Chapter 11

The Legal Position of the Churches in East Central Europe from 1945 to 1989

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ABSTRACT

After the end of hostilities, Central and Eastern Europe forcibly became a zone of Soviet influence. Local communist governments adopted the political and legal solutions of the USSR as their model. Under the assumed model of a secular state, they undertook anti-religious policies combined with indoctrination in the spirit of materialist philosophy. Despite the preservation of the appearance of religious freedoms under the façade constitutions, in reality, the legislation enacted and the actions of the administrative-police apparatus were aimed at destroying the organizational structures of the churches, reducing the authority of the clerical hierarchy and the Holy See, and regularly discouraging the faithful from religious practice. In the first years after the communist takeover, religious life was already successively subjected to the control of state bodies: the material heritage of the churches was appropriated, religious worship was licensed or paralyzed, and the clergy and faithful were persecuted. So-called patriot priests loyal to the regime were also effectively recruited, making it possible to break up church organizations and steer the faithful according to the prevailing ideology. The status of individual churches and religious associations was generally highly unstable under communist regimes, legally restricted, and above all dependent on the arbitrary will of the regime's elite, whose overriding goal was to bring about the full secularization of societies.

KEYWORDS

Church, religion, persecution, resistance, totalitarianism, communists, East Central Europe.

Introduction

The geopolitical situation of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War was determined by the decisions of the anti-Hitler coalition known as the Big Three at the Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945) conferences. At that time, it was decided that the countries of the region would lose their sovereignty to the USSR, which entailed the imposition of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the often forcible establishment of a Soviet model of political and legal order. Thus, in the camp of socialist countries, they proceeded to unify the socio-political and economic model. For ideological and

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tactical reasons, there was a strong emphasis on the need to atheize local populations and break with religious tolerance as *sine qua non* conditions for cultural and social reforms. The so-called battle for the 'government of souls' was agreed upon at the meeting of the nine Communist Parties of the Eastern Bloc, held September 22–27, 1947, in Szklarska Poręba. At that time, Andrei Zhukov, a member of the political bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), outlined the goal and methods of intensifying this activity. Atheization was not only to ideologically bind together all Communist Parties (and especially its cadres) of Central and Eastern Europe, but also to be a factor in the enslavement of nations. The concretization of this task was to involve the elimination of specific national traditions and values identified with religion. The idea was to uproot the foundation of spiritual and ethnic culture, defining the moral principles and norms of behavior of individual nations for generations.[1] To achieve this goal, they wanted to use the Soviet experience, which had not only a propagandistic, but also an actual effect on the territory of the USSR, especially after the implementation of the 'Godless Five-Year Plan' (1932–1937).[2] The realization of the aforementioned plan consisted primarily of the (physical and mental) destruction of the hierarchy and other inconvenient priests, as well as the religiously committed laity. The next step was the creation of organizations of priests or lay Catholics supporting the authorities in actions striking at the traditional Church. In this context, a characteristic procedure was the establishment of local movements of so-called 'patriot priests', bringing together in their ranks clergymen who were loyal and obedient to the regime. In addition, the process of secularization of individual societies was to gain support in the appropriate formatting of education and upbringing of youth.[3] Significantly, secularization was to essentially serve to create a new type of man-citizen, devoid of previous social roots, cultural-religious values, and historical context. Such tactics, were in essence to favor the new government in more easily managing and controlling citizens according to top-down guidelines. This was a typical, conscious action of totalitarian authorities, practiced in the fascist and Nazi systems, but also in the much longer term (and therefore more dangerous) communist regimes. It conformed to the thesis aptly put forward and described by George Orwell in '1984' that: "*he who rules the past, in his hands is the future; he who rules the present, in his hands is the past*".[4]

What was essentially becoming the party's 'new religion', atheization was supposed shape mentally homogeneous societies that would unreflectively follow the orders of political power. However, the assumed religious policy of the various regimes was not spectacularly and fully successful. Even with the varying levels of religious identification of local communities, Christian values were not infrequently

1 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 13–15.
2 More: Szymański, 2005, pp. 9–43.
3 Grajewski, 1999, p. 14.
4 Orwell, 1988, p. 43.

treated as exemplary established norms of behavior. On the other hand, some ecclesiastical institutions and their representatives, enjoyed authority, and in conditions of omnipresent oppressiveness of governments, became a symbol of resistance. Regardless of the aforementioned heterogeneous conditions of the countries of this region of the continent, essentially two models of state-church relations developed in the post-war period. The first was characteristic mainly in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. It showed the eradication of organized religious worship and the suppression of the activities of church structures including the reduction of ties with the Holy See. The second variant, locally differentiated and specific to Hungary, Yugoslavia, East Germany, or Poland, was characterized by relative tolerance of church organizations, although the authorities strongly obstructed and licensed the realization of religious freedom of their citizens.[5] Of course, such typification indicated should be taken as a great simplification of this complex and dramatic situation in terms of its consequences. The following analysis examines the situation of churches and their believers in specific selected Eastern Bloc countries whose governments adopted the path of secularization in accordance with the guidelines of the USSR.

1. Czechoslovakia

The situation of Czechoslovakia in the first post-war years (1945–1947) appeared to be privileged and different from that of other countries subjected to the political supremacy of the Soviet Union. The 1943 Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Treaty was guaranteed, as it turned out, by a seemingly comfortable and short-lived political independence. This atmosphere was seconded by the rather widespread positive memory of the pre-war activity of the domestic left, but also by a sense of betrayal by Western countries during the Munich Conference of 1938. Rather significant and unresolved national tensions lurked in the background of the political turbulence,[6] which affected the fate of the country before and after the Second World War. After all, the newly established Republic of Czechoslovakia was a multi-national state, with Czechs making up 50% of the population, Germans approximately 20%, and Slovaks accounting for a third nation, or 18% of the total population. In particular, mutual Czech-Slovak animosities were evident in differences in cultural and historical experience (exacerbated by unfulfilled promises of autonomy for Slovaks), but also in attitudes towards Catholicism. During the building of the First Republic (1918–1938), anti-Catholic sentiment had already become apparent, justified by the suppression of Hussitism, forced recatholization and institutional submission to the Habsburg monarchy, among other things. This attitude resulted in the promotion of a secular political model, culminating in the regulations of the Constitution of the First Republic of February 29, 1920, sanctioning a system of formal equality of

5 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 15–18.
6 Cywiński, 1990, p. 217.

religious corporations.[7] Regardless of the normative regulations, an uneasy experience for the local Catholic Church became an internal schism, which resulted in the formation of the Czech National Church in 1920, which had about 1.5 million believers before the war. A sizable percentage of religiously indifferent Czechs was also a thorny problem. At the same time, the prudent diplomacy of the Catholic hierarchy in the interwar period led to the signing of a *modus vivendi* between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See in 1928, and in the following years the Church gained respect, and Catholics constituted the largest religious community in the country.[8] In addition, during the war period, the heroic attitude of the clergy, led by dedicated patriot and Dachau prisoner Archbishop Josef Beran, and the appropriate policy of the Vatican, contributed strongly to increasing the confidence of the Czech public (including from non-believers) in the Church.[9]

In the case of the Slovaks, religious commitment did not falter throughout the interwar period and was identified with a strong sense of national consciousness and independence. In this context, the local parliament took advantage of the Munich resolutions and proclaimed the First Slovak Republic (1939–1945) under the leadership of Catholic clergyman and Slovak People's Party leader Josef Tito. This state, identified as a satellite state to the Third Reich, was nevertheless notable in its short history for its infamous dictatorial rule (mainly against the Jewish community).[10] Slovak separatism did not meet with acceptance on the part of Czech political elites and citizens, deepening mutual prejudice. After the war, controversial president Fr. J. Tiso was held responsible and sentenced to death, executed in 1947. The event sparked demonstrations by a sizable portion of Slovaks.[11]

On the final balance sheet after the end of hostilities, the difficult and varied experiences of the Czechoslovak Catholic Church earned it considerable public support. It is worth recalling that the Catholic Church at the time numbered some nine million believers (representing 76% of the total population), organizationally assigned to two archdioceses and several dioceses, and that the fundamental institutional problem at the time was a significant shortage of clergy (especially in Bohemia and Moravia). The Czech Hussite Church, on the other hand, had less than 8% of the faithful, while the Evangelical Church had 3.3%.[12]

