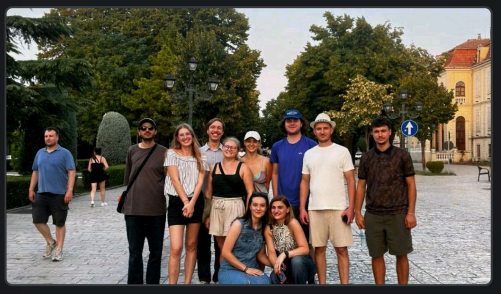
NARRATIVE REPORT • 8TH EDITION

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER CAMP • SPAÇ

Historical Memory, Reconciliation, and Civic Education in Albania







Lead Organizers & Partners:

Justice and Peace Albania • Spaçi Museum Association • Justice and Peace Germany (Iustitia et Pax) • Maximilian-Kolbe-Stiftung

Itinerary & Locations:

Tirana • Spaç (Mirditë) • Rubik • Shkodër

Program Focus:

Historical Heritage, Survivor Testimonies, Voluntary Conservation

Executive Summary & Program Framework

From late August to early September, a diverse cohort of young participants, researchers, and civil society activists from Albania, Germany, Ukraine, and Latvia convened for the 8th edition of the International Commemorative Summer Camp. Organized in close collaboration between *Justice and Peace Albania*, the *Spaçi Museum Association*, *Justice and Peace Germany*, and the *Maximilian-Kolbe-Stiftung*, this commemorative seminar interwove historical research, hands-on site conservation, and direct intergenerational dialogues with survivors of the notorious Spaç political labor camp.

The initiative seeks to sustain the living memory of victims of totalitarian communist persecution in Albania while fostering a culture of peace, human dignity, and democratic reconciliation. Through field expeditions, voluntary debris clearance, immersive testimonies inside original isolation cells, and ethical reflection workshops, participants developed profound insights into the apparatus of state terror under Enver Hoxha's regime and the pressing duty of preserving institutional memory.



Official digital welcome display at Tirana International Hotel inaugurating the 8th International Summer Camp.



Official cap and field materials distributed to international participants and volunteer workers.

Strategic Program Objectives

- **Intergenerational Transmission:** Hearing firsthand testimonies from former political prisoners directly within the physical spaces of their confinement.
- **Site Stewardship & Preservation:** Practical volunteer work clearing invasive vegetation and waste to protect the fragile physical structures from further degradation.
- **Creative Civic Awareness ("My Spaç"):** Photographic documentation and narrative reflections through the perspective of the youth, transforming memory into active civic advocacy.
- **Transnational Solidarity:** Strengthening enduring networks of European solidarity and human rights awareness between Albanian and European youth.

Partner Organization	Key Representatives	Role & Primary Contribution
Justice & Peace Albania / Spaçi Museum	Luigj Mila, Silvana Gega	In-country coordination, survivor network support, and heritage management
Justitia et Pax Germany	Dr. Bernd Hirschberger	Theological and ethical dimensions of memory work and transitional justice
Maximilian-Kolbe-Stiftung	Paulis Apinis	International commemorative pedagogy and experiential learning at sites of suffering

DAY 1 • TIRANA

Program Opening & Historical Context

The commemorative program opened in Tirana with registration and the formal introductory plenary at the *Tirana International Hotel*. The session was moderated by **Luigj Mila** (Justice and Peace Albania / Spaçi Museum Association), who welcomed the delegations and underscored the indispensable role of civic memory in safeguarding democracy against authoritarian regression.



Opening panel featuring Luigj Mila, Dr. Bernd Hirschberger, Paulis Apinis, and Silvana Gega outlining the program objectives.



Dr. Bernd Hirschberger and Paulis Apinis delivering their conceptual framework on the ethics of remembrance.

