Orthodoxy under Discussion:

Public Religion and State Building in Abkhazia

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, many people prefer to find their own spiritual way rather than to follow the instructions of traditional religious organizations. Catholicity, traditional protestant denominations, and Orthodoxy are that kind of religious organizations whose hierarchical structure and prescribed way of communication with supernatural lead to decreasing of the number of supporters. In this circumstances, the churches try different ways to combine the leading role of religious institutions with the global trend of individualization of religion. Particularly, Orthodoxy uses nationalism, secular and modern project, to legitimate its role in peoples' life. The phenomenon is especially acute for semi-recognized states such as Abkhazia, separated territory of Georgia. The Abkhazian Orthodox Church invests in both national identity and creative transformation of church's structure for the purpose of its own surviving. The thesis investigates the question: how does the structure of traditional Christian churches change in the conditions of lacking legitimacy upon shifting of national borders. What does the shift mean for our understanding of public religion? In other words, the ways how secular and religious borders form new religious communities in the public sphere.

The thesis argues that nationalistic discourse is still the most effective way of communication with state's authorities and spiritual leadership is needed church's legitimation inside religious groups. However, there appears a new model of church's community formation that uses Internet technology and the model reshapes common secular / religious borders.

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Introduction

Nearly 50 years ago, Peter Berger declared the decline of religion and growth of the secular era (Berger 1967). Nowadays it is obvious for the most scholars of religion that religion keeps playing an important role in different spheres of human life, though the dynamic of religious groups, the number of believers, and the modes of religiosity are changing all the time. Despite the upsurge of New Age religion, the Islamic movement, and neo-charismatic churches, many other Christian churches (particularly the Catholic Church, some of Protestant denominations, the Orthodox Church[1]) face a decrease of the numbers of believers. Scholars explain this partly by the institutional conservatism of these Christian churches that do not match with people's perception of religion in their life. Whereas individuals prefer "believing without belonging" (Davie 1994) and religious "bricolage" (Luckmann 1967), which allows them to fill out their religious life with whatever concepts and practices they enjoy, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches still base on the hierarchical model of religious proficiency and local church communities organization level. There are some tendencies inside these churches that shatter this state of matters, for example, new monastic communities inside the Catholic Church try to combine secular life in their city apartments with monastic vows (Palmisano 2015), but generally this community-based approach to believers and hierarchical structure of the churches do not go well with more individualistic needs of worshippers.

What gives the new religious movements an advantage in obtaining new believers is their different understanding of the global contemporary world and the very role of the individual in religious life. The New Age is an umbrella-shaped definition, which includes various types of religious life based on Renaissance esoteric traditions (Hanegraaff 1996). Neo-charismatic

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[1] Especially if one speaks rather of regular church attendance national identity than of national identity.

churches represent the person-God relationship in a much more intimate and accessible way for lay people than ever (Coleman 2004). The Islamic surge is essentially entangled with changes in authority disposition and modern nation-state project (Asad 2003).

But what advantages do the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and some of Protestant denominations have nowadays? One of the key differences between these Christian churches and neo-charismatic and New Age movements is that the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and such Protestant denominations as Anglican, and Lutheran have rights and privileges[2] that are often recognized on the state level (Casanova 1994) and church identity that is equated with national identity especially in the Orthodox world. Moreover, these churches recognize each other if not as spiritually equal organizations then as politically and socially meaningful actors. The recognition of these Christian churches by their states and by each other makes them important players in inner and outer politics of their state.

However, there are several situations in the contemporary world when these Christian churches are struggling for recognition. If one looks at the Orthodox world, one can find Ukrainian Autocephalous Church, Transnistria Church, South Ossetia and Abkhazian Orthodox Churches in this circumstance. At least one common feature combines all these churches: searching for religious legitimation comes with changing of national borders. These unrecognized churches find themselves in difficult circumstances: they do not have the advantages of the new religious groups that can play with hierarchy and the level of personal involvement in one's religious life and by breaking away with historical churches they lost the benefits of the officially recognized churches. In addition, recruiting of new believers and recognition both inside their country and outside it are the important factors of success of such Churches.

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[2] For instance, low taxation.

This thesis explores this process in the post-Soviet context, trying to answer the following questions: how does the structure of traditional Christian Churches change in the conditions of lacking legitimacy upon shifting of national borders? What does the shift mean for our understanding of public religion? In other words, the ways how secular and religious borders form new religious communities in the public sphere.

The questions of new churches' legitimation and giving them autonomy or autocephaly[3] have always been a sore point for the Orthodox world. Most of the Orthodox Autocephalous churches (Serbian, Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Georgian, Polish, Albanian) gained their independent status during the process of nation-building in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The recognition included two steps: the first was self-declared independence, the second is the approval of a new church by The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The time interval between these steps was from 20 to 70 years.

Nowadays, new canonical problems arise for the process of new churches' legitimation. There are fifteen Orthodox churches that recognize each other as autocephalous. They have a roster, so-called diptych, in which they are listed in chronological order[4]. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is at the top of the diptych so the Constantinople Patriarchate considers that it should have the deciding vote in the approval of a new church. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Georgian, Romanian, and Bulgarian believe that a Mother church should bestow independence to a new church. Both positions are well grounded in the Ecclesiastical law and church history (Shishkov 2016). However, entangled with politics, the problem is so acute that

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[3]Autocephaly means full Church independence in the Orthodox world, in other words, establishing its own church hierarchy which can be reproduced within the church.

[4] The rank of these churches in the diptych is very disputable since some of the Autocephalous churches lost their territory in the Middle Ages and were reinvented in the modern period.

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the last Pan-Orthodox Council (June 2016) decided not to bring it up, in spite of the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Abkhazian, and various diasporas are highly interested in the discussion.

These problems with the national borders and creation of national Church inevitable reformulate religious agenda into political and national one. Politics, by definition, can not be a private matter so the Churches are forced to go beyond the private domain of individual's beliefs (the place which reserved for them by secular theories) or "domesticated" religion (the only half-legitimated role for religion in the Soviet Union, see Dragadze 1993) and search for the opportunity to be presented in public.

Generally speaking, the problems of Christian churches' separation has evoked the state's interventions in the faith affairs since the very beginning of the Christian churches history. States oppress or support one branch of a church or use a different combination of both strategies. However, since the invention of secular state, state's intervention into church's affair is disputable. Also, the church's presence in the public sphere and the exact modality of this presence is not a clear point neither for politics nor for religious institutions.

In the following I will investigate the particular situation of an Orthodox church schism resulting in the emergence of a new church searching for legitimacy in the post-Soviet context. My case is about the Abkhazian Orthodox Church that emerged in the 1990s due to it schism with the Georgian Church. Now, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church suffers from the second split inside itself that gives the case a comparative perspective of two contemporary Abkhazian churches.

Sociological approaches to churches' split

There are two main research approaches to changes in Orthodox churches' structure as a result of schism and fragmentation of Orthodoxy. One of them is closely connected with research of national identity and state buildings. The other focuses on the transmission of spiritual leadership inside a new unrecognized church and proof of its veracity among believers. The latter deals with mainly Old Believers, the religious movement that separated from the Russian Church in the 17th century. The specificity of that movement is its denying of the legitimacy of the Russian Church's reform that was supported by the Russian state. Thus if there is no true religious center that could approve a new church, the task of the new church would be to establish new discourse and practices of legitimation among its supporters and recruiting of newcomers. Such churches are forced to reproduce symbols and rituals from the mythical golden age of the past religious prosperity to separate themselves from those religious organizations that recognized by state but are considered as fallacious by schismatics (Robson 1995). One of the productive research approaches in this case is focusing on the structure of this religious community that can unexpectedly go well with the secular authority's plan of the social organization in the time of forced integration (Rogers 2009). Focused on the historical and organizational development of the marginal group of Old Believers, this kind of research can widen and deepen the famous concepts of religious scholars such as "popular"/"folk" and "elitist" religion (Crummey 1993).

The second approach is concerned with nation-building. It seems to be a method interested mainly in elites. In the national churches' emergence, the elitist features of new churches are quite obvious because church's activity turns to be political acts and church's heads become political leaders. Many Orthodox churches that were part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of

Constantinople or Russian Orthodox Church began to declare their independence during the process of nation-building in East Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not that long ago, the collapse of the Soviet Union and borders' changing in the Soviet block led to the new surge of the national Orthodox churches question. Most of the scholars' attention has got Ukraine in which there are Catholic, Greek-Catholic, different Orthodox churches as well as a few protestant denominations. Competing for believers and buildings, these churches involve different narratives of Ukrainian history and offer various symbols for national identity. The role and the level of involvement of different confessions were changing during the building of national identity (Yelensky 2005). After the revolution of 1917, there was nearly successful attempt to create Orthodox Ukrainian Autocephalous Church but it failed after the strengthening of the Soviet authority (Bociurkiw 1991). However, those churches, especially Greek-Catholic, whom the Soviet authority forced to go underground, managed to survive till 1990s and got new symbolic capital as a true and oppressed church. The transmission of religious tradition, its transformation in new circumstances, and relationship between underground illegal Greek-Catholic Church and official but limited Orthodox can be productive frame for analyzing post-socialist religious life (Naumescu 2008).

Another direction in investigation of the post-Soviet nation building looks at construction of national identity that is bound with the commemoration policy (Wanner 1998). Commemoration is a particular symbolic resource for formerly oppressed church. Memories of church's repressions and religious persecution constitute a base of religious and sometimes national identity of many post-soviet citizens. This theoretical framework was used in Buzalka's book about Greek-Catholic Ukrainians in contemporary South Poland (2007).

