

SERBIA: Attacks on Religious Minorities in 2001

Branko Bjelajac, Keston News Service, 13 June 2002

With funding from the Serbian Ministry of Religion and the Open Society Fund, the Centre for the Empirical Research of Religion has organised a one-day round table in Novi Sad on 14 June. The overall title is "Educational and Faith System in Societies in Transition" and among the topics will be: "How to develop religious tolerance and dialogue between members of various faith traditions in a multiconfessional and multicultural society?" and "How to educate young people in the spirit of religious and other types of tolerance?". Among participants will be visitors from Russia, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, as well as local Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Lutherans, and officials of the Ministry of Religion, the Supreme Military Court, and professors of sociology and philosophy of religion.

Ahead of the round table, at which the rights of religious minorities will be discussed, Keston News Service has compiled a list of some of the attacks on religious minorities in Serbia in 2001, excluding events in Kosovo. The source of the information is given in brackets.

1. January - Leskovac - Evangelical Romani (Gypsy) church broken into. (KNS information)
2. February - Belgrade - synagogue desecrated and graveyard walls defaced with swastika graffiti and curses. (Association of Jewish Communities - AJC)
3. February - Novi Sad - after being badly portrayed by Novi Sad TV, Hare Krishna members tried to get right to reply but failed. During same month, rental of premises cancelled in Belgrade/Zemun, due to pressure from city hall, according to owner. (KNS 30 July 2001)
4. February - Zrenjanin - Jewish and Muslim cemeteries desecrated and damaged, memorial plate at the former synagogue building broken. (US State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, FRY Country Report 4 March 2002)
5. 13/14 February - Belgrade - swastikas and anti-Semitic messages daubed on Jewish community building. (AJC)
6. March - Belgrade - anti-Semitic graffiti at Philosophical Faculty. (Helsinki Board for Human Rights in Serbia)
7. March - Leskovac - Evangelical Serbian Community broken into, windows broken, items stolen. Several days later, windows broken again, another attempt to enter building failed. (KNS information)
8. March - Belgrade - windows broken three times at Adventist church in Borca suburb. (Glas Javnosti 17 April 2001)

9. March - Pancevo - windows broken at Adventist church. (Glas Javnosti 17 April 2001)
10. April - Belgrade and Apatin - anti-Semitic graffiti daubed on walls (according to AJC there are no Jews in Apatin).
11. April - Belgrade - Federal Ministry of Interior banned import of literature for Jehovah's Witnesses (HLF 22 May 2001)
12. 6 April - Subotica - windows broken at Lutheran church. (police reported that it was a case of betting between two minors, B92 8 April 2001)
13. 6/7 April - Belgrade - repeated attacks on Adventist church in Borca. (B92 8 April 2001)
14. 9 April - Vrbas - Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall stoned.
15. mid April - Novi Sad - Baptist church stoned and panel discussion where several minority leaders spoke disrupted. Attacks against Baptist church repeated two days later after two Serbian Orthodox bishops attacked panel discussion via printed media. (Gradjanski List 20 April 2001, B92 21 April 2001, Danas 24 April 2001, ANEM 21-27 April 2001, Fonet 25 April 2001, BBC 26 April 2001, BKTv 11 June 2001, Christianity Today 6 August 2001, Informativna sluzba SPC 23 April 2001)
16. mid April - Belgrade - desecration of Muslim graveyard in Borca suburb. (KNS 15 June 2001)
17. April - Belgrade - several individuals calling themselves "Orthodox students" systematically disrupted week-long Adventist lectures at hotel Slavija. (KNS information)
18. 14 April - Belgrade - windows broken at First Baptist Church (KNS information). Later night-time attempt to enter building failed.
19. 15 April - Leskovac - Evangelical Romani church received three day deadline to remove tent from its own property because of closeness to the water supply area, despite the fact that more than 500 other objects were built at the same area, but they received no order (KNS 14 May 2001). Following day, at their building in city centre, phone line cut and windows broken.
20. end of April - Belgrade - after negative documentary on Belgrade TV, Hare Krishna community tried to get right to reply but failed. Same happened during May with false accusations printed in daily newspaper Blic, and also in June with weekly Nedeljni Telegraf. (KNS 30 July 2001)
21. May - Leskovac - windows broken three times at Evangelical Serbian Church. (KNS information)
22. 8 May - Subotica - one of Jewish community leaders beaten for second time in three weeks. (US State Department report)

