



**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND INTERFAITH  
HARMONY IN PROMOTING SOCIAL PEACE:  
A CASE STUDY OF ALBANIA**

**BY  
HYSNI SKURA**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCES AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of religion, religious communities, religious leadership, and interfaith harmony in Albania, as key factors in building a moderate and inclusive society by fostering and promoting religious, humanitarian, and social peace values as the main foundation for societal development. It assesses Albanian society's perception of the role and correlation between religion, dialogue, interfaith harmony, and the process of building social peace in the Albanian reality. Additionally, the study objectively evaluates the extent to which religious communities in Albania have contributed to the preservation and construction to peace. Within the framework of achieving the main objectives of this work, several research questions and a primary hypothesis have been developed. This hypothesis and research questions enable readers to better understand how religion, religious communities, and interfaith harmony in Albania influence the promotion and development of social peace and peace-building.

The thesis employs a mixed methodology, including qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed approach provides a broader perspective on the subject, combining qualitative data from interviews, observations, and surveys with quantitative data from reviewed literature. It also utilizes the Likert scale correlation coefficient, statistical distribution of percentages, and survey research design. Additionally, the ANOVA statistical data analysis platform is used to determine the significance of the interaction between variables. In the

process of realizing this thesis, a comprehensive review and evaluation of a wide range of literature have been conducted, assessing various aspects such as religion, politics, interfaith dialogue, etc., and their correlation, analyzing the works of pioneer authors such as Galtung, Lederach, Abu Nimer, Elbasani, etc.

The findings of this thesis suggest that while religion may significantly influence internal and international events, it is essential to approach religious knowledge with an understanding of the context in which it exists. Understanding the role of religion in a globalized world can provide insight into how it impacts local policies and interinstitutional relationships within the country. Among other things, this thesis demonstrates that raising awareness of interfaith dialogue among people should be approached in various ways, with the help of all relevant actors, not just educational institutions. This study suggests that educational leaders, policymakers, religious communities, and society as a whole should continuously invest in interfaith harmony and dialogue as they are key elements in societal development and the promotion of social peace.

***Keywords:*** religion, social peace, interfaith dialogue, peacemaking, Albania

## **ABSTRAKT**

Ky punim shkencor synon të kontribuojë në studimin e fesë, komuniteteve fetare, lidhshimit fetar dhe harmonisë ndërfaqetare në Shqipërisë, si faktorët kryesorë për ndërtimin e një shoqërie të moderuar dhe përfshirëse, duke promovuar vlerat fetare, humane dhe paqes sociale si gurthemel kryesor për përparimin e shoqërive. Ai mat perceptimin e shoqërisë shqiptare mbi rolin dhe korrelacionin midis fesë, dialogut, harmonisë ndërfaqetare me procesin e ndërtimit të paqes sociale në realitetin Shqiptar. Gjithashtu, në mënyrë krejt objektive, studimi vlerëson si dhe sa kanë kontribuar komunitetet fetare në Shqipëri në ruajtjen dhe ndërtimin e paqes. Në kuadër të realizimit të objektivave kryesore të këtij punimi janë zhvilluar disa pyetje kërkimore si dhe një hipotezë kryesore. Këto supozime dhe pyetje kërkimore bëjnë të mundur për lexuesit që të kuptojnë më mirë se si feja, komunitetet fetare dhe harmonia ndërfaqetare në Shqipëri ndikojnë në promovimin dhe zhvillimin e paqes sociale dhe ndërtimin e paqes.

Teza përdor një metodologji të përzier, duke përfshirë metoda cilësore dhe sasore. Kjo qasje e përzier ofron një këndvështrim më të gjerë të temës, duke kombinuar të dhënat cilësore nga intervistat, vëzhgimet dhe anketat me të dhënat sasore nga literatura e vlerësuar. Gjithashtu përdor koeficientin e korrelacionit të shkallës Likert, shpërndarjen statistikore të përqindjes dhe dizajnin e hulumtimit të anketës. Përveç kësaj, platforma e analizimit të të dhënave statistikore ANOVA përdoret për të përcaktuar rëndësinë e ndërveprimit midis variablave. Në kuadër të realizimit të kësaj teze është kryer një rishikim dhe vlerësim i një literature të gjerë, duke vlerësuar aspekte të ndryshme si, feja, politika, dialogu ndërfaqetar, etj. dhe korrelacioni midis tyre, duke analizuar veprat e autorëve pionierë si Galtung, Lederach, Abu Nimer, Elbasani etj.

Gjetjet e këtij punimi shkencor sugjerojnë se ndërsa feja mund të ndikojë ndjeshëm në ngjarjet e brendshme dhe ndërkombëtare, është thelbësore t'i qasemi njohurive fetare me një kuptim të kontekstit në të cilin ajo ekziston. Duke kuptuar rolin e fesë në një botë të globalizuar, është e mundur të fitohet njohuri se si ajo ndikon në politikat lokale dhe marrëdhëniet ndërinstucionale në vend. Ndër të tjera, kjo tezë dëshmon se ndërgjegjësimi i njerëzve mbi dialogun ndërfetar, duhet të bëhet në mënyra të ndryshme, me ndihmën e të gjithë aktorëve përkatës, jo vetëm të institucioneve arsimore. Ky studim sugjeron që udhëheqësit e arsimit, politikëbërësit, komunitetet fetare dhe shoqëria në tërësi duhet të investojnë në mënyrë të vazhdueshme mbi harmoninë dhe dialogun ndërfetar pasi janë elementë kyç në zhvillimin e shoqërisë dhe promovimin e paqes sociale.

**Fjalë kyçe:** *fe, paqe sociale, dialog ndërfetar, ndërtim paqeje, Shqipëri.*

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my mother, father, two brothers, and my wife. Without their firm support, I wouldn't have been able to achieve all that I have in my academic and professional journey. Their constant encouragement has helped me overcome every obstacle and develop my skills. I am immensely grateful to have them as my biggest motivation as I embark on a new career journey.

*To my family!*



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I must also express my deepest appreciation to the professors of the defense jury, whose suggestions and feedback greatly contributed to consolidating this study.

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all data in this document was gathered and presented in accordance with ethical standards and scholarly guidelines. Additionally, I certify that, in accordance with the requirements of such regulations and conduct, I have properly cited and referenced all data and findings that are not unique to this work.

Hysni Skura  
May 2024

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>UN:</b>	UNITED NATIONS
<b>IDM:</b>	INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND MEDIATION
<b>MCA:</b>	MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF ALBANIA
<b>ACCH:</b>	ALBANIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
<b>AOCH:</b>	AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH
<b>IRCA:</b>	INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA
<b>UNESCO:</b>	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
<b>WB:</b>	WESTERN BALKANS

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS OF THE CANDIDATE

### A. Journal Publications

1. Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing, The Revival of Religion in Albania After 1990: The Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic Communities, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Lisen Bashkurti & Hysni Skura, <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jppw/article/view/17797>
2. SIBATIK JOURNAL Social, Economics, Culture, Technology, and Education, The Right Way to Preach Islam: The Case of Albania, Hysni Skura, <https://publish.ojs-indonesia.com/index.php/SIBATIK/article/view/868/650>
3. Eurasian Journal of Social and Economic Research (EJSER), Ankara, 30 November 2022, Family communication as the key to solving family conflicts: a socio-religious perspective, Hysni Skura. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/3122856>
4. Peace, Conflict and Developments in the Western Balkans, Albana Cekrezi & Hysni Skura, <https://content-select.com/de/portal/media/view/6026adff-41a8-4edc-949b-4fa7b0dd2d03>
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## **B. Conferences**

1. Sixth International Conference on Humanities - ICH 2019 "Gender Studies: Law, Media and Society", Beder University, Tirana, 05/30/2019, Albana Cekrezi & Hysni Skura, [https://ichl.beder.edu.al/uploads/ICH%206%20Proceeding%20%20perfundimtar,%2030.05.2019-22.11.2019\).pdf](https://ichl.beder.edu.al/uploads/ICH%206%20Proceeding%20%20perfundimtar,%2030.05.2019-22.11.2019).pdf)
2. International Conference on Scientific and Innovative Studies, the right way to preach Islam the Albanian Case 2023, <https://as-proceeding.com/index.php/icsis>
3. International Journal of Advanced Natural Sciences and Engineering Researches, Kur'ani Kerim ve Kitab-i Mukaddeste Hukuki Açidan Aileye Bakış, Hysni Skura 2023. <https://as-proceeding.com/index.php/icsis/article/view/594>
4. 8th International Congress on Innovative Scientific Approaches, Samsun, Turkey 23-24 November 2022, Peace Education in Western Balkans, Hysni Skura.
5. 12th International Online Conference on Social Researches and Behavioral Sciences, Turkey, November 12-13, 2022 Religious Education: A Must for Contemporary Societies, Hysni Skura.

# CHAPTER

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. The history of the interfaith harmony in the Albanian context

Albanian culture and heritage boast a unique model of religious harmony that has persisted throughout history, leaving an indelible mark on society and families. This coexistence is an exemplary standard of inter-religious, inter-ethnic, and intercultural harmony that has benefited both politics and moral values. Throughout the studied period of Albanian history, religion has played an essential role in the dialogue between civilizations. Despite the division, Albanians have maintained a remarkable level of religious tolerance and coexistence throughout history. The history of the Albanian people offers an almost unique model in this regard. The well-founded religious understanding among Albanians has not led to conflict or violence but has instead fostered a culture of mutual respect and understanding. Religious harmony is now a critical identifying value for Albanian society, and it continues to be a source of pride for Albanians worldwide. Albanians have set an excellent example of inter-religious, inter-ethnic, and intercultural harmony and coexistence, which serves as a model for other societies to follow.

The Albanian tradition of coexistence and interfaith harmony is a precious gem that demands our utmost attention and preservation (Kruja, 2008). Throughout Albanian history, we have witnessed the state leaders promoting unity among Albanians, such as King Zog, who swore upon the Quran and Bible on his first day of power. The solidarity and religious tolerance among Albanians were notably displayed by religious leaders like Luigj Bumçi (*He was a clergyman, bishop, diplomat and member of the Supreme Council that emerged from the Congress of Lushnja*), Father Gjergj Fishta (*was a Franciscan friar, educator and chairman*

*of the commission for drafting the alphabet of the Albanian language at the Congress of Manastir), Mehdi Bey Frasheri (He served as prime Minister of Albania during 1930) , Mihal Turtulli (He served as an oculist doctor, a politician, he was the minister of education in 1914), Vehbi Dibra (was the mufti, signatory of the Declaration of Independence of Albania, the first Chairman of the Eldership of Albania, the first Chairman of the Muslim Community of Albania, among the best commentators of the Koran in the Albanian language and Albanian intellectuals), and Fan Noli (was an orthodox cleric, politician, prime minister of Albania in 1924) etc. These leaders and more worked together in Albania or abroad to defend the Albanian cause. Since the collapse of communism in Albania, the reopening of religious institutions has allowed Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox to take part in each other's religious celebrations and reopening ceremonies, exemplifying the continued unity and religious harmony among Albanians. Despite its small size, Albania boasts a rich and robust culture that can serve as a model for other countries in the region and Europe at large (Elbasani, 2017). Religion has long played a central role in Albanian culture, and in societies like this, it has often been utilized as a tool for conflict resolution. Today, one of the most pressing issues is the need for dialogue.*

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of survey data in the Albanian context to examine the impact of interfaith harmony on social peace. By applying survey techniques, this research aims to collect the viewpoints and observations of public perception on the varied religious backgrounds in Albania. The objective is to identify the essential factors that promote interfaith harmony and its influence on social peace and cohesion. To gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the role of religious communities, interfaith harmony and social peace in Albania, our study utilizes a meticulously crafted survey questionnaire. The survey delves into respondents' demographics, their involvement in interfaith activities, their perspectives on interfaith relationships, and their beliefs on how much interfaith harmony contributes to social harmony. To ensure that my study is both valid and realizable, I've committed a sample of survey with individuals from Albania's various religious communities. This sample includes participants of varying ages, genders, professions, ethnicities, and religious affiliations in order to capture a wide range of viewpoints.

In addition, this research provides a descriptive exploration of the nature and content of religious communities, leaders, interfaith harmony, and its role in promoting social peace in the Albanian context through the use of survey data analysis. Our study's findings help to identify the factors that foster interfaith harmony, highlight the issues that require resolution, and showcase the practical advantages of encouraging peaceful coexistence between religious groups. The descriptive analysis of our survey results provides empirical support for the discussion of interfaith relationships and generates valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and academics who aim to advance social peace through interfaith initiatives.

Moreover, the study begins by examining the respondents' demographic details, including age, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. This analysis gives a thorough understanding of the sample's makeup and permits potential responses to vary depending on these factors. To determine the level of interfaith engagement among participants, survey data is analyzed. This includes tracking their participation in interreligious events like joint religious services, dialogue gatherings, or neighborhood projects. The analysis looks at how frequently, what kind of engagements they are, and how effective people think they are. The thesis at hand is a comprehensive piece of work consisting of seven chapters, each of which delves into a specific area of study. The primary focus of this thesis is to provide an in-depth analysis of various topics related to international relations. It provides definitions of essential terms that are frequently used within the scope of the thesis. In addition, it discusses the historical perspective of the interfaith harmony in the Albanian context, highlighting significant events that shaped the countries' identity. Moreover, the correlation between politics, religion, and international relations is explained. The impact of politics on religion and the impact of religion to politics is discussed. Through this thesis I adopted a clear methodology that helped to collect data, and to analyze it, which led to draw conclusions and recommendation for further researchers. The literature review chapter examines the existing literature on religion, religious communities, politics, international relations and identifies gaps that this thesis aims to fill.

The focus of this data analysis is on the public's perception of interreligious dialogue, harmony, coexistence, and interfaith relations in Albania and their impact on promoting social values. The purpose is to evaluate the level of respect, trust, and understanding

amongst different religious groups. Furthermore, the analysis will identify any obstacles or challenges to interfaith harmony, while also highlighting factors that contribute to positive and constructive interfaith relationships, societal peace, and more. The results of the survey will be analyzed to determine the impact of interfaith harmony on social harmony in Albania. This will include examining the perception of reduced conflict, improved community cohesion, and the role of interfaith dialogue in preventing conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence. The open-ended questions in the survey will provide valuable qualitative data that will be used to identify common themes, emerging patterns, and varying viewpoints on the role and impact of interfaith harmony on social peace. I will use a thematic analysis approach to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and interfaith narratives.

This thesis addresses as the main research problem the role of religion and religious communities in shaping the culture of the Albanian society, discussing how religious beliefs and practices influence social norms and values. Additionally, it explores the relationship between religion and politics, including the role of religious leaders in political decision-making. Religion has had a significant impact on Albanian society, both historically and in the present day. Albania is a predominantly Muslim country, with a significant minority of Christians, and religious beliefs and practices have played an important role in shaping the country's social, cultural, and political landscape.

Islam was introduced to Albania during the Ottoman Empire, and it has been a significant part of Albanian identity ever since. Christianity, too, has played an important role in Albanian history, with the country being home to a number of ancient churches and monasteries. In the present day, religion continues to be an important part of Albanian society. Religious institutions and leaders play a significant role in shaping public opinion and even influencing political decision-making such as the case of the draft law on family issues (KNFSH, 2021). Religious communities have also played a key role in promoting social peace and reconciliation in the wake of the country's tumultuous history. The impact of religion on Albanian society is complex and multifaceted. While the impact of religion on Albanian society is complex and multifaceted, it is clear that religious communities continue to be powerful agents of social cohesion and peace.

In today's interconnected world, people from diverse backgrounds are able to collaborate more easily than ever before, using various forms of communication to work towards



solutions for shared challenges. In this context, religion can serve as an important source of inspiration for both individuals and communities, promoting international and local cooperation. Nevertheless, creating a strong and prosperous society requires a solid foundation, beginning with healthy families and homes. When individuals have a secure and nurturing home environment, they are better equipped to make positive contributions to society, fostering the growth of healthy communities.

Traditional religious teachings have played a crucial role in promoting tolerance and understanding across Albania, bridging divides and strengthening bonds of unity across ethnic and national lines. By adhering to their respective religious beliefs, individuals can develop a greater sense of empathy and respect for others, resulting in a more cooperative and harmonious society. It is essential to emphasize the importance of maintaining the longstanding religious harmony and peaceful coexistence that has been fostered throughout history. This requires a collective effort to actively combat and prevent any negative influences that may affect the Albanian people, particularly those residing outside of Albania. By doing so, we can ensure that our society remains inclusive, respectful, and tolerant of diverse beliefs and cultural practices. Only through such measures can we preserve the fabric of our community and promote a harmonious and peaceful coexistence among all members of the Albanian society.

In addition, this research aims to explore and investigate a set of questions and hypotheses in order to achieve our intended outcomes. I will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the relevant data and information collected throughout the study period, to arrive at findings that enhance the understanding of the subject matter. Our goal is to ensure rigorous and methodical research, with a focus on accuracy and objectivity, to generate reliable and valid results for decision-making and policy formulation. Moreover, the hypothesis addressed in this research is that (H) *religious communities and interfaith harmony positively impact social peace by fostering a sense of belonging, moral values and promoting mutual understanding among individuals of different religious affiliations in Albania*. This will serve as the main driver to realize the objectives of this research. In addition to hypothesis, there are research questions that will address different important issues like (1) *how do religious communities and interfaith harmony affect social peace?* (2) *Why religious communities are important for social peace?* All these components will give a clearer image to the goal that I intended and will shed light for further academic research on similar topics. Furthermore, in more details the aim of this study is to provide valuable insights into inter-religious dialogue, harmony, and coexistence, fostering dialogue and understanding which

are crucial for promoting social peace in Albania. The research draws on questionnaires, interviews, and first-hand literature. While there are already numerous works, papers, and theses on interfaith dialogue and harmony, this thesis puts special emphasis on the vital role of religious leaders in driving this phenomenon. In addition, the text emphasizes the significance of achieving a state of harmony and mutual understanding among diverse religions and faiths. It highlights that this is not something that can be taken for granted, but rather it requires a thoughtful investment of time and effort, along with a well-planned approach to ensure effective implementation.

In addition, the purpose of this study is to provide a useful tool for academics who wish to conduct research, write articles, and publish papers in this particular field. Our research endeavors to investigate the various opportunities for peaceful coexistence between diverse religions, cultures, races, and ethnicities. I intend to achieve this by analyzing the historical context of Albania, thereby enhancing scientific knowledge and comprehension of the multifaceted cultural and religious environment of this region. Ultimately, our objective is to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing conversation about interfaith relationships and to encourage greater understanding and harmony among individuals of varying faiths and backgrounds.

Moreover, considering the complexity of this topic and the dynamics of it, this doctoral thesis will serve as a cornerstone to understanding the role of religion and representative institutions of religion to promoting peaceful coexistence and harmonious relations among different religious communities, the role and contribution of interfaith harmony and social peace, in the Albanian case etc. It is important to note that this research sheds light on the Albanian experience, providing important insights into the potential of interfaith harmony as a catalyst for social peace in a world marked by religious diversity and conflicts. The study emphasizes the value of encouraging religious communities to be tolerant and understanding of one another. It highlights how interfaith harmony can bridge gaps between different religions, promoting a deeper understanding and acceptance of diversity by examining the initiatives and behaviors of Albanian religious groups in fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Such comprehension serves as the foundation for social harmony and peace.

Furthermore, this research sheds light on effective strategies for combating radicalization and extremism, strategies derived from the activity of religious communities and leaders. It highlights the significance of interfaith dialogue in promoting these common values and countering divisive ideologies, drawing on successful interfaith initiatives in Albania that have marginalized radical elements and fostered a culture of peace. The findings of this research are valuable in informing policy interventions and methods for fostering social harmony and preventing radicalization. Indeed, building interfaith harmony is essential to strengthening social cohesion within communities. The Albanian case study provides a model for how interfaith initiatives can bridge religious divides and build trust between people of different faiths. By examining the factors that contribute to effective interfaith cooperation and emphasizing the benefits of increased social cohesion, this research offers valuable insights for creating effective tactics to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

In order to achieve success in peacebuilding efforts within areas affected by conflict, it is vital to understand the role and importance of interfaith harmony. Through an examination of the Albanian case, where interreligious tensions have historically been present, this study sheds light on the transformative power of interfaith dialogue in restoring trust and fostering reconciliation. The findings can offer valuable guidance to peacebuilding practitioners, policymakers, and academics working in similar contexts, providing insights into effective methods for healing societal divides and establishing long-lasting peace. For other societies grappling with religious diversity and striving for peaceful coexistence, the research on interfaith harmony in Albania can serve as a model. By examining the specific tactics, procedures, and lessons learned from the Albanian experience, this study offers helpful advice to communities and policymakers worldwide. It highlights the universal principles that underpin effective interfaith cooperation while emphasizing the importance of context-specific approaches.

Exploring the impact of interfaith harmony on social peace, particularly in the context of Albania, carries significant implications for fostering peaceful coexistence, mitigating extremism, strengthening social unity, and advancing peacebuilding efforts. This research sheds light on the unique experiences and initiatives of Albanian religious communities, contributing to the global comprehension of interfaith dialogue as a powerful driver of social

peace. The insights gleaned from this study can inform policy-making, interventions, and academic discussions, promoting greater harmony and mutual understanding among diverse religious groups worldwide.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

This study aims to present important data on inter-religious dialogue, harmony, and coexistence in Albania and their correlation to social peace. The data will be gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and literature review. While there are existing works on interfaith dialogue and harmony, this study will also focus on the inclusion of "religious education" as a key element affecting this phenomenon, known in Albania and beyond. The importance of this reality for Albanian society will also be emphasized. The paper aims to highlight that harmony and dialogue between religions and faiths require investment and a good plan to move forward.

Some of the expected benefits are as follows:

- Identifying the role of religious communities in maintaining social peace;
- Unveiling and highlighting important issues regarding the history of Albania in the context of interfaith activity;
- Serving and promoting scientific knowledge for academicians conducting research, articles, and papers in this field;
- Identifying the potential for coexistence among religions, cultures, and races;

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the role of religions and inter-religious dialogue in peacebuilding and to create a framework for this study, it is necessary to define a few concepts first and then specify the place of the peacebuilding approach in theory. Beginning with the concept of peace, answering the questions of what conflict is, what causes it, and with what strategies it can be resolved, will form the theoretical basis for understanding peacebuilding. Then, the dimensions of peacebuilding are put forward and its dimension of inter-religious dialogue is examined.

In a time of violent conflict or human rights violations, the first priority in establishing peace is to stop violence. However, the most effective way to achieve peace, not just a ceasefire, is to implement short-term and long-term strategies. These are conflict resolution, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. In addition, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peacebuilding strategies, which generally express the approaches of interventionist foreign powers, are also mentioned in the literature.

*Conflict Soothe* is one of the strategies used to stop conflict. This type of strategy aims at separating warring parties from each other to reduce hostilities, establishing security crossings for humanitarian aid, and initiating peace talks to end the conflict. It includes short-term measures and little attention is paid to the underlying causes of the conflict. The objectives of this strategy are achieved through Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping (Özerdem, 2013, p. 54)

*Conflict Resolution*, aims that the conflicting parties accept each other's continued existence in a voluntary agreement and stop all acts of violence against each other. This means transforming the conflict from a violent phase to a nonviolent phase. Depending on what the parties want and agree on, conflict resolution may include wider dimensions (Wallenstein,

2002, p. 10). Conditions such as ensuring goodwill for negotiations, determining mutual relations rules, determining suitable common goals for both of the rival parties, transferring information and diplomatic persuasion are frequently used within the scope of non-coercive methods. The fact that non-coercive methods do not provide the expected results causes intervening foreign powers to apply incentives or pressure from time to time in economic and military terms.

*The Conflict Transformation* strategy seeks to eliminate conflicts by identifying their broader social and political causes. This model is relationship-centered and focuses on long-term process identification strategies, cultural, contextual or structural issues including vindictiveness, relationships, and structures.

*Preventive Diplomacy* is the action taken to prevent and limit the emergence of disagreements between the parties and the progress of existing disagreements. The most desirable and effective operation of this strategy is to reduce tension before it turns into violent conflict (Galtung J. , 1992).

The goal in *Peacekeeping* is to facilitate the transition from a state of conflict to a state of peace. It is the activity of separating the armed forces of the parties from each other and dealing with civilian tasks such as monitoring, controlling and supporting the humanitarian response. These projects have been initiated by national/international institutions such as the military forces of states, the UN and regional organizations.

*Peacebuilding*, unlike Peacekeeping, covers a wider range of issues and is addressed by a wider range of actors. There are two different models of the establishment of peace. The first model, the Diplomatic Facility of Peace, is closer to keeping the traditional peace; it is mainly about political mediation, which encourages the parties to the conflict to negotiate rather than violent confrontations. It can only be applied with the consent of the parties and is usually carried out in peacekeeping operations. Secondly, the concept of peacebuilding also includes “peace-enforcement” as an important type of peacebuilding, especially in some cases where combatants target civilians and violate human rights; The power of peacekeeping can pass to the administration of peace enforcement, which allows the use of

threat or force to persuade the parties to the conflict to negotiate. Economic sanctions and military interventions are common methods of coercion (Ki-Moon, 2007).

Compared to Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, the difference of Peacebuilding analyzed in the next subsection lies in its effectiveness especially in the post-conflict period. Focusing on the core sources of conflict, it “concerns programs that include enhancing public safety, promoting economic recovery, facilitating social recovery, and developing democratic institutions”. Its medium and particularly long-term nature places Peacebuilding at the center of the peace process (Özerdem, 2013, p. 66).

When all of the mentioned strategies are considered, the peace process can be realized in the most effective way. While Conflict Relief, Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping strategies are more focused on achieving negative peace; Conflict Transforming and Peacebuilding aims to produce a set of measures that will ensure positive peace. It is very difficult to distinguish sharply between the Conflict Transforming and Peacebuilding approaches because both are essentially comprehensive and conflict-solving strategies. In the literature, this process is sometimes referred to as “peace building” and sometimes as “conflict transformation”. In the continuation of the study, this process is described as “peace building”.

## **2.1. Concepts related to interfaith harmony, tolerance and international relations**

The complex relationship between peace and religion can be examined through important concepts such as peace, negative peace, positive peace, structural peace, cultural peace, social peace, peacebuilding, and conflict. Peace, as a central theme, includes both the absence of conflict (negative peace) and the presence of justice and equality (positive peace). Structural peace addresses the underlying societal structures that promote harmony, while cultural peace emphasizes the role of cultural norms and values in fostering peaceful coexistence. Social peace underscores the importance of community relationships and social cohesion. Peacebuilding involves proactive efforts to establish lasting peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting reconciliation. Understanding conflict is crucial as it provides insight into the disruptions that threaten peace and highlights the necessity of resolving disputes to achieve lasting harmony. Together, these concepts provide a

comprehensive framework for analyzing how religious beliefs and practices can contribute to or hinder the pursuit of peace in various contexts.

### **2.1.1. Peace**

Although the concept of peace seems to be a simple word, it is a concept with different meanings. In the (Oxford, 2019) dictionary, the word peace has various meanings, such as “the period in which there is no war or the war has stopped”, “*public order and security*”, “*friendship*”, “*peace of mind*” and “*silence*”. The meanings of peace are used, as can be seen, depending on the situation. The meaning of peace in the discipline of Peace Studies is generally divided into two as positive peace and negative peace. This distinction was first introduced by Johan Galtung in 1967. According to Galtung, negative peace means the absence of forms of military violence (Galtung J. , 1967, p. 12) This approach aims to prevent conflict, destructive behavior and destructive attitude. Positive peace, on the other hand, means the absence of military violence, as well as the absence of forms of violence that prevent situations such as meeting people’s basic needs and justice, unlike negative peace. This approach not only prevents but also has a constructive feature, it tries to provide positive peace, conflict resolution and transformation, constructive behavior and constructive attitude. (Galtung J. , 1967, p. 67)

Similarly, to what Galtung states, Lederach adopts a peace approach that not only prevents destructive behavior but supports long-term, comprehensive constructive behavior. He defines peace as a “*continuously developing process*” instead of seeing it as a static “*final situation*” (Lederach J. P., 2014, p. 21). The process leading to positive peace is discussed widely and this process includes developments in the socio-economic, security, political and justice fields. However, in order to understand and realize the peace process, it is necessary to define the concept of conflict first.

Peace can be understood and conceptualized in various ways, depending on the context and perspectives involved. Here are some common types of peace along with brief definitions and academic references:



### **2.1.2. Negative Peace**

Negative peace is a term used to describe a state of tranquility and calmness where there is no visible conflict or hostility, such as the absence of war. This state is generally characterized by the absence of warfare or explicit physical aggression. However, it is important to note that even in the absence of visible conflict, underlying issues and grievances may still exist. Johan Galtung, a renowned peace scholar, was the first to introduce this concept in his groundbreaking research. Negative peace is particularly crucial in conflict resolution efforts as it lays the foundation for peaceful coexistence and paves the way for addressing underlying issues that may lead to conflict in the future (Galtung J. , 1969).

### **2.1.3. Positive Peace**

Positive peace is a comprehensive concept that goes beyond the mere absence of violence. It focuses on identifying and addressing the root causes of conflict, while creating an environment that promotes sustainable and lasting peace. This involves a range of factors such as social justice, equality, and access to nonviolent methods of resolving disputes.