The briefly highlighted historical cultural and political conditions provided a starting point for the Czechoslovak political elite, led by President Edvard Beneš, to adopt a posture of balancing between West and East after the Second World War. This rather quickly proved to be a vain prospect, as the Communists staged an effective political coup as early as February 1948. At that time, with full-scale support from the USSR, they launched a radical political and social transformation. Anti-church policies were

7 Staszewski, 1994, p. 94; Jakimowicz-Pisarska, 2018, p. 167.
8 More: Kaczmarek, 2016, pp. 123–134, 185–188.
9 Cywiński, 1990, p. 220.
10 Staszewski, 1994, p. 90.
11 Wietrzak, 1997, p. 14.
12 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 220–221; Němec, 1955, pp. 163–165.

to play an important role in this process. Despite their ostensible gestures of ideological and institutional respect for the Church, they were in essence looking for a pretext to tighten religious policy. The growing communist faction began to perceive the postwar increase in public confidence and even religious awakening as a serious threat to their ideological and political position. Concerns were becoming real, especially because of the growing authority of Archbishop Beran of Prague and the mass demonstrations of a national-religious nature that were taking place. They became all the more important because, unlike Catholics, Protestants, led by prominent theologian Josef Hromadka, displayed a positive attitude towards the new political force.[13] Under such circumstances, the Communists decided to prepare a long-term anti-church strategy. Its objectives included: weakening religious identity and even eradicating religious worship, breaking up or eliminating church institutions (especially Catholic and Protestant ones), but above all, making the Catholic Church independent of the negatively perceived Vatican. This goal was served by measures aimed at creating a national church subordinate to the secular government. The aforementioned stages of government tactics were signaled in a speech by President Klement Gottwald (E. Beneš's successor) at the 1948 meeting of party leaders in Karlovy Vary.[14] Their realization was emphasized on the basis of systemic regulations. Under the Basic Law of May 9, 1948, the model of state sovereignty over the Church was adopted. In the absence of guarantees for their observance also in the matter of civil liberties (including conscience and religion), its rather vague provisions provided the opportunity for supervisory-police activity by state bodies. In practice, the administration decided on the entire functioning of churches and religious associations.[15]

A fundamentally hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church was expressed as early as 1945 as part of holding Slovaks accountable for collaborating with the Nazis. On the basis of decrees of the Slovak National Council, the local Communists began nationalizing the Catholic school institutions that dominated the area, nationalizing boarding schools, educational institutions run by religious orders, and obstructing the religious life of the local population and persecuting the clergy.[16] This was not only a revanchism for cooperation with the Third Reich, but also a probe into the future as to what extent the Church, considered to be in opposition, was willing to submit to the directives of the public authorities, with the aim of eventually achieving its total elimination. A few weeks after the political upheaval of February 1948, a commission on religious affairs, known as the Church Six, was established, which consisted of party representation from the National Front's Central Operating Commission (ÚAV NF) and the Czechoslovak clergy hierarchy of various denominations. Its purpose was to agree on the status of churches and religious associations in the Czech lands (analogous structures were established in Slovakia). The heavily partisan central and

13 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 217–218, 222.
14 Podolec, 2011, p. 13; Boryszewski, 2001, p. 237.
15 Staszewski, 1994, pp. 94–95.
16 Vlček, 2017, pp. 257–258.

provincial commissions were entrusted with additional powers to maintain the personal files of the clergy and information-propaganda campaigns, as well as to build an agent network in church structures. At the same time, these bodies applied intensified and multiplied control over church institutions with the help of the Communist Party's information and repressive structures and the Security Service (ŠtB).[17] Their repressive activity was given a boost by the People's Democratic Republic Protection Act (231 of 1948) which in effect sanctioned disproportionate punishments for acts (or even mere intent) against the regime and its officials, among which were provisions (Section 28) for abuse of clergy.[18]

The negotiations between the government and church sides, which lasted approximately a year (1948–1949), did not yield fruitful results for the Communists. The failure of the church authorities to agree to voluntary subordination to the state prompted an intensification of anti-religious repression. Despite the aforementioned control, applied repression and other forms of pressure in the form of property seizure (including nationalization of Catholic educational institutions) and the eradication of religion from social life (gradual elimination of religious instruction in schools, dismissal of clerical teachers, removal of crucifixes in schools, removal of certain Catholic holidays in the calendar, wiretapping the offices of the church hierarchy, censorship and subsequent liquidation of Catholic publications), this failed to convince the church hierarchy to cooperate and morally support the regime. Beginning in April 1949, the ÚAV NF began successively implementing an anti-religious strategy aimed at creating an atheist society. As previously mentioned, the first institutional step, was to break up the Church and remove Vatican influence. The role of church hierarchs was to be gradually taken over by state plenipotentiaries (special administrative bodies) along with self-governing bodies of priests cooperating with the regime. In the longer term, the plan was to temporarily create a national church with the cult of Cyril and Methodius administered by a clerical structure submissive to the regime. Eventually, this state church was to be liquidated,[19] as modern communist society was to overcome its dependence on this relic of the old system. To disorganize and dismantle church structures, the rulers legalized censorship of church letters in June 1949, banned any meetings with priests, pilgrimages, church gatherings, and finally led to the outlawing of lay Catholic associations. The place of the existing religious organizations was to be taken by a pro-regime movement of progressive Catholics called Catholic Action, which was seen as a counterweight to the legal church hierarchy. However, the firm opposition of the Church hierarchy including Beran (appeal of June 18, 1949 to the nation to persevere in persecution and trust in the Church hierarchy[20]), as well as the papal threat of excommunication against members and sympathizers of the Communist Party (Holy Office decree 'On Communism'), caused

17 Podolec, 2011, pp. 15–18.
18 Zákon č. 231/1948 Sb. na ochranu lidově demokratické republiky.
19 Vlček, 2017, p. 253; Kaplan, 1993, p. 23.
20 Němec, 1955, pp. 248–249.

its disintegration after a few months. Moreover, there were mass religious uprisings and forcible confrontations with law enforcement (especially in Orava and Spiš). The government's response to the anti-regime uprisings was numerous arrests or deportations of priests and lay Catholics to forced labor camps. This repression was consistently continued in subsequent years.[21]

Significant and completely legalizing the authorities' previously pursued policy towards the churches became the enactment of a package of so-called Church Laws (laws and government regulations) in October 1949, under which, among other things, the State Office for Church Affairs was established (an adequate office was established in Slovakia) and the material status of churches and religious associations was regulated.[22] On the one hand, the purpose of these measures was to break up unity (especially of the Catholic Church) and, on the other, to make the management of church affairs dependent on state bodies and to take administrative control over the clergy. The newly created central office was given (based on Decree No. 228/1949[23]) full authority to directly supervise worship and church polity. It carried out its tasks in provincial and district branches through church secretaries and plenipotentiaries to (Protestant) consistories until 1956. Furthermore, the 'Safeguards Law' actually made the exercise of priestly ministry and the holding of certain positions in the church subject to state approval. It reduced the clergy to the role of civil servants who, along with church institutions, were maintained from the state budget. In addition, it required clergy to take an oath of allegiance to the state as a condition for carrying out pastoral work. These regulations deprived churches and religious associations of all institutional and organizational autonomy, and allowed clergy to be instrumentalized and often paralyzed their activities.[24] They also arbitrarily established the number of recognized churches and religious associations (at the time, 15), resulting the forced massification of certain Evangelical associations in particular. Other religious organizations were abolished, and the activities of unofficial religious associations were prohibited.[25]

Catholic Archbishop J. Beran, along with ten bishops, refused to pledge loyalty to the communist government, which was another important pretext, after the aforementioned appeal of 1949, for their intervention.[26] The public authorities also banned the reading of the contents of the document. It was only a matter of time before relations with the Vatican were severed and the Apostolic Nuncio was forced

21 Wietrzak, 1997, p. 15.

22 Zákon č. 217/1949 Sb. o zřízení Státního úřadu pro *věci* církevní end Zákon *č.* 218/1949 Sb. o hospodářském zabezpečení církví a náboženských společností státem.

23 *Nařízení č. 228/1949 Sb., o pusobnosti a organizaci Státního úřadu pro věci církevní*, https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1949-228 (Accessed: 15 January 2023).

24 Podolec, 2011, pp. 19–21; Kwapis, 1999, p. 166.

25 Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 5.