Besides East European changing in borders, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in several wars in the Caucasian region. In the consequence of these wars, three unrecognized states put in appearance, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Two of them have the huge

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resemblance between their situation and the position of their Orthodox churches: South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Conroy 2014, Matsuzato 2009, 2010). The South Ossetian Church chose the way of Old Believers, however, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church still hopes to become a fully recognized church and to obtain autocephaly.

My research will add to these previous perspectives the accent on the religious and secular borders which are important for contemporary shaping of the public sphere. Broadly speaking, my approach will problematize the religious/secular borders themselves and the place, reserved for the religious communities in the public sphere.

Abkhazian case

The Abkhazian Orthodox Church situation is especially acute since it has not had any bishop for 23 years so no one can ordain new priests. The whole of Abkhazia was the canonic territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, but after the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict 1992-93, Georgian Church was banned in Abkhazia. The absence of an Abkhazian bishop brings pessimistic and gloomy moods to believers because as soon as the last priest die, the Orthodox church in Abkhazia will vanish. In contrast to all other national Orthodox churches, which have their own bishops for church's reproduction and could allow themselves long anticipation, Abkhazian Orthodox believers are not able to afford decades-long waiting. The urgent circumstances make the Abkhazian Orthodox community actively in search of recognition and promulgation of this religion.

The unwillingness of the part of Abkhazian clergies to wait any longer resulted in the split of the church in 2011. The contemporary Abkhazian Orthodox is divided into two religious or-

ganizations: the Abkhazian Apostolic Church (AAC), focusing on the ROC, and the Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia (HMA), seeking for legitimation via the Constantinople Patriarchate. Both the AAC and the HMA are self-appointed and unrecognized by the Autocephalous Orthodox churches.

Both of the churches want first and foremost to obtain autocephaly. For many other Orthodox churches, this process went hand in hand with national-building in nineteenth century. Abkhazian clergies follow the same schema as that churches. The first chapter of the thesis is devoted to the role of the HMA and AAC in the Abkhazian national project. The approach that considers religion as an important part of national building process and as mobilizing force is well developed (for example, Barker 2009, Taylor 2006). The abundant literature of religious nationalism directs to the questions of religious and national identity, commemorative practices, Abkhaz language politics in religious sphere, Churches relationship with other denominations, mainly with neo-pagan movement in the very case. The first chapter gives a context of the situation with religious organizations in Abkhazia and their embeddedness in state politics. It mainly looks at churches as political actors.

The second chapter is focused on the particular organizational structure and social networks of both churches and the opportunities for public presence that their structural configuration gives to the churches. Though there are plenty of academic works devoted to the structure of different organizations, religious studies do not pay much attention to the religious organizations from this perspective. I could find inspiration and theoretical support nearly in one anthropological book: Agnieszka Halemba (2015) investigates a religious community in Transcarpatia and describes a traditional priest-oriented group and alternative new one that centers around common prayer and combines virtual participants through mobile phones and Internet.

In my case, there are two churches that constantly come against each other. They use different strategies for broadening their influence in public. The AAC chooses to rely on the network that goes beyond human dimension: it includes exorcism, a new-canonization project, and early Christian Abkhazian martyrs veneration. The AAC leads the large majority of church services. Its hope for recognition is underpinned by personal relations with Russian bishops. The HMA bases itself upon democratic methods: collecting the Assembly of all Orthodox Abkhazs, who elect the Church Governing Council, openly publishing its financial statement. The HMA does a lot of missionary works and provides social services for impoverished. This church is especially active on social networks, where it can attract not only local Abkhazs but also Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey and Russia as well as supporters from Greece and Ukrainian unrecognized Church. Thus the AAC organization and networking is based on the traditional for religious institution involvement of supernatural beings into human relationship, but HMA places its reliance in the new technologies. Broadly speaking, the second chapter will deal with the questions: how do new Internet technologies change the social structure of a religious group and what advantage and disadvantage can new technologies bring to the group? Also, what is the difference between an online church's network and a traditional Orthodox church that is constructed through its contacts with supernatural beings? These questions should make a contribution to the broader question of church's public formation upon the religious and secular borders.

Data and methods

For the purpose of this research, I analyzed the print production of both churches, especially their polemics and reflection on the acute question of legitimacy. The HMA position can be found in its journal, printed productions, personal Facebook profile of the leader and their site

https://anyha.org/en/. The AAC point of view represented in a few booklets, several remonstrative notices and not really well-updated site http://aiasha.ru/. These materials disclose the rhetoric of mutual accusations and the legitimation strategy: to what resources and how the churches refer to. I have followed the facebook profile of the HMA's leader for a year and the profile of the leader of the AAC's missionary activity for a couple of months. The Facebook social network allows to count the number of churchers' supporters, their geography, and the level of engagement in the online churches' life. The online-dimension of these churches is a meaningful part of the whole Orthodox promulgation in Abkhazia.

However, traditionally for anthropology, my main methods were participant observation and interview. I made several trips in Abkhazia, which took more than three weeks in total. My first trips were during the period of May-June 2016. This period of time was saturated with the prominent events for both churches. The HMA conducted the Second Assembly of all Orthodox Abkhazs, which takes place once in four years. I observed this event and talked with the attendees about their motives of participating and vision of the Orthodox Church in Abkhazia. Also I took interviews with HMA's leader and some of his close followers.

My next trip was devoted to the other church. I took part in a Russian pilgrimage to Abkhazia on a day of one Abkhazian national saint. The leader of the pilgrims was the ROC priest who spent a lot of time in Abkhazia and personally knew everyone from the AAC. Due to the trip, I got acquainted with the AAC's social network and figured out the ROC position to the Abkhazian situation.

The last fieldwork, April 2017, was concentrated on the Eastern celebration that gathered a lot of believers. Also, I took an interview with the AAC's leaders and due to this the position of the two churches are equally represented.

Chapter I

Limited Orthodoxy: between Canon Law and National Borders

Religion and nationalism in the post-Soviet context

Broadly speaking, there are many different approaches to nationalism and religion: from classic works, which do not pay much attention to the religious dimension of national process, to the post-Durkheimian tradition that sees nationalism as a secular religion. Such classic works about nationalism are represented by Hobsbawm's and Gellner's theories that are concentrated on European nationalism and its reflection in colonies (Hobsbawm 1991, Gellner 1983). The ways of the modern development in European countries came along the same line with secularism. The consequence was that for a long time scholars considered secularism as a global unified process and religion, in turn, was expected to be diminished with the upsurge of modernization. Thus, the abovementioned classic books said little to nothing about religious dimension of the nationalistic process.

The post-Durkheimian tradition, did the opposite, putting a lot of attention on the national rituals and symbols, considering them as a kind of quasi-religion practices. This tradition is driven by Durkheim's conception of sacral as separated from secular and religion that is "system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden" (Durkheim 1912 [1995]: 44). Maybe one of the first scholars who applied Durkheim's idea was Benedict Anderson who compared nationalism with a kind of secular religion (Anderson

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1983). In relation to the Soviet Union, the second approach was widely used. Though the Soviet state's project was openly secular, it has so many peculiar features: mummification of leaders, replacement religious celebration with state secular analogous, creation of new rituals for weddings and funerals that religious features of the Soviet ideology was basically taken for granted (see for instance Fitzgerald 2000: 98-120).

This uncritical division between secular and religious spheres has been criticized since the 1990s, and the voices in favor of revising nation and religion conceptualization have been growing since. Scholars have redefined both religious and secular societies as ideological systems with different power dispositions (Asad 2003) and rethought the interpretation of secularization as a one-directional unitary process (Casanova 1994). Investigations of nation-building process in the post-colonial countries and post-Soviet space also show a more patchwork picture among secularism, religion, and nationalism. If the European way of secularization puts religion aside, many post-colonial countries get used to reinventing religion according to a Western standard. This happens along two lines. The first one is the construction one's own 'right' religion after the same pattern as Christianity has. The second one is a desire of new elites to take over a narrow Western modern space for religion (Shtyrkov 2012). The same process applies to the post-Soviet territory with the difference that the reinvented religions usually start with rethinking of the Soviet heritage: what is and what is not 'religion'.

Thus, the ethnic movements and so-called traditional religions, growing all over the post-Soviet space, often set themselves against Christianity, which they see as a part of the colonial project but at the same time they construct themselves in accordance with Christian canon. These minor groups see their traditional religion as a resource with help of which they can lead the dialog with the state's authority. Therefore, the chance to be heard for the small ethnic groups seems to be bonded to their traditional religion. On the state level, these traditional reinvented religions usually support nationalistic ideas and provide essentialist understanding

of religious and ethnic identities (for more about reinvention of traditional religion on the post-Soviet space see, for example, Gavrilova 2015 about Mari ethnic group and their grass-roots nationalism, Antonyan 2010 about revitalization of Armenian traditional religion, Lesiv 2013 about Ukrainian neo-pagan movements).

As regards the traditionally recognizable religion that endured during the Soviet time, the recent study by Pew Research Centre shows the very strong ties between Orthodoxy and national identities. This study says that "Orthodox identity is tightly bound up with national identity, feelings of pride and cultural superiority, support for linkages between national churches and governments, and views of Russia as a bulwark against the West" (Pew…. Religious belief 2017). However, this survey does not include unrecognized Orthodox churches (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and it is unclear do they distinguish different Orthodox groups in Ukraine) what underlines the necessity to be a recognized church to become 'visible' for different powerful actors.

