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**NIĆIFOR PERIĆ METROPOLITAN
OF RAŠKA-PRIZREN AND SKENDERIJA
(1901–1911)***

Abstract: The paper presents biographical data on Nićifor Perić, Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren and Skenderija. It analyzes his role of a religious leader, who also had jurisdiction in the marital and partly hereditary law. A special focus is put on his work concerning the establishment of important church institutions and funds. The paper explains his relationship towards education and one part focuses on the issue of the monastery of Visoki Dečani, especially when the foundation of the Committee for debt settlement and stay of Russian monks there is concerned. The paper also explains the nature of the Metropolitan's misunderstandings both with the Ottoman authorities and the authorities of the Kingdom of Serbia, because he did not yield in his firm attitude concerning the preservation of church privileges, including the authority over schools. Another focus is on the relationship of the Great Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate) with Metropolitan Nićifor and the events that took place during his rule in the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanate.

Keywords: Nićifor Perić, Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanate, Ottoman Empire, Great Church, Kingdom of Serbia, Metropolitan, church, school.

For Orthodoxy in the Balkan Peninsula the crucial years in early modern history were 1766 and 1767, when the Patriarchates of Peć and Ohrid were abolished, while all their Metropolitanates were annexed to the Great Church. This was the case with the Metropolitanates of Prizren and Raška. Since the abolition of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1766 until 1896 Metropolitans of the Great Church took turns on the thrones of Prizren and Raška, and then since 1808 the united Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates. Among

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them, in addition to Greeks, there were also archbishops of Serbian origin.¹ After the Principality of Serbia gained state independence in 1878, the activity of Serbian diplomats in the Ottoman Empire aimed, among other things, at the appointment of a Serbian Metropolitan as the head of the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanate. This was considered to be an important issue in Serbia, since the church leaders in the Ottoman Empire had spiritual authority over Orthodox believers, jurisdiction over marital and partly inheritance rights, but also over educational institutions. After the death of Metropolitan Meletije in 1895, the Serbian government increased its diplomatic activity in Constantinople to resolve the issue. The Great Church was also affected in this respect by the missions of Russia and Montenegro to Constantinople. Serbs from the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates also petitioned for a Serb to be elected as the new Metropolitan, noting that they would not accept a Greek as the new archbishop. Alexander Ivanovich Nelidov, a Russian ambassador in Constantinople, promised to support with the Ottoman authorities the proposed candidacy of Archimandrite Dionisije Petrović as the new Metropolitan of Raška and Prizren. At the end of December 1895² the Ottoman authorities agreed that the new Metropolitan should be of Serbian nationality. Immediately afterwards, in January 1896, the Holy Synod of the Great Church elected Archimandrite Dionisije Petrović to the Metropolitan throne. His title as an archbishop was: By the grace of God, Archbishop of Peć, and Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren-Skenderija and Pljevlja Metropolitanates. This also pleased Stojan Novaković, who was at that time the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia and who had been working hard on this issue for years. Dionisije Petrović was a Metropolitan from 1896 until his death in 1900. Following the death of Metropolitan Dionisije, Serbian diplomacy again sought to elect a Serb as the new Metropolitan. The Government of the Kingdom of Serbia, supported by Russian diplomacy, succeeded in obtaining the election of Archimandrite Nićifor Perić to that post. He was elected by the Great Church at one of its sessions held on 3 February 1901.³

Nićifor Perić's secular name was Nikola. He was born on 16 December 1862 in Baranda. His father's name was Petar and his mother's name was Olimpija. He received his primary education in his hometown and then continued his education in Belgrade, in the Kingdom of Serbia. On 26 September 1880 his spiritual father Archimandrite Gavriilo ordained him in the monastery of Vračevšnici. Next year, on 14 March 1881, the Bishop of Žiča Vikentije ordained him as a hieromonk in Kraljevo. As a monk, Nićifor continued his education at the Belgrade School of Orthodox Theology, which he completed with great success in 1889. He was then sent to further education at the Patriarchate Academy on Halki, where he spent three years (1889–1892). At the same time, two other Serbian monks Dionisije Petrović, later a Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren and Skenderija, and Janićije Vasić, a professor of the School of Orthodox Theology in Prizren were educated there as well. After completing his education, Nićifor returned to the Kingdom of Serbia. He spent four months in the office of the Metropolitan of Serbia, Mihailo Jovanović, who promoted him to the rank of a syncellus in

¹ Joanikije was the Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren and Skenderija from 1789 to 1818. More on Metropolitan Joanikije in: Radosavljević 2012: 145–163; Metropolitan Zaharija was the head of the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanate from 1819 to 1830. Radosavljević 2013: 9–15.

² All dates in the paper except for those in the footnotes are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

³ Novakov 2011: 41.

November 1892. He was then given the administration of the Ravanica Monastery. After one year, he was again sent to Constantinople. The Serbian grammar school in that city, founded in early 1893, did not have a religious education teacher. Having been educated at the Patriarchate Academy on Halki, Nićifor was a good candidate for the post so he was sent to the grammar school by the Serbian government. He worked as a religious teacher, a singing teacher and an educator at the Serbian grammar school in Constantinople. In the period between March 1893 and 1894, he taught eight hours a week in the first and second grades. For a short period of time during the summer break he also acted as the school principal.⁴

