

Table of Contents

- ***Serbian cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo and Metohija***
 - ***Statement of Serbia's delegation to the OSCE about persecution in Kosovo***
-

Serbian cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo and Metohija

By Amb. Tamara Rastovac Siamasvili

NewEurope (26.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2mWb5qR> - Kosovo and Metohija are the cradle of both the Serbian state and church, as well as of the spiritual home of the centuries-old culture of the Serbian people. Around 1,300 churches, monasteries, and other sites comprising Serbia's cultural heritage are located there. The tangible and non-tangible Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is an authentic and fundamental part of its national identity and our major contribution to the cultural heritage of Europe and the world.

The indivisible bond between the spiritual tradition of the Serbian people with Kosovo and Metohija is also evidenced in the etymology of the very name of Serbia's most southern province. Metohija is a word of Greek origin meaning "the land under monastic administration".

The rich Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is of immeasurable importance to the cultural and national history of the Serbs and is crucial for understanding its past, present, and future. In the centuries of Turkish and Austrian rule, both which followed in the wake of the historic 1389 Battle of Kosovo, it was this heritage that had a decisive impact on the spiritual and cultural life of Serbs. To this day, remains the key feature of the Serbian national being and identity. Much like the French cultural heritage cannot be imagined without Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral, neither can Serbia begin to comprehend its existence without the holy sites of Dečani, Gračanica, Zočiste, and the Patriarchate of Peć, where Serbia's Patriarch has resided since the 13th century.

The many medieval buildings erected by Serbian rulers, members of the nobility, and high religious dignitaries testify to the fact that the Serb people have been present in these place for many centuries. It is important to bear in mind that today many of these sites are still not only cultural and historic monuments, but also active places of worship and homes to monastic communities.

In this sense, the acts of vandalism and attempts to destroy centuries of Serbia's cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija are above all attacks against the Serbia's cultural and national identity Furthermore, these places are not only part of the Serbia's own heritage, but also an intrinsic historical and civilisational legacy of modern Europe and the world and it is an inalienable right of every nation to foster and preserve cultural heritage of such importance. This ultimately necessary protection must also be in line with the relevant standards of international law.

I would like to remind you that as of June 1999 – after the end of the decade's armed conflicts – as many as 236 churches, monasteries and other properties of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as cultural and historical sites, were attacked. A total of 174

religious buildings and 33 cultural and historical sites were destroyed, more than 10,000 church icons, religious artefacts, and art objects were stolen.

Four of these gems of world heritage – the Monastery of Dečani, the Patriarchate of Peć, Gračanica, and the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš – are now all on UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. In the area south of the Ibar River, not a single Serbian historical monument remains undamaged. The extent of the destruction of anything that serves as a reminder of the centuries of a Serb presence in Kosovo and Metohija is demonstrated by the fact that a pine tree believed to have been planted by medieval Serbian leader Dušan the Mighty in 1336, in the village of Nerodimlje, was cut down in 1999. In the towns south of the Ibar there is not a single street bearing a Serbian name or one named after an important Serbian historical or cultural figure.

The physical destruction of cultural monuments is not the only method used to wipe out the evidence of centuries of Serb existence on the soil of Kosovo and Metohija. Unfortunately, the goal has remained the same, but the means are becoming more and more sophisticated. Violations of property rights, usurpation of church property by institutions, denying Serbian Orthodox believers the right to practice religion, and many others examples continue to be the means to deny Serbs their rightful 1,000-year claim to a very deep cultural and spiritual bond to the region.

Particularly worrying is the continuous, systemic and strategically planned and carried out attempts at covering up or even forging historical facts in regards identity and ownership of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people over the cultural heritage and the monasteries and churches of Kosovo and Metohija.

Contrary to historical facts, Serbian cultural heritage sites are being falsely presented as either Albanian, Byzantine, Catholic, Illyrian, and many others, which introduces a new, no less dangerous, aspect of Serbian cultural heritage annihilation in the province. Regrettably, there are many such examples.

