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Daniela Kalkandjieva graduated from the Faculty of History of "St. Kliment Ohridiski" university in Sofia, obtained his PhD at Central European University in Hungary with a dissertation on the "Ecclesio-Political Aspects of the International Activities of the Moscow Patriarchate, 1917-1948". At present, she is researcher at "St. Kliment Ohridiski" university. Her interests go from the history of the Russian Church to the relationships between religion and politics in Bulgaria and from the ecumenical dialogue to the influence of Orthodoxy on the European integration. Among her publications: The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917-1948: From Decline to Resurrection, London 2015; Balgarskata pravoslavna tsarkva i 'narodnata demokratsiya', 1944-1953 [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the 'people's democracy', 1944-1953], Silistra 2002

Discerning the Present Time. Metropolitan Stephan of Sofia and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (1940-1944)

ABSTRACT

?he Bulgarian Orthodox Church faced a difficult choice in the early 1940s. On the one hand, the anti-Jewish policy, adopted by the Bulgarian state as an ally of Nazi Germany, called for a deeper understanding of the Lord's order to Christians to love their neighbors as themselves. What did the word "blizhen" (in Bulgarian) or "blizhniy" (in Russian) mean in a time when the Nazi ideology deprived Jews of the right to be perceived and treated as human beings? In this regard, it is worthy to mention that in the Slavic languages the word "blizhnii" does not mean simply a neighbor, i.e., somebody is closely situated to you in space, but one who shares similar worldviews, historical experience, etc. Therefore, the principle of Christian love in Slavic countries is often read through the prism of local history and customs.

On the other hand, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, at least many of its bishops, clerics, and laymen were inclined to support the wartime choice of their state leadership, because the alliance with Hitler made possible a realization of the national dream – the reunion of all Orthodox Bulgarians within the borders of a political entity similar to the so-called San Stephano Bulgaria, planned to be created after the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-78)– and whose territory de facto overlapped with the lands under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarchate, set up by a sultan's decree in 1870, but which was never had existed in reality. At first glance, Bulgaria's joining the fascist coalition of states seemed to be a good choice: in September 1940 – the Treaty of Krayova, signed by Hitler and Stalin, returned Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria, while in May 1941, Nazi Germany allowed the Bulgarian authorities to occupy significant areas of Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. This opportunity to turn the dream of a Great Bulgaria into reality – tempted the Bulgarian hierarchs as well. It allowed the Bulgarian Synod to spread its jurisdiction over the Orthodox eparchies in the occupied areas of Macedonia and Aegean Thrace, thus reviving and even exceeding the original territorial jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarchate. Inspired by this achievement, in 1942, the Synod even proposed a restoration of the patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian Church. From this perspective, one could assume that such a strong politically and ecclesiologically motivated nationalist impulse would incite Bulgarian church leadership to support the anti-Jewish policy of its state. However, this did not happen. In fact, the nationalist impulse and the dream of patriarchal dignity did not take over the Bulgarian hierarchs common sense and their empathy to the fellow citizens of Jewish origins. On the contrary, the Holy Synod adopted many decisions and made open statements in defense of Jews. How did this happen? What did provoke the Bulgarian Synod to oppose anti-Semitism? Which biblical sources were used in favor of the human attitude to Jews? What was the role of Metropoltian Stefan of Sofia in this endeavor? These are the questions my paper has the ambition to answer to.

ALL SPEAKERS