Johan Galtung is widely acknowledged for his contribution to the development of the positive peace concept. He argued that peace is not just about ending wars and conflicts but also about addressing the underlying structural, cultural, and systemic issues that lead to violence and conflict. By addressing these issues, positive peace seeks to create a society that is just, equitable, and inclusive, where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive and live in peace (Galtung J. , 1996)

### **2.1.4. Structural Peace**

Structural peace is a concept that emphasizes the importance of addressing the underlying structural inequalities and injustices that often contribute to conflicts and violence in society. This approach recognizes that issues such as poverty, discrimination, inequality, and lack of access to resources can create tensions and exacerbate existing conflicts. Therefore, it seeks to identify and address the root causes of these issues, rather than just treating their

symptoms. Structural peace aims to create a more equitable and just society by promoting policies and practices that promote fairness and equality. This may involve measures such as economic development, social welfare programs, education and training, and legal reforms. By addressing these structural issues, societies can build stronger, more resilient communities that are less prone to conflict and violence. Moreover, the goal of structural peace is to build a more peaceful and prosperous world for all (Richmond, 2010).

#### **2.1.5. Cultural Peace**

Cultural peace is a concept that prioritizes the significance of cultural understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity in the creation and maintenance of peaceful societies. It involves various activities and initiatives that aim to foster intercultural dialogue, education, and appreciation for different cultural traditions. Its primary objective is to prevent conflict and promote harmony among individuals and communities of different cultural backgrounds. Cultural peace involves creating an environment where people can freely express their cultural identities and beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution. It recognizes that cultural diversity is a fundamental aspect of human society and that cultural exchange and interaction can enrich the lives of individuals and communities alike. Therefore, it encourages individuals and communities to embrace cultural differences, celebrate cultural heritage, and work together to create a world that is inclusive, respectful, and peaceful (Avruch, 1998).

#### **2.1.6. Social Peace**

Social peace refers to a state of calm, equilibrium, and amity that prevails within a society. It is marked by the absence of any form of violent conflict, oppression, discrimination, or any other type of social unrest that may disrupt the peaceful coexistence of people. In essence, social peace is a state where justice, equality, and cooperation are upheld among individuals and groups, creating a conducive environment for the pursuit of shared goals and the overall well-being of the community (De Souza, 2012).

A society that enjoys social peace is one where people feel secure, respected, and valued regardless of their gender, race, religion, or any other personal characteristic. Such a society

fosters a sense of mutual trust, empathy, and understanding, which are essential for building strong relationships and promoting social cohesion (Lederach J. P., 2010). This, in turn, helps to reduce tension, conflicts, and misunderstandings that may arise due to differences in opinions, beliefs, or values.

Moreover, social peace encourages people to work together towards a common goal, be it economic, social, or political development. When people are united, they can pool their resources and knowledge, and use them to improve their lives and the lives of others. This collaborative effort can also lead to the creation of a more equitable and just society, where everyone has equal opportunities to succeed and thrive. Social peace is a vital aspect of any healthy society. It is a state where people can live together in harmony, respect, and cooperation, without fear of violence, discrimination, or oppression. Achieving social peace requires the collective effort of everyone in society, and it is a goal worth striving for.

#### **2.1.7. Societal Security**

Societal security is a complex and multifaceted concept. It involves the protection of a society's identity, values, and basic functions (Aboudouh, 2022). Societal security also includes ensuring the well-being and safety of the population, as well as the ability to maintain critical social functions in the face of various threats. This requires coordination and organization of different actors at various levels, and the management of complex interactions among economic, technological, social, and cultural factors (Olsen, O.E., Kruke, B.I., & Hovden, J., 2007). Over time, the concept of societal security has evolved from a focus on survival to a broader consideration of a society's well-being and resilience.

#### **2.1.8. Peace Building**

Depending on the definition of the concept of peace, Peacebuilding differs in the scope and time frame of its activities. Mainly it is about the peacebuilding process. In the field of peace studies, the term "Peace Building" was first used in 1976 in Johan Galtung's article "*Three Realistic Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Peacebuilding*" (Galtung J. , 1976). In his work, Galtung focuses on the questions of "What is the structure of peace and how should it be?". Unlike the results of the Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding strategies,

Galtung concludes that in peacebuilding, “structures must be found that will eliminate the causes of war and offer alternatives in cases where war may occur” (Galtung J. , 1976, p. 111). With this work, Galtung drew attention to the “root causes” of conflict and laid the foundation for peacebuilding. In 1992, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, officially coined the term “post-conflict peacebuilding” in his report “An Agenda for Peace”<sup>13</sup>. Post-conflict peacebuilding is “the act of identifying and supporting structures that tend to strengthen and consolidate peace in order to prevent a recurrence of conflict” (Galtung J. , 1992).

Thus, the interventionist approach of foreign power was added to the meaning of peacebuilding. (Lederach J. P., 1997) on the other hand, gave a wider dimension to the meaning of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is not just a 'post-conflict' process, it is a comprehensive concept that includes 'the processes, approaches and stages needed to make conflict more sustainable and transform it into peaceful relations' and therefore encompasses a wide range of activities that precede and follow formal peace agreements (Lederach J. P., 1997, p. 20). The basis of the sustainable transformative approach to peacebuilding is the relationship of the parties involved, and it is argued that this term also has psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and military levels. The biggest contribution of this approach is that it shifts its focus from international to local actors (Lederach J. P., 1997, pp. 44-46).

The concept of Peacebuilding is also included in the article of (Paffenholz, 2009). In his work, Paffenholz presents a systematic analysis of different schools of thought explaining why different actors choose different paths for peacebuilding. In his analysis, he explains the approaches of “peace building in the theories of International Relations” and “peace building in different schools of thought”. In the context of International Relations theories, Realism, Idealism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism theories are discussed. Within the scope of Different Schools of Thought, Conflict Management School, Conflict Resolution School, Complementary School, Conflict Transformation School and Peacebuilding Alternative Discourse School are examined (Paffenholz, 2009, pp. 3-5).

As a result, it is emphasized that when working in the field of Peacebuilding, it is necessary to specify which definition the work will be carried out. This study adopts the transformative

definition of Peacebuilding developed by Lederach, which encompasses international and local efforts at the pre- and post-conflict, psychological, social, economic, political and military levels.

Security Rebuilding is the most urgent of the Peacebuilding tasks. Because protecting the civilian population from the violence that may develop in the new environment becomes a priority. Other phases of peacebuilding cannot progress without a stable environment of security. For this reason, “the rebuilding of security is seen as a prerequisite for long-lasting peace and advanced economic development” (Özerdem, 2013, p. 188). In current peacebuilding processes, security building focuses on four areas: First, the strengthening of the ceasefire, the disarmament of fighters, and the demobilization of troops; Second, the institutionalization of the police, military, intelligence agencies and non-state armed units; Third, the destruction of small arms and landmines, the restoration of the state's monopoly on the use of force, and the fight against poverty; The fourth is the implementation of security programs against threats that may come from outside. Political Reconstruction aims to transform political and governmental institutions into more inclusive, accountable and professional institutions. This dimension generally focuses on three issues: Election Assistance, Public Administration Reform and Reconstruction of the Legal and Judicial System (Özerdem, 2013, pp. 197-200).

### **2.1.9. Conflict**

The history of humanity is full of conflicts, and conflict is one of the factors that most affect the world system and the flow of history. Avoiding conflict is one of the biggest challenges. The question of “*How do we prevent war*” has already given birth to the discipline of International Relations (Özlük, 2016, p. 107) and the discipline is still trying to find a solution to this main question. In this context, great ideas and strategies were developed, but the conflicts never stopped despite all efforts. In addition, in the post-Cold War period, it is seen that the nature of the conflict has evolved into intra-state conflicts rather than interstate conflicts. Between 1989 and 1997, a total of 103 conflicts occurred. 97 of them are in the nature of intra-state conflict (Wallensteen, P., & Sollenberg, M., 1998)

In general, conflict is defined as a struggle between at least two actors at the same time and for incompatible goals (Mitchell, 1981, p. 17) and (Wallensteen, 2002, p. 16). The main sources of incompatible goals are based on the incompatibility between social values and social structure (Mitchell, 1981) and (Lederach J. P., 1997) states that conflict is actually the way problems are noticed and characterizes conflict as the engine of change. Rather than seeing it as a threat, he sees conflict as “an opportunity to grow and better understand ourselves, others, and social structures” (Lederach J. P., 2014, p. 23). However, if the conflict is not given enough attention and cannot be transformed in a timely manner, it can reach a violent stage.

#### **2.1.10. Religion**

It is a fallacy to think that there is a definition of religion that will serve to all the needs of different people. There are many definitions made regarding religion but I have chosen two of them one descriptive and the other one normative definition. Descriptive definition: “Religion is the total attitude of man toward what he considers to be superhuman and worthy of worship, or devotion, or propitiation, or at least of reverence. The normative one is “Religion ought to be characterized by the feeling of dependence on a personal God and dominated by the will to cooperate with God in the conservation and increase of values” (E. S. Brightman, 1925).

The man who lives in constant contact with events and the material world, from the moment he begins to feel his existence, asking about himself and the environment tries to understand what is happening around him. A man who seeks answers to his questions, in addition to science and philosophy, also needs religion. Religion as a social reality, influences the behaviors of people living together and the commentary of life and events that occur (Altaş, N. & Arıcı, İ., 2015, p. 68). Religion as a necessity of the feeling of belief in human nature, is a great need from the aspect of individual and social life. People to meet this need in any period, whether it is of divine origin or not have trusted a religion (Kılavuz, M. A. & Yılmaz, H., 2009, p. 125). Due to the large number of religions, it is impossible to say that there is a religion that everyone likes and practices. Philosophers, social scientists and theologians have tried to describe the concept, which approaches religion, and this has resulted in many

definitions. To give a complete definition of the concept of religion, I have tried to explain it below.

All the religions of the world aim to guide their followers towards eternal happiness in this world and the next and making them better citizens by contributing to their respective societies. To achieve this happiness, they have set some principles that must be followed. Someone who has carefully studied these principles will see that they are not just about faith and worship, but also have an impact on a person's mental and physical health. In general, in all religions of the world, in addition to certain qualities such as patience, tolerance, love, humility, solidarity, there are also some not very popular qualities that harm the body and soul. Actions or principles that are encouraged to be done and that are forbidden aim at the maturation of man physically and mentally. It is already known today that there is a strong connection between body and soul (Köylü, 2012, p. 290).

#### **2.1.11. Religious Community**

A group of people who follow the same religion is referred to as a “religious community.” This community provides its members with a shared set of values and beliefs that form the foundation of their lives. The phrase is used to describe followers of a particular religion who reside in a neighborhood, are not isolated from others, and are not solely devoted to their religion. The phrase can also refer to groups of people from different backgrounds who have come together through their shared religion to form a stronger, more unified community. In a place of worship like a mosque, church, synagogue, or temple, they participate in communal worship. A congregation is the name given to a group of worshipers in many religions. Specifically, a religious community. In our research thesis it is the official community that represents the believers that are affiliated to it. In our case when we speak about religious community, we mean the five officially recognized communities such as Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Bektashi and Evangelical.

#### **2.1.12. Dialogue**

Dialogue is an exchange of information between two or more people. It can be oral or written. It is also a type of literary work, in prose or verse, in which a conversation between

two or more characters is represented. Dialogue can be of several types, such as intercultural, interreligious, social, etc. In which case this term refers to conversations that take place between people of different cultures. It can be done at the institutional level with representatives of different cultures. The objective of this type of dialogue is recognition and understanding between cultures. Themes may be different, but are usually oriented in the field of solidarity, peace, cooperation and mutual respect. With intercultural dialogue, position approach and consensus are usually required.

Dialogue itself has many forms of expression in different ways and concepts. Dialogue should also not be limited to words of tolerance or love, but should be feasible in various religious organizations, in everyday life to become mutual assistance. Another definition of dialogue made by Dr. Ayduz appears as follows: *“The word dialogue means a reciprocal conversation of two or more individuals. In the broadest sense, the word dialogue means dialogue and compromise reached between people belonging to different cultures and nations, based on the principles of civilization”* (Ayduz, 2007).

Dialogue is communication in a tolerant, gentle way, not forcing the followers of different religious groups to accept beliefs or opinions, ideologies by force, but they must be ready to solve various problems in common interests. In order for dialogue to reach an important place a special role must be played by justice. In a thought by John Rawls in his book *The Theory of Justice*, he states: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is the first virtue of the thinking system. “A theory, no matter how elegant and economical, must be rejected or changed if it is untrue, and laws and institutions, however effective and regulated, must be removed if they are unfair” (Rawls, 1999). In short, justice must extend its horizons in every field not only that of communication, dialogue but in every aspect of life.

Dialogue initiatives must be “action-oriented” in the sense of moving beyond simple words and mutual desire and undertakings that bring about real, substantive and meaningful accountability. They should involve all the roots of society and not just scholars or leaders. Finally, dialogue must build mutual awareness and understanding. So, there should be no way for some people to compromise in dialogue where there is a possibility of losing their trust. Dialogue in this way should be only through speech, but if people through this



communication would erase some elements of their belief in religious practice it would cause an extremely great catastrophe. In short, looking at it from a point of view, this situation does not turn out to be a genuine dialogue, because it contradicts the principles of compassion, humility and voluntary acceptance of his faith. All these messages mean that whatever ethnicity of religion is endowed, these individuals of different groups must first of all be aware of the dialogue, the communication between them, the fact that they are human beings, and then consequently come all the solutions to the social issues that can threaten an entire society.

### **2.1.13. Harmony**

A state of peaceful coexistence, agreement, or compatibility between various elements or people is known as harmony. It suggests a state of harmony, balance, or unity in which various elements or entities can coexist, communicate, and support one another without friction or discord. At different scales, harmony can be seen in social interactions, community life, and even in the natural world and the cosmos. It entails a feeling of unity, respect for one another, and comprehension, where differences are recognized and welcomed to form a unified whole. The ability of various religious traditions or belief systems to coexist, engage in dialogue, and work toward shared objectives while respecting each other's differences and fostering peaceful interactions is referred to as interfaith harmony.

### **2.1.14. Coexistence**

Different people, groups, or entities coexist, frequently in close proximity, while recognizing and respecting each other's presence, rights, and differences. This is known as coexistence. It entails the capacity to coexist peacefully and harmoniously with those who come from different backgrounds, ideologies, or points of view. Coexistence places a strong emphasis on the value of shared tolerance, comprehension, and acceptance, in which people or groups refrain from violating or harming the rights of others and instead promote an atmosphere of respect, cooperation, and peaceful cohabitation. A fundamental tenet of creating inclusive communities that value diversity and advance social cohesion is the development of harmonious relationships.

### 2.1.15. Tolerance

Tolerance is a tendency to resist or tolerate the beliefs and practices of other people with whom one may disagree because he or she considers these beliefs or practices to be false or erroneous. (Scanlon, 1996: 226) states that “*tolerance involves an attitude that mediates between wholehearted acceptance and unbridled opposition*”. For an individual to be tolerant, he or she must first have an idea of what it is about in order to disagree with the views of others on the same issue, in order to show a tolerant attitude towards them. A religious individual knows that the true path to salvation belongs to his religion or cult and those who believe in other religions and cults are mistaken and deceived, but who nevertheless chooses to tolerate the beliefs of other people. So, tolerance is not synonymous with a lack of prejudice. It is often assumed that a person without prejudice is tolerant, while those who are prejudiced are intolerant. But this is not always said to be true, because a prejudiced person may be tolerant when he or she is willing to allow the expression of those things to which he or she is prejudiced (Eisenstein, 2008: 18-19). Tolerance is presumed to be a public virtue or a moral attitude in societies with diverse cultures and complexes, because it means acknowledging that shared affiliation in society is more valuable than the disagreements and conflicts that may arise about the nature and direction of society. Tolerance is the acceptance of the fact that other members, despite the differences, have the right to contribute to the definition of our society.

Tolerance of people's views and opinions, including religious identities, is hard work and risky because it involves the possibility that worldviews and opinions with which you may disagree may circulate freely in society and even dominate it, but however it is worth risking tolerance as long as it produces more value than an alternative society of antagonisms and quarrels where the freedoms of individuals and communities are endangered. The spread of tolerance in a democratic state requires that minorities or those who hold the “wrong” side of the distinction should not be denied legal and political rights, continue to benefit from the public benefits offered to all members of society, and requires that the state does not give priority to one particular group over another in the distribution of benefits (Scanlon, 1996: 231).

## 2.2. Literature Review

The significance of religious communities and interfaith harmony in promoting social peace has been widely discussed in academic and public spheres. This topic is particularly relevant in Albania, a country with a diverse religious background and a history of interreligious conflicts. To cultivate peaceful coexistence and establish inclusive societies, it is crucial to comprehend the roles played by religious communities and interfaith harmony. Focusing on the Albanian context, this literature review aims to assess current academic works and studies that highlight the importance of religious communities and interfaith harmony in advancing social peace. Through the synthesis and analysis of various scholarly sources, such as research articles, books, and reports, this review seeks to identify key themes, trends, and gaps in the literature.

The primary goal of this literature review is to investigate the various ways in which Albanian religious communities have contributed to social peace. The review aims to assess the critical roles played by different religious groups in promoting interfaith dialogue, cooperation, and understanding, which ultimately foster greater social cohesion and harmony. Additionally, it seeks to identify the distinct methods, initiatives, and practices employed by religious communities to alleviate interreligious tensions and cultivate peaceful coexistence within Albanian society. Moreover, by examining the impact of interfaith harmony on conflict resolution, reconciliation processes, and the prevention of religiously motivated violence, this literature review aims to highlight the transformative power of interfaith harmony in the Albanian context. The review seeks to clarify the underlying mechanisms through which interfaith harmony contributes to social peace and provide insights into the factors that facilitate successful interreligious collaboration and dialogue by analyzing empirical evidence, theoretical frameworks, and case studies.

Through this literature review, I have discovered valuable resources for enhancing scholarly research and developing effective initiatives and programs to promote interfaith harmony, reduce religious hostility, and foster cohesive and inclusive societies in Albania and beyond. Our analysis of primary and secondary literature reveals a wealth of publications on this topic, including reports and academic articles from reputable organizations such as *UNDP* and *IDM - Institute for Democracy and Mediation*, as well as contributions from esteemed

scholars. However, despite some scientific articles in journals, conference papers, and reports, there is still a need for a comprehensive scientific work on the role and impact of religious communities, leaders, and religion itself in building and sustaining social peace in Albania.

It cannot be denied that the harmony and religious coexistence present in Albania is a remarkable achievement. However, it would be unwise to take it for granted without understanding its origins. By delving into the roots of this treasure, we can equip ourselves to face the challenges and difficulties that may arise for Albanian society and its youth. History is a reliable indicator of a nation's past and future since it has a tendency to repeat itself. Upon examining Albania's history, from its independence from the Ottoman Empire to the present day, we find no instances of conflicts initiated by different clergy. On the contrary, we discover accounts of clergy acting as mediators in resolving conflicts.

Throughout my scientific research, I had the privilege of consulting with a wide literature of experts in the field from all over the world, including renowned authors such as (Weber, 1999) book *“The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”*, (Galtung J. , 1976) *“Three Realistic Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Peacebuilding”*, (Lederach J. P., 1996), *“Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures”* (Habermas, 2008), work *“Notes on Post- Secular Society. New Perspectives Quarterly”* (Fukuyama, 1997), *“The End of History and the Last Man”* Abu Nimer’s book *“Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice”*, Gjergji Sinani’s book *“Feja dhe Edukimi (religion and education)”* (Sinani, 2017), Genti Kruja’s book on *“Shqiptarët përballë sfidave të mirëkuptimit ndërfaqetare”* (Kruja, 2008), and Arolda Elbasani’s research work on *“Islam in the Post-Communist Balkans: Alternative Pathways to God”* (Elbasani, 2017). The published works I utilized, served as the foundation of my thesis, providing both theoretical and methodological support. It's worth noting that there is a plethora of literature available on the subjects of religion, international relations, and peace. Nevertheless, despite this abundance of information, a gap in knowledge persists when it comes to comprehending the Albanian context as a distinct case study. Bearing this in mind, my research was tailored to meet the requirements of my thesis, encompassing a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the subject matter.

Throughout my thesis, I've delved into the traditional concept of peace in Albanian culture and the vital role that religion and religious communities play in promoting peacemaking practices. While many scholars have already explored the significance of religious communities in this area, our research specifically focuses on the contributions made by these communities in Albania towards fostering peaceful relationships at both the domestic and international levels. I've conducted a thorough analysis of various studies conducted by Albanian and foreign scholars to examine how religious communities have impacted Albania's overall peaceful atmosphere, including their role in peace initiatives and their influence on the country's international relations.

This study offers a unique perspective on the roots of interfaith harmony in Albania, exploring the promotional values that underlie this phenomenon. It seeks to answer important questions, such as who are the leading advocates of interfaith harmony and how does it impact peace in the region? Additionally, the study examines the attitudes of religious figures in Albania, including imams and priests, and their role in promoting interfaith harmony. Through an analysis of religious discourse, the study sheds light on the ways in which this issue has been addressed with sensitivity and grace, both locally and globally.

Based on the literature evaluation it is seen that religion can serve as a means of identification, a tool for mobilization, a justification for violent behavior, or a source of values for promoting peace and reconciliation. The complex relationships between religion and other significant actors, particularly the state, can have various implications. Religious leaders can play crucial roles in inciting or preventing violence, as well as either perpetuating animosity or attempting to prevent its recurrence. The diverse organizational forms associated with religious traditions can provide a foundation for mobilization, offer humanitarian aid during emergencies, assist in long-term recovery efforts, and foster peaceful or confrontational relationships over time (Best, S. G. and Rakodi, C., 2011).

Mainstream publications on conflict resolution and peace studies, as well as those on international relations, used to disregard the topic of 'religion' for a long time. However, a great deal of literature on the relationship between religion, peace, conflict, and diplomacy emerged during the 1990s, much of which was written from a religious perspective by authors with a religious background; some of it was contradictory. Nevertheless, much of it

was inspired by universalist thinking, analyzing the bridges that religions have built across societies and throughout history, while still recognizing the divisive power of religious discourse. Consequently, this report devotes considerable attention to this literature.

Research and writing on the intersections of religion and international affairs suggest that religion can be a valuable tool for achieving peace. Many believe that religious beliefs, leaders, and faith-based organizations have the potential to promote peace within societies and on a global scale. Scholars in the US, such as Johnston, Sampson, and Appleby, are at the forefront of this school of thought. The US ( (Johnston, D. and Sampson, C. , 1994); (Johnston, 2003); (Appleby S. R., 2001); (Shah, T., Stepan, A. and M. Toft (eds.), 2012) has even pioneered "*faith-based*" diplomacy, with resources for interfaith projects and an office for religious engagement in the State Department. While this perspective has been primarily developed in the US, Europe is also producing important works on the subject e.g. (Thomas S. , 2005); (Galtung, J. and MacQueen, G., 2008). Alongside academic literature, faith groups and NGOs are also working to promote and enhance the contributions of religious actors to development and reconciliation.

There is a large group of people who believe that including the religious dimension in conflict resolution work is necessary. However, various authors emphasize different reasons, aspects, and priorities for this. Consequently, we have segmented the following sections based on themes. (Appleby S. R., 2000) states in "*The Ambivalence of the Sacred*" that the main drivers for peace are ethics and ethical convictions, which can be expressed through religious beliefs. The ethical power of religion has the potential to unite societies, regardless of which religion is prevalent. (Thomas S. , 2005) believes that religion can play a constructive role in facilitating a dialogue about virtues that can help shape a better society. While acknowledging the useful characteristics of faith-based networks and NGOs, Thomas warns against a reductionist approach that downplays or discounts the need to address other issues and involve other actors. He cautions against an instrumentalist perspective of religion and a logic of problem-solving that might overlook the importance of addressing other issues and involving other actors.

There are numerous references to the Christian contribution to promoting non-violence and peacebuilding. The central ideas include reconciliation, which is based on God's

reconciliation with sinful humanity, Jesus' self-sacrifice as a powerful model to redeem humanity, his message to "turn the other cheek," and his focus on the poor and marginalized, which encourages Christians to care for the dignity of all human beings. Christianity highlights the crucial relationship between social justice and reconciliation, as one cannot exist without the other (Philpott, 2007). This explains why Christian denominations play a significant role in mediation and promoting transitional justice. Christian values are also fundamental to the Western concept of human rights, although there is a parallel, sometimes competing, secular account. After World War II, Christian denominations and the ecumenical movement played a crucial role in the peaceful reconstruction of Europe and the establishment of the European Communities (Thomas S. , 2005) & (Byrnes and Katzenstein, 2006), even though the European integration project later took on a highly secular and liberal character, mainly focused on economic and political reasoning.

According to (Abu-Nimer, 2003) analysis, Islam is rooted in essential human values outlined in the Qur'an, related religious texts, and the Islamic tradition. In alignment with these values, Muslim communities have cultivated a diverse array of peaceful strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Among these methods are third-party mediation and arbitration in social disputes, as well as traditional reconciliation approaches that prioritize the virtues of forgiveness and public repentance.

The Islamic faith places great emphasis on social justice, as explained by (Abu-Nimer, 2003). In his work, he highlights how Islamic values, including social justice, can contribute to peaceful conflict resolution. According to Islamic principles, a nation cannot thrive unless it ensures fair and adequate support for its underprivileged members. The ultimate goal is to eliminate suffering and poverty altogether. With this in mind, it can be argued that Islam is well-positioned to combat structural violence. Abu-Nimer further elaborates that Islamic values are rooted in universal human dignity, equality across all races and ethnicities, and the sanctity of human life and forgiveness. These values form the foundation for any positive conflict resolution and are crucial in building peaceful societies (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

In a similar vein, (Sachedina, (2000) ) emphasized the importance of Koranic teachings on religious and cultural pluralism as a divine principle for peaceful coexistence among human societies. His work serves as a classic exposition of the nonviolent, humanistic values within

Islam. Similarly, (Said, 2001) provided a valuable collection of essays that explore both Islamic teachings and practices on peaceful conflict resolution. They contend that Islam, in theory and practice, advocates for justice, harmony, and the avoidance of war. Said et al. also advocate for Islamic approaches to peacebuilding (Said et al., 2002), while (Kalin, 2005) delves into the concept of peace within the Islamic tradition, offering a contrast to the dominant focus in the literature on the legal aspects of declaring jihad. Kalin identifies four contexts - metaphysical-spiritual, philosophical-theological, political-legal, and socio-cultural - in which peace is addressed in the Islamic tradition. He concludes that Muslim communities should prioritize developing a proper ethics of peace to facilitate the resolution of ethnic or sectarian conflicts in their societies.

Another important aspect that has been analyzed throughout the literature review is the role of “*interreligious Dialogue*” efforts in international relations and politics. The importance of religion has been among the consensus-based formulas. In the most general sense, Interfaith Dialogue appears as a “peace and security project” that sees the source of the problems causing conflict in cultural differences but seeks solutions in the partnership of these cultures. Interreligious dialogue efforts, as handled by international institutional structures such as the UN and the EU, are primarily set to work with the aim of developing a “*preventive dialogue against terrorism and conflict.*” Considering the claim that the source of “*terrorism*” is “*religion,*” or, to put it more optimistically, societies that embrace faith and religion.

This contradictory position of religion, which emerged in the dimension of interreligious dialogue, is actually a projection of the experienced paradox on the political plane. The source of this paradox is based on the claim that liberalism, which remained unrivaled after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the last quarter of the century, was the “*only ideological alternative.*” At this point, the “*monist*” structure of the social and political system built within the nation-state construct is trying to be overcome with multiculturalism policies depending on new needs. However, to the extent that multiculturalism policies lead to the principle of “*recognition and counting of differences,*” it creates a problem of “*unity.*” In order for the said “*unity*” to be realized at the international level, according to Akbar S. Ahmed, “There is only one civilization that is an obstacle, and that is the Islamic civilization.” (Ahmed, 2000) As a matter of fact, “*political Islam*”



emerges as the most radical and concrete example of the fact that the phenomenon of “*unity*,” accelerated by the dynamics of globalization, does not simultaneously express “*unity*.”

The intellectual orientation links the “*rise*” of religion, especially in the context of the identity problem, to the “*crisis*” of the modern paradigm. It is claimed that the progressive understanding of modernism based on rational knowledge has “*bankrupted*” in a sense when today's problems are taken into account. Based on these criticisms, postmodernist views emphasize the existence of everyone's own universe of meaning and therefore oppose “*universality*.” However, in the globalization process we are in, the phenomenon of “*universality*” makes itself felt more strongly than ever before. In this context, globalization points to the inadequacy of postmodernist propositions. However, thinkers like Roland Robertson claim otherwise. Based on the simultaneous rise of “*native responses*” Robertson defines globalization in philosophical, nihilistic language as a movement to first fragment cultures and then integrate these fragments around a particular culture. (Robertson, 1998) Robertson's interpretation of globalization is a complete contrast to postmodernism and its refusal to recognize the underlying cultural structures that continue to shape the world today. This understanding of globalization implies a system of integration in which cultures are not necessarily homogenized but instead allowed to flourish in an interconnected world.

The nature of this “*private culture*” is a paradox of the paradox we have emphasized. For example, Friedman expresses this dilemma as follows: “*The challenge that awaits countries and individuals in the era of globalization is to strike a healthy balance between preserving a sense of identity, homeland, and community and doing things that will ensure survival in the globalization process*” (Friedman, 1996). Fukuyama argues in his book “*The End of History and the Last Man*” that this balance has already been established on the values of liberalism. Toffler, on the other hand, points out that much more information is required in order to keep the system in balance as a whole in this new era, in which the stage of mass production, distribution, and communication has passed and values and attitudes are classified accordingly. (Fukuyama, 1997) While Fukuyama called on societies with different cultural values as a result of a progressive understanding of history to be included in the “*universal*” in order to exist, Toffler proposes to take into account the value of different ways of knowing as a requirement of the diversity produced by change. As a result, a strategy of using power in both forms draws attention.