In the database of the so-called "Kosovo" cultural heritage, the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List at the request of Serbia, has been renamed into the "Church of Saint Paraskeva". The database description makes no mention of the fact that this is the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church. When it comes to the "reconstruction works" undertaken by the order of King Milutin, nowhere does it say that he was a Serbian medieval monarch. Furthermore, the above database includes information that the church suffered through a fire in 2004, while at the same time evading an explanation as to the concrete circumstances of this event.

One of the most beautiful and most valuable Serbian medieval art and culture monuments, as old as the Notre Dame in Paris, was set on fire during a March 2004 pogrom by Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. The underreported event saw both civilians and numerous Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries subjected to two days of violence and destruction.

The trend of tampering with historical facts to erase any trace of a Serb presence in Kosovo and Metohija had its latest example during an attempt to present the Romanesque Serbian Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas in Novo Brdo, which was erected in the 14th century by the Serbian high nobility, as well as other key Serbian religious heritage sites from the same period, as Catholic churches.

The Gračanica Monastery, built by Serbian King Milutin in 1321 and dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, or the Visoki Dečani, part of the endowment of Serbian King Stefan Dečanski, cannot belong to the heritage of any other people but Serbian. The cultural and historical identity of so-called "Kosovo" cannot be artificially built on historical

revisionism and the forcible physical destruction of material signs of Serbs' presence in the area. Culture needs to be fostered and protected as a bridge between people and not, as is the case present-day Kosovo and Metohija, as an object of politically motivated abuses that would serve as a way to eliminate any reminder of Serbia and Serbs as the original majority population in the province.

Such an approach where the cultural heritage of one people is subject to a kind of cultural genocide is inadmissible and unthinkable in any democratic environment. As numerous activities are being undertaken at the international level to prevent the theft of cultural goods, we are faced with an unprecedented attempt of forcible appropriation of an entire cultural heritage of one people in a certain territory.

If the provisional institutions of self-government in Kosovo and Metohija are not ready to accept the fact that this is and always has been a land of Serbian cultural heritage, how are we to expect them to provide it with suitable protection.

With all the above in mind, the international community must not turn a blind eye to the threats that a small nation's cultural heritage is having to endure, particularly when that nation made a major contribution to European and world culture.

Statement of Serbia's delegation to the OSCE about persecution in Kosovo

Statement by Dusan Kozarev for the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019 of the OSCE/ODIHR

ODIHR (24.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2IFNdYv> - Good afternoon, I am Dusan Kozarev, Deputy-Director in the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. It is my honour to speak at this Panel on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, and I intend to inform you of an unacceptable discrimination still being enforced on the European soil against the Serbian people in the Southern Serbian Province of Kosovo and Metohija. There, the fundamental human rights of Serbs are being routinely violated, including the rights to life, to movement, to property, to belonging, to their ethnic and religious community. There are no positive developments to report since the previous OSCE Human Dimension event in Warsaw; moreover, the situation worsened. We are witnessing intensified intimidation aimed both at compelling Serbs to leave Kosovo and Metohija and preventing the displaced ones to return. There were some 70 ethnically driven attacks against Serbs, throughout the course of the year behind us.

In October 2018, during a single night in the Municipality of Klina, Albanians broke in 25 homes of Serbian returnees. Few days later, in the Municipality of Peë a Serbian home was set on fire. Pristina exerts, tolerates, and fails to sanction various pressures against Serbs, and this effectively hinders their return.

November 2018 was the harshest period for the Serbs in that year. Firstly, on 6 November Pristina introduced 10% taxes on the incoming goods from Central Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then on 21 November increased the taxes to 100%, as an unprecedented move in recent history, despite the regional free-trade agreement in force (CEFTA). This Pristina's anti-civilizational measure

disrupted the regular supply of food, medications, technical supplies, the basic hygiene commodities. Besides this targeted economic isolation, the Serbian community was exposed to additional concerns caused by incursion of the Special Unit ROSU in the northern Kosovska Mitrovica, raiding several sites and arresting four Serbs under false charges of their alleged involvement in the assassination of Serb politician Oliver Ivanović. The true executors of this heinous crime are still not identified.