While in Constantinople, Nićifor Perić paid close attention to the celebration of Saint Sava's Day. This great Serbian holiday brought together both Serbs in Constantinople and their friends. Nićifor Perić tried to obtain the permission of the Ecumenical Patriarch Neofit VIII to allow Serbs to go to service on Savindan, 26 January 1894, to the Church of the Holy Emperor Constantine in the vicinity of the grammar school. The Patriarch did not accept this request on the grounds that many Greeks lived next to the church and they did not want to hear the service in a Slavic language.⁵ Even later efforts of Serbs to have a service in that church in the Slavic liturgical language were unsuccessful. Concluding that "the school without the church is dead", Nićifor Perić sought to get the Serbs their own church in Constantinople, as well as to form their own church municipality without going outside the Great Church.⁶

Nićifor Perić left the grammar school in 1894 because he was appointed a priest at the Serbian Mission in Constantinople. In this capacity he headed the delegation of Constantinople Serbs, who visited Patriarch Antim VII in 1895. The Patriarch was interested in the work of the Serbian grammar school, the Serbian newspaper *Constantinople Herald* (*Carigradski glasnik*) and the Serbian municipality.⁷ On Saint Sava's day in 1896, God's service was held in the Russian church of Saint Nicholas. The service was attended by all teachers and students of Serbian schools, ambassador Vladan Đorđević, officials of the embassy, as well as representatives of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian embassies. After the service, almost everyone present went to the Serbian grammar school, where they were greeted by its teachers headed by Principal Miloš Dinić.⁸

When Dionisije Petrović was elected Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren and Skenderija in 1896, Nićifor was consecrated as the Archimandrite in Constantinople and transferred to Skoplje. In that city he was the proto-syncellus of the Skoplje Metropolitanate of the Great Church. At the ceremony marking the end of the 1895/96 school year, which was held at the Serbian grammar school for men in Skopje, Metropolitan Metodije of Skoplje held the service with his help. Together with the principal of the Serbian grammar school

⁴ AS, MID PPO, 1893, line 618, 30 November 1893; *Carigradski glasnik* 1901: 21; Vuković 1996: 378–379.

⁵ Mutual Greek-Slavic intolerance was great after the creation of Bulgarian exarchate as an autonomous church in 1870 and its proclamation as schismatic at the synod in Constantinople in 1872.

⁶ AS, PO, 33/89, Constantinople, 1 March 1894.

⁷ *Srpski sion* 1895: 205.

⁸ *Carigradski glasnik*, 18 January 1896; Miloš Dinić, professor, geologist (Kragujevac, 25 July 1864 – Požarevac, 6 July 1921). He graduated from the grammar school and the Department of natural sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. He specialized in Paris for two years while preparing for the exam at the Institute of Geology of the Great School. He was a teacher at the Second Belgrade Grammar School (1891–1893, 1901–1905) and principal of the Serbian Grammar School in Constantinople (1893–1901). Novakov 2017: 204.

Archimandrite Ilarion Vesić⁹ and the priest Jovan Burković,¹⁰ Nićifor Perić served the liturgy at Epiphany. After the liturgy, they went to the Vardar with their students, where the sanctification of the water was performed.¹¹

In Skoplje there was a latent dispute between the Greeks and Serbs over the jurisdiction over the Church of the Holy Saviour in that city. Serbian consul General Mihajlo Ristić, Archimandrite Nićifor Perić and Archimandrite Ilarion Vesić organized Serbs from Skoplje to take over the church. The people led by Archimandrite Perić and priest Burković entered the church, where after many years the service was again held in the Slavic language. For this reason, in 1897 the Great Church punished Nićifor Perić with a penance,¹² ordering him to stay on Patmos Island with strict fasting and church supervision. He spent four months at Patmos.¹³ After that Archimandrite Nićifor again went to Constantinople, where he was a priest with the Serbian embassy. He served in the church and was always active in celebrating Saint Sava's Day. In 1899 the celebration of Saint Sava's Day, in which he also played a significant role, began at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Galata.¹⁴ In November of the same year the Great Church appointed Nićifor Perić as the steward of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Feriköy. However, at the end of 1900 he resigned from that service.¹⁵

After the death of Metropolitan Dionisije, three candidates were nominated for the new Metropolitan of Raška-Prizren and Skenderija: Damaskin Moskopulos, Deputy Metropolitan in Gevgelija, Irinej Pantelon, Professor of the School of Orthodox Theology on Halki, and Archimandrite Nićifor Perić. At the session of the Holy Synod of the Great Church held on 29 January 1901, out of twelve members of the Holy Synod, ten voted for Nićifor Perić. On 3 February 1901 he was ordained to the Episcopal rank and subsequently enthroned at the Church of Saint George in Constantinople. In addition to the Serbs from Constantinople and the surrounding area, the church was attended by students and

⁹ Ilarion (Ivan) S. Vesić, archimandrite, rector of the Clerical School (Pepeljevac near Kruševac, 22 October 1852 – Kruševac, 7 August 1906). He graduated from the Kiev Spiritual Academy (1891). He was a rector of the Clerical School in Prizren 1891–1896 and 1904–1906. He was appointed the principal of the Skoplje grammar school in 1896. He worked as a teacher and representative of the rector of the Clerical School “Sveti Sava” in Belgrade 1901–1903. Novakov 2017: 96.

¹⁰ Jovan T. Burković, priest and national worker (Skoplje, 1828 – Skoplje, 1905). He went to primary Slavic-Serbian school in Skoplje (1843). He was anointed as a priest in 1861. He had conflicts with Greeks for many years because of the ban on the Slavic service in the Church of Holy Saviour. Novakov 2017: 314.

¹¹ Nikolić 2009: 528.

¹² *Penance*, one of the punishments for believers or priests for certain actions. Penance implies the deprivation of the rank of a priest or a temporary ban of Eucharist, along with a certain spiritual remedy, strict fasting and explicit remorse. The length of the penance is determined by the person who declared it taking into consideration the weight of the guilt, the age of the person being punished and the circumstances in which the cause of the penance happened. Cypin 2013: 533–535.