26 The internment lasted until 1963; two years later, the archbishop was allowed to leave Czechoslovakia and travelled to Rome, forbidden to return to the country. The hierarch died in Rome in 1969, and the primate's beatification process began in 1998. Brodniewicz, 2017, p. 61.

to leave Prague in 1950.[27] Successively, the rulers limited the activity of the Church to the performance of rites in temples with which they entailed: liquidation of church education, introduction of restrictions on the education of priests (up to two seminaries), transfer of church registry books to the national councils, giving marriage a secular character, implementation of religious worship only within temples, and obtaining permission from the local church office to conduct non-church activities (including the activities of religious and charitable societies). Under such conditions, the church hierarchy was reduced to a passive observer who often legitimized the decisions of those in power under duress. This was an even more difficult challenge, since the position of Metropolitan of Prague was not filled after the imprisonment of Bishop Beran, and the rulers consciously refused to fill the vacancy. Only in 1977 was it agreed to fill the vacant post by Cardinal František Tomášek.[28] Such sweeping anti-religious tactics were accompanied by numerous administrative impediments designed to effectively discourage the faithful from participating in religious life. This phenomenon was further encouraged by pro-government media propaganda that maintained a tone of criticism of the Church and the Holy See.

Another brutal action undertaken in 1950 was intended to cause even greater humiliation and paralysis of religious life. On the basis of a special order of the Ministry of the Interior (dated April 12, 1950), a program called Action 'K' and Action 'VK' was undertaken to 'purify' religious congregations. In their effects, they brought irreparable cultural and material losses. These actions were to put a definitive end to the earlier actions of concentrating monks and liquidating monasteries. As a result, men's and women's monasteries were closed, some monks were placed in closed concentration cloisters or centers of further training, while some were arrested under the pretext of anti-state activity or forced to provide other work. This was met with dissatisfaction from the population and forceful confrontation.[29] On April 28, 1950, a convened council in Prešov led to the violent liquidation of the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church, which existed in eastern Slovakia and had approximately 360,000 believers (mostly so-called Ruthenians). The said Action 'P' caused some of the clergy to convert to Orthodoxy under pressure from the authorities, and the unruly were persecuted.[30] In May 1950, an unsuccessful attempt was made to force the church hierarchy to sign the Stockholm Peace Appeal regarding the ban on nuclear weapons. Their opposition was used as a pretext for the gradual isolation of the Catholic bishops.[31]

As indicated above, the imprisonment or internment of the clergy (including bishops), as well as the faithful of almost all denominations, was a constant element of the anti-church policy. The repressions used were often the result of provocations or spectacular trials (such as the trial of Abbot Augustin Machalk). In 1951, as

27 Brodniewicz, 2017, p. 61.
28 Such behavior by the authorities caused Cardinal Tomášek to refuse to sign Charter 77 for fear of reprisals against the Church. Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 5.
29 Wietrzak, 1997, p. 16.
30 Vlček, 2017, p. 253.
31 Wietrzak, 1997, p. 16.

a consequence of arrests and licensing of permits to exercise priestly ministry, the authorities led to a situation where 70% of parishes were without clergy. Arrests of clergy culminated in the period 1949–1952, with a slight decrease in the following years. Priestly services were taken over by so-called patriot priests associated with Catholic Action. In accordance with the will of those in power, they organized pilgrimages, politically trained priests, edited the Catholic newspaper Katolické noviny, and filled the positions of deans, canons, and vicars general in place of interned bishops, among other things. In 1951, after the disintegration of Catholic Action, a better-organized mass pro-government association of priests called 'Mirowe hnuti katolického duchovenstva' (MHKD, 'Peace Movement of the Catholic Church') was established, headed by progressive priest (and also Minister of Health) Josef Plojhař. The MHKD became an official partner (minus the bishops) in talks between the authorities and the church. By the end of 1952, the regime had completely captured the official church structure through its organs (church secretaries, plenipotentiaries in consistories, and the peace movement). However, it failed to establish a national church.[32]

During this dramatic period of persecution, the informal activity of the Catholic clergy occurred simultaneously. Their goal became the preservation of the continuity of the already over-strained institutional structures and the realization of priestly ministry to the faithful. At the end of 1949, clandestine ordinations of priests, including bishops, were carried out with the authority of the Pope. After 1951, illegally ordained priests, together with those who had lost their 'statni souhlas' (state compulsory permission to provide ministry), began to organize an underground pastoral ministry, in time called the 'Catacomb Church'. However, the independent pastoral groups formed under it provoked objections from the clergy operating legally under the control of the authorities. Concerns included the danger of tearing the unity of Catholics apart in what were already difficult conditions for the Church.[33]

The aforementioned intensified anti-church campaign continued throughout the 1950s with minor and short-lived changes in 1956. At that time, religious worship was somewhat facilitated, show trials were abandoned, some clergy were released from labor and internment camps, and atheization propaganda was curtailed.[34] In addition, in 1956, the State Office for Church Affairs and the Slovak Office for Church Affairs were abolished, and their powers were taken over by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and by the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Education and Culture in Slovakia. Although the newly established organizational units for religious policy did not have the character of a central authority, the churches were so controlled and paralyzed at the time that the issue was not treated in highly strategic terms. This organizationally modified model of church-state dependence survived until the end of the communist regime.[35]

32 Vlček, 2017, pp. 253–254.
33 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 270–271; Boryszewki, 2001, pp. 252–256.
34 Wietrzak, 1997, p. 17.
35 Podolec, 2011, p. 25.

In 1960, under the new constitution, which, although it duplicated the regulations on religious freedoms, actually increased the scope of restrictions under the 1948 Basic Law. This is because it introduced a Marxist-Leninist orientation of education and cultural policy, effectively making it an illusion to preserve worldview pluralism. Moreover, by the time of the 'Prague Spring' (1968), there was a renewed intensification of arrests and trials of the clergy and Catholic laity.[36] Only with the advent of the relative liberalization of domestic politics in 1968 was there an increase in religious worship in some regions, priests were restored to the priestly ministry, and religious publications were initiated. The liquidation of the so-called 'peaceful priests' movement was also brought about, and the Sobor Renewal Work was established in its place under the leadership of Bishop František Tomášek (it lasted a few months). In the same year, those in power allowed the Greek Catholic Church to resume its activities. The wave of these positive changes did not last long and was abandoned after the Warsaw Pact invasion. The Church was again subjected to control and pressure from the security services. Surveillance of believers and attacks on the clergy became a daily occurrence. In 1971, the pro-government organization Association of Catholic Clergy 'Pacem in Terris' was re-established, bringing together a large percentage of the clergy. Protest on the subject from unruly church circles was expressed in the papal decree *Quidam episcopi*. Under it, membership of this type of political organization was banned, which was supported by Bishop Tomášek. However, the association continued to function.[37]

The commitment of the Eastern Bloc governments at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 to respect human rights and fundamental civil liberties was an important signal to the Czechoslovak government of the need for real respect for religious freedom. Subsequent important events (the creation of 'Charter 77' and the appointment of John Paul II to the papal office) were strongly linked to the mobilization of the anti-communist opposition, but also drew attention to violations of freedom rights, including religious rights in Czechoslovakia. The 1970s and 1980s of the previous century were marked by semi-official or clandestine religious initiatives while security services deliberately obstructed their organization or implementation. There was also repression in the form of criminal or political trials of clergy.[38]

After 1989, in the wake of the 'Velvet Revolution', religious relations were regulated on the basis of the Act of January 23, 1990 on the Economic Security of Churches and Religious Associations by the State (amending Act 218 of 1949 and repealing its implementing provisions) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of January 9, 1991. Comprehensively, mutual state-church relations were normalized in the Act on Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations of August 9, 1991 (Act 308 of 1991).[39] The new regulations expressed the principle of

36 Vlček, 2017, pp. 255–256; Staszewski, 1994, pp. 95–96.
37 Brodniewicz, 2017, p. 61.
38 Vlček, 2017, pp. 273–274.
39 Zákon č. 308/1991, Sb. Zákon o svobodě náboženské víry a postavení církví a náboženských společností.