December 2018 saw a repeated practice of intimidation of Serbs by writing "KLA" graffiti in the Municipality of Lipjan on the walls of: an elementary school, a Serbian-owned home, a chapel at the local Orthodox cemetery, and the local Monument of Fallen Serbian Fighters in the Liberation Wars. For Serbs, "KLA" graffiti epitomize crimes committed by this terrorist organization during the fighting.

In January 2019, in the vicinity of the Monastery of the Assumption of Mother of God, some hundred Albanians gathered for their regular annual preventing the former, now-displaced, fellow citizens from Dakovica to celebrate Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Pristina's true nature was revealed by their seizure of the New Year's and Christmas gifts for Serbian children from Gorazdevac and Osojane. **In February**, near Orahovac, the memorial plaque marking the place of abduction of TV journalists Duro Slavuj and Ranko Perenić in August 1998 was removed, for the seventh time. Shortly thereafter the St. Trinity Church in the Municipality of Urosevac was plundered and desecrated.

During **March and April 2019** the usual practice of theft of Serb-owned property, from seedlings to livestock to vehicles and tractors, was continued. A church in the village of Suvi Do was plundered and desecrated. Harassment of Serbs at the checkpoints went on, and the Kosovo Police banned entry to the FC Novi Pazar Juniors, bound for a match in Zubin Potok. The police also continued the arrest of Serbs from the secret list of indictments for alleged war crimes.

Full force of brutality of the Kosovo Police exploded in **May 2019** when its special units raided four northern Municipalities with Serbian majority population. Their six-hour violent action almost provoked a serious armed interaction. Contrary to the provision that any north-bound action has to be sanctioned by Police Commander for the North and KFOR, this one was carried out without prior notice, in a three-pronged incursion aimed at intimidating, stirring panic, and arresting persons under charges of alleged organized crime. Tear gas, shock bombs, and live ammunition were used against civilians. 28 persons (19 KPS officers and 9 civilians) were arrested. Also arrested were two UNMIK staff under diplomatic immunity, including Russian citizen Mikhail Krasnoschhenko who was also severely beaten up.

Let me recall that back in March 2018, those same special units arrested Marko Đurić, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija and Head of Negotiating Team with Pristina. By arresting and beating of Lead Negotiator of the Republic of Serbia, and arresting and beating of an international mission staff, Pristina sends a crystal clear message to the remaining Serbs: "If we dare do this to persons protected by diplomatic immunity, just imagine what we dare do to you. Leave!"

In response to the special forces raiding the North of Kosovo and Metohija, President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić pre-emptively ordered full combat readiness for all units of the Serbian Armed Forces. However, as the Republic of Serbia stayed true to being committed to peaceful solution of problems in this instance, too, this incursion did not evolve into an all-out armed

conflict. For Belgrade, threatening the Serbian lives in Kosovo and Metohija is the "red line". The international community, sadly, remained very quiet.

August 2019 saw another blatant discrimination against Orthodox Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, in hoisting the so-called Kosovo flag on the walls of Serbian medieval town of Novo Brdo, as an act of gross revision of history. The Novo Brdo Fort is among key Serbian historie and archaeological sites, and any Albanian attempt to appropriate it is but an act of forging history and aimed at the deepening the inter-ethnie abyss in Kosovo and Metohija. Obviously; the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is in a dire need to be protected. Albanians seek to go beyond mere plundering and destroying Serbian shrines and heritage, they seek to fully usurp and falsify Serbian history and, eventually, erase any trace of existence of Serbs in the area of Kosovo and Metohija.

Another danger, both for Serbs and for Al ban ia ns, is the return of battle-hardened fighters from the battlefields in Syria and whole Middle East. According to the State Department report for 2017, 403 Al banians from Kosovo and Metohija went to war for terrorist organization dubbed Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, it is estimated that more than 250 ISIS fighters returned to Kosovo and Metohija, posing a real danger for the Balkans and Europe. Presently, one of the last remnants of Jihadist struggle in Syria is an all-Albanian unit, called Jamati Alban. According to Albanian media, more than 50,000 people in Kosovo and Metohija practice Wahhabism, the most radical form of Islam.

In spite of this all, the Republic of Serbia remains patient and prudent, committed to dialogue and peace and to a compromise-oriented settlement of the centuries old Kosovo knot, and to enhancing cooperation in the region.