The contribution of religions to this sought-after “*universal culture*” on the basis of interfaith dialogue focuses on theological associations rather than rituals. This form of interfaith dialogue centers on finding common ground between different religious traditions, allowing individuals to both express their own faith and understand the beliefs of others. For example, in (Hick, 2023) “*Religious Pluralism*” and (Schoun, 1984) “*Transcendent Unity of Religions*,” by emphasizing the sameness of the existence and emergence of all religions, they say that if the source and purpose are the same, a theological unity, or at worst a similarity, is possible.

Religion's discourses toward people are summarized in two main points: The first is that religion offers people salvation and truth. Regardless of how salvation and truth are expressed, all religions claim to save people. In this direction, religion's belief and worship system, cults, and rituals are a recipe for salvation offered to people. The second is that religion aims for the peace and happiness of people and shows the way to happiness. Religions, in accordance with these discourses, strive to make qualities such as justice, honesty, and love, which they regard as indispensable values of happiness, dominant in human life and to ensure that these values are placed. Different beliefs with these common characteristics should join forces against things that threaten the future, and they should be aware that their own freedom of belief and expression is based on respecting the lives and beliefs of others.

Democracy, on the other hand, does not fundamentally contradict these values but has to sit within a political and cultural framework, fed by moral and spiritual resources. Democracy, on the other hand, does not fundamentally contradict these values, but has to sit within a political and cultural framework fed by moral and spiritual resources. Thus, the bond between “human, nature, and the sacred” that the modern paradigm has broken will be restored, and the solutions needed to overcome the problems will emerge. The problems presented as the justification for interfaith dialogue are not really new to the world. As a matter of fact, prescriptions such as the “New International Economic Order” North-South Dialogue” were put into practice in the 1970s to find solutions to similar problems. The only thing that has changed, however, is that the conflict between classes, which was based on economic distortion in the 1970s, is now linked to cultural differences.

### **3. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND THE INTERFAITH HARMONY: THE CASE OF ALBANIA**

#### **3.1. The history of interfaith harmony in Albania during the years 1912-1945**

The historical period of Albania, from 1912 to 1945 is a noteworthy era in the nation's history, marked by a unique combination of religious acceptance and peaceful cohabitation. Following Albania's declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, the fledgling state embraced a secular ideology, enshrining religious liberty in its constitution. This secular foundation paved the way for a society where individuals of varying faiths could coexist and practice their beliefs without the threat of bias or mistreatment. One of the primary factors contributing to interfaith harmony during this period was Albania's longstanding tradition of religious pluralism. Throughout history, Albania has been home to an array of religious communities, including Muslims and Christians (Kruja, 2008). Despite their theological differences, Albanians across religious lines often shared common cultural traditions, language, and values, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual respect.

Despite occasional tensions and conflicts in neighboring regions of the Balkans, Albania maintained relative stability and peace among its diverse religious communities. Interfaith marriages were common, serving as a testament to the harmonious coexistence of different religious groups. Moreover, Albanians often came together to celebrate shared cultural events, festivals, and ceremonies, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity that transcended religious boundaries.

However, the outbreak of World War II and subsequent occupation of Albania by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany posed significant challenges to interfaith harmony in the country. Despite this, Albanians of different religious backgrounds continued to demonstrate solidarity and mutual support, resisting the occupation and protecting vulnerable

communities, including Jews. Acts of bravery and altruism showcased the resilience of interfaith relations even in the face of external threats and adversity. Scholars have noted that Albania's unique geographical and historical context played a crucial role in shaping interfaith dynamics during the years 1912-1945 (Kruja, 2008). Situated at the crossroads of different civilizations, Albania has long served as a melting pot of cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This cultural diversity, coupled with a strong sense of national identity and independence, helped foster an environment where religious pluralism was not only tolerated but celebrated as a source of strength and resilience.

The legacy of interfaith harmony in Albania during the early 20th century continues to resonate in the country's cultural and social fabric today. Despite challenges posed by political upheavals, economic hardships, and social transformations, Albania remains committed to upholding the principles of religious freedom, tolerance, and mutual respect enshrined in its constitution. The historical period from 1912 to 1945 is a remarkable example of how diverse religious communities can coexist peacefully and collaboratively in a pluralistic society. The enduring legacy of religious tolerance and cooperation, interfaith dialogue and understanding serves as a source of inspiration for promoting social peace and values in Albania (Elbasani, 2017).

Inter-religious harmony has reigned among Albanians for centuries as a value of the tradition of the country, which has surprised and is constantly surprising foreigners as they see a unique case of this inter-religious coexistence. This tradition is not from today; it is not even the tradition of the last 100 years, but it is a tradition of several centuries since the final establishment of Ottoman rule in Albanian lands at the beginning of the century (Kruja, 2014). For this tradition and value, they possess, Albanians are proud, and there are special moments in the history of the country for which all Albanians feel pleased. Foreign travelers who have visited our country even in the most decisive moments, in the moments when the war was normal, have confirmed this fact. Mrs. Edith Durham (Durham, 2013), a British woman and Albanian admirer, says in the early twentieth century, “the wars heard among the Albanians are always for quarrels between the opposing bays. “In this case, Christians fight against Christians and Muslims against Muslims – she emphasizes this – before the common enemy units.

The Albanian movements for autonomy pointed out such a fact, where most of the initiators were religious intellectuals, and a considerable part of them were clerics of different faiths that led the Albanians towards autonomy. Even in the Declaration of Independence of Albania, on November 28, 1912 in Vlora, the main and important signatories were clerics of all faiths (Kruja, 2014). Nevertheless, coexistence between believers of different faiths reached its peak in the Assembly of Vlora when it was decided that the Provisional Government would have in its cabinet, members of four religions, despite the percentage of believers that had a religious community. Religious coexistence between Albanians would seem even greater in January 1920 at the Lushnja Congress when Albania was declared a Constitutional Monarchy. The role of the Monarch was held by a High Council of the Regency composed of four representatives of each faith. This material will address concrete practices with the works of the most prominent clergy in the country, of the chief priests, their lectures to the faithful or even speeches in cases of special ceremonies.

### **3.2. The role of religion in peacebuilding process**

In a peace education process, human beings are considered able to change their violent attitudes and behaviors, considering the harmful effects of the lack of it, thus providing a difficult but long-term solution. The region of the Western Balkans has testified conflicts and disputes and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has found the region to be shattered economically, socially and at the state level. Various attempts have been undertaken in order to bring stability to the region. Elements of negative peace have been seen in Kosovo with the NATO intervention. The EU has been active in introducing strategies in order to integrate the region. Nowadays, different organizations are based locally and many projects aim regional cooperation in field like economy, energy, history and education etc. Students, teachers and the community have been invited to cooperate. Peace education in the Balkan region aims to educate the youth in order to bring long term cooperation, democracy, respect for human life and tolerance by establishing the grounds for communication and tolerance among different ethnicities, cultures and religions. It is essential to changing the mindset from a conflict based to one that regards diversity as richness for the region.

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO, 1945) it is in this way that the constitution of UNESCO

refers to peace in its preamble. Wars and conflicts that prevent societies live in a peaceful environment have their genesis in the souls and thoughts of elites that force masses to suffer the destructible effects of disputes. Violence starts in our minds, becomes verbal and ends up being physical. Negative thoughts bring verbal violence; abusive language becomes the main tool of a bully and weapons become tools for massive murders and genocide.

Peace itself gains different significances to different cultures in relation to the phases where countries are in a peaceful process (Harris, 2004). It can be observed as a process of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace building. Peacekeeping refers mostly to the efforts of the state to prevent violence and increase citizens` security in defense and prisons. Whereas peacemaking focuses more on personnel teaching conflict resolution techniques to students and citizens in order to facilitate the resolution of their problematic issues at an initial phase. The final goal has to do with peace building, motivating students and the community to choose peace and nonviolence as a basis for a sustainable future. Citizens need to be educated so that peace sounds the most appropriate goal to their problems.

These phases are intersected with the inner and outer peace of the individual. Inner peace is related to the person`s inner psychological state. It can take the form of outer peace when the person has a valuable relation with the people that surround him like individuals, family members and society. So, every individual might have a different perception of peace in accordance also to the problematic issues they face. Such an understanding for peace may vary from the inner psychological state of the individual and it may end up with ceasefire and peace treaties that represent the relationship communities and cultures have with each-other. Appropriate examples of outer peace might be mutual understanding and respect, multicultural communication as well as dialogue between communities of different religions and collaboration.

### **3.3. The role of the religious communities and religious leaders in peacebuilding process**

The history of the Albanian people offers an almost unique model in terms of the peculiarities of the religious composition of these people over the centuries. Throughout Albanian history, I see that state leaders have contributed to unity among Albanians. Here

can be mentioned the case of King Zog, who swore by placing his hand on the Quran and the Bible on his first day in power. The solidarity and religious tolerance among the Albanians were especially pronounced among the religious leaders; we see them all together in Albania or abroad in defense of the Albanian cause. From a historical standpoint, Albanians have played an important role in the dialogue between civilizations, where they have set a wonderful example of inter-religious, even inter-ethnic, and intercultural coexistence of the synthesis of various east and west civilizations that coexisted in the ancient Albanian lands.

With the collapse of communism in Albania and the reopening of religious institutions, Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox took part in the reopening ceremonies of these institutions as they celebrated each other's religious holidays today. Today, we Albanians must fight harder to strengthen the factors that help nourish the historically cultivated religious harmony and peaceful coexistence by combating and avoiding negative influences that may be imposed on Albanians, primarily from outside Albania.

Today, the world population is estimated to approach eight billion. This demographic distribution has two important sociological determinants: the first is ethnic belonging, and the other is religious belonging. While these two sociological character structures draw attention to the defining features of people worldwide, religious affiliation is more noticeable regarding region and ethnicity. Because ethnic origin frequently blends into the spiritual atmosphere of religious belonging, religious belonging has risen to the top of the list of religions in the world today, indicating the role that members of these religions play in ensuring world peace.

When we examine whether there is a relationship between the distribution of religions in the world and world peace, we come across many factors that threaten world peace: First of all, poverty, political tensions, ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, and ethnic, religious, and social tensions caused by migrations as a result of natural disasters. As it is seen, the world has lost its peace and tranquility as a result of religious, ethnic, social, and natural disasters. It is facing many problems, both personal and social. Even the loss of social peace in our world, caused by tensions based on religion alone, is a severe problem that needs to be addressed. Social and political tensions caused by fundamentalist currents in Islamic

countries, religious conflicts in the Balkans, and the Jewish-Muslim war in Palestine have been and continue to be elements that seriously threaten world peace.

All religions have peaceful goals and force their members to stay within these peaceful borders. If Christians, and Muslims, who make up almost half of the world's population today, had remained faithful to the orders of their religion, they would have made a significant contribution to the establishment of world peace. Because these three religions carry the legacy of the Prophet Abraham and because his name "*Khalilullah*" (friend of God) is based on these three religions, that is enough to be a source of hope for world peace.

We face a different situation when we approach Christianity with regard to world peace. In the Gospels and the New Testament letters, Christianity's primary doctrinal sources, we see that Christianity is not closed to other people; on the contrary, it is open to everyone. It is incorrect to say that Christianity only approaches members of other religions in a missionary spirit. Christianity is also structurally a peaceful religion. The prophet (Isa) Jesus stated as follows: "*Do not resist evil; and whoever strikes your right cheek, turn the other one to him, and give your coat to the one who wants your shirt*" he is offering peace.

Jesus gave extremely important advice for world peace and said, "Love your enemies." "*Pray for those who persecute you.*" One of the basic principles laid out by Christianity for the provision of social peace is the principle of loving one's neighbor. In the ninth and tenth commandments, "You shall not falsely testify against your neighbor, nor covet your neighbor's house, wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything." These orders can be regarded as the common key to social peace.

It is also stated in Islam that it is necessary to do good to one's neighbors and that a Muslim should not harm a Muslim with his hand or tongue. Thus, the members of the three religions that make up half of the world's population should make brotherhood and human love the basic philosophy of their messages. While the command "*Remove evils with goodness*" is given in the Qur'an, the believers are also characterized as "swallowing their grudges and grudges and forgiving people." Islamic Sufis brought this philosophy to its peak.



In line with the explanations, I have made so far, we can quickly come to the following conclusion: The existing religions in the world provide the necessary material for the provision of world peace in the theoretical plan. It is possible to see this in all heavenly rooted faiths, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although world religions offer principles that will lay the foundations of peace and tranquility, why can beliefs and their representatives play a critical role in ensuring world peace? The real problem lies in the answer to this question. Let's point out right here that people need to learn more about the religions they belong to. People who do not know their religion or foreign religions act not with religious feelings but pragmatically and with a sense of self-interest. Religious institutions and religious leaders have essential duties in this regard. From this point of view, it cannot be said that they did their job correctly. However, religious leaders have essential duties: essentialization, solidarity, and peace instead of hostility. Religious leaders who can speak the truth despite political, economic, and ethnic pressures will have a significant share in ensuring world peace.

According to the basic holy books of the religions of Christianity and Islam, all persecution in the name of religion is prohibited. None of these religions allow religious terrorism. The basic philosophy of all of them is based on respect for people and respect for life. For this reason, let's all educate our coreligionists, and then the members of other religions, in this field. Let's spread the wide tolerance and unity of religions to the whole world. Perhaps then, the social peace that all humanity desires will be realized, and humanity will achieve the ideal and peace of coexistence. The duty of leaders and members of all religions in the construction of such a world is to teach the messages of their religions full of peace and tranquility to all humanity and to continue the necessary efforts for this purpose.

### **3.4. Ways to promote the transformative power of religion**

Academic literature on religion and peace includes a branch that focuses on policies and actions. This branch aims to explore the ways in which religion's transformative power and potential can be used to promote peace among societies and nations. (Lederach J. P., 1996) suggested conflict resolution mechanisms that rely on culture and religion as positive tools for change, emphasizing a holistic approach instead of an antagonistic one that divides societies based on religion. According to (Johnston, D. and Cox, B, 2003), faith-based

peacemaking is centered around reconciliation and the restoration of healthy and respectful relationships between parties.

Practical recommendations are available for promoting interreligious dialogue and utilizing religion for fostering peace, according to a significant body of literature. Steele (2011) highlights the importance of a sustained effort to transform societies in order to establish peace. Some scholars argue that in conflict situations, it is best to first address practical issues before tackling value differences with respect and mutual understanding. In this field of study, experts hold differing perspectives, either experientialist (example Marc Gopin) or constructivist (example Jean Nicolas Bitter). Experientialists place emphasis on individual experiences, recognizing that spiritual experiences are a common thread among devotees of all religions. By acknowledging this commonality, experientialists believe that mutual understanding of conflicts can be achieved, ultimately leading to conflict resolution. Alternatively, constructivists view religion as a tool for society members to gain direction and guidance. Religion can assist individuals in creating personal meaning and comprehending what drives conflicts and can help them prevent the society falling in this trap.

Both the experientialist and constructivist approaches are considered nonfunctionalist in their perspective on religion. Rather than viewing it as a set of guidelines that shape reality for its followers, they see it as a collection of norms and rules. Conversely, functionalist approaches focus on religion's ability to decode and interpret societal principles, norms, and rules, contributing to a greater comprehension of peaceful perceptions and values (Aroua, 2010). (Weingardt, 2007) has compiled a list of factors that, in his opinion, can enhance the role of "religion-based" actors in promoting peace, based on a comprehensive analysis of case studies from different parts of the world. It is worth summarizing these points, which are as follows.

1. "*Religion-based*" actors who are affiliated with religion require adequate resources in terms of finance, technology, and human capital for various activities such as expert training, networking, public relations campaigns, monitoring of human rights, observation of elections, prevention of conflicts, and implementation of projects for promoting reconciliation.

2. Internal “religion-based” actors are needed. If third parties wish to participate in resolving conflicts, they are more likely to succeed if they rely on internal actors. However, Weingardt suggests that such actors must be identified, strengthened, and supported over the long term by providing assistance to relevant organizations and actors through training, cooperation, and networking. The importance of involving faith-based grassroots actors and entire indigenous communities, rather than just religious leaders, is emphasized by several scholars (Lederach J. P., *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, 1996) (Little, 2007).

3. Religious education should primarily focus on the positive aspects of religion. Although religious illiteracy itself does not lead to conflicts, education that mainly highlights the confrontational and violence-promoting elements of religion can be exploited by political and religious leaders to incite violence and sabotage peace processes. Therefore, teaching students about the peaceful elements of their own religion and those of others can be a powerful tool to build resilience against violence (Mandaville, P. and Silvestri, S, 2015).

4. To emphasize the importance and support moderate religious leaders. (Weingardt, 2007) believes that the role of these leaders in countering fundamentalist tendencies in religion has been widely recognized. The author suggests that the international community should support them early on and strengthen their role as partners in dialogue and cooperation.

(Galtung J. , 2012) suggests that leaders should explore the vast amount of knowledge offered by religions and use it to assess political developments. He believes that religions can offer a unique perspective to promote peace, as they provide a transcendent point of view. Galtung also proposes that different religions can be used to tackle different types of violence. Similarly, (Stückelberger, 2012) argues that peace studies have yet to fully understand the way religion is instrumentalized or how it can be adapted to their discipline. Furthermore, suggests that excluding religion is not a solution to problems; rather, it is a way of postponing them. Early integration of religion can pre-empt the emergence of violent fundamentalism before it becomes too late. Lastly, cautions that the complexity of economic, social, political, and ethnic forces must be taken into account when studying religion and peace.

(Johnston, D. and Cox, B, 2003) offers a detailed explanation of the characteristics that allow religious leaders and institutions to positively impact peacemaking. These actors hold significant influence in the community and generally have a reputation as a politically neutral force that aims to bring positive change based on a respected set of values. Moreover, they have a particular ability to facilitate reconciliation between conflicting parties, including the power to restore human relationships. They also possess the capacity to rally support for peace processes at the community, national, and international level. However, their most significant attribute is their ability to exert a transcendent authority over their followers, which is something that most temporal leaders aspire to achieve.

Scholars have created models that target specific activities to enhance the positive effect of religion. (Abu Nimer, 2001) described a training model for interreligious peacebuilding, which is crucial in transforming conflicts. This is because religious identities play a fundamental role in shaping the understanding and the importance of peace. The focus of interreligious training should be on individual practitioners' experiences, and they should be encouraged to share positive practices. Using a religious narrative to explain peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities can help all parties better understand and acceptance of the outside interveners. The main objective of interreligious peacebuilding is to change attitudes towards the "*Other*". Changing attitudes is a process that requires several steps, which has been used for a long time in training workshops on conflict resolution.

Abu-Nimer suggests that using a combination of the elicitive model, which emphasizes the participants' experiences, and the prescriptive model, which focuses on the trainers' experiences and their sharing with the participants, is more effective than either model alone. According to Abu-Nimer, an ideal training workshop should consist of five phases: "*Getting started*", "*Situating our work*", "*Know where you stand*", "*Meet the other*", and "*What can we do together?*" (Abu Nimer, 2001). The purpose of these phases is to help participants explore their identities and understand those of others. The goal is to share and comprehend commonalities, such as shared values and understandings of society and conflict, as well as to reflect on differences, their potential for conflict, and their advantages in promoting peacebuilding.

(Abu Nimer, 2003) suggests that interreligious training should be rooted in the religions of the individuals participating in it. This means that training for peacemakers must originate from the teachings, scriptures, and traditions of the religions of these peacemakers. He believes that Islam is based on concepts that are essentially humane, and has developed several drivers for peace. However, many Muslims lack sufficient knowledge of the Islamic tradition and experience in social peace and peacebuilding. Therefore, there is not only a need to train Westerners in non-Western modes and rituals of peace making and peace keeping, but also to encourage the emergence of indigenous (non-Western) actors who can articulate the search for peace from within their own faith tradition.

Over the years, there have been evaluations conducted on faith-based dialogue programs, which shed light on the practical challenges involved and underscore the importance of further research. One such report is Garfinkel 2004 publication, titled "*What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs.*" This report strives to offer a comprehensive analysis of how these programs can promote religious tolerance and engender societal transformation. According to the report, it is crucial that religious dimensions are integrated into all stages of the project for these programs to be effective.

### **3.5. Religion in Albania after the downfall of communist regime**

For centuries, Albanians have been living in interreligious harmony and coexistence, which is already the main ethnotype of our nation. With the establishment of the Albanian state in 1912, in addition to many values that the statesmen attached importance to, among them prominent Muslim and Christian clerics, one of these values was freedom of belief, as one of the basic human rights. in any democratic society. It was part of Albanian society until the installation of the communist regime in 1944.

With the advent of communism, this process took a turn, as many Muslim and Christian clerics, who were aware of the struggle of Bolshevism and communism against religion, had warned. The communist state was not a purely secular state, but a state that aimed at the total secularization of society and its transformation into an atheistic society. In the first phase, the violence exercised against the clergy by the communist regime limited its authority in the community and gradually made its existence impossible. Later, in 1967, the

campaign to close churches and mosques made Albania the only country in the world without the rights and freedoms of practicing religious beliefs.

The revival of religious beliefs from grace, right after the fall of communism, has had as many difficulties as the establishment of the pillars of a free, civil and democratic society. After an unprecedented persecution and genocide of the semi-patriarchal structure of the Albanian society with the disruption, submission and terrible totalitarian surveillance, through the infamous class struggle, for the sake of the masterpiece of socialism “young man”, the impression was created that God no longer returns to the land of samples and that with the “*young man*” rinsing seemed a finished process. That is what communism had decided. Thus, the recovery of the edifice of faith began from its ruins, in a state of pronounced theological and doctrinal bankruptcy and with a prejudiced and indifferent psychological background. If today we can boast of the great influential power of religious communities in society, this is without question the work of those spiritual leaders who bore a great and difficult burden in man's lost ties with God. And the opening of paths is always, it is known, as important as that of those who follow these paths.

The Albanians, who were not guilty of anything, were isolated from society for almost half a century, subjected to political oppression, economic warfare, violence by the political police, innocent sentences by the courts, the prohibition by law of religion and any religious rite, etc.! All this period had significantly affected the society of the country where many had come to terms with this bitter reality while many others continued their attempts at resistance. One of the most important issues that kept alive the desire to oppose a destructive system like communism was precisely religious sentiment.

Many clerics had been unjustly imprisoned and died in their cells as a result of cruel torture, and some of them had successfully completed their sentences and gained their missing freedom. The end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s would mark the great turning point in the history of Albania. The communist system was already in its final throes and society began to see light at the end of the tunnel. After the fall of communism, there were many reforms that were undertaken, such as the democratization of the country, reforms in the economy and reforms for the reopening of religious institutions.

It is the end of 1990 that would mark the beginning of a new life for Albanians. This is full of challenges and unknowns due to the isolation that the country had gone through, which had caused the backwardness of society compared to neighboring countries and Europe. Albanian society still suffers today from the consequences of the “*young man*” created by the communist system. It aimed to be a man without religious affiliation, without faith in God.

The main focus of this section on the study of religion in Albania, immediately following the collapse of the Communist regime is inherently restricted as it concentrates solely on the officially recognized religious communities of that time. This limited scope may fail to acknowledge the diverse range of religious beliefs and the significant clandestine movements that continued to exist despite official suppression. Many unregistered or unofficial religious organizations, which played key roles in sustaining spiritual life and resistance during the regime, have not been thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, this focus might obscure the wider socio-political influences that impacted religious customs and affiliations in the post-Communist environment. As a result, such research could provide an incomplete and biased understanding of the true religious landscape and the intricacies of its development during this crucial historical period.

### **3.5.1. Religious revival in Albania and the challenges of transition**

With the prohibition of religion by law in 1967, Albania was already the first and only country in the world declared as an atheist state with a constitution. Despite all the attempts of the communist regime it is noticed that they never managed to remove from the hearts of the people the desire to believe. For this reason, in the early 90's we talk about the rebirth of the faith which for fifty years “*lived imprisoned*” in the hearts of the people. Immediately after the fall of the dictatorial regime, all religious communities took concrete steps to reopen, rebuild, restore and revive religious life in the country.

The dictatorship, with its savagery, banned the teaching of religion from schools, closed all schools aimed at preparing religious staff, suspended the religious press and publications, seized all personal libraries with religious literature, banned the operation of religious facilities, and hindered the development of rites. religiously, he turned mosques into

warehouses and stables and destroyed and razed most of them. Out of 1127 mosques that were in 1967, in 1990 only a few were counted. He imprisoned and shot the most prominent imams, and interned some of them, leaving them unemployed, forcing them to take off their religious garb and deny their views. In short, he tried every means to destroy everything that had to do with the religion and the religious feelings of the people (Demetja, 2020).

The reopening of the first church and mosque in Shkodra and Albania in November 1990, after a long ban of almost a quarter of a century, was an expression of interfaith harmony and brotherhood in the face of the communist regime still in power. The young Muslim and Catholic boys cooperated in preparing the ground for the development of the first mass in the Catholic cemetery of Rrëmaj. Someone said that the police forces were coming and would arrest the young people who were working. One of the Catholic boys said to his Muslim friends: *“Get away! You at least save. “We are determined to die here under the shelter of this church.” “If it’s about dying for this sake, we will die together,”* the Muslim boys replied. *“We are not moving any step until they kill us.”*

All this is an indication of how Albanian society perceived religion and what role they recognized in the human brotherhood, respecting basic rights, such as belief in God, religious practices, etc. To speak in more detail, it is precisely these two precedents that make it possible to lay sound foundations for the revival of the faith. Initially, the first public mass took place on 4 November 1990 in Rrëmaj, and the first priest to held the preach was Dom Simon Jubani from Shkodra. Secondary, the reopening of the Lead Mosque in Shkodra took place on Friday, 16 November 1990 held by Hafiz Sabri Koçi<sup>1</sup> who started his speech by saying *“dear Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox brothers, and above all Albanian brothers”* (MCA, 2017).

Regarding this significant day, the former mufti of Shkodra, H. Faik Hoxha, writes, among other things: *“Five years ago, a group of citizens, mostly young, took the bold initiative to open the mosque, to pray on Friday, to renew religion, to regain the right to freely practice one’s religion. Commemorating this landmark historical event, we face that great popular rally with about 60,000 participants from town and village, of all ages, gathered with their*

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<sup>1</sup> Hafiz Sabri Koçi was the first leader of Muslim Community of Albania (1990-2003)



*free will and desire, who expressed hatred for the dictatorship and the feelings of for their religion.” (Hoxha, 1995)*

As for the reopening ceremony of the Lead Mosque, during an interview, Hafiz Sabri was asked: *“Did you think about the consequences you could have in conducting this ceremony?” He replied: “Remembering all the suffering and hardship, I had nothing to lose. Supported by the boys and invited by the wonderful youth of Shkodra, I felt superior to those I should have feared.”* (Luli, 1996) These are clear proofs that the Albanian society had never abandoned the belief in God.

In addition to places of worship such as mosques or churches, the respective communities gave special importance to education and upbringing of generations where the reopening of 8-year or secondary education institutions was encouraged, such as the case of Tirana Madrasa which was closed by communist government decision. In addition, concrete steps were taken for the opening of new educational institutions where among them it is worth mentioning those that date back to the earliest, to leave the country further following the later developments in this field. In fact, Albania is one of the few countries with a pluralistic religious distribution and a pronounced lack of conflict and the presence of social peace. Saying this as a model example for the most developed countries in the region and beyond. All this is indicative of a good religious perception, sound knowledge and model representation.

The case of Albania is the most beautiful model of building social peace through trust. Let's go back to the revival of faith after the 90's where Albania had already left behind a completely dark and alarming period. It was now time to find the old man whom the system had transformed and alienated. Religious communities were the first to be re-established and reopened, bringing to the forefront human consciousness and feelings of faith which had been lacking for more than 23 years due to the 1967 prohibition of religion by law.

The truth is, Albania was all in search of the lost identity during the years of communism. It is the Muslim Community of Albania led by Hafiz Sabri Koçi who would take religious and humanitarian initiatives for individuals in society. Exactly among the first initiatives was the

stabilization of the religious life in the country, turning into mosques objects that had been alienated from the system, appointing muftis and imams in different cities of Albania.

### **3.5.2. Religious education as a key factor in the revival of religion in Albania**

Education is an “*institution*” founded by people in order to respond to the needs of today and the future and formed to complete the development of society along with its continuity. So does religion, it owns a space of culture and knowledge that affects every person, regardless of whether he believes or not. Religion and education, which come together at the point of educating man and forming him in accordance with specific objectives, have many aspects in common, and it is impossible to think of religious education outside of general education. In fact, even today's discussions are not about whether religious education should be part of general education or not, but focus on “how much” and “*how*” of this participation (Altaş, 2015).

It is important to determine whether religion, and therefore faith, is necessary for man or not, in order to understand whether religious education and training is necessary or not. In this regard, many psychologists and anthropologists emphasize that religion and faith are a reality in human life and fulfill an important need (Yavuz, 1998), because in man there is a desire to accept a supreme being. It has been observed that the feeling of faith constitutes the foundation of religious faith since the first man. (Hamann, 1970).

It is precisely this reason that kept alive the feeling of faith of the Albanians, who, regardless of the fact that they spent 45 years under the harsh communist dictatorship, never lost their sense of faith. And then after years of being characterized by atheist monist despotism, the Albanian government has not allowed the United Nations Declaration on Freedom of Religion to be made public. However, the impact of this Declaration began to show its signs only four years after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985. With his death on April 11, Ramiz Alia takes over the country. Rules on religion remained the same until freedom of religion was allowed in the country after his visit to the United States. With the fall of the communist regime in 1990, religious institutions in the country were given permission to operate, reopening mosques, churches, and other places of worship and institutions to reopen.

I believe it is important to elaborate on religious education as a concept and its types. Based on the extensive literature we encounter two forms of this education, formal and informal. We must first emphasize the fact that formal religious education in Albania is offered only in religious schools established by the respective communities such as the type of “madrasah school” and the informal education which is taught through various courses, periodic meetings in mosques or churches etc. Despite the attempts from the ministry of education to implement and adapt the subject of “religious culture” in public schools, until now it has been only a pilot test in some rural schools. All religious communities have done an important job in the field of educating young generations with religious and universal values.

