
BOSNIA PROBES CHRISTMAS EVE 'INTIMIDATION' BY CELEBRATING SERBS

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The Bosnian state prosecution opened a case on Wednesday to investigate whether Bosniaks who returned to the Srebrenica, Visegrad and Bratunac areas after fleeing during the 1990s war were intimidated by noisy celebrations by Serbs on Orthodox Christmas Eve on Monday.

The case will also examine whether the celebrations provoked ethnic and religious hatred and intolerance.

The prosecution said in a statement that requests will be sent to relevant police and security agencies to collect and submit all pieces of information and evidence concerning the events in question.

Groups of Serbs marked Orthodox Christmas Eve by driving in convoys playing loud Serbian songs through Srebrenica, Visegrad and Bratunac, areas where a minority of Bosniaks have returned since large-scale crimes were committed there during the war.

One of the convoys of cars passed by the Potocari Memorial Centre, where thousands of victims of the July 1995 massacres of Bosniaks from Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces are buried. Another of the convoys, in Visegrad, was organised by supporters of the Serb nationalist Ravna Gora Chetnik movement.

Local Bosniaks said they were frightened by the noisy celebrations.

But Goran Simic, the president of the Srebrenica war veterans organisation, who led the car convoy in that area, said the celebration was normal for the Christmas holidays.

No Chetnik songs were sung, Simic told BIRN. He insisted that participants did not fire guns, but said that firecrackers were set off.

The justice minister of Sarajevo Canton, Lejla Salihagic-Brcic, said that the Chetnik celebration in Visegrad might not have happened if the prosecutors office had completed its investigation into a controversial commemoration of WWII Chetnik leader Draza Mihajlovic, a probe which was launched in March 2019.

I am sure that there would not have been such unpleasant events again as we had yesterday, which upset the public and inflamed religious and national hatred, Salihagic-Brcic said on Tuesday.

Chetnik leader Mihailovic was sentenced to death in 1946 by a Yugoslav court for high treason and collaboration with Nazi Germany.

He was rehabilitated in 2015 by a Belgrade court which ruled that his trial was political and ideological and made serious legal errors.

During WWII, his forces committed large-scale war crimes and other atrocities, including crimes against Bosniaks in Visegrad.

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