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The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Part 3: Under The Second Union of Democratic Forces Government, 1997–2001¹

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Introduction

The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which started in 1992 had still not been resolved at the millennium. The first Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) government was dominated by the urbanised, secularised, technologically well-qualified intelligentsia and middle class who were responsible for the overthrow of Todor Zhivkov's government in 1989. They were in a hurry to dismantle the last vestiges of the system which they regarded as an anachronism incompatible with Bulgaria's progress towards freedom, pluralism and democracy, and were mainly atheist or agnostic in practice, even if they claimed to profess their nation's traditional Orthodox faith. Decades of unavoidable alienation from any sort of normal church life left them deficient in their understanding of basic theology and of how this faith worked, unable to distinguish between what was acceptable to most committed believers and what infringed its time-hallowed canons. Though in 1992 85 per cent of Bulgarians claimed to be Orthodox, a mere 10 per cent admitted to deep religious convictions and regular religious observance, and this figure included the much more committed Muslim minority.

Partly as a result of pressure from a mix of people, some genuine church activists who despaired of what they regarded as a deeply compromised, corrupt and procrastinating church leadership and others who had their own agendas and religio-political ambitions, cloaked under reformist credentials, the government's Board for Religious Affairs under Metodi Spasov interfered disastrously in church affairs. It declared Patriarch Maksim's election under communism invalid and the Holy Synod illegitimate and replaced it with a Provisional Synod headed by one of Maksim's former colleagues, Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop.

In reply the government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, the recycled Communist Party) which succeeded the UDF government from late 1992 until 4 February 1997 endorsed Maksim and the Holy Synod. By then the original impetus for Orthodox renewal had long been dissipated by the schism (*raskol*) and other churches, local Catholic and Protestant as well as a plethora of unfamiliar churches, cults and sects from abroad, had made advances, usually at the expense of the Orthodox. The Holy Synod had still not convened the *Tsurkovno-naroden Subor*

(Council of Church and Nation) it had pledged back in 1990. The schismatics (*raskolniki*), on the other hand, had in 1996 convened an irregular Council with UDF backing and elected Pimen patriarch, although no local Orthodox Church would recognise him. During the dignified mass rallies which brought about the BSP government's collapse it was Pimen and his schismatic clergy rather than Maksim and the Holy Synod who seized the initiative in urging the overthrow of the corrupt government which had brought the nation to the brink of disaster. The new president Petur Stoyanov made the mistake – as he admitted a year later – of endorsing Pimen at his swearing-in on 27 January 1998.

The schismatics' initiative did not however sway people to throw themselves behind them in their ecclesiastical disputes. The true motives of their leaders, whose past records as trusty servants of the communist government did not inspire confidence, remained ambiguous and most well-informed people were not prepared to trust them. Pimen of Nevrokop and Kalinik of Vratsa had been assiduous in the promotion of foreign relations in accordance with Soviet foreign policy while Pankrati of Stara Zagora had been the person ultimately responsible for providing references for church personnel and therefore assessing their 'reliability'. Former security police had infiltrated the ranks of the schismatics. Their former eminence grise, Khristofor Subev, had been unmasked as a security officer and after playing his own brand of ecclesiastical power games reached a dead end and departed for the USA. The impetus provided at the start of the schism from some members of the Union of Priests, genuinely concerned older men who had suffered for their faith in the past, had been dissipated. By the end of the decade sympathisers felt that there was a need for new blood and ideas.

To quote an informed visitor to Bulgaria in 1998, 'The basic causes and ramifications of the schism had become lost on the mass of the population and were a matter of indifference to them'. Most people were not really involved in or divided from each other by the schism, according to the journalist Angelina Todorova.² After their experiences under communism most people regarded all institutions as corrupt and had become accustomed to keeping their distance from them. What they had seen since under democracy in both church and political life had only disillusioned them. On the basis of her own experience of worship within her family in communist times Todorova believed that even though some Bulgarians in traditionally believing families had kept God in their homes and hearts, when freedom came they had found little to encourage a more committed church life.

The expert on religion Dimitrina Merdjanova feels that the schism had a profoundly negative effect on the nation and has no sympathy for either side.

The schism has had grievous consequences for believers and nonbelievers alike because people were waiting for a symbolic power to guide them through the difficulties in our situation and they didn't find it. Looking for church renewal, they would have welcomed public admission of guilt, but nothing happened at all – the bishops were arrogant! The Orthodox Church cannot present any visible or invisible power to give the nation the integrity and self-determination it is looking for. People desperately need reunification, but repentance must come first. Canonical rules must be followed There wasn't any sense in what happened. The conflict in our church is not doctrinal; it is the political repercussion of events in our country. Our church officially purports not to be involved in worldly activity, but it is.³

If the schismatics did not evoke widespread confidence, neither, in practice, did the Holy Synod. It contained no towering or charismatic personalities to provide inspired leadership and guidance or capture public imagination. Maksim was in his mid-eighties, determined to cling on to his position. Members of the Holy Synod were seen as more intent on maintaining the status quo, their prestige, privileges and comfortable lifestyles, than on putting their church to rights. It would be very surprising had not some, as in the Russian Orthodox Church, originated as agents of the security services and there were aspects of their behaviour which caused public scandal; they knew that people did not trust them and feared that they might be supplanted. Infighting did not improve their public image. The St Nikola Bank, promoted by the Holy Synod, gave rise to scandal, being generally regarded as a cover for money-laundering, since it was run by people who had worked for the Sixth Department of the security services, which had oversight of church and religious institutions. While bishops were concentrating on the restitution of church property, which brought benefits to them but none to the impoverished, ill-trained clergy, the gap between the two groups only widened. Todorova expresses a widespread view when she says that laypeople would prefer a new patriarch from the new generation, someone who is not tainted, who could attract people and make an impact on them, bring them out of their isolated religious life and back into the churches: for parish community life in the normally accepted sense hardly exists. In a land renowned for its choral singing few parishes can provide more than elderly ladies and the priest. The level of preaching is low. Huge urban suburbs still lack churches and the current state of parish life rarely provides an incentive to travel to central churches. The low number of vocations reflects deep disillusionment within the church and monasticism is so fragile that eligible candidates for bishop are very few on the ground.

The priest Boyan Saruev, notorious because of his past involvement as a police officer in the 1984–85 campaign to force Turks to adopt Bulgarian Christian names and controversial because of his mission, as a reformed Christian, to convert Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) to his faith, has had some tough yet constructive things to say. He has written that Bulgaria has only one Synod and one patriarch, but a Synod which is so passive that it reaches the limits of criminality by its failure to provide priests for all its parishes. Many more serious reforms are needed to reactivate the church; canons need to be revised. He compares the archimandrites to generals without armies, jostling for their places, with no genuinely holy clergy behind them.

The Union of Democratic Forces Launches its New Religious Policy

The caretaker government set up on 10 February 1997 by Stefan Sofyansky signalled its intention to eradicate corruption by purging key institutions including the Interior Ministry and the police and not excluding the Holy Synod. Sofyansky made it clear that the government had no intention of dispensing with the Board for Religious Affairs altogether, despite criticism from several human rights organisations, but also announced that no replacement for its sacked head Boncho Asenov was to be made for the time being. Bulgarian Orthodox claim they have always had an office for religious affairs; most were firmly behind its draconian restrictions on new churches from abroad, and even those on the century-old, registered Bulgarian Protestant churches – now resurgent and self-confident after the low profile forced on them by the communists.

At first the government exerted very one-sided political pressure on Patriarch Maksim in the hope that he would resign once the Supreme Court granted his rival Pimen's appeal for registration, which was endorsed by Procurator Ivan Tatarchev. On 28 February Maksim and his Synod made it clear to Sofyansky that they had no intention of standing down. On the contrary, they requested his cooperation for the return of church property and announced that they would appeal to the world Orthodox community and human rights groups for justice.⁴ On 5 March the Supreme Court nullified the Holy Synod's registration, ruling that it had not been done at the right time or by competent organs.⁵ While the Holy Synod ignored this ruling, Pimen and the schismatics maintained that the decision rendered it illegitimate. Tatarchev would not register Pimen's Synod either, however. He explained that although he believed that Maksim's Synod was illegitimate, since it had been appointed by the communist regime, in principle it was not possible to register two leaderships of a single denomination. The government seemed to have decided that reconciliation and reunification must precede any registration. The next day President Stoyanov met the two claimants separately and tried to mediate. Maksim was adamant that only death could remove him from his office, that he had no grounds for withdrawing and that resignation would be a sin against God who had chosen him as patriarch. He accused Pimen of sowing disunity in the church and rejected compromise, widely mooted by many church members as the best way towards unity. He denied that the schism was caused by the struggle between conflicting economic interests. The schismatic Synod's spokesman archpriest Anatoli Balachev emphasised that it would not use the decision to seize control of buildings (as it had in 1992).⁶ Pimen suggested a new Council, with both Synods represented at it, to discuss means for reunification, and offered to resign provided Maksim did so too.

The section of the UDF's election manifesto on Bulgarian Orthodoxy and other religious faiths emphasised the importance of restoring the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to its previous leading role in society, but its pledge to support 'all clergy who struggle against the servants of the former totalitarian government who have infiltrated senior church circles' contradicted its claim to keep church and state completely separate.⁷

On 21 March Metropolitan Neofit of Dorostol-Cherven and Dometian of Vidin handed the president a letter from the Synod asking him to order the opening of secret police files on clergy so as to enable voters to separate moral issues from political concerns ahead of the general election. It was signed only by the Synod secretary Metropolitan Gelasi, so it is probable that the Synod was not unanimous on the issue.⁸ Maksim was indeed to obstruct a proposal to open the files during the subsequent Council. Acknowledging the UDF's recognition of the role of Orthodoxy they expressed consternation about the manifesto's recourse to expressions reminiscent of the old communist slogan about 'combating the enemy who carries a party membership card' from the days of the purges in the 1940s. Kostov retorted that opening files was not a spiritual approach to achieving church unity. Asenov, whose duties in the Sixth Department of the state security service had included recruiting priests, called a press conference soon after his dismissal. He stated that files were destroyed in late 1989 and early 1990.⁹ If true, this would have detracted from the Holy Synod's plea for forgiveness for its helplessness in the face of Communist Party policies.¹⁰ Asenov was almost certainly lying about the files but his claims that a considerable number of secular clergy and monks on both sides were security agents were probably true.¹¹ He also claimed that the security services would never have allowed a schism to develop and laid responsibility for it on agents who had

been 'cut loose' by the closure of the state security's department of religious affairs.¹² The postponement of the Council from May until July 1997 prompted doubts as to whether the bishops around Maksim really wanted to convene a forum where sensitive issues could be publicly debated. *Duma*, the BSP's mouthpiece, carried an article asserting that their sluggishness had helped Pimen's group to gain momentum.¹³

When elections for delegates were arranged on 12 April some church members complained that such short notice was quite inadequate. Some elections to parish councils, which then elected delegates for the Council, had been unsatisfactory, not least because of the lack of close-knit parish communities. People who were not churchgoers suddenly took an interest in church affairs. When electors in one central Sofia parish got wind that several candidates were communists, many in protest crossed out all the names on the list. That particular election was scuttled and had to be held again, but without adequate publicity.¹⁴ Academy and Seminary teacher Aleksandur Gospodinov, a supporter of Maksim and the Holy Synod, but also a keen UDF member, observed that these elections had made it easier for communists and people with no church background whatever to creep into key positions in the canonical Synod at various levels in the administration, from where they could exert control.