In this part of the scientific research, we will dwell in detail on the steps taken by religious communities in the field of reviving religion in post-communist Albania.

### **3.5.3. Muslim Community of Albania (MCA)**

The Muslim community constitutes the largest population of the country. Among the first steps taken on this regard was the re-establishment of the institution of the Albanian Muslim Community which would be the locomotive of many wagons for a single purpose, education, education and revival of faith in the hearts of Albanian believers.

The first step in the re-establishment of this institution was made on 16.11.1991, immediately after the end of the ceremony held in the Lead Mosque of Shkodra. A group of initiators consisting of 20 people, led by Hafiz Sabri Koçi, gathered and took the decision on the establishment of the proposed name: *Albanian Islamic Community*. (Faik, 2010) Based on the official statute of the Muslim Community of Albania (chapter 1, article 1), the Community includes all the sects compatible with the basic principles of the Islamic religion. (Lederer, 1994).

Albania in 1991, as in all areas, even in the religious aspect was miserable. The 1600 mosques that functioned in the past were all flattened to the ground and any that remained as a building were turned into a warehouse, club, or left at the mercy of humidity and time.

And so, the work began everywhere: in Shkodra, Tirana, Durrës, Kavaja, Berat, Elbasan, Vlora, Korça, Peshkopi, in every town and village, from Koplík to Konispol and slowly, with a careful work full of sacrifices began to open the first mosques, to repair what was left when they were handed over by the authorities, halls were opened to perform occasional prayers and sermons, new mosques were built.

The reopening of madrasas required the necessary staff, required the teaching material base, required students, required relevant regulations curricula and textbooks. All was lacking, except the desire, passion and willingness to get started. (MCA K. M., 2015)

Based on the meeting of January 21, 1991, a request was made for the reopening of the Madrasa of Tirana, where the former teacher of this school would write: “On October 16, 1991, the Madrasa of Tirana opens its doors to first year students of secondary education. Mr. Ibrahim Balla is initially elected in charge of school affairs, who is appointed director of the madrasa a year later by the Muslim Community.” (MCA, 1991).

On 12.12.1991 the madrasa “*Haxhi Sheh Shamia*” was opened in Shkodra and several other madrasas were continuously opened in the districts of Kavaja, Berat, Korça. Regarding religious subjects, the madrasas relied on the former students of the High Madrasa of Tirana, who, despite their age, were ready to teach.

In addition to religious schools, of course, there was a need to organize a religious press and religious books, because since 1944 no magazines or newspapers were published, no religious books were allowed to be published. Therefore, on October 7, 1991, Hafiz Sabri Koçi addressed the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports with a letter, where, among other things, he asked them to allow the publication of a newspaper.

On January 10, 1992, the first issue of the magazine “Drita Islame” was published. Regarding this, Nasuf Dizdari would note: “*These were the historic days of 1991, when the first meeting of the Directorate of Culture took place in December and it was decided that in January 1992 the newspaper “Drita Islame”, as a bi-weekly periodical by a structure of the Muslim Community Albania.*

The activity of the Muslim Community did not stop there but continued by paving the way for the education of the younger generations through the education they received in the madrasas of the time but also those that would open later such as Madrasa “Liria” in Cerrik, Madrasa “Hafiz Ali Korca” in Kavaja, Madrasa “Hafiz Abdullah Zemblaku” in Korça, and other Madrasas in Berat, Gjirokastrë etc. In addition to educational institutions and the press, MCA has paid special attention to the reopening and building of mosques in all areas of Albania.

Also, the Muslim Community of Albania since October 2012 turns into activity one of the most important bodies in the intellectual field, the scientific journal “Zani i Naltë” which was founded in 1923. “Zani i Naltë” magazine contains genuine scientific articles with academic treatments in the fields of various Islamic sciences, such as Fiqh, tafsir, hadith, but also in social sciences, such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, history, etc. which serves as a reliable source of information for those who want to read and study Islam.

Muslim Community of Albania would crown its activity in the field of education with the establishment of the Beder University in 2010, where in addition to the main programs in the field of social sciences and humanities, one of the departments is that of Islamic Sciences. With the opening of this university, the only one of its kind in the country, the Community already offered the Albanian society the opportunity to study Islam in Albania, without having to go to other countries such as Turkey, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, etc. to study Islamic religious sciences.

Today, the Muslim Community of Albania is spread in 35 cities of the country and follows the religious activity through the respective muftis. It has over 942 mosques, 4 Madrasas in the districts of Tirana, Durrës, Shkodra and Elbasan, as well as Beder University College in Tirana.

According to one of the most recent censuses, 56.7% of Albanians in Albania are Sunni Muslims, and thus Muslims are the largest religious community in the country.

### **3.5.4. Christian Community**

#### **3.5.4.1. *Orthodox Church***

As were all religious communities, the Orthodox one was in a very bad situation in many dimensions. Demolition of places of worship, lack of religious clerics, lack of religious knowledge from the adult society under the dictatorial system. All of this required a great deal of effort to put on the rails and once an entire community. The first official movements began on 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1992 with the election of Anastasios Janullatos as Archbishop of all Albania (Ejdersten, 2015).

During the years 1992-1998 important steps were taken where among them we can mention the establishment or formation of ecclesiastical structures, which consisted of a council composed of several bishops and Metropolitan headed by His Grace Janullatos. These were the initial steps but in fact very important in the whole process of reviving the faith after the fall of the communist system in Albania.

Later the Orthodox community took over the opening of educational institutions such as kindergartens, 9-year schools and high schools. In addition to these, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church has under its management since 1992, the Orthodox Theological Academy “Resurrection of Christ” in the monastery of Saint Vlash, Durres in which clergy and new cadres are trained for catechism and services in various activities of the Church, which starting from year 2020 is part of the University College Logos, an institution that is under the Orthodox church’s management. As well there two high schools “Holy Cross” in Gjirokastra and “Holy Cross” in Sukth (Durrës), and a Byzantine Music School in Tirana that aim the theological education of Orthodoxy (Orthodox Church of Albania, 2022). Based on the Church data, there are 20 kindergartens: in Tirana (2), Durrës, Kavajë, Elbasan (2), Cërrik, Gramsh, Shkodër, Berat, Vlorë, Lushnje, Gjirokastër (2), Sarandë, Dervic, Përmet, Tepelenë, Korça, Pogradec.

The church also manages several other schools such as: “Protagonists” (kindergarten, 9-year school, gymnasium); in Durrës and Gjirokastër, the 9-year Albanian-Greek schools “Frymë Dashurie”, as well as gymnasiums; in Korça, “Plato” gymnasium; in Mesopotamia, the

gymnasium and vocational high school “Apostle Paul”; in Bularat, the dormitory “Untouched Rose” for high school girls; in Saint Vlash, Durrës, the orphanage “Orthodox House of Hope”. From 2000 - 2010 it operated in Tirana - with a branch in Gjirokastra (in 2002 - 2011) - Institute of Vocational Training “Spirit of Love”. As well as starting from October 2008, in Tirana operates the University College “Logos” (Tirana Judicial District Court, 2009)

It is worth mentioning the fact that the Orthodox Church has an important contribution in the field of health where in 1994 dates the opening of the first Orthodox clinic named “St. Luke”, which later in 1999 would be replaced by the Orthodox Diagnostic Center “Evangelization”, a polyclinic with all the necessary conditions and services. (Kisha Orthodhokse, 2012)

In addition, there are several polyclinics in different cities with activity until 2015 as follows: Primary health care centers (Polyclinic) in Kavaja, Korça, and Lushnje, as well as diagnostic centers in Jergucat (Gjirokastra).

We also see an important expansion in the sector of press, media and communication with several different channels such as: printing house “Ngjallja”, children's magazine “Gëzohu!”, Youth magazine “Kambanat”, periodical magazine “Kërkim”, magazine “Tempulli”, “Our Enoria” bulletin, “Fjala” student bulletin, “Ngjallja” radio station. (Orthodox Church of Albania, 2022)

#### **3.5.4.2. Catholic Church**

The fall of the communist regime in Albania presented a positive challenge for the Catholic Church in the long road of material and spiritual reconstruction of the country; many efforts have been made in this direction, however, the journey started years ago is only the beginning and every day new problems appear that undoubtedly add to the number of unresolved issues. The Catholic Church has accepted the challenge of human and material reconstruction of this country torn apart by internal divisions, structural poverty and cultural poverty.

The official reorganization of the Catholic church began on 25 April 1993, with the visit of the Pope John Paul who stopped in two main cities such as Shkodra and Tirana. During his visit he declared the new hierarchy of the Church naming four new bishops, Monsignor Frano Illin, Monsignor Rrok Mirdita, Monsignor Robert Ashta, and Monsignor Zef Simoni.

Like other communities (Muslim and Orthodox) the Catholic Community or otherwise called the Catholic Church immediately took important steps to revive religious life in the country. They had a very important support from the Vatican, where qualified religious personnel would immediately be sent to fill the void created by the long period of communist rule in the country.

Among the first important actions, I can mention the opening of Seminaries for Catholic theological studies in Shkoder by Jesuits and Franciscans. For the sake of truth, it was not only the Vatican that found you close to the revival of the Catholic faith. There were many sisters and priestesses who came from Kosovo, Yugoslavia, Italy, Malta, the USA to help restore the values of this faith as well as to restore to function the Catholic churches and institutions that had survived the communist regime.

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Albania in 1993 was a strong signal for the support that the Vatican is giving to Catholicism. He also brought with him several copies of the sacraments and various lectures/messages translated and published in Albanian. Moreover, the year 1993 would also mark the year when it became possible to translate the main documents that came from the Vatican.

It is true that the Catholic press was of a special dimension in the pre-communist period and therefore its absence was felt in social life. Thus, another important step was the re-establishment and launch of publications, where in 1996 the translation and publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church was carried out.

His Grace, Mikel Koliqi, was consecrated as the first Albanian cardinal by the Holy Father on November 26, 1994. Following the restructuring of the dioceses in the Albanian Catholic Church, His Holiness John Paul II founded the Diocese of Rrshen (Mirdit) on December 7, 1996, replacing the abbey of Oroshi. He also named Father Angelo Massafra as the first



Bishop of Rrshen and apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Lezha. Father Massafra was formerly the Parish Priest of Troshan and Councilor of the Albanian Franciscan Province (Catholic Church, 2022).

Following the restructuring of the Catholic Church's hierarchy in Albania, Pope Benedict XVI named three new bishops on January 25, 2006: Monsignor Dod Gjergji, bishop of Sapa, Monsignor Ottavio Vitale, bishop of Lezha, and Monsignor Cristoforo Palmieri, bishop of Rrshen (Catholic Church, 2022).

In addition to the important developments in the completion of the religious clergy as well as the provision of a significant literature in the Albanian language, in 1993 Caritas was established in Albania, which from that time until now has a continuous activity. (Marku, 2019)

After the fall of the communist regime, the Jesuits immediately returned to Albania and in 1992 reopened a small school in Shkodër in a temporary house with a group of young Catholics. In 1994 the Jesuits were given back their old property, on which a state school had been built. Exactly, the school was located in this building, taking the name of Father Pjetër Meshkalla, a Shkodran Jesuit, who in this city remains a symbol of faith, culture and freedom. In the 1998-99 school year, the “Father Pjetër Meshkalla” school was open to young men and women, meeting the needs of many Christians and Muslims families in Shkodër regarding the education of future generations.

In the school year 2009 - 2010, another change begins with the transition from 4 to 3 years of the study cycle in secondary education teaching. This change is accompanied by the start of work on the new structure. Even that it is not under a direct supervision of the Catholic Church of Albania, the Catholic University of Our Lady of Good Counsel is part of this dome, which educates young generations in various fields and disciplines.

### **3.5.5. Bektashi Community**

The revival of Bektashism in Albania following the collapse of communism, as other religions did, is seen as a profound milestone in the religious and cultural narrative of the

nation. Throughout the communist era, Albania was proclaimed the world's first atheist state, resulting in severe oppression of all forms of religious expression. This suppression extended to the Bektashi Order, a Sufi Islamic tradition deeply rooted in Albanian history, as religious institutions were shuttered and adherents were persecuted.

The dawn of the 1990s brought about a revival of religious identity and freedom in Albania, paving the way for the reemergence of Bektashism among the Albanian population, and encompassing pivotal transformations. The restoration of religious freedom permitted Bektashi adherents to openly practice their faith once more. Closed or repurposed Bektashi tekkes (monasteries) were reopened, while new ones were established as centers for religious gatherings, education, and cultural preservation. The rekindling of traditional ceremonies, pilgrimages, and festivals played an integral role in rejuvenating the community and reigniting connections with spiritual heritage.

Central to this revival was the leadership within the Bektashi community, exemplified by figures like Baba Reshat Bardhi, who played a pivotal role in reconstructing the order's organizational structure and fostering unity among followers. International support and networks, particularly from Turkey and other Balkan countries, also contributed to the reestablishment of the order in Albania. This period witnessed a renewed emphasis on the teachings of Bektashism, promoting values such as tolerance, love, and the quest for inner truth.

Furthermore, the resurgence of Bektashism was accompanied by endeavors to safeguard and promote Bektashi cultural heritage. The order undertook initiatives to restore historical sites, publish religious texts, and document the history and traditions of Bektashism, fortifying the faith community and enriching the broader cultural and religious landscape of Albania. The revival of Bektashism serves as a testament to the resiliency of religious traditions and their capacity to adapt and flourish even after endured suppression.

In conclusion, the revival of Bektashism in Albania following the communist era echoes a broader trend of religious and cultural reawakening in the country. It underscores the enduring significance of Bektashi beliefs and practices in Albanian society and emphasizes the crucial role of religious freedom in revitalizing suppressed traditions. Through the

dedicated efforts of its leaders and adherents, Bektashism not only reclaimed its presence but continues to play an integral part in the spiritual and cultural fabric of Albania.

### **3.6. Interreligious Council of Albania and its role in promoting values of harmony and peace**

The Interreligious Council of Albania (IRCA) serves as a significant platform for promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation among Albania's diverse religious communities. Established in 2007 the IRCA comprises five official religious communities recognized by the Albanian government: Muslim Community of Albania (MCA), Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania (AOCHA), Catholic Church of Albania (CCHA), World Bektashi Patriarchate (WBP), Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania (EBA). This council plays a vital role in fostering understanding, mutual respect, and collaboration among these religious groups, contributing to Albania's tradition of religious tolerance, harmony and coexistence.

Furthermore, the IRCA functions as a consultative entity that offers a platform for representatives from various religious communities to tackle common obstacles, champion shared principles, and advocate for religious freedom and human rights. By means of consistent gatherings, collaborative endeavors, and public declarations, the council endeavors to foster rapport and unity among religious leaders and their followers, promoting social coherence and fortitude against extremist and intolerant attitudes. The IRCA's composition mirrors Albania's religious panorama, which is marked by a rich tapestry of faiths and beliefs.

In addition, it is involved in numerous areas of mutual interest, such as interfaith dialogue, religious education, social welfare, and peace-building initiatives. Through constructive dialogue and collaborative efforts, the council aims to foster interreligious understanding, challenge stereotypes and prejudices, and tackle societal issues that impact all religious communities. A significant aspect of the IRCA's work is advocating for religious freedom and equal rights for all individuals, regardless of their faith. Albania's secular constitution ensures freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. The IRCA

plays a vital role in protecting these fundamental rights and advancing their practical implementation.

Moreover, it has gained national and international recognition for its notable efforts in promoting interfaith harmony and peace-building in Albania. Through encouraging dialogue and fostering cooperation among various religious communities, the council has successfully cultivated a culture of tolerance, respect, and coexistence, thus serving as an exemplar of interreligious engagement in diverse societies. Scholars and researchers alike have emphasized the value of initiatives such as the IRCA in advancing social peace and cohesion within Albania.

Additionally, the IRCA engages in collaborative efforts with governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as international partners, in order to tackle common challenges and promote shared values. Through joint initiatives and partnerships, the council is able to broaden its impact and reach, contributing to larger efforts aimed at fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society. Research conducted on interfaith relations in Albania has emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation among religious communities in maintaining social stability and preventing conflicts. Studies have highlighted the positive role played by initiatives such as the IRCA in bridging divides, promoting understanding, and building trust among diverse religious groups. The council's commitment to promoting peace and social justice extends beyond Albania's borders, as it actively participates in regional and international interfaith forums and conferences. By sharing experiences and best practices, the IRCA contributes to global efforts to promote religious tolerance, diversity, and harmony.

While considering the scope of the IRCA I stopped on analyzing the statute of the official body. The fifth article of the Interreligious Council of Albania's statute sheds light on the diverse objectives of the organization. Its core mission is to cultivate knowledge, values, and principles among religious communities in Albania. Through the promotion of intellectual development and the establishment of common ethical foundations, the IRCA strives to be a driving force in the creation of a society that is both peaceful and equitable. This facet of the organization's mission underscores the transformative potential of education and shared values in mitigating conflicts and fostering a society that prioritizes fairness and harmony.

The statute underscores the importance of fostering a comprehensive social, cultural, and professional framework that caters to the unique needs of religious groups in Albania. This recognizes the diverse and multifaceted nature of these communities, acknowledging that their identity goes beyond their religious beliefs. IRCA is dedicated to supporting the holistic growth of religious communities by addressing not just their spiritual needs, but also their social, cultural, and professional dimensions, to enhance their overall well-being and contribution to society as a whole. As discussed in the forthcoming article, IRCA has initiated several significant projects geared towards promoting the welfare of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. One noteworthy initiative is the earthquake zone project that assists families affected by property loss, the death of loved ones, and other related issues.

Pivotal to IRCA's mission, as detailed in Article 5, is the seamless integration of religious communities into the tapestry of Albanian society. Attaining this objective necessitates transparent conversations and actively soliciting feedback on topics of mutual concern. The Interreligious Council of Albania serves as a forum for dialogue, fostering the exchange of viewpoints among religious factions and the wider populace. This commitment to integration is crucial for fostering bonds and breaking down barriers, fostering a more cohesive and interdependent social milieu. IRCA's fourth mission dimension involves strategically planning and executing joint action programs. These programs are anchored in shared moral commitments, uniting diverse religious communities in pursuit of common objectives. By taking a proactive approach, the aim is to leverage the collective influence of these communities to tackle societal issues. This further contributes to the development of a fair and peaceful society in Albania.

Article 5 emphasizes the crucial role of religious communities in decision-making processes that pertain to their rights. The IRCA acknowledges the significance of empowering these communities to shape policies that directly impact them. This approach fosters inclusivity and upholds the distinctive traditions and beliefs of each community. By actively engaging religious communities in decision-making, the IRCA promotes a more democratic and equitable society that values diverse perspectives. In brief, the IRCA statute's Article 5 offers a holistic strategy to accomplish the organization's mission. It emphasizes the significance of advancing awareness, ethics, and beliefs, establishing an all-encompassing structure for

religious groups, assimilating into societal norms, coordinating collaborative undertakings, and striving for active engagement in decision-making. Through these endeavors, IRCA endeavors to provoke constructive transformation and cultivate a community in Albania that upholds harmony, impartiality, comprehensiveness, and variation.

Religion plays a crucial role in the social fabric of societies, and Albania is no exception. The promotion of knowledge, values, and principles among religious communities related to the construction of a peaceful and just society in Albania is a statement that highlights the importance of educating religious communities about key concepts such as peace and justice. By promoting knowledge, values, and principles among religious communities, it becomes possible to foster a culture of understanding, cooperation, and respect within society. This is important because religious communities have a significant influence on their members and can shape their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

The promotion of a social, cultural, and professional model of religious communities in Albania emphasizes the importance of encouraging religious communities to adopt a forward-thinking approach (Rita & Petro, 2021). that not only focuses on religious practices but also incorporates social, cultural, and professional aspects. This holistic approach recognizes that religious communities are not isolated entities, but rather active participants in the larger society. By promoting a social, cultural, and professional model, religious communities can contribute to the overall development of Albania by engaging in activities that benefit the broader community and by adapting to the changing needs and demands of society. The integration of religious communities in social life by discussing and giving opinions on areas of common interest and concern recognizes the significance of including religious perspectives in societal discussions and decision-making processes. This inclusion promotes a sense of ownership and participation among religious communities, allowing them to contribute their unique perspectives and insights on common issues.

The planning and implementation of joint action programs based on common moral commitments in Albania emphasizes the importance of collaboration and cooperation among religious communities. By formulating joint action programs based on shared moral commitments, religious communities can work together towards common goals and address societal challenges in a unified manner. This approach ensures that efforts are aligned and

resources are effectively utilized, leading to more impactful outcomes. The participation and involvement of the religious community in decision-making in matters related to their rights plays a vital role in promoting inclusivity, respect, and tolerance within society. It acknowledges that religious communities should not be passive recipients of decisions that affect their rights and interests but should actively participate in the decision-making process. This involvement ensures that decisions are made with a comprehensive understanding of the unique traditions, beliefs, and practices of different religious communities. Source: - “Promoting knowledge, values, and principles among religious communities related to the construction of a peaceful and just society in Albania” highlights the importance of nurturing a shared understanding and appreciation of knowledge, values, and principles among religious communities in Albania. This promotes mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among different religious communities, which are essential for building a peaceful and just society. Promotion of a social, cultural, and professional model for religious communities in Albania is crucial for their growth, development, and sustainability. It encompasses the need for religious communities to have a robust social support system that addresses their cultural, social, and professional needs.

Based on article number six of the statute, shortly can shed light on the main fields of activities of the Council.

1. The identification of the existing parameters of the level of mutual social cooperation and the determination of the paths and methods that lead to the approach and the solution of the problems related to it, through the organization of studies, surveys, polls, and others.
2. Investigating and identifying violations of the rights of individuals or religious groups for integration and harmonious interaction in society.
3. The preparation of strategies that will enable the creation of advanced contemporary concepts in favor of the development and integration into society of individuals and groups of traditional religious communities.
4. Providing multidisciplinary assistance: psychological, social, legal, economic, etc., for the support of individuals, groups of groups of traditional religious communities that suffer dysfunctions caused by the lack of integrity and integration and social development.
5. Cooperation and exchange of experience with reliable partners: organizations, governmental and non-governmental institutions, private and legal persons, local and

foreign, as well as with such organizations from different countries of the world, for the development of projects to help the realization of goals and objectives.

6. To publish auxiliary materials, alone or in cooperation with other institutions, defined in this statute.

7. To help, through trainings, seminars and conferences, groups of traditional religious communities by setting up professional structures to develop their knowledge in all fields.

### **3.7. Common projects of religious communities in Albania**

Religious communities have historically played an important role in promoting social peace in Albanian society. They have done so by emphasizing values such as harmony, tolerance, coexistence, respect for the divine, humane, and universal principles. In times of crisis, religious communities have shown remarkable leadership by responding to the needs of society. The 2019 earthquake, for instance, left many families without homes and emotional and financial support. In this difficult period, religious communities in Albania provided critical assistance to those affected by distributing food packages and aid. The international community took notice of these efforts, with institutions such as Religions for Peace (RfP) featuring the Albanian religious communities' response to the earthquake. This response illustrates how religious communities can serve as key actors in times of crisis (KNFSH., 2019).

Following that event, members of various religious communities' leaders, youth and women have directed their attention towards a local orphanage. The children residing in this facility have lost one or both parents, and are now burdened with the additional trauma of having experienced an earthquake. In an effort to uplift their spirits and create a festive atmosphere, these communities have arranged a social and cultural event for these children, which includes the exchange of gifts and opportunities to engage in playful activities. This event is intended to provide these children with a temporary respite from their usual place of residence, allowing them to have fun and forget their troubles for a little while (KNFSH., 2020).

Religious communities in Albania are not only focused on providing emotional and monetary support to their members, but also on preventing violent extremism in all its forms,



including religious and political extremism. These communities have come together to release joint statements calling for calmness, common sense, love, and tolerance. The leaders of these communities urge both young and old to avoid falling prey to extremist and radical calls, as religion itself promotes peace, harmony, and prosperity. Moreover, these religious communities have been actively involved in addressing the issue of human trafficking. Under the umbrella of the Interreligious Council of Albania, they have participated in several round tables, national, and international conferences to discuss the role of religious communities in combating human trafficking. By working together, these communities are making a positive impact on society and promoting the values of love, compassion, and tolerance (KNFSH., 2020) & (KNFSH., 2021).

Five different religious communities have come together to embark on a truly remarkable humanitarian effort. Amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they have generously donated hospital equipment worth \$5,000 to aid the civil hospital of Tepelena. This inspiring interfaith collaboration serves as a shining example of how diverse religious communities can unite and support their fellow citizens in their time of need, demonstrating the power of unity and solidarity in the face of adversity (KNFSH, 2021).

The Interreligious Council of Albania has taken the initiative to organize a series of important meetings with different members of the two main departments - women and youth. Each department has two representatives from each official community in Albania. The primary objective of these interfaith forums is to promote the peaceful values that religion conveys. As it is seen on the reports, the religious communities, along with their leaders, have come together to aim for a wide range of activities that will extend throughout the entire territory of Albania. The council is working towards closely involving the grassroots, the focus groups of interest from young people, women, and emerging religious leaders. These activities seek to create an impact by fostering a sense of unity among different religious communities and promoting a culture of peace and harmony. Through these forums, the council hopes to foster mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among different religions, and create a platform for dialogue and collaboration (KNFSH, 2022).

Religious communities are actively engaged in various international projects, one such significant effort being a 3-year project funded by GCERF, aimed at preventing violent

extremism and radicalism, both of which are perceived to be serious threats to our society. The project has brought together current and emerging leaders, all of whom are working towards developing innovative and contemporary methods to address the key elements that contribute to the spread of violent extremism, be it religious, political, cultural, or social. These leaders are investing their knowledge, expertise, and recommendations to facilitate the preservation of peace and harmony in society. The project's focus is to foster a culture of inclusivity, openness, and acceptance, and to promote the values of mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among all communities (KNFSH, 2021).

Engaging in various activities is crucial for promoting social peace and cohesion in any society. Such activities are designed to cater to the needs of vulnerable populations, foster empathy and compassion, and encourage collective action for the greater good. These activities may include community service, volunteering, philanthropy, and advocacy for social justice, among others. By participating in these activities, individuals develop a sense of purpose and belonging, which strengthens social bonds and leads to a more harmonious society. Moreover, these activities help address societal issues and instill a sense of responsibility towards the community. Through active engagement and contribution to society, individuals learn to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and experiences, leading to a more empathetic and compassionate society where collective action for the greater good is the norm.

### **3.8. Joint declarations of the religious communities' leaders on social topics that concern Albanian society.**

In this section I will go through the joint declarations of the religious communities' leaders on social topics that concern Albanian society. These declarations are signed respectively by: Hadji Bujar Spahiu, Chairman of the Muslim Community of Albania, His Beatitude, Anastasios Janullatos, Archbishop of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, Archbishop Gjergj Meta, Chairman of the Episcopal Conference, Hadji Dede Edmond Brahimaj, Headfather of the Bektashi World Center, Pastor Ylli Doci, Chairman of the Evangelical Alliance of Albania. Since there is a rotation process on the presidency of the IRCA some declarations are signed only by its president.

### **3.8.1. “Religious communities, call for calm: Make Dialogue, say no violence”**

Part of the declaration: *“The leaders of the Muslim community, the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the World Archpriest of the Bektashi and the Evangelical Brotherhood, say that they are worried about the recent developments, about the lack of dialogue and the will to solve the created impasses. Also, they express concern about the violent and contemptuous rhetoric that politicians convey through the media and social networks, as well as the phenomenon of corruption.”*

The declaration issued by religious leaders in Albania underscores the critical role that religious communities play in promoting social peace and stability within the nation. Through their collective expression of concern over recent developments characterized by a lack of dialogue and escalating tensions, these leaders demonstrate their commitment to fostering harmony and cooperation among diverse societal factions. By addressing issues such as divisive rhetoric by politicians, corruption, and narcotics production, religious leaders acknowledge the multifaceted challenges that threaten the fabric of societal cohesion. Their assertion of the importance of maintaining stability within the country as a common good reflects a shared moral imperative that transcends religious differences and underscores the unifying role of religious institutions in addressing societal concerns.

Moreover, the declaration highlights the moral authority of religious communities in advocating for constructive dialogue and collaboration among political actors. By calling upon all political factions to prioritize building bridges rather than erecting walls, religious leaders emphasize the necessity of reconciliation and mutual understanding in resolving conflicts. This appeal for honest dialogue resonates with the ethical teachings of many religious traditions, which often emphasize the values of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Furthermore, the demand for politicians to refrain from using violent and disparaging rhetoric towards opponents underscores the role of religious communities in promoting respectful and dignified discourse as a foundation for social peace. Through these calls for dialogue and civility, religious leaders assert their influence in shaping public discourse and guiding political behavior towards paths that promote peace and harmony.

Additionally, the declaration underscores the proactive stance of religious communities in upholding democratic principles and ensuring the integrity of electoral processes. By advocating for transparent and comprehensive pre-election and election procedures, religious leaders seek to safeguard the democratic values upon which social peace depends. Their appeal to citizens to resist electoral malpractice, such as vote buying and coercion, reflects a commitment to promoting ethical conduct and civic responsibility among the populace. Furthermore, the call for citizens to refrain from resorting to violence against individuals and institutions reinforces the importance of upholding the rule of law and respecting human dignity within society. Overall, the declaration highlights the indispensable role of religious institutions as moral authorities and advocates for peace, contributing significantly to the promotion of social cohesion and stability within Albanian society, (KNFSH, Keshilli Nderfetar i Shqiperise, 2017).

