

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**



**INSTITUTE FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS**

**REPORT**  
**ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF**  
**MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO (SERBIA)**  
**INSCRIBED ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST IN DANGER**

**MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO, Serbia (C 724)**

**The Dečani Monastery**

**The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery**

**The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša**

**The Gračanica Monastery**

Belgrade, January 2020.

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## INTRODUCTION

The property “**Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)**“ (C724) was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in 2004.

In 2006, at 30<sup>th</sup> session of The World Heritage Committee decided that the site of the Dečani Monastery will be extended by adding three groups of churches, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša (*Decision 30 COM 8B.53*).

The property “Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)”, mainly dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, was at same session placed on the **List of World Heritage in Danger** in 2006 due to difficulties in its management and conservation stemming from the region's political instability (*Decision 30 COM 8B.54*). The Committee requested that the State Party (Serbia) work with UNESCO programmes, with the United Nations Mission to Kosovo (UNMIK) and with the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština in caring for the site.

According to the *Decision 30 COM 8B.54* (2006) the following threats to the site were detected:

- Lack of legal status of the property;
- Lack of legislative protection of buffer zones;
- Lack of implementation of the Management Plan and of active management;
- Difficulties to monitor the property due to political instability, post-conflict situation (visits under the Kosovo Stabilization Force / United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (KFOR / UNMIK) escort and lack of guards and security);
- Unsatisfactory state of conservation and maintenance of the property.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Dečani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša reflect the high points of the Byzantine-Romanesque and Serbian medieval ecclesiastical culture, with its distinct style of wall painting, which developed in the wider region of the Balkans between the 13th and 17th centuries.

The Dečani Monastery was built in the mid-14th century for the Serbian king Stefan Dečanski and is also his mausoleum. The church represents the last important phase of Byzantine-Romanesque architecture in the Balkan region. Built in marble, it is the largest of all medieval Balkan churches, and is exceptionally rich in well preserved Byzantine painting and Romanesque sculpture.

The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery is a group of four domed churches featuring series of wall paintings. All the churches display an extensive series of wall paintings but the 13th-century frescoes of the Church of Holy Apostles are painted in a unique, monumental style.

Early 14th-century frescoes in the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljevisa represent the appearance of the new so-called Palaiologian Renaissance style, combining the influences of the eastern Orthodox Byzantine and the Western Romanesque traditions. The style played a decisive role in subsequent Balkan art.

Gračanica Monastery was one of the last monumental endowments of Serbian King Milutin (1282-1321). The main church of Theotokos with the plan, spatial arrangement, decorative wall treatment and wall paintings together have made it an emblematic structure for Balkan architecture of the 14th century reflecting the spirit of the Byzantine tradition but slight modified by western influence.

## **The Dečani Monastery**

In the Dečani Monastery, no new conservation works were carried out in 2019. During the year, constant monitoring was conducted for buildings in the monastery, wall painting in the main church and mobile church mobiliary, as well as other movable artistic material which is kept in the monastery, and no negative phenomena that may affect the conservation status were observed.

In addition to constant threats and limited freedom of movement of the monastery fraternity, it is extremely worrying that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština haven't given up from the construction of the main road Dečani – Plav in the protected (buffer) zone of the monastery. Namely, the so-called deputy minister of infrastructure in Priština in June 2019 announced the finalization of the project in 2020, including the part of the road that passes through the monastery's protected zone, as work on other sections is ongoing. We remind that the Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia wrote to the Director-General of UNESCO in June 2018, and the passage of the route through the protected area of a monument included on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger has been repeatedly condemned by EU and OSCE officials in Pristina. Another confirmation that further works on building this road initiated in May 2018 were not abandoned is the fact that the terrain has not been restored to its original state.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by KFOR forces on a daily basis.



1. Construction works on the road Decani – Plav through the Dečani monastery buffer zone, May 2018



2. KFOR Control Station on the road leading to the Dečani Monastery

## The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

In 2019, specifically in July and August, the construction of drainage channels for the discharge of atmospheric precipitation from the roofs of the churches was carried out in the monastery complex of the Patriarchate of Peć. The canals were laid from the west, northeast and south sides of the complex until the southwest entrance to St. Nicholas Church, totaling 124.80 meters. As in the previous period noticed during the monitoring, the spraying of the lower parts of the outer walls of the churches was stated, and due to the increasing abundance - especially of spring and summer rains, it was concluded that it was necessary to build a drainage system. The project documentation was drafted in the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in 2018, which, after the project received all the necessary permits, supervised the execution of the works.