¹³ Kapetanović 1925: 21.

¹⁴ The Church of St. Nicholas was Greek but there was a department where liturgy was served in the Slavic language. Archimandrite Nićifor Perić served with the aid of hieromonk Valerijan Pribičević. On that occasion there were many Serbs in the church including the Serbian ambassador Stojan Novaković and clerks of the embassy. The celebration continued in the grammar school and archimandrite Nićifor cut the slava cake with principal Dinić. Stojan Novaković held the first toast “to the health of His Highness the Sultan”. Archimandrite Nićifor Perić spoke in the name of Serbs from the Ottoman Empire, toasting to King of Serbia Aleksandar as “an excellent friend of His Highness the Sultan”. (*Carigradski glasnik* 1899: 21).

¹⁵ *Carigradski glasnik* 1901: 18.

professors of the Serbian grammar school in Constantinople, as well as by the Serbian ambassador General Sava Grujić with the officials from the embassy.¹⁶

In January 1901 Metropolitan Nićifor Perić sent an epistle to the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanate addressing “clergymen, priests, hieromonks, municipal officials, champions of the people, teachers and other blessed children of the Lord”, informing them of his election.¹⁷ In early April 1901 he moved to Prizren, the centre of the Metropolitanate. He travelled via Thessaloniki and Skoplje, where he stayed for a short time. In the vicinity of Prizren, in Suva Reka, he was greeted by numerous Prizren Serbs led by Stevan Dimitrijević, rector of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology.¹⁸ The faithful also welcomed him in large numbers at the Cathedral of Saint George.¹⁹

Metropolitan Nićifor Perić quickly began to establish new institutions. He established the Principal Educational Board and sub-boards for the management of education in the diocese. Alongside Rector Dimitrijević and the professors of the School of Orthodox Theology, he invested a lot of effort to improve the work of that institution. The members of the Principal Educational Board were mostly professors of the School of Orthodox Theology and their important duty was to develop a curriculum. The Board instructed all supervisors to form teaching boards after the supervision, whose main topic would be defining the drafts of the curricula. On the basis of the drafts defined at these boards, as well as the supervision reports, the Educational Board produced a curriculum adopted by Metropolitan Nićifor on 12 January 1902. Following that curriculum, he personally approved the absences of teachers and the rector, as well as the times of the exams. He also appointed supervisors for the review of schools.²⁰ Metropolitan Perić also founded the Spiritual Court and the Mixed Court for material things. With Dimitrijević, the rector of the School of Orthodox Theology, he also established the diocesan gazette the *Diocesan Orders (Eparhijske naredbe)*.²¹

At the beginning of the 20th century Serbs in Prizren needed economic assistance. For this reason the idea was developed of establishing a kind of “bank” or the “Saint George Church Fund”, which played an important role in the economic progress of Serbs. The Fund was established through the efforts of Metropolitan Nićifor, Rector of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology Stevan Dimitrijević and Petar Kostić, Secretary of the Metropolitanate.

¹⁶ *Carigradski glasnik* 1901: 26.

¹⁷ Stojanović 1906: 15–18.

¹⁸ Stevan M. Dimitrijević, rector of the Clerical School, university professor, church historian (Aleksinac, 10 January 1866 – Beograd, 24 November 1953). On two occasions he was a rector of the Clerical School in Prizren (1899–1903, 1911–1920).

¹⁹ The welcome was attended by teachers and students of the Prizren Clerical School. The rector of the Clerical School Dimitrijević held a speech and the Metropolitan responded appropriately. *Carigradski glasnik* 1901: 18, 26.

²⁰ Novakov 2017: 53.

²¹ Metropolitan Nićifor and the rector of the Clerical School advocated with the Russian consul Sergey Vladimirovich Tuholka to enroll three students in one of the Russian spiritual academies at the expense of the Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate. Alexei Konstantinovich Belaev, Russian consul in Prizren, in a conversation with Sava Grujić, Serbian ambassador in Constantinople stated that “the Metropolitan’s simple behaviour and accessibility gained the love and respect of all he came into contact with”. He said of rector Dimitrijević that “he was both a consul and the Metropolitan’s sincere councilor”. AS, MID PPO, 1901, line 286, Constantinople, 8 May 1901.

The first aid of 30,000.00 Serbian dinars in gold was given to the newly established fund as a savings deposit by the custodians of the Fund of Sima Andrejević Igumanov from Belgrade. The Serbian Royal National Bank also made a big deposit. This contributed to the Serbs' confidence in the institution and to the fact that they also deposited their money there.²²

In 1908, during the time of Metropolitan Nićifor, a "Decree of the Church-Educational Administration of the Orthodox Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates" was created, defining the boundaries of the diocese. In addition, the diocesan authority was divided into the Diocesan Assembly, Orthodox parishes, Orthodox parish monasteries, the Spiritual Administrative Judicial Authority and the Administration of Orthodox Funds.²³

Metropolitan Nićifor felt it was necessary to prepare as many Serb candidates as possible for higher ranks in the Church hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire. That is why it was obligatory for the students of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology to learn Greek. He brought physician Stavros Nikoloidis from Constantinople to Prizren to work as a physician in all Serbian schools in Prizren and to teach Greek at the School of Orthodox Theology. Nikoloidis was also a clerk in the Metropolitanate when it was necessary.²⁴

