

Empirika Advocacy Platform

The Empirika Platform wishes to, in light of recent threats to the private property of citizens of Serb nationality throughout Kosovo, appeal to relevant institutions to undertake necessary measures needed to prevent and protect a basic human right: the right to the infallibility and protection of private property. In a time when the COVID-19 pandemic affects all of Kosovo's citizens, irrespective and irresponsible individuals have been abusing these measures that were issued due to the fight against this virus without sanction. Restrictions on freedom of movement and the absence of preventative security measures have certain individuals the opportunity to violate the law and to endanger the private property of citizens of Kosovo.

However, it is clear that this is merely an extension of a series of ever-more frequent attacks on citizens' private property. Beginning at the end of November and continuing throughout December of 2019, the residents of the Gračanica/Gračanicë municipality were on a number of different occasions the victims of robberies, that over an extended period of time generated feelings of fear and insecurity among the local population. In mid-February, this string of incidents continued with the destruction of private property in the village of Cernica/Cërnice (Gjilan/Gnjilane Municipality), and was swiftly followed by the acts of vandalism committed against ten returnee homes in the Novake village, and thefts in the Banje/Bajë (Skenderaj/Srbica Municipality) and Osojane (Istog/k Municipality) villages which occurred within a short period of time (at the end of March.) The unresolved case of arson committed against a home in Janjina Voda (Obilic Municipality) in mid-April constituted the first in a succession of attacks on private property held by citizens of Serb nationality.

During this last week a number of robberies of private property were carried out in the villages of Novake (Municipality of Prizren), Babin Most/Babimoc (Municipality of Obiliq/ć), Crkolez (Istog/k Municipality), as well as in the city of Leposavić/q. Two homes in the villages of Novake and Cernica/Cërnice were set ablaze, while a school and church in the Gojbulja/Gojbulë village (Vushtrri/Vučitrn Municipality) were targeted by vandals.

Taking into consideration the current situation and the concerns of local citizenry, Empirika members call on relevant state organs to undertake all necessary preventative measures in order to prevent similar cases of endangerment and destruction of private property irregardless of the nationality of their owners.

More meaningful efforts and engagement of institutions aimed at the protection of citizenry and their property is necessary, particularly when consideration the unusual circumstances that Kosovo currently finds itself in:

- The Government of Kosovo and local authorities on the territory in which these incidents took place need to publicly condemn these acts and to demand that a careful investigation on the part of relevant authorities be conducted and to identify those responsible for these crimes;
- To establish regular coordination meetings between local governments and local residents, particularly in enclaves and returnee communities in the goal of building mutual trust through a process of direct and continued dialogue;
- The Kosovo Police should, through its regional offices, strengthen its physical presence in sensitive areas of Kosovo, enclaves and returnee communities thereby increasing the level of security in those areas;
- Through the Ministry of Communities and Returnees and the Office for Communities, the Government of Kosovo should conduct a damage assessment and set aside additional funds that will be directed at victims;
- Aside from the publicly condemning these criminal acts, we call on representatives of the diplomatic corps and international organisations to encourage relevant organs of local and central institutions to carry out thorough investigations and to inform the wide public of the results and to recommend adaptation of an action plan that would allow for public bodies to react to these or other similar sorts of incident in a timely and adequate manner.

4th of May 2020

Empirika Members: Aktiv, Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC), Center for the Rights of Minority Communities, EMEG, Forum for Development and Multi-ethnic Cooperation (FDMC), Gračanica online, Humani Centar Mitrovica, Communication for Social Development (CSD), Media Center, Network for Civic Activism, New Press, Radio Kontakt Plus, RTV Kim, RTV Mir and Sinergija.