Constant monitoring was conducted for the state of wall painting, monastery objects and movable artistic material which is kept in the monastery. Monitoring will continue in the future. The preparation of project documentation for the rehabilitation of the Holy Apostles church roof that was started last year is still ongoing.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on a daily basis.



3. Drainage system around the churches of the Patriarchate of Peć, August 2019.

## The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren

No new conservation works were carried out in the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren in 2019. According to a survey from July 2017, the experts of Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments started the production of project documentation for the necessary conservation interventions in the future, since the conditions in the church are not satisfactory, that there is capillary moisture in the walls that threatens wall painting, as well as that the atmospheric water drainage system does not function in full scope. As a result, work on repairing the roof structure and its lead roof, which damaged the fallen bell, repairing the bell, minor interventions on the façade and repairing the fence around the church, is planned for the following year. Competent institutions of the Republic of Serbia are ready for full cooperation with the UNESCO's World Heritage Center, regarding future conservation and rehabilitation works in the church.

The Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments prepares project documentation for the conservation of the remaining wall painting that was damaged in 2004 March pogrom when the church was set on fire.

Due to the lack of freedom of movement of the non-Albanian population the church is still not open to visitors daily. Thus, there is neither regular worship nor gathering during church festivities and Sunday services.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on a daily basis.



4. Southern look of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren





5. Western look of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren



6. The consequences of the church burning in March 2004

## The Gračanica Monastery

In the Gračanica Monastery, during the year, constant monitoring was conducted for buildings in the monastery, wall painting in the main church and mobile church mobiliary, as well as other movable artistic material which is kept in the monastery and no negative phenomena that may affect the conservation status were observed. The monitoring was done by the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on a daily basis.



7. Southwestern view of the church in Gračanica

## **Final conclusions**

It is extremely worrying that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština haven't given up from the construction of the main road Dečani – Plav in the protected (buffer) zone of the Dečani monastery. Although there is no new damage to the properties and their integrity in the reporting period has been maintained, the general state of the Serbian churches and monasteries in the province of Kosovo and Metohija is far from a satisfactory level.

The local authorities still impose numerous administrative and technical barriers for priestly and monastic communities (such as restrictions on water and electricity or lack of maintenance of infrastructure facilities) which make their survival on these properties - living testimonies of the Serbian and world spiritual heritage – rather difficult. These holy places of great importance for the Serbian people and strongly associated with its identity and history are still inaccessible to the great majority of believers as there is still no secured freedom of movement for Serbs. Thus, their religious rights are also seriously undermined. A telling example of the mistreatment of Serbian cultural and religious heritage in the Province is the rejection of the Dečani mayor to fulfil the decision of Constitutional Court from 2016 and return more than 24 hectares (59 acres) of land in the possession of the Dečani monastery.

There is no progress in the communication of church and monastery communities with local administrations and populations. Also, the values and significance of these monuments are still being misinterpreted, in conflict with confirmed historical facts, and even contrary to the decision of the World Heritage Committee to list these properties on the World Heritage List. The established matrix of this distortion of historical facts is the negation of any connection for these monuments with the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church.



**REPUBLIQUE DE SERBIE**  
*Délégation permanente  
auprès de l'UNESCO*

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**  
*Permanent Delegation to  
UNESCO*

Paris, 29 January 2021

Ref. 74 - 2/2021

Dear Ms. Rössler,

With reference to my letter No. 65-2/2020 dated 30 January 2020, I have the honor to transmit, enclosed herewith, the additional information provided by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia on the state of conservation for Serbian cultural heritage site "Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)", inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Danger. At the same time, I confirm that the Republic of Serbia pose no objection to publishing these additional information on the World Heritage Centre's website.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

  
Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili

Ambassador

Ms. Mechtild Rössler  
Director  
World Heritage Centre  
UNESCO  
Paris

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**



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OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS**

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Belgrade January 2021.