A sensational article appeared on the front page of *Duma* on 5 April 1997 accusing Pimen of having been an agent of the security services and quoting from articles by émigré historian Spas Raikin, who, before he left Bulgaria for the USA studied alongside several leading protagonists in the schism. In an unpublished paper *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Victim of State-imposed Illegalities*¹⁵ Raikin had claimed that Pimen was a protégé of the interior minister Anton Yugov, perhaps the most ruthless and dreaded communist official of the 1940s and 1950s. Pimen was elected successor of Metropolitan Boris of Nevrokop after the latter's mysterious assassination in August 1952. It took the then uninfiltated Holy Synod five months instead of the routine two weeks to ratify his position. Thereafter Pimen sang fulsome praises to Stalin and the state-enforced democratisation of the church. Raikin had pointed out in an open letter to President Zhelyu Zhelev in 1992 that it was common knowledge among émigrés that in 1963 Pimen broke up the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the USA by placing it under the control of the Holy Synod (and therefore of the state security apparatus) and expelling its most deserving, dedicated and patriotic priests. Raikin accused Pimen of being an ambitious maverick: though he dared to challenge Maksim's election as patriarch he had been prepared to work alongside him in the inner Holy Synod council for 20 years and serve the communist government obsequiously. Raikin stated that the UDF government fell into the 'biggest trap that there is' when it chose Pimen to supplant Maksim. Although Pimen's church career started long before the massive infiltration which eventually churned out non-believing bishops, priests and theology lecturers, the calibre of Bulgarian priests before communism also left a lot to be desired. Documentary evidence reveals that as assistant to Metropolitan Pavel of Stara Zagora in the 1930s Pimen had been disciplined for a serious moral offence and banished to Bachkovo monastery with the threat that he would never be allowed to leave.¹⁶ Contrary to the hopes of Raikin and of those UDF supporters who would have preferred a prelate with an untarnished record, there was no public reaction to the accusations. The UDF had accepted Pimen and endorsed him, and was now unable to do anything about him.

On 19 April the UDF and its coalition partners won the general election resound-

ingly, with 52 per cent of the votes as against the BSP's 22 per cent.

Bulgarian Orthodox communities in Stockholm, Vienna, Berlin and Munich, probably now hoping for government sympathy for their efforts to escape from a metropolitan they suspected of being an agent, made the unprecedented request that they be removed from the jurisdiction of Simeon, metropolitan of Western and Central Europe, and be placed directly under Maksim.¹⁷

In May Maksim carried out his threat and formally protested to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.¹⁸ Nevertheless the new government, no doubt aware of the inadvisability of any action which might remove its major church from mainstream Orthodoxy, became, with certain notable exceptions, less confrontational towards Maksim and more reserved in its commitment to Pimen and the schismatics than in 1992. Thus Stoyanov chose Maksim to bless the troops on Armed Forces' Day (6 May). Vicepremier Anchev expressed his hopes for reconciliation and that there would be no occupation of the Sofia metropolitan see and the Synod headquarters like that carried out by the Provisional Synod in 1992.¹⁹ Despite a pledge by Balachev, the schismatics irresponsibly tried to occupy the monastery village of German, which belongs to the Bulgarian Zograph Monastery on Mount Athos, and almost succeeded.

When Prime Minister Kostov's government assumed office on 21 May ministers headed by priests from Pimen's Synod processed from the National Assembly to the government headquarters where the schismatic metropolitan of Sofia, Innokenti, Kostov's favourite to succeed as patriarch, celebrated the blessing of the waters.²⁰ However Ivan Sungarsky, the new chairman of the parliamentary commission on minorities, religious confessions and human rights, whose former career as a car salesman would hardly seem to have fitted him for that particular post, called on Maksim to assure him of his confidence in the success of the Holy Synod's efforts to restore unity. The deputy prime minister, Evgeni Bakardzhive, promised Pimen that the government authorities would do their best not to interfere during the imminent Council provided some resolution of the dispute emerged.²¹

Pimen suggested that Maksim would do well to resign so as to leave the way clear for a much younger patriarch to be chosen. In June, however, the new deputy prime minister, Veselin Metodiev, a nominally Orthodox history professor, given interim responsibility for the Board for Religious Affairs, tried unsuccessfully to persuade Maksim to stand down, though he did elicit a promise that if Pimen resigned, Maksim would reinstate him as a metropolitan and allow him to live out the rest of his days in his see city of Blagoevgrad. A projected meeting between the rival patriarchs scheduled for 10 June was vetoed by some members of the government. Metodiev, asked in the Assembly on 27 June to clarify the government's stand, arrogantly declared both patriarchs invalid – which did little to conciliate supporters of either side.²² He further antagonised most church members by doing his utmost to scupper the Council by turning down the Holy Synod's request for 15 million *lev* to accommodate foreign Orthodox representatives and Council delegates. He even threatened to research his prerogatives to see if he could ban it altogether. In this situation, Pimen was emboldened to give Maksim two months to resign. Metodiev and Sungarsky, in particular, adopted very impolite tones when addressing Maksim. The new director of the Board, Lyubomir Mladenov, Spasov's deputy in the first UDF government, was less rough with Maksim, but made no secret of his preference for Pimen, who he claimed had been elected by a Council rather than picked by the Politbureau.²³ The government representatives ignored a survey showing that Maksim enjoyed the support of over half the respondents (55 per cent), as

against only 6 per cent for Pimen (the remaining 39 per cent having no interest in the issue).²⁴

The Council Meets at Last, 2–4 July 1997

The Council (*Tsurkovno-naroden Subor*) met on 2 July, seven years after the Holy Synod had promised to convene it. Public expectations that it would resolve the schism, and in particular that Maksim might be persuaded to retire, ran high. However, its deliberations lasted only two days, the first of which was dedicated to greetings from visiting prelates, the patriarch's report on the church since 1953 and some procedural issues.

Although it achieved its main object, according to Raikin 'a solid affirmation of the legitimacy and canonicity of the Holy Synod and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church',²⁵ and provided an impressive programme for the future, expectations were not fully realised and discussion and voting on some issues were stifled by the patriarch.

The Holy Synod produced its long-awaited statement, which combined a vindication of church activity under communism and an indictment of that regime with a bitter attack on the UDF and the schismatics. The statement stressed that the consequences of the serious wounds inflicted by militant atheism and infiltration and control by state organs would take years to overcome. The Orthodox Church had borne the brunt of the persecution. The 1949 law on confessions, the tool for controlling the church, was still 'to a great degree in force to this day' and had been exploited by the UDF to instigate and support schism. State officials had 'by anti-canonical and illegal administrative acts effected a brutal intervention in the life of a self-governing church'. There was absolutely no justification in government claims that 'the Holy Synod was a tool of the communists, and the hierarchy red bishops and servants of the totalitarian regime'. The UDF and the schismatics had launched 'an evil campaign ostensibly for church decommunisation and renewal, but which resulted in intolerable schism' and even split Bulgarian church communities abroad. The UDF humiliated the church by administrative interference with its constitution and legally recognised rights, as when the Holy Synod was declared illegal because it had not been registered.²⁶ 'The judicial courts through absurd decisions and actions blatantly interfered in church government, violated its canons and compelled it to seek protection before international tribunals.' The evolution of the schism suggested deliberate manipulation by forces working behind the scenes. The schismatics had resorted to force and deceit to seize key church properties, with the approval of the procurator general and local authorities. The instigators of the schism had recruited clergy and consecrated bishops from among individuals who were completely unsuitable for office (a pointed reference to Subev). Conditions for the readmission of repentant schismatics were spelled out.

The Council reaffirmed the autocephalous character of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its inseparable membership of the One Holy Catholic (*Suborna*) and Apostolic Church. It expressed the desire that the church be recognised constitutionally as the official religion of the Bulgarian state. Insisting that 53 years' experience (1944–97) proved that state interference was disastrous not only for church but also for nation and state, it appealed to the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government not to hinder but to assist it in performing its mission, for the church could not be separated from society. It insisted that 'the new law at present being drafted be discussed and coordinated with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church'. It force-

fully condemned all acts of communist repression and appointed a commission to identify clergy and church officials who had disappeared or who had been tortured or murdered, and to erect a memorial in their honour. Moreover, in a significant concession, it begged the Bulgarian people for 'indulgence and forgiveness' for all that the clergy and laity had failed to do in their defence.

The Council demanded restitution of all church property and tax remissions on religious communities. It emphasised the need for the state to limit the activities of foreign sects. It outlined the resumption of the church's former welfare and educational activities, with new opportunities for chaplaincies in prisons, hospitals and the army, and care for the religious needs of Bulgarian emigrants. It spoke of programmes for monastic renewal and affirmed the laity particularly in youth work and parish brotherhoods.²⁷ It voted to encourage the use of contemporary Bulgarian in the liturgy and for strict observance of church discipline by the clergy.²⁸ It failed to mention that although a modern translation was under way, so far it had tackled only the New Testament and had reached the Epistles, and that there were no first-rate Hebrew scholars available to translate the Old Testament properly. (Moreover, the modern-language version of the liturgy, though in use in some city churches, is according to former theological student Petur Petkov unsatisfactory and unpoetic and does not fit the traditional chants.)

The Council expressed 'the deep pain caused by some people's falling away from church unity; Mother Church addresses a warm appeal for humility, penitence and return to her bosom to all who have wandered away from the one true Church'. One theologian, commenting on this, emphasised that the schism could not be resolved until individual, personal acts of repentance were made; collective repentance would not work.²⁹

The Council's modest proposals for amendments to the iniquitous 1951 bylaws, by which the communist government had enforced 'democratisation' on the church in order to shackle it, did not envisage the radical reshaping of church administration which some critics felt it needed, but did attempt to prevent government intervention in the election of patriarchs and metropolitans and in regulations concerning Council delegates. In the provision requiring the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to inform the government of its decisions the word 'government' was to be replaced by 'head of state' – possibly a tacit recognition of the impartiality of Zhelev and Stoyanov.³⁰

On the second day journalists waiting outside, avid for news, were very annoyed that delegates had been forbidden to comment on the proceedings. A lack of experience in conciliar procedure was evident – hardly surprising in view of the 44-year lapse since the last Council, which had been stage-managed by the communists and which had met in an atmosphere of fear and foreboding. In the view of some participants, however, this fact did not justify the quashing of several controversial proposals by violation of procedure.

