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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Bulgaria

REPORT

SUBJECT The Bulgarian Law on Religions

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1. One of the purposes of the Russicum College of Rome is to prepare Catholic priests for work in Orthodox countries. At the present time this function cannot be realized, but the activities of Russicum College continue anyway. Russicum is very interested in the organization and lives of the members of the various creeds practiced in the Slavic countries where Orthodoxy is predominant, and is relatively well informed in these matters.
2. It was from one of the members of Russicum College that the conditions of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria were revealed with regard to the effects of the law of 1 March 1949 passed just when the spy trial against Protestant ministers was taking place in Sofia. Although this law recognizes that "the Bulgarian Orthodox Church constitutes the traditional faith of the Bulgarian people, together with its history," it establishes nevertheless a uniform system for all creeds, which are subject to the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion. Although this law repeats the usual statements concerning freedom of conscience and of religion and re-emphasizes the principle of the separation of Church and State, it recognizes only the exercise of "religious rites" and makes no mention of activities of the propagation of faith. In order to exist officially in Bulgaria, each religion must be given a special authorization for this purpose by the Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion. This authorization, however, may be withdrawn arbitrarily. Governmental recognition of a religion also includes recognition of the statute of this religion as a legal entity. The directors of the various faiths are responsible to the Government and the "agencies directing" these creeds are also responsible to the Government and must be formed by members who are Bulgarian citizens. The priests who "act against the democratic institutions of the State" can be dismissed upon request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As to questions of a financial nature, the annual budgets of the various churches must be presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion which "can supply a subsidy in case of need." This subsidy.

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is obviously granted by the State. All relations of a financial nature and all personal relations with foreign countries must be maintained solely through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion. The various faiths in Bulgaria are authorized to open schools for the training of the clergy under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion, but they are not authorized to open or maintain hospitals, orphan asylums, and other similar institutions. The messages, circular letters, and publications of these religions are subject to approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion, which may prohibit their publication. An important characteristic of the new regime of control over the various faiths is the obligatory registration of their directing bodies. Furthermore, religious institutions established abroad cannot have any branches in Bulgaria. The law provides that within one month of the promulgation of this law, all creeds existing inside Bulgaria will present to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion a list of their clergy. The Ministry may insist on the dismissal of one or more of these clergymen. Therefore, in a subtle but clearly legal manner, the law of 1949 established complete control of the Church by the State. By means of the various types of control, the authorities have the legal power to suppress, restrict, or interfere in the creeds or to make use of them for their own purposes. The Orthodox Church is no exception.

25. The text of the 1949 Law on Confessions is as follows:

- Article 1 Freedom of conscience and of religion is guaranteed to all citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.
- Article 2 Religious faiths, insofar as they are religious communities, are separate from the State.
- Article 3 The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is the traditional religion of the Bulgarian people, associated with its history and vested with a form, a doctrine, and a spirit such as to allow it to become the democratic church of the people.
- Article 4 No citizen may be persecuted or limited in his civil and political rights and may not be exempt from the obligations imposed by law because of the fact that he belongs to one or another faith or because he is listed on vital statistics registers as being a member of no religious faith. This clause concerns clergymen of all confessions.
- Article 5 The various faiths may, within the structure of their organization, conform in their rites and religious services with their canons and their dogma, insofar as these doctrines are not in contradiction with the law, public order, and morals.
- Article 6 A religious creed is recognized and will receive approval as a legal entity from the day in which its statutes are approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After this date, the approval as a legal entity will allow also the ramifications of the religious creed. The Minister of Foreign Affairs may withdraw its approval in cases in which the activity of one of the faiths violates the law, public order, and good morals.
- Article 7 The creeds may construct houses of worship with their own facilities and there carry out the religious ceremonies and rites of the

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cult. Religious ceremonies and open-air processions are subject to the general laws and administrative regulations.

- Article 8 The cult may convoke councils, conferences, and general meetings for the whole country or in one or another region of the country. These must conform with the general laws and administrative regulations.
- Article 9 Each creed will be headed by a directing body responsible to the State. The statutes of each creed must establish the manner in which it is to be administered, the character of its representatives, and the manner in which they are to be elected or appointed. Representatives of the various creeds who have canonical relations with foreign countries may not exercise these functions except with the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Article 10 Only Bulgarian citizens who are honest and trustworthy and who have not been deprived of their rights by court sentence may be ministers or officials of a religious cult.
- Article 11 The creeds may, in conformity with their canons and doctrines, institute councils of discipline for the clergy or high officials of their church. The organization and methods of procedure of these councils shall be set forth in the statutes of the religions. Disciplinary penalties will not be considered valid if they are contrary to the law, to public order, and to good morals.
- Article 12 Priests and high functionaries who infringe upon the laws, disturb public order, or good morals, or act against the democratic institutions of the State are liable, in addition to the other sanctions, to temporary suspension from their duties and even complete termination of such duties upon request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Such termination or suspension must be immediately enforced by the directing body of the religious faith upon receipt of the request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If the priest is not suspended or dismissed by said responsible directing body, he will be suspended or dismissed by administrative order.
- Article 13 Religious creeds may receive income and make expenditures in conformity with the budgets elaborated within their statutes. They may receive State subsidies if necessary. The budgets must be presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Financial administration of the religious cults is subordinate to control exercised by agents of the Treasury.
- Article 14 Each religious cult may open secondary or advanced schools for preparing clergymen, with the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The organization and program of these pedagogical institutions will be subject to special regulations approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must authorize any foreign study by seminary students.
- Article 15 The institutes of the cult will be invited to submit in advance all messages, circular letters, and other publications of public