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## Introduction

During 2020, this property's four components continued to face serious security issues. Also, COVID-19 pandemic created a new challenge for the female and male monastics living there, enhancing monuments' overall vulnerability.

## The Dečani Monastery

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no new conservation interventions took place during 2020 in the Dečani Monastery. The site's overall integrity and security were endangered by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government activities in Priština, in terms of continuing the construction of the main road Dečani–Plav, through the protected area (buffer zone) of the monastery. The construction involving heavy machinery started first on 14<sup>th</sup> June and again on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, penetrating even deeper into the protected area (buffer zone) of the Dečani monastery. That compelled Serbia's Minister of Culture and Media to write to the UNESCO Director-General on this matter on two occasions. Namely, he sent letters on 18<sup>th</sup> June when the construction began, and on 14<sup>th</sup> August, urging UNESCO's prompt reaction to this illegal and damaging activities.

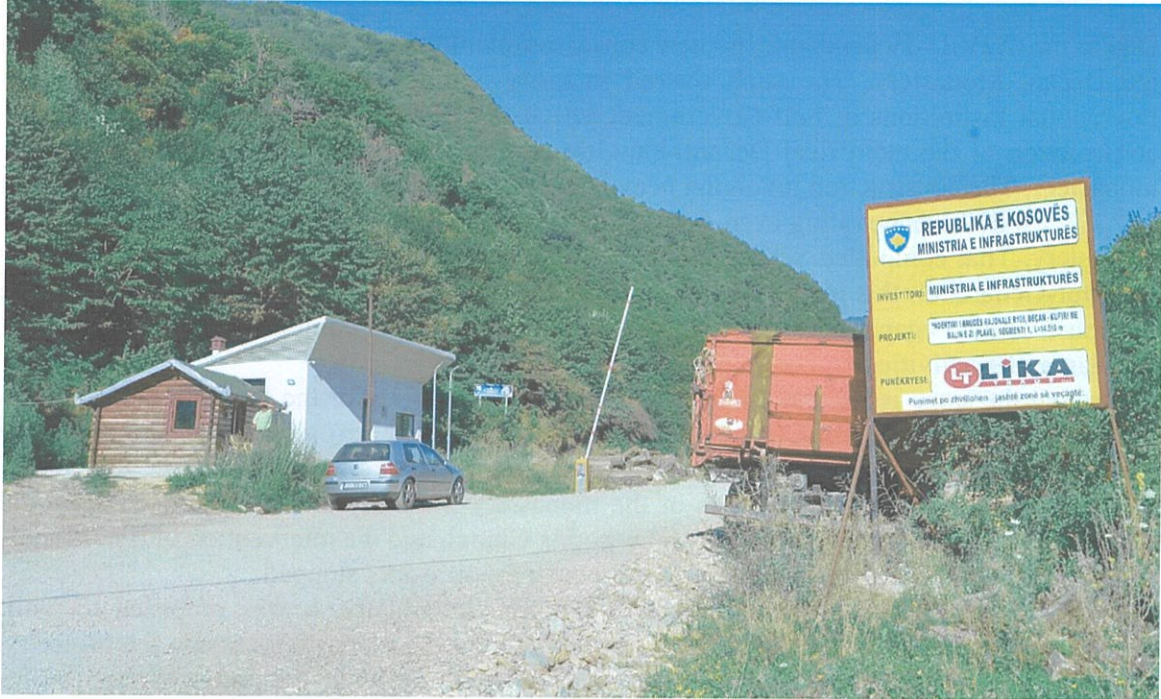
Regarding the same issue, the Director of the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments wrote to UNESCO Director-General on 18<sup>th</sup> June, expressing concern about the impact that such major infrastructural interventions may have on the integrity of this World Heritage property. After the protests of the monastery fraternity and the Raška-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the intervention of EU officials in Priština, with the assistance of KFOR, the construction works stopped.

Several efforts were invested in finding a solution. Eventually, it was proposed to work synchronously and simultaneously on the bypass around the monastery outside the protected zone and on rehabilitating the existing local road that passes through the protected area (buffer zone) and the monastery itself. The mentioned rehabilitated local road would also have traffic obstacles to prevent heavy traffic and redirect to use only bypass roads. The agreement was reached on 8<sup>th</sup> November and was confirmed by the Mixed Commission for Protected Zones (consisting of representatives of the EU Office in Priština, the OSCE Mission, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština responsible for Culture and Information and the Bishop of Raška-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija of Serbian Orthodox Church).