Those delegates who pressed for more radical revision of the canons and stressed the urgent need to adapt to changing conditions were promised that the Council would be transformed into a church parliament with a four-year mandate. When some attempted to introduce procedures whereby patriarchs would retire at 80 and metropolitans at 75, and for subsequent elections, Maksim refused to countenance any discussion.³¹

There was some disappointment at the Council's failure to produce a definitive declaration on the schism, despite lively exchanges about it and conflicting views expressed, some arguing that the *nomenklatura* was to blame. Gospodinov, who came top (with 72 votes) out of 12 additional lay members specially elected at the

Council, publicly expressed unease about the election of people with private business interests onto the Synod's Council of Finance, and especially about two whose names had not appeared on the final list of candidates: Aleksandrov, former minister of finance in Berov's cabinet (1993–94), and Karastoyanov, who claimed to be a former merchant navy captain, subsequently studied international relations in Moscow and had been running a business for ten years. Both were patently former communists. When Gospodinov went on to propose that the church discontinue its private bank, some people raised their hands immediately, but no one counted them or put the issue to a vote – a clear violation of procedure. When he made the even more controversial proposal that the personal files of all senior clergy be opened and disclosed – as the Synod had volunteered to do earlier that year – there was loud applause, but Maksim again refused to put the issue to the vote.

The Government Tries to Negotiate with both Synods

During the autumn government-sponsored investigations unmasked only three former security agents in the National Assembly, such a minute figure that it was obvious that there had been a major cover-up.

On 4 November the Council of Bishops of the Orthodox Church asked Stoyanov to help implement their decisions to heal the schism; at the same time they excommunicated Kalinik, former metropolitan of Vratsa, one of the original schismatic bishops, and ordered him to hand over the control of his diocese to their canonical Metropolitan Ignati.³² Kalinik, who long before 1989 had been nicknamed the 'red bishop' and who still enjoyed the support of local BSP mayors (though not of rank-and-file church members), ignored the ban and appointed Konstantin, a Sofia parish priest, as bishop of Znepole to deputise for him while he temporarily recuperated in a monastery.³³ Many priests demonstrated outside Kalinik's palace and went so far as to blame him for starting the schism. Kalinik, who felt out on a limb, decided to return to Pimen's Synod, but they decided they did not want him either. He caused another sensation when he entertained Todor Zhivkov at his residence.³⁴

On 27 November Mladenov, together with Metodiev, according to the Holy Synod, employed intimidation, threats and verbal abuse to try to force both Maksim and Pimen to consent to government arbitration. While Pimen agreed to the setting up of a contact group Maksim insisted on consulting the Holy Synod, which hit back with a strongly-worded declaration on 19 December in which it rejected accusations that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was committed to any specific political power group and stressed its commitment to democratic developments. Referring inevitably to the legal violation of 25 May 1992 it emphasised that no succeeding government had honoured and defended the church's rights and autonomy as a centuries-old institution. It condemned all attempts by civil institutions to intervene in its organisation and life an 'artificial and sterile methods in search of a pseudo-unity'. In a direct snub to the government it declared that it would be a pity if the pressure which was compelling it to defend its rights before appropriate international organisations proved a hindrance for national efforts to join the European Community.³⁵ In Yambol some pro-Maksim priests refused to pray for either the president or the government.³⁶

By the end of the year some elements within the government, realising that spurning Maksim and endorsing Pimen was getting them nowhere, switched to non-involvement tactics. In line with this evenhandedness, television carried Christmas liturgies celebrated by both Maksim and Pimen. Judiciously, Stoyanov, Kostov and Sofyansky all attended Christmas liturgies back in their home towns. Stoyanov also

decided that for the first time since its reintroduction in 1993 there would be no blessing of the banners of the armed forces at Theophany (7 January) 1998. While Maksim blessed the waters outside the cathedral, as was customary, some ministers, including Sungarsky, broke ranks by attending Innokenti's ceremony at a park lake. On the anniversary of the execution of the nineteenth-century national hero Vasil Levsky (19 February) the comedy continued as the Holy Synod, Pimen and government representatives all studiously avoided arriving at the same time to lay wreaths so as not to bump into each other. At Easter Stoyanov pleaded with all believers to continue to boycott celebrations led by top hierarchs on both sides – an appeal endorsed by teachers and intellectuals in a press release *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church Commits Suicide*, a fate which they said could be avoided only if the participants were genuinely prepared to negotiate. On St Georgi's Day, 6 May, the president and government made do with ordinary priests to bless the colours.³⁷

At the 150th anniversary celebrations of national hero Khristo Botev on 6 January 1998 Stoyanov made his exasperation clear. He pleaded with both Maksim and Pimen to provide proof of their responsibility and humility and have the courage to bow out to allow a generation of clergy uncorrupted by the old regime to take their place: 'A section of the hierarchy were always faithful lackeys of the atheist regime. Yet under the Ottoman yoke our clergy were prepared to face chains and death. Today we ask these bishops to make a much easier sacrifice – simply to retire.'³⁸ Later that month he admitted that he regretted having endorsed Pimen at his swearing-in a year earlier.

Metodiev claimed that the legal position of the competing Synods was uncertain since neither had been registered under the new government, and said that if all other means were exhausted the Board for Religious Affairs would have to register Pimen's group. Maksim however emphasised to the president that no local Orthodox Church would ever recognise Pimen's patriarchy and Synod.

Priests from both sides, weary with the wrangling, made determined efforts to bring the two sides together. One group met in Metodiev's office to prepare a joint appeal for unity. On 19 January 250 priests from the pro-Maksim Movement of Priests for Church Unity invited government representatives to a conference on the urgent need to combat so-called sects. Nevertheless the conference itself, held on 30 January, and to which Mladenov and supporters of Pimen were invited, only indicated the degree of hostility which still existed. Various participants walked out, some because of a genuine zeal for Orthodoxy. It was evident that on both sides there were a sufficient number of communist sympathisers aiming to keep the government at loggerheads with the church. Metodiev's proposal to force unification by carving up the dioceses so as to provide jurisdictions for all episcopal claimants distressed many genuine church members, as did the fact that Pimen was consecrating divorced and unworthy priests as bishops. Konstantin, bishop of Samokov, was divorced and therefore ineligible to remain as a priest – though it should be pointed out that divorced priests had occasionally functioned in the past in the official church.

After the meeting on 24 February between the president and the Holy Synod, called at the Synod's request to try to resolve the schism by canonical means, Maksim maintained that it would not be in the church's best interests if he retired and that the president had never advised him to stand down. At a presidential reception for Pimen's Synod on 7 March Pimen promised to retire if the metropolitans of both Synods made both patriarchs convene an extraordinary Council.³⁹ The Holy Synod remained intransigent. As its secretary, Metropolitan Gelasi, put it,

Who are we supposed to be negotiating with? This is not a dispute between two sides on an equal basis. With Pimen? Pimen is a renegade, an apostate. We have nothing whatsoever to say to him. A Council? Yes, but only after they crawl back to us on bended knees, and not to discuss disputes about church hierarchy but to talk about millennium-related issues.⁴⁰

On 7 March *Demokratiya* claimed that polls showed that the great majority of the public were behind the president's call for both contestants to stand down. It believed that 'many people would accept firmer administrative pressure in order to overcome the crisis' and recalled prime minister Stambulov's use of the police a century earlier against Metropolitans Kliment and Konstantin because of their pro-Russian policy.⁴¹ Early in 1998 the Holy Synod stated that since the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, as part of world-wide Orthodoxy, was non-political, it was entitled to reject the claim that it was committed to support certain political forces. It complained of pressure from senior government officials and commended Bulgaria's efforts to join the EU. It appealed to those who had left the church to return to its care.⁴²

Meanwhile Maksim had received expressions of solidarity from several local Orthodox churches, in response to his December appeal. They included Patriarchs Bartholomaios, Aleksii of Moscow, Petros VII of Alexandria and All Africa (who offered to come to Bulgaria and mediate) and Teoctist of Romania.⁴³ To quash rumours, the church's magazine carried an explanation of the non-appearance of Aleksii and Teoctist at the celebrations of the 120th anniversary of Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule on 1 March: they were occupied with special services for the first week of Lent but had sent representatives. Teoctist also wrote endorsing Maksim in no uncertain terms, contrasting the ephemeral nature of political parties with the stability of the church.

On 9 April the Holy Synod decided to withdraw the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the WCC, the second local church to do so following Georgia's withdrawal the previous year.

Discontent among the Clergy, and Grassroots Desire to Resolve the Schism

Church members at grassroots level, frustrated by the continuing deadlock, showed a new determination to put an end to the power games of their bishops. Between January and the summer of 1998 over 30,000 people signed petitions distributed mainly in kiosks outside schismatic churches calling for an end to the schism and including the slogan 'Maksim the Red is no patriarch, just a protégé of Todor Zhivkov'.⁴⁴

According to *Glaube in der Zweiten Welt* correspondent Inge Bell, the new government policy of boycotting the leaders of both Synods bore fruit because it touched a raw nerve: relations between the black (monastic) clergy and the white (parish) clergy who constitute the backbone of the church. Many people were starting to feel that they could get along quite nicely without the hierarchy, whose elbowroom was becoming restricted because of pressure from below. Parish priests, who were also victims of the protracted national economic crisis, were becoming increasingly restless and suspicious. While city priests, often with 15,000–20,000 parishioners, were amply reimbursed through rites of passage, village priests had few sources of income to draw on, with falling and ageing populations. Without unification, there could be no formal agreement between church and state, no cash subsidies, no proper

restitution of church property. The wide gulf between bishops on one side and lower clergy and laity on the other, in itself a weakness going back to precommunist times, was, according to one church historian, accentuated by the Holy Synod's resistance to reform. The morals of at least two metropolitans who were protégés of the communists gave rise to public scandal.

Priests, unpaid for months, came out on strike in the Vidin and Ruse dioceses. Many had been topping up their incomes by illicit trading in candles which, since the Ilentsi workshop was still in schismatic hands, they bought from private companies.⁴⁵ One group threatened to demonstrate at the Holy Synod headquarters in May. Priests in Vratsa diocese, who had not been paid for six months, demanded an additional meeting for church reunification and even threatened that if Maksim and Pimen did not come to an agreement they would transfer to the Russian jurisdiction. For church members who preferred to abide by canonical procedures, the demonstrations set a hazardous precedent.

At the start of the schism the schismatics had been more open to defending the rights of priests, but by 1998 their Union of Priests was no longer so active in this sphere. There were rumours that the stipends of Pimen's priests were higher than those of the priests of the Patriarchal Synod. An investigation by *Glaube in der Zweiten Welt* found that, on the contrary, some of Pimen's priests were having to supplement their stipends by second jobs, including running shops. Fr Serafim in Kyustendil in the Strumitsa valley in Nevrokop diocese advertised 'The priest's shop offers you good wares at a fair price'. Most priests made a virtue out of necessity, offering a range of useful, beneficial goods (unlike most other private shops, which specialise in alcoholic drinks, electronic goods and pornography). Serafim, with five children to support, claimed that his new job brought him into contact with people who otherwise would hardly ever darken a church door and provided him with the opportunity to give his customers 'a religious pep-talk', with the result that they often turned up at the liturgy with their families.⁴⁶

Clergy discontent and frustration spread up to the hierarchy. Some Holy Synod bishops even started to put out feelers to the opposition, behind Maksim's back, which would have been unthinkable a few weeks before. On 20 May a forum for representatives from both sides met in the Academy of Sciences with no bishop present. The general consensus was that they feared a confrontation with hostile parish clergy. Demands for the Holy Synod's resignation, a speedy reconciliation and yet another Council of Church and Nation sounded loud and clear.⁴⁷

On 22 June a follow-up conference of about 100 priests, mostly from the Union of Priests, plus a far smaller number from the Movement of Priests for Church Unity and about a dozen laymen, decided almost unanimously to convene a Council on 20 October to dismiss Maksim and the metropolitans and elect new ones. It would include all senior clerics, and lay delegates, one for each parish with over 3000 members. A provisional council with representatives from both sides was to be set up to ensure that the decisions of the Council were observed. The canon law tutor at Sofia Faculty of Theology pointed out that the 1951 constitution of the Church, on which the Union of Priests and supporters of the schism originally based their case, was a communist document. There was no way, commented Gospodinov, to assess how representative the conference of 22 June was of clergy and laity nationwide, though he thought that despite the charged atmosphere some of the schismatics seemed to be mellowing. Emil Barakov, a leading protagonist of the schism and general secretary of the Provisional Synod, who had pressed for schismatic occupation of the Holy Synod six years previously, denied that there was any intention of

removing anyone. Later, writing in *Demokratiya* about Metropolitan Pankrati's funeral, he unexpectedly used the affectionate and reverent term 'dyado' ('grandpa') for Maksim.

