

THE IARF PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO NORTH MACEDONIA, KOSOVO AND ALBANIA

Three countries, one journey towards dialogue and the 2027 Congress

From Tetovo to Gjakova and then to Tirana: meetings with religious communities, institutions and partners, continuing years of cooperation between IARF and the Bektashi Community.

HIS HOLINESS, THE DEDEBABA, HAXHI DEDE BABA EDMOND BRAHIMAJ WITH PRESIDENT ROBERT INCE



THE WORLD HEADQUARTERS AT THE HEART OF PREPARATIONS FOR 2027

In Albania, the visit took on a distinctly forward-looking dimension. Alongside institutional and interfaith dialogue, preparations for the 2027 IARF Congress were a central focus. This stage continues the engagement of the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia with IARF and extends it to Tirana, where the Congress is expected to take place, hosted by the Dede Baba and the Bektashi World Headquarters.

At the Bektashi World Headquarters in Tirana, President Ince and the delegation were received by the Dede Baba of the Bektashis, His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj. The discussion focused on religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, tolerance and the role of religious communities in promoting peace and understanding, as well as concrete prospects for cooperation with IARF.

The hospitality of His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj also carries symbolic significance: his relationship with IARF, in which he became involved in 2010 while serving as Baba at the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia, now continues in a new setting in Tirana, where he serves as Dede Baba of the Bektashis.

Across three countries in the region, a week of meetings brought religious leaders, community representatives and institutional partners around the same table. The President of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), Mr Robert Ince, visited North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania on a journey focused on freedom of belief, interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. But the visit went beyond a series of routine meetings. Also on the horizon was the 2027 IARF Congress in Albania, to be hosted by His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj and the Bektashi World Headquarters. Alongside institutional and interfaith dialogue, the visit also provided an opportunity to assess first-hand the organisational and logistical conditions for an international event of this scale.

KOSOVO | PLURALISM, DIALOGUE AND REGISTRATION ISSUES

GJAKOVA, PREKAZ, MITROVICA AND PRISTINA

In Gjakova, the representatives were received by Dervish Rauf Radonqi at a meeting that highlighted community life, religious tradition, relations with other communities, and issues concerning registration and institutional recognition. The discussion broadened to encompass the legal and institutional framework, freedom of belief and the experience of coexistence among different communities, giving President Ince a more direct understanding of religious life in Kosovo.

Another stop on the visit was the Adem Jashari Memorial Complex in Prekaz, where the IARF President learned about one of Kosovo's most significant sites of historical remembrance and the impact of the recent past on the country's society. In Mitrovica, the meeting with the head of the Jewish community, Mr Hysen Hyseni, added another interfaith dimension to the visit.

The discussion centred on the experiences of religious communities and their role in society. In Pristina, there were meetings with representatives of other religious traditions, including Mr Femi Cakolli, head of the Protestant community. The stay in the capital also included contacts with journalists, media representatives and Catholic believers. In a television interview, the IARF President spoke about his impressions of the visit, the role of religious freedom and the prospects for strengthening interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

PROF. ARBEN SULEJMANI, PRESIDENT INCE, AND THE HEAD OF THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY, FEMI CAKOLLI



HEAD OF THE BEKTASHI COMMUNITY OF NORTH MACEDONIA, PROF. ARBEN SULEJMANI
IARF PRESIDENT ROBERT INCE,
HEAD OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF KOSOVO, DR HYSEN HYSENI



PROF. ARBEN SULEJMANI, DERVISH RAUF RADONQI, PRESIDENT INCE



NORTH MACEDONIA | TETOVO 2016 AND CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT WITH IARF

FROM HARABATI BABA TEKKE TO AN INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGE TOWARDS TIRANA

In North Macedonia, the visit entered territory of particular significance in the history of IARF's relations in the region. At the heart of this history are the regional Bektashi headquarters in North Macedonia, Harabati Baba Tekke in Tetovo, and the institutional engagement of the Bektashi Community under its head, Prof. Arben Sulejmani. It was here that the ties established over the years formed a bridge between the local Bektashi tradition, IARF and international networks for religious dialogue.

