11/02/2020

Bosnian Serb MPs Mull Declaration Deploring Montenegro's Serbs' Plight



Assembly looks likely to adopt a declaration expressing sympathy for Montenegro's Serbs in their battles with the Podgorica government over a new religion law.
The assembly of the Serb-led entity in Bosnia, Republika Srpska, is likely to adopt a "Declaration on the Situation of the Serbian People in Montenegro" at its next session, following the popular protests over a new religion law, led by the Serbian Orthodox Church, that have been going on in Montenegro for weeks.

Nebojsa Vukanovic, an MP from the opposition bloc in the Republika Srpska assembly, has proposed the document, which will be debated on 18 February and expresses, among other things, "deep concern about the position of Serbs in Montenegro and frequent examples of violations of the basic human and civil rights of the Serbian people".

Vukanovic proposes that the assembly condemn what he called "discrimination against Serbs in Montenegro who have been relegated from almost every sphere of decision-making and management".

The declaration condemns alleged "attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church in

Montenegro” and calls for the abolition of the recently adopted Law on Religious Freedom in Montenegro, and alleged “attempts to confiscate the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro”.

Vukanovic wrote in the proposal that, in contrast to the position of Serbs in Montenegro, “members of the Montenegrin national minority in the RS and Bosnia and Herzegovina … enjoy the highest minority rights and protection.
“Therefore, the RS National Assembly calls on the Montenegrin authorities to stop the persecution of Serbs in Montenegro and asks the Montenegrin authorities to treat Serbs in a way that they have the same position and the same rights as Montenegrins in RS and Bosnia.”

The Declaration will likely be accepted as its sentiments match those of the ruling party in the RS, led by Milorad Dodik, Serbian member of the Bosnian state Presidency.

At the state presidency session on February 3, Dodik notably withheld consent for Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic to pay an official visit to Bosnia, given what he called the current situation in Montenegro.

“It was inappropriate for me to do so [welcome Djukanovic] now that Montenegro is facing such a serious challenge, which is being witnessed by everyone and is being followed with great care in Republika Srpska, by virtue of the fact that we belong to the same Church,” Dodik told the Bosnian media.

Since Montenegro’s parliament passed the law on December 27, 2019, tens of thousands of Serbian Orthodox Church priests, believers and supporters have been protesting twice a week across the country, demanding its withdrawal.

The disputed law calls for the creation of a register of all religious buildings and sites that authorities say were owned by the independent kingdom of Montenegro before it became part of the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, later renamed Yugoslavia.

Churches or other faith groups unable to prove ownership of the sites risk seeing them taken into state ownership. The Serbian Orthodox Church, by far the largest church in the country, says it suspects the law will be used to strip it of its assets. The government has denied this.
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