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## Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Exile's Policy Towards the Patriarchate of Constantinople after 1948

### Introduction

The events of World War II and its consequences initiated another wave of emigration from Belarus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It lasted from 1944 to the second half of the 1950s and was political in nature. With a clearly defined social diversity – peasantry, intelligentsia, army – the representatives of this wave were characterized by “strong Belarusian national consciousness, independence views and absolute uncompromising attitude towards the communist system”<sup>1</sup>

According to religious affiliation, the vast majority were Orthodox, one fifth of the total – Catholics, and a small percentage – Protestants. Initially, this wave of emigration stopped in West Germany, Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, France and Italy. However, already in the early 1950s, most Belarusian emigrants from these countries went overseas – to the USA, Canada, Australia, and also to Argentina.

Time has shown that in the difficult conditions of life in exile, religion and the Church, despite conflicts and crises, became important organizing factors for most of them, contributing to the preservation of Belarusian traditionalism and national identity. Newly organized parishes of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC), restored in June 1948 in Konstanz (Germany), and

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<sup>1</sup> V. Kipel, *Belarusians in the United States*, New York 1999, pp. 195–288.

the first Belarusian parishes in Greek jurisdiction (USA and Canada) played a major role in this.

The aim of the publication is to present BAOC's policy in relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, to define its essence and goals, as well as to make a short review-retrospect of these relations and their effects (including political ones) for each of the parties. The analysis of this issue requires, first of all, answers to two key questions. Why did the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in exile/exile seek the possibility of establishing relations only with the Patriarchate of Constantinople? What role did the politics and attitude of the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church play in this?

In Belarusian historiography, mainly in emigration, there are a number of solid publications devoted to the history of BAOC.<sup>2</sup> However, even today it is difficult to find monographic works that would comprehensively show the main periods and regularities of the development of the idea of autocephaly of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, its historical and canonical foundations. This applies no less to the problem of the relationship between the BAOC in exile and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

For this reason, the publication was based mainly on documents from the archives of the BAOC hierarchs – Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk and Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich, as well as letters, memories and materials in the Belarusian emigration press.<sup>3</sup>

### The issue of BAOC's canonical status and how to resolve it

It should be emphasized that the essence and dynamics of Belarusian religious life in exile, starting from the 1950s and 1960s, were largely related to the search for such optimal possibilities that could effectively solve the issue of the canonical status of the BAOC and overcome the division of the Belarusian

<sup>2</sup> Mgr. AM [a. Martas], *Materialy da historii Pravaslaunaj Belaruskaj Carkvy (pery jad savieckaj i niemieckaj akupacyi)*. Niemiechchyna 1948; M.L. [a. M. Lapitsky] *Bielaruskaja Autakefalnaja Pravaslaunaja Carkva*, "Carkouny Svetach", sniežań 1951/luty 1952, nr 2; praciah: 1952, nr 2(3); 1953, nr 1(4); 1954, nr 1(5); 1955, nr 1(6) (koniec); A.L. Haroshka, *Chranalohia da historyi Chryścijanstva na Bielarusi*, Paryż 1952; I. Kasiak, *Z historyi Pravaslaunaj Carkvy bielaruskaha narodu*, Nju Jork 1956; *Relihijny stan na Bielarusi*, BINIM, Nju Jork 1957; *Davedki z historyi autokefalii Bielaruskaj Pravaslaunaj Carkvy*, Melburn 1960; A.M. Jackievich, „Adziny ratunek”. *Autakefalia Sviatoj Bielaruskaj Pravaslaunaj Carkvy*, Melburn 1960; Jep. Afanasij [Jep. A. Martas], *Bielaruś v istoricheskoj gosudarstvennoj i cerkovnoj žizni*, Buenos Aires 1966; A. Vinnicki, *Materialy da historyi bielaruskaj emigracyi u Niemiechchynie u 1939–1951 hadach*. Chastka II: *Relihijnyja spravy*, Los Angeles 1968; V. Kipel, *Bielarusy u ZSHA*, Minsk 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in exile, Archives (New York, USA).

clergy and followers of the Orthodox faith by jurisdiction (BAOC and Patriarchate of Constantinople). However, the original source of this state of affairs was the political division of the post-war Belarusian emigration into *kryvichy* and *zarubezhniki*.<sup>4</sup>

For these reasons, since the second half of the 1950s, the leadership of the BAOC in the person of Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk and lay religious activists have been making efforts to solve the following two issues. The first of them was related to the need to increase the hierarchy and number of clergy. The second issue concerned establishing contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. These activities were aimed at recognizing and confirming the canonical status of the BAOC as the heir of the Lithuanian-Navahradak Orthodox Metropolis from the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This institution, headed by Metropolitan Theophilus, was created by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1330.<sup>5</sup>