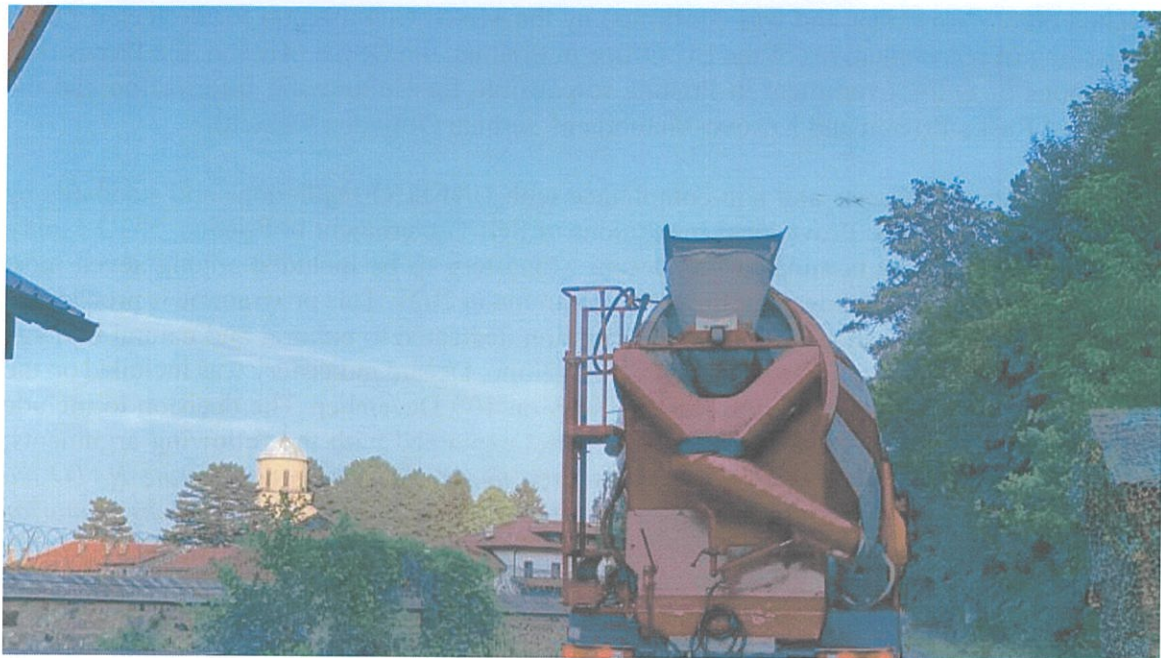
Due to the security threats and non-compliance with UNESCO regulations and standards by local authorities and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština, NGO *Future for Religious Heritage* nominated the Dečani Monastery to be included among seven most endangered cultural monuments in Europe programme in 2021. This programme is proclaimed by well-known European civil society organization dedicated to cultural and natural heritage Europa Nostra and European Investment Bank Institute. Dečani monastery was included on the list of 12 most endangered cultural heritage sites on 10<sup>th</sup> December. The decision to include Dečani monastery to this list Europa Nostra panel explained with the following arguments: *Since June 1999, the Dečani Monastery has been under 24/7 protection by the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping troops. Despite this, the monastery was a target of four attacks by mortar grenades by local extremists during the period from 1999 to 2007 and an attempted terrorist attack by ISIS in 2016, causing easily repairable damage. At the same time, the monastery with its special protective zone is facing severe environmental threats. The local municipal spatial plan is not in compliance with the UNESCO World Heritage Site's strict protection rules or the related national laws and regulations. There is a constant risk of unsuitable urban facilities being constructed in the monastery vicinity and the danger of expropriation of the land*

*belonging to the Dečani Monastery. Hazardous is the plan to have a significant international highway pass next to the monastery gates.*

Because of the constant threats and limited freedom of movement of the monastery fraternity, the Dečani Monastery is still guarded by KFOR military forces deployed at four points. Also, regular patrols and helicopter surveillance are provided, which confirms the assessment of KFOR itself, that the monastery is still seriously endangered.



