



## **Grand reception on the occasion of Patriarch Kirill's visit to the Albanian Orthodox Church**

April 29, 2019 – A reception was given by the Albanian Orthodox Church in Tirana, Albania, in honour of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Patriarch Kirill was greeted by Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, who said in particular, 'Your visit of peace to Albania is a joyful Paschal gift. Welcome to our country, which in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the period of mad anti-religious persecution, experienced the darkest times, but by God's mercy it has begun developing since 1991 and now flourishes in the situation of full religious freedom. And all the religious communities participate in this development. All these years we have sought to cultivate mutual respect, solidarity and sincere harmonious co-existence'.

His Beatitude stated that the peaceful co-existence of people who belong to different religious communities could generally have two opposite starting points: it is achieved through either indifference to religious experience or personal conscious experience of the profound essence of religion. And quite the contrary, religious intolerance and strife between religious communities living together can either develop from a seed of religious type, such as radical fanaticism, or stem from non-religious factors, political, nationalistic, psychological, when religion is used for achieving other goals. 'These roots used to be very strong in the past, though today they continue preserving their vital capacity in all countries; whereas we seek to draw saps from the healthy roots of religious experience in order to promote Albania's social development and progress and help her reconcile and co-exist in peace especially with her neighbours and all other peoples', he said.

Patriarch Kirill, on his part, said,

'Your Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, Your Eminences and Graces, Your Excellences, distinguished assembly:

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Your Beatitude for your kind invitation for me to visit Albania and for Abraham's hospitality you have accorded my fellow travelers and me. Surrounded by your love, we feel exceptional joy, continuing to celebrate the Pascha of Christ and enjoying fellowship with our Albanian brothers.

Though my coming here is the first visit to be made by a head of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Albanian Orthodox Church, the Albanian land was visited earlier by the Russian Church's high-ranking

delegations. One of them participated in the episcopal consecration of His Eminence Paisius, a future Primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church. But between those visits and the present one, there is a considerable distance in time – seventy years, during which the Albanian Church had to endure persecution unprecedented in its brutality.

Persecuted were also Muslims with Bektashis, Catholics and Protestants – all who believe in God. Every expression of religious feelings, every use of religious symbols was under strict ban. Thanks God, now all this is over, and freedom of faith has been restored in today's Albania, and people of different religious communities can now live in peace with one another in this multi-confessional country.

I see today's common service in the newly built Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ a sign of God's mercy manifested in the revival of the Albanian Church and in her recovered opportunity for developing church life in her country and strengthening fraternal relations with Local Orthodox Churches.

From my heart I wish that the Lord Pantocrator may always bless your and your helpers' work, give you more strength and grant peace and prosperity to the Albanian Orthodox Church.

Christ Is Risen!

The solemn event was attended by President of the Republic of Albania Mr. Ilir Meta, 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. There were also the head of the State Committee on Cults Mr. L. Aliko, diplomats, including Russian Ambassador A. Karpushin, Greek Ambassador Eleni Surani and Polish Ambassador Karol Bachura, and Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Charles John Brown.

Present at the reception were also members of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation – 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 Bondrenko, acting head of the Patriarchal Protocol Service, and Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal press service. Among the attendees were also hierarchs of the Albanian Orthodox Church, Metropolitans Ignatios of Berat, Joan of Corce, Demetrios of **Gjirokaster**, Nicolla of Apollonia, Anthony of Elbasan, Nathanael of Amantia, and Bishop Asti of Byllis.

*DECR Communication Service*

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