In the history of the BAOC-in-exile's relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, at least two periods should be distinguished:

– the first, related to the initiatives of Bishop Vasil Tamashchyk (from the second half of the 1950s – early 1960s);<sup>6</sup>

– the second one, initiated in the 1970s by the BAOC hierarchs – Metropolitan Andrey Kryt and Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich.<sup>7</sup>

Each of these periods certainly had its own specificity. Nevertheless, they had in common the goals that the BAOC leadership tried to achieve: first, to obtain confirmation of the canonical status of the BAOC and to restore prayer unity with the Patriarchate of Constantinople; secondly, the unification of BAOC parishes with Belarusian parishes under Greek jurisdiction; thirdly, reducing the role of political divisions; and fourthly, eliminating the influence of the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church on the religious life of representatives of the post-war Belarusian emigration.

What exactly was the role of the Church in the everyday life of the Belarusian diaspora? According to Vitaut Kipel, a researcher of Belarusian emigration/diaspora in the West, it was the Church that not only attracted everyone, but also fostered social, political and religious activity:

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<sup>4</sup> See: A. Vinnicki, *op. cit.*; V. Kipel, *Belarusans...*, pp. 199–201.

<sup>5</sup> N. Lapitsky, *Orthodoxy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*, New York 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

<sup>7</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Mikalay Matsukievich (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

People came from more or less the same region, spoke the same language, had a cultural community, and national consciousness could be quite low. So the Church, as a neutral ground, gave all these people the opportunity to meet regularly – once a week or from time to time. It was a common base that did not require national consciousness, but attracted the maximum number of people. [...] In such conditions, the organizational foundations of Belarusian social and religious life, as well as political and cultural life, were gradually created. It was all intertwined.

Before the establishment of BAOC, Belarusian emigration was completely dispersed from a religious point of view. The restoration of BAOC made it possible to maintain the national awareness of emigration, because without leadership it was impossible to build a parish or organize a church as an organizational unit.<sup>8</sup>

### Initiatives of Bishop Vasil Tamashchyk (second half of 1950s – early 1960s)

One of the first to initiate clarification on the issue of the canonical status of BAOC among its hierarchs was Bishop Vasil Tamashchyk. In this way, he tried to overcome the impact of the political division of the Belarusian diaspora on religious life and, as a result, unite Orthodox parishes in the jurisdictions of the BAOC and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In this matter, in the second half of the 1950s, he turned to Archbishop Michael, exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the United States of America. However, the Greek hierarch ignored this initiative of BAOC Bishop. No less crucial role in this was played by Rev. Mikalay Łapitski, parish priest of the Belarusian parish of St. Euphrosyne Polackaya from the Greek jurisdiction in South River (New Jersey, USA), who was associated with the *zarubiežniki* political camp.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 1960s, with the support of the Ukrainian Orthodox priest Vitaly Sahaidakivsky, Bishop Tamashchyk made one more attempt. This time he turned to Exarch Yakovos, who headed the Exarchate in North and South America after the death of Exarch Michael:

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<sup>8</sup> Information from Dr. V. Kipel and Dr. J. Zaprudnik to the author on November 30, 2005 (Somerset, USA).

<sup>9</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk...

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Bishop Vasiley (Tomashchyk).

New York, N.Y.

January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

His Eminence Jakovos,  
Greek  
Archdiocese,  
10 East – 79<sup>th</sup> Street,  
New York, N.Y.  
Your Eminence:

In conformity with the requirements of the 'Resolution of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas' of May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1962, I do hereby entreat Your Eminence to look into the matter of the canonical status of my episcopal ordination. Accordingly I do also herewith submit my corresponding document.<sup>10</sup>

In this letter to the Greek exarch, not without the influence of A.V. Sahajdakivskij, he also wrote that he condemns *lipkovishchyna* and no longer recognizes the canonical status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Ivan Teodorovich. However, these actions did not bring the expected results.

Meanwhile, the issue of enlarging the BAOC episcopate and the number of clergy was still one of the most important ones. Both Archbishops were aware of this. Vasil Tamashchyk, as well as lay religious activists. Therefore, from the second half of the 1960s, there was an active search for candidates for BAOC bishops. At the same time, possibilities of reaching an agreement with the clergy and Belarusian faithful under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople were sought. These were the most important issues that were considered at the Second Diocesan Council of BAOC, which took place on August 31, 1963 and was a breakthrough.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the merger of "Belarusian parishes of different jurisdictions" under the authority of BAOC, it was noted that negotiations are ongoing and that believers want such reconciliation, but "priests do not".<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it was decided to develop a special instruction regarding such unification.