1. Construction works on the road Dečani – Plav through the Dečani monastery buffer zone, August 2020

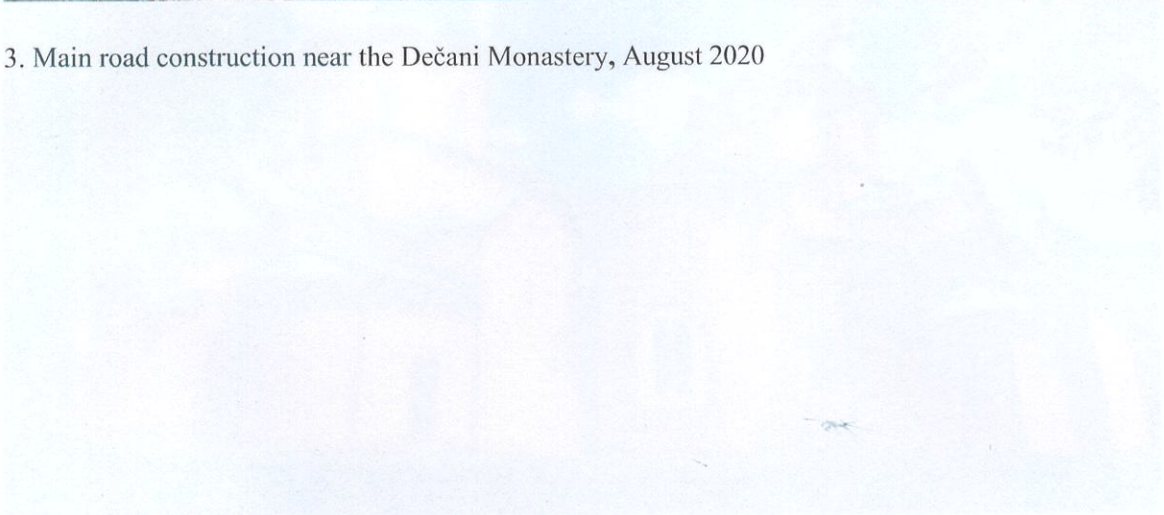


2. Heavy machinery engaged in road construction near the Dečani Monastery, August 2020





3. Main road construction near the Dečani Monastery, August 2020



## The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

There were no conservation interventions during 2020 in the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery. The monastery was closed to visitors most of the year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten nuns have been infected with the coronavirus in October and November, including the abbess, and one nun passed away. Despite these challenging circumstances caused by pandemic, the state of wall painting, monastery objects and movable artistic material kept in the monastery were monitored. No negative phenomena that might affect conservation status were observed.

The preparation of project documentation for the Holy Apostles church roof's rehabilitation started two years ago is still ongoing.

For its constant physical endangerment, the property is still daily secured by the local police forces.



