

KOSOVO: 56 Orthodox Tombstones Seriously Vandalized

Draško Đenović, Centar 9 (www.centar9.info), Belgrade, 15 January 2013.



During the last several days, in the midst of Serbian Eastern Orthodox celebrations of Christmas holidays, in a graveyard in Kosovo Polje, central Kosovo, unknown perpetrators broke down and demolished 56 tombstones. The Kosovo police issued a statement that the incident occurred in a village of Makarabe, and this discrepancy in locations instantly became a matter of controversy in Serbia.

In its statement published 14 January, the Serbian governmental Office for Kosovo and Metohia, strongly condemned this 'attempt to conceal'

the true location. The incident occurred in Kosovo Polje, in central Kosovo, and not in the village of Makarabe.

Office for Kosovo reminds both OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) that the tombstones destroyed in the village of Makarabe were desecrated long ago and Kosovo police is grossly misused: "We are asking the international community to urgently find and punish perpetrators of this vandalism, and also to find vandals who broke in the chapel in the village of Bresje in Kosovo polje during the Christmas festivities."

The county mayor Stevica Lazic stated that: „We do not have information about who did it. Police came and did an investigation. Since the gate door is being stolen there was no difficulty to enter the graveyard. We consider this to be a reaction to the announcement of the removal of the monument in Presevo.” Lazic was referring to a crisis situation looming in the Southern Serbia where the local Albanian population recently erected a monument to the fallen Albanian insurgents in 1999-2001 incidents, which the Serbian government considers to be a blatant provocation and intends to remove it after the 17 January deadline given to local municipality to remove it to some remote location.

The graveyard in Kosovo Polje was desecrated also in the past. The total of destroyed or damaged tombstones is now around 130.

Minister in the Kosovo government in charge of return of the refugees and for the communities Radojica Tomic also asked for a swift investigation and punishment of those responsible for the destruction of the Serbian grave yards, condemning it as a shameful and cowardly act.

The UNMIK spokesperson today condemned the recent desecrations: „UNMIK wholeheartedly condemns this disgraceful act. The destruction of graveyards in any community is contemptible. As of late, municipalities throughout Kosovo have been participating in a restoration program for Orthodox cemeteries.

Unfortunately, such incidents seriously impede the progress achieved thus far. The prompt condemnation issued by the mayor of the municipality is an encouraging initial response.

UNMIK urges competent authorities to act responsibly by bringing the perpetrators to justice, and for the municipality to quickly react in offering the necessary support.

Finally we call for tolerance, coexistence, and mutual respect," ends UNMIK statement.