The almost 10-year-long efforts of the BAOC management and lay activists related to the issue of candidates for new bishops have finally come to a logical

<sup>10</sup> See: V. Sahajdakivskij, *Pravdy nie vtopity*, Toronto, 1977, pp. 273–274.

<sup>11</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk...

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

conclusion. On February 15, 1968, in Adelaide (Australia), Archimandrite Andrey Kryt was elevated to the dignity of Bishop of Grodno-Novograd and Cleveland. A few weeks later, on March 10, 1968, in the same place, Archimandrite Mikalay Matsukevich was ordained the Bishop of Turawsko-Piński and Toronto. The consecration was presided over by the head of BAOOC, Archbishop Serhiy Akhatsenko together with Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk, Archbishop Danat of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and Serbian Bishop Dmitry.

It should be emphasized that acquiring two new bishops for the BAOOC allowed the BAOOC to increase its authority and attract greater attention of the faithful and political leaders of the Belarusian diaspora. There is no doubt that these actions strengthened the position of the leadership of the BAOOC in planned contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The unexpected death of Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk on June 9, 1970, which, according to some sources, involved the Soviet intelligence services, significantly complicated the situation in BAOOC.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a thorough reorganization was carried out in the administrative structures of the BAOOC. At the next meeting of bishops, held on June 16, 1970, with the participation of clergy and representatives of parish councils, the diocese of BAOOC in the USA, Canada and Europe was handed over to Bishop Andrey Kryt. In September of the same year, Bishop Mikalay Matsukevich, outside Toronto, was entrusted with the care of the parish of St. Kirila Turauski in Brooklyn (New York). In parallel with this function, he worked on the draft BAOOC Statute. It was at this time that the question was first raised about the need to write and publish a short history of the BAOOC that “would serve to clarify its canonical foundations”.

### Relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the 1970s

The importance of the issue of the canonical status of the BAOOC, its hierarchs and clergy in the 1970s intensified efforts to pursue further relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Therefore, it was considered at the meeting of the BAOOC Council of Bishops on August 25, 1971 in Cleveland.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Bishop Mikalay Matsukevich was soon to meet with Bishop Andrey Kushchak to establish contact and preliminary negotiations. In turn, Bishop Andrey Kryt, during his visit to Europe, allegedly commissioned Father Auhén Smarshchok to conduct talks with Archbishop Gregory of Paris and “if possible” with

<sup>13</sup> Report from B. Daniluk to the author on December 12, 2005 (Somerset, USA).

<sup>14</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich...

Bishop Emilian. Each of these meetings was about establishing contacts with Constantinople.

The death of Archbishop Serhiy Akhatsenko in Adelaide on October 2, 1971 led to profound changes in the management and administrative structures of BAOC. First of all, it was necessary to decide on her new superior. This issue was considered by the BAOC Council, which took place on May 27–29, 1972 in Highland Park (New Jersey, USA).

In addition to the elections, the Statute of the BAOC was discussed and approved, which was another important argument of the BAOC management in talks with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Moreover, the election of Bishop as the head of BAOC. Andrey Kryt, compared to his predecessor – Archbishop Serhiy Akhatsenko, created more favorable conditions for the success of such negotiations. Meetings were also planned between the representative of BAOC, Father Auhen Smarshchok in Belgium, and the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Then, at the BAOC Council in May 1972, a special “Memorial” was prepared, which was to be submitted to the head of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It presented a short history of the BAOC and its current situation in exile. In addition, there was a request to “give a blessing” to the BAOC and its newly elected head – Metropolitan Andrey Kryt.

Originally, the “Memorial” on behalf of the BAOC Council was to be sent to Patriarch Athenagoras I. However, his unexpected death and the election of the new Patriarch Dimitrios forced the authors to change the name of the addressee and edit the previous text:

October 3, 1972

His Holiness  
Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios I  
Archbishop of Constantinople  
Your Holiness:

We, the hierarchs, clergy and laity of the Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, in Council assembled on May 27–29, 1972 at Our Lady of Żyrovicy Church in Highland Park, New Jersey in the United States of America, by this letter send Your Holiness our felicitations and best wishes and pray to Our Lord that He may grant you good health for the lasting good of the Orthodox Church, and at the same time we ask for your holy

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.*

prayers and blessing. We humbly bow our heads before Your Holiness in the recognition of the Constantinople Patriarch as the traditional head of the Orthodox Church.

