



MINISTRY OF RELIGION AND DIASPORA
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working session 13: Tolerance and non-discrimination II: Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding

Intolerance against Orthodox Christians in Kosovo and Metohija

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Intolerance against Orthodox Christians in Kosovo and Metohija

Subtopic at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting titled “Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions” is the most proper place to reiterate the facts surrounding intolerance against Orthodox Christians in Serbia’s Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

During the 20th century, Orthodox Christians in Kosovo and Metohija faced constant pressure from Albanian secessionists, which led towards a change in ethnic and, consequently, religious structure in the Province. To avoid discrimination, Orthodox Christian Serbs were forced to migrate, in particular, to other parts of Serbia. At the same time, Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries, as well as cemeteries, were exposed to violent attacks motivated both ethnically and religiously.

| Ethnic structure of Kosovo and Metohija, 1921–1991 | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------------|-----------|-------|-------|----------------------|
| | Serbs | Montenegrins | Albanians | Turks | Roma | Total |
| 1921 | 26.58% | | 65.01% | 6.52% | | 428,283 |
| 1931 | 32.64% | | 60.07% | | | 552,064 |
| 1948 | 23.62% | 3.85% | 68.46% | 0.18% | 1.54% | 727,820 |
| 1953 | 23.51% | 3.88% | 64.91% | 4.28% | | 808,141 |
| 1961 | 23.55% | 3.90% | 67.08% | | 0.33% | 963,959 |
| 1971 | 18.35% | 2.54% | 73.67% | | 1.17% | 1,243,693 |
| 1981 | 13.22% | 1.71% | 77.42% | | 2.15% | 1,584,440 |
| 1991 | 9.93% | 1.04% | 81.59% | | 2.34% | <i>ca.</i> 1,956,196 |

After the NATO bombardment against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (24 March – 10 June 1999) and the Kumanovo Treaty (9 June 1999), the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian Police pulled out of Kosovo and Metohija. The UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1244 (10 June 1999), which placed Kosovo under the UN transitional administration (UNMIK) and the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping force. Since 2001, UNMIK has been transferring administrative competencies to the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. It is of particular concern that prominent figures of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army – a combatant group internationally considered as terrorist prior to and during the insurgency in 1998–1999 – remained unpunished and even infiltrated into the structures of the mentioned institutions.

Religious freedom of Orthodox Christians in Kosovo and Metohija has rapidly regressed since June 1999. Violence against their identity and heritage, churches, monasteries and cemeteries, committed by ethnic Albanian extremists can be classified into three periods:

- 1. From June 1999 to March 2004** there were 1,328 people killed (mainly Serbs), among them two Orthodox Christian monks, 1,146 were kidnapped (mainly Serbs),

250,000 were driven out (mainly Serbs), 110 Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries were devastated and desecrated (76 from June to October 1999), 5,250 cemetery monuments at Orthodox Christian graveyards were vandalized and 50 Orthodox Christian graveyards razed to the ground.

2. **March 2004 Pogrom (17–18 March 2004).** During the March 2004 Pogrom, 8 Serbs were killed, more than 900 Serbian homes were destroyed, 4,000 Serbs were driven out, 35 Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries devastated and desecrated, 15 Orthodox Christian graveyards seriously damaged, two Orthodox Christian monasteries had their monks and nuns evacuated fearing for their safety from the gathered mob.
3. **After March 2004** attacks continued against Orthodox Christian clergy and shrines. Looting of churches, monasteries and ethnic Serb property, devastation of graveyards are still common and occur almost daily. For example, only in 2007–2008 there were 618 attacks on Serbs and their property (32 attacks on Orthodox Christian shrines, 11 churches damaged), whereas from January to March 2009 there were 108 attacks on Serbs and one church was damaged, mostly as a follow up to unilateral declaration of independence.

It has to be emphasized that religious intolerance against Orthodox Christian impacts, as well, return processes of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. Despite all efforts invested by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, results are very modest.

By way of concluding, the above-mentioned provides clear testimony of the processes leading to a change in religious structure in the Province, stemming from a national identity switch. Kosovo and Metohija, once the bulwark of European Christendom, has unfortunately had to straddle this path.