A defining moment came in 2016 when, building on the relationship established with IARF and in cooperation with its European Chapter, Tetovo was chosen to host the IARF European Conference. Prof. Arben Sulejmani, as head of the Bektashi Community in Macedonia, played an essential role in creating the conditions and partnerships that made it possible to hold the conference in Tetovo. The event was hosted by the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia. The programme was organised in cooperation with and hosted by the University of Tetovo, with activities also held on the headquarters' premises. The conference brought together representatives from 26 countries and gave Tetovo, Harabati Baba Tekke and the Bektashi Community significant international visibility. At the same event, His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj was thanked by the then Chair, Ms Wytse Dijkstra, for his contribution to religious tolerance and harmony. Through this event, a relationship cultivated over the years became a practical European platform for interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Throughout this process, Prof. Arben Sulejmani has been one of the figures sustaining the institutional relationship: from establishing ties with IARF and organising the European Conference in Tetovo to extending cooperation to the Bektashi World Headquarters. His responsibility as Director of External Relations at the World Headquarters complements this role, linking North Macedonia's experience with the Headquarters' international dimension.

FROM TETOVO 2016 TOWARDS TIRANA 2027

Prof. Arben Sulejmani provides an important institutional link between these stages. As head of the Bektashi Community in North Macedonia, he has helped establish and maintain relations with IARF, while his responsibility as Director of External Relations at the Bektashi World Headquarters now contributes to the continuation of this cooperation in Tirana.

PROF. ARBEN SULEJMANI, DERVISH ABDULMUTALIPI OF HARABATI BABA TEKKE, TETOVO, PRESIDENT INCE





ALBANIA | THE WORLD HEADQUARTERS AS HOST OF THE 2027 CONGRESS

TIRANA: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND THE PROSPECT OF THE CONGRESS

In Albania, the visit took on a distinctly forward-looking dimension. Alongside institutional and interfaith dialogue, preparations for the 2027 IARF Congress were a central focus. This stage continues the engagement of the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia with IARF and extends it to Tirana, where the Congress is expected to take place, hosted by the Dede Baba and the Bektashi World Headquarters.

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Another particularly important occasion was the meeting with the Chair of the State Committee on Cults and representatives of Albania's five traditional religious communities: Bektashi, Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj hosted a lunch at the Holy See in honour of the international representative for religious freedom. The meeting, which also involved the Chair of the Committee, provided a broad platform for discussing Albania's experience of religious coexistence, relations between state institutions and religious communities, and the role of interfaith dialogue in strengthening understanding and social cohesion. The prospect of the IARF Congress in Albania was also central to the exchange. Participants discussed the possible involvement and contribution of Albania's religious communities to an international event that would bring together representatives of different religious traditions from around the world, as well as professionals and academics in the social sciences and philosophy.

During the meeting, the representatives of the religious communities conveyed to President Ince the high international esteem in which the Dedebara, His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj, is held. They noted that, at meetings outside Albania, they often encounter public figures who express particular respect for his person and work and also send their greetings to Albania. His Holiness is also Chair of the Interreligious Council of Albania, a responsibility that reflects his commitment to interfaith dialogue and harmony.

THE DEDEBARA AND THE HEADQUARTERS

The hospitality of His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj also carries symbolic significance: his relationship with IARF, in which he became involved in 2010 while serving as Baba at the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia, now continues in a new setting in Tirana, where he serves as Dedebara of the Bektashis.

Through these presentations, President Ince was able to gain a comprehensive overview of the organisation, heritage and contemporary activities of the Bektashi World Headquarters, as well as the important role of the Dedebara.

President Ince expressed particular gratitude for the hospitality and for the journey he had made with Prof. Arben Sulejmani through Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania. He was impressed by interfaith relations in Albania and, in particular, by the Bektashi World Headquarters: its organisation, logistics, the functioning of its structures and the leadership of the Dedebara. The President was pleased to have experienced at first hand a model he had long wanted to see.

