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The Historical-Legal Development of Religious Tolerance and Harmony in Albania

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There are three identifying cultural values of Albanian society that have survived and coexisted for years. They are hospitality, besa¹ (the given word), and religious coexistence. These values have survived the challenge of globalization, but, nowadays, they are at constant risk of being misused.

The case of Albania is also special because in a homogeneous ethnic composition, like few countries in the Balkans, religions in Albania have been diverse. In this way, Albania appears as a nation and as a multi-religious society. This has created what is considered the Albanian religious identity.

But this is not a sporadic identity.

The year 1912 is considered to be the year of hope and great changes for Albania and Albanians. On 28 November 1912, Albania declared independence. Until this time, it had been under the sovereignty of Turkey. A regulatory legal framework was also being adopted at this time. In the north of Albania, the Kanun of Leke Dukagjini was the only legal act regulating all social, economic, and coexistence rules in the area. The activity of Kanun was very limited. In the other part of Albanian territory, there started to emerge the legal framework adopted by the national assembly of Vlora. At the same time, it was held during the London Conference which redefined the borders of the Balkans and, consequently, the borders of Albania. Among other things, it was urged to be aware of the adoption of the legal framework, with particular attention of preventing the spread of belonging and Muslim

¹A promise made by Albanians which is destined to fulfill.

communities in the country.² At that time, it was very important to maintain public order, regardless of how relations between religious communities would be regulated. The Organic Statute of Albania was approved on 10 April 1914 in Vlora.³ In order to preserve the religious balance in the country, the statute sanctioned that Albania has no official⁴ (fe shtetërore) religion. The freedom and public exercise of all cults are guaranteed, even nowadays.

There are specific provisions of this law which regulate relations with religious communities. All existing Albanian religious communities are recognized (by the state). This principle also applies to the various Muslim sects. On the other hand, there must be no obstacles regarding the hierarchical organization of various communities, nor to the relationships these communities might have on religious dogma with their higher spiritual leaders. Religious communities have always protected and maintained their properties, and their buildings have always been excluded from tax liabilities.

The 1920 Statute of Lushnja,⁵ supplemented by the expanded Statute of Lushnje, 1922, which was the basic law, provided general rules regarding the functioning of the state. Among other things, in a separate chapter which summarizes the various provisions, the Statute declared that there is no official religion in Albania.⁶ This provision is of particular historical legal relevance as it is an accepting and not prohibitive provision. This means that the state has no official religion, but not the citizens.

The legislator, in the continuation of the provision, also developed acceptance, coexistence, and other religions. All religions are honored, accepting their diversity and coexistence. This prediction also creates a division between religion and faith. In this way, all religions, meaning all organized systems of beliefs, ceremonies and rules are accepted to worship God and regulate human relations. According to that, the provision also regulates the freedom to practice certain religions and faiths. The legislator

²Giovanni Cimbalo, *Pluralismo confessionale e comunità religiose in Albania*, Bononia University Press, ISBN 978-88-7395-762-1, pg 22.

³Albania is constituted as a constitutional, sovereign, and hereditary principality under the guarantee of the six great powers, headed by Prince Vid.

⁴Legally accepted by the government.

⁵This act is considered by many scholars as the first Constitution of the Republic of Albania, in terms of its form and content.

⁶Article 93 of Elected Statute of Lushnja, 8-12-1922.

states that freedom to exercise their religion and beliefs are guaranteed to everyone.

Religious and belief restraint extends its effects on the organization and functioning of the state. Religion cannot become a legal barrier, nor can it be used for political purposes. It is the law itself that has foreseen the limits of activity, limiting particulars that violate state activity. This legal provision was not only advanced for the time, but, on the other hand, it also laid down the legal basis for the guarantee of religious harmony and coexistence in Albania.

But what is more important is the recognition of the full autonomy of the religious communities, proving that “the heads of every religion and every confession are chosen on the basis of their statutes, and recognized by a decree by part of the government” which confirms the jurisdictional approach of the law. “Every religious association and institute like: a mosque, a Teqe, a Church, a Monastery etc., is recognized as a legal person and is represented on the basis of one’s own religious rules,” with an explicit postponement to the internal ordering of cults. There could be of no greater guarantee than this to testify to the effective recognition of the religious freedom of associations and of individuals, especially since different cult organizations have the right to have, acquire, dispose of, and administer movable and immovable assets.⁷

The approval of the Statutes of the various religious communities, imposed by the constitutional provisions referred to above and by international events, leads in 1923 upon the approval of the law on the legal status of religious communities with which confers civil juridical personality on the various cults.⁸ Thus, in 1923, Albania — the only state in Europe — adopted legislation on the attribution of legal personality to religious communities which represents the most advanced point of a long elaboration of European law, proving to be at the center of the debate on what the peculiar characteristics, the formants must be, necessary for the construction of a modern state.⁹

As the only state in Europe — legislation on the matter of attribution of juridical personality to the religious communities, representing the most

⁷Ibid.

