

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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KOSOVO: CURRENT AND FUTURE STATUS

**Public Remarks
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Honorable Chairman Hyde,
Esteemed Members of the House Committee
On International Relations,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I consider it my distinct honor and privilege to address this august House Committee on Foreign Relations, as Coordinator of the recently created Kosovo and Metohija Committee Office at the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and as an engaged, American citizen of Serbian heritage. My message on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Pavle and the Holy Synod of Bishops is, together, we can and must seek a way forward for the good estate of all citizens of the region.

Introduction

Mr. Chairman:

The Church holds it imperative to engage directly with the government of the United States of America, as well as other institutions and persons of good will and intention, from Kosovo and Metohija, and the International Community. In bearing credible, first-hand testimony, the Church renders known its past, present and future role in the life of its faithful and all who call Kosovo and Metohija their home.

This outreach of the Church is based on the reality of the situation on the ground, given that the Church lives with its flock. And, as the future status of Kosovo and Metohija will, in no small part, be determined by engaging the International Community in open dialogue, as accession towards the European Union, and Euro-Atlantic integration processes must prevail.

The Church is indispensably situated to offer in partnership core initiatives in laying the foundations for an equitable, constructive future based on peace and

justice, tolerance and security. Kosovo and Metohija can only be preserved for all of its inhabitants by preventing the shifting or displacing of its indigenous faiths and cultures, which uniquely form a common home and shared heritage. Distinctly among them are the Orthodox faith and a historical Serbian culture and presence.

By its name alone, Metohija bears witness to the presence of the Church, as the word μετοχλιον (*metohion*, derived from the Greek), refers to ecclesiastical land or property belonging to the Church. Therefore, the Church, as legitimate stockholder, in cooperating with other local and international communities of faith is seminal to a truly multi-cultural and multi-confessional society, based on the words of the great Psalmist David: *"Behold how good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell in unity . . ."*¹

Yet, in any given post-conflict society, implicit trust must be based on truth and inherent unity based on reconciliation, otherwise society-at-large becomes seriously challenged when irresponsible attempts at revisionist history provide substitution models for truth, rendering reconciliation entirely futile.

PSIG: Institutionalizing Disinformation

*"You will know the truth,
And the truth will set you free."*²

Mr. Chairman:

This past Friday, 13 April 2005, I attended the first International Donors Conference for the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Kosovo. Organized by UNESCO in cooperation with the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, the conference was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

There, substantive, scrupulously researched, non-biased documentation was prepared for the Conference by an ad-hoc interagency group of experts designated jointly by UNSECO, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNMIK, with the participation of experts from both Belgrade and Pristina.

Based on UNSECO Mission Reports of 2003 and 2004, as well as Council of Europe Reports from 2004, it was determined that 75 priority cultural and religious monuments and sites would be restored, rehabilitated or reconstructed: among them 48 Byzantine/Serbian Orthodox, 14 Islamic/Ottoman, and 13 secular/historical. The estimated cost for the revival of Kosovo and Metohija's heritage-in-common is in the order of 40 million Euros. Gratefully, a substantial portion of the intended allocation, in addition to pledges of technological know-how and assistance, was raised from the participant nations and institutions.

Still, this outstanding event, though overall encouraging, was marred by the presence of illicit literature distributed by the PISG³ “Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport (and Non Resident Affairs of Kosova)”, one titled: Monuments of Kosova⁴ and the other, Religion and Kosova’s Cultural Monuments⁵.

The dissemination of these documents was carried out in the very presence of the PSIG Minister of Culture, Mr. Astrit Haraqija. The unauthorized use of the UNMIK logo in the publication credits of the Monuments of Kosova is seen as an ethical breach of institutional trust, as swiftly and openly condemned by UN High Representative Søren Jessen-Peterson.

This flagrant display of institution immaturity and intentional deception impedes upon all international conventions, norms and standards. As blatant abuse of a self-governmental ministry by its minister, whose signed text serves as foreword to the Monuments of Kosova, in any other normative situation in the civilized world, would serve as a call for his immediate resignation in order to move forward the process of open and constructive dialogue.

As a PISG ministry publication, the Monuments of Kosova, one-sidedly speaks of a Kosovar Albanian history of culture and art, and refers to Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries and shrines as being either “Christian Illyrian-Arberor-Albanian”⁶, or as having been built in the “Byzantine Kosovar style”⁷. There is no reference, whatsoever, to a historical or contemporary Serbian presence, save for the mention of “Serb dwelling houses”⁸.

Is this not, in tandem with the systematic post-war destruction of Serbian patrimonial sites, tantamount to cultural and spiritual genocide? Unless we confront these and similar issues, how can we overcome such obstacles on the road to an enduring peace, mutual respect and tolerance.

Overcoming Post-Conflict Violence

Mr. Chairman:

There is hope. For, the world is watching.