The Holy Synod, predictably, gave the proposed Council short shrift, emphasising in a letter to the president, prime minister and chairman of parliament that it would have no canonical validity and would violate the church's constitution; it would benefit both church and state if those politicians and government and cultural personalities who desired unity would insist that the schismatics implement church canons. It warned that other local Orthodox churches were prepared to come to Bulgaria to try to resolve the schism canonically. The Holy Synod, Supreme Council of Bishops and Fourth Council of Church and Nation held from 2 to 4 July the previous year showed the correct way. If the schismatics renounced the schism and their non-canonical consecration of bishops they could retain the ranks they had held prior to the schism and the Holy Synod would in due course decide their future status, dependent on the records of their past work.⁴⁸

The first leading protagonist of the schism to die was Pankrati, who had been restored in 1995 to the bosom of the Holy Synod. He died shortly after representing the Bulgarian Orthodox Church at the enthronement of the new patriarch of Poland, Sawa, in Warsaw in July. He had suffered from acute hypertension for 20 years, but when he complained of giddiness and died the next day in hospital the delay in summoning an ambulance aroused suspicions of foul play, so much so that Mladenov accused the Holy Synod of possible violence and psychological abuse as well as the unjustifiable delay. He even ordered an investigation by the Sofia Procuracy. According to some sources there had been a major row within the Synod over possible compromise and Pankrati had been the target of a disgraceful shouting match. Since the doctor in the case was Maksim's niece, journalists avid for sensation seized on the story, but the postmortem enquiry proved that no foul play was involved.

Schismatics in Stara Zagora, vacant after Pankrati's death, appealed for a boycott of the election for a new metropolitan until after the Council. Ioanniki, the canonical metropolitan of Sliven, temporarily in charge of their diocese, sent a message to its clergy and laity reproving its diocesan council for deciding to have its sittings chaired by a senior member in his absence, which conflicted with Orthodox canons, the constitution of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Fathers and 'smacked of presbyterianism'.⁴⁹

Todor Zhivkov's civil funeral on 9 August attracted many BSP adherents but only one priest (whose contribution was confined to making the sign of the cross). In a letter to Zhivkov's family Stoyanov made yet another of his devastatingly honest statements when he said that Zhivkov had presided over 'one of the darkest periods of recent Bulgarian history'.⁵⁰

Moves Towards a Pan-Orthodox Council in Bulgaria

As a sign of local Orthodox church concern to bring an end to the schism a patriarch, Petros VII, arrived on 29 June to familiarise himself with the scene in Bulgaria and lend moral support to Maksim, with whom he concelebrated on 5 July in the presence of ambassadors from Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and Yugoslavia.⁵¹ In a speech at Sofia seminary he endorsed the canonical church's primacy and condemned the schism as lacking any theological foundations. His reception from the government, to which he stressed the impropriety of its meddling in church matters, was hardly

welcoming. The prime minister refused to attend the liturgy; both he and the president agreed to receive Petros, but not accompanied by Maksim. When Stoyanov changed his mind and received both on 3 July, misunderstandings of the exact protocol involved were magnified in the press. The UDF paper *Demokratsiya* stated that Maksim misread Stoyanov's politeness as approval, while *Tsurkoven vestnik*, in censuring Stoyanov for initially refusing to meet Maksim and then changing his mind for diplomatic reasons, seemed to be attempting to discredit the president, who was trying to let matters settle gradually. Elements within both papers seemed to be deliberately keeping the schism on the boil. Some UDF supporters were becoming increasingly disenchanted about their party's democratic credentials and felt that the continuing row over Maksim was conveniently diverting attention from the way in which members of the former nomenklatura and communist activists and their families were creeping even into positions of leadership and from the fact that normal processes of democratic control and openness were being ignored. This could, they feared, go hand in hand with the promotion as next patriarch of a churchman loyal to the 'ancien régime'.

A delegation headed by Metropolitans Meletios and Meliton from the Ecumenical Patriarchate arrived to sound out the possibility of a Pan-Orthodox Council in Sofia in the near future and met Mladenov and Metodiev on 17–19 September, stressing that church and state ought to help each other.⁵² Meanwhile priests from both Synods met deputies from the Assembly Group of the Democratic Left (the BSP and its allies) in which Tatyana Doncheva of the BSP expressed their parties' commitment to church unity and hope for international support for the Council and its decisions. Resolution of the schism had become not just a cross-party but an international issue.

The Pan-Orthodox Council Declares the Schism at an End

The projected Pan-Orthodox Council met at Maksim's request in Sofia on 30 September and 1 October under the chairmanship of Patriarch Bartholomaios, who also represented the archbishop of Finland. It was attended by the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, Russia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the metropolitan of Nazareth representing the patriarch of Jerusalem, the archbishops of Cyprus, Albania and Athens and all Greece, the metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Poland, a Czech bishop representing the Orthodox Church of the Czech and Slovak Republics, and 22 other bishops. The Georgian Church failed to send either a representative or an explanation for its absence and the Orthodox Church of America, whose statute of autocephaly is not yet recognised by all local churches, was not represented.

Following Maksim's presentation of the case against the schismatics Mladenov rudely intervened, took the floor and made a vitriolic attack on him which furnished convincing evidence, if any were needed, of his government's violation of the constitutional provisions for separation of church and state.⁵³

Eventually, after tortuous negotiations, the schismatic leaders removed their insignia, proffered their public repentance and expressed their desire to return to the Orthodox Church and specifically to the canonical Church of Bulgaria under Patriarch Maksim's leadership. Only Pimen was not present, ostensibly for health reasons. In view of their past intransigence, the Council showed remarkable magnanimity as it applied the Orthodox doctrine of exceptional economy in forgiving all participants, clerical and lay. It even reinstated Kalinik to his see at Vratsa, but split it in two, creating a new diocese centred in Pleven under Metropolitan Ignati. It accepted statements of repentance from Pimen and twelve bishops, including some

consecrated by the schismatics, and gave them the titles of ancient sees. It annulled the anathema against Pimen and his demotion to monastic status, but in view of his age – he was 93 – did not reinstate him, though it allowed him the title ‘former metropolitan of Nevrokop’, leaving his replacement, Natanail, as metropolitan. The Council emphasised the duty of the rehabilitated clergy and laity humbly to accept Maksim and his bishops as their canonical pastors, in communion with local Orthodox churches. It concluded that the schism was at an end. Bartholomaios emphasised that neither side could claim victory or defeat; only the Devil had lost. The primates reaffirmed that schisms within local churches constitute a grievous sin which prevents the faithful from receiving the sanctifying and saving grace of the Holy Spirit. It arrived at its decisions unanimously.

Balachev, spokesman for the schismatics, expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the Council, promising that henceforth they would all address each other as brothers rather than enemies. Emil Baralinov, the editor of *Tsurkoven vestnik*, stressed the significance of the Council in Orthodox history as a signpost providing guidelines for regulating parallel disputes in Ukraine, Estonia and Macedonia, but he recognised that a lot more hard work was necessary to make the principles work. The ecumenical patriarch and Patriarchs Aleksii and Petros, and also Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw, who had persuaded the dissident bishops to appear in their monastic habits as a mark of their penitence, had all played key roles.⁵⁴

The press speculated that the Council had suggested to Maksim that in the near future he must appoint a younger man as *locum tenens* and be prepared to relinquish his office gradually; Natanail, born in 1952, was widely tipped.⁵⁵ The schismatics’ acceptance of the Council’s decisions could thus be seen as conditional on Maksim’s retirement. Baralinov dismissed this as journalistic imagination, pointing out that the canons prohibit anyone from forcing a patriarch to leave office.

Widespread relief among devout supporters of the Holy Synod was shattered as it became clear that the government did not recognise the Council’s ruling and that with its active encouragement dissenters still flourished. Mariya Dimitrova, a religious specialist at St Kliment of Ohrid University in Sofia, had cautioned the press that talk of reconciliation was premature; the inner conflict had not been resolved. In her opinion most of the church leaders were too old and had been in office too long; ‘it is clear that changes must be made’. She claimed that most Bulgarians did not wish to support or work with Maksim, and that he owed his victory to the influence of other churches and had no real public support.⁵⁶

Some of the divisions of dioceses (Vratsa and Plevna, Dorostol-Cherven and Silistra, for instance) were agreed to only because the situation there was so tense that there was no short-term practical alternative. Prompted by Mladenov, the eight schismatic bishops raised to auxiliary metropolitan rank failed to appear at the Synod on 7 October to take their letters of appointment, grudgingly demanding ‘dialogue on an equal footing’.

The Holy Synod felt compelled to deny that most of its members wanted Maksim to resign.⁵⁷ Sungarsky expressed relief that the schism had been overcome but said it would be better for the church if Maksim made way for a younger leader.⁵⁸ At the UDF congress there was a round-table discussion on democracy and the Bulgarian Church on 18 October; here Sungarsky said that the government wanted to leave the church to solve its own problems. Mladenov, truculent as ever, still insisted that Maksim must go. Balachev and Barakov, spearheading opposition to the Pan-Orthodox Council, appealed to their former schismatic bishops, none of whom was present at the round-table discussion, to back them in their forthcoming Council

planned for 20 October. Justice minister Vasili Gotsev reopened old sores by accusing Maksim of walking hand-in-hand with the disgraced former BSP prime minister Zhan Videnov. At the congress some delegates expressed concern about the UDF's increasing readiness to suppress dissent and resort to nondemocratic methods. One even accused the UDF of 'Blarism'.

When Maksim returned from Moscow after visiting the Bulgarian Patriarchate church there to collect a casket of relics he reiterated that he had no intention of resigning. Gelasi threatened continuing schismatics with excommunication by the ecumenical patriarch. Only one rehabilitated bishop, Nikon, attended the ceremony to venerate the relics and celebrate church unity in the Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky on 18 October. The omens were not promising. The conduct of the recently reintegrated schismatic bishops suggested that their repentance had been skin-deep, and cast doubts on their basic Christian commitment, though possibly it could have reflected a negative atmosphere of hostility and distrust they had encountered within the Holy Synod.

