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## **Additional attacks against the Orthodox Sites**

Center 9 (24.01.2013) - Serbian Orthodox Christians continue to struggle with a wave of attacks and vandalism against their graveyards and churches in Kosovo, connected with anger of the Albanian population related to a police removing of a monument to 27 Albanians who died in clashes with the police in 2000. The removal occurred in Presevo in southern Serbia on the 20th of January.

During the evening of 21 January, unknown perpetrators demolished eight tombstones in the Serbian Orthodox graveyard in **Vitina**, the city where a local monument to the victims of the Second World War was demolished the same day. That monument bore names of both the Albanians and Serbs who died in the fights more than 65 years ago. Because of passivity, several police officers were suspended in Vitina, by a decree from the headquarters in Pristina.

During the night 21/22 January, five Serbian tombstones were desecrated and demolished in **Pristina**. A local priest reports that the church is being protected by a police patrol all the time.

Rasko-Prizren Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church reported that on the 22 January unknown perpetrators broke into and desecrated a small church of Holy Trinity in the village of **Babljak**, near Urosevac.

During the night of 22/23 January unknown perpetrators wrote insulting graffiti on the southern wall of the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Czar Uros, in the center of **Urosevac**, in Kosovo. They also wrote an acronym OBPBM that stands for the former Albanian fighting unit in the Southern Serbia "Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja".

Local priest, Fr. Zivojin Kojic, stated that he "does not know how this occurred since the police is guarding the church". A patrol of the Kosovo police is located in front of the church for the last several days. In spite of their protection this incident occurred, which is quite disturbing for the small Serbian population in Urosevac.

Because of the continuation of the attacks, atmosphere of uncertainty prevails. The Serbian population of Vitina and Klokot even fear, some media reported, that the 'Albanians will now come and plow our graveyards... and as they are attacking the dead, what can be expected for the living' they ask.

Center 9 reminds that in 2011 the vandals also desecrated a Jewish graveyard, and AP wrote about it: <http://news.yahoo.com/jewish-cemetery-kosovo-capital-desecrated-153240427.html>.

At that occasion, the US embassy strongly condemned the perpetrators, and after that signed an agreement with the Pristina government on the protection of objects related to

Holocaust. Under the attacks, all the remaining Jews moved out from Kosovo either to Serbia or Israel.

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## Sharp rise in vandalism against the Serbian Orthodox religious sites

Centar 9 (22.01.2013) - 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.

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## **56 Orthodox tombstones seriously vandalized**

Centar 9 (15.01.2013) - 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.

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