In early August of 2004, I was part of an ecumenical Mission of American Church Leaders to Kosovo, organized by the Washington-based Institute on Religion and Public Policy. Our mission was that of denominational Christian leaders reaching out to embrace and support each other in common faith shared in Christ Jesus.

Together with my colleagues, we became living witnesses to the poignant reality left in the wake of extreme Albanian on Serbian violence in Kosovo during the *pogrom* of 17-19 March 2004. According to UN statistics, 50,000 Albanians—in the presence of 18,000 NATO “peacekeepers”—drove 4,500 Serbs and other

non-Albanians from their homes, injuring 900, including 150 peacekeepers, and killing 19 persons. With 33 synchronized flashpoints, all of Kosovo was engulfed in flames, as over 800 homes, many of which had recently been rebuilt by the International Community for repatriated Serbs, were looted and demolished.

In addition to the loss of precious human lives, and the desecration of cemeteries and graves, uncontrollable crowds converged to obliterate anything bearing the sign of the Cross, which is in complete violation of the international norms on the manifestation of religious symbols. As Christian representatives, that which pained us the most was the destruction of 35 additional churches and shrines, including those, dating to the 12th and 14th centuries.

Entering Devic Monastery, no one, not even our guard unit, could hold back their tears as the elderly nuns emerged from their temporary metal shelters offering us consolation and refreshment. Helplessly entering into the charred ruins of a sooty sanctuary with its smashed altar table, we fell upon our knees as from the blackened wall, where the fresco of the Virgin Mother had once stood in prayerful protection of her children, an engraved map of Kosovo with the letters “UÇK”⁹ became manifest.

To everyone present the intended result was clear: the complete cultural, religious and historical eradication of any Serbian presence in Kosovo and Metohija, and the obliteration of precious religious freedom, a fundamental human right.

In the old city of Prizren, Our Mission visited the once Cathedral Church of St. George which was raised and pillaged, with the painted –over inscription “Death to Serbs” in graffiti on the arch above the main portal, while “Down with UNMIK” was scribbled on the side of the church and the perpetrators’ signature piece “UÇK” was displayed on the columns of the former narthex.

We gazed in utter amazement as we learned of the thousands of volumes of priceless books that were reduced to ashes as the Orthodox episcopal residence was torched, and learned of an innocent victim who was burned alive, seeking shelter in the Seminary of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

Given the above horrific statistics, coupled with those of the past 6 years, that is from the time of the 1999 NATO-brokered international “peace”, which witnessed the expulsion of 250,000 refugees, 1,000 kidnapped and 1,200 murdered, and a sustained attempt at expunging the sacerdotal Serbian presence: of the original 1,657 churches, monasteries and monuments, over 115 were destroyed, added to the 35 above for a total of 150; 211 Orthodox cemeteries desecrated and 5,177 monuments smashed, with many graves opened and earthly remains of our loved ones disinterred—reiterating all during the time of peace and not war.

As Christian church leaders, we made a pledge to reach out and extend a hand of cooperation in this land that is and must remain common to all. For we cannot continue to live on the tears of destruction, but like a phoenix must rise out of the ashes into the resurrection of a new day and a new life, filled with hope and prosperity.

The violence has yet to subside

Sadly, Mr. Chairman, this legacy continues.

Only two days ago, on the 16th of May, the family house of Kosovo Serb, Krsto Bulajic, in the settlement of Vranjevac, in Pristina, was completely destroyed after the UNMIK directorate for property and legal issues decided to give the house back to its legal owner.¹⁰

And, as all of Europe prepared to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the victory against fascism in World War II, at a meeting held on 4 May 2005, the Pristina municipal assembly rendered a decision to build a monument and memorial park dedicated to local fascist collaborators: The Skenderbeg SS Division, the Kosovo Regiment and the Albanian gendarmerie. The decision foresaw the building of a memorial park on 1.5 hectares and a monument on the location where fascist members of the Second League of Prizren¹¹ were executed. UN High Representative Jessen-Petersen, is to be commended for his decisive action in overruling the same.

Continued international presence and supervision in Kosovo and Metohija obviously are invaluable.

Towards the Future: Applicable Solutions

Mr. Chairman:

The Serbian Orthodox Church has survived institutionally as it transcends governments, politics and mere geography, and is identified with the social and spiritual conditions of its people. The Church is not only the repository and guardian of Orthodox Christianity; it is also uniquely situated as the patron and protector of the Serbian people and their rich, world-class cultural and spiritual heritage.

This is clearly attested to in the recent naming of four Serbian Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija as UNESCO World Heritage Sites: *High Decani*, *Gracanica*, *The Patriarchate of Pec*, and *The Theotokos of Ljevis*. Special international consideration must be given to the preservation of these priceless representational edifices, as in the protectorate zone recently incepted around Decani Monastery.

To that end and substantially more, representatives of UNMIK from Pristina participated in a meeting of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Kosovo and Metohija Committee of the Holy Assembly of Bishops in Belgrade. A decision was rendered to bolster cooperation with UNMIK authorities in Kosovo and Metohija by establishing direct lines of communication with the Holy Synod and the Kosovo and Metohija Committee and to fully re-engage in all dialogues and commissions, including reconstruction efforts.