The Pan-Orthodox Council's decisions seemed to have done little to allay the discontent of a section of parish priests or UDF laypeople, and the Board for Religious Affairs was ready to back and even subsidise meetings at which they could vent their opposition to its rulings. On 20 October at a Pre-Council Assembly of Priests and Laypeople in Sofia it was decided to hold an Extraordinary Council of Church and Nation on 9–10 November and to invite all metropolitans and bishops to participate. Barakov stated that the priests and laypeople involved did not care whether the bishops attended or not; they would carry on without them.⁵⁹ Financial topics surfaced again, with some protagonists of a continued schism trying to win over priests by saying that the metropolitans produced no accounts to show their incomes or where church money went. There were demands for government audits of church accounts. The meeting adopted the draft bylaws of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in principle and proposed that the forthcoming Extraordinary Council discuss them.

The press reported that during the campaign for electing delegates government functionaries had crossed and recrossed the country trying to lure priests into attending the proposed Council with inducements of higher stipends.⁶⁰ While conceding that he was not against having another Council in the near future, Maksim made his disapproval clear. He said that the newly reintegrated bishops needed to work together with the Holy Synod for a while and that unless the Council acted in accordance with the canons of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church it would be invalid.

The Pseudo-Council Deposes Maksim

The Board for Religious Affairs promoted the Extraordinary Council on 9–10 November in defiance of the warning issued by the Pan-Orthodox Council that no Council could be convened without the patriarch and the consent of the Holy Synod. Key government figures attended; the Board subsidised the venue and travel and hotel expenses for around 600 delegates, though it appears that not as many priests as the organisers expected attended: only 385 at the start. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church has around 700 full-time and 500 part-time pensioner priests, so two-thirds of the clergy boycotted the Council. A number of Holy Synod metropolitans wrote explaining that although they would gladly attend a Council of Unity in the future they could not attend this one. There were 700 lay delegates.

The Council voted unanimously for Maksim's dethronement. The draft statutes,

composed under the direction of Mladenov and Professor Ivan Denev, the dean of Sofia University's Theology Faculty, and duly registered by Metodiev, followed the precedent set by the communist government in 1950, and so were in clear violation of the church's tradition. The Council elected and registered its Synod and prepared the ground for another Council.⁶¹

The Council was condemned by, among others, Spas Mikhailov of the pro-Patriarchate Movement of Priests for Church Unity, and by Boyan Saruev, who as founder of the St John the Forerunner Movement for Christianity and Progress enjoys a high profile among nationalists and the approval of the prime minister, Kostov, and his wife. Elements within the government sensitive to public and international Orthodox opinion, such as the vicepresident, Kavaldzhiev, had considerable reservations about the Council and endorsed Maksim as rightful patriarch, while most Orthodox believers simply ignored it.⁶² The government stopped short of committing itself to official recognition of the new statutes. Although most UDF politicians continued to support the schismatics, letting their political loyalties override any scruples, they were so theologically illiterate that they equated the hierarchy with any other administrative structure, as some of the lay electors' statements revealed. Committed church members, who understood and respected proper church order, mostly supported Maksim.

On 17 November the Holy Synod denounced the composition and competence of the Council, there being no provision for it in the church's canons or constitution. It regretted that 'a government organ encouraged and supported the participants with exhortations, financial inducements and promises of material benefits'. It exhorted clergy and members loyal to the Orthodox Church to stand firm and help promote the unity of church and people.⁶³

On 10 January 1999 Balachev preached to government representatives in the Church of St Sofia in Sofia at a thanksgiving service marking the second anniversary of the fall of the BSP government.⁶⁴

On 10 February Maksim complained to David Atkinson and Henning Gjellerod, rapporteurs for the EU parliamentary assembly monitoring Bulgaria's human rights situation, of the state's attempts to destabilise and divide the church and of the refusal of certain priests to conform to the decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Council. He specifically accused Metodiev of actively supporting the schismatic Synod and reaffirmed that he had no intention of resigning.⁶⁵ The chairman of the National Assembly retorted that there was no need for further outside monitoring. Sungarsky, whose remit was to respond to complaints and citizens' petitions, questioned the Holy Synod's right to complain in the light of the fact that the government had not implemented the Supreme Court's original endorsement of the legitimacy of the schismatic Synod back in 1992.⁶⁶

Interlude: Chaplaincies and Conferences

In line with the government's positive measures to allow clergy access to sectors of society which had been forbidden zones under communism, the first prison chapel for half a century was built in Pleven in 1998. Individual priests had already been conducting services in prisons and baptising inmates. The Ministry of Justice appointed and paid full-time Orthodox chaplains for each of the 13 prisons in Bulgaria and made provision for prisoners to contact clergy of other denominations, though in the event the latter often found access to prisons blocked. Army chaplains had been appointed to try to stem the tide of suicides among young conscripts and

the infiltration of sects into the barracks. Chaplains had been appointed in hospitals, and chapels provided in some new Sofia hospitals.⁶⁷

The Bulgarian Orthodox and other churches were involved in several conferences vital to Bulgaria's progress towards full democracy. In June the Bulgaria office of the Adenauer Foundation promoted conferences in Plovdiv, Burgas and Varna. In September the International Association for Christian Prison Fellowship promoted a three-day conference at the instigation of Fr Nikolai Georgiev, the pioneer of prison chaplaincy in Bulgaria.

The Death of Pimen

The government remained inconsistent in its attitude towards the disputants. Kostov refused to receive one of the schismatic priests, or even to meet him later. Maksim attended the launch of three books by his patriarchal vicar Ilarion of Trianopol in a Sofia municipal hall under the aegis of Sofia's UDF council, in the presence of UDF deputies. In June Barakov complained that Maksim was being given too high a profile on television and that the government was failing to recognise the efforts of Christians to rebuild a democratic society. In September government leaders attended a service for the city of Sofia at which the officiant was Innokenti, whose previously warm relations with Kostov were said to have deteriorated. In what seemed a deliberate snub, Kostov chose Neofit to officiate at his daughter's wedding on 11 September, though *Demokratiya* did not see fit to mention Neofit's name. In November Kavaldzhiev and Kalinik attended Neofit's consecration of a new village church in Breze.

Pimen meanwhile had been in hospital in Sofia since January and, since few people had been allowed to see him, rumours that he was already dead had been rife. His death on 10 April at the age of 93 made little impact. It certainly did not bring the schism to an end, as *Standart* commented three days later. Only two ministers, Mladenov, who delivered the funeral oration, and Gotsev, the most committed to Orthodoxy, attended his funeral in Blagoevgrad, but both the president and the patriarch sent wreaths. Television coverage was brief and reticent, neither giving praise nor making accusations. The general consensus was that Pimen had merely been a figurehead manipulated by others for their own ends and that he had joined the schism so as not to be accused of being procommunist. It may be significant that after he started the schism Subev refused for some months to recognise Pimen as metropolitan and eventually did so only under duress.⁶⁸ *Trud* pointed out the coincidence that he died at Easter, and recalled the Orthodox belief that the souls of those who died at that time were saved. It said that once again Bulgarians found themselves with only one patriarch, and recalled that Pimen was the first leading prelate to be anathematised for 116 years, but that he would be remembered for two events: for having received Stoyanov's oath at his investiture and for having canonised national hero Vasil Levsky.⁶⁹

After deliberation on 20 April the schismatics decided to refrain from electing a patriarch to replace Pimen until the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was reunited. The government likewise was in no hurry to sponsor another rival patriarch. (There was still no replacement two years later, when Cardinal Edward Cassidy remarked to me that this was a significant indication that the schismatics had become more prepared to negotiate a solution.) Meanwhile Innokenti was to be *locum tenens*. The meeting also agreed on a statement condemning Milošević for the situation in Yugoslavia.

On 26 June in Blagoevgrad the schismatics elected Gavril, former representative of

the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Moscow and abbot of the Troyan Monastery, as successor to Pimen in Nevrokop. The Holy Synod's request to the government to intervene and prevent the election met no response.⁷⁰ Tensions within the ranks of the schismatics became evident, with Balachev and Barakov disagreeing over relations with the Holy Synod. By autumn 1999 groups of priests here and there, including those in the town of Petrich in Nevrokop diocese, had become disenchanted, especially over what they perceived as the suspicious business connections of some schismatics, and left, together with their parishes. One claimed that schismatic leaders wanted them to 'do Satanical things'.⁷¹

With Pimen's death and the defection from the Holy Synod of eight of the twelve reinstated bishops disputes arose again over diocesan jurisdictions. There was even blatant intrusion, as in November when Innokenti blessed a cemetery chapel in Shumen in Varna diocese, which was under Kiril's jurisdiction. However, *Demo-kratsiya* did start (on occasions) to acknowledge the proper titles of legitimate bishops performing ceremonies.

On 27 July 1999 Maksim consecrated the first new Orthodox church to be built in Sofia for over 50 years, in the suburb of Lyulin, dedicated to St Kliment of Okhrid. The delay in implementing systematic provision of churches in the extensive communist-era suburbs of Sofia and other cities could be partially attributed to the schism as well as to the prolonged national economic crisis. All the money for its construction and decoration came from donations.⁷² So did that for the memorial chapel to 29,500 documented Bulgarian victims of communism in the park of the Palace of Culture dedicated on 11 September by Innokenti and Sofia mayor Sofyansky. The Holy Synod was not officially represented; the commission appointed by its Council in 1997 to rehabilitate victims of communism had made little progress. It was left to an independent committee of concerned individuals to erect the memorial, a 200-year-old funeral cross installed in front of a black marble wall with the names of 7526 victims carved on it, including over 40 clergy, some of them Catholic, plus a handful of Jews and Turks.⁷³

The Millennium

By 2000 the government had forfeited the approval of almost three-quarters of the population. The high hopes aroused during the confrontations of early 1997 had been shattered; the 'honest dialogue' Kostov had pledged had come to nothing. British evangelicals from the Bulgaria Support Group familiar with the country hoped that the UDF government would be returned for a second term to consolidate its programme. However, the government's overambitious drive towards accession to the European Union had vitiated its economic reform programme, the EU's rigid and unreasonable demands proving detrimental to the establishment of a soundly based market economy.