equality, cooperation, and autonomy of churches. It is also worth noting that historical conditions, especially the communist regime, left a mark on the level of religious commitment of citizens (visible especially in the Czech community). According to statistics at the time (from 1991), approximately 44 % of citizens identified themselves as believers, of whom, Catholics accounted for 39% (including Slovaks 60%), Evangelicals 2.2%, believers in the Czechoslovak Hussite Church 1.7%, and approximately 40% as atheists. Data from 2011 already indicates that the structure of religiosity displayes an increase in secularism in Czech society. The declared number of believers was 20.8% (Catholics 10%, Evangelicals 0.5%, Hussites 0.4%). In the case of Slovaks, approximately 85% declared affiliation with the Catholic faith.[40] The political transition also prompted efforts to purge and hold accountable the ranks of the clergy of individual churches for their cooperation with the services, as well as their affiliation with the 'Pacem in terris' movement.[41]

2. German Democratic Republic

After losing the Second World War and under the decisions of the Big Three, the German Reich was finally divided into two separate states under occupation zones independent of each other. As a result of the division, the situation of the church institutions in the two states varied. In the case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was established on October 7, 1949, and remained within the sphere of Soviet influence, the denominational policy was modelled on the solutions of the USSR. The local Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) thus employed a peculiar tactic in East Germany known as *Kirchenkampf*. This tactic was intended to drive out the religious mentality in favor of the reign of the only legitimate materialist worldview. The younger generation in particular yeamed for an effective process of secularization. At the same time, the dominant church in the GDR was formed by Protestants (10 out of 17 million citizens), and Catholics were a minority (about 1.4 million).[42] Post-war political divisions coincided with old religious divisions, including diocesan structure. In the case of Catholicism, in terms of organization, the Berlin Confederation of Ordinaries was established in 1950 with the approval of the Holy See, jurisdictionally covering the Diocese of Berlin and Meissen.[43] For many years, the status of the Catholic hierarchy in the GDR was not settled, and some priests and laymen loyal to the government co-founded a small Christian Democratic party (CDU) with a weak political position vis-à-vis the SED. In general, owing to the small religious representation concentrated in the diasporas, Catholics were not treated as a serious threat by the regime, unlike the more numerous Evangelicals. The Catholic

40 Staszewski, 1994, p. 92; Jakimowicz-Pisarska, 2018, p. 173.
41 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 62–70.
42 Ulrich, 1994, p. 145.
43 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 115–116.

Church, however, was more resolute in the face of political indoctrination of youth and was able to maintain a link with the Holy See, which also had a positive effect on its independence from the state.[44]

In the case of Evangelicals, with the approval of the Soviet authorities, Bishop Otto Dibelius was entrusted with the function of establishing the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 1945, bringing together regional churches of all occupation zones. Bishop Dibelius was chairman of the EKD Council from 1949 to 1961, and this federative structure, unified for both German states, lasted until March 5, 1969. At that time, a separate Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (called BEK) was formed, headed by Bishop Albrecht Schönherr, under communist coercion. In practice, the Union's secretary and supporter of close cooperation with the regime, Manfret Stolpe, was the main decision-maker. The attitude of the ruling elite was the fundamental problem in maintaining this supra-state church structure, which made it difficult for the clergy to interact and for the eastern church to carry out a common mission with the western part, especially since the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961).[45]

From a systemic viewpoint, both GDR constitutions (1949 and 1968) formally respected freedom of belief and religion, and guaranteed the activities of churches.[46] Nevertheless, the SED assumed the need to maximize restrictions on the churches' influence on society. In truth, for geopolitical reasons, the Communists initially showed a semblance of a neutral attitude towards religious issues. In fact, they began to exert pressure on the churches' personnel policies and to enter into confrontations with opponents of the system as early as 1948. From 1952, in connection with the adopted party direction of building the foundations of socialism, they intensified the persecution of believing youth, and liquidated the Evangelical community of the so-called Young Community (*Junge Gemeinde*) the following year. Representatives of the churches tried to take legal action in defense of the constitutional freedom of religion and other fundamental rights violated by state authorities. They even compared the initiated struggle against the churches to the anti-religious policies of the NSDAP. The course of legal resistance adopted by the hierarchy of the churches did not bring positive results, as it did not stop the arrests of church workers or the confiscation of church property.[47]

After the death of J. Stalin, the regime's elite adopted a so-called new policy course that also targeted religion. In practice, this meant the instrumentalization and infiltration of churches by the security services (MfS) and the promotion of people loyal to the SED, especially the so-called 'priests of peace' (*Friedens-Pfärrer*). In truth, this was the hard course to which the establishment of the Church Affairs Office on March 8, 1957 should be linked. This institution was to act as an intermediary between the

44 Grajewski, 1999, p. 130.
45 Pietzsch, 2010, p. 1; Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 10.
46 Kapitel V, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 7. Oktober 1949 (Available at: https://www.verfassungen.de/ddr/verf49.htm); Arts. 20 and 39, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 9. April 1968.
47 Neubert, 2011, pp. 4–5.

churches and state authorities and exercise full control over religious life.[48] Subsequent legal regulations exposed the true intentions of the authorities towards the churches. They were evident in the prohibition of religious lessons in schools or the functioning of religious youth organizations, and above all, they reduced religious worship to the walls of temples. The deliberate tactics of legal exclusion of religious freedoms were accompanied by campaigns deprecating religion or promoting the need to leave churches, even under threat of losing one's job. Significantly, the authorities deliberately began to take over elements of religious traditions and ceremonies, giving them a secular dimension, for example, the role of the Reformation (Martin Luther, Thomas Münzer) was emphasized in the context of its progressive character, or the institution of '*Jugendweihe*' (initiation into adulthood) was used from 1955 to supplant Protestant or Catholic confirmation. The target group for this political indoctrination was church members, as well as the mass communist youth organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ). Indeed, these actions drove a sizable portion of the youth away from the churches, all the more so because until the late 1960s, essentially all Protestant churches pursued a conciliatory policy towards the authorities. This was due not only to the slogans of universal prosperity preached, but also to the financial dependence on state subsidies.[49] Even Bishop Dibelius' 1959 protest letter questioning the legality of the new system not only failed to meet with the approval of the church hierarchy, but even resulted in his environmental isolation (and urging of his resignation), as well as a show of defamation from those in power.[50] A similar reaction to the rest was met with a declaration passed on March 8, 1963, by part of the Evangelical Church leadership, titled 'Ten Articles on the Freedom and Ministry of the Church'. It provoked criticism from opportunist clergy and repression by the authorities.[51] However, apart from exceptional formal protests by anti-regime theologians, the Evangelical Church was inclined to accept the position of cooperation with the political system. In this regard, it consistently pursued the so-called Turin Road. Its aftermath was the adoption by the Evangelical bishops at the Council of Lehnin (1968) of the formula 'church in socialism' ('not against, not alongside, but in socialism').[52] The regime side, of course, made propaganda use of this demonstration of ideological symbiosis. It presented the Evangelical Church as the largest non-communist organization supporting the East German government. For these concessions, the Church was granted a certain independence within the limits of its jurisdiction (e.g., clergy could not be arrested on church grounds or religious worship could not be restricted within its boundaries), which was turned into anti-regime activity by the political opposition. Nevertheless, this clear turn towards a socialist state ultimately brought negative consequences for the institution and its faithful. After the dismantling of the communist system, the secularization of society was gradually but successively

48 Boyens, 1993, p. 211.
49 Michalak, 2010, pp. 102–103.
50 Besier, 1993, p. 319.
51 Neubert, 2011, p. 8.
52 Ruszkowski, 1995, pp. 75–76.

felt. Indeed, the church in the GDR was balancing between preserving spiritual independence and religious tradition (and involving persecution) and opportunistic adaptation. This situation caused moral dilemmas and a sense of depreciation of the institution among some of the clergy, as demonstrated by Pastor Oskar Brüsewitz and by Pastor Rolf Günther of Falkenstein in 1976 and 1978, respectively, who committed self-immolation in protest of the Church's policy (mainly due to the situation of believing youth).[53]