The position of the unrecognized Orthodox institutions seems to be quite fragile. The Autocephalous churches should base their church-wide decisions on Canon Law, the ecclesiastical code of laws. But the foundation of Canon Law traces back to the period of Oecumenical Councils and reflects the Roman imperial world order. The meaning of contemporary national churches can not be fully compatible with the ancient definition of Autocephalous church, because national churches are a result of modern history and the process of nationalization. For today's church, autocephaly is close in meaning to state's sovereignty. That is why a lot of contemporary Orthodox churches got the status of Autocephaly during the national liberation struggle. And it was not uncommon, that a state had already gained independence but its church should be waiting for decades until the other Orthodox churches recognize it. That was a story of the Greek Orthodox Church, which declared its autocephaly in 1833 and received it from

the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1850. The Romanian Orthodox Church asserted its independence in 1865 and got it from Constantinople in 1885. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church had been waiting for 73 years before the Ecumenical Patriarchate bestowed it autocephaly. Despite the fact that the primacy of national interests over church-wide perspectives was condemned as a heresy in Constantinople in 1872, most Orthodox churches are still seeking for recognition within the boundaries of national states (Shishkov 2016).

The problem of recognition of any Orthodox church is mainly in their necessity of its acceptance by other Orthodox churches. As distinct from Neo-Pagan movements, any Orthodox church should stress not so much its unique ethnic characteristics as its succession to the Apostolic tradition that is the ability to trace its clergy's order back to the very beginning of Christianity, to an apostle, who started to preach on this land. Therefore any National Orthodox church should be balancing between national interest and its supranational ultimate purpose. Consequently, the choice of Orthodox Christianity for any new unrecognized states gives some advantages as well as disadvantages with comparison to Neo-Paganism. On the one hand, Orthodoxy is much less coupled with national borders. But on the other hand, the Orthodox churches are involved in mainstream politics, and to get a church recognition may help with state's recognition.

Religious milieu in Abkhazia

Abkhazia is a small territory, situated near the Black sea and bounded by the Russian Federation from the north and east and Georgia from the south. Abkhaz ASSR belonged to Georgian SSR during the Soviet period but after the collapse of the Soviet State, Abkhazia started looking for independence. During the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in 1992-1993, Abkhazia fell away

from Georgia. To the present day, the Republic of Abkhazia has been recognized by the Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and other states with the contested status: Transnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh. For the others, Abkhazia is still a separated part of Georgia. Nowadays, Abkhazia is a presidential republic. The majority of Abkhaz citizens (the total population is about 250,000 inhabits) have two passports: an Abkhazian government-issued one and a Russian foreign travel passport. There are very limited transport systems, which include only one railway line going along the coast, and a companion auto-road. Every day in the summer season, two trains come from Russia: a passenger train and a cargo one, filled with oil. Another border, the border with Georgia, is hardly penetrable. Consequently, Abkhazian economics is heavily dependent on Russia. Several times, Russia granted tranches to the Abkhazian governments. The social sphere (public health service, education, culture, retirement fund) is mainly financed by the Russian Federation. For the microlevel as well, the main income for many households is tied to Russian tourism (meanwhile, Abkhazia offers non-visa regime only for those countries that recognize it). As a result, both the macroeconomics of Abkhazia and household strategies of making a living rely on business with Russia. This cannot but affect the religious situation in Abkhazia. The support of Russia plays a significant role in the way how different religious groups are legitimatized. This is true for for the state's choice between Orthodox Christianity and Abkhaz Neo-Paganism.

Abkhazian authorities as the leaders of the partially recognized state realize quite well the political resource of religion. At the present moment in Abkhazia, there are Christians (Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic), supporters of the Abkhaz Native Religion (ANR) and Sunni Muslims. Abkhazian Muslims mainly live abroad (particularly in Turkey) in diasporas. Nowadays, despite the fact that Abkhazia invited their refugees to return, who left the country more than a century ago during the Russian-Caucasian war, very few of them really have come back. So the question of using the religious political power of legitimization concerns mainly

the Abkhazian Christians and Neo-Pagan believers. Each choice has its own advantages. The creation of one's own Christian national church is a potential leap forward to the more wide-spread support of the Abkhazian independency from Georgia state and the Georgia Orthodox Church. Whereas, dissemination of the Abkhaz Native Religion could strengthen the unique Abkhaz identity which goes with its own unique religion.

The question about origins the Abkhaz Native religion, its connection with Christianity and Islam, its (re)construction/revitalization in 1990th, its status as a religion are widely presented in academic publications (see Agababyan 2016, Akaba 2007, Kuznetsov, Kuznetsova 2016, Krylov 1999, Shnirelman 2002). The political role of the ANR is increasing since the 1980s. The first and extremely popular Abkhazian president, Vladislav Ardzinba, who won the war with Georgia and is treated as a national hero in today's Abkhazia, gave his support to the ANR. In the early 1990s, Christianity was perceived as a part of Georgian domination. So the rhetoric of returning to the authentic Abkhazian roots and building the nation on the base of traditional religion was becoming popular. The Abkhazian authorities started to participate in ritual bull sacrifice as well as Neopagan priests took part in political ceremonies and people's Assembly. Though today's president shows some endorsement to the one Orthodox group, his contemporary meetings with Abkhazian citizens are still accompanied by the religious ceremony conducted by neo-pagan priests. However, when I conducted my recent fieldwork in April 2017 in Abkhazia, the same days were marked by visit of the Russian minister for foreign affairs. It was a huge event for Abkhazia as far as it was the first visit of such high level since the Abkhazian independence was proclaimed in 1993. Together with the Abkhazian president and his government, the head of the one church, the AAC, took part in the meeting with the Russian minister. I can hardly imagine that the Orthodox priest's place could be taken over by a Neopagan in this case. Orthodoxy still plays a part in the world politics but for Neopagan movement, this is still not reachable.

Even Abkhazian Orthodox believers, clergies and laypeople, partly refuse to enter into a conflict with the ANR, considering the Abkhaz Native religion not as a religion at all. The Orthodox priests, following the Soviet way of separating religion from folklore and ethnic motives of local people life, prefer to see the ANR rituals just as a part of traditional life. According to their view, the ANR has ritual practices but no strict dogma, so one can not speak about the ANR as a religion. Nevertheless, it does not bother a lot of Abkhazs, who can participate in both Christian and the ANR festivals.

Today's Orthodox Church in Abkhazia

Christianity in Abkhazia is represented by the Eastern Orthodox Church, but its contemporary position is even more ambivalent than the status of the Republic of Abkhazia. The Abkhazian Orthodox Church has not been recognized for more than 20 years. According to Church law, Abkhazia now is a canonical territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia (OCG). Although Christianity in Georgia traces its roots to the Apostolic period, in the modern time, the OCG became a part of the Synodal Church of Russia. In 1917, the OCG declared its autocephaly that was recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church only in 1943 and by the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1989.

However, in spite of Canon law, the OCG's presence in today's Abkhazia is a nearly impossible. Georgian bishops have no access to the Abkhazian diocese since the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in 1993. In recent time the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II included reference to the Abkhazian eparchy in his official title and by that emphasising that the Georgian Church will not reconsider the Abkhazian Church status. Given the fact that Abkhazia is a canonical territory of the Georgia Church, other Autocephalous Churches also do not hurry to give Abkhazia autocephaly or autonomy or at least metropolitanate since Canon law prohibits to violate the

canonical border of another Autocephalous Church. Strictly speaking, there are only two canonical possibilities to access autocephaly for any unrecognized church. The first is to take it from a Mother Church, which is nearly impossibly for Abkhazia, taking into account the political situation between Abkhazia and Georgia. The alternative is to be bestowed with autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which is considered as having primacy of honor among other Patriarchs. But this way is contested by the Russian Orthodox Church. As it has the majority of official believers among others Orthodox churches, the ROC would like to revise the diptych of Orthodox churches. In the Abkhazian case, orientation on the ROC seems a logical decision since it is compatible with Abkhazian state commitment to Russia. Vice versa, getting recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate may appear as a change in the direction of external policy. This is a sticking point among the Abkhazian Orthodox themselves and between those Orthodox who support getting recognition from Constantinople and Abkhazian state's authority.

The reasons why this situation is perceived by Abkhazian Orthodox believers as very acute are as follows. Any changes in the Canon Law may take decades but the contemporary Abkhazian Orthodox have very little time because there is no bishop in Abkhazia so no one can ordain new priests. Prospective priests should find a way of their ordination by themselves. Most of today's sixteen Abkhazian priests were consecrated in the ROC (mainly in Transnistria diocese and Maikop diocese in the Republic of Adygea), only two priests at the start were clerics of the Georgian Church. The question of choosing a church which gives an ordination is extremely important because priests will be a part of the church in which they were ordained. So, their church can prohibit them to perform liturgy and through this control the activity of their priests.

This ambivalent longstanding status provoked an institutional crisis in the Abkhazian Church, resulting in a split among the Abkhazian Orthodox. This very situation has already pushed the

South Ossetian Church to gain recognition from Greek Old Believers. However, the Abkhazian Church still has a hope to get a recognition from the autocephalous Orthodox Church and by this to stay with the majority of the Orthodox world. Now there are two self-appointed Churches in contemporary Abkhazia. The first one, Abkhazian Apostolic Church, has the majority of churches and priests. The AAC is placed under president's protection. The Abkhazian authorities give the AAC their support because it is oriented towards Russia in the same way as the Abkhazian state does. The AAC somehow wants to get an independence with the help of the Russian Orthodox Church. Given that this way is canonical inaccessible and the ROC officially recognizes the canonical territory of Georgia Church, another self-appointed metropolitanate was established in 2011. This alternative Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia is looking for recognition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The HMA occupies only the New Athos monastery, but due to the fact that this monastery is a tourist attraction, it gives them enough income to conduct active missionary work and charity.