In the tenth century, Constantinople missionaries first introduced Christianity to Byelorussian lands where it quickly took root and grew in all its mystic beauty. Ever since, Orthodox Christianity played a pivotal role in Byelorussia's existence and in its fluctuating political fortunes. In the course of centuries our nation became enlightened and blossomed in the Orthodox Church's benevolent light, and its spirit was enriched by the eternal truth of Christ's teachings. As a result of the spiritual and moral impetus imparted by the Orthodox faith, our nation was privileged to give to the Church many saints, including the Most Blessed Euphrosyne, Princess of Polacak; the Saints Cyril and Lauren, bishops of Turov; the Most Blessed Aphonasius, abbot of Brest; and the Saints Abram and Mercurius of Smolensk. Throughout the centuries the Byelorussian people followed the Orthodox faith of their ancestors in its original purity and beauty, despite recurring adverse political pressures against their religion.

As early as in the eleventh century, Byelorussia had episcopal seats in Polacak (Polock), Smalensk (Smolensk), and Turau (Turov) and later also seats in Novogrodok and Brest. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Patriarch John Glyksi of Constantinople agreed to recognize our own Metropolitan with his seat in Novogrodok, at that time the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuania or Litva for short) was our nation's historical name, and should not be confused with today's Lithuania. The name Byelorussia came into being after the conquest of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In spite of many adversities, the Lithuanian Metropole lasted for almost three hundred years. After the Grand Duchy's political union with Poland in 1569, the Orthodox Church was subjected to powerful pressures from Roman Catholic Poland to enter into a religious union with Rome. The resulting church union of 1596, union of Brest, did not succeed, however, in destruction of Orthodox Church in Byelorussia since a great majority of our people remained faithful to their Orthodox traditions and the idea of independent Orthodox Church of Lithuania.

With the annexation of Byelorussian lands by Russia in 1795, the Byelorussian Orthodox Church was forcibly subjected to the control of This unilateral and noncanonical expansion of Moscow's Synod. ecclesiastical domain into Byelorussian territory was pointed out by the late Patriarch Athenagoras I in his letter of June 24, 1970 to Metropolitan Pimen (Kruticky). Our people never agreed with Moscow's political or religious domination. On March 25, 1918, shortly after Bolshevik Revolution, Byelorussian people proclaimed Byelorussia free and independent nation under the name of Byelorussian National Republic. A few years later, on July 23, 1922, the Council of Miensk (Minsk) proclaimed the renewal of the Byelorussian Orthodox Church with Metropolitan Melchisedokos (Payeuski) at its head.

Unfortunately, this was not to be for long. All of the Byelorussian hierarchs, most of its clergy and millions of Orthodox believers fell victim to the ruthless atheistic and suppressive policies of the newly established Soviet Socialist Republic. The Communist regime either closed all the churches or converted them to warehouses, theatres or canters for antireligious activities. The Orthodox Church in Byelorussia was greatly weakened. In the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic today there remains one officially sanctioned archbishop who presides over a small number of clergy.

Pursuant to the terms of the Treaty of Riga in 1921, the Bolsheviks ceded approximately one third of Byelorussian territory to Poland. In this part of Polish-controlled territory, the Byelorussian Orthodox Church was able to attain some semblance of normal religious life. Patriarch Gregory II recognized the Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Poland by his Tomas of November, 1924. Although the Moscow Patriarch for some reason considered the creation of the Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Poland as noncanonical, we attest that the creation of this Church was a positive step in the preservation of the Orthodox faith amongst our brothers in Roman Catholic Poland.

The Second World War created a different set of circumstances for the Byelorussian Orthodox Church. From 1941 to 1944 almost all of Byelorussia was occupied by German military forces. Byelorussians were striving under these adverse conditions to attain a degree of self-government and cultural autonomy. Wherever these goals have been achieved the rebirth of religious life followed. Metropolitan Panteleimon (Rozhnovski) became the head of resurrected Byelorussian Orthodox Church. The Council of our Church, which met in Minsk from July 30 to August 2, 1942, officially adopted a new name for the resurgent Byelorussian Church, the Holy Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, and ratified its constitution.

At the end of the war, the Byelorussian hierarchs, who emigrated to Germany defected to the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile leaving their flock bishopric care. Apparently the better economic status of the Russian church and the fact that the hierarchs of the Holy Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church were in their majority of Russian ancestry were the reasons for their defection.

In order to provide spiritual care for the believers and to insure the continuation of the Byelorussian Autocephalic Church, Byelorussian clergy and laity turned for assistance to the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, which delegated its Bishop Sergiy (Okhotenko) to the Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church. At the Council of Byelorussian clergy and laity held in Constance, Germany, on June 5, 1948, Bishop Sergiy assumed temporary leadership of the orphaned Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church. On December 19, 1949 Archimandrite Vasil (Tomashchik) was consecrated a bishop by the Bishops Sergiy, Platon, and Viacheslav of the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church.

