



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. FILIP VUČAK
NEW AMBASSADOR OF CROATIA TO THE HOLY SEE**

Monday, 11 April 2011

Mr Ambassador,

I am glad to welcome you on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Croatia to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words. I would be grateful if in reciprocation you would kindly express to H.E. Mr Ivo Josipović, President of the Republic, whom I had the pleasure to meet recently, my cordial good wishes for him and for the happiness and peace of the Croatian people.

The beginning of your mission happily coincides with the 20th anniversary of Croatia's Independence. And next year will be the 20th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between your country and the Holy See. Our relations are harmonious and serene. The Holy See has always had a special concern for Croatia. My distant Predecessor, Pope Leo X, seeing the beauty of your culture and the depth of your ancestors' faith, described your country as the "*scutum saldissimum et antemurale Christianitatis*". These ancient values are still dear to our contemporaries who have had to face, not so long ago, particular difficulties. To fortify the present generations it is right to explain clearly to them Croatia's rich history and the Christian culture which has watered it deeply and on which your people has always relied in adversity.

I learned with pleasure that your Parliament has proclaimed this year "The Bošćović Year". This Jesuit was a physician, an astronomer, a mathematician, an architect, a philosopher and a diplomat. His life shows that it is possible to harmonize science and faith, service to the motherland and commitment to the Church. This Christian scholar said to young people that it is possible to be fulfilled in contemporary society and be happy in it while being a believer. Moreover, the monuments and the innumerable crucifixes that are scattered across your country are a clear

demonstration of this felicitous symbiosis. In seeing this harmony, young people will be proud of their country, of its history and of its faith and will feel increasingly the heirs of a treasure that it is their task today to bring to fruition.

Croatia will soon be a full member of the European Union. The Holy See cannot but congratulate itself on seeing the European family completed by the inclusion of States which were historically part of it. This integration, Mr Ambassador, must be brought about with full respect for the specific Croatian features of the country's religious life and culture. It would be an illusion to wish to deny its identity to link it with another, which came into being in circumstances so different from those which saw the birth and formation of Croatia.

In entering the European Union not only will your country be the recipient of an economic and juridical system which has its advantages and limitations, but it will also be able to make its own, typically Croatian, contribution. It must not be afraid to claim firmly respect for its history and its religious and cultural identity. Contentious voices are raised against with astonishing regularity the reality of the religious roots of Europe. It has become fashionable to be amnesiac and to deny historical proofs. To say that Europe has no Christian roots is equivalent to claiming that a human being can live without oxygen and food. There is no shame in remembering and in supporting the truth, rejecting, if necessary, what is contrary to it. I am certain that your country will be able to defend its identity with conviction and pride, avoiding the new stumbling blocks which crop up and, which, under the pretext of a badly understood religious freedom, are contrary to the natural law, to the family and, quite simply, to morals.

I would also like to express my pleasure at the attention your country has shown to ensuring that Croatians in Bosnia and Herzegovina may play their proper role as one of the three constitutive peoples of the country. I likewise note that in a desire for peace and healthy collaboration with the countries of your geographical and political region, Croatia does not fail to make its specific contribution to facilitate dialogue and understanding between peoples with different traditions but which have lived together for centuries. I encourage you to continue on this path which will consolidate peace with respect for each one. Even within your national boundaries, the four Agreements signed by your country and the Holy See make it possible, with respect for each identity, to discuss matters of common interest. It will be necessary to continue in this direction for the good of the parties concerned. I am pleased to note that Croatia promotes religious freedom and respect for the Church's particular mission.

For all these reasons, Mr Ambassador, I am profoundly glad to be able to visit your country in a few weeks. My Predecessor, Venerable John Paul II, visited it three times, and I myself, while I was still the head of a Roman Dicastery, have been there on several occasions. I gladly accepted the invitation of the Croatian Authorities and the invitations of the Bishops of your noble country. As you know, the theme chosen for the Visit will be: "Together in Christ!". It is this "together" that I wish to celebrate with your people. Together, in spite of the innumerable human differences,

together with these differences! And in Christ who has accompanied the Croatian people for centuries with goodness and mercy. Because of him I would like to encourage your country and to encourage the Church which is among and with you; she has accompanied with the same solicitude as Christ the destiny and progress of your nation since its origin. On this happy occasion I would also like to greet warmly the Bishops and faithful of the Catholic Church in Croatia.

At the moment when you are beginning your noble mission of representation to the Holy See, I address to you, Mr Ambassador, my best wishes for the successful accomplishment of your mission. You may be certain that you will always find with my co-workers the welcome and understanding you may need. As I entrust your country to the protection of the Mother of God, Our Lady of Marija Bistrica, as well as to the intercession of Bl. Alojzije Stepinac, I warmly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon your co-workers, as well as upon the entire Croatian people and its leaders.