



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr ANTUN SBUTEGA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF MONTENEGRO TO THE HOLY SEE****
Monday, 22 January 2007

Mr Ambassador,

It is a cause of special joy for me to receive the Letters with which H.E. Mr Filip Vujanovic, President of the Republic of Montenegro, accredits you as the Country's first Ambassador to the Apostolic See. Welcome!

The sentiments today of the Successor of Peter have ancient roots and thrive on a memory that renews the on-going dialogue between the Montenegrin peoples and the Bishop of Rome down the centuries.

Through you, Mr Ambassador, I would like to express my deep pleasure in the first place to the President of the Republic, whom I had the joy to meet recently, and then to all the other State Authorities and to the entire civil society of Montenegro, which, with its multiethnic features, has desired to establish a direct and cordial dialogue with the Holy See.

As you know, already in the time of the Apostles, the Good News reached those lands which in our day constitute the Republic to which you belong.

These spiritual bonds were strengthened by the apostolic work of the Benedictine monks, to the point that during the Pontificate of the great Pope Gregory VII, the independence of the Kingdom of Ciolea was publicly recognized and Prince Mihail received the royal insignia from the See of Peter.

In the course of the alternating events of the centuries, the peoples present in today's Crna Gora always maintained such a dynamic and cordial relationship with the other neighbouring peoples

that they made interesting contributions to the life of European nations, and not the least to Italy itself, to which in the last century they gave a Queen.

The ancient Charters refer to a fruitful dialogue between the Apostolic See and Prince Nicola of Montenegro, which led in 1886 to the stipulation of an agreement that provided for the spiritual needs of Catholic citizens, dependent on Cetinje, the former capital.

The farsightedness of the deliberations adopted by that Head of State with regard to recognition of the rights of a part of his fellow citizens still elicits admiration today and stresses the need for a correct appraisal of the objective requirements of the religious practice of each person.

All Catholics are well aware of the prerogatives of the State, but at the same time are likewise conscious of their duties with regard to the Gospel imperatives.

Thus, in reflecting on the past centuries when the Gospel message of salvation reached the regions of Montenegro, one can see that by embracing both the Eastern and Western traditions, your Homeland, Mr Ambassador, has always distinguished itself as a privileged place for that ecumenical encounter longed for by all. Some outstanding examples of Christian-Muslim encounter have been achieved in Montenegro.

It is necessary to pursue this path on which the Church hopes that all will converge in the commitment to join forces at the service of the nobility inherent in the human being. Indeed, the Church sees this as an important part of her mission at the service of the person in his entirety of thought, action and planning, with respect for the traditions that identify a land as such.

I am sure that in the European arena Montenegro will not fail to make its own active contribution in the civil contexts as well as in the political, social, cultural and religious spheres.

One of the priorities on which the new independent Republic which you represent is certainly reflecting, is the reinforcement of the state of rights in various areas of public life, through the adoption of provisions that guarantee the effective enjoyment of all those rights provided for by the fundamental laws of the State.

This will foster social confidence in the citizens, enabling them to feel free to pursue their legitimate objectives, both as individuals and as communities in which they have chosen to gather. It will be expressed in a general development of the culture of legality.

Montenegro belongs to the family of European nations to which, even in its own small way, it has made and intends to continue to make a generous contribution. Full recognition of the life and aims of the Catholic community in the context of Montenegrin society, which came into force more than a century ago, has proven useful to the sovereignty of the State and welcome to the specific

mission of the Church.

In that specific occasion in history, how can one fail to note the respectful attitude of the Orthodox Church of that time, which did not oppose an agreement with the Apostolic See? Indeed, she saw in this step a useful means to provide in a better way for the spiritual needs of the population. It is to be hoped that this Christian attitude will develop further.

As in the past, so also today the Apostolic See desires to reassert its own esteem, affection and consideration for the noble groups that dwell in Montenegro by pursuing a fraternal dialogue with Orthodoxy, which is very present and alive throughout the Country. The 1,000-year-old relations of reciprocal respect witness to this approach.

It is also necessary today to deepen this constructive attitude in order to serve better the peoples you worthily represent here today. With a broadminded outlook they see East and West acting as a bridge between both these realities contemporaneously.

In unreserved cordiality, as in past centuries, it is possible to establish those forms of understanding which serve to benefit the Country and the Catholic Community without harming in the very slightest the legitimate rights of other religious communities. This is the way that contemporary Europe has taken and that your Country intends to take with great hope.

Mr Ambassador, the credentials you have presented to me today are the sign of a positive will to contribute to international life with your own specific identity. In this regard, you will find in the Apostolic See a conversation partner well versed in the history, in the current situation and in the aspirations of your People. You will find in me and in my excellent collaborators attention and consideration based on our 1,000-year-old cordial reciprocal relations.

As I ask you to convey my esteem and gratitude to the Authorities who have accredited you, please express my warmest good wishes for prosperity, peace and progress to all the inhabitants of Montenegro, upon whom I invoke abundant Blessings from the Most High.

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