Background of the AAC's and HMA's leaders

Perhaps, one of the striking aspect of life in Abkhazia is the fact that nearly every political person in Abkhazia is accessible in one or two steps. If local people need to solve some problems, sometimes the most direct way is to go to a suitable minister and discuss one's problem directly. It is a similar situation in the Abkhazian Church: though there is no special position in public relations in both churches, I was able to reach the head of the HMA by simply sending him an email.

It was not that easy to establish a contact with the head of the AAC. He does not have any online published contacts or pages in social networks. However, when I went to the AAC's cathedral, a worker gave me the personal mobile number of the AAC's leader without many

questions. I called the AAC's head and asked for interview for my thesis. At the beginning, he rejected to appear on the pages in a line with "those heretics" [HMA], but then he decided to allow me to take an interview with his deputy, hieromonk David (the AAC's leader himself could not meet me due to his departure to another Abkhazian region). Probably, this was one of the few interviews when an interviewee was better prepared than an interviewer: David came to the interview bringing with him a laptop containing all documentation in support of the AAC position to demonstrate me their rightness. The biography of the AAC's leader is collected partly from this interview, partly from different publications.

The biography of the head of the AAC, Vissarion Apliaa, has a lot of gaps. He was born in 1947, his family had a peasant background. He was educated in a technical school but then he ended up in prison in Siberia. After coming back to Abkhazia, he became interested in Orthodoxy and in 1989 was ordained as a deacon and then as a priest by the Georgian Orthodox Church. At that moment Vissarion Apliaa was the only Abkhazian priest, all other priests were either Russian or Georgian. During the Abkhaz-Georgian war, he established his reputation as a truly supporter of the Abkhazian independence. The war forced all Georgian priests to abandon Abkhazia and when the question of the new national Abkhazian Church appeared there were only three priests: two Russians and Vissarion, who by virtue of his ethnicity was chosen as the head of the new church. However, he is a married priest, this fact prevents him from climbing church hierarchy ladder. According to the Orthodox Church law, only a monk can be a bishop. In the beginning of the 1990s, Vissarion, understanding that the number of clergy should grow, encouraged two young men to pursue education in the Moscow seminary (they later became the leaders of the opposition church). From there on, he continued politics of broadening clergy in Abkhazian Church, helping to ordain new priests and accepting Russian new-comers. The policy required a good relationship with the ROC that officially refuses to grant independence or bishop to the Abkhazian Church, however unofficially it ordained new

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priests and sent some representatives on the ROC's clergy in the country even before the Russian Federation recognition of the Abkhazia state. Vissarion tried to conduct negotiation with the Georgian Church as well, but there were no positive results. Generally since the war, his main activity was to find enough priests to guide believers and establish a good relationship with the ROC, expecting its future help.

For, the next generation of the Abkhazian priests, this policy seems to be uneffective and too passive. After a decade of mutual disagreements, Dorofei Dbar declared about establishing new Abkhazian Church, Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia. Archimandrite Dorofei Dbar was born in 1972 in a small village near New Athos. In the beginning of the 1990s, he studied arts at the Abkhaz State University. That was the period of the religious surge, and he as well as many other people over all Soviet Union began to visit Orthodox churches. Though he stressed in his interview that there were a lot of different missionaries in Abkhazia in that time (Krishnaite, various Protestant groups), he preferred Orthodoxy. But it was difficult to pick up any knowledge about the Orthodox dogma or history. He used to attend one active church in Sukhum (the capital of Abkhazia) and got acquainted with liturgical practice. He read self-published books (samizdat) about prayer in Orthodoxy and made a decision to be a priest. But he could not enter the Georgian seminary, because of the war, and he could not get in any Russian seminaries because of the permission that bishop should give to prospective students (as I said above, there was no bishop in Abkhazia at that time). That situation required a personal intervention of Abkhazia's first President, Vladislav Ardzinba. In spite of his support of Neo-paganism, he wrote to Russian Patriarch Alexei II and asked him to educate some priests for Abkhazia.

Dorofei entered the Moscow seminary in the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra in 1993. In that time, the atmosphere in the institution was quite creative. Many intellectuals who were seeking some religious revelations were studying there. Dorofei devoted his time to work on the history

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of Abkhaz religion. After finishing the Moscow Theological Academy in 2001, he was looking for some opportunity to be ordained. Moscow diocese refused to do that, because of the Georgian note, which said that the ROC intervened on the Georgian canonical territory. The loophole was found due to the less known bishop from Maikop, who ordained him and his colleague at the Moscow Academy, Andrei Ampar, in 2001. When they returned to Abkhazia, they began to restore the New Athos monastery and conducted an active mission. They opened a seminary, translated Patristic work in the Abkhaz language, and created a movie about Orthodoxy in Abkhazia. All that activity was not warmly greeted by the Georgian Church, which constantly reminded the ROC about the illegal activity of the New Athos priests. To avoid trouble with the OCG, the ROC gave them permission to go into any other Orthodox church. For some years Dbar and Ampar partly-legally worked, then Dorofei got an opportunity to continue his education at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. He defended his Ph.D. there and returned as a cleric of the Greek Orthodox Church. Then his confrontation with the AAC was becoming more obvious. According to Dorofei's opinion, it is not wise to hope that the ROC give the autocephaly to the Abkhazian Church because the ROC is neither Abkhazia's Mother-Church, nor the head of the other Orthodox churches. And, considering that the OCG does not bother itself to solve the Abkhazia problem, there is only one choice to ask for autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. For that purpose, the Abkhazian Church should prove their ancientness, theological maturity, and wide support from the Abkhaz citizens and believers.

The rhetoric of mutual accusation of both churches is full of reference to the Christian sins and virtues and/or psychological individual features. However, there is a clear clash between habitus of the HMA's and AAC's leaders. I will not describe the whole biography of the Abkhazian clergy, the two examples should show a general tendency in the background of both churches priests that is concerned the generational gap and the growth of nationalist mood among young clergy. The AAC clergy, total amount is 16 priests) consists half of Russian, half of Abkhazian

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priests but all leading position are held by Abkhazians. The head of the AAC has a senior age thus he spent the most of his life in the Soviet Union and became acquainted with the Soviet norm of administration and management strategy between central authorities and local ones both in church and in state sense. He did not receive a high education that was typical for the Soviet priests. Some of the other Abkhazian authoritative priests (Sergei Dzhopya) share similar features or they can be better educated but from the same generation (Ignatii Kiyta). Most of the other Abkhazian clergy either substantially younger or they were ordained recently. Russian priests in Abkhazia do not really involve in Abkhazian Church's politics since they as representatives of the ROC do not have a right to serve liturgies in Abkhazia, canonical territory of the Georgian Church. Officially, Russian priests just have a termless vacation in Abkhazia. That is why the best strategy for them is not to be very active and visible for media and consequently Georgian authority for the purpose of not to provoke the Georgian Church to write a claim letter to the ROC. Thus, the church's conflict touches mainly Abkhazian clergy.

All three (previously four) of the HMA's active leaders (archimandrite Dorofei Dbar, deacon David Sarsaniia and laypeople Herman Marshania) were born in the 1970s, they grew up at a time of the Georgian-Abkhazian war (1992-1993, the following economic blockade (1993-1999), and Abkhazian struggle for recognition. The national ideas and Abkhazian independence were the main state's ideology of that time. In this sense, the HMA's leaders are more sensitive to the nationalistic questions than the previous generation who were used to the absence of borders between Abkhazia, Georgia, and Russia in the Soviet time. Moreover, as with following the classical pattern of national elites' emergence, all the HMA's leaders get their education abroad in the metropole, in Moscow. In the Soviet period, Moscow education was a necessity for reaching the leading positions. They followed this Soviet career steps at the beginning but then continue their education in Greece (Dbar) and Switzerland (Sarsaniia). In the

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western theological institutions, the future HMA's leaders got acquainted with the broader context of the Church history and the situation with Orthodoxy in the contemporary world.

The clash between the AAC's leaders and HMA's has its source in the different habitus of these people: differently educated, having dissimilar life experiences these people (all HMA clergy are either monks or single laypeople and the most of the AAC's priests are married) can not find a common ground to agree on single way to the common goal — the church's independence. For Vissarion, the young priests, whose main aim should be to obey him, excited a riot as a result of their vanity or greed (both popular Christian sins). For the HMA's leader, the AAC strategy is slow, cautious and outdated and it will lead to the Abkhazian Church's disappearance before long.

National church building process

Though, both church's leaders want to create an Abkhazian national church, the HMA project is much better constructed due to education of the HMA's clergy and their mono-ethnicity. That is why I will consider the HMA's policy more attentively here. The beginning of Abkhazian nation-building process is quite classic: there is an elite, which was educated abroad and that now wants to reconstruct and modernize their society in accordance with the adopted norms. So, the processes of national building, conducted a century ago, become actual in contemporary Abkhazia. The elite quite well realizes this aims. One deacon of the New Athos monastery said 'We are running late for a century compared with Greek, Roumanian, and Bulgarian Churches. But it is the same process.' Since the most popular practices of nation-building are attention to the local history and language, in HMA one can see the concerns with the Christian history in Abkhazia and restoration of liturgy in Abkhaz.