In this sense, an IARF Congress in Albania would create not only an international platform for dialogue, but also an opportunity to introduce Albania's experience of interfaith coexistence more widely to around 80 representatives from 25 countries, who could experience it at first hand and share this example of religious tolerance more widely.

THE DEDEBABA, HIS HOLINESS HAXHI DEDE BABA EDMOND BRAHIMAJ, WITH THE HEAD OF THE BEKTASHI COMMUNITY IN MACEDONIA, MR ARBEN SULEJMANI



In this context, the hospitality of His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj takes on particular significance: in 2010 he was Baba at the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia and was involved in the first outreach to IARF; today he welcomes this relationship to Tirana as Dede Baba of the Bektashis.

The IARF President was then introduced in greater detail to the structure and activities of the Bektashi World Headquarters.

Mr Nuri Çuni, Secretary General, outlined the Headquarters' organisation and its institutional and administrative operations.

Ms Shejdiana Jano presented the work of the Protocol Office and its institutional relations.

Mr Kujtim Boriqi presented the print media, editorial activities and publications.

Mr Kristian Muço accompanied President Ince on his visit to the museum, introducing the historical and spiritual heritage on display.

Mr Belul Ameti outlined matters concerning the Bektashi Community's property and its historical context.

Mr Endrit Xibri came specially, at the President's request, to provide details about the audio section and audiovisual documentation.

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THE DEDEBABA, HIS HOLINESS HAXHI DEDE BABA EDMOND BRAHIMAJ, PROF. ARBEN SULEJMANI, PRESIDENT INCE, NURI CUNI, AND LAWYER SHELDIANA JANO



PRESIDENT INCE WITH THE HEAD OF THE BEKTASHI COMMUNITY IN MACEDONIA, MR ARBEN SULEJMANI







PLACES VISITED | THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION

The visit extended beyond its institutional dimension. Durrës, Krujë, Lezhë and Shkodër added a cultural and historical layer to the journey, introducing President Ince to some of the most representative sites of Albanian heritage. In Krujë, the delegation explored the historic town, the castle and the heritage associated with Gjergj Kastrioti – Skënderbeu. In Lezhë, they visited the Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu Memorial, while in Shkodër the delegation visited Rozafa Castle and the old town, gaining first-hand insight into the city's historical, cultural and multifaith character and its local traditions. These visits also provided an opportunity to consider how Albanian history and culture could form part of an accompanying cultural programme for the Congress's international delegates, combining the official IARF programme with an introduction to the host country's heritage and traditions.

TETOVO – TIRANA | INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY

From Kosovo to North Macedonia and then to Albania, the visit marked a new stage in IARF's regional engagement. The meetings brought together an understanding of local religious realities, the strengthening of relationships established over the years, and preparations for the next step: the 2027 Congress. In this process, the regional Bektashi headquarters in North Macedonia retains a distinctive role

in sustaining the relationship built with IARF and as the starting point for the experience consolidated in Tetovo. The Albanian stage extends this journey to the Bektashi World Headquarters, which, under the leadership and with the hospitality of His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj, is preparing to welcome the IARF Congress in 2027. Thus, a journey that began with international outreach in 2010 and was consolidated in Tetovo through the 2016 European Conference is entering a new stage in Tirana. The 2027 Congress is expected to bring together the experience and network developed by the regional Bektashi headquarters in Macedonia with the hospitality and global reach of the Bektashi World Headquarters, placing interfaith dialogue, freedom of belief and Albania's tradition of coexistence on a wider international stage.



The IARF President, Mr Robert Ince, expressed his particular gratitude and appreciation for the warm hospitality and care shown by His Holiness Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj throughout the week. He also praised the spirit of cooperation and the shared commitment to preparing and organising the 2027 IARF Congress in Albania, to be hosted by the Bektashi World Headquarters.