox Church. Not only a different interpretation of the canon is offered, excluding any jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on Orthodox diaspora, but also an invitation is extended to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to abandon, together with the rights on Orthodox diaspora accorded by canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council, its primacy of honor within the Orthodox Church altogether²⁸. Indeed, according to the report of the Russian Orthodox Church, the problem of Orthodox diaspora “considered as such both in its essence and its historical emergence, it did not and should not have the sad consequences and complications, which have appeared because of the unjustified claims and unilateral actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate”.

Because of the canonical impasse resulting from the controversial reading and interpretation of canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church suggested a shift to the combined use of two other criteria: ethnic identity and mission. Therefore, they have suggested as entry point apostolic canon 34 and canon 2 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council (381) to defend the thesis that both ethnic identity and mission constitute commonly agreed canonical criteria justifying the presence of Orthodox Churches beyond their canonical borders and allowing to local Orthodox Churches the exercise of an administrative jurisdiction on their respective diaspora. This reading presented a weak point. Though ethnic identity is valued and highly respected by the Orthodox Church, it might carry the latent danger and high risk of falling into nationalism if it is promoted to a unique and exclusive canonical criterion. Though ethnic diversity should be carefully considered in diaspora, particularly from a pastoral perspective, it should not lead to unacceptable ecclesiological solutions.

Therefore, a third reading was proposed by the Patriarchate of Antioch. The fundamental criterion should be the pastoral reality which entails, without any doubt, the ecclesial unity of all Orthodox communities in diaspora, according to the canonical tradition and the conciliar praxis of the Orthodox Church. This proposal had the advantage of transcending the obstacles created by the strict canonical or missiological criteria and opened new possibilities for dealing creatively with the whole matter.

²⁸ Cf. Metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandreou) of Switzerland, *op. cit.*

Finally, another proposal was made by the Church of Greece, drawing attention on the criterion of primacy within the Orthodox Church. The primacy of honor, implemented to all Orthodox Churches according to a commonly agreed order, could constitute a firm canonical ground in order to solve the problem of diaspora. Indeed, the notion of primacy of honor is closely related to the whole structure and functioning of the conciliar system within the Orthodox Church. Not only the need for a combined reading of canons 2 and 3 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381), is reminded, but emphasis is also given to canons 9 and 17 of the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451) endowing the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the privilege of the “ekkliton” (hearing, appeal) and granting its jurisdiction over regions not already subject to the other Orthodox Churches²⁹.

This multitude of proposals formulated by Orthodox Churches –sometimes opposed and sometimes complementary to one another– is extremely important because the preconiliar process had anticipated that all decisions would be taken unanimously. In fact, this was an unequivocal decision, included in the *Regulations for the Panorthodox Preconiliar Conferences*, approved during the 3rd Panorthodox Preconiliar Conference held at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, in 1986³⁰.

(b) An emerging convergence. Despite the difficulties to reach an agreement with regard to a canonical solution, the whole exercise leads to a broad consensus among the Orthodox Churches. Thus, the documents of the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commissions reflect the following affirmations³¹:

Every Orthodox Church is unanimous that the problem of the Orthodox diaspora should be solved as quickly as possible and that Orthodox diaspora should be organized in a way that is in accordance with the ecclesiological tradition and the canonical praxis of the Orthodox Church.

Taking into consideration that during the current phase it is not possible to follow exactly the strict canonical order prevailing in the Orthodox Church, the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission proposed unanimously the creation of a transnational structure that would prepare the ground-work for a strictly canonical solution to the problem. Such a solution would be based on principles and directives defined through panorthodox processes.

²⁹ An excellent summary of all the above mentioned positions and reports of the Orthodox Churches is offered by Metropolitan Damaskinos in his report to the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission, in 1990. Elements of this summary are also available in French, in: *Epispepsis* No 452.

³⁰ La III^{ème} Conférence Panorthodoxe Préconcliaire (Chambésy, 28 octobre-6 novembre 1986). In: *Epispepsis* 17, No 366, 6 novembre 1986.

³¹ Cf. *Textes de la Commission interorthodoxe préparatoire*, In: *Epispepsis* No 452; *Orthodox Diaspora: Adopted text*. Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, In: OTSA Bulletin, Fall/Winter 1994; *Réunion de la Commission Interorthodoxe préparatoire*. In: *Epispepsis* 24, No 498, 30 Novembre 1993, pp. 8-25. *Communiqué*. Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission. In: OTSA Bulletin, Fall/Winter 1994.

The preparatory phase should not go beyond the convocation date of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church so that the later might confirm the canonical solution to the problem.

(c) The proposed solution. The three affirmations above, took a much clearer and concrete shape through a combined implementation of the canonical tradition and the contemporary experience of the Orthodox Churches in diaspora.

