

SERBIA**PATRIARCH SAYS NO FREEDOM IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA, CALLS FOR FORGIVENESS**

BELGRADE, 3 January 2019 (Beta) - The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irinej, stressed in his Christmas message that the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija were being stripped of even the basic right to a dignified life, and that freedom for the Serb people and all others was not possible in the "self-proclaimed false state of Kosovo." He said proof of this was the "introduction of the notorious import fees" on Serbian goods, "the constant threats, arrests, forming of the so-called army of Kosovo, the purpose of which is to intimidate and finally expel all Serbs" from KiM. "We are stressing once again that, for us, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is, among others, one of the survival of our nation, of priests, monks and, especially, our ancient holy sites, without which we would not be who we are," Patriarch Irinej stated, saying that these were primarily places of the liturgical congregation of the people. The Serbian Orthodox Church believes, Patriarch Irinej pointed out, that one of the important preconditions for solving the problem in KiM was "the building of a society based on the rule of law, in which people of different origin can live in peace, with full protection and respect for everyone's religious, cultural and national identity." "To speak about a sustainable solution to the problem in Kosovo and Metohija, without taking into consideration these preconditions would mean to accept the war and post-war ethnic cleansing as a fait accompli, and to reject all the values on which, declaratively at least, Christian Europe is based, as well as the entire world," it was stated in the message which the Serbian Orthodox Church and its head traditionally issue at Christmas. Patriarch Irinej also called for forgiveness and reconciliation among the peoples from the territory of the former Yugoslavia. While stressing the significance of the holiday of Christmas, Patriarch Irinej stated that "Christ came as the Savior of all peoples" but that "we can only experience the joy of the gift of salvation through mutual forgiveness and reconciliation." "With this in mind and with deep regret for the Serb and all other victims of the tragic wars in the territories of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, we pray to the newly born God Child, the giver of all peace, for peace to finally move into our hearts, that we forgive each other, like the Lord has forgiven us our trespasses," Patriarch Irinej stated. He recollected that the Serbian Orthodox Church was celebrating a great jubilee this year - 800 years since it became autocephalous, and dedicated much space in his message to the issue of obtaining church independence. "With shepherdly concern and responsibility, we urge our brothers and sisters in Macedonia, who are in schism, to understand, in the spirit of the love of Christ, that autocephality is solely a church institution and that it should contribute to progress and the strengthening of unity among the local Orthodox Churches," the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church stated in the message. "If, by the logic of this world," Patriarch Irinej wrote, "autocephality is viewed in a different way, as an element of state sovereignty, national particularity or division, then it does not contribute to the unity and building of the Church, but incites self-complacency and selfishness, and itself, paradoxically, becomes blasphemous of the Holy Spirit." The Patriarch also made "the same invitation to those who speak about some 'Montenegrin church', and remain blind for not seeing the ancient Metropolis of Montenegro and the Coast." "They forget that salvation is not conditioned by declaring who is a Serb and who a Montenegrin," Patriarch Irinej wrote.

STOLTENBERG: NATO HAS FIRM RELATIONS WITH EVERYONE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

PODGORICA, 3 January 2019 (Beta) - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said that Montenegro's admission in the western military alliance had increased security and stability in the Western Balkans, which was extremely important to NATO and added that the Alliance had firm relations with all of the countries in the region. In an interview with the Podgorica Pobjeda, Stoltenberg said that he was happy that Macedonia would become the military alliance's 30th member, that he fully supported Bosnia and Herzegovina on its Euroatlantic road and respected Serbia's decision to maintain military neutrality, while cultivating a partnership with NATO.