⁸Legal Statute of Religious Communities, <http://licodu.cois.it/415/view>.

⁹Giovanni Cimbalò, *Pluralismo confessionale e comunità religiose in Albania*, Bononia University Press, ISBN 978-88-7395-762-1, pg 37.

advanced point of a long elaboration of European law — Albania performed the characteristics for the construction of a modern state.¹⁰

In the same line, when the form of state changed in Albania, from a parliamentary Republican state,¹¹ in a democratic, parliamentary, and hereditary kingdom state. On 1 December 1928 was approved the Basic Statute of the Albanian Kingdom, headed by King Zog. This act was similar in form and content to all the constitutions of that time. In the preamble of this act are invoked the values of national unity, the assurance of peaceful development of the homeland, and the common good while respecting historical traditions. This preamble glorifies the values of the Albanian people who, for religious reasons, appear to be united.

In the same form as the Extended Statute of Lushnja, the Statute of the Albanian Kingdom institutionalized that the Albanian State had no official religion. All religions and beliefs are honored and the freedom to practice each is guaranteed. Religion cannot form legal barriers. Religions and beliefs can never be used for political purposes.¹²

It is an interesting fact that this law provided the incompatibility of the function of the deputy with people with active religious service. Over the years, the most educated and intellectual parts of the Albanians have had a genuine religious orientation. For this reason, in delegating bodies and assemblies, delegates belonged to different religious communities, in the capacity of representing the best interests of the population. They had a very high reputation, and their word was often decisive in decision making. Such was the national assembly held on 28 November 1912 in Vlora, consisting of 83 delegates of the Muslim and Christian faiths, who signed the Albanian Declaration of Independence. In 1924,¹³ Albania's Prime Minister was Fan Noli, who previously served as a priest. He continued to be a priest even after the fall of the government of 1924.

¹⁰Ministero per i beni e le attivita culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, *L'unione fra l'Albania e l'Italia*, a cura di S. Trani, Roma, Pubblicazioni degli Archivisti Stato, Strumenti CLXXIII, 2007, 72–82,

¹¹The proclamation Republic of Albania, for the first time in history, took place on 21 January 1925, on the 5th anniversary of the beginning of the Lushnja Congress.

¹²Article 5 of the Basic Statute of the Kingdom of Albania, 01 December 1928.

¹³16 June 1924 to 24 December 1924 has been in Albania what is known in history as the Fan Noli Government. He was the first Prime Minister to come from the ranks of Catholic clergy in Albania. In 1908, he was appointed (ORDAINED) priest and founded the Albanian Church.

Meanwhile, since 1928, this situation has changed. First, part of the intellectual and well-educated elite in Albania did not belong only to those who were in active religious service. Second, the mentality of the people who demanded that their representatives not only belong to religious beliefs had changed, but there was a general inclusion of the representatives' categories.

The Statute of the Kingdom went further, stating that the Member of Parliament could not attend Parliamentary meetings in religious clothing. In this way, the manifestation of a certain religious belief was left out of the doors of the legislative body.

I think it is important to mention in this paper the formula of the oath in case of taking the mandate of a deputy or a king.

Before committing to office, MPs swear this way: "I swear in the name of God, that as an Albanian MP I will be faithful to the Statute, I will work honorably and conscientiously for the good of the Fatherland."¹⁴

Also the formula of the King's oath in Parliament was conceived in this way: "I (.....), the King of the Albanians, as ascends the throne of the Albanian Kingdom and takes over the royal powers, I swear before the Almighty God, that I will preserve national unity, state independence and territorial integrity; I will also abide by the Statute and act in accordance with it and the laws in force, always taking into account the good of the people. God help me."

Although a laic state, before taking up representative duties in both cases, there is a direct reference to "God." This shows that not only for the sake of a legal provision but also because of a self-accepting culture, Albanians have accepted the coexistence and harmony of their faith and religion.