### **3.8.2. Call for participation in the elections**

Following this declaration, I can say that the main idea conveyed in it is the importance and significance of participating in the electoral process. It emphasizes that voting is not only a right but also a moral and civic obligation. The religious leaders aim to encourage individuals to engage in peaceful and democratic voting, highlighting that it is a fundamental aspect of democracy and a legitimate right recognized by the Constitution and laws of the land.

*Main topic addressed through this declaration are as follows:*

- a. The material underscores the notion that participation in the electoral process is not just a privilege but also a responsibility that individuals have towards their community and society at large. It suggests that voting is a way for citizens to actively contribute to the betterment of their communities.
  
- b. Voting is presented as a means through which individuals can influence change within their communities. By participating in the electoral process, individuals have the opportunity to shape the direction of their communities and advocate for issues that are important to them.

c. The material emphasizes the importance of making informed decisions when choosing candidates to support. It suggests that individuals should prioritize reputable, non-corrupt candidates who demonstrate qualities such as justice, high morals, and achievements. Additionally, voters are encouraged to consider a candidate's proposed platform and ideas for the welfare of individuals, families, and society as a whole.

Religious leaders through this declaration want to remind the citizens of the power and responsibility that they hold as participants in the democratic process (KNFSH, 2019).

### **3.8.3. The Interreligious Council of Albania sends proposals to the Assembly for changes to the Family Code**

The text of the declaration: *“The religious leaders of the official religious communities in Albania have sent a request to the Parliament of Albania to participate in the sessions of the Law Commission where changes to the Family Code will be discussed. In addition to the request for participation, the Interreligious Council of Albania has also submitted several proposals regarding the changes in the Family Code for articles 241, 242. The proposals of the leaders for article 241 are to increase the age of the adopter, based on the Italian Civil Code, the council proposes that the current age, which is 21 years old, should be increased to be 35 years old or older, only in rare cases to be 30 years old or older. As for article 242, the proposal of the IRCA is that the minor can be adopted by a single person or by persons who are spouses or cohabitants only when it is proven that they are bounded by marriage or cohabitation according to the provisions of articles 7 and 163 of this Code, and who have lived together stably and continuously for at least 3 years.”*

The religious leaders of official religious communities in Albania have expressed a desire to be involved in discussions regarding changes to the Family Code. This indicates their interest in influencing the legislative process and potentially ensuring that any revisions align with their religious and ethical beliefs considering the family as the main pillar of the society. In addition to requesting participation, the Interreligious Council of Albania has submitted specific proposals for amendments to articles 241 and 242 of the Family Code. This suggests proactive engagement by religious leaders in shaping the legal framework governing family and adoption matters.

The have overseen some changes on the legislation that based on their point of view will help on the protection of the family institution. Moreover, this statement indicates active engagement by religious leaders in advocating for changes to the Family Code that align with their values and beliefs, particularly concerning the age and eligibility criteria for adopters. It also suggests a desire to ensure that any revisions to the law promote the best interests of children and families within the Albanian context (KNFSH, Keshilli Nderfetar i Shqiperise, 2021).

## **4. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND RELIGION**

### **4.1. International Relations and Religion**

Religion not only connects people with a divine feeling but also creates a sense of partnership among those who believe in it. For this reason, it is at the forefront of national and international policy elements in terms of values that are adopted by large masses (Macit, 2013, p. 175) Even if the way religion is placed in politics changes, it has always maintained its influence in politics and international relations. Although studies on the effects of religion gained momentum with the end of the cold war, its main effect was after the September 11 attacks in the USA in 2001. The global impact of these attacks on the world has led to a more serious consideration of the place of religion in the discipline of International Relations.

Although some researchers argue that religion is always one of the basic structures of local and international politics, religion does not find a place in IRs (Sandal, Nukhet A & Fox, Jonathan, 2013, p. 169). International relations as a discipline are a small universe of modern Western philosophy and Western social sciences, based on the Enlightenment philosophy. The establishment and progress of international relations as a discipline is similar to the process of modern Western science. While the philosophy of the Enlightenment was shaped by the Renaissance and Reformation movements; it was the beginning of science based on reason and cause-effect relationship in the West.

The founders of the social sciences and their successors did not accept religion as a reference to explain the world. According to them, these elements, which are seen as primitive factors such as ethnicity and religion, have no place in modern society; nor could they take part in rational interpretations of the workings of the world. However, while the focus of science was the Western world, the relative diminishing influence of religion in

the West modern times allowed the influence of religion in science to be ignored. By social scientists, especially political scientists; it was thought that by providing material and spiritual opportunities to modern people, a strong modern state would give up their primitive attachments such as pre-modern religion (Connolly, 1988).

While religion has ceased to be the focus of modern philosophy and research, this situation has remained in the background of as one of the main focal points of research compared to other social sciences in the discipline of international relations, which began taking shape in the 15th century, when the foundations of today's international system were laid. The main reason for this is that the political philosophy and legitimating principles of the discipline of international relations, which established its dominance on modern foundations after religious wars, were shaped in a secular structure (Fox & Sandler, 2004).

#### **4.1.1. Conceptualization of Religion in IR**

Religion, which means “*method or way*” is one of the fundamental aspects of social life. It stems from the fact that humans are social beings and has manifested itself in numerous ways ever since social life began. Depending on the physical characteristics of the area where they lived and the variety of economic income, many local faiths started to arise. (Frayer, 2016, p. 100) As evidence of this diversity, polytheistic religions have local characteristics and are identified with various ties with the ruling gods at the top of society. Since these religions do not tend to spread, polytheistic religions have mostly left their place to monotheistic religions in the historical process. Even though polytheistic religions have continued to exist until today, they have become widespread with the emergence of monotheistic religions (Frayer, 2016, p. 45).

Unlike polytheistic religions, monotheistic religions claim to be universal. Therefore, monotheistic religions do not discriminate between people at different levels in society and between societies. This mission adopted by religion ensures that it has an expansionist nature that appeals to all humanity (Frayer, 2016). The fact that Christianity and Islam emerged from the lands where they were born and exist in different geographies and communities of the world can be shown as evidence of this nature.



Religion establishes guiding principles that control social behavior in society. The fact that religion is deeply ingrained in social life and the set of laws it has established to govern interpersonal relationships permeate every aspect of society. It is one of the most important factors in determining how society is shaped politically, economically, culturally, and in terms of how individuals interact. Although it has changed with modernity and has lessened in intensity, religion continues to have a significant impact on society. The influence of religion has continued to permeate all spheres of life, even though its intensity fluctuates from time to time.

It is challenging to develop a broad definition of religion that is both inclusive and encompasses various kinds due to the universality of religion and its emergence in numerous forms (Aktay, Yasin ve Köktaş, M. Emin, 2007). With the diversity of religion's meaning grows and makes it more challenging to an impartial description when it manifests in human conduct. The reason for this is that everyone has distinct religious beliefs and lifestyles. Although there isn't a one term that everyone agrees on, there are many meanings that reflect varied viewpoints. Although Rudolf Otto attempted to define religion in a way that would encompass all religions for the first time, and in accordance with the definition favored by many religious academics, religion is “*the living of the sacred*” (Frayer, 2016). Considering religion as the living of the sacred, as a basic motive that directs the actions of individuals; it emerged in the process of questioning the meaning of religion with the enlightenment and gained a different dimension by being shaped under rationalism and occurring in modern life.

Enlightenment philosophers approached religion with a distance from the reform and expected a secular society structure shaped by the principle of rationality. At this point, according to secularization, religion is a phenomenon that occurs in the personal space of the individual in modern life. In his critique of religion based on rationalism, Marx dealt with religion economically, Feuerbach anthropologically and Freud psychologically. In these approaches, religion is not a part of a scientific reality. While some early philosophers of the Enlightenment approached religion as an irrational reality; the place religion has taken in modern society has been shaped by the birth of sociology. The first sociologists encountered religious phenomena while examining the formation of modern society and the causes that prepared it. For the first time by sociologists, religion was

accepted as one of the basic parts of society and they developed a scientific approach to religion.

The phenomenon of religion, which not only affects individuals deeply but also can dominate the values of society in modern societies, has entered the field of scientific investigation. In this sense, the birth of the sociology of religion was born during the examination of the sociological factors of modernity. The effects of religious phenomena in modern society are included in the research of the first great sociologists in the discipline. They showed that religion is an important phenomenon that should be evaluated with a scientific approach by showing the place and importance of religion in social structures against the reductionist arguments developed against religion with the Enlightenment. This contributed to the religion's regaining its prestige (Willaime, 2017, p. 22)

According to Durkheim, religious beliefs are “*conceptions that express sacred things and their relationship to each other or to profane actions.*” The dimension of collective living of religion makes religion one of the most important components of social life. Durkheim sees religion as the internalization of a collective feeling and argues that religion is an important part of the social order by providing social integration within society. While religion is seen as a tool of social integration in Durkheim; it is not seen as a means of disintegration of society nor of protest as a counterpoint. Weber, on the other hand, considers religion as a matter of world affairs rather than as a metaphysical subject that cannot be proven. He sees the relations of supernatural forces with humans as a field of study and thus focuses on the effect of human relations in the world rather than the unknowable aspect of religion. According to the association of religion with the otherworldly world, Weber's emphasis on worldly relations has been a serious break. The second important break in Weber's approach to religion is his defense that religion has a rationality within its own systematic. According to him, there are various types of rationality. The fact that religion has gained its own rationality has shown that it is central to the emergence of modernity (Willaime, 2017, pp. 30–31)

Although the influence of religion in the social and political arenas decreased with modernism, especially in Western societies, with the revival of religion in the

international arena in the 1970s, its social, cultural and political effects increased visibly. In many parts of the world, tensions about religion's place in the public sphere have become more visible as “*Religious*” and “*Secular*” collide. These topics cover various themes such as life and death, scientific development, human rights, welfare and public services. Democratic, social and political integration of religious beliefs and organizations; It is at the center of modern debates over the role of national, cultural, and individual religious issues in matters of faith. Simultaneously, terrorist organizations that act with religious motives in violence and conflict take part in discussions over fundamentalist movements (Kettell, 2016, p. 93). When demographic trends are considered, including estimations of conversion and separation from religion, it is predicted that 80 % of the world's population will continue to have relations with religion in the next 200 years (Johnson, 2004, pp. 947–960) This shows that religion will continue to affect social life, therefore, domestic and foreign policy, and therefore the international system.

#### **4.1.2. The Rise of the concept of Religion in IR in the 21st Century**

It was a surprising development for the Western world that the September 11 attacks that occurred in the USA in 2001 were so influential that the phenomenon of religion impacted the heart of the whole world. After 2001, the effect of religion on social and political phenomena began to be investigated in more detail in international relations. Unless the effect of religion on international relations is revealed, the thought that political analysis in the discipline will be insufficient (Fox & Sandler, 2004).

However, while the Western world is the focus of these studies; In Non-Western societies, it has been estimated that religion is a remnant of primitive factors and will disappear with the modernization process of these societies; however, contrary to what is thought, religion did not disappear in non-Western societies, but reborn and became visible in both Western and non-Western societies. It has contributed to the ignorance of religion by scientists in international relations with the influence of the Western-centered worldview and social sciences. This situation and the tendency to ignore religion are more common in international relations than in other social sciences disciplines. The fact that international relations gained its dominance by separating from religious wars has evolved

with the formation of its basic and legitimate principles and political philosophy in this direction.

The influence of the discipline of international relations by behaviouralism and quantitative methodology has caused religion to be a blind spot in IR. As another result of international relations are Western-centered, while the discipline focuses on concepts such as the state, material power, and economy; religion has not been accepted as one of the fundamental points in all international relations theories. According to most of the social scientists and some of the political scientists, modernity has eliminated the need for God by excluding the primitive bonds and creating a strong state and modern individual. Another reason is that international relations scholars find it difficult to put religion in a conceptual framework (Snyder, 2011).

Despite this, the indirect effects of religion on the system are well accepted by academics. A very important point that religion affects international relations is legitimacy. Political legitimacy is complementary to physical strength. Religion is a powerful source of legitimacy in persuading societies in the survival of regimes and the exercise of power. While supporting war or peace in foreign policy, religion provides legitimacy in maintaining the status quo or in change by religious authorities or in the identity dimension of religion. Since religion can be a visible face of identity, it can be effective in giving identity to international politics. Another important effect of religion on international relations is the link between domestic and foreign policy. The concept of “connected politics” was coined by James Rosenau in the early 1960s, especially in relation to religion (Rosenau, 1969). While the increase in the influence of religion in domestic politics is a clear situation according to social scientists; found its place in the theory of international relations recently.

The rise of religion in the 21st century has made religion an integral part of politics and international politics. According to Habermas, the rise of religion in the 21st century has been through three phenomena in post-secular society. These; the spread of missionary work, the potential for violence from the essence of religions to become a political instrument, and radicalization (Habermas, 2008). In this process, in which religion was on the rise in secularism, its place in societies and institutions began to be discussed.

According to Peter Berger, while secularization managed to maintain its presence among both institutions and intellectuals in Western Europe, it lost its power in the rest of the world. Especially in this process, religion gained momentum in the global arena, especially the effectiveness of two dynamic movements, Islam and Evangelical groups.

According to Berger, the reason for the rise of religion in post-secular societies is the search for certainty against the uncertainty brought by modernity and the rebellion against the elite secular minority. According to Berger, there are four possible outcomes of the rise of religion and the erosion of secularism. According to this; Firstly, religion is an important factor in wars, secondly, religion provides the legitimacy that starts and ends wars, thirdly, religion and economic development in this process can be either a blessing or a scourge for developing Third World countries, and lastly, important national decisions are made. human rights and social justice, which are complex when taken with religious influence, become more complex (Reaves, 2012, p. 7)

#### **4.1.3. The Effects of the Religion on Foreign Policy**

In the international system, regarding the dimension of the state, which is the most important actor of the system, the concept of foreign policy, which is one of the most basic elements of international relations, appears. Foreign Policy is the strategy or the approach adopted by a national government to achieve its purpose in its relationship with external structures. The observable nature of foreign policy, which are specific actions and words used to penetrate others in the foreign policy field, encompass processes of conflict and cooperation used in the data creation process, including event data. This policy is produced and managed in a complex and intricate domestic and international environment. This results in a coalition of active groups and actors located both within and outside the state borders. It is the process of bargaining and reconciliation that affects the interests of both internal and external actors. It refers to a bilateral structure with one foot based on domestic politics and the other on international relations. this case

Christopher Hill, it is the interaction of complex processes between actors from different structures. Their interaction is a dynamic process that results in a continuous evaluation of actors and structures (Hill, 2003, p. 28). In the real world, there are many actors, both

local and international, that are somehow closely involved in foreign policy decision-making processes. On both sides of the domestic and international divide there are many structures that decisively affect these actors in different ways (Smith, Steve & Handfield, Amelia & Dunne, Tim, 2012, p. 12) As it has been clearly revealed, there are many factors, domestic and foreign, that affect the foreign policy of countries. Policy makers, when making decisions about foreign policy, form a structure based on the domestic policy of their own nation and the aim at maximizing their interests compared to other countries in the international system.

Although religion was one of the most common causes of war between countries before the Peace of Westphalia, it was accepted that it was removed from the foreign policy of states as it was removed from being a cause of war between sovereign states with this peace. With Modernism and Secularism shaping the international system, the role of religion in foreign policy has been put into the background. The decline of religion in international relations was due to the suppression of religious belief by secularism and modernism, the rise of science and reason, and the prevalence of secular policies worldwide, while religion was in a constant decline (Haynes J. , 2016, p. 293) While the secularization thesis defines religion as “anti-modern” in politics and, by extension, in international relations; it has been associated with “*religious fundamentalism*.”

Religion does not occur in international relations only through fundamentalist groups and policies. Although for example the Israel-Palestine conflict is about the division of land between the two states, religious motives in the struggle have been the driving force of the conflict that has continued since Israel's establishment. However, with the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, religion became the main element in Iran's foreign policy, and religion became more remarkable in interstate relations. Another important example is the Roman Catholic Church. The role of the church, as a structure with the most members in the world, in a system where the states are the main actors, is only important to religious identity.

The importance given to the diplomacy that the Church establishes not only with countries with a Christian population but also with countries where people belonging to different religions are common, is remarkable. The Church did not support religious

fundamentalism, but assumed the identity of being a part of the modern world and supported the democratic transition processes of countries in various parts of the world. As can be seen in the examples, while the visibility of religion in politics has decreased, its influence has not decreased. Only by denying the influence of religion in the analysis of events has made international relations and foreign policy more reductionist. However, this reductionist approach has led to the re-examination of the secularization thesis, which is constantly challenged not only in Western Europe but also in many parts of the world, with the re-emergence of religion in the international system in the 21st century.

Religion is a two-way foreign policy notion that affects both national politics and international relations. Religion affects foreign policy through both internal and external factors. Religion can first be considered a factor in domestic politics. The domestic structure and politics of a country are one of the most determining factors in foreign policy. At this point, the history, culture and memory of the country determine the domestic politics. Religion comes to the fore as a factor that affects all of these notions. According to this, in foreign policy fed by domestic politics, religion constitutes one of the primary factors in the influence of foreign policy. Particularly in societies that have adopted holistic religions that impose binding rules on many aspects of life, such as Islam and Judaism, the distinction between public and private spheres and national identity that determine domestic politics are intertwined concepts (Hurd E. S., 2007, p. 350)

The most important feature of religion that affects and shapes foreign policy in terms of external factors is the instrumentalization of religion. The policy most used by states in the instrumentalization of religion is “*soft power*.” According to Joseph Nye (1990) first put forward and defined; soft power, though not necessarily a state, generally refers to the ability of a state to influence the actions of others, directly or indirectly, through international influence and encouragement. Soft power is the capacity to influence a nation or community over its culture, values and ideals. Religion becomes a soft power tool of states in influencing them by developing foreign policy against other states based on these values. By referring to the ethical and human values provided by religion, the legitimacy of the policies is provided (Haynes J. , 2016, p. 95) Religion is used as an instrumental in the negotiations that try establishing a consensus between the states. Religion as an important source of legitimacy is used in political violence and

reconciliation negotiations over norms and values (Rees, 2014, p. 471) In the instrumentalization of religion over the values it represents, the search for support in foreign policy towards Muslim countries, especially states, especially through Islam, is more common for many reasons. International connections are trying to win the hearts and minds of Muslims by using soft power.

Many examples can be given from various parts of the world on the religious activity and instrumentalization of countries in foreign policy. At this point, religion can be a matter of both domestic and foreign policy. Religion is included in foreign policy with the instrumentalization of religion not only in states where religious societies live intensely but also in secular states. By defining the freedom of religion, these commissions identify the oppression in other countries due to religious beliefs and the violations of religion in the direction they define. With this law, freedom of religion, which is owned by the states and measured by the American state, has been institutionalized in American foreign policy and has become an agenda item in its relations with the states. By instrumentalizing religion, America has made it a tool of oppression that allows states to interfere in their internal affairs in interstate relations.

The assumption that Westphalia and sovereign states cannot interfere in their internal affairs and that religion cannot be an agenda item in interstate relations because the states are accepted as their own internal matter has been violated by the Western world, which is the founder of the system, and in particular, the most powerful actor of the system, America. This situation has given visibility to the relationship between religion and foreign policy in American foreign policy. It is an important example of the change in the religious dimension of the international system after the Cold War. In the evolving international system, the effectiveness of religion has not been realized only through states. The effectiveness of non-state actors, in which religion is active, has also increased in the system.

In addition to the states, the religious element plays an active role in non-state international actors. Radical and fundamentalist religious organizations are more visible in international relations because they pose a security threat in foreign policy through terrorist acts. Despite this, these organizations are not accepted as a part of the system due



of radical actions. Organizations such as al-Qaeda, Daesh, and Boko Haram are on the security agenda, which state must take precautions with their actions. Despite this, the influence of international religious organizations that conduct universal policies based on peaceful and humanitarian values is undeniable. Christianity and Islam, which have universal teachings and have many members worldwide, stand out among the world religions. The Roman Catholic Church is most influential of the international religious organizations.

The Vatican represents the Roman Catholic Church and attracts (though not always) the attention of Catholics in various countries around the world. The Evangelist Church also conducts missionary activities in many parts of the world, especially in America. Islamic organizations, another widespread religious organization, also operate at an international level (Haynes J. , 2007, p. 45)

## **4.2. Religion and Politics**

### **4.2.1. Modernism and Religion**

An effort to ensure peace and security in international relations through interreligious dialogue raises the suspicion that the rationalist administrative understanding of modernism has been abandoned at first glance. Because modernism, above all, implies a rejection of the traditional, that is, a transcendent will-based dominance, secularism is the essential condition of modernity. In the globalization era, opposition to the current political order based on religious references is seen as a failure of modernism. On the other hand, the system's preference for building the defense reflex makes it possible to talk about a crisis, if not a paradigm shift.

However, when we look closely at the policies and programs carried out under the name of Interfaith Dialogue, no new approach emerges other than the continuation of the functional role that the classical theorists of modernism have assigned to the religious. Therefore, it would be appropriate to evaluate how this functional role of religion was historically established. In its most general sense, the term “*modernity*,” which began to be used with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, refers to putting the human being in the position

of the subject and putting the social will under the control of the mind instead of the transcendent. In this case, “in parallel with the development of the modern capitalist-industrial state, the opposite of the traditional order” means that there is progress, economic and administrative rationalization, and differentiating of the social world. (Saribay, 2001)

Modernization theory operates based on a fundamental distinction between traditional and modern societies. The mind, which replaced the transcendent will with enlightenment, is an ideal that everyone will attain sooner or later, and history will be a record of the progress to be made in the process of History will be a record of the progress to be made in attaining this ideal. Through this development, which can no longer be prevented once started, science will lead to not only the control of the forces of nature but also to the establishment of universal morality, the equity of legal institutions, and even to the happiness of human beings. (Sarup, 1997)

As a requirement of this design of modernization theory, secularization is inevitable. Modernity implies managerial rationality and differentiation in the social world. What is meant by differentiation is the separation of fact from value and moral from theoretical fields. (Weber, 1999) In his analysis of the place of religion in social life, Auguste Comte says that spiritual power should be separated from political power. The important thing for humanity in the modern age is not to obtain God's consent but to obtain the consent of society. In the industrialization, capitalism, and nation-state processes that emerged in the period following the Enlightenment tradition, it is seen that this consent is based on the phenomena created. In a sense, although the source of the “sacred” is rejected, its function has always been kept in mind, as Comte said.

In sociology, Durkheim is accepted as the first name to analyze the functional relationship between societies and religions openly. Durkheim says that the order and structures of society find their expression in religion. Religious rituals are a “confirmation” that enables people living in a community to remember their structure's social “constitution” from time to time. Therefore, Durkheim argues that religion is a social process, not a personal one. Respect for the religious is nothing but reverence for authority and religious rituals. The real object of worship is society itself (Durkheim, 2005). Durkheim sees religion as a model that helps people understand the general lines of the social structure in which they live, rather

than a tool of “self-deception,” as Marx said. Religion, in addition to determining the shape of society, serves a function such as ensuring the continuity of society.

Max Weber, in his book “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” examines this function of religion by looking at its effect on the development of capitalism. According to Weber, it was the worldview of Protestantism that led to the development of capitalism. The belief of Protestantism in the form of Calvinism that man was born to realize the natural order given by God, not for his purposes, led people in the capitalist system to develop the rational aspects of society and thus to accept and use the rationality elements of the market mechanism as an image of God. The idea of Calvinism, that the wealth obtained could not be used for personal interests, led to accumulation. However, since success is accepted as a “sign” that God loves his servant, individuals are directed to be industrious in Calvinism. Thus, capitalism, which started to take shape, had more opportunities to develop, according to Weber (Weber, 1999). Based on these findings, Weber uses the following expressions while determining the relationship between society and religion: “*Indeed, every religion, with its aims and promises, affects the layer to which it is applied to a certain extent.*” But the next generation resorts to new interpretations to adapt the revelations of religion to new situations. Thus, religious thinking styles are adapted to religious needs (Weber, 1999). As a result, while Enlightenment thought aimed to eliminate religion from the world stage through the secularization that would emerge as a result of modernization, it did not ignore the role of religion in establishing psychological balance in individual and social life. (Berger P. L., 2002).

On the other hand, in our age and in an environment where many strong anti-secularization movements are emerging, the focus on the instrumental rationality of modernism is being replaced by an increasing interest in lofty goals. The secularization project of modernism is thus subjected to a transformation, and it can be seen that religious decline and lifestyle have returned to the fore. In the broadest sense, this situation is sought when the promises of modernization theory do not materialize into a universal benefit shared by humanity, as claimed or hoped. In short, the idea that modernization and secularization are identical is no longer valid. The philosophical foundations of the “alternative modernity” approaches that emerged at this point are based on postmodernist views.

#### **4.2.2. The Rise of Postmodernism**

Although postmodernism emerged among artists and critics in New York in the 1960s, it was only developed by European theorists in the 1970s. Jean-François Lyotard, one of these theorists, opposes the idea that philosophy can provide humanity with the unity needed to teach the legitimating discourses (grand narratives) of the modern age, the progressive emancipation of society through science, and the universally developed good knowledge of humanity. Lyotard says it is impossible to talk about the idea of an integrative reason since there is not a single mind but several (Sarup, 1997).

With this aspect, postmodernism is based on questioning the single, unique truth claim of post-Enlightenment European philosophy in the most general sense. Instead, it favors relativity and opposes the idea of a single, inclusive, objective, external, or universal truth. According to Wittgenstein, the world is made up of facts, not objects. The knowledge of what something is, is attached to its meaning (Gellner E. , 1994). Therefore, it is necessary to replace the objective truth with the truth of hermeneutic knowledge. Positivism is a form of colonialism, or colonialism is a result of positivism. After all, objective facts and generalizations are both an expression and a tool of power. The truth of hermeneutic knowledge respects the subjectivity of both the research object and the researcher, even the reader or listener. It takes all of them into account.

Postmodernism emerged from the criticism of modernism, rather than from the gaps and problems it left and/or caused. In this context, postmodernism brings everything that modernism excludes into the discussion with a new understanding. The re-questioning of the roles and functions of religions is one of the topics included in the discussion. By re-evaluating religion and its roles, postmodernism has the potential to create a different world-view, one in which various beliefs are accepted without judging their validity. This open-mindedness, combined with the willingness to re-evaluate the world around us, has the potential to revolutionize how we understand and interact with religions, potentially opening doors for more peaceful and just discourse in our societies.

Postmodernity's decentralization of the subject enabled important formations such as the emergence of the sense of community, the gathering of large masses in temporary emotional

communities, and the creation of a new style of life. To begin with, religions are the most important structures that emerge from the foundation of a community based on the lifestyle or cultural world that they provide and the values of that community. Therefore, while postmodernity promotes a sense of community, it also leads individuals to religion; it creates a framework in which religions and religious movements can present themselves freely. In other words, postmodernity, which gives everyone the right to transform their lifestyle into a culture, inevitably necessitates a structure based on plurality; religion, like every lifestyle, legitimizes its place in the structure in question as one of those pluralities and with the right to transform its own lifestyle into a culture (Saribay, 2001).

In his analysis of postmodernism, Ernest Gellner attributes the reason why during the Enlightenment, which is the focus of postmodernist criticism, people sought the recipe for salvation in a non-religious way, to the understanding of the role of new, non-religious knowledge in the social order. While Gellner finds some justification in his criticisms, he does not fail to emphasize the contradiction that the postmodernist paradigm has fallen into: “In a very precise sense, we live in a post-enlightenment age. The notion that a secular version of the exposition exists and could provide the preliminary blueprint for an attractive, legitimate social order has been rightly rejected. However, it should not be forgotten that the only age that enacted valid knowledge principles that could be taken seriously was the age of enlightenment (Gellner E. , 1994).

### **4.2.3. Globalization**

It is possible to talk about a very large literature on globalization. The common denominator of the articles in this literature is the acceptance that the world is going through a period of confusion, both in terms of fact and concept. On the basis of this confusion lies the dissolution of the state of “certainty” and “specificity” that modernity provides for both political, social, and economic institutions and for the individual. According to Bauman, the reason for this decline is the disintegration of the centers, thus leaving behind decentralized, confused individuals who are in search of a “center to hold on to” (Bauman, 1999).

In parallel with the industrial expansion and the spread of mass media, multi-dimensional social relations at the political, cultural, and economic levels are becoming widespread

throughout the world. At this point, the fluidity of capital, interdependence, and uncertainty appear as the three main features of the period. Roland Robertson says that globalization has been happening since the second half of the 1500s. This process consists of five periods extending to the present day. The formation period was from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century; the initial period was from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1870s; the takeoff and acceleration period was from the 1870s to the mid-1920s; the period of hegemony wars was from the mid-1920s to the second half of the 1960s; and the period of uncertainty started in the 1960s and still continues (Robertson, 1998).

Therefore, it would be more correct to accept globalization as a new term rather than a new phenomenon. In other words, globalization is the intensification and compression of world consciousness as a whole, and as such, it gives the appearance of being a logical consequence of modernism. However, in this new period, the values of modernity being brought to a global scale and the increasing human and cultural mobility tend to create pluralism rather than the expected or desired uniformity, causing tension. Before moving on to this tension between the global and the local, it would be appropriate to review the theoretical background of globalization. Peter Berger mentions the four main fundamental faces of globalization. Accordingly, globalization is first and foremost a cultural aspect of an economic-based process. Berger defines this facet of globalization as “Davos culture” and emphasizes that this facet is an elite culture. On the other hand, globalization is defined as “faculty club culture” in the form of a culture that is an element of formations such as foundations, academic communication networks, non-governmental organizations, and multinational organizations. Berger exemplifies this definition of feminism and environmentalism. The third face of globalization is called “Mc World Culture.” This third face, exemplified by wearing clothes bearing the symbols and slogans of American universities, watching American TV series and movies, and consuming fast food, is a popular culture called “American stamp.” Lastly, the fourth face, called “Evangelical Protestantism,” imposes a pluralism, market economy, and pro-democracy discourse widely on Latin American countries, East Asian countries excluding Japan and the Philippines, the South Pacific, African, and Eastern European countries. (Berger P. , 1997)

In summary, Berger defines globalization as the creation of a universal culture with the “*American stamp*” that directs the economic, social and political situation of all local

cultures on earth, including Western culture. As an international system that shapes the local policies and foreign relations of the countries of the world, the conditions that prepare the globalization are attributed by Thomas Freidman to the spread of the free market all over the world.