"Serbia is still a valuable partner. NATO completely respects the fact that Serbia does not strive for membership in NATO, in terms of its policy of military neutrality. At the same time, we hail the fact that Serbia has chosen the road of partnership with NATO. Our partnership is useful to both Serbia and NATO," Stoltenberg said. The NATO secretary general reiterated that the adoption of a law on the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into an army had come at a bad time and despite the concern that NATO expressed on the occasion. "Even though, in general, the transition of the Kosovo Security Forces is a question that Kosovo ought to decide on, we have made it clear that the move is ill-timed. NATO supports the development of the Kosovo Security Forces within its current term. With the change of its mandate, the NATO Council will have to review the level of NATO's involvement with the Kosovo Security Forces," Stoltenberg was quoted as saying by the CDM website. Stoltenberg added that "all sides must ensure that this decision, which is ill-timed, will not raise tensions in the region" and that "all of the political actors in the region must focus on moving ahead with reforms and dialog." He said that he had informed Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Ramush Haradinaj on the current discussion between NATO member-states. "I stressed that it was important to keep calm and refrain from any statements or actions that could lead to [an] escalation [of tensions]. In that context, I hail the constant communications between our KFOR commander Major General Lorenzo D'Addario and his colleagues in the region, including his recent meeting in Nis with Serbian Chief of Staff Lieutenant-Colonel General Milan Mojsilovic," Stoltenberg said.

ECONOMY

MIHAJLOVIC: COMPLETION OF CORRIDOR 10 BY MID-2019

BELGRADE, 3 January 2019 (Beta) - A new investment cycle in infrastructure in Serbia, costing EUR5 billion will begin in 2019, Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure Zorana Mihajlovic has said, announcing the completion of Corridor 10 by mid-year. In an interview with the Beta news agency she said that the new investment cycle, which is supposed to help the country's economic growth, contained projects that pertained to the construction of highways, railway corridors and waterway traffic and that the envisaged sum would be distributed over a period of three to four years. "The construction of the Preljina-Pozega [highway] section in Corridor 11 worth EUR450 million will definitely start. We expect the construction of the Morava Corridor worth EUR800 million to begin, as well as the renewal of the Nis-Dimitrovgrad railway which will cost EUR264 million, the modernization of the Novi Sad-Subotica highway worth EUR924, but also a portion of the Nis-Plocni highway of peace, which is 38 kilometers long and will cost EUR220 million in just the first phase," Mihajlovic said, adding that investment in water

transport would cost EUR200 million. The Minister of Construction stressed that in Serbia in 2018 more kilometers of highway had been completed than in the last several years. "In 2018, 103 kilometers of highway were finished, completely paved, while some segments were opened for traffic and some were not because of critical points that are being worked on. Above all, I mean Corridor 10 but Corridor 11 as well, given that a section between Ub and Lajkovac is being worked on as well as a tunnel between the Ljig and Preljina section," she said. Speaking about the completion of Corridor 10, Mihajlovic said that the restructuring of a section that passes through the Grdelicka canyon was being worked on and that the contractors and supervisory companies were not being rushed as, she stressed, the most important thing was passenger safety, but that she expected the aforementioned section and the eastern leg toward the border with Bulgaria, to be completed by mid-year. She added that plans and technical documents for the Morava Corridor had been readied and that an agreement and memorandum for the road's construction had been signed with the U.S. Bechtel company, which was worth an estimated EUR800 million and that some of this amount had been secured in the budget for 2019. Mihajlovic explained that the method of financing the job would be established by mid-2019 at the latest. "When the financial contract is signed, works can begin very quickly. It would be realistic to complete the financial contract in the first part of the year and for the works to being in the second part, which should last from two and a half to three years," the minister said. She added that the documentation for the Fruska Gora Corridor had been completed and that the completion of the financial model for the project could be expected in 2019. She confirmed that a 20 kilometer highway, connecting Ruma and Sabac, would be built and a so-called 50 kilometer fast track would be built between Sabac and Loznica. "This will be done with the Azerbaijani AzVirt company. Ministry of Finance negotiations on the financial conditions are nearly finished, while guarantees have been secured in the budget for 2019, meaning that construction can start in the second half of the year," Mihajlovic said.