

Bonner Querschnitte

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Phone: +49 / 4106 / 804806; Fax: +49 / 4106 / 804807

E-Mail: bq@bucer.de; <http://www.bucer.org/bq.html>

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Schirmmacher makes a positive assessment of the Pope's visit to Albania

(Bonn, 24.09.2014) The Ambassador for Human Rights of the World Evangelical Alliance and Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Thomas Schirmmacher, had a very positive assessment of the Pope's visit to Albania. At the invitation of the President of Albania, Bujar Hishani, he took part in the reception for the Pope, and during his visit he held discussions with the most important Christian and Muslim leaders.

Schirmmacher especially endorsed the fact that at the reception the Pope so explicitly renounced any use of force in the name of God, and that by his visit the Pope emphasized that Christians are thankful to Muslims when Muslims guarantee the peace and freedom of Christians wherever Muslims form the majority in a land.

The president of Albania had already invited Schirmmacher a few days in advance for preparatory discussions for the Pope's visit. At that time Schirmmacher emphasized



Thomas Schirmmacher presents the President of Albania a selection of books on freedom of religion (© Presidential Palace of Albania)

that Albania has established an outstanding paradigm of a Muslim-majority land that insures full religious freedom for Christians. Both agreed that worldwide developments mean that European politicians and lands that support democracy and human rights should get much more intensively involved in the support of democracy and human rights. That this leads to real benefits is shown by the Albania's new status as a candidate for EU membership. The president also reached an agreement with the International Institute for Religious Freedom to have the implementation of religious freedom in Albania carefully researched. Schirmmacher was accompanied in the meetings by the General Secretary of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance, Akil Pano.

Among others Schirmmacher met with the Grand Mufti of Albania, Skënder Bruçaj, with the world leader of the Muslim Sufi Bektashi Order, Haxhi Baba Edmond Brahimaj, with the seven Catholic bishops in the land, with the board of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance, and with Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, head of the autocephalous Orthodox Church, the largest Christian confession in Albania.

Bonner Querschnitte *Bonn Profiles – Press Reports*

Text & Technology:

Titus Vogt (ViSdP)

Vorderer Kamp 52a, D-25479 Ellerau

Phone: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 06

Fax: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 07

E-Mail: Titus.Vogt@bucer.de



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www.hfe.org

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By means of his wide-ranging program of visits Schirmmacher wants to make very clear that Evangelicals are not standing on the sideline when religions work together to promote peace and freedom in a land and want to support the government in this direction. Specifically he said, "We cannot only criticize others when things go poorly but we have to support and praise those who really get it right."

Schirmmacher has had a long term friendship with the Archbishop of Albania. And the relation of the Orthodox Church to the Albanian Evangelical Alliance is regarded as quite good. The members of the churches in the evangelical alliance are almost entirely former Muslims who became Christians since the renewed independence of the country in 1990. The Archbishop spent many years as chairman of the Commission on World Missions and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and is regarded as an important theorist of Christian missions. For him freedom of religion in Albania includes the freedom to change religions, even from Islam to Christianity, and he has been publicly engaged to this end since 1990.



from left: Thomas Schirmmacher, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Akil Pano, General Secretary of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance

Downloads:

- [Photo 1](#): The President of Albania, Bujar Nishani, greets Thomas Schirmmacher (© Presidential Palace of Albania)
- [Photo 2](#): Thomas Schirmmacher presents the President of Albania a selection of books on freedom of religion (© Presidential Palace of Albania)
- [Photo 3](#): Thomas Schirmmacher in conversation with Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, head of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania
- [Photo 4](#): from left: Thomas Schirmmacher, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Akil Pano, General Secretary of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance
- [Photo 5](#): Thomas Schirmmacher preaching in an Evangelical Church in Albania
- [Photo 6](#): Pope Francis during his trip through Tirana

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Titus Vogt (ViSdP)
Vorderer Kamp 52a, D-25479 Ellerau
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Fax: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 07
E-Mail: Titus.Vogt@bucer.de

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