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March 17, 2008

Fourth anniversary of the “March 17, 2004” anti-Serb pogrom in Kosovo

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Monday’s violence in Kosovska Mitrovica erupted on the fourth anniversary of the anti-Serb pogrom in 2004, in which 19 people were killed, 954 were wounded and 35 Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries were destroyed.

The March 17, 2004 violence was launched after Albanian media claimed Serbs had chased three Albanian children into water, where they drowned.

This rumour proved to be false by a UN police investigation, but only after it had already triggered organized Albanian mobs – some 50,000 according to UN figures – to attack Serbs throughout Kosovo.

Some 4,000 Serbs were expelled from their homes during the violence, six cities and nine villages were ethnically cleansed.

Jewels of medieval architecture – such as Prizren’s Bogorodica Ljeviska from the 14th century or the monastery of Devic – were burned.

None of the organizers of the attack -- which at the time was dubbed “organized ethnic cleansing” by senior international officials – were arrested.

Some 266 rioters were convicted.

The March 17, 2004 pogrom served as an excuse to supporters of Kosovo’s secession to say that the status quo was untenable and to speed up the process which resulted four years later in a unilateral declaration of independence.

"Unfortunately, the consequences are still felt to this day, four years later. Those persecuted have not returned to their homes, and the churches and monasteries that were set on fire in 2004 have not been renovated, despite strong promises", a Kosovo Serb leader Goran Bogdanovic said.

The Bishop of Raska and Prizren Artemije expressed his dissatisfaction with the restoration of Serbian monasteries and churches destroyed during the March 2004 violence, stating that the entire process has been handled in an incorrect manner, as it is being decided by those who had destroyed the shrines.

"This restoration has no goal or aim of actual restoration, because we are not deciding it, but those who demolished and destroyed our shrines are," stated Bishop Artemije.



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Deputy president of the Serbian National Court of central Kosovo, Rada Trajkovic, expressed concern because not even today, four years after the March violence, have the main organizers of the "mini genocide" against Serbs been identified.

"That which is particularly painful and worrying for us is that Albanian society did not have enough courage and institutional responsibility to identify the people who organized this "mini genocide".