### **4.3. International Relations and Interfaith Dialogue**

#### **4.3.1. A Conceptual Discussion**

Concepts such as conflict and dialog between civilizations, cultural differences, and fundamentalism, which are frequently used today, include the dimensions of culture and civilization, but they also contain religious references. The dictionary meaning of the word “religion,” which has different views on its etymological origin, is belief and relationship with God. However, it is not possible to gather many belief systems with different characteristics, which are called “religion” the world today, under a single definition. The common point of different religions; it can be said that there are symbols, bonding with reverence, rituals, collective practices and narratives (Anthony, 1997, p. 436). The most important aspect of religion, which differs from the concepts of culture and civilization from which it is nourished, is that it is God who initiates and maintains religion in the context of divine religions. Despite this reality, people can react in various ways such as researching, believing, not believing, or changing. Man, in itself cannot influence religion. All actions related to religion, whether individual or collective, are not a manifestation, but a response to what exists. (Haddad, 2000)

The relationship of religion with the concepts of culture and civilization is related to both the individual's influence on his actions by shaping his world of thought and spirit, and its effect on social life. Religions deeply affect the lives of their communities and their relationships with each other. (Tümer, 1986, p. 228) However, it is not only religion that shapes the identity of a society, that is, both the inner world of individuals and the common life form that they create. Many factors such as ethnicity, common background, geographical conditions, and management style contribute to this formation.

Culture, like religion and civilization, is among the factors that determine the identity of human societies (Shaffer, 2006). “*Culture*” derives from the Latin word “*cultura*” meaning cultivating the soil. At the beginning of the modern period, the word “culture” began to be used to mean the cultivation of mental abilities. Since the eighteenth century, three meanings have emerged for the word culture today, especially with the influence of German thinkers' interpretations of the concept. The first is the processing of mental, aesthetic and moral abilities on an individual and social scale for the pursuit of perfection. The second is the artifacts that are the result of this effort. In the third, culture is the meaning that people attach to the common life they share with other people (Fischer, 2006).

*Culture* refers to various aspects of a society's way of life, including family life, clothing, business life, religious ceremonies and leisure, including literature and art (Anthony, 1997). It allows people to communicate on a common ground, which we call the language, and to create awareness of themselves (Anthony, 1997). As can be understood from the differences between languages, which are the symbolic expressions of culture, each society has its own tradition of thought and behavior that expresses itself and is probably incomprehensible to others. Culture determines both the values and rules that the individual accepts as given, and the limits of his perspective, in short, his worldview (Fischer, 2006). Today, perhaps the most important shortcoming of the theses that the differences between cultures feed conflicts is that they analyze a culture through the value system of another culture and then attach labels such as backward, immoral, or violent.

Culture may belong to a small tribe at the micro level, or it may encompass a country or group of countries. Religions, on the other hand, do not limit themselves to a certain time, place, or group of people, except for some belief systems whose membership is based on nationality. The concept of civilization, on the other hand, is a categorizing concept, not a descriptive one, together with being fed from religion and culture. Although it is used in different meanings, the most important features of the concept of civilization are; its emergence with modernization, its emphasis on development and its political dimension. Civilization is identified with a certain geographical area and culture, and with etiquette and lifestyle symbolized by city life, in which norms are transferred from one generation to the next. In the macrosense, civilization refers to large units that include nations or societies, which evoke a sense of finality (Baykara, 1990) For this reason, civilization, the super unit



of which is humanity, was thought to be a good classification tool to explain human history. The civilization cannot be thought of independently of time, that is, the memories created by its historical past and space (Szakolczai, 2001). Within the framework of this concept, we call civilization, culture manifests itself in the form of structures such as written languages, states, cities, buildings, religions and social institutions. Therefore, subcultures with different characteristics may exist within a civilization, but civilization represents the structured state of a common culture on the basis of the geographical area it covers and its members.

We see that civilization is discussed in two senses in an academic discussion. In the first sense, it is meant the “civilization” that emerged in Western Europe during the Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, Europe, whose integrity was destroyed due to sectarian differences and subsequent religious wars, put forward the idea of the superiority of a European civilization based on geographical and cultural elements and a common past. Although other civilizations had bright periods in the past, it was thought that Europe was in a superior position and its political symbol was the nation-states symbolizing Europe. He declared his superiority over the “others” (Kapustin, 2009). The concept of “non-Western civilizations,” on the other hand, was partly an invention of the Westerners, but largely constructed as a response to this assumption of superiority by the non-Western elite. (Kapustin, 2009)

Secondly, civilization is identified with politics based on culture. Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis, which divides the world into civilization basins, by saying that future conflicts in the world will be experienced between civilizations beyond ideological or economic reasons, and that the signs of this have emerged, deals with the civilization from this perspective. In this approach, civilizations are evaluated independently of social institutions. Some of the social institutions are accepted as “values” and presented as the values of civilization. Others are not seen as equally important and remain institutions that are not part of civilization. Thus, while respect for human rights and the rule of law are presented as essential features of Western civilization, colonialism or inequality between classes can be ignored. In the clash of civilizations thesis, Western civilization is considered the source of global modernization, economic and scientific progress, as well as political and moral values such as democracy and human rights. In this framework, the clash of

civilizations is positioned as the clash between the modern and the barbaric and backward. Theses and initiatives for the alliance and dialog of civilizations also attribute a positive meaning to differences, but they are based on culture-based politics from the same viewpoint as the conflict thesis.

In addition to the clash of civilizations thesis, which has been much discussed in the recent past, there is another issue where the “*progressive*” of the West and the “backwardness” of the rest are discussed. It is the assumption of the civilized West's obligation to civilize the rest of the world, identified with Kipling's “The White Man's Burden.” In this approach, the relationship between the two worlds is unequal, primarily because the West positions itself as superior. Secondly, the West feels obliged to help the uncivilized. The groundwork for the colonization movement was thus prepared. According to Edward Said, this approach has been translated into discourse as the West's “homework” for the benefit of the natives, or the colonial country's effort to gain prestige (Hirono, 2008). Civilization, from an orientalist viewpoint of view, is to liberate non-Westerns from the deprivations of their own culture. But the endless civilization is a process that perpetuates this unequal positioning. Thus, the missing culture, that is, the other, is condemned to remain that way all the time.

#### **4.3.2. Secularization Process**

The decline of the influence of religion on political life and the emergence of certain bordered administrative units, which argue that they are not under the yoke of a superior material or spiritual power, go back to the fourteenth century (Hehir, 2004). From a Christian perspective, the word “*religio*” in the Middle Ages meant monastic life or Christian virtues. Traditionally, religious values and practices were intertwined with social life. Religion in the modern sense began to emerge in the fifteenth century, and instead of the concept of “*religio*,” “religions,” that is, religions with different belief and worship systems, began to be mentioned. Another distinction between the modern and the traditional occurred within Christianity itself in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this period, Christianity began to be thought of as a system of beliefs and doctrines that existed independently of the church community (Thomas S. M., 2000).

I see that the determinant of religion in foreign policy has decreased as of the seventeenth century in terms of Western states. With the Peace of Westphalia (1648), religion ceased to be considered a source of political legitimacy for Europe (Shani, 2009). The Ottomans' failure in the siege of Vienna (1683) and the withdrawal from Europe were effective in this. Features of the Westphalian system, making the sovereign state the basic unit of world politics; These were issues such as preventing states from interfering with each other for religious reasons, adopting the principle of “non-interference in internal affairs” because states' internal and external relations were to be separated from each other, and that religion was prevented from being a cause of war by secularizing international politics (Hehir, 2004).

The French Revolution (1789) and the Enlightenment also laid the groundwork for the formation of the secular state model and the establishment of the concept of popular sovereignty (Kadercan, 2012). Over time, the modern secular state model originating in Europe spread throughout the world (Haynes J. , 2016). The remarkable aspect of the secularization of the West is that Islam has served as the other for both Europe and America from the past to the present (Hurd E. S., 2008).

Intellectually, the Enlightenment period witnessed various reservations about the role of religion in world politics. Enlightenment saw believers as those who could be mobilized en masse through the systematization of religious beliefs and who could exclude non-believers or use violence against them. Religion was viewed by both Marxism and secular liberalism as opposed to knowledge and progress and was thought to lead to regression, dogmatism, and intolerance (Lynch, 2003). As a solution to the conflicts arising from religion, modernity expected that the influence of religion should be limited to private life and that social life should have a secular character (Winfield, 2007). This position of religion, which was politically limited to private life and marginalized after Westphalia, worked for the modern state, and the loyalty of the people was directed from religion to the state (Thomas S. M., 2000).

In the post-Westphalia period, it was expected that the religion of the ruler would be valid for every administrative structure in Europe, and if necessary, the people would migrate to the ruler's sect or migrate. Thus, the coexistence of different Christian denominations in Europe became possible. But, only one of these was valid in each administrative unit, thus

resulting, at least in theory, because of the identification of religious and sectarian boundaries with terrestrial boundaries. With the emergence of nationalism, the borders of the national culture with the territorial borders began to be seen as the same, and the national culture began to be accepted whole as a homogeneous (Brubaker, 2009).

Today, we can talk about the existence of both a secularization, that is, the decrease in the influence of religion on people, and a departure from secularism, which is defined as desecularization (Anthony, 1997). In the twentieth century, the decline of religion's influence on people's lives can be observed in three dimensions. The first is the reduction in the number of people attending temples and attending mass meetings at these places. Second, the power of religious institutions and clergy and their influence on society and politicians have diminished. The third is the perspective that has changed in the dimension of belief compared to the past. Today, most people think that divine forces do not regulate their relationship with nature. Wars are also waged on non-religious rather than religious grounds (Anthony, 1997). However, the fact that modern political systems allow the masses to participate in politics and the spread of mass media has led to the expression of views based on religion and finding supporters in society. The liberal structure of modern society, on the other hand, allows people to adopt the belief they want and make the choice to live in accordance with the rational choice logic. This can lead to religiosity in society in proportion to the religiosity of individuals (Fox, 2004). A lot of efforts have been done to revive an imaginary past through the construction of symbols and cultural references, especially as a solution to the problems of modern societies based on the cultural past (Kinnwall, 2004).

In the third world, secularization and modernization efforts, which took the West as an example but were unsuccessful, also led to the emergence of religion-based counter-movements. The traces of the colonial past, the cultural colonization efforts experienced today and the standardization that pushes the religious values brought by globalization to the background also affect this opposition (Fox & Sandler, 2004). From a historical viewpoint, in the first half of the twentieth century, third world countries tried solving their dilemma between identity and development by taking the West as an example, with democratization and secularization efforts at home and with a non-aligned foreign policy approach abroad. These countries thought that a management approach based on religious or traditional cultural foundations would hinder development. However, the modern secular

state model of Western origin has often failed to ensure the development and democratization of third world countries. The failure of modernization efforts, the establishment of authoritarian regimes in these countries since the 1960s, caused internal turmoil that resulted in corruption or the division of some countries. In the 1990s, tensions between religious and secular nationalisms were added to these problems. Neither secular nationalism nor Marxism has achieved the desired economic development and effective political participation in these countries. When evaluated within this framework, the rise of religion in Third World countries symbolizes both a nostalgia and a search for development. Especially in countries where the political demands of the people have the opportunity to affect the administration, the expectation of the society for the localization of modernization has decreased the effectiveness of secular and elitist policies. In foreign policy, societies have begun demanding more sensitivity to their religious and cultural priorities.

#### **4.3.3. Religion and Culture in the Discipline of International Relations**

The discipline of International Relations was reluctant to consider the effects of factors such as religion, culture and civilization on the relations between states, as it was built on the Enlightenment thought and the modern nation-state model. In terms of International Relations theories, realism interpreted religion and ideology within the same framework. Neorealism has seen the state as the basic element of the international system and has dealt with the state through its material power elements. Therefore, it did not consider the effect of religion on foreign policy. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, has included the view of the existence of an international community in which states can cooperate within the framework of common principles. Although neoliberalism was inspired by the early Christian teachings from time to time, it excluded religion in its analysis and predictions about international relations. In behavioralist, on the other hand, religion has been excluded from the analysis, since it is a variable that is very difficult to measure and because it does not occupy an important place in the disciplinary literature (Fox & Sandler, 2004, p. 26).

Constructivism, whose starting point is the Westphalian international system, does not approach the relations between states from the perspective of religion. The mainstream of constructivism, which is rigid about the state-centeredness of the international system, does not deny the importance of religious and cultural factors, but opposes a theorizing based on

these abstract factors. Postmodernism, on the other hand, shows sensitivity in abstract areas where modernism is indifferent compared to other theories (Fox & Sandler, 2004, p. 29), but there is no comprehensive “Postmodern International Relations Theory” on how to include spiritual and intellectual factors in the analysis.

While analyzing the nation-state, the discipline is based on the material elements of the state, which is an entity with legal and territorial boundaries, instead of the effects of elements such as shared past, religion, culture, and common future vision on foreign policy; We see that material power and controllability are considered as a priority. However, the increasing importance of factors such as religion, culture and civilization, which were not included in the analysis, in the internal affairs of states and international relations led the discipline to take a stand on this issue. The primary response of the International Relations discipline to these developments has been the effort to create a universal “ethics of international relations” by preserving its secular character.

The main thesis of the studies on religions is the idea that international stability can be achieved by making illiberal states adopt values such as respect for human rights and cultural differences (Demenchonok, 2009). This effort, on the other hand, is aimed at determining criteria that will enable to evaluate and categorize these actions rather than trying to understand the actions of states in the specific conditions that brought them about. The inclusion of the concepts of religion, culture and civilization in the analysis progresses much more slowly due to the conflict discourses that set the agenda.

Today, both conflict and dialogue theses approach civilization from an essentialist perspective. Approaches criticizing the conflict thesis have followed a similar path and have developed judgments that are decisive and have similar starting points about the basic features and boundaries of civilizations (Hall, 2007). For example, the September 11 attacks took place in 2001, which feeds the clash of civilizations thesis. 2001 was also declared the year of “*dialogue between civilizations*” by the UN. The important thing here is not to overcome the conflict thesis with the discourse of dialogue, but to question the reality of the categories based on the supposed boundaries of civilization. It is clear that today, as a legitimating discourse in international politics, a distinction between civilization based on religion is tried to be made. However, if we are to consider civilizations as units that divide

the world geography and form a unity, just like nation-states, a distinction based on religion alone will not be enough. There is a fixed-mindedness about how the relations between civilizations and the possibility of conflict affect world politics, especially about the potentials of Islamic-Christian conflict.

Globalization has allowed transnational religious actors to take part in international politics in a way that undermines the absolute sovereignty of nation states. The first of the reasons why religious discourse can be effective in the national and international arena is that the power of nation states to adopt their secular programs in economic and political terms has decreased. Second, the perception of space is gradually losing its importance. Thus, the depiction of the nation, which Benedict Anderson calls imaginary communities, formed by people living in a certain geography, whose members feel that they belong to the same community without knowing each other, and built on cultural ties, this time is a transnational and not tied to the land, but again containing a sense of common community. It can be constructed in the form of “*imaginary religious communities*” shaped around identity. The third reason is that religious actors can reach a large number of people without being stuck in the borders of the country by using the developments in communication technology and opportunities such as online sites and satellite broadcasting. However, the identity-based policies developed in the globalizing world are one of the important causes of conflicts as well as determining the discourse.

According to Gellner's definition, the relationship between modernity and technological developments with fundamentalism, which embraces a certain belief in its entirety, literally, does not allow any compromise or reinterpretation, is quite complex. Today, when we look at their activities such as using technology, making propaganda through mass media and social media, benefiting from women in organizing and actions, fundamentalist movements that oppose both the state authority and the interpretation of religion adopted the public, by wearing down religion by modernity and secularism, are actually quite modern. For both Islam and Christianity, it is important that fundamentalist movements do not feel attached to a state or registered with a territorial border. Fundamentalist groups from different religions are very similar to each other in many respects, such as their transnational aims, organizational forms, and their capacity to influence world politics (Gellner E. , 1992).

#### **4.3.4. Conclusion on chapter**

In the relationship of religion with international relations and politics, Since the literature was written mainly by the West and continued with the international system established with the peace of Westphalia and the modernism and secularism that followed it, it seemed to have resulted in the cleansing of Christianity from politics and the international system in the West. Although the influence of religion in politics in the non-Western world, mostly in countries with no Christian population, has decreased due to the Western-centered system, it has never completely lost its influence (Sayın, 2011). In the Western world, which is the center of secularization, the reason and scientific knowledge on which secularization is based have been redefined with post-modern time. In this process, where relativity was the dominant thought, reason and scientific knowledge were also accepted as culturally coded knowledge (Macit, 2013). With the end of the Cold War and the erosion of ideologies, while cultural structures came to the fore, religion, as the most important cultural component, became one of the political tools of politics and the international system in its newly formed global situation.

The most important effect of religion in the international arena and foreign policy is that it provides legitimacy to states and policies. In addition to this, religion; Its relationship with nationalism, totalitarianism, modernism, the origin of the Westphalian system, political regimes, political thought and behavior, identity issue is remarkable. Religion covers states' foreign policy, the globalization process, conflict management, terrorism, political culture, environmentalism, individual welfare, and attitudes towards war and peace. According to Elizabeth Hurd (Hurd E. S., 2007) religion and religious differences have become important factors in international conflicts, national security and foreign policy recently. The interaction of religion with the international system and foreign policy has become more critical than ever at a time when identities are intensifying and shrinking with globalization. Still, at the same time, identities are more diversified and revealed.



## **5. ANALYSIS AND THE FINDINGS OF THE DATA**

### **5.1. Research Methodology**

Considering the complex nature of the thesis topic, I have opted for a qualitative and interpretive methodology. Our approach involves a comprehensive analysis of literature from various academic domains, such as politics, international relations, peace and conflict studies, theology, sociology, history, social psychology, and comparative studies of religions. Additionally, I have included materials produced by faith-based NGOs on social peace and peacebuilding, and expanded upon existing research on the influence of religion and religious communities in civil society and social cohesion.

Our analysis of various sources has led us to develop a methodology that intends to encompass the variety of approaches employed in the exploration of the role of religion, religious communities, religious leadership, and the correlation between religion, peacemaking, and social peace, as well as in the handling of these issues from different perspectives, such as those of diplomats, policymakers, and faith-based organizations. I believe this comprehensive methodology is necessary to ensure an extensive, unbiased, and nuanced interpretation in this report, and to guarantee that no particular conceptual framework was imposed that could constrain or distort the examination of such a complicated and multifaceted subject.

I have undertaken an exhaustive literature review in this study. Therefore, I have divided the review into three sections for practical purposes. The first section presents a broad overview of the correlation between religion and international relations. The second section examines sources that identify religion as a promoter of social harmony, while the third section analyzes sources that provide evidence of how religious leaders and communities act as catalysts for a healthy society in the Albanian case.

In addition, to cover aspects of the subject that may not have been fully encompassed in our literature review, I have included the Albanian case study. The study showcases how five official religious communities work together as a unified body for the betterment of society. These case studies enable readers to understand the specifics of different socio-economic and historical contexts, the role of religion in varying times and situations, and how it is interconnected with international relations and other factors that shape conflict prevention, peacemaking, and social harmony. It is crucial to categorize the subject matter into different sections, as it helps to comprehend and address the intricacies of the problems being examined. This approach is useful in determining suitable and custom-made policy measures.

When it comes to peacebuilding, it is important to identify the various actors involved. These actors can be classified based on their affiliation with religious or secular groups, or based on their gender. They may also be individuals or communities. Understanding the nature of these actors can be crucial for successful peacebuilding efforts. The premise of this analysis is that in certain circumstances, religious concepts and claims may play a pivotal role in resolving or preventing conflicts, thus contributing to a more sustainable, peaceful society and environment. Additionally, non-religious individuals may appropriate religious concepts to facilitate the implementation of their plans. This exercise aims to deconstruct a complex case by scrutinizing these factors, and it can be especially beneficial for civil servants, policymakers, and decision-makers who face the challenge of responding expeditiously to crises with a religious dimension, both at home and abroad. Given that religious tolerance and harmony in the Albanian context cannot be taken for granted, it is imperative to make sound and intelligent investments in safeguarding the vital religious organizations (official ones) and actors to prevent misinformation and societal collapse.

According to Creswell: “The objective of the quantitative research is to test or verify, rather than to develop it. This method begins by studying the progress of the theory, collects data to test it, and reflects on where the theory has been confirmed or disconfirmed by the outcome of the study. The theory becomes a framework for the entire study, as an organizational model for the research questions or hypotheses and for the data collection procedure. The researcher tests a theory using hypotheses or questions, which, in turn, contain variables, which are measured using items in an instrument” (Creswell, 1994)

Another feature of the quantitative method is that it combines primary and secondary data. The primary data are the results obtained from the questionnaires that were developed in wide range of participants from Albania, based on the public perceptions on the role of religious communities, interfaith dialogue and harmony on social peace, while the secondary data are the result of a review of a wide and contemporary literature regarding the impact that religion has on IR, politics, societies and on the societal cohesion and peace.

### **5.1.1. Instruments and Sampling**

The determination of the participants in this survey was made on the basis of convenience sampling. This methodology focuses on gaining information from the participants who are considered convenient by the researcher. It has a set of shortcomings and advantages like the quick collection of the data, easy to reach, less strict rules to follow, fewer costs during research etc. As well, in convenience sampling, researchers simply use as participants those individuals who are easy to reach. People are selected based on their availability and willingness to respond (Gravetter, 2015). The participants in my case are intellectuals, religious leaders, students and representatives of official religious communities in the country. In total 668 surveys were conducted. In the final assessments, 12 surveys were assessed as invalid, while another 656 were assessed as valid, due to their information. The respondents who participated in this survey are of different genders, ages and professions, making the sample as representative as possible.

In the thesis on “*The role of religious communities and interfaith harmony in promoting social peace: a case study of Albania*” utilized a survey technique with questionnaires to gather public perception and the perspectives of religious community leaders, representatives, and students etc. on the impotence of the interfaith harmony. Through this, the study examines how religion has impacted the establishment and maintenance of peace in Albania.

According to (Khandwalla, 1976) there is not only one research method that can be considered as the best. Each of the methods used is associated with advantages and disadvantages. The choice of method can be made based on several criteria. The possibility to generalize the data using the questionnaire research instrument is rated high in the case

of questionnaires. As a result, the use of questionnaires as an instrument for data collection in this paper enables (1) the investigation of possible relationships between the variables taken in the study and (2) attempts to '*complement*' previous studies, which mainly used qualitative methods, such as situation analysis.

Using a questionnaire as a data collection instrument of has its advantages and disadvantages. The main concerns in the use of questionnaires relate to the assessment of their validity and reliability (Saunders, 2009) According to the American Psychological Association questionnaire measures must demonstrate content validity, criterion-related validity, construct validity, and internal consistency. The first three criteria are related to the evaluation of the internal validity of the questionnaire, which indicates the ability of the questionnaire to measure what the researcher intends (Saunders, 2009).

Content validity refers to the extent to which the questionnaire provides adequate coverage of the research questions. One way to accomplish this is to use a panel of individuals to score the questionnaire. Criterion-related validity is concerned with the ability of questions to make appropriate predictions. Statistical correlation analysis can be used for this. Reliability (reliability testing) is concerned with whether or not the questionnaire will produce consistent results at different times and in different choices.

One of the research strategies used to carry out the studies is based on surveys with questionnaires, which is one of the data collection techniques belonging to this strategy. The use of the survey strategy enables the collection and quantitative analysis of data using descriptive and analytical statistics. Also, the data collected through this strategy can be used to suggest possible reasons for certain relationships between variables (variables) and to create models of these relationships.

The methods of achieving the goal of the study are among the most diverse, seeing and simultaneously evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. The use of questionnaires enables not only the analysis of possible relationships between the variables taken in the study, but also gives the possibility of some recommendations regarding the influence of religious education factors on the general education of children studying in madrasas.

The questionnaire used in this study, in addition to general information, has some important questions related to: *“Measuring the influence of the factors that push society through interfaith dialogue and social peace”*, *their perception on interfaith dialogues, the role of religion and religiosity, etc.* The questions are formulated in such a way that they are easily understandable by the respondents choosing the answer through the alternatives provided in the questionnaire, which are scaled according to the *Likert scale*, but also affirmative or negative questions (with alternatives). During the drafting of the questionnaire, a special importance was paid not only to the structuring of the questions, but also to their formulation in the right way, with the aim that the answers were valid and useful for the main goal.

After revision and adaptation, the questionnaire consists of two sections: The first part is composed of questions that aim to collect demographic data from the respondents, such as age, gender, profession, place of residence, etc. The second part of the survey is composed of questions that aim to measure the public perception who take part in this survey on the main factors that lead to the strengthening of inter-religious dialogue as main drivers for peace, as well as the role of religion, inter-religious dialogue, religious communities in building social peace.

### **5.1.2. Data collection**

The survey started on March 10, 2021, and their collection ended on July 21, 2021. The analysis of the questionnaires was performed through descriptive analysis, cross-tabulations, independence tests, correlations between variables, factorial analysis, building and examining hypotheses, analysis of variance (*ANOVA*), construction of multiple linear regression equations, etc. So, not only a descriptive analysis but also an analytical approach. Part of this process was the creation of the register with the collected data, their processing and analysis, and the use of software packages SPSS 27.3 and Excel. The sampling used in this paper is convenient, not random.

## **5.2. Public Discourse analysis**

A significant aspect of this thesis involves delving into the public discourse delivered by religious officials, including both prominent leaders and personnel employed by their

respective institutions. During my research years I have been meeting with different stakeholders, individuals, public figures, civil society organizations and NGO's, students etc. talking with them around and about the main topic of interreligious harmony in Albania. Their perspectives, ideas and thoughts helped me for a better shape of my research idea and the preparation of the questionnaire. My analysis revealed a sense of collaboration and mutual comprehension within their dialogue, often referring to one another as "brothers by nationality," members of a shared society, or simply as "friends." Our evaluation was based on a comprehensive review of over 30 videos and press statements featuring religious clerics in Albania.

It is important to recognize that while the clergy in Albanian society have generally served as a stabilizing force, providing guidance to their followers on the values of dialogue, understanding, and harmony, there have been instances where certain clerics, whether officially appointed by institutions or self-proclaimed, have contributed to division, destabilization, and even conflict. It is crucial to acknowledge and address these sporadic cases in order to promote a more unified and peaceful society in Albania.

The balanced approach taken by the Albanian clergy has facilitated the expansion of interreligious dialogue to various domains of society, including the theological and academic realms. This has culminated in the organization of frequent seminars and collaborative symposia with diverse scholars, thereby enabling the cultivation of fresh spiritual leaders with a comprehensive understanding of universal principles, who can serve as emissaries of harmony based on the religious doctrines of their respective beliefs.

### **5.2.1. Positive Cases that promote social peace**

In 2013, the Catholic Church leader of Albania, Mon Senior Gjergj Meta, made a statement regarding the country's negotiations for EU membership. There was a widespread belief that Albania's Islamic affiliation was the main reason for the negative response to the opening of negotiations. Meta spoke out in defense of Albanian Muslims, stating that "I don't want the Europe without Albanian Muslims" (Meta, 2013). This public display of interfaith understanding and harmony is just one out of so many examples of the cultural values that define Albania.

Moreover, one of the analyzed videos is titled "Tolerance or Religious Harmony in Albania?" In it, representatives of various religious communities in the country express their opinions. Bujar Spahiu, the Leader of the Muslim Community of Albania, states that "we are not merely tolerating each other but living in full harmony and dialogue." Head of the Catholic Church, Imozi George Frenzo, adds that harmony is indeed present in Albania. Father Gregor Pelushi from the Orthodox Church also shares his perspective, stating that "harmony, tolerance, and coexistence are some of the most important values in Albania." In addition, Baba Mondi, the leader of the Bektashian community, agrees with his colleagues, declaring that coexistence and harmony are present. Chairman Spahiu also refutes the notion that this coexistence is due to indifference towards others' beliefs, arguing that it stems from religion itself. George Frenzo adds that this tradition has existed for centuries among Albanians (Jakimi, 2022). They have always been peace marchers (Lideret Fetare, 2024) and an example for society. Various activities and practices play a significant role in maintaining peace and stability in a society. Among these practices are the constructive and peaceful approach represented in weekly sermons, festive ceremonies like Eid and Easter, and media and public statements.

Weekly sermons delivered by religious leaders are not only a source of spiritual guidance but also serve as a means of promoting positive values and behaviors that contribute to peaceful coexistence and social harmony. These sermons often highlight the importance of tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion and emphasize the need for mutual respect and understanding among different religious communities. Festive ceremonies like Eid and Easter are another way of promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding and cooperation. These events bring people from different backgrounds together, creating a sense of community and shared belonging. They also provide an opportunity for people to learn about each other's beliefs, customs, and traditions, which can help break down stereotypes and prejudices. Media and public statements by religious leaders and other influential figures can also play a crucial role in promoting social peace and harmony. These messages can help counter negative narratives and promote positive attitudes towards people from different backgrounds. They can also encourage dialogue and cooperation between different religious and cultural communities, which can help build trust and understanding. The constructive and peaceful approach represented in weekly sermons, festive ceremonies like Eid and Easter, and media and public statements all serve to maintain stability, promote

inter-institutional cooperation, encourage harmony and religious coexistence, and foster the development of social peace in a society.