On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Sima Andrejević Igumanov in 1904, the Metropolitan sent an invitation to the citizens with a programme of worship and events.²⁵ He did not participate in the celebration itself. Metropolitan Nićifor celebrated the 25th anniversary of the priesthood service in 1905. The ceremony, which was organized on that occasion, began at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Priština. The Holy Liturgy was officiated by the Rector of the School of Orthodox Theology, Archimandrite Ilarion, in the presence of the Metropolitan and six other priests. After the service Archimandrite Ilarion delivered a speech on the Metropolitan's work. This was followed by a dinner in the Metropolitanate, which was attended by a hundred guests. Sava Stojanović, a professor at the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology, published a *Memorial* on the occasion of this anniversary.²⁶

Metropolitan Nićifor's letter to Nikola Pašić, the prime minister of the Serbian government in 1907, shows the breadth of his activities. He took care of all segments of the life of Orthodox Serb in the Metropolitanate. During his canonical visits he toured the most remote places.²⁷ This is how we know of his visit to Shkodra and the village of Vraka, in which there was a Serbian school. The *Constantinople Herald* reported that the Metropolitan had arrived "accompanied by distinguished persons from Shkodra to encourage and reinforce everything that adorns an Orthodox Serb".²⁸

The Metropolitan supported the work of the Serbian Gymnastics Society "Dušan Silni" in Skoplje and managed to obtain an approval from the Ottoman authorities to hold a gymnastic event of that society at the Gračanica Monastery in 1910, which featured exercises in front of more than a thousand spectators, Serbs as well as the Arbanasi and Turks. The

²² Timotijević 1984: 23.

²³ AS, MID PPO, 1908, line 300, Priština, 12 May 1908.

²⁴ AS, MID PPO, 1901, line 570, Prizren, 7 April 1901; line 286, Constantinople, 8 May 1901.

²⁵ *Carigradski glasnik* 1904: 30.

²⁶ Stojanović 1906: 25–27, 41.

²⁷ Petrović 1995: 150–180.

²⁸ Čolić 2018: 328.

events organized by that society were also noted in Priština, Prizren and Belgrade. On Saint Peter's Day of 1911 events were organized in the Devič Monastery and in Drenica.²⁹

Many of his close associates testified of the courage of Metropolitan Nićifor. His personal secretary and translator Stojan K. Kapetanović left records of his relationship with the Turkish authorities. On one occasion Grand Vizier Mahmud Shevket Pasha visited Priština. The Metropolitan seized the opportunity and told him that "there is no justice for Christians in his diocese, because every day the Arnauts kill them like rabbits and the authorities have never captured nor sentenced any killer of Serbs. Moreover, even in the midst of the municipality authorities kill Christians". Metropolitan Perić also named an example of the murder of a Serbian girl at the very door of the municipality because she renounced the Muslim faith she had received under duress and because she returned to Orthodoxy.³⁰

The appointment of Metropolitan Nićifor Perić as the head of the diocese contributed to the restoration of old churches and monasteries and the construction of new ones. There are interesting examples of how the Metropolitan handled the problem of damaged churches. He hired state engineers (*mendize*), who fortified old church foundations and then he asked for the permission of the patriarch and the sultan to approve the construction. He built larger churches, added bell towers and, in some cases, changed church patrons. He dedicated the church in Donja Gušterica to Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, so the appeal to and reminder of Serbian medieval statehood strengthened the Serbian national awareness. When he transferred the Metropolitan throne from Prizren to Priština in 1902, he became involved in the decoration of the Church of St. Nicholas. The church was then rebuilt and an external narthex was added. Zograph Avram Dičov, engaged in works on churches throughout the diocese, also painted the Church of St. Nicholas. The Metropolitan took care of the financial circumstances of the churches. Thus, at his request, the Miraculous Icon of the Mother of God of Peć was ceremonially accompanied and carried through the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates and at the same time voluntary contributions were collected, which were used to repay the debts of the Peć Monastery.³¹

Metropolitan Nićifor found the Monastery Visoki Dečani in a poor financial condition. Abbot Joanikije Marković, who was deeply involved in the Austro-Hungarian intelligence structure, put the monastery into debt, sold antiquities, denounced Serbian national workers with the authorities and tried to prevent the election of Nićifor Perić as the new Metropolitan. Finally, he was banished from the monastery. At the end of June 1901, at the initiative of Metropolitan Nićifor, as well as teachers of the School of Orthodox Theology and priests from Metohija, a "Committee for Debt Settlement of Visoki Dečani" was established and the rector of the School of Orthodox Theology, Stevan Dimitrijević, was elected as its chairman. That committee raised enough money to repay a significant portion of the monastery's debts.³² The monastery was thus saved, but it was still abandoned and impoverished, without enough monks ready for a spiritual mission. That is why, with the endeavour of Metropolitan Nićifor and with the consent of the Government of the Kingdom of Serbia, Russian monks from the

²⁹ Živković 1928: 45–47.

³⁰ Kapetanović 1925: 22.

³¹ Ženarju Rajović 2016: 18, 43, 80–81, 214.

³² Kapetanović 1925: 19–20.

