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Patriarch Alexei II, a long-time supporter of a Kosovo compromise, has passed away

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Russia's Patriarch Alexei II, who passed away on Friday in Moscow at the age of 79, was a long-time supporter of a Kosovo compromise.

He strongly condemned Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and called for a genuine compromise on its status, based on the respect of international law.

"We support these days Serbia's stand of non-recognition of self-proclaimed Kosovo independence, as that territory is the land sacred to the Serbs. There are so many shrines, monasteries and temples on Kosovo land. We, certainly, commiserate with the suffering of the Serb people," said the 16th Patriarch of Russia last spring.

Last summer, he had asked UNESCO to guarantee the access of Orthodox believers to their shrines in Kosovo.

"After they are restored, the Orthodox holy sites in Kosovo should be returned to their legal owners to enable the congregations to use them", the Patriarch told UNESCO Secretary-General Koichiro Matsuura in Moscow.

The Russian patriarch said that in Kosovo, which "has a huge role in the history of the Serb nation ... about 150 churches were demolished with the tacit agreement of the international forces, although they represent the world cultural and historic heritage."