



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Albania

Albania – ALB36773 – Greece – Orthodox
Christian Church – Baptisms – Albania –
Church services – Tirana – Trikala
9 July 2010

1. Please search for information on Greece in relation to whether a person cannot be baptised Orthodox if they are illegally in Greece.

Information regarding whether a person cannot be baptised Orthodox if they are illegally in Greece was not located in a search of the sources consulted.

The Greek constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodox Church) as the prevailing religion in Greece and it was estimated that 97 percent of the population identified itself as Greek Orthodox. The Greek Orthodox Church exercises significant influence and “[m]any citizens assumed that Greek ethnicity was tied to Orthodox Christianity. Some non-Orthodox citizens complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.”¹ It is reported that most of Greece’s native born population are baptised into the Orthodox Church.² A 2004 report indicates that the “Orthodox Church takes on the self anointed role as keeper of the national identity”. The report refers to the comments of a priest in Athens who said that “in Greece, we regard Greeks as the ones who are baptised” and people who were not baptised, immigrants, were not seen as Greek.³

2. Please provide information generally about the Orthodox Church in Albania including, if possible, details about the order of the church service.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania is one of four traditional religious groups in Albania. The majority of Albanians do not actively practice a faith,⁴ but it is estimated that 20 to 25 percent of the Albanian population are in communities that are traditionally Albanian Orthodox. Orthodox Christians are concentrated in the south of Albania.⁵

The Orthodox Church in Albania is one of 15 autocephalous churches which are part of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Autocephalous is referred to as meaning having its own head,⁶ or independent.⁷ The Orthodox Church is one of the three principal Christian groups, along with the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. It consists of a number of self-governing churches which are either autocephalous or autonomous (self-

¹ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Greece*, October, Introduction & Sections 1 & III – Attachment 1

² ‘Violence in Greece over Koran defacement claim’ 2009, *The Irish Examiner*, 23 May – Attachment 2

³ Corcoran, M. 2004, ‘Greece - Being Greek’, *Foreign Correspondent*, 13 July

<http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2004/s1153267.htm> - Accessed 9 July 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Albania*, October, Section 1 – Attachment 4

⁵ US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Albania*, September, Section 1 – Attachment 5

⁶ ‘Eastern Orthodox Church’ 2008, *BBC*, 11 June

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml - Accessed 4 June 2010 – Attachment 6

⁷ US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2004 – Albania*, September, Section 1 – Attachment 7

governing). The churches are united in their faith, have a common approach to tradition, worship and theology, and draw on elements of Middle-Eastern, Greek, Russian, and Slav culture. They have their own geographical, rather than national, titles which usually reflect their believers' cultural traditions. Orthodox Churches are not all Eastern Orthodox, with the Oriental Orthodox Churches forming a separate group and a few Orthodox Churches not being in communion with others. The Patriarch of Constantinople is the nominal head of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, but only has real authority over his own church.⁸

The Orthodox Church in Albania has been independent from Constantinople's authority since 1929, but it did not receive recognition as autocephalous until 1937. In 1967, Albania's then communist government banned all religious practices and expropriated the property belonging to the established Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic and other churches. The communist regime ended in 1990.⁹

The number of priests in the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania had fallen from 440 prior to communism to 22 when communism fell. In 1991, the Ecumenical Patriarch appointed Anastasios Yannoulatos from Greece as Patriarchal Exarch in Albania.¹⁰ In June 1992, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate elected Anastasios as Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania. Three other bishops, who were also Greek nationals, were named for the remaining Orthodox dioceses in the country.¹¹ Following difficulties with the Albanian authorities who were against an all-Greek hierarchy, the holy synod of the church was re-established in 1998. Two of the four hierarchs were Albanian.¹²

In 2006, three new bishops were ordained and became members of the Holy Synod. In November 2006, a clergy-laity Assembly of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania made up of 257 members analysed and accepted the new Statute of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, which was approved by the Holy Synod on 6 November 2006.¹³

The website of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania indicates that by February 2008, 145 new churches had been built in Albania, 158 churches reconstructed, and 60 churches and monasteries renovated and restored.¹⁴ The Orthodox Autocephalous Church

⁸ 'Eastern Orthodox Church' 2008, *BBC*, 11 June

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml - Accessed 4 June 2010 – Attachment 6

⁹ US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2004 – Albania*, September, Sections 1 & II – Attachment 7

¹⁰ World Council of Churches 2006, 'Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania', World Council of Churches website, 1 January [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wceddiscussion\[sub\]=1](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wceddiscussion[sub]=1) – Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 8