Though the UDF government could claim with pride that it had changed the unfavourable perception of Bulgaria among EU and NATO countries, stabilised the economy, reduced inflation significantly from the 1000 per cent mark it had reached in 1997, and put Bulgaria on track towards EU membership, the ordinary Bulgarian felt little benefit, only the draconian austerity measures. The government moreover had fallen prey to the same temptations as its predecessor: corruption and nepotism. The elite around Kostov, involved in dubious privatisation deals, were seen as self-serving and arrogant, while Kostov himself had become distant and paranoid, increasingly reliant on the security services. Elena Kostova presided over the patently

nationalist charitable foundation 'Future for Bulgaria', which the media accused of forcing state corporations to make donations. Among other activities the foundation aided Orthodox proselytism among the Pomaks. Kostov had had to sack ten of his 16 ministers in an effort to clean up his government. An enquiry unearthed 234 instances of corruption involving 377 members of national and local government.⁷⁴

With taxes increased and the enterprise culture smothered, most people saw little chance of any improvement in their unacceptably low living standards. Unemployment was running at around 60 per cent of the workforce, average incomes were around £70 a month, salaries and pensions were often months in arrears, the land was littered with derelict factories and many of the population were at subsistence level. Foreign reporters found that some elderly people had given up hope and longed only for death. Since the dismissal the previous year of the apparently principled interior minister, Bogumil Bonev, crime and racketeering had soared again. Yet, with the next election due in 2001, there was no credible or creditable opposition party or coalition waiting in the wings to lead Bulgaria out of its prolonged morass. Despite their mistakes, the UDF leaders retained the loyalty of most of the UDF membership. Although various splinter parties founded by people formerly associated with communist policies had surfaced under the umbrella of the BSP, their programmes were ultimately irreconcilable, embracing old-style dogmatic Marxist loyalists and people patently on the make. They did not provide a viable alternative to the UDF, so there was little likelihood of the Holy Synod jumping on the BSP bandwagon again. Though Stoyanov was increasingly distancing himself from the government in order to enhance his own chances of reelection, this had no effect on the schism.

Stefan Sofyansky, a possible successor to Kostov, was also tarnished with allegations of corruption. A mushrooming of civic associations throughout Bulgaria, culminating in the formation of an umbrella association on 28 May, tapped popular disillusionment with all political parties. One of its key demands was the replacement of the proportional electoral system with a majority system in order to make assembly members more accountable to the electorate.⁷⁵

Against this background of political unease there was little likelihood of any clear formulation of government policy towards the Holy Synod and the continuing schism. The government seemed to have decided that it would be better to leave the church to settle the matter in its own way, to the chagrin of the schismatic wing centred round Innokenti, which was becoming increasingly frustrated and impotent; meanwhile the UDF rank and file, motivated by sentiment rather than careful political analysis, accepted the government's inactivity.

On 2 January 2000, for the dawn of the new millennium, Maksim and the heads of the Catholic, Armenian, Evangelical, Muslim and Jewish communities jointly greeted the Bulgarian nation.

Choice of clergy for major ceremonies continued to be equivocal. The patriarch's Easter vigil was only partly covered on television. Priests, not bishops, blessed the armed forces on 6 May. All other events were however downstaged by the ecclesiastical events beginning on 9 May. A metropolitan of the Jerusalem Patriarchate and two archimandrites bore a miraculous icon of the Mother of God and part of the True Cross from the Church of Sveta Nedelya to St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and concelebrated there with Maksim to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ, the 130th anniversary of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the 47th anniversary of the restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate. In the most impressive manifestation of faith ever seen in modern Bulgaria, for a week an estimated 300,000 people from all over the country queued for up to four hours outside for prayer,

vation of the sacred relics and anointing.⁷⁶ The Russian and Italian embassies were represented and almost all parliamentarians put in an appearance.⁷⁷ A huge crowd watched the relics being taken off to Serbia on 16 May. Patriarch Teoctist of Romania paid a prolonged visit from 17 June until mid-July.

The Sofia municipal court tendentiously registered the schismatic Synod and Innokenti as metropolitan of Sofia on 15 June. Aggrieved, the Holy Synod appealed to the Supreme Court.

Maksim attended the consecration of a renovated village church in the presence of the vicepresident, who on 7 September visited Sofia seminary, spoke to its principal, Archimandrite Sioni, and blessed its programme of food distribution to the poor. On 8 September Archimandrite Kliment was consecrated in Sofia as schismatic bishop to serve his existing flock in Paris.⁷⁸ On 3 October Kostov attended the consecration of a chapel in the courtyard of the Bulgarian church in Paris at which Simeon, metropolitan of Central and Western Europe, presented him on behalf of the Holy Synod with the Order of St Clement, the highest distinction in the church, in recognition of his services as donor to the chapel. On 10 October Maksim received the National Assembly's BSP leader Georgi Parvanov (the future president), with two of his delegates bound for Russia, handed him a message for Patriarch Aleksii, and discussed the draft law on confessions and problems related to the church and its role in public life. Possibly the Holy Synod, following its endorsement of Kostov, was seeking to redress the balance, trying to keep in with both sides, in view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections; or, as under communism, the hierarchy had become accustomed to agreeing to whatever was expected of them.

In mid-October Innokenti gave advance notice of the election of new parish councils to choose delegates for the new Council of Church and Nation, thus pre-empting the original plan for it to be convened jointly by both Synods and forestalling the patriarch; to have allowed him the initiative would have been tantamount to recognising his primacy. Barakov, emphasising that his side sought unity, suggested that the reason why the government had not registered them was an Interior Ministry revelation that Pimen had to some degree been working for the security services.⁷⁹

Ioanniki, metropolitan of Sliven, claimed that the church was now undergoing far worse suffering than in the time of the Turkish yoke. Similar allegations by New York metropolitan Iosif and Spas Raikin were disseminated in Bulgaria. Interviewed by Raikin, Maksim continued to stand by his principles: he had been elected by the church and could not resign because it would be like a shepherd abandoning his flock when it was under attack.⁸⁰

On 18 November, discussing the proposed dropping of Bulgaria from the list of countries whose citizens needed a visa for the EU, the Holy Synod approved of rapid integration into Europe as the way forward towards a partial solution of the people's social problems.⁸¹

On the same date the Holy Synod issued a statement in connection with the Supreme Court's decision on 18 October to reject its appeal. Holy scripture, church canons and the constitution of the church, the Synod claimed, had not been observed in such a vital matter as the state's recognition of the church and its canonical leadership; the church's very existence was subordinated to political decisions, 'crucified by ill-intentioned civil servants, ambitious schismatics, obedient magistrates, politicians lacking in vision'. Bulgarians had even been misled into believing that it was possible for two religious communities to bear the title 'the Bulgarian Orthodox Church'. On the basis of the separation of church and state provided for by Article 13

of the constitution, the state was under an obligation to abstain from interfering in internal church life. The church's autonomy had been reinforced by the 1992 decision of the Constitutional Court that there was only one Bulgarian Orthodox Church: that ruled by the Holy Synod chaired by Patriarch Maksim, and recognised by world Orthodoxy. The canonicity of his election had never been questioned by the Bulgarian Orthodox or any other local Orthodox churches. The statement went on to reject as contrary to canons and constitution a proposal that a forum be convened to decide whether Maksim continued as patriarch. A Council would be held, but not to elect a patriarch. (Elections for parish councils were held in canonical churches on 5 November.) The Synod also declared that Innokenti's registration as metropolitan of Sofia breached canons and constitution. It insisted that the law on confessions, in affirming the special role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Bulgarian history, was bound to recognise that church unconditionally, without requiring formal registration. The statement appealed to the schismatics to repent, as the only way forward lay in humble acceptance of the ruling of the 1998 Pan-Orthodox Council.⁸²

In his Christmas message to the Orthodox faithful Maksim exhorted them and their politicians to fight against poverty and corruption. The Holy Synod drew attention to further drops in Bulgaria's already very low birth rate and to the ravages of drug addiction: 'a land without young people is on the road to death'. It complained that the authorities were excluding it from many spheres of life including social work. 'Even if there is separation of church from state, politicians must not ignore the concerns of the church'.⁸³

During the concluding ceremonies of the jubilee year in December in İznik (Nicea) and at the Phanar, the Pan-Orthodox Council stressed its continuing commitment to Christian unity and interchurch dialogue. Bewailing the scandal caused by division and fragmentation among churches, not least among their own, the Council appealed specifically to those member-churches which had detached themselves from canonical Orthodoxy. The primates also expressed their unease at the readiness of certain governments to exploit Orthodoxy for nationalist or political ends, although without actually identifying the culprits. Later, from the Phanar, the Council was more specific, urging Bulgarian clergy and faithful to end hostilities on the basis of the 1998 Sofia pronouncement and appealing to heads of state and governments in Orthodox countries to 'respect the traditional canons and structures of Orthodoxy in matters concerning methods of administering local churches as well as in those involving ownership of church buildings and ecclesiastical property'.⁸⁴

Property Disputes between the Rival Synods

Under the UDF government there were no stand-offs over property on the scale of the 1996 'battle of the candles' at Ilientsi Monastery until the Blagoevgrad siege in the autumn of 2000.

During the preceding summer there had been further defections from the schismatics. On 28 September the board of trustees of Blagoevgrad Cathedral in Pimen's former see, supported by its priests, decided against continuing to accept his schismatic successor, Metropolitan Gavril, and rejoined the canonical Synod. Concerned that they had been exploited as a 'cover for church disunity' they sought to rejoin the larger part of Nevrokop diocese and its canonically valid metropolitan, Natanail. All the other parish councils in the diocese, except two which remained loyal to Gavril, followed suit. Natanail was invited back to serve at the cathedral and Gavril was denied access unless he was coserving with Natanail.⁸⁵ In October a joint

liturgy was celebrated by former schismatic and canonical clergy on the initiative of Natanail and Blagoevgrad priests.⁸⁶

Gavril successfully appealed to the regional prosecutor Mikhov to reverse the decision of the cathedral trustees and on 20 November Mikhov ordered that the cathedral and its assets be handed back to their 'legal proprietor', Gavril. However, when Gavril, backed by local police, tried to enter the cathedral, the clergy barred the door. Gavril appealed again to the prosecutor, with the backing this time of a repossession order from Innokenti. Priests from the cathedral chapter pointed out that according to church bylaws only their own metropolitan and the diocesan council could issue such an order; Innokenti, as metropolitan of another diocese, had no local jurisdiction. Natanail and the diocesan council in turn issued a repossession order, which Mikhov at Gavril's request countered on 8 December with yet another – this time to be enforced by the police. In scenes reminiscent of the demeaning occupations and sieges of key properties, including the headquarters of the Holy Synod, in 1992, cathedral clergy arriving that morning found the doors sealed with police stickers and tried to prevent Gavril, his two remaining priest supporters and two inspectors, backed by a police cordon, from entering the building. Using hammer and chisel, the police, despite having no authorisation order, forced their way into the cathedral and all its constituent offices. No procedural witnesses were present and no records were drawn up. Gavril's supporters remained in occupation around the clock for five days, with a posse of up to 40 police officers cordoning off the precincts. When Metropolitan Iosif, in Bulgaria at the time, arrived and asked the officer in charge to show him the order, he was told that it had been delivered by word of mouth. Both Mikhov and Blagoi Georgiev, the local head of police, denied responsibility, and they and Gavril refused to provide any explanation to representatives of the Bulgarian Helsinki committee: they said that only Ioan, schismatic abbot of Rozhan Monastery, was entitled to comment. Cathedral clergy were more forthcoming, complaining of a deliberate campaign of intimidation.

When Maksim himself arrived from Sofia, police would not allow him into the cathedral. Natanail and the expelled clergy sang the offices outside and 70 priests mounted protests.

