



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Dr MARIJAN ŠUNJIÆ,
AMBASSADOR OF CROATIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 12 October 1998

Mr Ambassador,

1. As I welcome you to the Vatican, I accept with great pleasure the Letters accrediting you to the Holy See as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Croatia.

Please convey my gratitude to the President of the Republic, Mr Franjo Tudjman, for the respectful and cordial greeting that he has expressed again through you on behalf of the entire nation, which has had relations with the Chair of Peter for centuries. I also thank you personally, Mr Ambassador, for the best wishes you have kindly offered me on the anniversary of my election to the Petrine ministry.

The presentation of your credentials takes place a few days after my [Pastoral Visit to Croatia](#). I will never forget my intense feelings during the various meetings with the people, especially at the Holy Mass in which I had the joy of beatifying an illustrious son of Croatia and a faithful Pastor of the Church, Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac. That is why I wished to congratulate the President personally at the end of the solemn liturgy in Marija Bistrica. Equally unforgettable are my impressions of the solemn Eucharist celebrated in Žnjan in honour of the 1,700th anniversary of the city of Split, and of the meetings in Zagreb and in Solin.

Once again the Croatian nation has shown not only its living faith and deep attachment to the Catholic Church, but also its dignity and the vitality of its culture, elements that made my apostolic journey highly significant. The authorities of Church and State, at all levels, did everything they could to facilitate the Successor of Peter's meeting with the people, helping to make my ministry

bear fruit among my Croatian brothers and sisters. I gladly take this opportunity to express once again my gratitude to everyone.

2. After the suffering experienced in the years of the recent war, Croatia now enjoys the great gift of peace. I offer my best wishes so that this fundamental value will be constantly strengthened and will eventually extend to all the peoples of South-East Europe, who are called to live in reciprocal respect, sincere dialogue and mutual collaboration.

Now that communist totalitarianism has collapsed, your country and the other nations of Central and Eastern Europe are no longer isolated from the rest of the great family of European nations. The Lord of history, on the threshold of the third millennium, has restored the precious blessing of freedom to these peoples after decades of grievous suffering.

Therefore, it is understandable and legitimate that they should aspire to being involved again in the process of building a common home, at the same level as the other nations of the continent, and to make their own spiritual, moral and cultural contribution to this historic undertaking. To ensure that the building's foundations are sound, it will be most important for them to be built on the firm rock of Christian values.

In this regard, I keenly hope that the legitimate expectations of the peoples of these countries will not be disappointed. Today they need sincere and generous support at the economic and social as well as at the cultural and political levels, if they are to overcome the problems bequeathed by past totalitarian regimes.

3. Today, after the long years of dictatorship and the painful experiences of violence to which the peoples of the region were subjected, an enormous effort is required to build a true democracy on a human scale. If it wants to be such a democracy, it cannot ignore the ethical presuppositions stemming from the truth about man as revealed in the searching of sound reason. In particular, it must consider every dimension of the human being, starting with the spiritual and religious. Only a democracy that puts the person at the centre of all political, economic, social and cultural concerns can claim that it fully respects the dignity of the human being. As such it cannot fail to promote the family, the basic institution of society, nor can it disregard the duties deriving from solidarity with the weakest classes. In short, the goal for which every society must strive is a democracy of responsibility and co-responsibility, which will further the well-being of all social classes, with clearly defined rights and duties for every citizen.

By taking this route, Croatia will be able to make its own particular contribution to the region's democratic growth and stability, by encouraging constant human, civil and spiritual progress there and everywhere on the continent.

To meet today's difficult challenges, Mr Ambassador, may your country, one of Europe's ancient

nations, seek to instil hope in its own people by concrete acts of solidarity towards the poor and marginalized. Indeed, this is the way to the future. I encourage everyone not to surrender before the difficulties inevitably encountered in such an undertaking.

4. The restoration of democracy in your country has fostered good relations between the State and the Church, confirmed also by the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia and by the signing of four specific Agreements, three of which were concluded in December 1996 and the other of which was signed last Friday. Without doubt, these Agreements will give a further impetus to understanding and will facilitate an ever more fruitful collaboration between State and Church institutions, according to each one's responsibility, to the benefit of all the citizens of Croatia.

The Church and the State, each in its own way, serve the same human being and work for his benefit. It is therefore necessary that, with full respect for each other's autonomy and area of competence, they co-operate in common matters, seeking an understanding with each other so they can effectively meet the legitimate expectations of the citizens, most of whom are Catholic.

By walking together, civil society and the Church in Croatia will write important pages in the history of a people whose ancient roots are sunk in the fertile soil of Christian values.

5. Mr Ambassador, with this hopeful vision, I offer you my fervent wishes for the successful and fruitful fulfilment of your lofty mission to the Apostolic See, in the spirit of those always cordial relations between the Successor of Peter and the Croatian people to which you referred in your speech.

I accompany these wishes with my Apostolic Blessing, which I give to you, to your staff and family, and to all the citizens of beloved Croatia.

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