



## President of Albania Ilir Meta gives reception in honour of Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church

On April 29, 2018, President of the Republic of Albania Ilir Meta gave a grand dinner on the occasion of the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russian to the Albanian Orthodox Church.

The event was attended by the head of the state, Patriarch Kirill, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, members of the delegation accompanying the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church: Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, Archpriest Andrey Bondarenko, acting head of the Patriarchal Protocol Service, and Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal press service; and hierarchs of the Albanian Orthodox Church including Metropolitans Ignatios of Berat, Joan of Corce, Demetrios of **Gjirokaster**, Nicolla of Apollonia, Anthony of Elbasan, Nathanael of Amantia, and Bishop Asti of Byllis.

Among the guests were representatives of major religious communities in the country including Grand Mufti of Albania Skender Brucai, Catholic Archbishop George Friendo of Tiranë-Durrës, leader of the Bektashi religious community Haji Dede Edmond Brahimaj, leaders of the Protestant community in the country, and Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Charles John Brown.

In his speech, the head of the state pointed to the importance of the Albanian Orthodox Church for the Albanian people and said that Christianity had very deep roots in the land: *from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ*, as St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 15:19).

Speaking about the interreligious relations in the country, Mr. Ilir Meta stressed that ‘harmony, mutual respect, tolerance, mutual understanding and mutual respect and solidarity are characteristic of the relations between various religious faiths in Albania and represent the most precious pearls of our historical legacy, which we are to perfect and enrich in handing it down to future generations’.

The president also spoke about the severe trials the Albanian believers had to experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Many clergy were imprisoned, interned and subjected to torture by the cruelest Communist regime of that time’, he said. However, the 90s made a beginning of religious revival in the country. He attested to the fact that the work of representatives of religious communities helped consolidate the unity

of the people, to heal social wounds and develop social relations.

‘Using this opportunity, I would like to underscore the special importance of the bright image of Archbishop Anastasios as a respected pastor of the Orthodox believers in Albania. His efforts, his long-standing purposefulness have contributed to not only the canonical and spiritual rebirth of the autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church, but also to the education and training of a new generation of Albanian clergy who have contributed to the elevation and propagation, also beyond Albania, of the inalienable values of religious harmony and tolerance among the Albanians’.

Addressing His Holiness Kirill, Mr. Meta stressed that ‘unfortunately, the Russian Orthodox Church, too, had to go through many hardships and troubles in the last century. But after great sacrifices she was able to revive and become what she is today’.

Speaking about the present situation in the world, Mr. Meta pointed to intolerance, hate language, discrimination against various religions and ethnic groups, terrorism and extremism, armed conflicts as major challenges for humanity as they involve severe consequences in the humanitarian sphere.

In conclusion of his speech, Mr. Meta expressed a hope for the continuation of the already half a century-long history of friendship between Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Anastasios.

This speech was followed by an address of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church:

‘Your Excellency, Much Esteemed Mr. President,

Your Beatitude, Beloved in the Lord Archbishop Anastasios,

Your Eminences and Graces,

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wholeheartedly greet you all as you have been gathered together by the President of Albania for this grand dinner. For me it is a great honour to share this common meal with you, Mr. President, and all the guests. Staying in the Albanian land, I do not stop admiring the hospitality and generosity of the Albanian people.

It is the first ever visit of a Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to Albania. However,

between the Russian and Albanian Orthodox Church there has been established a longstanding tradition of the best relations. Our Churches do not only share a faith and have a similar experience of severe persecution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but they also have common stands on major problems of the present time. His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios has always been a welcome and dear guest in Russia.

The revival of religious life in Albania has brought forth good fruits precious for the whole Albanian society. The era of mass persecution for faith and forcibly imposed atheism has proved unable to break the spirit of our nations who show to the whole world today our common commitment to traditional values and interreligious accord.

I am delighted to note the high level of church-state relations in Albania, where not only the Orthodox Church but also other religious communities have proved to be reliable partners of the state in strengthening morals in society. It is a guarantee of accord among people and various social groups.

I wish you, Much Esteemed Mr. President, and all the present here, spiritual and physical fortitude, success in all good initiatives and to all the Albanian people I wish peace and prosperity'.

*DECR Communication Service*