Our present canonical status is similar to that of other canonical We know as a fact that our Orthodox brethren Orthodox Churches in exile. in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist

Republic rejoice in the existence of the Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church in exile and they place great hope in its future.

In conclusion, we wish to assure Your Holiness that the Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church fully adheres to the teachings, dogma and canons of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church. Our link to Constantinople dates back to the very beginning of Christianity in Byelorussia, and it remains as one of our most venerable traditions.

We respectfully request Your Holiness for your holy prayers and to consider closely to your loving heart the needs of our martyr-Church, to understand the particular circumstances of our emigre life, as well as the problems of our Orthodox brothers in the anti-religious environment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, and to bestow your Patriarchal blessing upon our Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church and upon our newly elected First Hierarch, Metropolitan Andrew.

With love in Christ,  
Metropolitan Andrew  
Chairman of the Congress of the  
Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church

Very Rev. Vasil Kendysh  
Secretary of the of the Congress of the  
Byelorussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the Belarusian Episcopate sent telegrams of condolence to the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople and to its exarch in New York – Archbishop Yakovos. In addition, a congratulatory telegram was sent to the newly elected Patriarch Dmitry I. However, no response was received to either the telegrams or the “Memorial” sent. Therefore, the idea of sending the protégé’s father to Constantinople arose. Augén Smarshchok from Belgium, after prior arrangement of such a visit with the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Europe. It looks like it did not happen after all.

The issue of establishing relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was still treated as a priority also at the meeting of the BAOC Council held on June 2, 1973 in New York. Secretary of the Consistory Rev. Vasil Kendysh informed the participants about what had been done and noted that the Patriarchate of Constantinople had not yet responded.

In the meantime, another important event took place in the life of the clergy and followers of the BAOC – on May 18, 1974, Bishop Mikalay Matsukevich

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

was elevated to the dignity of archbishop. This was not done by accident. First of all, Bishop Mikalay deserved such a high award for her active church activities. Secondly, this nomination strengthened the authority of the BAOC episcopate.

Finally, after years of efforts, the matter of establishing contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople began to take real shape and bring the first positive results. One of them was the meeting of the leadership of BAOC (Metropolitan Andrey, Archbishop Mikalay) with Archbishop Yakovos, Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for North and South America, which took place on December 19, 1974 at his residence in New York.

Belarusian hierarchs, citing the historical continuity of the BAOC-in-exile's relationship with the Belarusian Orthodox Church from the times of the Lithuanian-Navagrad Metropolis and its approval in 1291 by the then Patriarch of Constantinople Theophilos, expressed their desire to "establish prayerful and canonical unity/reconciliation with the Patriarchate of Constantinople". During the meeting, Archbishop Yakovos received copies of the "Memorial", sent on behalf of the BAOC Council to Patriarch Dimitrios I. It was also agreed that in the near future the BAOC Consistory would prepare "a historical list of the ordinations of bishops of the revived Belarusian Autocephalous Church and other documents", which was then to be forwarded to Constantinople.<sup>17</sup>

Undoubtedly, this conversation allowed us to understand the position of the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople towards the autocephaly of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in its historical context. In turn, the Greek archbishop's approach to the issue of the canonical status of BAOC in exile showed the Belarusian hierarchs real possibilities of prayerful and canonical unification of the BAOC with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, to what extent could these conditions be accepted by Belarusian autocephalists, their supporters, and the political elites of the Belarusian diaspora?

After analysing the conversation with Exarch Yakovos from the perspective of BAOC's interests and determining with Metropolitan Andrey Kryt a strategy for further negotiations with Constantinople, Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich stated that the authority of the Patriarch should be accepted, taking into account the following issues:

- the patriarch only approves the head of the BAOC – the metropolitan,
- the BAOC metropolitan reports directly to the patriarch and not to his exarch,
- the current term/name of the BAOC remains unchanged,

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<sup>17</sup> See: *Sustrecha herarkhau BAPC z arkhijapiskapam Jakavasam, ekzarkham Susvietnaha patryjarkha Dzmitryjasa*, „Bielarus”, 1975, nr 213, p. 1.

– regardless of the circumstances, the BAOC has the right to have at least three bishops,

– BAOC’s Statute remains in force.<sup>18</sup>

This strategy in talks with Constantinople, according to Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich allowed us to achieve several important things:

1) in church matters, we will return to the state of our Church from before the times of the Church Union. In this case, we don’t waste anything and we win:

- a) we will be in prayerful unity with the World Church;
- b) Belarusians will be more loyal to BAOC;
- c) no one will be able to raise any objections to BAOC.