For the canonical part, reference was made to the old and widely recognized *metropolitan system*. The restoration of the *metropolitan system* in the areas of diaspora would constitute both a canonical solution and a response to new historical developments. Historical and geopolitical developments had always influenced the institutional basis and external structure of the Church. Thus, the 1st Ecumenical Council in Nicea (325) first introduced the *metropolitan system* as a criterion of canonical continuity and harmonization of the administrative structure of the Church. Today, this same system could respond to the challenges of the European Union and the fermentations in the New World. For example, if the contemporary vision of the European Union includes *administrative decentralization* and *the strengthening of local authorities*, these two elements constitute the functional features of the metropolitan system, such as metropolitan districts and local (metropolitan) councils. Another advantage consists in the fact that the system takes seriously into consideration the pastoral dimension, allowing the confrontation of pastoral problems on a local basis and in missionary activity. Therefore, within the parameters of the metropolitan system, every metropolitan council would be responsible for a given region in diaspora. In this sense, the metropolitan system would preserve and strengthen the *quality, canonicity* and *polyphony* within Orthodox diaspora.

With regard to the contemporary ecclesial praxis and experience, inspiration was drawn from the examples of the USA³² and France³³, where “Episcopal conferences (or assemblies)” existed and functioned for a long time³⁴. These assemblies had limited rights and range of activities. Yet, they had reflected the canonical consciousness of a local council of Orthodox bishops, despite the uncertainties and challenges within the new experiences in the context of diaspora.

Following this double track, the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission unanimously suggested that “Episcopal Assemblies” be created, in a first stage, in North America and

³² Cf. the Standing Conference of All Canonical Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA): <http://www.scoba.us/jurisdictions.html>.

³³ Cf *Assemblée des Evêques Orthodoxes de France*, a new body established in 1997 in continuation of the work inaugurated already in 1967 by the *Comité interépiscopal Orthodoxe de France*. <http://www.egliseorthodoxe.net/>.

³⁴ To these assemblies one could also add the one in Germany, the most recently established *Kommission der Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland*, also very active and quite representative of the way to tackle the problem of Orthodox diaspora through Episcopal assemblies.

<http://www.kokid.de/>.

Central America; South America; Australia; Great Britain; France; Belgium and Holland; Austria and Italy; and Germany.

These assemblies would be comprised of all bishops of each region, who are in canonical communion with all the Orthodox Churches. They would have as their president the primate of the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and in his absence, the president would be according to order of diptychs. The assemblies would have an executive committee formed from among the presiding hierarchs of the various jurisdictions that exist in the region. The bishops of the diaspora, residing in the diaspora and having parishes in several regions, would be members of the assemblies of these regions and continue to exercise their jurisdiction over already existing parishes which are not included in one of the above-mentioned regions.

The work and responsibility of these assemblies should primarily be to bear witness to the unity of the Orthodox. Their tasks should include: (a) developing a common ministry for all Orthodox living in the region; (b) ensuring inter-Orthodox cooperation in the relationship with other confessions, as well as in the society at large; (c) cultivating theological and religious education, etc.

The Secretariat for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council was asked to prepare a project of regulations for this transitional arrangement, until the convocation of the Council. The Secretariat was instructed to draft the project on the basis of the text approved by the 3rd Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission, in 1993, using already existing models of episcopal assemblies, and in line with the Orthodox canonical tradition. The forthcoming 4th Panorthodox Preconciliar Conference would consider and approve the project. The episcopal assemblies –to be constituted formally after the 4th Panorthodox Preconciliar Conference– would have the responsibility of reviewing and completing the details of the regulations.

The first step towards the elaboration of regulations was taken by the Secretariat in 1995, when an encounter of canonists was held at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in Chambésy³⁵. The meeting studied the project elaborated in France and welcomed it very warmly as “a living testimony, matured within the Orthodox diaspora itself”, as a document that was grounded on twenty years of ecclesial experience. Another important feature of this same gathering was the invitation extended, for the first time, to representatives and theologians of/from the Orthodox diaspora³⁶.

It is very unfortunate that very little progress has been made since this encounter. However, it could be argued that in the life and consciousness of the Orthodox Churches

³⁵ Congrès des canonistes à Chambésy sur le règlement du statut de la diaspora Orthodoxe, In: *Episkepsis* 26, 1995, No 517, pp. 6-7; Réunion de travail sur le status de la diaspora Orthodoxe, In: SOP No 198, mai 1995, pp. 2-3.