Religious coexistence and harmony in Albania at that time continued to be complemented by a rich legal framework. For the first time in Albania, there was an adoption of special legislation on religious communities. The law on the administration of religious communities of 01.02.1930, among others, quoted that: "Religious communities in Albania were moral legal entities who enjoyed all rights except to participate in political activities directly or indirectly. Religious communities enjoyed the rights conferred by law only when the Statute presented by them was approved by the Council of Ministers and decreed by the King."

Eqerem Bey Vlora, a scholar, among others referring to the period of King Zog, has quoted: "Zog created not only a state but also a nation."

¹⁴Article 30 of The Basic Statute of the Kingdom of Albania, 01 December 1928.

This philosophy was also served by the relationships he instituted with the religious communities in Albania.

5.1 Communist Albania and Forced Atheism

The elements of historical legal treatment of religious tolerance in Albania relate to the most important moments selected to support this thesis.

In October 1944 in Berat was held the second meeting of the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council, which decided to transform and mandate Albania into temporary democratic government. A Declaration of Civil Rights was adopted at this time, which guaranteed the exercise of freedoms, universal rights, and the right to religious belief and conscience, as equal rights are accorded to all religious beliefs. For the moment, there were no significant changes in religious life; indeed, it reaffirmed the equal treatment between the confessions: the politics of national unity required it. Resistance to religion would emerge later.

In 1945, based on the law on the Constituent Assembly and the electoral law sanctioned the right to vote without distinction of religion and political ideas, of women and of all citizens over the age of 18. The elections of 2 December 1945 saw the victory with 90% of the Democratic Front dominated by the communists; the government presided over by Enver Hoxha took office on 24 March 1946.

Meanwhile, the Constitution was promulgated on 14 March 1946 which reaffirmed the state to be laic and teaching; ownership and private initiative were guaranteed, even if it was established that private property can be limited and expropriated when the general interest requires it and always according to the law.

An entire chapter of the Constitution, the 13th, was dedicated to the rights and obligations of citizens, who were guaranteed freedom and equality in religious matters and the separation between state and religions was sanctioned, even if the state could economically support the confessions. The law on political parties,¹⁵ in Article 7, prohibited those with a religious background and the Government urged the religious communities to re-establish the ecclesiastical hierarchies that would be left free to carry out their activities according to the legislation and statutes approved in the period of King Zog. The approval of the law marks the end of a first phase of relations in the

¹⁵Decree no. 241 dated 06 December 1946 "On the establishment of political parties", Official Gazette no. 115, dated 23 December 1946.

name of the reconstruction of national unity, after which a phase opens in the relations between the political authorities and the various religious communities which will last until 1967, during which the government subordinates the very existence of religious communities to the building of the socialist state and will order its suppression.

According to Prof. Hysi,¹⁶ from a 1945 survey, 68%–70% of Albanians were Muslims, 17% Orthodox, and more than 10% Catholics. In addition to the Sunnis, who were the majority, five other brotherhoods were included within the Muslim community: haleveti, rufai, kadri, tixhan, and sadi. The Bektashi maintained their own organization.

In the first years of communist governance, the modalities of application of the statutory norms constituted an internal matter of religious communities. The war and the struggle for the liberation of the country had involved many members of the clergy or militant members of the religious communities and these wished to bring elements of democratization and participation within the communities themselves; therefore, they fueled the confrontation within the respective religious organizations.

From the speech of the Communist dictator, held on 6 February 1967, began the most tragic stage of an entire Albanian nation, Calvary, to the Crucifixion and, with God's help, to the Resurrection. As history later showed, atheistic communism educated a whole generation without conscience, that is, inhuman ideals, with disrespect for the person, with disrespect for the freedom of the other, instilled a spirit that was neither spirit nor Albanian national tradition, nor is the tradition of European humanism¹⁷. Enver Hoxha delivered a speech entitled "Further Revolutionizing Party and Power," a speech in which he began the fight against "religious ideology" and "customs," which later led to the proclamation of Albania as the first and the only atheist country in world history.¹⁸

On 28 December 1976,¹⁹ it was approved by the Constitution of the Popular Socialist Republic of Albania. In Article 37, it was stipulated that:

¹⁶Shyqyri Hysi, *Myslimanizmi në Shqipëri 1945–1950*, Tirane, Mesonjtorja e pare, 2000, 7.