2) we will not be dependent on the exarch, and our relations with the patriarch will go through our metropolitan. We will omit the Greek mediator.

3) by keeping the name “Autocephaly”, we preserve its historical significance. One hundred or two hundred years later, different people will explain this word in their own way. Therefore, it must be stopped at all costs.

4) we must have the right to three bishops; because you have to look to the future. Namely: in the event of favourable circumstances, i.e. the establishment of an independent Belarus, our bishops will be able to build a BAOC in Belarus immediately and regardless of the policy of Constantinople.

5) The Statute will provide us with the internal organization of the Orthodox Church, as well as the consecration of our bishops independently of Constantinople.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Archbishop Mikalay believed that in relations with Patriarch Dimitrios I one should express a “strong desire” to restore BAOC’s past relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was also about accepting the apostolic succession of the current Belarusian episcopate. Metropolitan Andrey Kryt agreed with almost everything, but for his part he noted that “everything possible” should be demanded from Constantinople.<sup>20</sup>

The meeting of the BAOC hierarchs with the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in New York and the results of the talks certainly worked to increase the authority of the BAOC among the Belarusian diaspora and strength-

<sup>18</sup> The letter from Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich to Metropolitan Andrey Kryt of January 15, 1975, [in:] Archival collections of Metropolitan Andrey Kryt (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> The letter from Metropolitan Andrey Kryt to Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich of January 28, 1975, [in:] Archival collections of Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

ened its position in the eyes of international opinion and other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

This event was immediately reported in the emigre press, and its leading newspaper "Biełarus" wrote on its front page under the great title "Meeting of the BAOC hierarchs with Archbishop Yakovos, exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios": "The meeting took place in an atmosphere of sincere and friendly exchange of information and discussions on canonical issues and ended with an exchange of Christmas wishes".<sup>21</sup>

As a result, as the BAOC Consistory noted, from the moment of sending the "Memorial" to Patriarch Dimitrios I on October 3, 1972, a "spiritual union" of the BAOC Metropolitan with the Patriarchs, Heads and Bishops of the Orthodox Churches was established, also through mutual wishes on the occasion of the Holy Feasts Nativity and Resurrection of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the first steps towards cooperation with the Belarusian episcopate were taken by representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the summer of 1978, the head of the BAOC, Metropolitan Andrey Kryt, was invited by Bishop John R. Martin of the Carpatho-Ruthenian Church, with the consent of Archbishop Yakovos, to participate in the First Conference of Orthodox Canonical Bishops of America, held on October 17–18, 1978 in Jonestown (Pennsylvania, USA). The higher authorities of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church were represented at the conference by Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich due to the illness of Metropolitan Andrey. The organizing institution was the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA). Since its founding in 1960, it has aimed to cooperate and establish contacts with Orthodox Churches of various jurisdictions in North America.

Inviting the head of BAOC and the participation of his representative in the conference was recognized by the Belarusian episcopate as proof of recognition of the canonical status of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. In this regard, the secretary of the BAOC Consistory, Father V. Kendysh, wrote in his letter to the parish council of Our Lady of Żyrowicy in Cleveland:

Today we are happy that on October 17, our BAOC was admitted to the Permanent Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America, which includes bishops of all Ortho-

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<sup>21</sup> See: *Sustrecha...*, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Archival collections of Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich...

dox Churches and is chaired by the Exarch of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Yakovos. This is an official recognition of the canonical status of our bishops and BAOC.<sup>23</sup>

Wider activities aimed at further contacts with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and above all, the fact that a BAOC representative participated in the proceedings of the Conference of Orthodox Canonical Bishops of America, did not escape the attention of the Belarusian clergy and faithful from the parish of St. Euphrosyne Polackaya in South River (New Jersey) under Greek jurisdiction. Some people perceived this event with caution, others perceived it as the first step towards the possible unification of the clergy and faithful of the Belarusian diaspora from various jurisdictions under the jurisdiction of BAOC in the near future.

In June 1978, at a meeting of the BAOC Consistory, its participants were informed that the documentation regarding BAOC had been handed over to the secretary of Exarch Yakovos in New York – Rev. Dr. Nikan Patrinas for its further consideration by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>24</sup>

The 1970s were one of the most fruitful periods in the activity of the BAOC. Moreover, June 1978 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the renewal of the BAOC in exile. At that time, important structural and administrative changes were made: two church units were created – American and European dioceses. No less an achievement was the establishment of relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was to serve the recognition of the canonical status of the BAOC.