23. June - Belgrade - book "The Bible - Jewish Mirror" containing insults and false accusations reprinted and published. (Institute for War and Peace Reporting 3 August 2001, AJC statement 17 August 2001)
24. 7-10 June - Belgrade - 200-year-old Muslim religious monument (nishan) broken in mosque yard. During night of 10 June attempt made to enter mufti's house, two cars stolen and third destroyed. (KNS 14 June 2001).
25. 16, 25 June and 9 July - Vrbas - windows broken at Methodist church. (Beta 10 July 2001, Danas 10 July 2001)
26. 25 June - Backa Palanka - Delegates to annual conference of Christ Spiritual Church attacked with beer bottles and stones. Several book stands burned, one bus suffered major damage and one person severely injured. That night windows broken at Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal and Christ Spiritual churches in the city. Four men threatened the CSC pastor that they would "mutilate him". (Danas 26 June 2001, KNS 1 November 2001)
27. July - Belgrade and Novi Sad - new campaign of anti-Semitic graffiti, also several tombstones desecrated with swastika graffiti. (AJC statement 17 August 2001)
28. July - Zrenjanin - local members of Jewish community receive threatening letters signed by "members of Serbian patriotic front". (Danas)
29. August - Pljevlja - Old Muslim graveyard converted to building material storage site and garbage dump after city hall failed to fence the graveyard as promised to local Islamic community. (Danas 17 August 2001)
30. August - Vlasotince - pejorative graffiti daubed on rented building of local Baptist church. (KNS information).
31. 3 August - Cacak - campaign of anti-Semitic attacks since the end of July culminated at the panel discussion on anti-Semitism, when the event was cancelled because of many insults by the individuals in the audience. That night city covered with anti-Semitic leaflets. Next day, false bomb alarm raised at place where prominent Serbian politician of Jewish background was to give speech. (Helsinki board 3 August 2001, Fonet 4 August 2001, Humanitarian Law Fund 23 October 2001)
32. 14 August - Vrbas - broken windows at Methodist church. (KNS information)
33. 21 August - Novi Sad - broken windows at Baptist church (KNS information). Local pastor declared "sect" graffiti on building represented "result of media inquisition and ignoring by state officials for last ten years". (Radio 021, 22 August 2001, Dnevnik 24 August 2001)
34. August 26 - Leskovac - police patrol interrupted church service at Evangelical Romani church after neighbour's complaint. Following day, church broken into in city. (Blic 28 August 2001, KNS information)

35. 27 August - Belgrade - two people entered office of St. Peter Catholic church, cursed the clerk, and hit and threatened one believer. (Danas 28 August 2001)
36. 31 August/1 September - Backa Topola - door to Catholic church damaged, three minors drew Serbian military insignia, arrested. (Suboticke Novine 7 September 2001)
37. September - Sombor - anti-Semitic graffiti "Death to Jews" and other slogans attacking religious minorities. (Somborskie Novine 28 September 2001)
38. September - Sombor - wall of Carmelite monastery sprayed with offensive graffiti asking monks to leave for Croatia (Somborskie Novine 28 September 2001)
39. 13 September - Subotica - window broken and facade damaged during night at Calvary Chapel (police stated minors were responsible). (Suboticke Novine 21 September 2001)
40. end of September - Jagodina - after local TV showed programme attacking Hare Krishna community, one local member injured with knife by unknown perpetrator, after he attempted unsuccessfully to get right to reply. (KNS information)
41. October - Belgrade - Weekly Nedeljni Telegraf significantly altered interview given by mufti of Islamic Faith Community on 11 September attacks in United States. (Glas Islama, November 2001).
42. October 19/20 - Cacak - church wall-plate and windows broken at pastor's flat at Adventist church. Two people arrested while yelling "Death to the sectarians!" (Danas 23 October 2001)
43. October 22 - Backa Palanka - graffiti written on Christ Spiritual Church, perpetrators arrested and released. After release they returned, broke all the windows, smashed entry doors to preacher's flat and threatened that they will throw a hand grenade. Graffiti written at local Adventist church also. (HLF 23 October 2001, KNS 1 November 2001)
44. 30 October - Kacarevo - all the windows broken during Church of God service. Local police called state security (SDB) who came following day and asked for all of the church documents to read. After reading Statute declared "everything is OK". Building later sprayed with graffiti "Go away Satanists!", "This is Serbia". (KNS information)
45. 5 November - Vlasotince - Baptist church building again sprayed. Inside were left leaflets of the Obraz Serbian ultra-rightist and clerical organisation. (KNS information)
46. November - Novi Pazar - City hall planned to tear down religious education building in mosque yard despite negative opinion by monument preservation and conservation regional branch. Demonstrations held for several days. (Danas 7 November 2001, Glas Javnosti 7 November 2001, Glas Islama, December 2001)

47. 12/13 December - Belgrade/Novi Sad - Adventist faculty sprayed with offensive graffiti, also neighbourhood. Same occurred in Novi Sad at local church, though of lesser intensity. Following night church in Borca attacked and sprayed with graffiti again (Danas 14 December 2001). Following day, unknown person threatened and intimidated Adventist president in Yugoslavia. (KNS information)

48. 30 December - Novi Sad - windows broken at Baptist church. (KNS information)

(END)