¹⁷Martirët e Lum të Kishës katolike në Shqipëri Vatican news, 06 February 2019

¹⁸With a secret order of dictator Enver Hoxha in 1967, figures and details are given on the destruction of cult sites in Albania and the open fight against religious beliefs. This number totals 2169, of which 740 mosques, 608 Orthodox churches and monasteries, 157 Catholics, 530 teqes, mausoleums etc.

¹⁹Law nr. 5506 dated 28 December 1976 The Constitution of the Popular Socialist Republic of Albania.

“The state does not recognize or support any religion and develops atheistic propaganda to instill in people the materialistic scientific understanding.”

Meanwhile, Article 55 of the Criminal Code of 1977 in Albania stated:

“Fascist, anti-democratic, religious, belligerent, anti-socialist agitation and propaganda, as well as the preparation, dissemination or preservation for the dissemination of literature with such content to weaken or undermine the state of the proletariat dictatorship, is punishable by deprivation of liberty from three to ten. After these offenses, when committed in times of war or have caused particularly grave consequences, are punished: with deprivation of liberty not less than ten years or by death.”

Albania became the first atheist country in the world. This was the decision taken by the communist government. After over 50 years of faith in God, religions of any form of manifestation of faith were then completely banned and even barbarously condemned.

The consequences were not small in terms of ideology. It is a twin generation who grew up totally distanced from religious beliefs or practicing it. This made Albanians indifferent to religion-related issues but, at the same time, fueled by a sense of hatred and fight against preachers who practiced religion in secret. The fact that the cult sites collapsed and were destroyed showed a propaganda of hatred and the fight against religion.

According to Sokol Paja,²⁰ media in totalitarian Albania totally serves this totalitarian country. They used to transmit information that is compatible with the political and ideological principles of this state. The power itself, media of that time and community, functions as a unit. The atheist propaganda of communist system had a special importance regarding the awareness due to the provisions taken in order to fight the proletariat, the proletarian triumph, and settling the dictatorship in Albania, and, of course, media has a specific role.

5.2 The Reborn of Religious Tradition, Tolerance and Harmony in Albania

The collapse of communist systems in Eastern Europe brought about a new system of new organizational spirit in Albania. On 29 April 1991, Law No. 7491 “On the Basic Constitutional Provisions” was adopted, which played

²⁰Ph.D. candidate, Universiteti Tiranës, Departamenti I Gazetarisë dhe Komunikimit, Book of Abstracts, First International Conference on Communication and Media Studies, 29–30 May 2015, Kolegjia AAB, Pristina, Kosovo, pg. 44.

the role of a provisional constitution. Meanwhile, state-owned activities and undertakings for Albania's accession to the Council of Europe had begun, in consultation with constitutional initiatives and with the Venice Commission.

The new Constitution certainly meets the criteria set by the Council of Europe for the countries that intend to be part of this organization. The legal nature and the freedom of religious communities, is the protection of individual and collective religious freedom, because in fact it is in a line of continuity with the legal experiences that have characterized the Albanian state since its independence.

In fact, the laic nature of the state, already present in the Statute of 1914, is reconfirmed as the regime of recognition of the juridical personality to which religious communities are subjected. Thus, the Constitution moves in the wake of the legal tradition of the country that, since 1923, has adopted pluralism of cults as one of its distinctive characters, a choice that makes Albania a unique case among the countries where Islam is in the majority.

This allows us to argue that Albanian is a European Islam quite different from that practiced in other areas of the world. These particular parameters of legal and institutional civilization, as well as attention to religious pluralism and secularism, confer on the Albanian system a capacity for social stabilization which has avoided Albania's ethnic-religious wars that have characterized other countries.

Conversely, the absence of interreligious conflicts, together with national cohesion, has played a fundamental role in keeping out the populations allocated on the territory of the Albanian state from the wars of religion, so frequent in the western Balkans.

However, after the fall of the regime and the absence of legal instruments in the system to manage and regulate the activities of the religious communities, they try to present themselves in another form or to use institutions set up for other types of activities that could somehow cover the void existing legislation and allowed them to operate in the territory of the state.

Article 7 of the law for the constitutional provisions of 1991, stipulated that:

The Republic of Albania is a secular state.

The state respects the freedom of religion and creates the conditions for its exercise.

Following the adoption of the law, a number of religious communities in Albania sought to organize their registration as organized formations. Some courts agreed to do so and others found the legal framework insufficient.