¹¹ 'The Orthodox Church of Albania' 2007, Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, 28 June <http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&IndexView=toc> – Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 9

¹² World Council of Churches 2006, 'Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania', World Council of Churches website, 1 January [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wceddiscussion\[sub\]=1](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wceddiscussion[sub]=1) – Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 8

¹³ 'Uninterrupted progress in all fields of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania: Re-establishing the Religious Life of the Church' 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Overview%20of%20Church%20Life/The%20Church%20is%20Growing.htm> – Accessed 6 July 2010 – Attachment 10

¹⁴ 'Building and Restorations' 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Technical%20Office/Technical_Office.htm - Accessed 6 July 2010 – Attachment 11

of Albania is training new clergy and by February 2008, there were 135 graduates of the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy serving as priests.¹⁵

The Orthodox Church is one of the four predominant religious communities in Albania that enjoys greater official recognition and social status based on their historical presence in the country. In October 2008, it was one of the religious groups that signed bilateral agreements with the government. The agreement means that the community is officially recognised and has tax exemptions and prioritised property restitution. The Orthodox Church was building a new cathedral in Tirana on land received as compensation for land taken by the previous communist government, but cited lack of action on other property claims in the country.¹⁶

Specific information on the order of church service in the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania was not located. There was general information found on worship in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eucharist surrounded by the Divine Offices or the Cycle of Prayer is at the centre of worship and belief in the Eastern Orthodox Church. These prayers are sung particularly at dawn and sunset and at other certain times during the day and night. Personal prayer is also important.

The Eucharist is a service consisting “of hymns, prayers, and readings from the New Testament, and... the solemn offering and consecration of leavened bread and wine mixed with water, followed by the reception of Holy Communion.” Communion is received standing and is given in a spoon which contains both the bread and wine. There is usually a sermon preached either after the Gospel reading or at the end of the service. At the end of the Liturgy, blessed but not consecrated bread is provided to the congregation, and as a gesture of fellowship, the non-Orthodox are often invited to share. Both parts of the Liturgy include a procession. “At the Little Entrance, the Book of the Gospels is solemnly carried into the sanctuary and at the Great Entrance the bread and wine are carried to the altar for the Prayer of Consecration and Holy Communion.” The proclamation of the Nicene Creed, often by the whole congregation, always precedes the prayer of consecration.

There are four different liturgies used during the year in the Eastern Orthodox Church, being the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom which is used on Sundays and weekdays, the Liturgy of St Basil the Great which is used 10 times a year, the Liturgy of St James, the Brother of the Lord, which is sometimes used on St James’ Day, and the Liturgy of the Presanctified which is used on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent and on the first three days of Holy Week.

On Christmas Day, there is divine liturgy, after which many people walk in procession to seas, rivers and lakes where there are ceremonies to bless the water. This is followed by a great feast indoors.¹⁷

An undated article on the website of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania indicates that the Great Blessing of the Waters is the main feature of the feast of Epiphany. The article provides information on the celebration of the feast in churches in various cities in Albania, including in the city of Berat, where the feast of Epiphany

¹⁵ ‘Uninterrupted progress in all fields of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania: Ordination of New Clergy’ 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Overview%20of%20Church%20Life/The%20Church%20is%20Growing.htm> – Accessed 8 July 2010 – Attachment 12

¹⁶ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Albania*, October, Section II – Attachment 4

¹⁷ ‘Eastern Orthodox Church’ 2008, BBC, 11 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml – Accessed 4 June 2010 – Attachment 6

concluded 12 days of celebration. On 24 December, the Church held the service of the Great Hours of Christmas and the following day, the Divine Liturgy of Christmas. On the feast of Saint Basil on 1 January, Orthodox Christians again participated in the Divine Liturgy. On 6 January, the celebration concluded with the feast of the Great Blessing of the Waters.¹⁸

3. Please search for information as to whether the Orthodox Church has a presence in Tirana.

The website of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania indicates that by February 2008, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania was building the Cathedral of the “Resurrection of Christ” in Tirana, and the Church of Annunciation and the Church of St. Procopios had been reconstructed. Other church buildings in Tirana included a new kindergarten and a new diagnostic medical centre, and reconstructed buildings including the Albanian – American Elementary School, a youth centre, a student centre, a soup kitchen and a children centre.¹⁹ As previously mentioned, the Orthodox Church was reported in October 2009 to be continuing construction of a new cathedral in Tirana on land it had received as compensation for land taken by the previous communist government.²⁰

The residence of the Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania is located in Tirana.²¹ The undated article on the website of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania refers to Archbishop Anastasios leading the Liturgy of the feast of Epiphany in the Orthodox Cathedral in Tirana, with hundreds of people gathering to participate in the Divine Liturgy and the Great Blessing of the Waters.²²