Clearly, the Church is moving forward.

Mr. Chairman:

During late March and early April of this year, I was an instrumental part of an official Delegation of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the United Nations Headquarters in New York and, here in Washington, to the United States Government. Our clear and resounding message was, regardless of political will or outcome, the Church remains with its faithful.

The Church is the authentic moral voice of the people as it is above politics and political involvement. The steadfastness and truthfulness of the Church has ultimately earned its influential role in both historical and contemporary Serbian society, from state-maker to promoter of social values, including morally supporting those surrendering themselves to the Hague Criminal Tribunal.

What does the Church propose in applicable solutions for the future of Kosovo and Metohija? What then are the benefits and detriments, as well as implications for the future of Southeast Europe? Given its level of trust and confidence, the Church can uniquely participate in the facilitation of:

1. The **repatriation** of 200,000 exiled Serbs and 50,000 other non-Albanians¹² to substantial Serb-populated areas in Kosovo and Metohija, especially in the immediate vicinity of our monastic communities to form compact, existentially feasible habitats, and through the likes of trustworthy Orthodox NGO's that have a proven track record in Kosovo and Metohija, the likes of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and Philanthropy;
2. The **restitution** of confiscated church properties and subsidiaries, and the resettlement of an otherwise non-sustainable IDP population to the same areas;
3. The **reconstruction** of churches, homes, schools and other destroyed buildings, by implementing The Memorandum of Understanding signed on 24 March 2005, and the employing of returnees in this enterprise to generate viable income, and allow for the rebuilding of lives and living, worshipping communities of faith; and
4. The **implementation** of local self-rule, which would allow for the sustainability and security of resettled refugees, while encouraging

Serbian participation in the provisional governmental institutions of Kosovo and Metohija.

Peaceful Coexistence Precedes Multi-ethnicity

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman:

Though Kosovo and Metohija cannot continue to survive in a state of indetermination, neither can the premature alleviation of short-term anxieties be permitted, resulting in dire long-term consequences. In order to meet and satisfy the realization of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional Kosovo, we must begin, realistically, with peaceful co-existence.

Let us learn, again, to live side-by-side in peace and in harmony as neighbors. Then, once familiar and comfortable with each others' presence, allow us to begin integrating into the life of the cities—which at present are mono-ethnic, save for Mitrovica, which is physically and geographically divided—and this will serve to define accomplished multi-ethnicity.

Mr. Chairman:

Ultimately, this will permit the International Community to implement a sustained effort toward an enduring and just peace while securing freedom and tolerance in a truly multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Kosovo and Metohija.

Thank you for your time and kind consideration.

¹ Psalm 133:1

² John 8:32

³ Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo

⁴ Institute for the Protection of the Monuments of Kosova, (PSIG Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, Pristina 2005)

⁵ Ministry of Sport, Culture, Youth, Sports and Non Resident (no further publication data is available)

⁶ p. 8. [In fact, Albanians are first mentioned in the 11th century as Arbers by Byzantine chronicles and their uninterrupted link with the Illyrians is highly disputable and cannot be proved by modern historical science. Arberia was situated in the central area of today's Albania and prior to the 14th century there are no records of Arber, Arvanite or Albanian settlers on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Therefore, between the 3rd century AD, when Illyrians are mentioned for the last time as a distinct political factor, and the appearance of Albanians/Arberians, there is no evidence linking the two. This makes the "Illyrian theory" more a romanticized myth than a historical fact. Since the 18th century Albanians refer to themselves as "Shqiptar" (Albanian) and their country "Shqiperi" (Albania).]

⁷ p. 8

⁸ p. 9

⁹ Albanian for 'KLA' – Kosovo Liberation Army

¹⁰ Radio Television Serbia, Belgrade: May 16, 2005 18:40, www.rts.co.yu

¹¹ This organization was founded in 1943 in Prizren upon the initiative of the Gestapo. The biggest role in the resurrection of the Prizren League belonged to Otto Meyer, a colonel in the Abwehr, who together with Karl Krempler, an SS colonel, and in collaboration with the Gestapo, activated their champion, Xhafer Deva. He was placed at the head of the League so they could more easily realize their influence on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. The military formations were the Albanian gendarmerie, the Kosovo Regiment, and the Skenderbeg SS Division, which engaged a total of more than 11,000 Albanians (Glas Javnosti, Belgrade, 7 May 2005).

¹² According to the coordinating Center for Kosovo and Metohija president Nebojsa Covic stated on 11 May 2005 in Belgrade, that so far a total of 12,218 persons have returned to Kosovo and Metohija, of those 5,782 Serbs, 1,318 Roma, 3,133 Ashkalia, 1,056 Bosniaks, 355 Goranis and 574 Albanians (SRNA News Agency).