However, in the new institutional framework, the existence of religious communities and the individual protection of religious freedom is again guaranteed at the level of constitutional principles, and this is soon reflected in the new civil code, published in 1994,²¹ whose article 39 establishes that: associations are social organizations that pursue a political, scientific, cultural, sporting, religious, charitable, or any other non-economic purpose, thus making religious communities fall among those social formations whose activities are regulated by common law legislation.

These guarantees provided with regard to the rights of freedom of association are accompanied by the restoration of the activities of religious communities through the development of procedures for the restitution to them of expropriated properties from 1945 and definitively confiscated in 1967.

In 1998, the constitution of the Republic of Albania was adopted, which also passed the referendum filter.²² Unlike any previous constitution or act with the power of the constitution, the 1998 constitution, in its preamble, states: “We, the people of Albania, are proud of our history, . . . with a spirit of religious coexistence and tolerance, with a deep conviction that justice, peace, harmony and cooperation among nations are among the highest values of humanity.”

In fact, the constitution, as the highest legal act in the Albanian legal system, has made its content subject to a number of articles that support and teach the harmony of religious tolerance in Albania.

Article 3²³ lists the basic principles on the basis of which the Albanian state was founded, among other things religious affiliation and coexistence. It also states that it is the duty of the state to respect and protect them.

²¹Civil Code of the Republic of Albania, approved by law. 7850 dated 29 July 1994

²²Adopted by law no. 8417, dated 21 December 1998 of the People’s Assembly. Approved by referendum on 22 November 1998 Declared by Decree no. 2260, dated 28 November 1998 of the President of the Republic, Rexhep Mejdani Amended by Law no. 9675, dated 13 January 2007 Amended by Law no. 9904, dated 21 April 2008 Amended by Law no. 88/2012, dated 18 September 2012 Amended by Law no. 137/2015, dated 17 December 2015 Amended by Law no. 76/2016, dated 22 July 2016.

²³Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania: Independence of the state and the entirety of its territory, human dignity, its rights and freedoms, social justice, constitutional order, pluralism, national identity and national heritage, religious coexistence and coexistence, and the understanding of Albanians with minorities are the basis of this state, which has a duty to respect and protect them.

Religious communities are considered part of the social formations on which the Albanian state is based. Article 9 of the Constitution provides for an exception to the first rule: the foundation of political parties and other organizations having totalitarian programs, activities and methods, which instigate or defend religious, racial and territorial hatred, which use the violence to govern or make politics in the country, thus reproducing more broadly a rule that has historically been part of the country's constitutional provisions.

As a consequence, the Constitution has dedicated a full article to religious matters.

Article 10:

- 1) There is no official religion in the Republic of Albania.
- 2) The state is neutral in matters of faith and conscience and guarantees the freedom of expression in public life.
- 3) The state recognizes the equality of religious communities.
- 4) The state and religious communities respect each other's independence and cooperate for the benefit of each and every one.
- 5) Relations between the state and religious communities shall be governed by the agreements reached between their representatives and the Council of Ministers. These agreements are ratified by the Assembly.
- 6) Religious communities are legal entities. They are independent toward the administration of their property according to their principles, rules and laws, insofar as the interests of third parties are not affected.

In this way, the traditional legislation on religious communities is restored which, as we have seen, has distant and thoughtful origins in Albanian law. With this provision, the atheist parenthesis introduced with the suppression of religious communities by the 1967 decree closes and resumes the legal tradition relating to the activity of religious communities with civil legal personality.

Article 18 of the Constitution establishes a fundamental principle — that of equality. All are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious and philosophical opinion, economic, social situation, right to education, and parental belonging. Nobody can be discriminated against for the reasons just mentioned, if not for justified reason.

The State guarantees, pursuant to Article 20, the rights of ethnic minorities who enjoy equal rights and freedoms before the law, can freely express

their ethnic, cultural belonging, receive education in their mother tongue, and can meet in organizations and groups to defend their interests and their identity.

Article 24 attributes to the State the role of guarantor of the right to declare and practice publicly the religion of belonging. The Constitution has the merit of balancing the principle of impartiality of the state in religious matters and that of state protection of the right of religious communities to participate in the public life of the country.

