

## **Serbian state returns almost all confiscated land to churches**



The restitution of property confiscated after World War II from churches and religious communities is coming to an end, and through the process of denominational restitution, 28,359 hectares of agricultural land have been returned so far, including as many as 24,227 hectares to the Serbian Orthodox Church.

This should not be surprising since more was taken away during the communist period, as evidenced by the data according to which out of a total of 3,049 requests submitted to the Agency for Restitution by all religious communities, half came from the Serbian Orthodox Church, more precisely 1,602. The remainder belonged to all other churches and religious communities, from whom a considerably smaller area of farmland was confiscated, but although with exceptions, most were returned.

“Most of it was returned to the Serbian Orthodox Church, i.e. the Patriarchate, Archbishopric, dioceses, monasteries and church communities, a total of 24,227 hectares. It should be noted that within the Serbian Orthodox Church there are monasteries that had several thousand hectares of land, as well as the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Kovilj, Sirig, Vajska). Of that area, 87% or 21,266 hectares were returned in the area of Backa, Banat and Srem. Srem diocese received most of it, 7,957 hectares, Banat diocese 5,286 and Bačka 4,746 hectares.

Only 6 percent of the land remains to be returned to church communities and citizens, which is now in the possession of the state. This means that the Republic of Serbia has fulfilled all its obligations regarding the recognition of ownership and the return of the land to the former owners without getting into mass disputes and other social upheavals that have accompanied this process in other countries,” says Branko Lakić, Acting Director of the Agricultural Land Administration

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