Legitimation through history

The history of Abkhazian Orthodoxy usually begins from two apostles: St. Andrew and Simon the Canaanean. In the next three centuries after apostle's teaching, Abkhazia was a refugee for Christians from unfriendly imperial Rome. The small number of Abkhazian saints are mainly related to the early Christian time of martyrs for the faith. By the beginning of the fourth century, the Pitiunt diocese (contemporary Pitsunda) was founded. In the next century, it received autocephaly and was called the Abazg diocese. By the eighth century, Abkhazia had its own catholicos. In the fifteenth century Abkhazia was conquered by the Ottoman Empire, as a result the impact of Islam was becoming stronger. In 1795, the medieval Pitsunda Patriarchate came to the end. Then, as a result of the numerous Russo-Turkish wars, Abkhazia turned into a part of the Russian Empire in 1810. Abkhazian Orthodox had their own Sukhum eparchy, which was included in the Georgian Church. After the February revolution in Russia, the Georgian Church declared its autocephaly (Dbar 2015).

This extremely short version of Abkhaz Christian history gives the HMA an opportunity to proclaim their succession with the Byzantine Church and through this to show a succession with the Apostolic Church. The procedure is meant to help with the recognition and to demonstrate the separateness of Orthodoxy in Abkhazia from Georgia. This long history of Christianity also gives an argument for debates with Neo-Paganism. So in accordance to Dbar's view, contemporary Neo-Paganism is a perverted image of Christianity that emerged in the period of the Turkish occupation.

Legitimation through language

Even in the beginning of his service in Abkhazia, archimandrite Dorofei was concerned with the translation of the Bible and church prayers into the Abkhaz language. He stresses in his articles that in the period of the Abkhaz Catholicos, liturgies were conducted in Abkhaz and Greek. As proof, he points to the defence speech of Saint Cyril in Rome, when he was accused in the invention of the Slavic alphabet, which violates the dogma of three sacred languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. St. Cyril, according to his hagiography, mentioned a lot of native languages having their translated version of the Bible, and among others, there was named the Abazg language (Dbar 2012). But in the end of the nineteenth century, church language was mainly Georgian, and some Russian intellectuals were at work upon translation the Bible from Russian into Abkhaz. However, HMA doesn't use that translation. Dbar prefers to take the Greek Church books as an original for translating.

Today's liturgies in New Athos monastery are conducted in three languages: Abkhaz, Greek and Russian. I want to stress that there is no word of the Church-Slavonic language during liturgies. Dbar insists on using Russian for better understanding of liturgy by churchgoers. This choice between Church-Slavonic and Russian is a critical question for the ROC too. There is a longstanding debate in the ROC upon the use of Church-Slavonic language during liturgies. This language is hardly understood by the majority of churchgoers. However, the few attempts to conduct liturgies in Russian were not supported by church authorities, since Russian language is not a sacred language and could not maintain a special atmosphere in church that separates sacral from profane spaces. The more important reason why Church-Slavonic is still preferable perhaps because it shows the succession of church's tradition and establish a border between mundane Russian language and sacred Church-Slavonic. That is why, speaking Russian during the liturgies in New Athos monastery gives one more argument to the AAC against HMA. The AAC accuses the HMA in renewal. According to the Abkhazian Apostolic Church,

the HMA has spoiled Church-Slavonic language (in the meaning to turn it into mundane Russian) so now the HMA should not be trusted to conduct liturgy in the Abkhaz language because the HMA can spoil the vernacular language the same way as they did with Church-Slavonic (Lykhnenskoe 2006).

Thus, the Abkhazian Apostolic Church's national project is inevitably more cautious. Though the AAC tries to promote Abkhazs to the new priests, since it orients on the ROC and has a half of Russian priests in its clergy, the AAC can not just neglect Church-Slavonic language or do an accent only on the Abkhazian Church history. The HMA showed themselves as consistent nationalists, by using national language and inventing national Church's history that resulted in the ROC's conviction of them as schismatics.

Church institution: national or ecumenical?

The appeal to the traditional national-building rhetoric for the purposes to get recognition seems to be the right strategy in the world where nations are still main actors on the political stage. However, according to Matsuzato's shrewd remark, in Abkhazian case "Orthodox diplomacy is more legal-minded than secular diplomacy" (2014: 395). The Russian Federation recognized the Abkhazia state in 2008, the ROC has still followed Canonic law that requires noninterference on the territory of another autocephalous church. However, the ROC's interference still happens though not formally: Russian priests serving in Abkhazia, Russian pilgrims visiting Abkhazia, ordination of the Abkhazian priests in the ROC. This double game raises questions mainly from the HMA's people, formulated in our conversations in such way: 'Why our Christian brother do not help us with independence in the situation when Abkhazia needs it so desperately? What kind of Christians are they?'

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I am not willing to answer the last question but the previous one touches the nerve of many Orthodox Churches who struggle between the global agenda of Christianity and necessity to follow its own Canonical law to show Church succession and to be inside the national territorial borders where many of them enclosed themselves. The previous models of churches' split show that the construction of a national church is an effective strategy for establishing a new auto-cephalous church. However, this model which was good in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be outdated for the contemporary world mainly because of the changing in the understanding what is religious and what is secular and where the secular state should draw the line between religious and secular.

Chapter II

Beyond National Ideas: Public Religion through Internet Technologies and Supernatural Beings

'So, what is the difference?' — the former abbot of the New Athos monastery asked me, partly checking my understanding of the clash between the two Abkhazian churches, partly referring this question to himself. Being used to clerics' habit of taking communicative initiative even during interviews, I replied: 'Well, one church orients towards the Russian Orthodox Church, another looks for support from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. They have different resources, different structures and use different methods but, yes, both churches share the same goal that of obtaining religious legitimacy and creating an independent Abkhazian Church.'

'That is right, but then, imagine that we got the independent church, what would be the difference between the Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia and the Abkhazian Apostolic Church?'.

I paused. That was not just an idle entertaining question: at least for my interlocutor, the answer had led to the crucial changes in his life. The former abbot of the New Athos monastery, one of the leader of the HMA, Andrei Ampar, had a similar biography to Dorofei Dbar. They studied together at the Department of Art at the Abkhazian university, they both were converted to Orthodoxy in the late 1980s, and they were accepted together in the Moscow Theological Academy. But then at the Academy, they went different ways. Dorofei was in his sphere but Andrei Ampar could not find himself and finally left the theological seminary and came to the department of icon painting, where as an artist he was quite comfortable. After graduation, he

took the monastic vows and got ordained in the Russian Orthodox Church, then following the familiar pattern, he was sent on termless vacation[5] back to Abkhazia. In Abkhazia, Vissarion Aplia appointed him to be an abbot of the New Athos monastery. That position Andrei Ampar was holding during 13 years. In his last two years serving as the abbot, he was one of the HMA's leaders and took an active part in the splitting of the HMA from the AAC. However, he got gradually disappointed in the church's institution since it seemed to him that national interests and today's politics prevailed over eternal Christian values. In 2013 he dropped his monk's and abbot's duties and returned to laypeople's life. Currently, he teaches Art in the Abkhazian University and draws pictures.

Despite that the HMA was to a large extent a result of Andrei Ampar's activity and was constructed in opposition to the AAC, he failed to see much difference between the two Abkhazian churches. Their present difference he explains through the various organizational principles that according to his opinion would disappear as soon as any of the churches will get recognition. But the main underpinning reason of his leaving the church is that he could not overcome a breach between national church and ecumenical Christianity. According to his words: 'We came down to the level of national ideas, patriotism. I would not mind them but it is not Church's level. Church man, Christian follows the Gospel, it is other rules of life'.

These words are not only about the problematic relationship between ideal and reality, Gospel and world. For me, the quotation has a quite particular social dimension: today's Orthodox churches receive state's and people's support mainly because of the connection between belonging to an Orthodox church and national identity. Thus Orthodox churches and their policy

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[5] All priests who were ordained in the Russian Orthodox Church can not serve in Abkhazia, the canonical territory of another Autocephalous church, Georgian Church. So the ROC's authority sends them to Abkhazia officially on vacation. De facto the termless vacation is just a juridic term to avoid the Georgian church's complaints.

of canonical territories match well national imaginary that requires one church for one people. However, what is the church's place in the public sphere besides supporting of nation identity? The previous chapter has considered church mainly as a political actor that in the contemporary world nation-state's structure was one of the few recognizable instruments of nation-building process in a line with national language and history. This chapter is devoted to the formation of church's community and the ways these communities shape religious and secular borders in the public sphere.

Public spaces for church

According to Jose Casanova (1994), the modern secular tendency of privatization of religion and separation church from state does not every time come together. Considering several cases in Spain, Brazil, Poland, he shows how church can be integrated with the modern state and what roles in the construction of national identity or social integrity can be undertaken by church. The Polish case as the closest in terms of the common Soviet experience demonstrates that the church can be the acknowledged symbol of national identity because of long-term repression by socialistic state and sometimes even compete with current Polish state as the institution that unites Polish people.

However, if in politics church can have more or less stable and reserved place, the same can not be said about church's role in the public sphere beyond national questions. Speaking of the same Polish church, Jose Casanova underscores that it will have to choose soon whether to construct social integrity on the base of the civil society or keep the nationalism as a funda-mental principle of its presence in the public sphere (1994: 109). The reason why nationalism goes quite well with the Christian Church was firstly offered by Emile Durkheim (1995 [1912]) who described religion as a sacral dimension of human life that de facto is the society itself

expressed in ritual and collective way. As many note, Durkheim's definition of religious can be easily applied to the modern nation-building project that targets to create a unique nation by declaring one language, one religion, one folk. Thus, the nationalism which includes religious identity as a part of national identity makes church an important part of state's project and gives church possibility to prolong their hierarchical and unified way in the contemporary world.