### **5.2.2. Negative cases that threaten interfaith harmony**

One of the cases involves an imam, identified by the initials A.K., who engaged in humorous/satirical conversations with members of the Albanian national team and made references to the Christian religion. As a result of this behavior, the State Committee for Cults sent a letter to the Muslim Community, “*expressing concern over the harmful impact of the message on religious harmony in the country*”. The letter requested the full cooperation of the Muslim Community in preventing similar incidents from occurring in the future, in order to preserve the valuable tradition of religious harmony that has been passed down through generations in Albania (BalkanWeb, 2017).

Another instance pertains to N. Xh., who claims to be a priest. He was invited by certain Muslim organizations to participate in a peaceful demonstration against Israel's offensive in Gaza. During the event, he referred to the leaders of the Muslim Community of Albania and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania as “individuals whose primary concern is their own the position and money, with little regard for the issues affecting society”. This statement proved to be troublesome and detrimental to the unity and amicability between faiths in the region (Mexhlis, 2024) that IRCA decided to prepare a joint declaration on it.

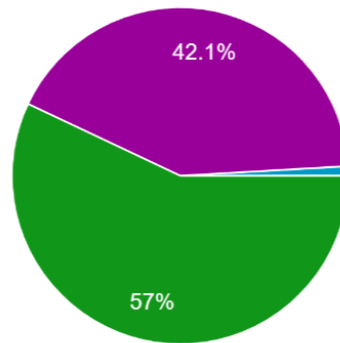
It's important to note that the cases I have mentioned so far are not an exhaustive list. There may be additional cases that can be included in the research. However, for the moment, we are content with the cases I have identified as they are relevant to the purpose of our research.

### **5.3. Survey statistical data analysis and discussion on Research findings**

In this section, I will conduct a comprehensive analysis of all the inquiries presented in the survey to examine the empirical and statistical data in-depth. This analysis will aid in comprehending the outcomes obtained from the survey of Albanian society regarding dialogue, harmony, peace, and democracy in the nation. The following analysis is based on



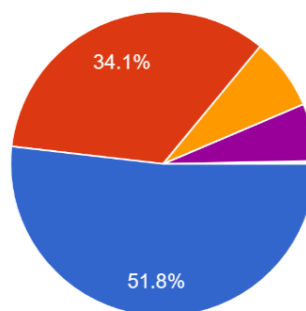
the theoretical framework of the literature reviewed during my research and the data gathered from the questionnaire.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-1 - Gender*

The initial graph in this questionnaire showcases the gender distribution of the participants who took part in the study. Based on the data, it is evident that 57% of the participants identify as female, indicating a significant representation of women in this study. Meanwhile, 42.1% of the participants identify as male, suggesting a considerable male participation. Furthermore, a small percentage of 0.6% preferred not to disclose their gender, which is still worth mentioning as it reflects the importance of respecting individual privacy and personal choices. Overall, the gender distribution in this study is quite diverse, which is a positive aspect that can lead to a better understanding of various perspectives and experiences.

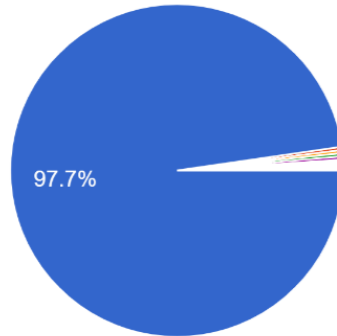


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-2- Age*

The survey focused on gathering data from Albanian citizens, including professionals, university students, and youth, among others. However, it was not limited to these groups.

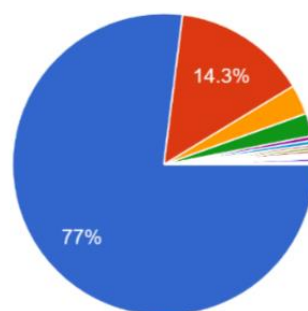
Our analysis revealed that the majority of participants, amounting to 51.8 percent of the total, belonged to the age bracket of 18 to 25 years old. The age group of 26 to 35 years old accounted for 34.1 percent, while the 36 to 45 age range represented 7.6 percent of the respondents. Lastly, individuals over 45 years old comprised 6.1 percent of the survey population.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-3 - Citizenship*

My scientific research places a strong emphasis on the Albanian audience, and I've made every effort to incorporate their perspectives in our work. As depicted in the above graph, the vast majority of respondents (97.7%) hail from Albania. However, we also received responses from Turkish, Italian, Macedonian, and Kosovar citizens who reside in Albania and have a deep understanding of the region. Their input is especially valuable, as it provides an objective viewpoint from outside the country's borders.

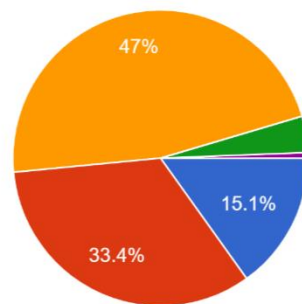


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-4 - Religion*

The religious preferences of individuals who participated in a recent survey revealed a clear divide among various faiths. As per the latest statistical data released by our country's

leading institute (INSTAT), the Islamic faith is the most commonly practiced religion, followed by other religions. The data is presented in the form of a graph, which displays that 77 percent of the survey participants identified themselves as Muslim. The remaining participants identified themselves as belonging to other religions, with 14.3 percent as Catholic, 3.4 percent as Orthodox Christians, 2.2 percent as Bektashi, and 0.7 percent as Evangelicals. A small number of respondents identified themselves as atheists, agnostic, or followers of Norse mythology.

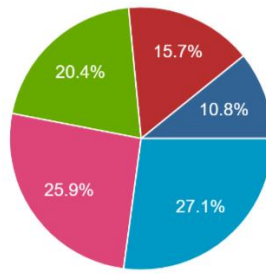


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-5 - Level of Education*

The data collected from the survey respondents depicts an esteemed and educated segment of Albanian society. The majority of the respondents, i.e., 47%, have completed master's studies, while 33.4% have attained a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, 15.1% of the respondents have completed secondary education before joining university, indicating their dedication towards academic pursuits. The survey also revealed that 4% of the respondents hold a PhD, signifying their expertise in their respective fields. Additionally, 0.6% of the respondents have completed a Post Doc, indicating their advanced level of academic research. This information is significant as it provides insights into the educational qualifications of Albanian citizens, which will be crucial in achieving the objectives of the scientific study.

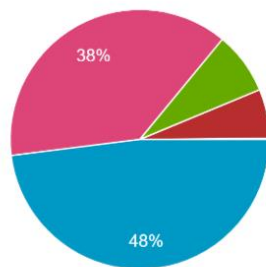
### **The second part of the survey**



Source: Author

Graphic 5.3-6 – How often do you visit cult objects?

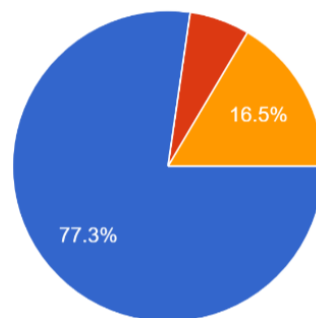
The primary objective of this questionnaire is to gather more accurate and objective data regarding people's religious practices. To achieve this goal, I have started with a fundamental question, “*How often do you visit places of worship?*” This question includes various religious institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, etc. To answer this question, I have used the Likert scale method with five alternatives, ranging from one to five, with one being the highest and five being the lowest in evaluation. Based on the responses I have received to this question, I can see that 27.1 percent of the participants are practical and regular visitors to places of worship, making it the highest percentage. Furthermore, 25.9 percent of people visit these institutions at least once a week, 10.8 percent visit them at least once a month, 20.4 percent visit them only on holidays and special days, and only 15.7 percent do not attend the religious institutions at all. This information is quite fascinating, as the following questions in the questionnaire are deeply rooted in religious beliefs, customs, and practices. All this is an interesting fact; since the following questions have a real religious background, it requires objectivity and clarity of thought to answer them properly.



Source: Author

Graphic 5.3-7 - All religious freedoms are guaranteed in Albania

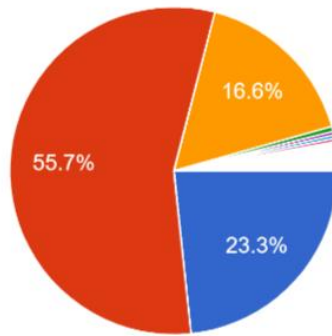
In our previous question, I stated that “Albania guarantees all religious freedoms.” Our aim was to gauge the perceptions of Albanian citizens about their representation and the rights and freedoms associated with their religious beliefs. The survey results were interesting, with 48 percent of respondents fully agreeing with the statement, while 38 percent agreed to some extent. This suggests that 86 percent of participants believe their religious rights and freedoms are adequately protected in Albania. Only 6.1 percent disagreed, while 7.8 percent were undecided. These findings indicate that the majority of Albanians have confidence in their country's ability to safeguard their religious rights and freedoms.



Source: Author

Graphic 5.3-8 - Do you think that there is interfaith dialogue in Albania?

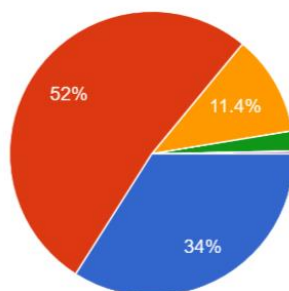
In order to achieve the objectives of this questionnaire and address the research questions of this dissertation, I posed the following inquiry to participants: “Do you think that there is interfaith dialogue in Albania?” The responses were as follows: 77.3 percent replied affirmatively by “yes”, indicating that interreligious dialogue does indeed exist in Albania. 16.5 percent reported a lack of information by answering “*don't have information*”, while only 6.3 percent answered negatively “*no*”, stating that interfaith dialogue does not exist in Albania. The high percentage of those who acknowledged the presence of interreligious dialogue leads us to believe that their responses will be instrumental in furthering the primary goal of this questionnaire, which is to uncover the significance and impact of dialogue in fostering and upholding social harmony and peace within Albanian society.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-9* - If yes, what are the main elements that promote interfaith dialogue?

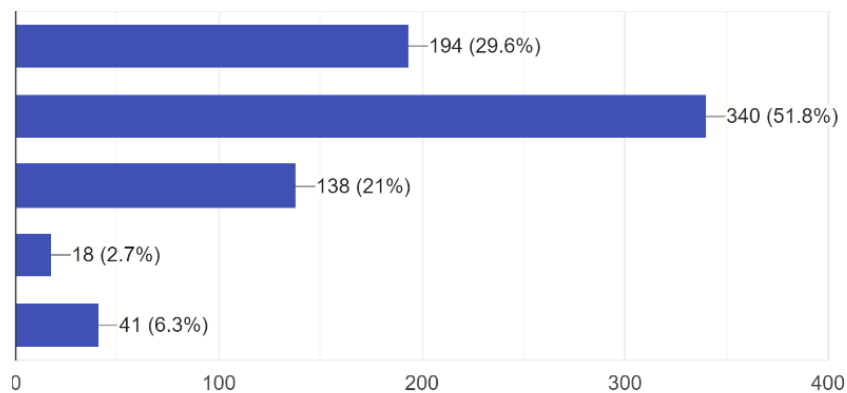
One of the survey questions asked participants to identify the key factors that promote interfaith dialogue. The results revealed that the majority of respondents (55.7%) believe that religious communities in the country are the primary drivers of interreligious dialogue. 23.3% attributed the promotion of interfaith dialogue to education, while 16.6% felt that being open-minded and respectful towards the faith of others is crucial to fostering interfaith dialogue in Albania. Only a small percentage (4.4%) were unsure or lacked information on this topic.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-10* - In Albania, religious beliefs have served to create a culture of peace and mutual understanding

A survey was conducted to gauge the perception of Albanians towards the statement “*In Albania, religious beliefs have served to create a culture of peace and mutual understanding*”. The results of the survey indicated that 52% of the participants agreed, 34% completely agreed, 11.4% were undecided, 2.3% disagreed, and 0.3% strongly disagreed. This suggests that a significant majority of Albanians view religion as playing a crucial role in fostering cooperation and dialogue among diverse members of society. The Albanian society appears to value inter-religious culture and cooperation, which is evident from their positive perception of the role of religion in promoting peace and understanding. This highlights the importance of religious tolerance and mutual respect in creating a harmonious society.



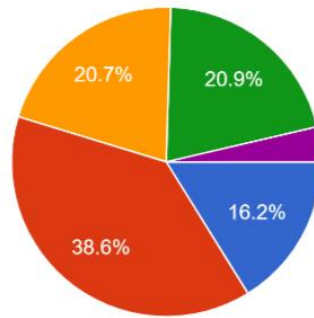
Source: Author

Graphic 5.3-11 - Do you think that interfaith dialogue and harmony in Albania:

In order to better understand society's approach and perception on the status of interreligious dialogue, but also to pose a question which would result in an objective recommendation from the participants of this survey, I posed the following question together with the respective alternatives: “*Do you think that interfaith dialogue and harmony in Albania*”: (a) *It is not at risk as they are values embedded in our history* (b) *Requires constant investment* (c) *It is improving* (d) *It has gotten worse* (e) *I don't know*.

According to the responses gathered from a recent question, it has been revealed that over half of the participants, or 51.8%, are of the opinion that interreligious dialogue in Albania is a matter of great significance, and therefore, requires consistent investment. Moreover, 29.6% of the respondents consider the country's history to be a crucial factor in safeguarding this process from any kind of harm. However, on a positive note, 21% of the participants believe that interreligious dialogue and harmony are gradually improving. Nevertheless, a small percentage of 6.3% were not able to determine the current situation, and only 2.7%

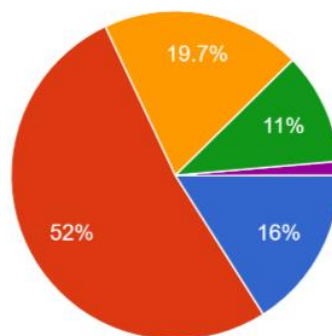
believed that the situation had deteriorated. These responses reflect the fact that Albanian society is not only aware but also mindful of the religious, social, and cultural climate of the country, and acknowledge the importance of developing and maintaining this process for the betterment of society and the establishment of sustainable, peaceful relationships. It is a clear indication that the people of Albania are committed to promoting interfaith dialogue and harmony, and are willing to take the necessary steps to ensure its continued success.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-12* - Interfaith dialogue in Albania is due to the fact that Albanians in general are not very religious

Based on the survey responses, it has been found that 38.6%, of the participants agree and consider interreligious dialogue due to the fact that Albanians in general are not very religious. 16.2% of respondents fully agree with this statement. 20.7% express that they are undecided. 20.9% does not agree with the statement and 3.6% strongly disagree.

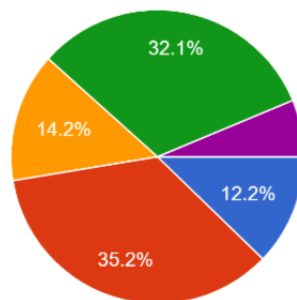


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-13* - Interfaith dialogue in Albania stems as a result of mutual recognition



According to the data received from this question, a significant proportion of Albanian citizens believe that mutual recognition and reciprocity are key factors in promoting interreligious harmony, dialogue, and cooperation. Out of the respondents, 52 percent agreed with this statement, while 16 percent agreed completely. However, a sizeable portion of the participants (19.7 percent) were undecided, and only 11 percent disagreed with the idea. A minuscule 1.3 percent of the respondents said they did not agree with the statement at all. If we delve deeper into the numbers, we find that 68 percent of the respondents agreed that mutual recognition fosters dialogue and cooperation between different religions and beliefs. This is a crucial point that highlights the need to strengthen interreligious cooperation and promote greater understanding among young people and society as a whole. In order to achieve this, it is essential to introduce and explain the beliefs and religions of others, and promote mutual respect and acceptance. By doing so, we can create a more harmonious and tolerant society that values diversity and embraces differences.

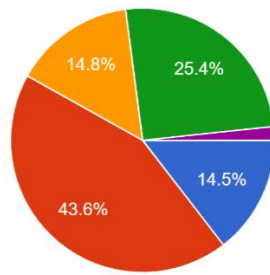


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-14* - Lack of information about other religions makes people more tolerant of them.

It has been observed that one can develop a sense of peace, love, and closeness by getting to know the person they are talking to. This can be particularly true when it comes to people from different religions or belief systems. In this vein, a statement was put forth claiming that a lack of knowledge about other religions might lead to greater acceptance of them. The statement was presented to a group of individuals, and the results were as follows: 35% of the participants agreed with the sentiment, while 12.2% completely agreed. On the other hand, 14.2% had no opinion on the matter, and 38.4% did not agree or disagree entirely with the statement. Essentially, the respondents were divided into two groups: those who believed that a lack of knowledge promotes tolerance and those who held the opposite view. It is

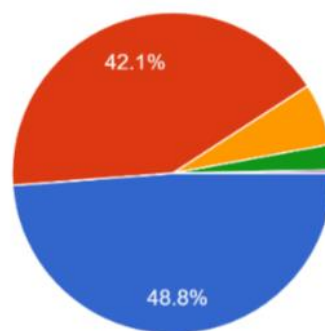
noteworthy that the results indicate that there is no clear consensus on this issue, and opinions vary widely among individuals.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-15 - The same nationality is what makes religious harmony possible in Albania.*

The existence and development of interreligious dialogue and harmony in Albania can be attributed to the common nationality. This hypothesis is explored in a scientific paper where I presented the statement, “The same nationality is what makes religious harmony possible in Albania.” According to the responses of the surveyed individuals, 58.1 percent agreed with this statement, while 25.4 % disagreed. 14.8 % remained undecided on the matter. The high percentage of agreement confirms that this statement is perceived as valid in Albanian society. It's worth noting that all religious communities in Albania share a common historical past, which united the clergy and religious representatives against a common enemy. This logical approach explains why Albania has never recorded conflicts with religious typologies in its history.

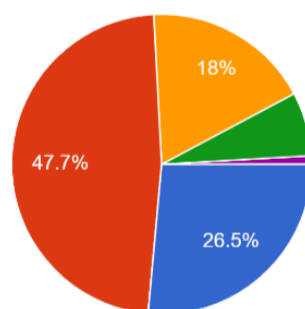


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-16 - Interfaith dialogue contributes to social peace*

One crucial element of this thesis is question no. 11, which plays a crucial role as it presents the statement, “Interfaith dialogue contributes to social peace,” to respondents. This particular statement also holds the status of being a research hypothesis in our thesis, which makes it even more significant. The responses I received regarding this statement are quite encouraging for our societal landscape. Out of all the respondents, a staggering 90.9 percent expressed their agreement or complete agreement with the notion that interfaith dialogue contributes to social peace. Only 6.2 percent were undecided about it, 2.6 percent disagreed with the statement, and only a mere 0.3 percent completely disagreed. This indicates that the majority of people are in favor of promoting interfaith dialogue, which can prove to be an essential tool in maintaining social peace.

After analyzing the responses to this particular question, it can be confidently stated that a society that values, practices, and supports inter-religious dialogue is a crucial asset for maintaining social peace in our country. In fact, an overwhelming majority of approximately 91 percent of the participants agreed that religion and dialogue play a significant role in fostering social harmony. Interestingly, the participants expressed this sentiment in various ways, but a common thread was that religion and religious communities have a remarkable contribution towards preserving and maintaining social peace in Albania. Furthermore, these answers provide evidence to support the initial hypothesis that the study began with, which highlights the special importance of inter-religious dialogue due to its unique nature and characteristics.



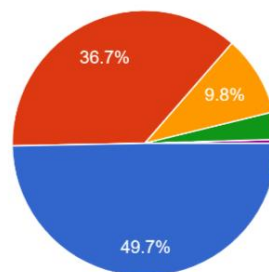
Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-17* - Religious communities & clerics contribute to interfaith harmony in Albania

Religious leaders and communities hold a significant responsibility in providing guidance, instruction, and knowledge to their followers. Additionally, they hold a crucial role in their

relationship with state law enforcement institutions. To assess the attitude and dependability of official representative communities from each faith, I posed the statement as follows: “Religious communities and clerics contribute to interfaith harmony in Albania “The results indicate that 74.2 percent of individuals surveyed believe that religious communities and clerics do indeed contribute to interfaith harmony. A smaller percentage of 18 percent remained undecided, while only 7.8 percent disagreed with the statement.

The answers provided in the above statement serve as a strong indication of the trust that the citizens of Albania have in their institutions and the appreciation, they hold for their work in promoting harmony and dialogue between different faiths. This trust and appreciation make it possible for the citizens to be supportive and willing to invest in activities that further promote these values. It is worth mentioning that the religious clergy in Albania has always been known for upholding these unique values. For instance, during the signing of the declaration of independence, the religious clergy played a crucial role alongside the political leaders. They were a part of the commission that worked towards achieving Albanian independence, further highlighting their commitment to the betterment of the nation. This is a testament to the fact that the religious leaders in Albania have always been active participants in the nation-building process and have contributed towards shaping the country's history positively.

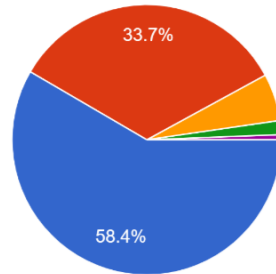


Source: Author

Graphic 5.3-18 - Religious and cultural diversity are important assets for democracy

Albania is renowned for its cultural and religious diversity, which sets it apart in the region and beyond. In light of this valuable asset, I posed the statement “*Religious and cultural diversity are important assets for democracy*” to gauge society's perception of this reality as a whole. It's noteworthy that a staggering 86.4 percent of respondents *agreed* with the statement, indicating that cultural and religious diversity contributes significantly to the

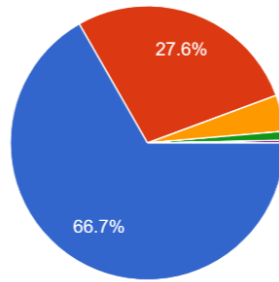
democratization of the state and society. Only a mere 3.7 percent *disagreed* with the statement, while 9.8 percent remained *undecided*. These findings serve as a crucial indicator that religion does not inherently oppose democratic values but rather serves as a fundamental asset in the democratization process.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-19* - Interfaith harmony is a precious treasure for the entire Albanian society

Albania recognizes five official religious beliefs, including Muslims, Bektashi, Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. While it may be acknowledged that there is tolerance and coexistence between these religious communities, it is important to understand that interreligious fellowship is a deeply rooted tradition among Albanian believers that has been developed over centuries. To gauge this sentiment, I asked respondents the following statement: “Interfaith harmony is a precious treasure for the entire Albanian society”. This survey reveals a resounding consensus amongst participants. An overwhelming 92.1 percent express their belief that inter-religious harmony is a precious treasure for our country and society, and that we must take all measures to preserve its purity, guarding against political or group interests with malicious intentions. Only a small 5.6 percent express indifference to this finding, and a mere 2.3 percent disagree, failing to recognize the value of inter-religious harmony as a crucial asset for our nation and society. This perspective highlights the significant role of interreligious harmony in Albanian society. The youth recognize that it is a valuable asset that must be actively maintained and cultivated. They understand that this harmony is not a given, but rather the result of ongoing investment. It is in the best interest of society to ensure this value continues to develop and thrive.

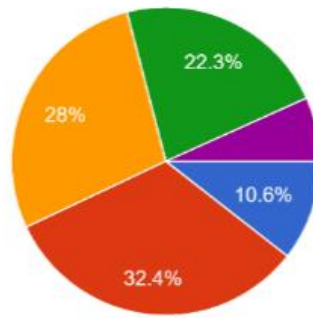


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-20 - I accept as a close friend a person who belongs to another religion*

At a time when developed societies suffer the complexity of religious and cultural affiliation as a basic criterion for building a society, the Albanian reality gives us an adequate answer to this situation. To see the citizens' perception regarding this, one of the questions raised in this survey is: *“I accept as a close friend a person who belongs to another religion”*.

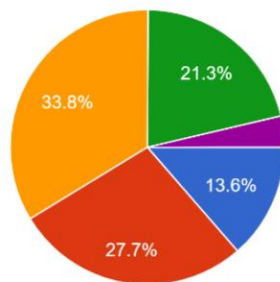
The Albanian society has been recognized as a model to be followed in the region and beyond, especially in terms of promoting harmony, mutual understanding, and inter-religious cooperation. To understand why this is the case, it is important to look at the answers to a specific question that was asked in a recent survey. The question inquired whether the participants would accept a person belonging to another faith as their friend. The results of the survey were quite striking, with 94.3 percent of the respondents indicating that they would indeed be willing to accept someone from a different faith as their friend. Only 1.4 percent of the participants disagreed with this statement, while 4.3 percent were unsure. The high percentage of positive responses to this question is particularly noteworthy, as it addresses a fundamental element of a believer's life - friendship. As two friends often spend a lot of time together, discussing important issues, maintaining a balance of respect and mutual understanding is crucial, especially when different theological beliefs and principles are involved due to their religious affiliations. The overwhelmingly positive response to this question thus highlights the strong culture of inclusivity, acceptance, and tolerance that prevails in Albanian society, making it a shining example of how different faiths can coexist peacefully and harmoniously.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-21 - Religious affiliation is respected in political decision-making in Albania*

One of the survey's questions dealt with the level of respect for religious affiliation in the policy-making and decision-making processes of state institutions within our country. When asked if they agree with the statement “Religious affiliation is respected in political decision-making in Albania”, 43 percent of respondents responded positively. These individuals believe that religious affiliation and its respective communities are taken into account during the creation and implementation of certain laws. An additional 28 percent of respondents remained undecided, while 22.3 % disagreed with the statement while 6.7 % strongly disagree. The nearly equal split between those who agree and disagree suggests that the lack of transparency from relevant bodies and genuine laws aimed at supporting communities and religious affiliations are issues of concern to society, who express their dissatisfaction with the current reality.

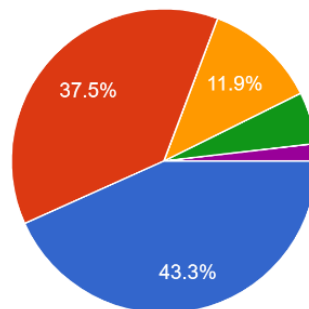


Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-22 - Religious discrimination is present in government / official bodies*

Discrimination based on social, cultural, ethnic, and religious factors is a pervasive issue in our society today. It can be found in both public and private spheres, and is especially

prevalent in regards to religion and race. To explore the presence of religious discrimination in government and official bodies, I conducted a survey. The results were mixed, with 33.8% of respondents indicating they had no information on the topic, 41.3 % agreeing that discrimination exists, and 24.8% disagreeing and only 3.6 % strongly disagreeing with the statement. Upon analysis, it is clear that this phenomenon is not well understood by the majority of society, as most respondents were undecided. It should be noted that the question is quite specific and requires firsthand experience with state institutions to fully comprehend the existence or lack thereof of discrimination.



Source: Author

*Graphic 5.3-23* - The course “culture of interfaith dialogue” should be included in Albanian education system

One of the debates of the last decade has been the integration of religious culture subjects in public schools, and this comes as one of the main demands for the integration process in the European Union. For years, the Albanian government has started a pilot test for the inclusion of the subject of religious culture in public schools. In order to better understand the society's perception of this phenomenon, I have presented the following statement: “The course “culture of interfaith dialogue” should be included in the Albanian education system”.

According to the results of a recent survey, a vast majority of participants (80.8 percent) have expressed their agreement with the inclusion of religious culture in the public education curricula. However, a small percentage of participants (7.3 percent) are against this idea, stating that they do not agree with it. Additionally, a small percentage of participants (11.9 percent) have expressed their indecision regarding the inclusion of this subject in public education. The results of this survey indicate that the Albanian government should take



concrete steps towards the integration of the subject of religious culture with the curricula and textbooks of public education in the country. Currently, in Albania, only religious schools are providing lectures and teaching their students about the theory and practice of the history of religions, dialogue, harmony, and interreligious coexistence. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate this subject into public education curricula to ensure the students receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for a diverse and inclusive society.

In addition to formal religious education, non-formal education is also available in our country through places of worship like mosques and churches, as well as cultural and social centers affiliated with various religious communities or independent from them. To ensure that these institutions do not promote ideologies that oppose the peaceful approach endorsed by official communities, the Albanian government should engage in dialogue with them. As a democratic state that values religious and universal principles, as well as cultural diversity, it is important to offer the best possible support to all religious communities.

The objective is to provide the Albanian citizens with accurate information and foster a deep understanding of the timeless national values that have shaped the country's history and identity. One of the key ways to achieve this objective is by promoting informed and voluntary participation in dialogue activities that foster mutual respect and understanding across different faiths. To make this possible, it is essential to invest in thoughtful and comprehensive education programs that help people appreciate the diversity of religions and the vital role they play in shaping our communities and society as a whole. By doing so, we can build a more inclusive and cohesive society that celebrates our differences while also recognizing our shared humanity.

An important part of the statistical analysis related to the information obtained from the developed questionnaire is the factorial analysis to analyze in more detail the main factors that influence social peace and peaceful coexistence of the Albanian society and to continue further with the construction of the regression equation of multiple linear.

The independent factors related to the assessment of the influence of factors is measured by 5 questions in total, therefore it is necessary to analyze each of the two groups of variables first by calculating the reliability coefficient Cronbach Alpha, which for the independent

variables in total has the value  $1.06 > 0.7$  (which is the allowed limit) by showed that the reliability of all these questions together is higher than the minimum limit of acceptability. While the reliability coefficient for the dependent variables has a value of 0.840, also a high reliability coefficient. We see the Cronbach Alpha coefficient as well as the factorial weights of each of the independent variables. We emphasize that the limit value of the factorial weights, which allows the factors to continue the further analysis, is 0.4.

