

## **KOSOVO: Sharp rise in vandalism against the Serbian Orthodox religious sites**

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The same day when the Serbian police from the city of Presevo removed the monument to the Albanians killed in clashes with the police 13 years ago in Presevo valley, in southern Serbia, a sharp rise in vandalism was reported by a number of sources against the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo.

Albanian daily *Koha Ditore*, in its 21 January edition, explains that the so called Albanian National Army asked its supporters on Facebook to protest the removal of the monument, by assembling at the electrical company in **Djakovica**, in Kosovo, the same evening. The invitation spoke about 'hitting the Serbs where hurts them the most'.

After the initial gathering, several dozens of young men went toward the Serbian monastery of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God, recently reconstructed after it was demolished in the March 2004 demonstrations. This was prevented by the Kosovo police and KFOR units, including Italian Carabinieri. The group dispersed around 22 o'clock after clashes with the police, throwing stones and 'firecrackers of various kinds'.

On that day, 20 January, unknown perpetrators destroyed 27 Serbian orthodox tombstones in a village of **Klokot**, near Vitina. Police came to investigate the scene.

During the night 20/21 of January, unknown perpetrators desecrated and damaged three Serbian orthodox graveyards in the villages of Priluzje, Miloseva and Plemetina in Kosovo.

In **Priluzje** several wooden crosses were set on fire and one larger tombstone was demolished by an explosive device.

In the ethnically mixed village of **Milosevo** a small chapel at the Orthodox graveyard was set on fire during the night.

In addition, in the village of **Plemetina**, unknown perpetrators demolished three tombstones. Police is investigating these cases.

The same night, in **Gorazdevac**, unknown perpetrators fired a gun at the monument to the victims of 1999 NATO bombing and killed Serbian children at the Bistrica river in 2003. This incident greatly disturbed a thousand of Serbs still living in this area.

In **Prizren**, 50 graves were desecrated the same night, according to a local Serbian orthodox paroch. The police came to investigate the scene.

During 21 January, unknown perpetrators demolished several tombstones at the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in an ethnically mixed village **Suvo Grlo**, in Srbica county.

During the same day, a number of perpetrators participated and witnessed, including some police officers, in a demolition of a monument dedicated to the local freedom fighters of the Second World War in **Kosovska Vitina**. Demolition was done by a construction dredge, and a video recording was put on YouTube showing a number of people cheering.

These latest unrest and vandalism in Kosovo are being connected with the act of moving the monument in Presevo, southern Serbia. Remains unclear, however, why the Albanian community in the southern Serbia erected this monument to the 27 killed back in November, when each of them has an individual monument or a remembrance site already, and without any issues with the authorities.