



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr SERGEI F. ALEINIK
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 29 May 2008

Your Excellency,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to the Holy See. I wish to express my gratitude for the message of greeting which you bring from President Aleksandr Lukashenko, and I ask you to convey to him my own good wishes and the assurance of my heartfelt affection for the people of your country.

Mr Ambassador, I am grateful for the kind words which you have shared with me concerning the progress that has been made in Belarus. In this regard, I am also appreciative of the many encouraging signs and challenges that are present in the country today. Please be assured that the Holy See will continue to support your nation in her efforts to affirm proper and legitimate aspirations for freedom and in her labours to foster the democratic process as a part of the great family of free and sovereign European nations.

For decades now Europe has actively sought to construct a future of peace and progress by removing walls of separation and overcoming painful divisions. This noble project, motivated by a sense of shared responsibility for the common destiny of European peoples, is of enormous value. Achieving such an ambitious goal is not easy; in fact, it requires all the parties involved to engage in constant, frank and reasonable dialogue, based on genuine solidarity and respectful of the legitimate aspirations, historical circumstances and diversity of others. To this end, every nation on the continent, Belarus included, is called to contribute to the construction of a common European home in which borders are seen as places of encounter and not as lines of division, or worse, as insurmountable walls. Indeed, the history, the spiritual and cultural roots and the geography of Belarus give her an integral role to play in this process. That which unites the nations of Europe is

far greater than any political, economic and cultural factors that divide them. To give new impetus to its own history, Europe must “recognize and reclaim with creative fidelity those fundamental values, acquired through a decisive contribution of Christianity, which can be summarized in the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom and democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religion” (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 109).

The newfound independence of your country and the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See have resulted in the development of a good working relationship between the institutions of the State and those of the Church. These relations are marked by the openness of both parties towards strengthening and improving these bonds, which in turn encourage the well-being and prosperity of the country. I am grateful for Your Excellency’s kind words regarding the Church’s activity in your country, and I am certain that the Government of Belarus will continue to assist the Catholic Church in addressing her needs. This year the Catholic Church in Belarus will mark two significant Anniversaries: the two hundred and twenty-fifth Anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of Mohylev and the two hundred and tenth Anniversary of the Diocese of Minsk. In this regard one must acknowledge with gratitude the recognition your country has already given to the Church’s spiritual, cultural and historic contribution to the life of the nation.

Church and State, in their own particular ways and in the light of their specific missions, are at the service of mankind. It is necessary therefore that they cooperate with one another, always respecting the autonomy and competence of each, in ways that will assist men and women in obtaining both material and spiritual prosperity. Such cooperation can only contribute to the strengthening of ever more dynamic democratic institutions. Considered as an integral part of the life and destiny of Belarus, the Catholic Church for her part looks forward to continuing to exercise her role in society through her various structures and institutions (such as the Episcopal Conference, dioceses, parishes and religious communities). These entities seek only to serve men and women and all of society through the transmission of universal values inspired by the Gospel. In this regard the Catholic Church in Belarus, from both the Latin and Byzantine Traditions, does not ask for special privileges but only to contribute to the growth and development of the country. All she requests is the freedom to be able to fulfil serenely the mandate received from the divine Founder in service of his creation. In this same spirit and with the same sense of mutual responsibility, the Catholics of Belarus are committed to moving forward in the area of ecumenical dialogue, especially with the Orthodox Church in your country. It is my prayer that ecumenical contacts will continue to develop in peace, harmony and fruitful dialogue, contributing in this way to an ever greater social harmony.

Mr Ambassador, as you begin your mission to the Holy See, I offer you wholehearted good wishes, and I assure you of the readiness of the offices of the Roman Curia to assist you. Upon yourself, your co-workers, your family and all the beloved people of Belarus I invoke abundant divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti IV, 1, 2008, p.901-903.*

L'Osservatore Romano 30.5.2008, p.6.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 23 p. 11, 13.

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