The first independent variable is - Factors that have influenced the development of interreligious harmony and dialogue in Albania (which is measured by 5 questions; the analysis of their factorial weights shows that these 5 questions have a factorial weight of  $1.07 > 0.7$ , indicating that the coefficient of reliability still remains high (Table no. 1).

Table 1: *Factorial weight of the first independent variable*

Question	Factorial weight
In Albania, religious beliefs have served to create a culture of peace and mutual understanding.	<b>0.54</b>
Interfaith dialogue in Albania is due to the fact that Albanians in general are not very religious	<b>1.21</b>
Interfaith dialogue in Albania stems as a result of mutual recognition.	<b>0.83</b>
Lack of information about other religions makes people more tolerant of them	<b>1.38</b>
The same nationality is what makes religious harmony possible in Albania	<b>1.14</b>

Source: Author

We analyze the other independent variable - The impact of interreligious dialogue on the development of peace and democracy (measured by 4 questions). The factorial weights for this factor are given by table no. 2, the data of which show that the coefficient for this variable has a very high reliability value with 1.07 in total as can be seen in table nr. 2.

Table 2: *Factorial weight of the second independent variable*

Question	Factorial weight
In Albania, religious beliefs have served to create a culture of peace and mutual understanding.	<b>0.54</b>
Interfaith dialogue contributes to social peace.	<b>0.55</b>
Interfaith harmony is a precious treasure for the entire Albanian society.	<b>0.54</b>
Religious and cultural diversity are important assets for democracy.	<b>0.67</b>

Source: Author

In the same way, I also analyze the dependent variable that is “*religiousness and religious affiliation*” We see that the factorial weights for each of the elements of this variable are greater than 0.4, therefore they are kept in the further analysis by maintaining the same Alpha coefficient.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1. Conclusions on the Research findings**

The findings of the study indicate that religious communities in Albania have played a vital role in promoting social peace and democratic principles in their society. Moreover, the study revealed that religious communities actively participate in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, promoting respect, tolerance, and understanding among different religious groups. Additionally, religious communities have established platforms for open dialogue and sharing of values, fostering social peace through joint religious ceremonies, dialogue sessions, and community initiatives that promote cooperation. This supports the hypothesis that religious communities in Albania are essential in maintaining and building social peace, in Albania.

Furthermore, religious institutions in Albania have been crucial in preventing conflicts and promoting peaceful resolutions. Their moral authority and teachings have enabled them to effectively address conflicts and mediate disputes, providing guidance and support to communities during times of turmoil. Their involvement has been essential in thwarting tensions and promoting comprehensive peacebuilding efforts. Leveraging their extensive networks, these institutions have facilitated dialogues between different groups and promoted understanding and reconciliation. Additionally, they have provided essential humanitarian assistance and support to vulnerable populations affected by conflicts, further contributing to peace initiatives. In summary, the role of religious institutions in Albania has been instrumental in fostering a peaceful society.

Throughout the study result we found out that religious communities in Albania have played a vital role in promoting and strengthening democratic values in the society. Their

commitment to ideals such as social justice, religious freedom, equality, and the right to believe has been instrumental in advancing democratic processes. Through their encouragement of inclusivity and participation, religious communities have fostered a democratic culture that cherishes fundamental rights and values.

In addition, the Albanian religious communities have demonstrated a firm commitment towards promoting social unity and community involvement. They have taken proactive measures to encourage solidarity, empathy, and a shared sense of responsibility through various initiatives, including extending social services, aiding underprivileged groups, and strengthening community ties. By addressing societal inequalities and creating a sense of togetherness, these endeavors have significantly contributed to the advancement of social harmony.

Different official religious communities in Albania have played a pivotal role in fostering an all-embracing and peaceful society, through means such as interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution, community engagement, and ethical guidance. The empirical data gained from the survey is strongly supporting this account that underscores the significance of recognizing and appreciating the important role of religious communities in establishing and upholding social harmony in the Albanian context.

An interesting result is clearly shown on the study finding that the shared *national identity* among Albanians has played a pivotal role in promoting cooperation and mutual understanding among diverse religious groups. This finding serves the hypothesis, and gives a clear indication on the main drivers of the interfaith harmony and cooperation in Albania. Several other factors support this explanation, including. Albania boasts a rich cultural heritage, marked by religious harmony and national unity.

Despite the presence of diverse religious communities, the Albanian people have maintained a strong sense of shared identity and cooperation. This historical and cultural foundation has fostered mutual understanding and respect between different religious groups, contributing to a harmonious and inclusive society. Albanian society is characterized by a deep-rooted sense of nationalism and solidarity that surpasses religious affiliations. Albanians place greater emphasis on their shared nationality than on religious differences, stressing the

significance of unity and collaboration for national progress and stability. This prevailing sentiment fosters an environment that is conducive to religious communities working together, engaging in dialogue, and gaining a better understanding of one another.

In addition, the study results indicate a clear link between public engagement in religious activities and their perception of peace. This is due to the positive correlation between the two variables and students' perceptions of peace. The explanation is supported by several factors. Religious activities often promote moral values such as kindness, tolerance, and respect, which can contribute to world peace. Students who actively participate in religious activities are more likely to internalize and adopt these values, leading to a greater sense of peace in both their personal lives and society.

Furthermore, the findings of the study demonstrate a significant association between one's involvement in religious events and their perception of peace. This is attributed to the positive correlation between these two variables and the way in which they view peace. By actively participating in these events, individuals are more likely to internalize and embrace these values, resulting in a greater sense of tranquility in both their individual lives and society as a whole.

In addition, participating in religious activities equips citizens with ethical values and direction to navigate the complexities of life and resolve disputes. The teachings of religion furnish a moral structure that has a positive impact on the decision-making of citizens, promoting peaceful conflict resolution. Consequently, individuals embrace a more serene perspective and exhibit conduct that reflects the significance of these teachings.

The study results clearly show that there is a positive correlation between citizens involvement in religious public and private activities and their perception of peace. It is important to note that this correlation should not be interpreted as a cause, because for sure there are other factors that contribute to their perceptions of peace, such as personal beliefs, experiences, and sociocultural contexts. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that religious participation can potentially raise and foster peaceful attitudes and behaviors among citizens. The data shows that citizens who actively engage in religious activities tend to have a higher perception of peace.

Furthermore, throughout the years, even during the hard dark period of communism, Albanian society has stood out for its exceptional religious tolerance, which can be attributed to the coexistence of diverse beliefs in Albanian populated regions. It is worth noting that efforts to restore faith and religious institutions after the communism downfall have been a complex task and required a necessitating patience, perseverance, and strategic planning. The newfound freedom of belief was met with tragic consequences. Religious traditions began to rebuild on a foundation of the few surviving cults and clergy who had resisted communist terror and destruction. Early attempts focused on restoring the thread of interrupted religious tradition. However, the remaining clergy found themselves in vastly different circumstances than 46 years prior. The need to rebuild spiritual structures brought a new dynamic to the communities, leaving the old clerical elites feeling powerless to determine the direction of their religious communities. Fortunately, foreign foundations stepped in to provide aid, helping to re-establish religious institutions, reconstruct cult objects, and establish numerous educational, social, and healthcare centers, asylums, and orphanages.

Muslim and Christian clerics demonstrated unwavering devotion to their faith, sacrificing themselves for their beliefs and remaining steadfast until the end. Their love for their religion and homeland was unshakable, and they refused to compromise with the regime. Their spirits remained free, even in the face of persecution. During this time, influential religious leaders of Islam and Christianity, who had suffered in communist prisons because of their faith, began their work by reviving religious discourse and rebuilding or constructing new religious buildings in settlements lacking them. Since the state did not offer any financial support for these endeavors, they were self-financed or supported by religious organizations outside of Albania, each catering to their own faith group.

## **6.2. Recommendations for further research**

Albania stands out amongst European and Balkan nations for its lack of religious education included in the state education system. To maintain religious harmony and social peace, it is crucial to carefully select a suitable model of religious education and allocate space for its provision within public schools. By introducing religious education in this manner, students can better understand the importance of avoiding both religiously prohibited behaviors and

those that are considered criminal under the law. This approach also enables individuals to tap into the positive influences of religion, both in their personal and communal lives.

The lack of religious education in public schools highlights the significance of non-formal education. As a result, religious communities should focus on providing alternative activities that are accessible to individuals of all ages, in addition to educational opportunities in mosques and churches. Conducting longitudinal studies that span several years or even decades can help researchers understand the evolving role of religious communities and interfaith harmony in promoting social peace in Albania. This approach will enable experts to grasp trends and anticipate the long-term outcomes of various initiatives and policies.

Beside all this some research recommendations topics could be as follows:

- a) Conduct a comparative study of Albania's situation in relation to other Western Balkan countries that have experienced similar or different interfaith dynamics. This research can shed light on what is most effective in promoting interfaith harmony and social peace.
- b) To look into the historical context of Albanian religious communities, their role during the communist era, and how they have evolved over time in terms of contributing to social peace and interfaith harmony.
- c) To assess the effectiveness of government policies and initiatives in Albania aimed at promoting interfaith harmony and social peace. Examine the impact, implementation, and challenges that these programs face.
- d) To conduct research into how international and regional factors, such as religious networks and organizations, influence interfaith dynamics and social peace in Albania.

These research recommendations, but not limited to it should contribute to a better understanding of the role of religious communities and interfaith harmony in promoting social peace in Albania, as well as provide useful insights for policymakers and practitioners.



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[https://knfsh.al/en/knfsh-zhvillon-forum-nderfetar-ne-korce/](http://knfsh.al/en/knfsh-zhvillon-forum-nderfetar-ne-korce/), [https://knfsh.al/en/knfsh-zhvillon-forum-nderfetar-ne-elbasan/](http://knfsh.al/en/knfsh-zhvillon-forum-nderfetar-ne-elbasan/)

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A: Useful Links

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4wtLyWQkDw>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVLooYwDEGI>
3. <https://www.kryeministria.al/newsroom/qeveria-kleri-dhe-media-sinergji-per-tolerancen-dhe-paqen/>
4. <https://www.oranews.tv/article/qytetaret-e-shkodres-marshim-kunder-krimet>
5. <https://top-channel.tv/2023/12/25/thirrje-per-paqe-e-solidaritet-mesha-e-krishtlindjes-ne-katedralen-nene-tereza-ne-prishtine/>
6. <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/speciale-tolerance-apo-harmoni-fetare-ne-shqiperi-paralajmerojne-udheheqesit-e-komuniteteve-fetare-nese-politika-do-te-shnderrohej-ne-besim-do-te-ishte-rrezik-per-vendin>
7. <https://debatiperfene.wordpress.com/2018/07/18/si-ndikojne-besimet-fetare-ne-sigurine-kombetare-te-nje-vendi-sfidat-me-te-cilat-perballet-sot-bota-nje-perspektive-mbi-shqiperine/>
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## **Appendix B: Questionnaire in English**

Could you spare a few minutes of your time to complete this survey which will be used by the PhD. Cand. Enter Skura in fulfillment of the obligations of the doctoral program entitled “*THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND INTERFAITH HARMONY IN PROMOTING SOCIAL PEACE: A CASE STUDY OF ALBANIA*” under the scientific leadership of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lisen Bashkurti. This questionnaire aims to obtain the perception of the Albanian society regarding interreligious dialogue and harmony, the role, challenges and aspirations for the future.

The data in this questionnaire are confidential and will be used only for the purpose of developing scientific research.

1. **Gender**
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to say
2. **Age**
  - a. 18-25
  - b. 26-35
  - c. 36-45
  - d. Over 45
3. **Citizenship**
  - a. Albanian
  - b. Other
4. **Religion**
  - a. Muslim
  - b. Catholic
  - c. Orthodox
  - d. Bektashian
  - e. Evangelical
5. **Level of education**
  - a. High School
  - b. Bachelor

- c. Master
- d. Ph.D.
- e. Post Doc.

6. **Profession**

Short answer text

7. **City of residence**

Short answer text

8. **Do you think that there is interfaith dialogue in Albania?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know

9. **If yes, what are the main elements that promote interfaith dialogue?**

- a. Education
- b. The contribution of religious communities
- c. Indifferentism
- d. Other

10. **How often do you visit places of worship?**

- a. Regularly (several times a week)
- b. At least once a week
- c. At least once a month
- d. Only for religious holidays
- e. I do not visit them

11. **All religious freedoms in Albania are guaranteed.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

12. **In Albania, religious beliefs have served to create a culture of peace and mutual understanding.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

13. **Do you think that interfaith dialogue and harmony in Albania**

- a. It is not at risk as they are values embedded in our history
- b. Requires constant investment
- c. It is improving
- d. It has gotten worse
- e. I don't know

**14. Interfaith dialogue in Albania is due to the fact that Albanians in general are not very religious.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**15. Interfaith dialogue in Albania stems as a result of mutual recognition**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**16. Lack of information about other religions makes people more tolerant of them.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**17. The same nationality is what makes religious harmony possible in Albania.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**18. Interfaith dialogue contributes to social peace**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**19. Interfaith harmony is a precious treasure for the entire Albanian society**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**20. Religious and cultural diversity are important assets for democracy**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree

- e. Strongly disagree
- 21. I accept as a close friend a person who belongs to another religion.**
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Undecided
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
- 22. Religious communities & clerics contribute to interfaith harmony in Albania.**
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Undecided
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
- 23. Religious affiliation is respected in political decision-making in Albania**
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Undecided
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
- 24. Religious discrimination is present in government / official bodies.**
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Undecided
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
- 25. The course on the culture of interfaith dialogue should be included in Albanian education system.**
- a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Undecided
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
- 26. In which aspect do you think that interfaith dialogue should be developed in the future? (open ended question)**

## Appendix C: Questionnaire in Albanian

Do të ju lutesha të ndanit pak minuta nga koha juaj të plotësoni këtë anketë e cila do të përdoret nga PhD. Cand. Hysni Skura në përmbushje të detyrimeve të programit të doktoraturës me titull **“ROLI I KOMUNITETET FETARE DHE HARMONIA NDËRFETARE NË PROMOVIMIN E PAQES SOCIALE: NJË RAST STUDIMOR I SHQIPËRISË”** nën udhëheqjen shkencore të Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lisen Bashkurti. Ky pyetësor ka për synim të marrë perceptimin e shoqërisë shqiptare lidhur me dialogun dhe harmoninë ndërfaqetare, rolin, sfidat dhe aspiratat për të ardhmen.

Të dhënat në këtë pyetësor janë konfidenciale dhe do të përdoren vetëm për qëllim të zhvillimit të kërkimit shkencor.

### 1. Gjinia

- a. Mashkull
- b. Femër
- c. Preferoj te mos e them

### 2. Moshë

- a. 18-25
- b. 26-35
- c. 36-45
- d. Mbi 45

### 3. Shtetësia

- a. Shqiptare
- b. Tjetër

### 4. Feja

- a. Mysliman
- b. Katolik
- c. Ortodoks
- d. Bektashi
- e. Ungjillor

### 5. Niveli i arsimimit

- a. Gjinnaz
- b. Bachelor



- c. Master
- d. Ph.D.
- e. Post Doc.

## **6. Profesioni**

Përgjigje e hapur

### **7. Vendbanimi**

Përgjigje e hapur

### **8. A mendoni se në Shqipëri ka dialog ndërfaqetar?**

- a. Po
- b. Jo
- c. Nuk e di

### **9. Nëse po, cilët janë elementët kryesorë që nxisin dialogun ndërfaqetar?**

- a. Arsimi
- b. Kontributi i komuniteteve fetare
- c. Indiferentizmi
- d. Tjetër

### **10. Sa shpesh i vizitoni objektet e kultit?**

- a. Rregullisht (disa herë në javë)
- b. Të paktën një herë në javë
- c. Të paktën një herë në muaj
- d. Vetëm për festat fetare
- e. Nuk i vizitoj fare

### **11. Në Shqipëri të gjitha liritë fetare janë të garantuara.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

### **12. Në Shqipëri, besimet fetare kanë shërbyer për të krijuar një kulturë paqeje dhe mirëkuptimi reciprok.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

### **13. A mendoni se dialogu dhe harmonia ndërfaqetare në Shqipëri:**

- a. Nuk është në rrezik pasi janë vlera të ngulitura në historinë tonë
- b. Kërkon investim të vazhdueshme
- c. Është në përmirësim
- d. Është përkeqësuar
- e. Nuk kam informacion

**14. Dialogu ndërfetar në Shqipëri është për faktin se shqiptarët në përgjithësi nuk janë shumë fetarë.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**15. Dialogu ndërfetar në Shqipëri buron si rezultat i njohjes reciproke**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**16. Mungesa e informacionit për fetë e tjera i bën njerëzit më tolerantë ndaj tyre.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**17. E njëjta kombësi është ajo që e bën të mundur harmoninë fetare në Shqipëri.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**18. Dialogu ndërfetar kontribuon në paqen sociale**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**19. Harmonia ndërfetare është një thesar i çmuar për mbarë shoqërinë shqiptare**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**20. Diversiteti fetar dhe kulturor janë asete të rëndësishme për demokracinë**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**21. Unë e pranoj si mik të ngushtë një person që i përket një feje tjetër.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**22. Komunitetet fetare dhe klerikët kontribuojnë në harmoninë ndërfetare në Shqipëri.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**23. Përkatësia fetare respektohet në vendimmarrjen politike në Shqipëri**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**24. Diskriminimi fetar është i pranishëm në organet qeveritare/zzyrtare.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**25. Lënda për kulturën e dialogut ndërfetar duhet të përfshihet në sistemin arsimor shqiptar.**

- a. Jam plotësisht dakord
- b. Jam dakord
- c. Jam i/e pavendosur
- d. Nuk jam dakord
- e. Nuk jam aspak dakord

**26. Në cilin aspekt mendoni se duhet të zhvillohet dialogu ndërfetar në të ardhmen? ( pyetje me fund të hapur )**

## **Appendix D: Interview with Muslim community of Albania representative**

### **1. Who do you think are the main actors in promoting and developing interfaith dialogue Albania?**

The main actors are religious representatives and the interfaith dialogue council.

### **2. What is your institution's role and contribution to interfaith dialogue in the country?**

The role and contribution of the KMSH is greater, given the extent of Muslims in Albania, % of the believers, as well as the orientations given by the center based on this direction.

### **3. Do you think that harmony between religions has a direct impact on the maintenance and development of peace in our country? If so, how does this happen?**

It has influence and this is through religious teachings that are being followed, which the source is from religion itself.

### **4. Would it foster a better understanding among the diverse cultural communities that exist in your country, in your view?**

It would certainly positively impact and foster understanding, despite not at high levels.

### **5. In your perspective, what are the future challenges in terms of dialogue and interfaith coexistence, and you see this future for Albania?**

I see the future challenges in the preservation and development of the interfaith dialogue in various formats.

**Dorjan Demetja – Muslim Community of Albania**

## **Appendix E: Interview with Orthodox Church representative**

### **1. Who do you think are the main actors in the development of interfaith dialogue Albania?**

The main actors in the promotion and development of interfaith dialogue in Albania are the social communities of traditional religious communities and the clerical and secular structures of the administration of religious institutions, in the framework of the spiritual cultivation of the truths of faith, which, as their theology testifies, consists in love, peace and respect even towards religious beliefs and choices of everyone.

### **2. What is your institution's role and contribution to interfaith dialogue in the country?**

The role and contribution of the institution of the Orthodox Church and its community in promoting and developing inter-religious dialogue in Albania is first-hand, as an institution of the centuries-old Christian tradition has faced political and historical intolerance according to religious teachings, fostering fraternal feelings and interfaith harmony for their fellow-people even when they have converted or embraced, without will or free will, a rite or another religion.

In institutional terms, high clergy, low clergy and at the same time theologians and active believers have contributed to the maintenance of interfaith harmony in the country, not only with peaceful attitudes towards the varieties of faith, but also by organizing and cooperating among religious institutions to maintain the fragility of interfaith harmony but also to cover the spiritual and social needs of the entire Albanian society, especially during this difficult period of transition.

### **3. Do you think that harmony between religions has a direct impact on the maintenance and development of peace in our country? If so, how does this happen? Naturally, yes.**

The religious are the promoters of peace and the most tangible example, more than any other layer in our society, as they respect the differences in faith indiscriminately and at the same time according to their theological principle behave towards each and preserve intact human dignity.

In this spirit, each religion supports interreligious dialogue, at the core of which lies the desired peace and harmony for each of them, for themselves and the other.

**4. Would it foster a better understanding among the diverse cultural communities that exist in your country, in your view?**

Interfaith harmony in Albania naturally needs to be fostered and developed even more with examples of cooperation as far as any religious community can, to foster a better understanding, offering not only what is exaggerated but sometimes from what little or much there is, in human and material good, to cover the needs of Albanian society, even when the mechanisms of the state do not function properly. This would serve not only religious communities but also cultural communities and benevolent Albanian society.

**5. In your perspective, what are the future challenges in terms of dialogue and interfaith coexistence, and you see this future for Albania?**

The challenges of Albanian society remain uncirculated education and religious ignorance. I think that religious institutions will continue to contribute to dialogue and preservation of interfaith harmony in Albania, as structures that have direct spiritual responsibility for the Albanian society and as model institutions to face any challenge to function fully as a civilized European society.

Answers from **Dr. Thoma Shkira, Theologian at the Orthodox Church**

## **Appendix F: Interview with Catholic Church representative**

### **1. Who do you think are the main actors in promoting and developing interfaith dialogue Albania?**

I think the main actors in Albania are:

- a. Interfaith Council
- b. Department of Islamic Religious Sciences at Beder University College
- c. National and local institutions of the Catholic Church.

### **2. What is your institution's role and contribution to interfaith dialogue in the country?**

Our institution (Catholic monk community “Little Family”) contributes:

- a. Friendship and spiritual exchange with Christian theologians and clergy (non-Catholic communities) and Muslims.
- b. Spiritual experience and prayer with the Orthodox Church and dervish fraternities.
- c. Study of the Holy Scriptures and spiritual sources of Islam and the knowledge of the Islamic mystic path.
- d. Monastic prayer for the unification of Christian churches.
- e. Prayer for our Muslim friends, especially on their holidays and in their time of fasting.
- f. Supporting interfaith relations of other communities.
- g. Our monastic dedication and the sacrifice of our lives to the Uniting of Humanity with God.

### **3. Do you think that harmony between religions has a direct impact on the maintenance and development of peace in our country? If so, how does this happen?**

Of course, it does. Mutual recognition and building a culture of respect for religious beliefs, based on personal knowledge of the theological and spiritual reasons of monotheistic

worship of other religions, will destroy the fears and drives of religious fundamentalists, which are never cause for confrontation. But it is the weapon that is most easily used to justify political, nationalistic, social or ethnic violence.

**4. Would it foster a better understanding among the diverse cultural communities that exist in your country, in your view?**

Of course, it does. Recently, it seems to me that the preaching of Orthodox clerics and catechists and above all Muslim imams on social media presses an objection against other religions (Christians or Tarikas) based on erroneous information about their real monotheistic and anti-idolalist beliefs. This leads to a climate of opposition, bad information, which destroys the tradition of respect and appreciation that our Holy Books encourage among those who worship one God. Ignorance risks creating debates and confrontations that can open up serious divisions. In addition, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) protects religious freedom not only as tolerance and the possibility of private exercise of religion, but guarantees the right to practice it in public, to display it in public and also to change. The one who is the one who chooses to be the most suitable. This inalienable human right is of great importance in Albania, after decades of persecution. If not taught and protected, taught in churches and mosques, especially in schools for clergy, the current context can lead to tense situations.

**5. In your perspective, what are the future challenges in terms of dialogue and interfaith coexistence, and you see this future for Albania?**

Education for religious freedom in churches, mosques and mosques, with the involvement of the religious people. Interfaith teaching, with direct meetings with clergy and believers of other religions, especially in the basic and permanent formation of clergy. Joint engagement in the social areas: physical and especially mental handicapping, investments in youth policies with the support of European religious institutions (Islamic and Christian). Joint training and campaigns to fight juvenile crime and mafia networks.

**Answers by: Don Paolo Marasco - Catholic Church**



## **Appendix G: Interview with Bektashi representative**

### **1. Who do you think are the main actors in promoting and developing interfaith dialogue Albania?**

Leaders of religious communities (religious leaders)

Representatives of different faiths (local clergy) serving in churches, mosques, teqe and other religious objects in different cities of Albania.

Religious preachers on social networks (facebook, twitter, instagram, tikta, etc. promoting peace and harmony between faiths)

Visual and written media (promoting values and elevating religious messages for peace and religious coexistence)

Video messages from clergy representatives jointly for harmony and religious tolerance which appear later and are broadcast through rradios, tv, social networks.

Historical documentaries of religion (showing the sufferings of the pains of the revival of the religious objects after the dictatorship and the resurrection of faith in the hearts of believers).

Video messages from young people of different faiths.

### **2. What is your institution's role and contribution to interfaith dialogue in the country?**

The Bektashi World Grand-Father is a member of the Presidency Council of the KNFH and its leader Haxhi Dede Reshat Bardhi has been one of the founders of the ICNA body that has as its main aim of its activity:

Promoting knowledge, values and principles among religious communities, which are related to building a peaceful and just society in Albania.

Promoting a social, cultural, professional model for religious communities in Albania

Integration of religious communities into social life by discussing and giving opinions on areas of common interest and concern.

Planning and implementing joint action programs based on shared moral commitments in

Albania.

Participation and involvement of the religious community in decision-making in matters related to their rights, promoting respect for unique traditions and changes in belief and action.

Delivering messages of peace and interfaith harmony on national and international public/private TV by the leader of the institution

Joint statements on various issues that concern Albanian society (covid-19, voting, protests of political parties, domestic and women violence, war in Ukraine, hospitality of the Afghan people.)

Exchange of excellent visits and relations of the Community Leader with other leaders of the official religious communities in the country.

Giving messages of harmony, tolerance and religious co-existence in religious ceremonies, to believers, not only Bektashi but also to other faiths.

National and international meetings with representatives of different faiths, in joint round tables with representatives of local and central institutions.

Delivering peaceful messages, in cases of wars, political disagreements etc.

**3. Do you think that harmony between religions has a direct impact on the maintenance and development of peace in our country? If so, how does this happen?**

Through messages to believers who live to the farthest reaches of Albania, for peace, harmony and brotherly kindness, on public and private TELEVISION. Meeting believers and preaching moral values of interfaith kindness. Calling on politics several times for peace and stability in the country in cases of protests and polls.

Calling on the people in the event of voting to participate democratically and peacefully.

Welcoming and willing to support (with clothing, shelter, etc.) to the different peoples who are sheltering in Albania (Afghans, Syrians, etc.)

**4. Would it foster a better understanding among the diverse cultural communities that exist in your country, in your view?**

If there were no interference by politics in the affairs of religious communities, religious coexistence would be even better.

If the interests that politics with internationals were to stay out of religious matters, the functioning of religious communities would be even more achievable.

These are not reasons for religious devotion, but in the eyes of believers, trust and credibility for religious institutions when politics are in the middle. (Politics should stay away from religion.)

**5. In your perspective, what are the future challenges in terms of dialogue and interfaith coexistence, and you see this future for Albania?**

Despite the political influences on religion (unprecedentedly and repeatedly in some cases publicly) coexistence between Christian and Muslim communities is like a now-consolidated and unbroken chain. Historically religious communities have supported and supported each other on various occasions (communist regime, denigration of clergy, the destruction of religious cult objects and then the reconstruction of religion has come in a similar way).

There has been and always will exist in Albania harmony and tolerance and coexistence between different religions, regardless of any external influence whether political, economic, social or technological (which has brought with it the language of hatred towards different religious beliefs, often against religious leaders, different kinds of religious extremists, etc.)

**Answers by: Sheldjana Jano – Bekstashi Order of Albania**

## **Appendix H: Interview with Evangelical Church representative**

### **1. Who do you think are the main actors in promoting and developing interfaith dialogue Albania?**

Personally, I think that the Interfaith Council of Albania is one of the main actors for the development of interfaith dialogue in our nation. This does not mean that they are the only ones or the first initiators to have it promoted. Our country is well known that historically religious clergy have contributed to society by uniting and not dividing the nation because of religious beliefs. Religious leaders themselves are the best promoter of interfaith dialogue in our country, a value that they convey to believers in their community.

### **2. What is your institution's role and contribution to interfaith dialogue in the country?**

Contributions can be numerous. Meetings with the Interfaith Council of Albania are one of the contributions. Christianity-based churches, Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox churches also hold joint meetings several times during the year such as the Ecumenical meeting or meetings of special importance to our faith. Believers meet together and religious leaders give their example and call to be united as people regardless of our beliefs.

### **3. Do you think that harmony between religions has a direct impact on the maintenance and development of peace in our country? If so, how does this happen?**

It has a direct influence only on the category of people who are part of or follow a certain religion, not necessarily on all the people of our nation. It is hard to say that people are separated only because of religion and that they are united only by religion. There are larger groups than religions in which different people find belonging in our country. Religions have a huge and direct influence on a large part. Promoting values different from the respective

religions in our nation, versus anti-values that are trying to be promoted by a minority part of society, is one of the ways religions directly affects.

**4. Would it foster a better understanding among the diverse cultural communities that exist in your country, in your view?**

It would certainly foster understanding for a large part. The understanding would be not only between us being part of religions but also among those we may consider external to religions.

**5. In your perspective, what are the future challenges in terms of dialogue and interfaith coexistence, and you see this future for Albania?**

I see Albania as a leader of interfaith dialogue. The world is an example to take from every country in the world in this regard. Albanians put personal relationships with the individual rather than their theological attitude, which does not often happen in other countries. I see Albania as a promoter and a country that will continue to demonstrate and more this value that we do not see applicable in other countries of the world.

**Answers by: Alesio Sema – Evangelical Church of Albania**