Chilandar metochion of Saint John Chrysostom came to Dečani in 1902. The Metropolitan signed two agreements with the Russian monks (in 1902 and early 1903).³³ He hoped that the hostile Arbanasi would stop their attacks on the monastery because of their presence and fear of Russia. He also believed that Russian monks would be a sure obstacle to the Roman Catholic propaganda. The Serbian government, for which Metohija was inaccessible, hoped that the arrival of the Russian monks would provoke interest of Russian diplomacy in Serbs from Metohija and that the situation in the monastery would be settled. At the very beginning Russian monks took care of the monastery, but then wanted to place it under the administration of the Russian consulate in Prizren, refusing obedience to Metropolitan Nićifor. They sought a way to break ties with Chilandar, and, through Serbian diplomacy, to win the right to establish a special skete to secure the future of their fraternity in Chilandar.³⁴ That is why there were serious disagreements between Metropolitan Nićifor and the Serbian government, as they accused each other of bringing the Russian monks there. When this was concerned, the biggest problem was that before a contract was concluded regarding the monastery being handed over to the Russian monks, no agreement between Serbian and Russian diplomacy preceded. The press in the Kingdom of Serbia condemned Metropolitan Nićifor as the main culprit for bringing the Russian monks to the monastery.³⁵ On the other hand, Metropolitan Nićifor insisted that the “Dečani issue” be resolved and that the Russian monks be removed. It was not in the interest of the Serbian government to lose the support of Russian diplomacy because of Russian monks in Visoki Dečani, as this support was of great importance for the Serbian national action in Old Serbia. Dušan Bataković made the following conclusion: “Metropolitan Nićifor, fundamentally well-intentioned but narrow-minded regarding the political perspective, made a significant contribution to the escalation of the issue of the administration of Dečani in the diplomatic dispute. With his manner of making an agreement, autocratic moves and then his inconsistent attitude, he prevented the proposed solutions and his orders gave a new impetus to the conflicts among the people.”³⁶

The relations between Metropolitan Nićifor and the rector of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology Stevan Dimitrijević were not good. The Metropolitan was not satisfied with the work of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology. He noted that there were constant disagreements on various issues and he suggested changing the teaching staff, which implied that Stevan Dimitrijević would leave the post of the rector. He also argued that everything that was done in the diocese was achieved through his personal initiative and that even more would have been done if there was no envy and emphasis of personal ambitions.³⁷ Rector Dimitrijević was also not happy with the Metropolitan’s behaviour, especially condemning his decision to move the Metropolitan throne from Prizren to Priština.³⁸

In August 1902 Rector Dimitrijević wrote a letter accompanying the Report of the School of Orthodox Theology to the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying the following: “I politely declare that it is impossible for me to perform this duty anymore and I ask that

³³ Radić 1998: 55.

³⁴ Bataković 2007: 258–259.

³⁵ Vuković 1995: 378–379.

³⁶ Bataković 2007: 248–249, 261.

³⁷ AS, MID PPO, 1902, line 557, Priština, 11 July 1902; Priština, 8 August 1902.

³⁸ AJ, JJP, 80/47/311–314, Prizren, 24 March 1902; 4 April 1902.

another person be found for the position of the rector and I be allowed to return to my previous position at the School of Orthodox Theology of Belgrade, where I still work but I am on leave now". He recalled that in 1901 he also wanted to leave Prizren, but that he had been persuaded to stay and that there was nothing that could convince him to stay any longer.³⁹

Metropolitan Nićifor's dissatisfaction was best seen in his attitude towards teachers, which initiated the *Teachers' Issue*. The Metropolitan often clashed with the teachers, who were therefore transferred to another position. Unsatisfied with this, teachers held protest rallies in 1902 and 1903. The conflict intensified in 1903, when they were supported by the rector of the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology, Stevan Dimitrijević, who they asked for protection. Because of that Dimitrijević resigned as a chairman of the Educational Board, but his resignation was never accepted by the Metropolitan. The Serbian government was not satisfied with such a development. Their position was clear: "Metropolitans are obliged to place their rights, guaranteed to them by the privileges they receive, in the service of the Serbian national interest, while consuls are responsible for coordinating these privileges with the instructions of Ministry. Metropolitans must not claim for themselves the exclusive right over schools and teachers and there should always be full agreement between consulates, Metropolitans and teachers."⁴⁰

Sometimes there was unrest among the students at the School of Orthodox Theology when there was no stable administration or when the rector was absent. Thus, at the end of November 1902, sixth grade students demanded that they be given better food than other students, while the Professors' Council opposed it. After a series of incidents, on 3 January 1903, the Professors' Council decided to expel twelve students who organized the rebellion. They were told this at the Russian consulate. They did not pay heed to this, but instead broke into the School of Orthodox Theology, ready for a conflict with its teachers. The conflict was prevented by armed men outside the office of the Professors' Council. The council then decided to temporarily close the School of Orthodox Theology and send the students to the Monastery of Saint Mark, without the knowledge of Metropolitan Nićifor. The students informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia about this in the written form.⁴¹ Rector Dimitrijević came to Prizren on 14 January 1903 and took students back to the School of Orthodox Theology. However, he could not accept those who had been expelled, which is why 28 students left the school stating that they would return when their expelled classmates returned. The Metropolitan was on the side of the rebelled students, whom he welcomed in the Metropolitanate, ordering one bakery and one grocery store to supply them with food. In a letter to the administration of the School of Orthodox Theology, he stated that they should not have sent students to the monastery without his knowledge and that they should return to school as soon as possible.⁴² Regular lectures at the School of Orthodox Theology began immediately after the rector's arrival.⁴³

Metropolitan Nićifor thought that, in order to calm the situation, rector Stevan

³⁹ AS, MID PPO, 1902, line 557, Prizren, 31 July 1902.

⁴⁰ Nedeljković 2003: 121–127.

⁴¹ AS, MID PPO, 1902, line 557, Prizren, 16 November 1902; 21 December 1902; 10 February 1902; Manastir Svetog Marka, 11 December 1902.

⁴² AS, MID PPO, 1902, line 557, Priština, 10 February 1902.

⁴³ AS, LJK, 522, Prizren, 1 January 1903.

