



## **Patriarch Kirill meets with Albanian ambassador in Russian Federation**

On 11 June 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Albania to the Russian Federation H.E. Sokol Gjoka. Attending the meeting that took place at the Patriarch's residence in Chisty side-street, was Rev. Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries.

Ambassador Gjoka thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for receiving him and underscored the great importance of the Russian Orthodox Church both for Russia and the entire world.

He said that before his departure for Russia he had met with His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania. The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Albania asked him to convey his brotherly greetings to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and expressed his interest in the development of relations between the two Churches.

"I know your kind feelings to the Church of Albania and to the Albanian people," said Ambassador Gjoka to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

His Holiness thanked the Ambassador for his kind words and said: "Indeed, our countries and people have a lot of common. We remember that both countries had suffered from atheistic ideology, experienced a difficult period of political and economic restructuring, and religious revival... We rejoice at

having more active relations between Russia and Albania."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church added that the followers of different religions live in both countries. "We are happy to see interreligious cooperation developing in Albania, where, as in Russia, the Interreligious Council works. Peace among religious communities is a very important factor, which enhances stability in society.

Speaking about the life of the Orthodox Church of Albania, His Holiness the Patriarch noted in particular that the Orthodox in Albania had survived hard times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. "I recall those hard times when we sent greetings from Moscow to the Primate of the Albanian Church, but never received a reply. Later we learnt that no one was alive. However, we have always remembered about our Albanian Orthodox brothers and sisters and prayed for them. We used all the possibilities at the level of international organizations to remind them of the destiny of believers in Albania."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church shared his reminiscences of his personal meetings with Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, with whom he worked in many international organizations and for implementing pan-Orthodox initiatives. His Holiness Kirill underscored that His Beatitude Anastasios had done a lot for the revival of the Orthodox Church in Albania and recalled his visit to Albania in 2003.

"Orthodoxy is a traditional religion of the Albanians, - His Holiness emphasized, - Certainly, the Muslims are in the majority, yet a considerable number of people belong to the Orthodox Church. We rejoice at the increasing number of Albanian priests and believers of the Albanian background, because one should not think that Orthodoxy is a foreign religion in Albania."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia expressed his confidence in an Orthodox factor's importance to the development of foreign affairs of Albania, as it borders on the states in which the majority professes Orthodoxy. "As you know, the majority of people in Russia are Orthodox, and an Orthodox factor is important to our bilateral relations... I believe that historical commonness of Russia and Albania is conducive to the development of relations among people, to the rapprochement between our countries, economic cooperation and political dialogue."

His Holiness told Ambassador Gjoka about the Days of Spiritual Culture of Russia in Albania planned to take place in 2011 and expressed his hope for this initiative to serve the strengthening of relations between the two countries.