Constantinople's favourable attitude towards Belarusian autocephalous Christians paved the way for wider cooperation, prayer unification and official recognition of BAOC by other Orthodox Autocephalous Churches. Mutual Christmas and Easter wishes between the hierarchs of the BAOC and the highest spiritual authorities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – Patriarch Dimitrios I, Archbishop Yakovos, exarch in the United States; Archbishop Athenagoras II, exarch in Great Britain – were a good sign and a true testimony of such spiritual unity. Good relations were also maintained with Patriarch Benedict of Jerusalem, Patriarch Nicholas VI of Alexandria, Metropolitan Mstislav of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA, Archbishop Chrysostom of Crete, Bishop John R. Martin of the Carpatho-Ruthenian Orthodox Church in the USA and others.

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<sup>23</sup> The letter of Rev. Vasil Kendysh to the chairman and parish council of the Zhirovitsa Mother of God in Cleveland from October 24, 1978 (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA); see: *BAPC nakanferencyji kananichnych japiskapau*, „Bielarus”, 1979, nr 259–260, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Pratakol narady Kanssystoryi z 3 chervienia 1978 hodu u Hajlend Parku* (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

It is worth emphasizing that in the official correspondence of the BAO C Consistory with the lower clergy from 1972 to 1981 it was stated that contacts had been established with the Patriarch in Constantinople and Exarch Jakovos, as well as with the superiors of other Orthodox Churches:

Currently, the case of our BAO C is being considered by the Exarchs of the Greek Archdiocese. Next week, documents regarding the consecration of bishops of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church will be presented. so it is to be hoped that the matter will not be delayed for long. Generally, Constantinople is treating us very favourably, so we hope for the best.<sup>25</sup>

Another important step towards broader cooperation could have been the invitation and participation of the BAO C hierarchy in the Second SCOBA conference, which was to be held on May 10, 1979. However, this did not happen. Time has shown who and why was not interested in such a development of events.

#### The Russian factor and its role in BAO C's relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople

There is no doubt that the contacts of the Episcopate of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church with the highest authorities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as the BAO C "Memorial" submitted to Patriarch Dimitrios, concerned the superiors of the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church (RZCP) and motivated them to take active measures. It is not hard to figure out why. Wider cooperation and recognition of the canonical status of the BAO C, its hierarchy, clergy and faithful by the Patriarchate of Constantinople fundamentally changed the situation of Russian Orthodoxy and its "living space" in the West. In North America alone, there were approximately 1.5 million Belarusians of the Orthodox faith, including Belarusian clergy belonging to the RZCP and other Orthodox Churches. The same was true for Western Europe, Australia and Argentina.

There were also autocephalous Belarusian bishops from the period of World War II, in particular Archbishop Apanas Martas and Archbishop Filafey Narko, who joined the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church in the second half of the 1940s, and could have expressed a desire to move to the BAO C in exile. Undoubtedly, Belarusian priests and a significant number of believers from Argentina, Austra-

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<sup>25</sup> The letter of Metropolitan Andrey Kryt to Rev. Vasil Kendysh, August 18, 1978; Informational note of Rev. Vasil Kendysh to the editor of "Voice of the Church" from December 6, 1979 (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

lia, Germany and other places where Belarusians live in the West would come with them. Moreover, the number of BAOC followers could be supplemented, if not by representatives of the old pre-war Belarusian emigration, then by their descendants.

Therefore, on the eve of the Second Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (May 1979), a special commission, composed of Bishop Silas and Bishop German, was established to discuss the issue of the canonical status of the BAOC, prayer union with it and cooperation.

The participation of the above-mentioned people in the commission aroused concern of the BAOC episcopate, in particular Metropolitan Andrey Kryt, who stated that he did not believe in the favour of the BAOC bishops elected to the commission.<sup>26</sup> The point was that neither Bishop Silas nor Bishop German asked the BAOC episcopate to send documents confirming the canonical status of the BAOC and its hierarchs. However, their predecessor, Bishop John R. Martin, behaved differently when he prepared the previous First Conference of the Permanent Meeting of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America in Johnstown. He then asked for access to such documents. It is easy to guess that the discussion in the committee regarding the participation of representatives of the BAOC episcopate in the next Second Conference of the Standing Meeting of Orthodox Canonical Bishops in America in May 1979 ended with a resolution that did not serve the interests of the BAOC.

It should be assumed that it is for this reason that after 1980, further relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the hierarchy of the BAOC did not go beyond mutual holiday greetings for Christmas and Easter.