Dimitrijević should be removed from Prizren. Therefore, he sent a letter to the Serbian ambassador in Constantinople, General Sava Grujić, condemning the rector's work and conduct. The Metropolitan believed that Dimitrijević exceeded the limits of politeness, that he interfered with the work of the Metropolitan and sent a circular across the diocese without his knowledge, urging teachers to complain about the position they held. The Metropolitan believed that, in fact, his real goal was "to make a little mess and confusion and hinder his work."⁴⁴ However, Tuholka, the Russian consul in Prizren, thought that the situation in Prizren could be improved if the rector of the School of Orthodox Theology and the Professors' Council were allowed to act more independently, that they received only general instructions from the Ministry, and that Metropolitan Nićifor's interference with the work of the School of Orthodox Theology was unnecessary.⁴⁵

Due to his poor relationship with the Metropolitan, rector Dimitrijević wanted to leave the School of Orthodox Theology and Prizren. The Serbian government eventually had to compromise and satisfy Metropolitan Nićifor. On 29 September 1903 Dimitrijević demanded for the third time in writing that his resignation be accepted since he had decided not to return to Prizren anymore. The resignation was accepted on 25 October 1903.⁴⁶ Upon his departure, Metropolitan Nićifor gave a poor assessment of his work in the Prizren School of Orthodox Theology. In a letter sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he wrote: "One must only look at the School of Orthodox Theology, its disorderliness, the wrongs of some teachers and Serbian officials and see the true Serbian misfortune, which I could only stop only if no one had interfered with me and only if the Serbian Government did not bypass me and address my younger associates regarding many affairs, who, had they known and had they been able to conduct people's business, would not need us from Serbia (Metropolitans and consuls)."⁴⁷

A few years later, when a more suitable figure than Stevan Dimitrijević could not be found as the rector of the School of Orthodox Theology, the Javor Customs House asked Metropolitan Nićifor to re-hire Dimitrijević as the rector. However, he decisively refused, stating that the appointment of Dimitrijević as the rector would also mean his departure from the Metropolitan's throne.⁴⁸ In 1907, despite the opposition of Metropolitan Nićifor, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still appointed Dimitrijević as the rector of the School of Orthodox Theology. Dimitrijević obeyed the demands of the Serbian government and came to Priština to see the Metropolitan, but he refused to receive him. When on 12 January 1911 the Serbian Consul Milan Rakić told the Metropolitan that Dimitrijević had come to Priština and begged him on behalf of the Serbian Government and its President Nikola Pašić to accept him as the rector, he refused it. He said to the consul: "I would do anything else for the Serbian Government and for you, just not what you are writing to me about. I did not think it would come to this and make me feel uncomfortable. It is horrible and sad." The Metropolitan did not provide any real reasons why he was against Dimitrijević. The consul believed that the Metropolitan would not relent, noting that any contact with him was difficult and that he was

⁴⁴ AS, MID PPO, 1903, N/1, Priština, 29 October 1903.

⁴⁵ AS, MID PPO, 1903, I/1, Skoplje, 13 January 1903.

⁴⁶ AS, MID PPO, 1903, D/1, Beograd, 16 September 1903, 12 October 1903, 7 November 1903; 27 November 1903.

⁴⁷ AS, MID PPO, 1904, line 25, Priština, 8 June 1904.

⁴⁸ AS, MID PPO, 1906, line 577, Beograd, 11 October 1907; Pljevlja, 18 October 1906.

increasingly a burden for the politics of the Kingdom of Serbia in Old Serbia.⁴⁹

Metropolitan Nićifor supported the establishment of the Serbian high school in Pljevlja. The local inhabitants Tanasije Pejatović and Svetozar Tomić, teachers of the Serbian grammar school in Skoplje, came in 1901 for a summer vacation to their homeland. While talking to more prominent Serbs in the region of Pljevlja, they came up with the idea of opening a school with a higher level of education than that provided by primary schools. They visited Suleiman Hakki-pasha, a Mutesariff of Pljevlja, who suggested that they return to their hometown and open a high school.⁵⁰ Encouraged by this statement, the municipality of Pljevlja addressed Metropolitan Nićifor on 21 July 1901 requesting that a class of civil school be opened in that city. The municipality asked that two of its teachers be funded by the Metropolitan from his sources, while the citizens of Pljevlja would commit to paying the teachers' rent and all expenses of the school. The Metropolitan agreed that the school should be opened, but suggested that it be a school for tradesmen or craftsmen rather than a grammar school. He also consulted with the Serbian government on that matter. The Kingdom of Serbia supported the idea of opening a high school in Pljevlja, but a lower secondary school, with a promise to finance the teachers' salaries. Metropolitan Nićifor opposed the proposal from Belgrade, prompting a heated discussion between him and the Serbian government. The Metropolitan did not relent, but the Government continued to insist on a lower secondary school. After a two-month discussion over the profile of the high school in Pljevlja, the position of the Serbian state authorities prevailed and the Metropolitan had to accept it.⁵¹

Thus, the Ottoman authorities were granted a permission for the work of a two-grade lower Serbian grammar school in the name of Metropolitan Nićifor Perić. On 13 September 1901 he reported this to the Church School Municipality in Pljevlja. On 17 September of that year Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihailo Vujčić signed a consent to open the first grade of the grammar school in Pljevlja. Metropolitan Nićifor, as the owner of the grammar school, contacted the Ottoman authorities providing them with a timetable and a list of teachers.⁵²

However, the misunderstandings between the teachers and Metropolitan Nićifor continued. Tanasije Pejatović wrote about it to friends: "I will not even talk about the Metropolitan; he completely ignored the school and did not give up the idea of establishing a civil school."⁵³ Metropolitan Nićifor did not want to issue a certificate to the teachers who worked there, which was necessary to obtain a work permit from the Ottoman authorities. He responded to requests from the Municipality that "the one who employed them" should issue them certificates although he knew that it was not possible because the name of the Serbian government was not allowed to appear anywhere. The unconfirmed teachers taught only thanks to the fair relations they had with Suleiman Hakki-pasha and because influential and wealthy citizens spoke in their favour with local authorities.⁵⁴

When there was a dispute with the Ottoman authorities regarding the validation of

⁴⁹ AS, MID PPO, 1911, line 85, Priština, 30 December 1910.