It should also be noted that the regime's rationing of public space and the accompanying tensions between church and state began to foster the intra-church creation of an opposition called *Hauskreise* in the 1970s. Religious circles, but also groups that did not identify with Christianity (dissidents, intellectual elites or youth subcultures) eagerly used church facilities conduct their activities. To revive non-party and counter-regime grassroots social activity, youth groups (including *Offene Jugendarbeit*), environmental, and pacifist movements (*Friedensgruppen*) were set up, pastoral work was arranged (including within the framework of *Gottesdienste niemals anders*), and religious ceremonies, the so-called *Rüstzeiten*, various musical concerts (e.g. panko concerts) or discussion club meetings were organized. Anti-state content was also distributed through church underground publications. Critical statements (memoranda, synodal speeches) appeared among the clergy, in which they argued for the civilizational and theological importance of the rule of law and human rights (Pastor Urlich Woronowicz, Bishop Hans-Joachim Fränkel, Pastor Heino Falcke, among others). Through the aforementioned initiatives, they wanted to prepare the public for daily work and survival under the prevailing regime. They contributed significantly to the development of the opposition movement.[54]

In the above context, the conversation between then EDK chairman Bishop Schönherr and State Council President Erich Honecker on March 6, 1978, became an important controversial event. It resulted in a reorientation of the government towards a policy of dialogue on religious issues, while on the church side it unfortunately perpetuated the belief in the theological legitimacy of the system. Although it was criticized by some church circles, it was not rejected until the end of the GDR's existence. This 'truce' brought a certain relaxation evident in the legal possibilities for the construction of church facilities, television broadcasts of religious broadcasts, pastoral activity in centers for seniors and for prisoners, or work in church-run kindergartens, among other things, and even the support and patronage of the authorities in the celebration of the 500th anniversary of M. Luther's birth (1983). Undoubtedly, this makeshift act was intended to favor those in power in gaining recognition from the political opposition.[55]

Internal dissent within the Evangelical Church, as well as tensions in relations with the state, did not prevent the religious-political opposition from strengthening

53 Neubert, 2011, p. 9.
54 Michalak, 2010, pp. 104–106.
55 Pietzsch, 2010, pp. 1–2.

in the late 1980s. In particular, the ecumenical assemblies initiated by the Evangelical Church in 1988 and at the beginning of 1989, in which the Catholic Church also participated, went down in history under the name 'The Conciliar Process for Peace, Justice, and the Safeguarding of Creation'. They played a significant role in the process of destabilizing the system, but also deepened the crisis on the state-church line. As part of this ideological manifestation, both churches served to create secular organizations to encourage the faithful to become politically active and civically responsible for systemic change. These were all the more important undertakings as they fostered debate within the Evangelical Church over the unreasonableness of the 'church in socialism' formula. Moreover, despite the numerous repressions and the establishment of an anti-religious freethought union by the regime's elite, this did not prevent the formation of civic movements on the basis of opposition church groups (*Neues Forum*, *Demokratie jetzt*), the organization of anti-government demonstrations or, finally, the association at prayers for non-violent peace. This attitude of the churches led them to be invited to actively participate in the November 1989 Round Table. The Evangelical Church even acted as a 'moderator of the talks'. In addition, the first elections in March 1990 included theologians and employees of the Evangelical Church in the House of the People.[56]

However, the political transformation did not bring religious renewal in East Germany, and already in the 1980s, only 30% of citizens were recorded as declaring identification with Evangelicalism (in the 1950s, the number was 80%).[57] After the years of the communist regime, the Church not only had to deal with the effect of a secularized society, but the institution also faced a reckoning with its infamous past. In 1991, most Protestant synods and the Catholic Episcopal Ordinariate in Berlin voted in favor of vetting clergy and laity holding positions in churches during the GDR period. This generated a lot of emotion, but also made it possible to account for the uncomfortable agential past of their representatives and the faithful, especially evangelicals.[58]

3. Hungary

As in other so-called people's democracies, religious issues in Hungary were an important aspect of the established tactics of secularization and the propagation of a materialist philosophy. Indeed, from an ideological perspective, this was quite a challenge given that the majority of the population displayed a sense of religious identity, with approximately 60% declaring themselves Catholic and approximately 30% Protestant (data from the 1940s).[59] The Communists therefore intended to

56 Neubert, 2011, pp. 22–30; Michalak, 2010, pp. 11–114.
57 Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 11.
58 More: Grajewski, 1999, pp. 133–157.
59 Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 6.

effectively deconstruct and weaken religious organizations, as well as discipline and intimidate the faithful with repressive measures. This task was difficult, especially since the Catholic Church was highly and actively institutionally expanded. In addition, it had strengthened its authority during the war because of its heroic stand in defense of the Jews and felt strong support from the public. Although a manifest readiness for reconciliation and cooperation between the new government (the Provisional Government) and the churches was noticeable in the first weeks, certain actions (e.g., the assassination of Bishop Vilmos Apor by Soviet soldiers, the expulsion of Vatican Nuncio Angelo Rotty, the partial liquidation of religious publications, and the agrarian reform depleting church property) tended to indicate a tightening of mutual relations.[60] The Communists' victory in the August 1947 elections made it possible to undertake a full-scale anti-religious policy, which, under the slogan of 'fighting reaction', was to eliminate the Church from public life. This was all the more so because the churches were accused in the public narrative of collaboration with the Third Reich, support for Miklós Horthy's rule, and being unresponsive to the Holocaust. In the spirit of such a message, especially during the 1948–1956 installation of the new regime, the Church's material and cultural heritage was systematically destroyed or seized (e.g., the introduced index of forbidden books included religious literature), the Church's educational activities were rationed, the faithful were prevented from participating in religious ceremonies, religious teaching was banned or, finally, institutions of a religious nature were nationalized (including convents, seminaries, schools, associations, and foundations), and the national holiday in honor of King St. Stephen was replaced by the state 'holiday of new bread'. Unruly priests and laity were repressed.[61] This was accompanied by a government press campaign, grassroots social provocations, the publication of artists' proclamations, as well as the indoctrination of youth and the intimidation of citizens with the loss of their jobs. All these activities were intended to lend credence to the necessity and legitimacy of cultural-religious change. The religious policy of the rulers culminated in the breaking up and weakening of the episcopate by supporting the Priests of Peace (*Opus Pacis*) movement initiated by clerics Miklós Beresztóczy and Richárd Horváth, who were linked to the Security Service (ÁVH). Above all, the culminating act was the arrest of Hungarian Primate József Mindszenty (original name József Pehm) in December 1948 and, after weeks of torture, his sentencing in a show trial of five days in 1949 to life imprisonment for alleged treason, espionage, and foreign currency trafficking. The cardinal was eventually imprisoned until the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and was then granted asylum at the American embassy in Budapest, where he stayed until 1971, only to leave Hungary with the approval of MFA First Secretary János Kádár. He briefly travelled to the Vatican and from there to Vienna, where he died and was buried in 1975. In the history of the Church, especially the Hungarian Church, he is a hero and a tragic figure. His fate exemplifies his helplessness

60 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 285–287.
61 Staszewski, 1994, p. 69.

not only in the face of his persecutors' attitude, but also of his potential allies. In connection with his arrest, the stigmatizing protests of Pius XII (including *Acerrimo Moerore*'s letter of January 2, 1949) and the public demonstration of support for the Primate organized in Rome (February 1949) proved ineffective. Moreover, as a result of Vatican diplomacy's bargaining with the Kádár government, leaving Hungary entailed a ban on the cardinal's public statements (including the publication of his memoirs), as well as the stripping of the title of Primate of Hungary and Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Esztergom by Paul VI in 1974. In 1991, his remains were brought back and buried in his former episcopal seat in the basilica in Esztergom, and the beatification process began in 1993.[62]

Like the Catholic Church, Evangelicals were also subjected to pressure from those in power. It should also be noted that within the womb of both religious communities, the attitude of the clergy and the faithful varied. In the case of the Evangelical Church, a group led by the Lutheran bishop of the Bánya diocese, Lajos Ordass, was among those who were unruly and ready for open confrontation. For his anti-communist stance, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and loss of public rights in a show trial in 1948, and after a short-lived amnesty in connection with the events of 1956, he was eventually forced to retire until his death in 1978. A similar fate befell other disobedient Protestant clergy, who were forced to resign, transferred to other parishes, imprisoned, or interned (among others, Lutheran Bishop Zoltán Túróczy was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 1945 on charges of war crimes, László Ravasz, bishop of the Reformed Church District Along the Danube, and Imre Révész, bishop of the Reformed Church District Trans-Tisza, were forced to resign their offices in 1948). Analogous to the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, weakened by internal division, balanced between protest and support for the regime. This rift was exploited in negotiations over the shape of mutual relations under the new regime. Ecclesiastical positions were filled with people who compromised with the authorities, culminating in the elevation of László Dezséry to the episcopal office in 1950 and the transfer of authority over the southern ecclesiastical district to him following a brutal ecclesiastical disciplinary procedure against Bishop László Ordass.[63]