Nevertheless, this nature of the relationship was perceived by the Belarusian episcopate as beneficial for the BAOC hierarchy and clergy, because in the future it could contribute to changes in the policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople towards individual Orthodox Autocephalous Churches in North America, including the BAOC. The reasonableness of expectations for such changes resulted, among others, from the intensifying church rivalry between Constantinople and Moscow in the USA since the 1980s, which was perceived by Belarusian autocephalists and expressed in the following way:

According to the magazine of the Greek Archdiocese, "Orthodox Observer", the archdiocese is not giving up on the idea of uniting the Orthodox Churches in the USA. The competition is with the Orthodox Church in America, which has accepted Autocephaly

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<sup>26</sup> Archival collections of Metropolitan Andrey Kryt (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

from Moscow and wants all Orthodox jurisdictions in the US to unite with it. For us, the Greek Orthodox Church is our historic Mother Church. The Christmas wishes of the Patriarch of Constantinople are the best testimony to this.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

In the functioning of the BAOC in exile, both internal factors and external stimuli played (and continue to play to this day) a significant influence. They were closely linked to one of the key issues regarding the status of its autocephaly. That is why, since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the leadership of BAOC (Archbishop Vasil Tamashchyk, Archbishop Mikalay Matsukevich, Metropolitan Andrey Kryt) has been making active efforts to establish relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, with which it had a past – the Lithuanian-Navahrad Orthodox Metropolis in the jurisdiction of Constantinople with times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

It was through the confirmation and recognition of the canonical status of the BAOC by Constantinople that the Belarusian Episcopate intended to unite all Belarusian Orthodox parishes in the West; overcome the political division of the diaspora and de-Russify the Belarusian Orthodox Church in exile, including eliminating the influence of the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church.

The achievement of these goals could have been largely facilitated by the rivalry between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow and the growing confrontation in the USA related to the establishment of the Russian-American Orthodox metropolis under the authority of Metropolitan Irene in October 1970. This event was perceived by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as an interference of the Moscow Patriarchate in the rights and privileges of Constantinople and Patriarch Athenagoras I and termed “American-Moscow autocephaly”.

However, this situation was not properly interpreted by BAOC's leadership and subsequently incorporated into the policy and strategy of its further efforts to establish broader relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. There was also a lack of proper involvement of politicians and Belarusian socio-cultural figures in exile in this matter.

The recognition of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I in January 2019 also gives hope for the BAOC in exile.

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<sup>27</sup> The letter of Rev. Vasil Kendysh to M. Vojtanka, July 20, 1981 (BAOC in exile, Archives, New York, USA).

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the attempts of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC) in exile to establish relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. BAOCC's intentions and policy towards the Constantinople Patriarchate were analysed, which included the implementation of the following goals: 1) confirmation/recognition

of the canonical status of the BAOC by the Patriarchate of Constantinople; 2) unification of all Belarusian Orthodox parishes in the democratic West under the jurisdiction of BAOC; 3) overcoming the political division of the Belarusian diaspora in the West and reducing its role in the functioning of parishes; 4) independence of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in exile from the influence of the Russian Foreign Orthodox Church.

**Keywords:** Belarusian diaspora in the West; Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BAOC) in exile; Patriarchate of Constantinople; Russian Foreign Orthodox Church; autocephaly; jurisdiction; canonical status

### **Polityka Białoruskiej Autokefalicznej Cerkwi Prawosławnej na uchodźctwie wobec Patriarchatu Konstantynopolskiego po 1948 roku**

**Streszczenie:** W artykule zostały omówione próby nawiązania w drugiej połowie XX wieku przez Białoruską Autokefaliczną Cerkiew Prawosławną (BACP) na uchodźctwie stosunków z Patriarchatem Konstantynopolskim. Przeanalizowano zamierzenia i politykę BACP wobec Konstantynopolskiego Patriarchatu, które obejmowały realizację następujących celów: 1) potwierdzenie/uznanie statusu kanonicznego Białoruskiej Autokefalicznej Cerkwi Prawosławnej przez Patriarchat Konstantynopolski; 2) zjednoczenie wszystkich białoruskich parafii prawosławnych na demokratycznym Zachodzie pod jurysdykcją BACP; 3) przewyciężenie polityczne podziału diaspery białoruskiej na Zachodzie oraz zmniejszeniu jego roli w funkcjonowaniu parafii; 4) uniezależnienie prawosławia białoruskiego na uchodźctwie od wpływów Rosyjskiej Zagranicznej Cerkwi Prawosławnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** białoruska diaspora na Zachodzie; Białoruska Autokefaliczna Prawosławna Cerkiew (BACP) na uchodźctwie; Patriarchat Konstantynopolski; Rosyjska Zagraniczna Cerkiew Prawosławna; autokefalia; jurysdykcja; status kanoniczny