Dr. Bernd Hirschberger (Justice and Peace Germany) articulated the ethical and theological imperative of active memory, while **Paulis Apinis** (Maximilian-Kolbe-Stiftung) elaborated on the pedagogical methodology of the summer camp. A comprehensive keynote was delivered by Member of Parliament and historian **Erald Kapri**, detailing the mechanisms of state security terror, hermetic national isolation, and political imprisonment throughout Albania's communist dictatorship.



The conference hall in Tirana with attendees gathered from various European nations.



Youth delegates representing Albania, Ukraine, and Latvia engaging in the comparative discussions.

The opening day concluded with a retrospective visual retrospective of previous summer camps, followed by an educational visit to the **BunkArt 2** memorial museum in downtown Tirana—a preserved underground shelter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that illustrates the Sigurimi apparatus and surveillance files.

DAY 2 • SPAÇ & RUBIK

Journey into Memory: Arrival at Spaç & Survivor Encounters

On the morning of the second day, the delegation traveled north into the rugged, secluded Mirdita mountains to reach the site of the former **Spaç Prison Camp** (established in 1968). Arriving at 10:30 within the stark mountain gorge evoked immediate emotional shock regarding the dehumanizing conditions of forced confinement and labor in the copper and pyrite mines.



Local guide orienting participants upon arrival at the secluded prison camp valley.



First panoramic view of the deteriorating three-story residential barracks made of silicate bricks.

Following collective prayer and an orientation walk through the administrative sector and cells, the afternoon focused on direct sharing sessions with surviving former political prisoners:

> *"Spaç was not merely a place of sentence; it was an industrial machine of slow physical and spiritual destruction. Yet right here, the unquenched flame of human dignity ignited the heroic 1973 Revolt, hoisting the flag without the communist star."*



Survivors recounting their prison memories in the main assembly room.



Testimony table positioned next to the panel "List of the Disappeared in Spaç".



Participants listening in focused silence from the wooden benches.

The dialogues unfolded across two sessions: the first addressing daily underground slavery and survival tactics, and the second examining the historic *May 1973 Spaç Revolt* and the regime's brutal retaliations. In the late afternoon, participants transferred to Rubik for check-in at *Hotel Marub* and attended Holy Mass at the historic 12th-century Church of the Redeemer.



Participants ascending the historic cobblestone trail leading to Rubik Church.



Full commemorative delegation gathered at the Rubik scenic overlook and memorial platform.

DAY 3 • SPAÇ

Concrete Conservation & Cellular Testimonies

Day 3 combined practical stewardship with deep historical and spiritual immersion. For three consecutive hours in the morning, volunteers equipped with gloves, rakes, shovels, and shears cleared overgrowth, brambles, and accumulated debris that endangered the fragile ruins of the former camp structures.



Morning safety briefing and task distribution before starting on-site work.



Volunteers removing aggressive shrubs along the historic building perimeters.



Meticulous cleaning operations on the historic "Roll-Call Terrace" (Terraca e Apelit).



Panoramic view of the voluntary conservation campaign in front of the barracks.



Utilizing pruning shears to remove damaging root systems and brush.



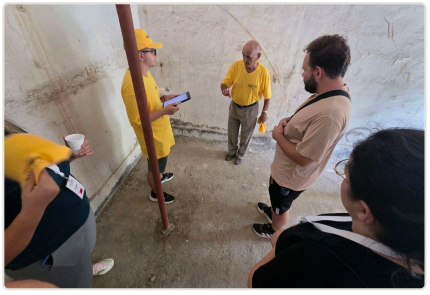
Collecting discarded material and stabilizing vulnerable retaining walls.

Testimonies Within Spaces of Suffering

Following the conservation session and lunch on-site, the group divided into small cohorts inside the original prison rooms and cells. Surrounded by crumbling plaster and temporary stabilizing scaffoldings, survivors shared harrowing details: extreme overcrowding, sensory deprivation, winter freezing temperatures, and constant psychological terror.



Participants entering the dark, ruined corridors of the main prison block.



Survivor illustrating how dozens of inmates were packed into a single unventilated room.



Intimate dialogue circle between a former prisoner and international youth.