Consequently, it is not for nothing that my interlocutor shows that there will be no difference in the national politics of the two Abkhazian churches as soon as one of them gets legitimacy. However, are they similar in their way of constructing public spaces with its own place for church? What kind of social integrity does church create in today's secular public life? Though religious studies scholars continue their incessant debates on should we use the word 'secular' for today's world or 'postsecular' or even 'desecular' conceptions, I will stay with the word 'secular' as it appears in Taylor's "A Secular Age" (2007). Charles Taylor stresses that probably the most essential distinction of the secular time is that there is no single and unite discourse anymore: atheists, agnostics, believers of all faith, and people who are not concerned with the so-called religious question have to coexist in the common space. Such a diversity causes the necessity to negotiate constantly the borders between religious and secular spheres that are never stable. Matthew Engelke (2013) considering the public religion and religious publicity argues that secular base is perceived as a common ground for any public activity at least in the Western countries since the roots of public sphere lay in the opportunity to look for agreement among different and presumably equal opinions, whereas in contrast Christian ideas of social solidarity assumes society that hierarchically united according to God's will. Consequently, there is an expectation that either a religious community will be act as any social organization in the public sphere or the presence of religious group in the public sphere will lead to conflicts

One of the brightest cases that pushes scholars to discuss the principles of the public space's construction and religion appearance in it was the so-called Muhammad cartoons, Danish caricatures that depicted Muslim in a non-traditional way: for example, the Prophet was drawn with a bomb on his head instead of a turban. Many Muslims publicly expressed their protest against this blasphemy, how they called that cartoons. In its turn, Western media fiercely rejected this protest as a hack on free speech and even as a threat to the Western civilization. The situation attracted scholars' attention who found it a fruitful case to problematize the idea of free speech, public spaces, and public religion. Despite the popular accusation of religion that it limits the free speech, the secular state has its own quite strict regulations of the free speech which we get used to not noticing. That is all kind of intellectual property laws and prohibition of the copyright piracy. Religious beliefs, in this case, follows the same idea of the free individual endued with property rights on her thoughts and beliefs. However, similar conflicts in the East Europe and post-Soviet countries adhere to different logic of what religion is and how it is combined with state and public life.

Kristen Ghodsee (2009) discusses the contemporary situation in Bulgaria with the right for Muslim students to wear veils in public schools and the necessity for Jehovah's Witnesses to accept blood transfusions if it is needed which the believers deny for religious reasons. The Bulgarian government was accused by human rights organizations for the prohibition to wear veils in public institutions and coercion of Jehovah's Witnesses to accept medical help. The human rights organisations see the situations as a violating of the freedom of conscience. However, Ghodsee argues that the Western understanding of religious identity as the private matter of each individual can not be applied to non-Western countries. She emphasizes that in today's Orthodox East Europe national identity has close ties with religious one and therefore, for instance, being Bulgarian equates with being Orthodox. Moreover, the very relationship between state and church differs from those we get used to seeing in the Western theories that declared

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secularism as a political situation of the separation state from church. In Orthodox East Europe, the idea of Symphony, the unity of state and church, has a long story, this means that the state interference in church's affairs does not irritate either clergy or laypeople. Thus Ghodsee main point is that what we called religion in the Bulgarian context is "not merely individual belief in the private sphere but a public declaration of affiliation with historically, culturally, and linguistically constituted groups" (2009: 241).

Thus the Western theoretical thoughts that amalgamate secular ideology with the public sphere can not be well applied to the post-Soviet territory. However, what does the new material bring to the understanding of church activity in the public? If religious figures act in the public sphere, does it mean that religion entangles with policy, or does these religious authorities behave as representatives of any other organizations with its own political and public agenda? As some sociologists put it there is nothing specifically religious in such activity of religious organizations since they behave quite secularly in public (Kohrsen 2012). And it can be true until, acting in the public sphere, the religious organizations do not try to bring the supernatural beings (God, saints, angels, etc) on their side. Since there are enough examples that church can be a successful political actor, the inner discrepancy between church and today's democratic public sphere is that the main inner purpose of religious organizations can be named as providing connection between people and the supernatural world. But in the public life, the institutions can act only in the human dimension. The same is true for both Western and the Soviet projects of secularization. Sonja Luehrmann argues that the main task of the Soviet anti-religious propaganda was to remove all supernatural creatures, God and saints, from the social relationship (2011). And the project was quite successful in this sense. The contemporary public and political life of the post-Soviet space, as well as Western Europe, do not include the supernatural presence and no Deus Vult can be announced in public places.

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The religious and secular borders in Abkhazia reflect the situation with religious communities in the post-socialistic world. The religious organizations can be present in the public sphere mainly to represent national identity. However, in the Abkhazian case, national discourse is not sufficient for creating a coherent religious community with diverse social network because there is a rival neo-pagan organization that can be more attractive not for politicians but for common Abkhazians who do not see much difference among the Abkhazian, Russian, and Georgian Orthodox Churches.

The Abkhazian Apostolic Church and the Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia found each their own way to create social integration inside their communities.

Abkhazian Apostolic Church's community formation

The AAC's churches and monasteries (the whole number of them is 15) are scattered all over Abkhazia. The purpose of such church's topology is the traditional parish-based structure for Orthodox Christianity that provides an easy access to a church for believers and ties a district to a church. That is organized partly for church benefits: to control the priests and easily count and mobilize churchgoers, and partly for people's convenience: not to spend much time and money on the road to their church. However, I would not say that the churches are full of people during liturgy. Those eight that I visited had from 20 to 40 laypeople, staying for a church service. Though in the church's saint day or on other Christian celebrations the sum of attendees can grow to 200 and up so the number of passive AAC's supporters is higher. Nevertheless, the strongest and visible support of the AAC is showed by Russian pilgrims for whom the famous Soviet health resort, Abkhazia, is now combined with spiritual healing as well.

It is well-known that supernatural beings can shape and reshape human community and create a powerful social network. For example, as it was described by Brown (1981), at the early Christianity, holy relics, sent in remote places, brought with themselves the new church structure and led to a new relationship among people. The saints, whose relics were sent, introduced the new patrons-client relationship, firstly between the saint as a holy protector and people, and then between bishops and clergy (who retook some function of the holy patron) and laypeople. Another example can be apparitions of the Virgin Mary that support the whole regions via pilgrimage. The Abkhazian Church, secluded and unrecognized, definitely needs a supernatural support. Though, the whole ritual churches' activity is directed to the supernatural world, sometimes the presence of God, saints, demons are more real. Robert Orsi, devoted his last book to the investigation of the presence of supernatural in human history, shows how mightily the appearance of the other world can reshape mundane human relationship (2016). The supernatural does not inevitably usher in peace. Quite the opposite, the supernatural may be the source of discord and doubts but at least it attracts attention. For the AAC that needs to be noticeable to get recognition from the ROC, the shaping relationship among humans with help of superhuman beings is a good solution. The Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia's way to be noticeable that will be discussed later irritates both the Russian Church and the Georgian. But neither the Russian Church nor Georgian Church can seriously protest against the supernatural presence in the Abkhazian land.

Right on the Georgian border, there is a village where a priest Sergii lives who is an exorcist. His fame has even reached cities in the central part of Russia. During the holidays, many buses and cars with Russian pilgrims and Abkhazian are gathering near his church. Though local people are displeased to see many so-called possessed by demons people, whose relatives

brought them to the priest Sergii, hoping for his spiritual skills, but this priest is the first AAC's bulwark on the East borders[6] and constant attraction for believers.

From the opposite side, near to the Russian borders, there is a Lukhny church. That was a place where for many years a Russian priest Peter served. He came into Abkhazia in the late Soviet period, stayed during the period of war and blockade and got a reputation of a man of faith. He died recently but a book about his life has already been published and local people worship him nearly as a canonized saint. Though the Abkhazian Church does not have the right to canonize its saints yet, I would expect that this priest Peter would be their first choice. It is also goes well with the AAC's orientation towards the ROC: the Russian priest who came in Abkhazia at dark times and shared all its woes would be a desirable illustration of the Russian-Abkhazian relationship for both sides.

Going deep in the country, the supernatural network is expanded. Near to the capital of Abkhazia but remote in the mountains, there is a monastery devoted to one of the early Christian martyrs. Abkhazia has not had a lot of their own saints: just a few martyrs from the period of the Roma Empire. Today the martyrs start to be a significant part of the national project of the Abkhazian Church since their presence proves the succession with the ancient Christian Church on the land of the contemporary Abkhazia.

However, here I want to emphasize not nationalistic rhetoric of the church but how the presence of the saints and their deeds are constructed by the today's AAC's clergies and how this presence can create public religion. One of the martyrs, saint Basilisk, has his day celebration on the 6th of June. In times of persecution against Christians, he was expelled to the remote region of the Roman empire, in the land of today's Abkhazia. Nevertheless, St. Basilisk did not cease

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[6] Demons as well as Georgians are unwelcome guests in Abkhazia.

his preach to local people and finally was killed by Roman soldiers. Now there are some sacred places devoted to the saint: place of execution, his assumed grave, and the spring of holy water (which is actually not a spring but a true mountain river). Nearby this sacred sites one monastery stands. Usually quite empty but in the days of Basilisk's celebration, it becomes overcrowded with pilgrims. They attend liturgy, then go to the Basilisk's grave and finish their way bathing in the river. Despite summer heat this mountain river stays very cold.

