

The speech of the Headfather of the Bektashi Order¹,

His Excellency,

Hajji Dede Edmond Brahimaj

The Presidency – Tirana, 11 June 2019

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful".

Honoured President of the Republic, Your Excellency, Mr. Meta!

Honoured high authorities of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs!

Honoured brothers, leaders of the religions in Albania!

I was very pleased to receive the invitation for the regional conference “Role of Religion in the Western Balkans’ Societies” and, as the world leader of the Bektashi Order, I wish all of you luck and good fortune! Moreover, I wish fruitful work to all those organising the conference! The challenges that the Western Balkans are facing today are sharp and multi-faceted. In this context, the role of religion and its contribution to identity deserves to be granted the right attention. Considering how the people of the Balkans came to these lands, and keeping in mind the state formations on the basis of ethnicity, language and culture, many traditions exchanged different elements with each-other during the centuries thus expanding, getting rich in new features and building a diverse religious mosaic. If we think for a moment about the constant commitment of the Ottoman Empire on this region, we can very-well understand the natural communication and cooperation between the ethno-national identities and the universal identities of Islam and other religions.

Especially in the twentieth century, due to the painful saga of the Balkans’ feuds and interests inspiring certain actions in the major powers, a new religious outline was drawn inside the political-cultural environment of South-Eastern Europe. This may not be the time and place to argue about it but it is worth to mention that the natural model behind the perceptions and new religious terrains still exists today.

Based on this perspective, ideas and debates in this conference can be really fruitful. In my opinion, it is important for us to look back, not in order to create tensions, but in order to look for healing means which can be found in abundance inside our spiritual resources. We are all the offspring of only one God and sharing love between us is without doubt His will!

Honoured guests!

The tariqat to which I belong to, the Bektashi Order, in these seven centuries of its existence in the Balkans and as a healthy branch of the magnificent tree of Islam, has testified one of the most essential principles of its philosophy and doctrine, exactly the deep culture of religious co-existence. The Bektashi tekkes established from Niš in Yugoslavia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia and down to Crete in Greece have

¹ The original speech was held in Albanian. This is a translation by IDM.

been transformed during the centuries into sources which spread the belief in God and have been oasis of peace and hope to all believers and common travellers regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion. As it is predicted and identified in every article of our customary code, hospitality, as it has been since the beginning, made it possible for tekkes to be seen not only as facilities of the Bektashi Order but also as shelters for popular movements aiming for modern reforms.

After its violent displacement from Turkey and its re-establishment in Albania in 1930, the World Bektashi Community took care to play an historical role, not only in the tariqat's sequential forms, but also in the context of interreligious interactions in this region. However, we are conscious that despite our achievements we still have a lot of work ahead of us, that we will hopefully do with the will of God.

We judge that it is really important that aside from the holy books, we inform ourselves on each-other's religions' philosophy, doctrine and practices while continuing to respect traditions. With respect to the ethno-cultural traditions, we the religious leaders in the Balkans think that we can unite much more than now, against the politicization of religion or the extremist elements arriving from outside the region. We should be alert about the religious brotherhood we want to promote.

May God bless you all!

Amin!