4. Question deleted.

5. Please provide information on which Orthodox Churches are in the Trikala prefecture of Greece and their location.

A group of six World Heritage listed monasteries known as the Meteora which are under the control of the Greek Orthodox Church are located two kilometres from the town of Kalambaka in Trikala. The six monasteries are the Great Meteoron (Transfiguration), Agios Nikolaos Anapafsas, Rousanou (S. Barbara, occupied by nuns), Varlaam, Agia Triada (Holy Trinity) and Agios Stephen.²³

¹⁸ Dhima, T., Dangaj, N., Jovani, V., Qako, J. Bulika, Pr. S. & Beci, O. (undated), ‘The Feast of Epiphany in Orthodox Church of Albania’, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/News%20and%20Publications/Year2010/TheofanianeShqiperiEn.htm> - Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 13

¹⁹ ‘Building and Restorations’ 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Technical%20Office/Technical_Office.htm - Accessed 6 July 2010 – Attachment 11

²⁰ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Albania*, October, Section II – Attachment 4

²¹ ‘The Orthodox Church of Albania’ 2007, Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, 28 June <http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&IndexView=toc> – Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 9

²² Dhima, T., Dangaj, N., Jovani, V., Qako, J. Bulika, Pr. S. & Beci, O. (undated), ‘The feast of Epiphany in Orthodox Church of Albania’, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/News%20and%20Publications/Year2010/TheofanianeShqiperiEn.htm> - Accessed 7 July 2010 – Attachment 13

²³ United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre 2005, ‘Meteora Greece’, United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre website, April <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Meteora.pdf> - Accessed 6 July 2010 – Attachment 14

A document prepared by the Prefectural Administration of Trikala Prefectural Committee of Touristic Promotion includes the names of churches in towns and villages in the prefecture without specifying their denomination.²⁴

6. Question deleted.

Attachments

1. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Greece*, October.
2. ‘Violence in Greece over Koran defacement claim’ 2009, *The Irish Examiner*, 23 May. (FACTIVA)
3. Corcoran, M. 2004, ‘Greece - Being Greek’, *Foreign Correspondent*, 13 July <http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2004/s1153267.htm> - Accessed 9 July 2010.
4. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Albania*, October.
5. US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Albania*, September.
6. ‘Eastern Orthodox Church’ 2008, *BBC*, 11 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml - Accessed 4 June 2010.
7. US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2004 – Albania*, September.
8. World Council of Churches 2006, ‘Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania’, World Council of Churches website, 1 January [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wecdiscussion\[sub\]=1](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/albania/orthodox-autocephalous-church-of-albania.html?tx_wecdiscussion[sub]=1) – Accessed 7 July 2010.
9. ‘The Orthodox Church of Albania’ 2007, Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, 28 June <http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&IndexView=toc> – Accessed 7 July 2010.
10. ‘Uninterrupted progress in all fields of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania: Re-establishing the Religious Life of the Church’ 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February <http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Overview%20of%20Church%20Life/The%20Church%20is%20Growing.htm> – Accessed 6 July 2010.
11. ‘Building and Restorations’ 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Technical%20Office/Technical_Office.htm - Accessed 6 July 2010.

²⁴ Prefectural Administration of Trikala Prefectural Committee of Touristic Promotion (undated) ‘Trikala Guide’, Broadband Cities 2008 website http://www.broadbandcities2008.com/files/GuideENG_1-61.pdf - Accessed 9 July 2010 – Attachment 15

12. 'Uninterrupted progress in all fields of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania: Ordination of New Clergy' 2008, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website, February
<http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/Overview%20of%20Church%20Life/The%20Church%20is%20Growing.htm> – Accessed 8 July 2010.
13. Dhima, T., Dangaj, N., Jovani, V., Qako, J. Bulika, Pr. S. & Beci, O. (undated), 'The Feast of Epiphany in Orthodox Church of Albania', Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania website
<http://www.orthodoxalbania.org/English/News%20and%20Publications/Year2010/TheofaniaShqiperiEn.htm> - Accessed 7 July 2010.
14. United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre 2005, 'Meteora Greece', United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre website, April <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Meteora.pdf> - Accessed 6 July 2010.
15. Prefectural Administration of Trikala Prefectural Committee of Touristic Promotion (undated) 'Trikala Guide', Broadband Cities 2008 website
http://www.broadbandcities2008.com/files/GuideENG_1-61.pdf - Accessed 9 July 2010.

Attachments 16-28 deleted