A spokesman for the Holy Synod, Fr Anton Shavulev, described the raid as an act of vandalism and crude state interference in church affairs unprecedented in the history of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. These events culminated in a large demonstration in Sofia of clergy and laypeople led by Maksim himself in front of the offices of the president and the prime minister. On 12 December the scandal was ended when the state prosecutor rescinded Mikhov's ruling and Gavril was escorted out under police protection. Ilieva, representing the Helsinki committee, commented that the authorities needed to ponder how disproportionate was the police action in pursuance of an illegal ruling by a prosecutor, and its consequences in the context of religion and church-state relations.⁸⁷

During the summer of 2001 the schismatics occupied Pomorie Monastery on the Black Sea coast: one of four monasteries under patriarchal rather than diocesan jurisdiction, it provides holiday accommodation for church employees and has a flourishing vineyard. As with most of the property disputes, the real issue was control of lucrative spots – as over the new church built where Vanga, a famous seer, had lived. The schismatics were eventually forced to evacuate the building.

Further property scandals were suspected. Spas Raikin claimed that secret deals had been made between people renting former church properties under government control and certain officials who took their share of the rents, thus starving the

church of its rightful income.⁸⁸ After the fall of the UDF government, at Theophany 2002, Metropolitan Gavril of Lovech of the Holy Synod revealed that Mladenov had written to many of those renting church property ordering them to pay the rents to the schismatic Synod. *Duma*, reporting, claimed that the schismatics had benefited by approximately half a million US dollars. Gavril also accused the UDF government of making contacts with Russia very difficult and stated that he was now looking for his old connections in Moscow so as to attract investors and enable him to get at least some of the projects in Lovech diocese working again.⁸⁹

Events of the Year 2001

In the new year of 2001 the Holy Synod asked the schismatic bishops Innokenti of Krupnik, Boris of Tiveriopol, Gavril of Konstansiya, Konstantin of Martsyanopol, Evlogi of Stanimaka and Yakov of Mesembriya to implement the decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Council and return to the fold of the church. It went ahead with two sets of elections in February for diocesan electors and diocesan councillors and members of the Council scheduled for the summer.⁹⁰ The rival Synod, not to be outdone, announced that it would convene a regular session of its Council in May-June.⁹¹ In the event neither materialised, since the national elections took priority.

In the meantime a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate consisting of Metropolitans Athanasios of Heliopolis and Meliton of Philadelphia arrived in Sofia bearing Patriarch Bartholomaios' reiterated condemnation of the schism and appeal to Bulgarians to remain faithful to Maksim as the 'only legitimate patriarch', and presented it to Stoyanov on 28 February 2001.⁹²

In the Assembly there was a move to block the Supreme Court's decision that there could be two Orthodox churches under the same name, which would have allowed the government legally to transfer church property under their control to the schismatics. 'Democratic Left' members Ginyu Ganey, president of the Fatherland Union, and Velko Vulkanov, president of the Antifascist Union and a professor of law, introduced a bill which stated that nobody was entitled to interfere in Bulgarian Orthodox church affairs or to set up other religious bodies bearing its name.⁹³ The bill stipulated that such bodies and bodies which had broken away from it and adopted its name be declared illegitimate.⁹⁴ The credentials of the two parties involved were dubious: the first was heir to the Fatherland Front, a major communist tool for political indoctrination, atheist propaganda and substitute rites of passage, and the second was originally reckoned antifascist and anticapitalist.

In response to this initiative Sungarsky stated that the proposed law would spell utter humiliation for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: church unity should be based on forgiveness and not imposed by law, as that would lead to the opposite of what was intended. The bill was rejected, largely by UDF members voting against it. Metropolitans Neofit, Iosif and Natanail took part in a BSP press conference in the Assembly affirming their support for the bill on account of the Holy Synod's commitment to one single Orthodox Church, but disassociating themselves from Vulkanov and Ganey: leading positions in the church, they pointed out, should be registered in court, not by the Board for Religious Affairs. Registration of churches in court was fundamental to the proposed second reading of the Law on Confessions, backed by both the UDF and the BSP.⁹⁵

A new angle on feuding within the Holy Synod was reported with the allegations that 'Russian agents in Bulgaria' planned to replace Maksim with Gavril, metropolitan of Lovech.⁹⁶ The schismatic Synod held a court which declared Maksim

dismissed for good.⁹⁷ Sungarsky called on the people to oppose the divisions in the church. At Easter the UDF paper *Demokratiya* carried Innokenti's pastoral greeting. *Demokratiya* also published a renewed challenge to the validity of Maksim's election in 1971 from a senior protagonist of the schism, the widely respected Professor Radko Poptodorov, on the grounds that resort to government assistance to obtain a post invalidated an election. No one could question that it was the Communist Party Central Committee's decision to endorse Maksim, but everyone understood that all senior church appointments were dependent on state approval.

The vexed question of increasing stipends was mooted again at a priests' conference at the end of April and Khristo Khristov, chairman of the Civil Committee for the Reunification of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, claimed to have collected a huge number of signatures in favour of reunification.

In June Innokenti and other clergy consecrated the chapel dedicated to the victims of communism, with the wall of names, in the Palace of Culture park. The schismatics had begun the procedure for the canonisation of 90 clergy victims – a rebuke to the Holy Synod's failure to accord them the respect they merited.⁹⁸

The Return of the Tsar

In view of later developments, the former Tsar Simeon's reciting of the creed at the 2001 Easter liturgy in St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which was also attended by the papal nuncio and assistant nuncio, was more significant than his appearance there on previous occasions. *Tsurkoven vestnik* issued a statement to clarify the church's position. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was always open to all people for public or private prayer. During visits, His Majesty had always attended churches of the canonical Orthodox Church and participated with exemplary piety. During his acts of worship in St Alexander Nevsky he had always stood in front of the royal throne but never in the area of the throne itself. The statement explained that by ancient tradition the officiating priest expected the most eminent citizen present to recite the creed on behalf of the congregation and that no political connotation was implied. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church adhered to its policy of noninterference in politics because as representative of the entire Bulgarian people it had no right to align itself with any section to the detriment of the rest.⁹⁹ However, the Holy Synod dropped a hint of ecclesiastical endorsement by confirming that as a child Simeon had been specially chrismated for royal office.

The UDF coalition government had survived for four years, a record for post-communist Bulgaria, but both leading parties were so discredited that a huge latent protest vote was waiting to be mobilised. The appearance of the 64-year-old tsar, deposed as a child in 1946, now a dignified and charismatic figure, with his new party, the National Movement for Simeon II (NMS) and his western technocrat aides, seduced the mass of the population by offering them what were bound to be illusory promises of prosperity within 800 days. Low interest loans, reduced taxation and the extension of social welfare are incompatible aims. Simeon's support did not come from a sudden upsurge of monarchism, since only 15 per cent of Bulgarians wanted the monarchy restored; it was possibly a reaction of despair. Although his father Boris III had been popular and had resisted the Nazis, Simeon Borisov Saksoburggotsky's roots were not deeply embedded in Bulgaria's past. During his campaign he avoided referring to any monarchical ambitions. He was not formally leader of his party. Since he had not lived in Bulgaria for the previous five years, constitutionally he was ineligible to be president either. The fact that he had visited

Bulgaria only three times in 12 years and had lived in the country for only about six months was to prove a handicap as he lacked a real grasp of the convolutions underlying the political scene. Some astute Bulgarians were less impressed by him than on his earlier visits; they felt that he had let himself be unduly swayed by his upsurge in popularity.

The two-month-old party won the election on 17 June on a protest vote, with almost half of the voters opting for Simeon. With 43 per cent of the total vote, the NMS was only one seat short of an absolute majority in the 240-seat Assembly. Of its main opponents, the UDF with 18 per cent came just 1 per cent ahead of the BSP, a disastrous plunge from its 52 per cent in 1997. Kostov had mobilised the state apparatus in a bitter and vicious campaign supported by the majority of the intellectual elite and the schismatics to malign Simeon, who was even accused of being manipulated by the Unification Church. These allegations and the government's legal manoeuvres to prevent the NMS being recognised as a political party only discredited them further.

Simeon called for a broad coalition, a position supported by Stoyanov. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), closely associated with the substantial Turkish minority, with 21 seats, and under 8 per cent of the vote, true to form declared its readiness to join. The new party was packed with celebrities, some well-qualified expatriate investors and bankers, many unseasoned would-be politicians and also – in a country where 55 government ministers since 1990 had had links with the former security police – with some embarrassing acquisitions who jumped onto the bandwagon. In order to comply with his call for a new morality in politics, Simeon removed these undesirables from his party's list – unlike the UDF and the BSP. Kostov, visibly shattered, admitted his party's errors but was not in favour of joining a coalition. In July, after discussions with Stoyanov, Simeon duly became prime minister. The new party's over-identification with one figure, its lack of a unifying ideology or proper organisation, its dependency on younger, inexperienced people, were handicaps which were to be hard to overcome. Meanwhile 50 per cent of Bulgarians were prepared to welcome a fresh start.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

As far as the schism was concerned, the UDF solved nothing, vacillating between sporadic attempts by more judicious members at even-handedness in their treatment of the disputants and the aggressive, truculent attitudes of ministers like Mladenov and Metodiev who appeared determined to promote the schismatics irrespective of external modifying factors. Thus the Pan-Orthodox Council's offer of very reasonable terms to reinstate and reintegrate penitent schismatic leaders into mainstream Orthodox church life, though formally accepted, proved a dead letter within a few weeks. The subsequent conduct of the rehabilitated bishops raises awkward questions about their religious integrity; but it could also suggest that they encountered a negative atmosphere and hostility from the Holy Synod, which has not always been united, not least because some members have been waiting years for Maksim's demise to clear the way for their possible succession. The Supreme Court's decision that there could be two Orthodox churches was according to at least one informed observer an easy rather than a far-reaching solution and testified to the lack of a proper system of jurisprudence and the ineptitude of the courts in the Balkans, largely a heritage of communist rule.

Whoever originally fomented the schism, if their intention was indeed, as some

observers believe, to split the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and dissipate energies which should have been employed in religious renewal, they have achieved their aim, not just in the short term but for an entire decade. When the Holy Synod should have been concentrating on updating antiquated church administration and training and inspiring clergy and laity for outreach among a dispirited and rudderless people, they were instead having to dissipate energy in issuing endless documents defending their canonical validity. Diversion of income from property which should have been restituted deprived the church of resources for launching projects, building churches in churchless suburbs or ensuring that priests were adequately paid. According to well-informed sources, profits from former church property are being exploited by organised crime.¹⁰¹ According to Metropolitan Gavril, speaking in 2002, the UDF government's understandable policy of concentrating on building up relations with the European Union has made relations with Russia difficult, thus cutting off other possible sources of income.

There are as yet no church canons addressing contemporary parish life, which urgently needs reactivating. Both sides in the schism tended to manifest a very negative attitude to smaller and often newer churches which were using their imagination and making a favourable impact on people in search of a living faith or in need of help. Both sides mooted a restrictive and discriminatory law on religion. As one church member told me, his church still has a very old-fashioned 'fortress' concept of religion, defensive rather than ontologically open. Neither side was in a position to offer government and society a sound basis of moral values or to provide the independent and powerful critique they so badly needed.