The desolate vista overlooking the gorge from an upper-floor cell window.



Reflective exchange on the urgency of preserving Spaç as an official national memorial.

DAY 4 • SPAÇ MINE & RUBIK

Forced Labor Sites, "My Spaç" Workshop & Visual Showcase

Day 4 examined the industrial environment of modern underground forced labor. The delegation visited the entrance galleries of the adjacent mine, where political prisoners were compelled to extract copper and pyrite under perilous conditions without protective gear, facing lethal quotas and suffocating heat in deep shafts.



Delegation halting before the primary entrance to the underground mine shafts.



Participants gathered around the dark portal of the Spaç mining complex.



Examining and handling heavy pneumatic drills used by the political inmates.

Creative Workshop • "My Spaç" (Spaci Im)

In the afternoon, both on the camp grounds and subsequently in the open gardens of *Eko Hotel Marub* in Rubik, participants engaged in a specialized educational and artistic exercise:

- **Field Exploration & Photography:** Each youth explored the ruins to capture three photographs that spoke most directly to their conscience—focusing on architectural decay, barbed wire, traces of isolation, or nature reclaiming the stones.
- **Small-Group Reflection:** Youth gathered in circles to articulate the personal emotional weight and historical inquiries behind their visual selections.
- **Evening Slideshow Showcase:** Following dinner, a curated slide projection showcased each participant's three images, building a collective visual archive of Spaç as perceived through the eyes of the emerging European generation.



Outdoor plenary reflection and debriefing in the serene courtyard of Eko Hotel Marub.



Youth cohorts exchanging insights and drafting summarizing statements from the workshop.



Mutual solidarity: joint portrait with local mine personnel and survivors at the camp grounds.



Communal lunch and quiet rest inside the historical assembly room of the camp.

DAYS 5 & 6 • PROCESSION, SHKODËR & CONCLUSION

The Road of Torments, Resistance in Shkodër & Key Outcomes

The final operational day opened with **The Walking Procession** along the dusty, unpaved mountain road that incoming prisoners once traversed on foot under armed escort. At the "Road of Torments" memorial table, the group observed a moment of silent prayer and commemoration.



Participants walking along the "Road of Torments" leading up to the prison camp.



Solemn commemorative procession honoring the footsteps and suffering of the victims.

Following their transfer to the historic city of **Shkodër**, the cradle of northern anti-communist resistance and clerical martyrdom, the delegation visited:

- **The Diocesan Museum at Shkodër Cathedral:** Documenting the brutal religious persecution, executions of Catholic clergy, and heroic spiritual endurance under state atheism.
- **Walking Tour of Shkodër Pedestrian Center:** Exploring the city's architectural renaissance and historic interfaith coexistence.
- **Farewell Reception & Closing Session:** Synthesizing weekly insights, awarding certificates of participation, and formulating plans for upcoming exhibitions and educational materials.



Visit to Shkodër Cathedral learning about the martyrs of faith.



Delegation group photo in the historic pedestrian center of Shkodër.



Warm and celebratory atmosphere during the closing farewell dinner in Shkodër.

Key Outcomes & Enduring Impact of the 8th Edition

1. Direct Intergenerational Transmission

Face-to-face encounters with eyewitness survivors bridged temporal distance, turning abstract history into deeply felt personal empathy and civic responsibility.

2. Visual & Creative Education ("My Spaç")

Youth shifted from passive observers into active chroniclers of memory, creating an authentic visual archive bearing universal messages of human rights.

3. Physical Site Stewardship

Voluntary manual clearance stabilized vital focal areas such as the Roll-Call Terrace and cell thresholds, preventing irreversible natural decay.

4. Transnational Peace & Solidarity Network

Consolidating cooperative bonds among Albanian, German, Latvian, and Ukrainian youth in the name of transitional justice and shared European democratic values.

Day 6 (Departures): International delegations concluded their itinerary with transfers to Tirana International Airport, carrying home a shared dedication to keeping the memory of Spaç alive across European educational platforms.