³⁶ Together with a large delegation mandated by the Interepiscopal conference of France and lead by Metropolitan Jeremy, Dr A. Kallis represented the Commission of Orthodox Churches in Germany, Prof. J. Erikson the Orthodox Church in America, while Fr Georges Dragas, Thomas Fitzgerald and Mircea Bassarab brought their respective experiences from Great Britain, the USA and Germany.

there is actually an important period of gestation. While on the one hand there is a seeming stagnation or impasse, on the other, the episcopal assemblies function and respond to both the canonical requirements and ecclesial needs. To give only one example, His Holiness Patriarch Aleksis referred to the matter recently and gave an assessment of the present situation: “Our hierarchs and theologians continue to seek better ways to establish the life of the Orthodox diaspora”, the Patriarch stated. “The search for the solution to the diaspora question remains a priority in inter-Orthodox debate, though as to date no satisfactory answer has been found which would be acceptable to the fullness of the Orthodox Church. However, while this answer is forthcoming, we cannot remain idle. The hierarchs and the laity of all local Orthodox Churches must engage in a common witness and cooperation both here in France and wherever the Orthodox diaspora is found”. The Patriarch has also praised the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of France as a coordinating and advisory body which includes representatives of all local Orthodox Churches operating in France. He emphasised that this cooperation must be effected in the Orthodox spirit of conciliarity and expressed his wish to see the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of France as a united voice of all the Orthodox in the country³⁷.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Regrettably, the only possible statement as a way of conclusion is that the extremely important work accomplished by the two encounter of the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission did not continue with the desired rhythm. Its destiny was unavoidably identical with the entire movement towards the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church which was dramatically slowed down since the mid 90s.

Three reasons could be mentioned as a way of explanation to this very unfortunate stagnation.

First, the very fact that, particularly after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the new wind of freedom for the Churches, the later concentrated all their efforts in rebuilding on the ruins caused by decades of atheistic totalitarianism. Priority was given to missionary work grounded on inauguration of new parishes, building of new churches, establishing new institutions for theological education and pastoral formation, creating new monasteries as centers of spiritual life, and inaugurating new diaconal, social, educational and publishing instruments³⁸.

³⁷ http://www.sourozh.org/web/Patriarchal_Visit_2007.

³⁸ The flourishing of ecclesial life, also included the creation of new parishes and dioceses in diaspora, despite the recommendation of the 3rd Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission, reading as follows: “The Orthodox Churches pledge not to proceed to acts which might impede the above-mentioned process for regulating the question of the diaspora in a canonical way, including the creation of new dioceses in the diaspora beyond those already in existence. To the contrary, these churches, in their capacity as mother-churches, will do everything within their power to facilitate the work of the Episcopal assemblies and to restore normality of

Second, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew committed himself and the Church of Constantinople to give a new impetus to the conciliar movement. However, an Orthodox mobilization and unanimity was reached only in cases of facing together external challenges. The first, in 1992, during the meeting of the Primate of the Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches at the Phanar, on Sunday of Orthodoxy, which unanimously condemned proselytistic activities and competitive relations in mission in Eastern Europe. The second, in 1998, during the Inter-orthodox encounter in Thessaloniki, convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the request of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church, in order to define the terms of Orthodox participation in the World Council of Churches³⁹.

Third, the health of H.E. Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland who served for many years as Secretary for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church and was known for his dedication to the advancement of the conciliar process. His summary of the problem of Orthodox diaspora and his concluding remarks were the most valuable asset and the most important engine for continuing the search for a solution.

The issue of Orthodox diaspora, however, continues to figure, both explicitly and implicitly, on the agenda of inter-Orthodox relations and dialogue. Explicitly, as episcopal assemblies in various countries continue to function and develop, moving slowly but steadily towards the objective set by the preconciliar process. Implicitly, as new challenges – such as the situation in Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine, but also in Western Europe – emerge and very naturally lead to the re-opening of canonical matters including those related to Orthodox diaspora.

In this sense, for example, the correspondence between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Moscow⁴⁰, following the dispute in Great Britain and involving also all other local Orthodox Churches who were invited to give their opinion, constitute the latest occasion – and source – for re-opening the discussion in view of the desired solution to the problem of Orthodox diaspora.

The Church of Greece, for example, responding to the Ecumenical Patriarchate affirmed unequivocally that Orthodox Churches should stick to the recommendations of the Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission, which have the character of unanimous

canonical order within the diaspora". Cf. *Orthodox Diaspora- Adopted Text, 3rd Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission*.

³⁹ Cf. *The Thessaloniki Statement*: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/05-98-thessaloniki-statement.html>.

⁴⁰ Cf., for example, letter of H.H. Patriarch Aleksis on the status of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Parishes in Western Europe (No 129, April, 2002), and response of H.A.H. Patriarch Bartholomew (September 18, 2002).

panorthodox decisions with regard to Orthodox diaspora, aiming at covering, by *oikonomia*, the urgent pastoral needs of our times⁴¹.

⁴¹ Cf. *L'Eglise de Grèce réaffirme son soutien au modèle d'organisation de la "diaspora" adopté à Chambésy*, In: SOP No 316, Mars 2007. The text of the letter (November 2, 2006) in Greek, in: http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/epistoles.asp?archive=yes&what_sub=epistoli&etos=2006&id=814.