The adopted direction of political change, including in religious matters, found its sanction in the Constitution of August 18, 1949, which introduced the separation of State and Church. This law formally and purely facially guaranteed the rights of the churches and the civil rights to freedom of conscience and religious practice while marking the socialist nature of the state. Regarding the status of ecclesiastical institutions, there were laws, Act 43 of 1895 on freedom of religious practice (comprehensively regulating freedom of religion) and Act 33 of 1947 on the equality of all faiths. Both acts defined the conditions for the functioning of denominations, with the latter abolishing the previously sanctioned differentiation into privileged (among other things, politically) and other tolerated denominations. Additionally, they regulated

62 More: Hołojuch, 2004, pp. 184–192.
63 Giczi, 1996, pp. 71–84.

(along with later executive decrees) the supervision of the state administration over their activities, or rather management, acting as 'religious police'. This task was entrusted first to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education (until 1951), then to the State Office for Church Affairs (1951–1956), and finally to the Ministry of Culture (1956–1959). The discretionary interpretation of the aforementioned denominational legislation resulted in a harsh administrative-repressive policy by those in power until 1956, while an attitude of dialogue or cooperation was adopted after János Kádár took over. This legislation was clarified in agreements concluded with individual churches recognized by the Hungarian government (with the Reformed Church on October 7, 1948, Lutheran Church on December 14, 1948, and Catholic Church on August 30, 1950). These documents actually contained conditions for the subordination of the churches to the state. In practice, they were not only enforced, but also narrowed the religious freedom of citizens and their churches.[64]

These agreements were made under humiliating conditions of confiscated church property, nationalized education (1948) and abolished religion in schools (starting in 1949), abolished monasteries and the violent removal of monks from them (1950), as well as the persecution of the clergy (imprisoned, sent to labor camps) or the deliberate dispersal of the remaining clergy throughout the country (often informally exercising their priestly ministry). In them, church parties expressed acts of loyalty and support for the regime. In the case of the dominant Catholic Church, the 1950 settlement was signed by the Hungarian episcopate despite the reservations of Pius XII and J. Mindszenty. In return, it obtained some concessions to the restrictive policies of the Communists (among other things, the release of monks from prison and the reopening of Catholic schools). In fact, it turned out to be a humiliation for the Catholic Church and a paralysis of religious worship, as well as a gradual decline in authority among the faithful. In addition, some priests succumbed to offers to cooperate with the Security Police (ÁVH) in exchange for promotions and material support, allowing the authorities to control church structures more effectively.[65] In addition, *Opus Pacis* was replaced by the more power-friendly Committee of Catholic Priests for Peace, which began publishing the weekly 'Kereszt' in 1950 (its activities were publicly denounced by the Pope in 1955). Through this association, the state paid priests' salaries and also influenced the filling of positions in the church. In 1951, the Hungarian hierarchy was forced to sign the Stockholm Appeal. It should also be noted that any attempts to resist the regime (including in 1951) were met with arrests, trials, or internment of many Catholic bishops, further paralyzing the functioning of the institution. Clergy were also forced by decree retroactive to January 1, 1946 to obtain government approval to hold positions at various levels of church administration. At the same time, independent prayer groups were formed among the laity, some with clerical spiritual leadership (so-called 'bázisközösségek'). This underground church initiated by the monk György Bulányi (his views were deemed religiously dangerous

64 Staszewski, 1994, pp. 70–71.
65 Hołojuch, 2004, p. 186; Schanda, 2015, pp. 377–378.

by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), did not abandon their activities despite persecution.[66]

The period of de-Stalinization allowed for a certain thaw in religious affairs, which was expressed in the release of Bishop József Grősz from internment (sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1951) and his agreement to serve as president of the Hungarian Episcopal Conference from 1956 (until his death in 1961). The dialogue with the Church undertaken by J. Kádár's government brought a temporary *modus vivendi* in matters of religious liberties. He caused some of the clergy to display loyalty to the Church and the Holy See, and some, within the framework of the reformed 'priests of peace' movement (under the name of the National Committee of the Catholic Peace Council Opus Pacis) and under the leadership of Bishop Endre Hamvas, cooperated with successive Hungarian hubs of power despite excommunication and a papal ban on political participation. Beginning in 1957, there was a tightening in denominational policy, which was expressed in the obstruction of the pastoral mission (among other things, permits for public gatherings were rationed, and the filling of church positions was again supervised). In general, subsequent ordinances (including March 24, 1957) violated earlier arrangements and increased interference in religious life. In late 1960 and early 1961, arrests of unruly clergy began under the guise of 'sectarian views'.[67]

It should also be noted that the late 1950s were characterized by a desire on the part of state bodies to renew the 1948–1950 agreements with recognized denominations, expecting them to fully consolidate with the system. Clergymen who had been compromised by their cooperation with the Communists were returned to office, despite the ecclesiastical penalties they were facing. Approval to participate in the Second Vatican Council was obtained by hierarchs representing the position of the communist authorities. The attitude of the local church towards such practices of the regime varied, and the current of preservation of institutions and material survival prevailed. Significantly, on Hungary's initiative, an agreement between the government and the Holy See was concluded on September 15, 1964. Consequently, religious freedoms within the country were expanded (including property relations and pastoral activities), but the regime still maintained control over the Church's personnel matters.[68] In addition, in 1964–1969, the rulers ensured that the Hungarian episcopate was dominated by a hierarchy loyal to the regime, including collaborators with the security services, and some bishoprics were not staffed. Evangelical churches also suffered humiliation and depreciation from the public authorities, which involved some clergy adopting a compromising attitude in the 1960s (e.g., Reformed Church Bishop Tibor Bartha).[69]

From the 1970s, Hungary's special relationship with the Holy See was evident. In 1972, a pilgrimage consisting of representatives of the Catholic Church and the

66 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 307–316.
67 Kopyś, 2016, pp. 90–91.
68 Staszewski, 1994, p. 71.
69 Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 6.

laity travelled to Rome for the first time, propagandistically to indicate the peaceful coexistence of the Hungarian state with the local church. In this vein, in the years that followed, the press and joint conferences held proved the possibility of dialogue in relations between Catholics and Marxists, pointing to the Hungarian model as a model in the Eastern Bloc. This was accompanied by state honors for Church representatives or ecclesiastical personal appointments determined by the government in consultation with the Holy See, which emphasized the special importance of these relations. The visits of Prime Minister György Lázár and János Kádár to the Vatican in 1975 and 1977, respectively, were seen as legitimizing the religious policy of Communist Hungary. Nevertheless, the Communists' stated goal of secularizing society was becoming increasingly feasible. During this period, the number of priests was decreasing, seminaries did not exist, the number of religious congregations was two, more denominational schools were liquidated, and thus religious life gradually died out.

In the second half of the 1980s, liberalization of the law was felt, including concessions to religious freedom, and there was even a discussion of the wrongs done to churches (a Commission on Church History was established). With the significant political changes of 1989, the Constitution was amended (October 18, 1989), under which, freedom to practice and teach religion was recognized, among other things. On the other hand, on January 4, 1990, the Act on Freedom of Conscience and Religion and Churches (with the rank of a constitutional law) was passed, which defined state-church relations, basing them on autonomy and equality of churches, partnership, dialogue, and joint activity for the good of the nation. In 1991, the Act on Restructuring of Property Taken by the Communists was passed, which regulated the financial affairs of churches.[70] It emphasized the social, cultural, and axiological importance of churches in shaping national consciousness. It also re-regulated relations with the Holy See (February 9, 1990). At the time, the churches, especially the Catholic Church, had not regained the position occupied before the Second World War and did not play an important role in the creation of the new political reality. Problems in communicating with society and the reserve of the Catholic episcopate in the face of the inevitability of political change were also evident.[71]

4. Poland

The territorial vastness, the inevitability of border changes, as well as the varied socio-political experiences of the inhabitants of the lands belonging to the Republic at the end of the Second World War caused differences in the situation and attitudes of the churches. After experiencing Soviet rule since September 17, 1939, the population of Volhynia, Eastern Lesser Poland and Vilnius (the eastern borderlands of the Republic), had an unequivocally negative attitude towards them. All the more so because