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importance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry may prohibit circulation or drawing up of all messages, circular letters, or other documents or publications contrary to the laws, public order, or good morals.

- Article 16 The directing bodies of the religious cults must be registered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the directing bodies of the local units of said cults will be registered with the local People's Councils.
- Article 17 Bulgarian language will be the official language of religious creeds both in their relations between themselves and the authorities and in their archives materials. Another language may be used for relations with the faithful and for religious ceremonies.
- Article 18 The religious cults may make reference during their ceremonies and offices to the supreme government of the State or to authorities; however, they must use a text previously approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Article 19 Religious cults must inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their names, symbols, and cachets (stamps, seals) which they use.
- Article 20 The constitution of societies with moral aims of a religious character, as well as the publication of books, etc. intended for religious instruction, are subject to the general laws and administrative regulations. The education and organization of the youth are the task of the government and are not within the purview of religious cults or of their ministers.
- Article 21 The religious creeds may not open hospitals, orphan asylums, or similar institutions. Institutions of this type already in existence will pass over to the control of the Ministry of Public Health or the Ministry of Labor and Social Service, and their properties will be taken over by the State. Owners of these properties will receive indemnity as fixed by a commission appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and composed of a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a representative of the Ministry of Finance, and a representative of the People's Council of the locality in which said properties are located. Appeals against the decision of the commission may be made before the regional committee, whose decision is final.
- Article 22 Religious cults may have relations with religious cults, institutions, organizations, and official personalities abroad only if so authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Article 23 Religious cults and their branches (orders, congregations, missions, etc.) established abroad may not create any branch (orders, congregations, missions, etc.) in the territory of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Branches of this type already in existence will be suppressed within a period of one month starting from the date of enforcement of the present law. Properties belonging to the branches concerned which are to be suppressed by this law will be turned over to the State against payment of an indemnity in conformity with that established in Article 21 of this present law.

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- Article 24 The religious cults may not receive financial help or gifts from abroad except with the permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Article 25 Religious cults possessing properties or goods abroad will be represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in all transactions concerning such goods and materials. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will also assume responsibility for the protection of religious interests of Bulgarian citizens abroad.
- Article 26 Each sermon or address which incites religious hatred, either oral, written, or by any other means, will be punishable by imprisonment and a fine up to 10,000 leva.
- Article 27 Whoever with violence or threat interferes in the religious practices of the citizens or religious cults which are not contrary to the law, public order, or good morals, will be punished by imprisonment up to one year. Whoever obliges another person to take part in religious practices of a religious cult will be punished by the same or a more severe penalty.
- Article 28 Whoever constitutes political organizations with a religious basis, or who by word, by writing, or by any other means uses the church and religion for propaganda against the authorities and their activity may be punished by imprisonment, unless his actions are such as to be punished by even more severe punishment.
- Article 29 Any violation of this law will be punished, in addition to such sanctions as may be derived from the enforcement of another law, with a fine up to 10,000 leva, to be imposed by decision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a right to appeal by virtue of the established law in Chapter V, Volume VI, of the Penal Code.
- Article 30 All questions concerning the financial character, the internal organization, and the management of the various religious cults will be covered by detailed regulation for each cult and stipulated by a special statute for such matters as are not covered by this present law. This statute will be drawn up by the leaders of each creed in conformity with the laws of the country and will be submitted for approval to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within three months of the date of enforcement of the present law. If the statute submitted for approval contains articles contrary to the laws of the country, public order, and good morals, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may require the exclusion of said articles. If the religious cult does not conform with the request of the Ministry, the Ministry may refuse approval of the statute.
- Article 31 Within a one-month period of the entering into force of the present law, the central directorate of each creed must present to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the list of its directors and its religious representatives. The latter may remain in power if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not object. Objections may be raised against any ministers, clergymen, or governing personnel who do not conform to the qualifications established by the present law.

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Article 32

The present law supersedes all laws which may contradict it. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the enforcement of the present law.



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