



19 JULY 2015

ON THE WORRISOME TREND OF INCIDENTS DIRECTED AT SERB COMMUNITIES IN THE PEJË/PEĆ AND KLINË/KLINA AREA

During the past ten days, there has been an upsurge in incidents involving Serb communities in the Pejë/Peć and Klinë/Klina area. On 8 and 9 July, the Serb-majority village of Goraždevac/Gorazhdec in the Municipality of Pejë/Peć was reported to have been the scene of several incidents involving a gun attack directed towards vehicles owned by the family Kolašinac (with Serbian plates), as well as a separate incident involving an attempt at arson directed against a monument for the children that were murdered in 2003 in the village of Goraždevac/Gorazhdec.¹ In addition, graffiti spelling out “Revenge” were found in the vicinity of the village church.² Several days later, a Kosovo Police officer was shot at and wounded by a purported thief during an attempted burglary.³ Separately, a church in the village of Dërsnik/Drnsnik in the municipality of Klinë/Klina was reported to have been burglarized and some property of the church damaged.⁴ Another incident occurred in Brestovik where it was reported that the Dešić family was attacked and shot at.⁵

Minister for Communities and Return, Dalibor Jevtić, condemned these incidents and called on police and municipal authorities to take this trend of incidents seriously and start offering real protection to the Serb community. There was a growing sense of frustration in Jevtić’s statements over this recurring pattern, but the Minister remained persistent that these incidents will not stop or delay the return process, and that his ministry will continue working to provide safety and security for Serb returnees in these areas.⁶ The Mayor of Pejë/Peja, Gazmend Muhaxheri, spoke to the inhabitants of the village of Goraždevac/Gorazhdec during his visit there to inaugurate an infrastructure project, and expressed his support for the community and promised that his municipality will invest there to improve the infrastructure of the village benefitting all citizens.⁷ The Mayor of Klinë/Klina, Sokol Bashota, also condemned the robbery of the church in Dërsnik/Drnsnik while on a visit there.⁸

The latest incidents come on the heels of a series of incidents in Klinë/Klina this past May, where Kosovo Serb returnees were victims of robberies and verbal abuses, the suspected perpetrators

¹ <http://www.rtklive.com/?id=2&r=36325>

² <http://www.radiokim.net/vesti/hronika/preteci-grafit-u-gorazdevcu.html>

³ <http://koha.net/?id=27&l=66362> and

http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/ranjen_policajac_u_gorazdevcu/5582

⁴ http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/ponovo_obijena_crkva_u_drnsniku/5511

⁵ <http://www.rtklive.com/rtk2/?id=2&r=2500>

⁶ <http://www.mkk-ks.org/?page=1,12,884>; <http://www.rtklive.com/rtk2/?id=2&r=2500>.

⁷ <http://www.mkk-ks.org/?page=1,12,885>

⁸ <https://kk.rks-gov.net/kline/News/Reagon-Kryetari-i--Komunes-se-Klines,-z--Sokol-Bas.aspx>

of which were arrested by the Kosovo Police.⁹ This series of attacks and damage to property directed towards the Kosovo Serb community in western Kosovo, although thankfully not causing any serious physical harm, speaks of an emerging trend of incidents directed at the Serb community in the area, which cannot be discarded as merely isolated cases. This pattern not only threatens to seriously derail the return process in Kosovo, but to also further complicate the already complex and fragile situation the Serb community finds itself in Kosovo, particularly in its western part.

In that regard, actions taken by Kosovo institutions and other authorities that are tasked with keeping peace and order and providing security for Kosovo's citizens—regardless of their ethnicity—are crucial in assuring the Serbian community and all communities generally of their willingness to provide such security and bring a sense of normality to their life. Increased alertness and presence from Kosovo Police in these areas as well as frequent consultations with local communities through Municipal Community Safety Councils provide a necessary platform for dialogue, trust-building and reporting and can help the police in setting up preventive strategies.

It is commendable that Kosovo Police arrested seven suspects for robberies during the May incidents, and it would be a positive sign in the right direction should the police manage to do the same for perpetrators of these incidents. Nevertheless, arrests need to be followed with swift trials wherein the perpetrators, if found guilty, are punished and sentenced for their crimes; this would send a message to everyone—including minority communities—that Kosovo's institutions are serious and determined to safeguard their basic human rights to their life and property, and would hopefully serve as a deterrent for would-be attackers and instigators of inter-ethnic incidents.

Finally, as we have stressed in the past, statements of condemnation alone are not enough, especially for the victims, the Serb community, and returnees in general, who feel particularly vulnerable as they take a small step in their long transition towards integration into Kosovo's society. It is a good sign that the mayors of Pejë/Peć and Klinë/Klina personally condemned the attacks and visited the victims; this sends a clear message that the incidents are unacceptable for the majority community as well. However, such statements remain an exception as incidents like these seem to be restricted domains for Serbian politicians in Kosovo (Minister Jevtić) and Serbia (Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Đurić). As ECMI Kosovo has also stressed in the past, minority issues are not the exclusive domain of minority representatives, and the message calling for an end to this and for the perpetrators to get a punishment befitting their crimes gains in strength when it is sent openly by the representatives of the majority community as well.

⁹ For more detail on those incidents, see ECMI Kosovo's report [On the recent security incidents in Klinë/Klina and the difficult return process](#) (21 May 2015).

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About ECMI Kosovo

ECMI Kosovo is the principal non-governmental organisation engaged with minority issues in Kosovo, with the overarching aim to develop inclusive, representative, community-sensitive institutions that support a stable multi-ethnic Kosovo. ECMI Kosovo contributes to the developing, strengthening and implementation of relevant legislation, supports the institutionalisation of communities-related governmental bodies, and enhances the capacity of civil society actors and the government to engage with one another in a constructive and sustainable way.