All the way along these sacred spaces, pilgrims are led by the head of the monastery. The father Ignatii is famous for his authoritarian manner of running the cloister and its churchgoers. Despite this or due to this he has a lot of admirers. Two years ago he began to preach near the river. He spoke about firmness of the first Christians and their readiness to suffer for their faith. Finally, he raised up the cross in his hand and cried: "Who are the true Christians? — follow me" and came to the river with all his vestments and in his patent-leather shoes. Wanting to catch up with the priest, pilgrims had no time to take off their shoes and change their clothes — they followed him fully dressed. Wet and frozen they got out of the river but felt extreme excitement and found themselves truly Christians.

When I was told about this story by their participants, firstly, I was surprised how unwise and senseless it was to go in the cold river without any reason to do so. There were no Roman soldiers and no one from non-Christians had condemned the pilgrims or testify their faith. For what did they want to feel some kind of act of faith? However, to that moment I was already a product of the Western secular thoughts for which a personal meeting with the supernatural (whether this be God, saints, or our true inner Self) can be acceptable because religion is a private inner experience. But the collective act of believing seems to be weird and even dangerous if it is presented in public.

When the AAC creates public space, it trusts more in this alliance with supernatural than any other methods to pull together its local churchgoers and Russian pilgrims. The AAC is quite sensitive to the diversity of personal religious experience, offering possibilities of a fearful exorcising ritual, early Christian model of witnessing one's faith, and calm and peace attendance of the priest Peter's grave for spiritual consolation. It is this diversity of practices and sites that include contact with supernatural attracts Russian clergies and pilgrims that widens and strengthens the AAC's position both for the ROC and the Abkhazian authorities.

Once more and potentially the most powerful supernatural support was revealed recently: an image of the Virgin Mary appeared on the windows of one village house, situated near to the Georgian border (Lik na okne 2017). The village has already become a pilgrimage site. The head of the AAC, Vissarion Apliaa, visited the place and promised to observe from there on this potentially sacred event.

Comparing with the different models of churches structure after schism, the Abkhazian Apostolic Church close to the situation with Old Believers and their orientation on the spiritual guiding of charismatic leaders. In a situation of a lack of official or traditional legitimation, one way to create a community is to turn to charismatic leadership, as it was described by Max Weber. Weber's separation of charismatic and rational types of legitimacy partly reflects the religious and secular dichotomy, where the rational type stays for secular and the charismatic for religious. That is why the Abkhazian intellectuals who got secular educations avoid the Abkhazian Apostolic Church and vice versa neither the Russian Orthodox Church nor the Georgian Church sees any problem in the way the AAC forms its community.

Online Community of Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia

If the Abkhazian Apostolic Church prefers to search for supernatural legitimacy for its church, the Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia tries to find quite secular but acceptable for a religious community means of legitimacy. The main method for the HMA is public debate that attracts Abkhazian intellectuals (who are the main supporters of the church) but seems to be unacceptable in the opinion of the Russian Orthodox Church since the structure of the hierarchical church does not assume any space for discussion between laypeople and clergy. The clergy can be only experts in churche's deeds and laypeople have to obey them.

However, even given that the HMA keeps to be a hierarchical church with the divicion between laypeople and clergy, the space for the public debate was found due to the internet technologies. For example, the reaction of the HMA on these miraculous images in one Abkhazian village was expressed in HMA's Facebook profile. Dorofei Dbar called people do not give in to panic because many Abkhazians got a message that called these image a sinister omen for Abkhazia and ordered people to prepare some local food and lighted a candle on the nearest Friday. Dorofei criticized the message as a source of superstition but he kept silence about these images themselves: are they superstitions as well? However, in comments to his post, people started to make a clarification of this point, discussing the question among themselves.

The personal facebook profile of Dorofei is probably the most important source of the promulgation of the HMA (see Appendix I)[7]. The content of his profile is quite diverse: the

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[7] Because of the Facebook's privacy policy, for the analysis representing in Appendix, I used not Dorofei's personal facebook page but the HMA's group page which has four times fewer supporters than his personal page.

lectures of the HMA's leaders, devoted to the topics, for examlpe, how to interpret one or another Bible's chapters, the right translation of the Greek version of the Bible to Abkhazian, the history of Christianity in the Abkhazia, some related materials about contemporary economic and religious situation in Abkhazia, videos of the liturgies from the New Athos, special training for guides about religious topics in Abkhazia, various pictures of the missionary and church's activity. His posts provoke people's interest and give a place for comments and discussion that is to say for expressing laypeople's opinion. The contemporary Orthodox churches do not give laypeople, especially women, many possibilities for being heard by church's organization. In the case of the HMA, when they made a pivotal decision to become separated from the AAC, the HMA understood that they need active and visible support of believers to survive. Their previous practices devoted to the national church building process put an accent on the national history, national language, museums. However, they needed more legitimate approval. For the purpose of representation and legitimation, the HMA turned towards democratic practices. The Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia argues that democratic institutions (means the election of bishops and priests) where a part of the ancient Christianity and by this they should be a legitimate part of the new Abkhazian Church. Thus, the HMA conducted two Church and People's Assemblies. The first one was summoned in 2011. This Assembly officially organized the HMA to struggle for the Abkhazian autocephaly. The second one was called on the 15 of May 2016 on the threshold of the Pan-Orthodox Council to elect new candidates in the HMA administration and to write a plea to the Council and Bartholomew Ecumenical Patriarch (http://anyha.org/en/akjyrsiannyha-aizara-du-axj-aapxjara/).

The second Assembly was conducted in the cathedral church of the New Athos monastery. More than a thousand people attended this meeting, supporting the independent Abkhazian Orthodox Church. Dozens of benches were brought into the main cathedral of the New Athos monastery, the biggest Abkhaz monastery. The cables for live webcast were lying all over the

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church floor. There were probably all media of Abkhazia presented. The first part of the Assembly began with a detailed account of financial statement of HMA, its missionary activity, publishing, social service. The second part was voting for accepting or denying the prepared plea to the Pan-Orthodox Council. Officially, taking part in the vote might only Abkhaz Christian citizens. But there were more than thousand participants, not all of whom were regular churchgoers or even Christians. For example, my neighbor declared herself as an atheist who lived nearby, so she could not miss so great events. The voting for the plea was open by raising a card in hands. There were neither negative votes nor abstentions. Though people expressed absolute trust to the HMA, the HMA's leaders were not prepared to such confidence in them or maybe they wanted to conduct public debate to prove their position. The HMA's leaders made an attempt to introduce public debate as a part of their institutional structure. During the second Assembly, there were special time and space allocated to public debates

Right in front of the icon screen, there were tables for the elective church presidium, all other participants found their places at the church hall, which was separated in two. Between these halves, one microphone was put. The opening ceremony began with public account of the budget of this Orthodox organization, its social and missionary affairs, and after that, people were asked to go to the microphone, introduce oneself, and ask questions or express one's opinion. Three minutes gone, nobody came out. The head of the presidium asked once more, saying that there is no blame to be disagreed and that everyone has the rule to think differently. After long persuasions one old man came to the microphone, he missed the part with introducing himself, quickly asked his question partly pass the microphone and hurried up to hide back in his seat. Three more minutes gone, another old man took a risk to ask his question out loud, though he did not dare to leave his seat and go to the microphone. The section, designed to be twenty minutes, actually took about five.

The HMA's people, well-educated and being used to academic debate, seemed disappointed. Perhaps, Abkhazian people were not used to the tradition of public debate or the HMA's lay-people thought that it was the only way how they could express their support to the leaders at the public sphere. However shy they were during the conventional public debates, the HMA's laypeople found another way to express their opinion about the HMA's policy and strategy. They actively joined the Facebook profile of Dorofei Dbar. This online HMA's dimension goes far beyond national Abkhazian borders and includes huge diasporas in Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, as well as smaller groups in European countries and the USA and separate individuals in Australia and South America. This online community exceeds the regular HMA's church-goers more than 50 times. People with diverse experiences who perhaps were once attracted by the HMA as the national Abkhazian Church, now start to comment the position of the HMA and Orthodoxy in Abkhazia. The biggest splash in comments for the recent years happened on the days of the second Assembly (see Appendix II). The online activity of the HMA's public has influenced the HMA's leaders' publishing policy. As any blogger knows the news should be regularly posted to keep readers. The HMA does it regularly and, probably, it is one of few Orthodox churches which share their news, achievements and worries with their supporters. Sharing its news, the HMA made a very interesting turn from a traditional religious organiza-tion that usually kept information for itself and shared only a thoroughly selected part. Cer-tainly, the HMA also chooses the publishable news but their range for the news is wider.

The youngest AAC's hieromonk, David, also has his own facebook profile where he as the head of the Abkhazian Apostolic Church' missionary center publishes the schedule of liturgies, pictures of the AAC'c activity: sacred procession, church lessons for children, and citations from the Bible. However, despite having a lot of Facebook friends the content of his page does not provoke any discussion, people mainly react by liking or just ignoring his publications. For

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the HMA, quite contrary, Dorofei's facebook page is, perhaps, the central place for the Abkhazian Church.

Secular and Religious Borders in the Public Sphere

In her book, Halemba (2015) describes how Catholic laypeople create their own network that are prayer groups which gather all over the world to pray for some specific needs and how these groups can quickly react on any events due to mass text messaging to the members. And how Catholic authority tries to take over the leadership in these groups. This ground-based religious community formation is quite inappropriate according to the church's authorities. However, the community is based on prayer and that fact pushes the Catholic clergy willingly or unwillingly to support it. The HMA way of a religious community's formation is much more challengeable for hierarchical churches. The base for the HMA''s community is the pivot of the secular public space -- the open debates.