70 1990. évi IV. törvény a lelkiismereti és vallásszabadságról, valamint az egyházakról.
71 Kopyś, 2016, pp. 115–119.

they were forced to leave their possessions and settle in the Recovered Territories (the western and northern parts of the country), which was accompanied by poor organizational and pastoral support from the church (due to the fact that a large percentage of priests remained in place). In contrast, in the areas east of the Vistula line, rather unprejudiced hopes were initially placed on the establishment of public order by the pro-Soviet new self-proclaimed authorities. In this socially majority agrarian part of the country, the church structure was severely weakened in numbers and organization. The expected spiritual support, including in the context of resistance to the Communists, was obtained rather locally and without publicity (causing a moral rift). An additional problem causing cultural and religious tensions in post-war Poland, or highlighting material contrasts, was not only the poor social integration between autochthons and settlers, but also between the mentally and financially diverse local population. As it turned out, the Church became a helpful actor, especially in the process of settlement. For the effectiveness of the relocation, the public authorities even carried it out according to the structure of the church administration and used the assistance of the clergy in resolving or mitigating conflicts that arose from the new realities.[72]

Note that in the initial phase of the struggle to consolidate 'people's power', the Communists tended to leave the churches out of the mainstream of the conflict until the spring of 1947. However, with the seizure of power in 1945 by the Provisional Government, efforts to limit their activity and influence on society became apparent. Especially since in the case of the Catholic Church, as early as 1945, after the return from captivity of Primate August Hlond, its structural organization began, new Ordinaries were appointed, including in the Recovered Territories, and Pius XII was in no hurry to recognize the new government. Moreover, using the pretext of the incompatibility of the provisions of the 1925 Concordat with the Apostolic appointments made in the Polish lands, the Concordat was terminated in early September 1945. This tactical move gave the hubs of power the freedom to decide on religious and institutional matters. In the same year, the model of secular marriage was introduced, security service inspections of places of worship began, Catholic publications were obstructed, material support from Western countries for Polish church institutions was blocked, priests accused of collaborating with the armed underground were arrested. The first collective protest of the clergy, led by the hierarchs, expressed at Jasna Gora in 1945 against political changes striking at the Christian identity of Poles, did not bring positive results.[73] It intensified state control over religious activity. Moreover, to limit the influence of Catholicism, the authorities supported the National Church, which was established in the spring of 1946, with propaganda and financial support. Furthermore, other minority churches and religious associations were subjected to varying pressures, and their attitude to the new system was sometimes uneven. Certainly,

72 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 13–23.
73 More: Rain, 1994, vol. I, p. 10.

ideologically, the authorities treated them instrumentally with the aim of using them to fight and weaken Catholicism.[74]

In the milieu of secular and clerical intellectuals in the context of regime change, there was a dispute over the future of the Church and Catholics and their ideological identification. The axis of the polemic appeared on the line between supporters of the formation of a Catholic and pro-Church political party, and opponents of the regime, and finally the parties to take up cooperation with the communist authorities, while distancing themselves from the Church hierarchy. The third option, headed by Boleslaw Piasecki, formed the 'Pax' Association in 1947. The 'Pax' Association, which ultimately failed to gain support from the episcopate, did gather some supporters in society and even received parliamentary seats.[75]

In 1947, after winning the rigged parliamentary elections, the Communists, aware that about 90% of the population was Catholic, were already undertaking anti-religious actions on a much larger scale. This was due to the accepted party directives expressed by Economy Minister Hilary Minec on the implementation of a 'developed plan of anti-clerical action'. This included the establishment of an association of clerics disposed to the authorities, as well as persuading others to sign declarations of loyalty.[76] This provoked a reaction from the church hierarchy. The pastoral letters, as well as the Episcopate's petition to the government of February 21, 1947,[77] at first politically balanced and then already firmer on the issues of adherence to constitutional provisions, guarantees of citizen security, and abandonment of repressive policies, began to be affected by censorship. In time, anti-Church aggression and accusatory public statements about the anti-state actions of the Church emerged.[78] Pius XII's 1948 pastoral letter to the German bishops regarding the situation of displaced persons from the western lands was also used for propaganda purposes, the contents of which were manipulatively used to attack the Holy See and the Church. In 1947–1948, secular schools began to be set up within the framework of the Society of Friends of Children, and older young people were mulled over with social advancement, which was to be helped by their participation in the only legal organization, the Union of Polish Youth, the forge of young communists. Mass arrests of clergy, censorship or liquidation of Catholic work or restrictions (combined with control) on the legalization of associations, including religious associations (under the Decree of August 5, 1949 on amending the provisions of the Act on Associations)[79] or the criminalization of abuses of freedom and religion by the clergy associated with the relativization of church-religious precepts (under the Decree of August 5, 1949 on the protection of conscience and religion)[80] began. There was also an order to transfer civil status docu-

74 More: Chabasińska, 2009, pp. 37–62.
75 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 13–44.
76 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 179–180.
77 More: Libera et al., 2003, vol. I.
78 Żaryn, 2003, p. 12.
79 Cywiński, 1990, pp. 34–35, 57; Mirek, 2003, pp. 171–172.
80 Dz. U. 1949, nr 45, poz. 334.

ments to state offices (Decree of September 25, 1945 on Civil Status Records).[81] In 1947 hospitals run by religious orders were nationalized and nuns working in them were brutally expelled. From 1949, public religious worship in the form of pilgrimages, processions, religious burials, and the erection of crosses and wayside chapels was banned. In 1950, the scandalous takeover under state administration of the Caritas organization, extensive in its charitable activities, which shared the fate of this association operating in other countries of people's democracy. Support was given to the establishment of the 'patriot priests' movement, within the framework of the 'Patriot Priests' Commission' created in September 1949. The task of the Commission of Priests at the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD) was to promote resentment against the church hierarchy and question the authority of the papacy. Some of them were infamous for their attitude as informers and careerists. At the same time, the Office of Security and the Ministry of Public Security (Department V, from 1953. Department IX aimed exclusively at the surveillance of the Catholic Church, and from 1962 Department IV, within which in time a special cell 'D' was created) worked to expand the number of clergy cooperating with the state organs, including the use of blackmail and repression.[82] The law of March 20, 1950 nationalizing a large part of the so-called 'Mortmain' property (church property) with the simultaneous establishment of the Church Fund was a significant blow aimed at the churches. It was to deal with compensation for the loss of these estates, which was mainly expressed in the state's assumption of the obligation to emolument the clergy. The action of taking over the estates was accompanied by acts of vandalism and unlawful searches.[83]

The escalating situation, which was very unfavorable to the ecclesiastical side, led to the conclusion of an *Agreement* between the episcopate and the government on April 14, 1950. This was to guarantee the preservation of a certain minimum of pastoral freedoms (religion in schools, the preservation of the Catholic University of Lublin, religious orders and congregations), and in return, the clergy was to refrain from questioning economic changes regarding the collectivization of land ownership.[84] Not only did the *Agreement* express the weakness of the episcopate, but for the government side, it was purely propaganda and in fact was not fully respected by it. In this context, for the rest, the reluctance of the clergy to sign the Stockholm Appeal, already mentioned as controversial in its message, was used as a pretext. Additionally, the persecution of priests intensified, religion was removed from schools, and political show trials intensified, including against bishops. In the recovered lands, the authorities removed or arrested legitimate diocesan administrators, arbitrarily appointing vicars of their own choosing in their place without the Primate's consent (the Primate, not wanting to cause the structure to fall apart, eventually supported the government appointments). Shortly after the signing of the *Agreement*, the Office

81 Dz. U. 1945, nr 48, poz. 272.
82 Grajewski, 1999, pp. 181–182, 191–205.
83 Dz. U. 1950, nr 9, poz. 87; Mirek, 2003, pp. 173–174.
84 Staszewski, 1994, p. 27.

for Religious Affairs was established (April 19, 1950) as a control and repressive apparatus against churches and religious associations, which was not abolished until 1989. In 1951, during Primate Stefan Wyszynski's visit to Rome, the ousted administrators received bishop's titles from the Pope, which also meant, in a sense, recognition of the Polishness of the territories. Contrary to the papal decision, the authorities did not allow them to perform administrative functions or allow them to be published; an anti-pope campaign was also launched. In the face of such events, on the part of the Catholic Church, emphasis was placed on intensifying the participation of the faithful in religious services, catechism groups for children and young people were created in the church, and other forms of parish ministry were developed as a counterbalance to manifest atheistic state practices, as well as owing to the noticeable decline in religiosity in society.[85]

