



## **Statement by DECR Communication Service on the desecration of an Orthodox church at the Kosovo village of Samodreza**

The church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist at the Kosovo village of Samodreza was built at a place where, according to tradition, the warriors of the Holy Prince Lazar took communion before the Battle of Kosovo and where participants in that historic battle were buried. The church was held in reverence by the Orthodox people in Kosovo.

The forced exodus of Serbs during the Yugoslavian crisis has led to the desolation of the holy shrine. In 1998, local people hostile to the Orthodox faith broke the roof of the church and in the following year the church was ravaged and set on fire from within. After the last group of Serbs left Samodreza in 1999, the concrete fence surrounding the church was destroyed and the church was filled with rubbish and excrement. The church building was considerably damaged in the course of anti-Serbian pogroms in March 2004.

In 2010, after repeated appeals made by the Serbian Orthodox Church's diocese of Raska-Prizren for many years, the international presence in Kosovo had the church cleaned up. A metal door was installed to prevent vandals from breaking in.

The local Albanian community was informed about projects for the restoration of the church as well as subsidies to be granted to a nearby Albanian school. But in March 2010 the Samodreza administration rejected all these proposals apparently for the fear of reaction from radical locals.

In June 2011, the door was forced and the church was defiled again. In the same month, Bishop Teodosije of Raska-Prizren made a statement appealing to the Kosovo authorities and the international organizations present in the region to take measures for preventing a new defilement of the church which could be turned into a dump again.

The situation in the Samodreza village, the theft of the roof from the protected old church of Our Lady of Ljevis in Prizren, the illegal resumption of road building next to the Zociste Monastery and the adjacent Serbian cemetery and a number of other recent incidents around the holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Metohija call in question the ability of the Kosovo police to exercise effective control over the state of the Serbian cultural heritage in the region.

*DECR Communication Service*

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