⁵⁰ Tomić 1956: 48.

⁵¹ Novakov 2017: 453.

⁵² AS, MID PPO, 1901, line 494, Skoplje, 1 July 1901; Pljevlja, 8 August 1901; Beograd, 16 August 1901; 24 August 1901; 10 November 1901; Prizren, 1 November 1901.

⁵³ AJ, JJP, 80/47/503, Pljevlja, 25 May 1902.

⁵⁴ AS, MID PPO, 1904, line 133, Javor, 29 November 1903.

diplomas, the teachers from the grammar school and teachers from all other schools refused to hand over their diplomas to the Ottoman authorities for verification following the advice of Metropolitan Nićifor and the same was done by elementary school teachers. This was the reason why all schools in the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates, including the grammar school in Pljevlja, closed in May 1910.

The principal of the Pljevlja grammar school Petar Kosović wanted the school to start working again as soon as possible and he appointed Đorđe Konstantinović as his deputy. He handed over Konstantinović's diploma to the Ottoman authorities, who gave their consent for his engagement. The Metropolitan was angry about this. He believed that he was fighting for the rights that the Great Church had in the school affairs in the Ottoman Empire. That is why, in mid-November 1910, he informed Archimandrite Vasilj Popović, abbot of the Monastery of Holy Trinity near Pljevlja, to tell the teachers that they had been banned from working in the grammar school and that they were excommunicated from the church community, "that they are denied a priest for any kind of church activity until their adherence to the Church, its ruler and his decisions proves that they are its true children and its truly obedient and loyal sons."⁵⁵ The diocesan administration of the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates ordered the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Municipality in Pljevlja to stop any assistance to the grammar school because its principal Petar Kosović was the only one in the whole Metropolitanate who issued certificates to students. This caused great controversy and a rift between the Metropolitan and the school authorities, who were under the influence of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The church, at the order of the Metropolitan, rejected the believers and put a curse on them without any foundation. The damage from such a relationship was felt by all: the believers were divided into several groups and the Ottoman authorities considered all educators to be rebels. Some teachers were detained, others were convicted and strict supervision was exercised over all. In a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director Kosović explained the new developments in the following way: "Metropolitan Nićifor has now increased of all these difficulties, has targeted the principal and teachers, banned them from working in the school, excommunicated them from the Christian community, banned them from communicating with priests etc. and even denied the students, innocent children, their right to communion."⁵⁶

Mutual accusations and mistrust were not the only problems with Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. The Porte tried to limit the privileges concerning Serbian schools. In 1907, Metropolitan Nićifor was informed by the authorities that all teachers who did not have diplomas verified by the muarifat would be banned from working in schools. On the other hand, the Metropolitan asked the Kosovo wali for the authorities to comply with the imperial irade (law) of 1891, but this did not produce any results. Metropolitan Nićifor defended patriarchal privileges and he was supported by the Great Church, while the Serbian embassy in Constantinople sought to preserve the acquired rights of the Serbs in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁷ Serbian consuls also committed themselves to respecting them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tomić 1956: 20.

⁵⁶ AS, MID PPO, 1910, line 413, Pljevlja, 20 September 1910, 26 November 1910; Durković Jakšić 2012: 1240, 1244.

⁵⁷ Nedeljković 2003: 86–95.

⁵⁸ In 1908 Skoplje consul Balugdžić spoke with the wali about the withdrawal of the order on the verification of

In 1908 and 1910 the Metropolitan appealed to church privileges and refused to obey the orders of the Turkish authorities to verify the diplomas of Serbian teachers in the official state offices so schools were closed again throughout the entire vilayet. Professors and teachers were in a complicated position because of all this. Failure to verify the diploma meant the termination of school work and if a diploma was verified, the Metropolitan would excommunicate them from the church community.

After the intervention of the Russian and Serbian governments, a compromise was reached with the Ottoman authorities. The schools were allowed to open, but under the condition the teachers' diplomas were verified by the Ottoman authorities. The Metropolitan did not agree to such a compromise and did not allow the schools to be opened. He believed that in this way the privileges enjoyed by the schools in the Raška-Prizren and Skenderija Metropolitanates would be abolished.⁵⁹ However, it was in the interest of the Serbian government that the schools start working. The different views of the Metropolitan and the Serbian government represented an additional burden in the already complicated educational issues of Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. Finally, Milovan Milovanović, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ordered Metropolitan Nićifor to compromise with the Ottoman authorities regarding the verification of the teachers' diplomas. In his response the Metropolitan vehemently protested and refused to comply with the order, again explaining that it would waive all the school privileges granted by the Great Church and its Metropolitans by then. He again offered his resignation, stating that "he would rather agree to a suicide than be marked by church history as a traitor of the faith, the church and its centuries-old rights – as another Judas." Milovanović replied to the Metropolitan that Serbia had done everything possible to open schools through diplomatic means, but as it failed to do so, it was prepared to give up in this case precisely to protect teachers and schools. The Minister asked the Education Department for an opinion on whether or not the schools that were closed were those of the Metropolitan. The department wrote a comprehensive report entitled "The closure of Serbian schools in the Diocese of Raška-Prizren". It concluded that all schools belonged to the Patriarchate and were recognized as such by the Ottoman authorities. The department was of the opinion that the conflict with the authorities should be terminated because fighting in that field was futile since it was known that the Ottoman administration would have the final say. The Minister agreed with this opinion, but Metropolitan Nićifor continued to persist in his position.⁶⁰

