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Patriarch of Serbia Irinej reposes in the Lord

The Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Serbian Patriarch, Irinej, reposed in the Lord on Friday morning.

The Serbian Patriarch had been hospitalized since November 5 at a military hospital in Belgrade after testing positive for COVID-19. His health subsequently deteriorated and the Patriarch was intubated, finally falling into a coma.

Patriarch Irinej was born on August 28, 1930 as Miroslav Gavrilovic. He was the 45th Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Serbs since January 2010.

In 1974, Irinej was elected vicar bishop of Moravica and consecrated by then Serbian Patriarch German. Irinej also studied theology in Athens at the post-graduate level.

In 1975, he was elected Bishop of Niš, leading the Niš eparchy for the next 35 years.

Irinej was elected the 45th Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church in January 2010, after the repose of Serbian Patriarch Pavle, and was enthroned in January 2010 in St. Michael's Cathedral in Belgrade.

Shortly after the sad announcement, the Metropolitan of Dabar-Bosnia, Hrizostom, officiated at a memorial service for the late Serbian hierarch at the Cathedral of Holy Archangel Michael in Belgrade.

In a message posted on his social media account immediately afterwards, the President of Serbia, Alexander Vucic, wrote "…It was an honor to know you. People like you never depart. May his memory be eternal".

Irinej was a pre-eminent voice for the Serbian people, described as a "soft-spoken force" that was respected by all, as well as a long-standing advocate for the Serbs, the orthodox faith and Serbian civilization in Kosovo and Metohija – as he considered the latter as the heart of the Serbian nation and an inseparable part of Serbia proper.

Irinej always underlined that the ancient patriarchate of the Serbian Church and its most significant monasteries were in Kosovo and Metohija. At the same time he was a firm proponent in the peaceful co-existence of Serbs and Albanians.

Irinej had close ties with many Greek Orthodox clerics and hierarchs over the decades.