4. Churches of the Patriarchate of Peć, July 2020.

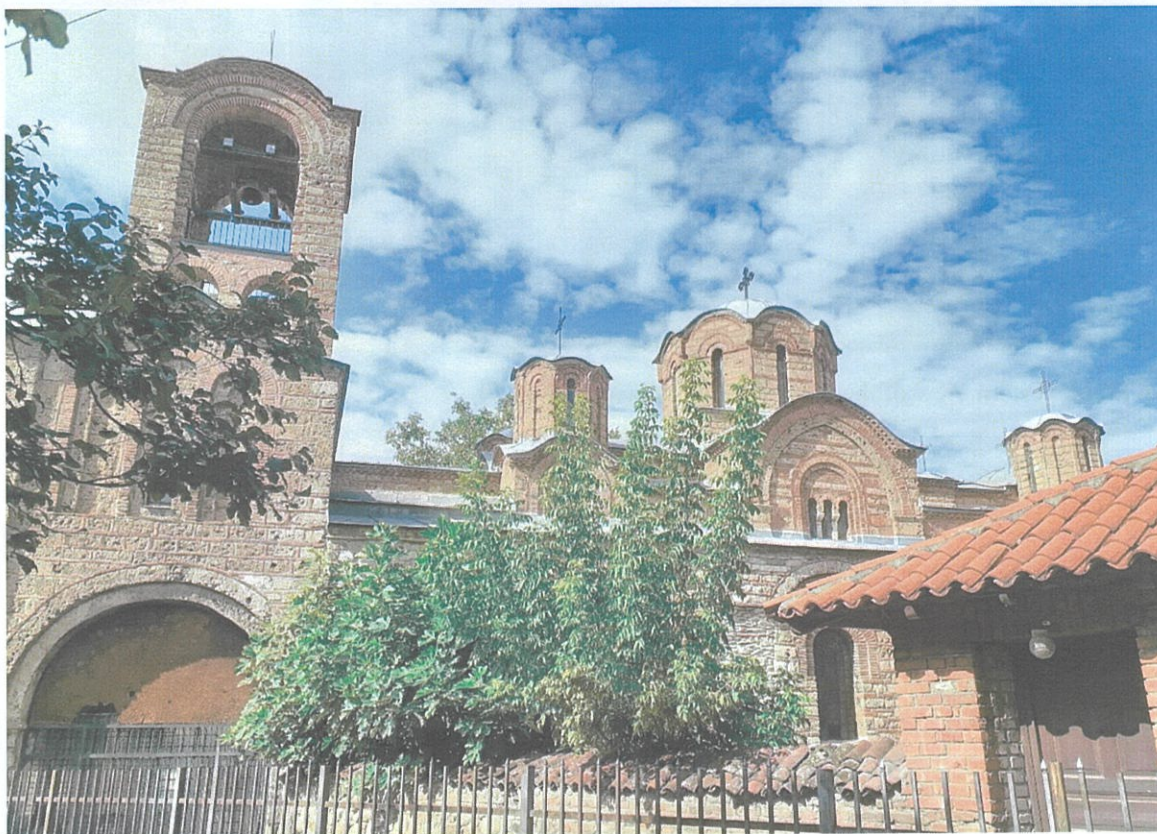
## The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren

Some conservation works carried out in the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša church in Prizren in 2020. These works included reparation and replacement of lead cover on damaged parts of the roof covering, the rehabilitation of the wooden structure of the bell tower, repair and cleaning of the lower zones on the facade, reparation of the fence stone wall and replacement of the damaged tile on the fence wall. Also, specific landscaping works were carried out on the arrangement of the churchyard. Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments conducted supervision of these conservation works and monitored wall painting and church objects.

In November, the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments finished a reconstruction project for the iconostasis in the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša church. In compliance with paragraph 172 of the Operational guidelines for implementing the World Heritage Convention, the project was sent to the World Heritage Centre for approval. Reconstruction of the iconostasis won't be undertaken until the World Heritage Centre's consent has been obtained.

Preparation of project documentation for the conservation of the remaining wall painting damaged in 2004 March pogrom, when the church was set on fire is still ongoing.

Due to the constant physical severe endangerment, the property is still secured daily by the local police forces.



5. Southern look of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, August 2020

## The Gračanica Monastery

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gračanica monastery was closed to visitors most of the year. The Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments monitored buildings in the sanctuary, wall painting in the main church and mobile church mobiliary and observed no negative phenomena that may affect the conservation status.

For its constant serious physical endangerment, the property is still secured daily by the local police forces.



6. Southwestern view of the church in Gračanica, June 2020.

## **Conclusions**

As it was the case in the previous reporting years, the general state of the Serbian churches and monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija province is still far from the satisfactory level. Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština started again with constructing the main road Dečani – Plav in the protected area (buffer zone) of the Dečani monastery what created grave concerns. Only after the reaction of the international community, these activities stopped. Building this road would seriously endanger the site's integrity as the essential component of the whole property Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia).

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Serbian monasteries and churches, which are components of this property, were closed for visitors most of the year. As there is still no freedom of movement secured for Serbs, these holy places are inaccessible to most believers even in normal conditions. Furthermore, the situation has not improved when it comes to administrative barriers implemented by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština for monastic and church communities. For example, despite the 2016 Supreme Court decision, Dečani Monastery still cannot register as its own, more than 24 hectares (59 acres) of the land in its possession.

The campaign of denying the origin and undoubted connection of these sites with Serbian people and Serbian Orthodox Church, contrary to the confirmed historical facts, unfortunately, has continued, contributing further to their endangerment.