On 31 December 1910 the Ottoman authorities ordered that Serbian schools be opened declaring that they did not want to communicate with Metropolitan Nićifor because

the teachers' diplomas and the attainment of the patriarch's privileges. The wali responded that the order must be implemented fully and that Metropolitan Nićifor's opposition only aggravated the situation in the diocese. The wali claimed that Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian schools would be subject to Turkish control and concluded: "it is clear that the teachers of these three nationalities are primarily agitators and revolutionaries and no one can blame the Turks whose destiny is at stake if they want to know who they let into their midst." He repeated this in a conversation several months later. The wali did not hide the intention of the Ottoman authorities to limit all special privileges and of the Great Church. The conduct of Metropolitan Nićifor, in his words, was such that "he emphasized his force and treated them as if they were in his state and not he in theirs". Pejčković, Vojvodić, 2010: 468, 648.

⁵⁹ Anonym 1911: 28–29.

⁶⁰ Durković Jakšić 2012: 518–523.

of his views. The order was communicated directly to the teachers but the Metropolitan again banned the opening of schools. The schools were only opened when Metropolitan Nićifor resigned and the new Metropolitanate Administrator, Archimandrite Sava Protić, allowed the verification of diplomas with the Turkish authorities.⁶¹

The many years of Metropolitan Nićifor's disagreement with Serbian consuls in Priština and his refusal to obey the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia threatened Serbian national work in the Kosovo vilayet. For this reason the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided that the Metropolitan should be deposed. Milovan Milovanović, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia, asked Metropolitan Nićifor to resign "considering his harmful past work and influence on national affairs in Turkey."⁶² The Metropolitan agreed and in February 1911 he sent a letter of resignation to the Ecumenical Patriarch. As a reason for resignation, he cited the School Issue in the Diocese of Raška-Prizren. The resignation was accepted in March of the same year.⁶³ Metropolitan Nićifor was asked by the Serbian authorities to appoint Archimandrite Sava Protić as his successor, but he replied that he could only propose it to the Great Church because it was responsible for the selection, ordination and enthronement of all the bishops.

Nićifor Perić then went to the Kingdom of Serbia, but returned to Old Serbia as a volunteer at the beginning of the First Balkan War. During World War I he was deported to Bulgaria, where he died under unexplained circumstances. He was awarded the Medal of Saint Sava of the First Order.⁶⁴ In *Golub*, in the calendar for 1908, he published: *List of schools and teachers, parishes and priests, monasteries and priests of the monastic order in the Diocese of Raška-Prizren in 1906–7*.⁶⁵ He translated from the Greek the *General Provisions of the Orthodox Church*.⁶⁶

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⁶¹ AS, MID PPO, 1911, line 254, Priština, 14 March 1911, 19 April 1911.

⁶² Попов 1983: VI/1, 287.

⁶³ Stanić 2003: 120; Rakić: 225–229.

⁶⁴ Stojanović 1906: 25.

⁶⁵ *Golub* 1908: 42–52.

⁶⁶ Капетановић 1925: 22.

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**НИЋИФОР ПЕРИЋ,
МИТРОПОЛИТ РАШКО-ПРИЗРЕНСКИ
И СКЕНДЕРИЈСКИ (1901–1911)**

Резиме

Рашко-призренски и скендеријски митрополит Нићифор Перић (световно име Никола), рођен је 1862. у Хабзбуршкој монархији. Био је настојатељ манастира Раваница у Краљевини Србији, да би потом 1893. од српске владе послат за наставника веронауке у новоотвореној Српској гимназији у Цариграду. Краће време био је свештеник Српског посланства у Цариграду, патријаршијски архимандрит у Скопљу, да би за рашко-призренског и скендеријског митрополита био изабран 1901. У повереној митрополији основао је важне институције и допринео уређењу црквеног живота. Установио је Главни просветни одбор и пододборе за руковођење школством у епархији, основао је Духовни суд, као и Мешовити суд који се бавио споровима материјалне природе. Покренуо је гласник Епархијске наредбе. Дао је допринос у оснивању „Фонда Цркве Светог Ђорђа“, који је помагао економски напредак Срба. У време његове управе 1908. настала је „Уредба Црквено-просветне управе православне Рашко-призренске митрополије“. Посебну бригу је водио о обнови старих и изградњи нових цркава. Јуна 1901. основао је „Одбор за одужење Високих Дечана“, јер је тај манастир био у тешкој финансијској ситуацији. Допринео је утемељењу још једне важне просветне институције, Српске гимназије у Пљевљима. Инсистирајући на протеривању руских монаха из Високих Дечана и чврстом позицијом у погледу очувања црквених привилегија, укључујући и надлежности над школама, дошао је у неспоразум са Владом Краљевине Србије, као и са османским властима. Одбацујући компромисне ставове професора и ректора Богословије у Призрену по том питању, непослушне је подвргавао црквеним казнама. Доследан у својим уверењима, више пута је нудио оставку. Последњи пут то је учинио 1911. на предлог српске владе. Ту оставку Велика црква је прихватила. У Стару Србију се вратио као добровољац у Првом балканском рату 1912. У Првом светском рату интерниран је у Бугарску, у којој је умро под недовољно разјашњеним околностима. Његов допринос српској националној акцији у Старој Србији је био велики, али су у једном тренутку бескомпромисни ставови које је имао постали терет српској дипломатској активности, због чега је практично био смењен.

Кључне речи: Нићифор Перић, митрополит рашко-призренски и скендеријски, Османско царство, Велика црква, Краљевина Србија, Митрополија, црква, школа.