Female Bulgarian academics have complained of the Orthodox Church's lack of concern for women and of its unwillingness to use their talents and initiative or take account of their views. At a (Protestant) European Christian women's conference in Sofia in October 2001 attention was drawn to Christian women who, with their husbands or in their own right, occupy important positions in Bulgarian business or government; because of their outspoken stance against corruption some of them have lived for years under threat of violence or even death. Noting that many people in Bulgaria have turned away from God, the conference report highlights 'Bulgarian Orthodox Church ladies who have the same desire for their people as we have for ours – a turning to Jesus as their only hope of salvation, and greater loving care for those in need'.¹⁰² The disputants in the schism should sit at their feet and learn.

Notes and References

- ¹ Part 1 of this series of articles is Janice Broun, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church', *Religion State & Society*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1993, pp. 207–20. Part 2 is *id.*, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, part 2: under the socialist government, 1993–97', *RSS*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2000, pp. 263–89.
- ² Respectively Jonathan Sutton of Leeds University and the journalist Angelina Todorova, an Oxford postgraduate student and editor of the cultural magazine *Kosmopolit*, both in conversation with the author.
- ³ Dimitrina Merdjanova, in conversation with the author.
- ⁴ BTA news agency, Sofia, 28 February 1997.
- ⁵ Bulgarian Radio, Sofia, 5 March 1997.
- ⁶ *24 Chasa* (a daily newspaper), 7 March 1997.
- ⁷ BTA news agency, 20 March 1997.
- ⁸ *Kontinent* (Sofia), 22–23 March 1997; *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 31 March 1997.
- ⁹ BTA news agency, 22 March 1997

- ¹⁰ 24 Chasa, 21 March 1997.
- ¹¹ Aleksandur Gospodinov in conversation with the author, 1997. He is convinced from an incident when he made an enquiry – not on a church matter – that the files had not been destroyed but kept for future use. He pointed out that the former communists had retained power for all except 11 months since 1990. As a teacher in Sofia Academy and Seminary he estimated that by 1990 half the students were agents. After his request at the church Council later that year for the files to be opened a metropolitan told him privately that Asenov had refused the Synod's request on the grounds that none were available, and asserted that no file was kept on Maksim.
- ¹² Spas Raikin, 'Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, 1992–1997', in John D. Bell (ed.), *Bulgaria in Transition* (Westview, Boulder, CO), p. 230 and note 57; 'Shesto nyamashe da raskolav tsurkavata', *Kontinent*, 18 March 1997.
- ¹³ *Duma*, 5 April 1997.
- ¹⁴ Gospodinov, in conversation with the author, July 1997.
- ¹⁵ Available in the archive of Keston Institute.
- ¹⁶ Spas Raikin, *Decapitation of the Orthodox Church in Post-communist Bulgaria*, unpublished paper, pp. 29–30.
- ¹⁷ *Kontinent*, 4 May 1997.
- ¹⁸ 'Patriarch protestiert', *Glaube in der 2. Welt* (hereafter *G2W*), no. 6, 1997, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ *Demokratiya*, 12 April 1997.
- ²⁰ *Demokratiya*, 22 May 1997.
- ²¹ *Demokratiya*, 12 June 1997.
- ²² Raikin, *Decapitation ...*, pp. 57–58.
- ²³ Inge Bell, 'Bulgariens Kirche und die Politik', *G2W*, nos. 7/8, 1998, p. 23.
- ²⁴ ACCA-M polling agency results, July 1997, based on interviews with 1389 individuals.
- ²⁵ Raikin, *Decapitation ...*, pp. 60–68, which provides a systematic summary.
- ²⁶ As on 2 July 1992: see Janice Broun, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church', p. 215.
- ²⁷ 'Sofia: Concile de l'Église Bulgare', *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* (hereafter *SOP*), no. 221, September–October 1997, p. 5.
- ²⁸ 'Grèce', *SOP*, no. 222, December 1997, p. 18.
- ²⁹ *SOP*, no. 221, September–October 1997, p. 5.
- ³⁰ Marian Zlateva, 'The Ecumenical Council awaited by Christian Orthodox Bulgarians for 44 years deliberated for only two days', *Face to Face*, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, July 1997, p. 6.
- ³¹ *loc. cit.*
- ³² *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 3 November 1997.
- ³³ *Demokratiya*, 19 November 1997. One priest camped outside the palace in protest at Kalinik's over-close relationship with the wives of some of his priests.
- ³⁴ *Trud*, 15 February 1998.
- ³⁵ *Declaration of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, 19 December 1997*, available in translation from Spas Raikin; *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 16 January 1998.
- ³⁶ *Duma*, 10 January 1998.
- ³⁷ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- ³⁸ 'Sofia: le Président Bulgare demande la démission du patriarche Maxime', *SOP*, no. 225, February 1998, pp. 8–9.
- ³⁹ *Sega* (a daily newspaper), 5 March 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- ⁴¹ Church–state relations reached a breaking point from 1887 to 1893 when the russophile church was not consulted on the appointment of the German Catholic Prince Ferdinand of Coburg-Gotha as tsar. Several metropolitans refused to pray for him. See Spas Raikin, 'The Bulgarian Orthodox Church', in Pedro Ramet (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1998), pp. 162–64.
- ⁴² *Tsurkoven vestnik*, January 1998.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 1 March 1998.

⁴⁴ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Heinz Gstrein, 'Allgemeine Not und besondere Kirchenprobleme', *G2W*, no. 3, 1997, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁸ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 September 1998.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Transition*, October 1998, p. 13.

⁵¹ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 September 1998

⁵² *Demokratiya*, 18 and 19 December 1998.

⁵³ In his open letter to the EU human rights committee of 11 December 1998 (pp. 2–3) Spas Raikin notes that neither the president nor the prime minister attended the official banquet for the guests, only Sungarsky.

⁵⁴ 'Sofia: Sommet des primats des églises orthodoxes', *SOP*, no. 232, November 1998, pp. 1–2. Balachev spoke to the BTA news agency; Baralinov, on behalf of *Tsurkoven vestnik*, to the ecumenical news agency ENI in Geneva.

⁵⁵ 'Bulgarien: Schisma beendet', *G2W*, no. 11, 1998, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Luxmoore, 'Orthodox summit brokers end to Bulgarian church schism', *ENI News Service*, 5 October 1998.

⁵⁷ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 October 1998.

⁵⁸ *Bulgarska korona*, 9 October 1998.

⁵⁹ *Standart*, 21 October 1998.

⁶⁰ Raikin, open letter to the EU ..., p. 4.

⁶¹ According to its bylaws, ratified by the National Assembly on 13 January 1885, the bylaws themselves could not be changed or rescinded, nor any other ordinances passed which affected church government and were contrary to them, without prior agreement between the Holy Synod and the Ministry of Confessions. Raikin, open letter to the EU ..., p. 4.

⁶² Spas Raikin, letter to Philip Walters, 30 September 2000.

⁶³ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 16 November 1998.

⁶⁴ BTA, 10 January 1999.

⁶⁵ 'Bulgarie', *SOP*, no. 236, March 1999, pp. 15–16.

⁶⁶ Broun, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁶⁷ Archimandrite Dr Pavel St Georgiev Stefanov, 'Orthodoxy in gaol', *Keston News Service* (henceforth *KNS*), 22 September 1999, and *id.*, 'Catechism in Bulgaria', *Orthodox Outlook*, January–February 1998 (Wallesey), p. 19.

⁶⁸ Gospodinov in conversation with the author. He rated Pimen a good organiser and, although inclined to go back on his word on occasion, not a bad man.

⁶⁹ 'Orthodoxie: les Séquelles d'un schisme', *APIC*, 16 April 1999, p. 12.

⁷⁰ 'Schismatic metropolitan elected', *KNS*, 22 September 1999; Spas Raikin, letter to Philip Walters, 28 May 1999.

⁷¹ Gospodinov, in conversation with the author.

⁷² 'New church consecrated', *KNS*, 22 September 1999.

⁷³ 'Monument inaugurated', *KNS*, 22 September 1999.

⁷⁴ 'Bulgarie', *Info*, Aide a l'Église en détresse, April 2001.

⁷⁵ 'Bulgaria', *Eastern Europe, the Political Briefing*, 12 June 2000, pp. 1–5.

⁷⁶ Gospodinov, in conversation with the author, May 2000.

⁷⁷ *Demokratiya*, 17 May 2000.

⁷⁸ *Demokratiya*, 9 September 2000.

⁷⁹ *Trud*, 17 November 2000.

⁸⁰ Spas Raikin, letter to the US ambassador in Bulgaria, Richard Miles, 10 January 2001.

⁸¹ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 December 2000.

⁸² The statement was signed by 13 of the 15 members of the Holy Synod: Simeon of Western

and Central Europe and Iosif of America and Australia were not in Bulgaria at the time.

- ⁸³ 'Sentiment d'exclusion', *APIC*, 8 January 2001.
- ⁸⁴ 'Istanbul: Sommet des primats des églises Orthodoxes', *SOP*, no. 255, February 2001, pp. 1–2.
- ⁸⁵ *Trud*, 27 November 2000, and Margarita Ilieva, 'Break in at the Blagoevgrad temple', *Obektiv*, November 2000–January 2001, pp. 18–19.
- ⁸⁶ *Duma*, 4 October 2000.
- ⁸⁷ Raikin, open letter to the EU ..., and Ilieva, *op. cit.* A bilateral commission was formed from inspectors representing Innokenti on the one side and Natanail on the other to resolve the occupation.
- ⁸⁸ Spas Raikin, Letter to Philip Walters, 30 September 2000.
- ⁸⁹ *Duma*, 8 January 2002.
- ⁹⁰ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 January 2001. The titles of the dioceses were historical ones.
- ⁹¹ *Demokratiya*, 17 January 2001.
- ⁹² 'Bulgarie', *SOP*, no. 257, April 2001, p. 9.
- ⁹³ Ganev is the son-in-law of Kimon Georgiev, leader of the 'Zveno' party, who became prime minister on 9 September 1944 and died in 1964.
- ⁹⁴ *Duma*, 12 January 2001.
- ⁹⁵ *Demokratiya*, 13 January 2001.
- ⁹⁶ *168 Chasa*, 23–29 March 2001.
- ⁹⁷ *Demokratiya*, 3 April 2001. No reference to this decision was made by Bulgarian television.
- ⁹⁸ *Demokratiya*, 11 June 2001.
- ⁹⁹ *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 16 April 2001.
- ¹⁰⁰ Steve Crashaw, 'Bulgarians set to vote for their ousted king as prime minister', *The Independent*, 16 June 2001; Justin Huggler, 'Exiled king ready for coronation by the people', *The Independent*, 18 June 2001, p. 11; Huggler, 'Victorious ex-king sets his sights on presidency', *The Independent*, 19 June 2001, p. 11, and *Monitor: Independent Review*, p. 2; Huggler, 'Bulgaria's deposed czar back to win power on cult ticket', *Independent on Sunday*, 17 June 2001, p. 18; 'Bulgaria', *Eastern Europe, the Political Briefing*, 26 June 2001, pp. 1–2; and conversation with Gospodinov.
- ¹⁰¹ 'Sofia: 5 concile de l'église de Bulgarie', *SOP*, no. 256, February 2002, p. 4.
- ¹⁰² 'New links forged at a ladies' conference', *Blythswood News*, Evanton, Ross-shire, Winter 2001–02, p. 10.