At the constitutional level, state-church relations were sanctioned by the Law of July 22, 1952. Religious issues were addressed in the chapter on civil rights and duties, where freedom of conscience and religion was proclaimed, the right of churches and religious associations to carry out religious functions, and in the framework of the separation of State and Church, the general framework of the legal and material position of church institutions was defined.[86] Of course, these solutions in practice meant the narrowing of the activities of churches to matters of worship and the rationing and supervision of state activity in religious matters. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that further legal and extra-legal anti-church actions were taken in defiance of constitutional provisions. On February 9, 1953, by virtue of the government's 'Decree on the Staffing of Church Clerical Positions in Poland', which, following the example of other socialist countries, eliminated organizational independence, the power to appoint and dismiss priests was transferred to state bodies. For this purpose, they used the activity of PAX and the 'patriot priests', who controlled the press and had a significant influence on the arrests and initiation of political trials of hierarchs and other clerics distinguished by heroism. The dramatic situation of the Church and Catholics led to the issuance of the 'Non possumus' pastoral letter by the episcopate, eloquent in its content, on May 8, 1953. The letter questioned the activities of 'patriot priests' (described as saboteurs and preachers of heresy), as well as stigmatizing the Communists' previous denominational policies, which did not stop the plan to destroy the Church. The climax came with the arrest of the Primate on September 25, 1953, which resulted in public demonstrations and papal excommunication against those responsible. On the other hand, the intimidated bishops issued (against the Primate's wishes) a conciliatory and infamous statement in November 1953, and then swore an oath of loyalty to the People's Republic of Poland in December 1953. They justified these actions on the grounds that they feared losing their ability to perform pastoral functions. However, this did not prevent the liquidation of theological faculties, restrictions on education at the Catholic University of Lublin, and the establishment

85 Wietrzak, 1997, pp. 165–166.
86 Dz. U. 1952, nr 33, poz. 232; More: Pietrzak, 2013, p. 87.

of the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw in 1954 (associated with the 'patriot movement' and intended as an alternative to academic training for Catholics).[87]

After the tumultuous events of 1956 in Central and Eastern Europe, seeking to calm public sentiment the Polish authorities recognized the need to release the Primate from internment. In the spirit of this temporary thaw, aggressive policies against the Church were withdrawn. Clergy and laymen convicted of committing alleged political crimes were released from prison and bishops were allowed to return to their dioceses. Against this backdrop, a new agreement was reached that abolished the clergy appointments decree, allowed religious practices in schools, hospitals, and prisons and the assumption of dioceses by legitimate bishops. On August 26, 1956, on the anniversary of the 300th anniversary of the vows of devotion to Our Lady of Czestochowa to the protection of the homeland made by King John Casimir, they were renewed at Jasna Gora. Their repetition within the framework of the Great Novena was held in all parishes throughout Poland (which lasted until May 5, 1957). In return, the authorities did not demand any commitments from the episcopate, and even renounced their support for the 'patriot priests'. Starting in 1958, the anti-church policy resumed: religious instruction by monks was prevented, which meant the removal of religion from a significant part of schools, and the 'patriot priests' movement was reactivated throughout the country with the strong patronage of the authorities. In the 1960s, the security services intensified their control, especially through the Office of Religious Affairs, a campaign was unleashed against the episcopate, and the persecution of the clergy adopted an individual character. A difficult moment came when the Polish episcopate issued a message to the German church in 1965, in which they used the phrase 'we forgive and ask forgiveness' in the spirit of religious reconciliation combined with forgiveness of mutual wrongs. This triggered an avalanche of attacks from the Communists. The following year, because of the millennium of Poland's baptism, the authorities refused to allow Pope Paul VI and other bishops to come to the celebration. They also began to organize parallel celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Polish state, forcing the public to participate.[88]

The 1970s marked a period of so-called normalization in mutual relations, which in practice meant settling the shape of the dioceses and their property situation in the Western and Northern Territories, also concessions by the authorities of a fiscal nature to the churches and on the issue of consent for the construction of temples. Surveillance, did not stop, especially with regard to youth movements, such as the 'Oasis' established by Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki (who died of poisoning), or attempts to disintegrate the clergy and other forms aimed at secularizing society. The election of Karol Wojtyła as Polish Pope on October 16, 1978, and his subsequent visits to his homeland, was a considerable challenge causing not only dissatisfaction among the communist authorities, but also a change in the situation of the Catholic Church.[89]

87 More: Stachewicz, 1997, pp. 219–231; Cywiński, 1990, pp. 106–115, 122.
88 Wietrzak, 1994, pp. 169–170; Żaryn, 2005, pp. 15–16.
89 More: Łatka, 2018, pp. 215–233.

After martial law was imposed on December 13, 1981, the Church became the spiritual refuge and material support for the political opposition, including Solidarity. Crowds (including non-Catholics) gathered in temples for religious ceremonies and those commemorating important Polish historical events (e.g., November 11 – Independence Day), as well as for systematically organized Christian cultural days. Repression, however, continued. On October 19, 1984, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko was murdered in a bestial manner, and the trial of his torturers descended into farce.[90] The priest's funeral became a social demonstration expressing negative attitudes towards the attitude of the authorities. In subsequent years, murders of priests associated with the anti-communist opposition in unexplained circumstances continued into 1989 (Rev. Stefan Niedzielak and Rev. Stanisław Suchowolc were murdered in January, and Rev. Sylwester Zych in July).

With the transformation of the political system, the legal position of churches and religious associations changed. On May 17, 1989, the following laws were passed: on the relationship of the state to the Catholic Church, on guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion, and on social insurance for clergy. In general, the system trends in state-church relations took the direction of recognizing the autonomy and equality of churches and the cooperation of public authorities with church bodies.[91]

Summary

The situation of churches and religious associations and their believers in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the period of communist rule was difficult and even tragic in some cases. The new regimes of the Eastern Bloc, along with the construction of socialism and the elimination of its internal enemies, assumed the need to break with the practice of tolerating all forms of independent opinion and social activity. The regime required profound cultural and social transformations to more effectively control and steer citizens, and above all to create their modern model identical to the 'homo sovieticus' mentality. Following the model of the Soviet social experiment, systemically based on manipulation, lies, sophisticated forms of blackmail and provocation, as well as violence, people were destroyed and their basic subjective rights, including freedom of conscience and religion, were notoriously violated. In the name of promoting the only right (and rather peculiarly interpreted) materialist philosophy of being, the communist elite folded the elimination or strict supervision of institutions, including, above all, the church, which ideologically did not fit into this scheme. From the very beginning of the regime's formation, extensive normative and factual measures were taken aimed at secularizing society, sometimes even while maintaining the appearance of religious freedom. To this end, organizational structures were destroyed, the authority of hierarchs and the Holy See was

90 Wietrzak, 1994, pp. 173–174.
91 Staszewski, 1994, pp. 33–45.

undermined, inconvenient priests or representatives of the laity were eliminated or imprisoned, and the faithful were discouraged from participating in religious practices via propaganda or administrative-repressive tools. Significantly, the painful experiences of religious institutions and the laity of that period, which are presented in the example of selected countries of people's democracies (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland) highlight their multifaceted drama. On the one hand, they had to face oppression, administrative licensing or paralysis of religious worship, as well as the humiliation of the steadfast heroes of persecution (such as Archbishop Beran, Cardinal Mindszenty, Primate Wyszynski). On the other, the existence of collaborating groups of clergy and laity consciously controlled by the authorities should be noted. These were often people who were unable to meet the dramatic challenges, but some also voluntarily succumbed to the delusion of ideology or undertook cooperation for financial and promotional reasons. Undoubtedly, for the regime, they were an instrument to break up, destroy, or create a state church. The anti-religious tactics implemented for more than 40 years unfortunately brought negative social consequences. Although with the political changes the status of churches and associations was regulated on the principles of freedom and equality of religion, the settlement of the clergy with the difficult past was not conducted satisfactorily, and a certain part of society does not display the need for religious identification.

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