This fact frightens the Russian and Georgian Churches that is why both these churches prefer to consider the HMA as a political project but not a religious organization. The rhetoric of the ROC's clergy when they speak of the HMA includes such contradictory opinions as the HMA is a Soviet party or it is a democratic institution. Though democratic in this context has negative connotations as something alien that was brought from the West, the mess in the description of the HMA shows the fail in its recognition by other churches as a religious institution.

The Abkhazian Apostolic Church's way of the community formation is more coherent with the other Orthodox churches vision of a religious organization. However, this way supports quite traditional religious and secular separations.On the contrary, the church's public debates,

opened due to the internet technologies, prompt a new model for being a religious community

in the public sphere that actually blurs the borders between religious and secular.

Conclusion

The Abkhazian Church has to prove its legitimacy and to gain recognition from its state and from other Orthodox churches. This necessity for legitimation makes Abkhazian Orthodox groups come into the public sphere and experiment with the new church's structure provided by internet technologies. Though still, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church follows the outdated model of the national church building, the model does not show much success on the course to get recognition. Ironically, despite the desire of both churches to be the one Abkhazian Orthodox, both of them do not fit within newly established national borders. The Abkhazian Apostolic Church violates these borders via their charismatic priests and their assumed connections to the Other world that attracts many pilgrims. The half of the AAC's priests came from other post-Soviet states (mainly, from Russia) and were ordained in the different ROC's dioceses. A lot of visitors to the AAC's churches and monasteries are Russian pilgrims. The Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia goes even further beyond Abkhazian challengeable borders: HMA's Facebook page gathers followers all over the world and the numbers of these online supporters are many times higher than the offline traditional churchgoers.

The actual Abkhazian Church's structure challenges the Orthodox territoriality bound to Canonical law which declares that one bishop for one land. Abkhazia has no bishop but through pilgrimage and Russian clergy, its Church spread its territoriality to the Russian Orthodox part and through the internet technology all over the world. If centuries ago national states imagination required to put national church inside one's state border, and the Abkhazian Church is still living the dream, the online Church-dimension opens other possibilities and opportunities for rethinking traditional Orthodox hierarchical structure. The situation when laypeople find their voice at least through public comments and discussion the Abkhazian Church's life and the necessity for clergy this public representation leads to redefinition of public and private

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church presence. Neither was the Abkhazian Church designed to serve the private needs of believers, nor has it the resources to be a bulwark of national values. Such an ambiguous status is fruitful for searching a new church model of public presence and collecting its from the previous models of churches' structures after schisms.

Some of the ways are closed for the Abkhazian Church. For example, the construction of a religious community on a base of the commemoration of the repressed during the Soviet time and of the symbolic capital of oppressed religious organizations as one can see in Ukraine and Poland is impossible for Abkhazia (see Buzalka 2007, Naumescu 2008). During the Soviet time, priests on the Abkhazian territory were either Georgians or Russians. Georgia is now the most sworn enemy for both churches, Russia is the current and potential helper. The special relationship between the Russian state and Abkhazian semi-recognized state makes impossible any obvious critique of the Soviet religious politics (Russian, in this case, is perceived as a direct successor of the Soviet Union). Moreover, there is not much to critique since, for the Abkhazian church in contrast to many other religious organizations in the post-socialistic countries, the hardest time came after the Soviet Union's collapse.

The religious situation in Abkhazia is very interesting, it definitely deserves further investigation. My thesis suffers from a short period of fieldwork and lack of my knowledge in the Abkhaz language. I was going to analyze Abkhazian media discourse of churches' split but I did not do it since many broadcast and news have recently switched from the Russian language into Abkhazian.

What can be concluded from the Abkhazian situation and generally post-socialistic countries is that nationalism is still the most effective resource for establishing the relationship between state and church. The other method of legitimacy through spiritual leadership can coexist with nationalistic strategy but spiritual leadership is used mostly for legitimacy inside a church than

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for others. Finally, the topic with the most potential is, as I see, concerned with new technologies and how they can change the structure of a traditional hierarchical church. The access to knowledge and the opportunity to express one's opinion is, to a large extent, are freely available on the Internet. How will a hierarchical church respond to the opinions of the laypeople and the challenge to the clergy's expert knowledge -- we will see.

Abbreviations

AAC — Abkhazian Apostolic Church

HMA — Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia

OCG — Orthodox Church of Georgia

ROC — Russian Orthodox Church

Appendix I

The HMA's Facebook network

The data collected via *Netvizz* from https://www.facebook.com/anyha.org/?fref=ts:

a list of page fan numbers per country; basic statistics per day for the period of 2 years.

The map of supporters from 45 countries/ 1570 people.

The biggest number of supporters come from countries where there are Abkhazian diasporas

Abkhazia-Abkhazia = 467 followers; Abkhazia-Russia = 457, A-Turkey = 124, Ab-Azerbaijan = 92, Ab-Greece = 90, Ab-Armenia = 45, Ab-Ukraine = 42, Ab-Italy = 38, Ab—USA = 29. (The big number of Greek fans is explainable through Dorofei Dbar's personal contacts, as a result of his education in Thessaloniki. I can not explain the emergence of Italian followers).

Appendix II

The HMA's Post - Reaction Graph
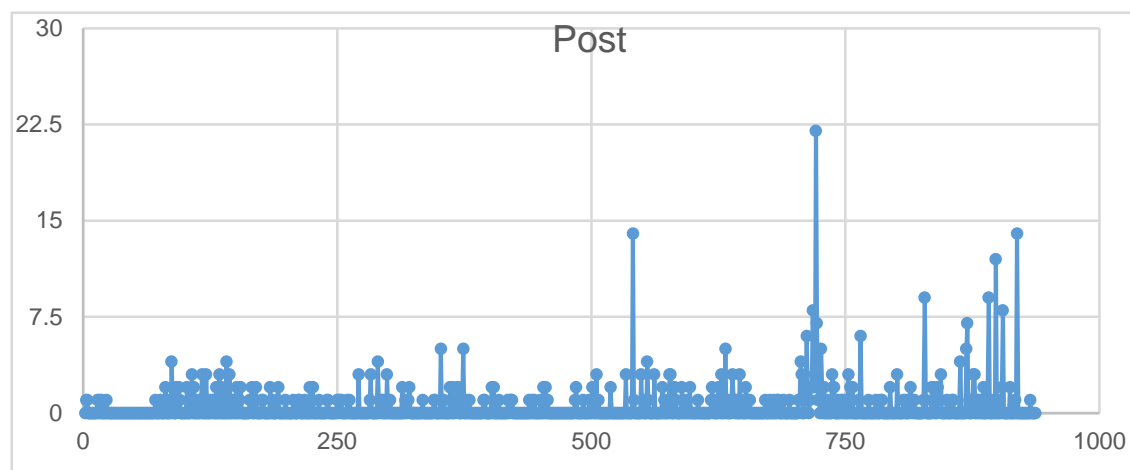
The number of posts for 2,5 years = 500, reactions (comments, likes, shares) = 8734. The splash of posts and comments in May 2016 is due to the political events: election in this church and organization of the Pan-Orthodox Council in Cyprus in June .
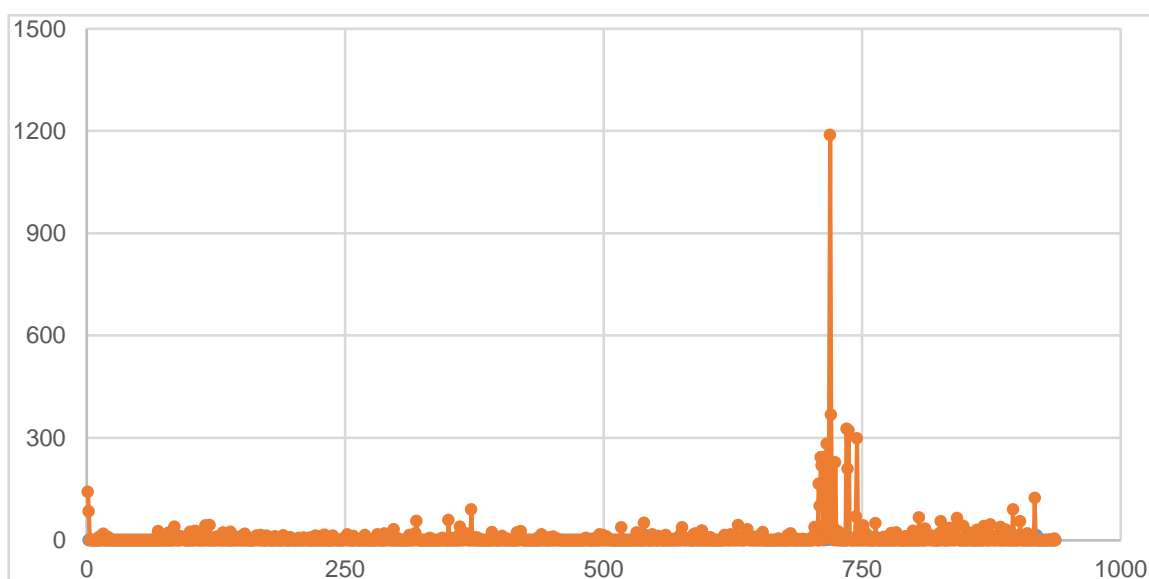
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