On an individual level, Article 24 guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion and the right to choose, change, and manifest one's religion and beliefs, privately or publicly, through worship, education, and the celebration of religious functions. When it states in point 24.3 that "no one can be forced or deprived of the right to participate in a religious community or its practices" the Constitution takes up the same provision contained in Constitutions such as the Czech or Lithuanian, but common to many Eastern countries.²⁴

Religious communities in Albania, as legal entities, have independence in the administration of their properties according to their principles, rules, and canons, relations between the state and religious communities are regulated on the basis of agreements. They can also recourse the Constitutional Court regarding the issues connected to their interests.²⁵

Albanian legislation is rich in laws and bylaws that regulate in detail the religious conventions but are also an expression of tolerance, acceptance, and harmony in the country. By law, the Office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination receives and processes discrimination complaints, including those related to religious practices. The law specifies that the State Committee on Cults, under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Prime Minister, regulates relations between government and religious groups, protects freedom of religion, and promotes interfaith cooperation and understanding. The law also instructs the committee to keep records and statistics on foreign religious groups seeking help, and to support foreign religious group workers in obtaining residence permits.

The law allows religious communities to run educational institutions as well as to build and administer religious cemeteries on the lands that those

²⁴Giovanni Cimbalo, *Pluralismo confessionale e comunità religiose in Albania*, Bononia University Press, ISBN 978-88-7395-762-1, pg. 129.

²⁵Even though they have this right, they have not yet brink a case to the Constitution Court.

communities own. In 2009,²⁶ a special law was adopted on state budget financing religious communities.

5.3 Religious Harmony in Albania, Between Myths and Truth

Religious harmony in Albania is considered an undeniable value for every Albanian. This value has its roots in the Albanian society as such, rather than a value created by its practical application. Albanians accept religious harmony in terms of a belief, cultural, and social policy in the country, despite the historical, legal, and political changes in the country.

Albanians lead a secular, legal-oriented life but, on the other hand, have a very high level of tolerance for the organization and functioning of the underlying communities in the country, accepting new communities without any differentiation or conditionality compared to other communities.

What is very important to note is the fact that Albanians acknowledge religious diversity but do not accept that one religion will prevail over another. This is a very interesting element of harmony in Albania, as avoiding the hierarchy of one religion over another, all acceptance is developed and promoted as a distinctive feature.

In the cultural aspect, religion occupies a very important place in the manifestation of religious beliefs through the holidays. In Albania, every holiday of every religious faith is celebrated. Albanians also celebrate the holidays of their individual religious beliefs as well as those of others. Currently, in Albania, the following are celebrated: Nevruz Day, Catholic Easter Sunday, Orthodox Easter Sunday, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Adha Day, Mother Teresa's Day of Christmas, Christmas, and Ramadan Month. These celebrations are peaceful and in mutual respect for the rituals of everyone.

Given the historical legal development of religious tolerance in Albania, maintaining social cohesion and religious tolerance and harmony, even in turbulent times, has been a remarkable achievement.²⁷

So far, the Albanian state has signed five agreements with the communities: Catholics, Muslims, Orthodox, Bektashi, and Evangelicals. The

²⁶Law No.10 140, dated 15 May 2009 on the financing from the state budget of the religious communities, which have signed agreements with the council of ministers.

²⁷Study on Religious Tolerance in Albania, UNDP, Programi I Kombeve te Bashkuara per Zhvillim, 2018, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20tolerance%20albania.pdf>

institutionalization of these reports has also contributed to religious tolerance and harmony in Albania.

The Religious Tolerance Report in Albania²⁸ has concluded that the foundations of religious tolerance in Albania are deeply rooted in social traditions and culture and do not come from the consciousness, knowledge, or practice of religious rites. As they recognize the role of religious leaders in fostering religious tolerance nowadays and throughout history, Albanians place greater importance on the legal and practical separation between state and religion; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; secularism as a feature of society; and national sentiment as key factors enabling religious tolerance. Religious tolerance as a fundamental value of Albanian society constitutes an element of unity for citizens of different religious backgrounds in the country.

While traditional religions are seen as part of a shared culture, they are not seen as insurmountable obstacles to mutual understanding and cooperation between religious divisions. These values of Albanians have not come as a requirement of the time but are the result of a particular history and culture. So, we may say that religious harmony in Albania lies between myth and truth. Both of these unite in the geo-political position of Albania in the Balkans and in Europe in particular. This position has served as an element of union between different religions, but also as an element of separation between east and west, between Catholicism and Muslimism. The relationship between the recognition and acceptance of a particular religion is still an unknown relation. As long as this report has not created conflicts, it remains intact and unexplored.

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²⁸ Study on Religious Tolerance in Albania, UNDP, Programi I Kombeve të Bashkuara për Zhvillim, 2018, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20tolerance%20albania.pdf>

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