



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S.E. IL SIGNOR DOJČILO MASLOVARIĆ
AMBASCIATORE DELLA REPUBBLICA FEDERALE DI JUGOSLAVIA
PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE***

Giovedì, 25 aprile 1996

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you cordially on the occasion of the presentation of the Credential Letters accrediting you to the Holy See as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I thank you for your courteous words and in particular for the greetings you have expressed to me on behalf of President Zoran Lilic, the Government and the entire population of your country. Please convey my expression of esteem to the President and his co-workers, which I accompany with a special prayer to the Lord that he may grant prosperity and peace to all.

2. Mr. Ambassador, on this solemn occasion in which your lofty mission begins, I express my heartfelt wishes for the success of your work and the joy of seeing the bilateral relationship between this Apostolic See and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia deepened. In fact, the country you are representing here has a clear influence in the Balkan area and can therefore help to build peace in the region with particular effectiveness, by fostering mutual respect and active co-operation among the peoples resident there.

In this grave historical period for the Balkan peoples, to which you referred at the beginning of your speech, concrete hopes for peace seem to be emerging. It is therefore more necessary than ever that all Slavs of the South offer their own active collaboration, each according to his specific responsibilities, in reinforcing the peace and reconciliation process which has been initiated. As I stressed in the homily I preached in Assisi at the meeting for the Day of Prayer for Peace in

Europe and Particularly in the Balkans, on 10 January 1993, «the peoples, the nations of that land, caught up in the dreadful conflict unfolding in the Balkans, form communities united with one another by so many bonds, inscribed not only in memories of the past but also in the shared hope of a better future founded upon the values of justice and peace» (Insegnamenti. vol. XVI/I, 1993, p. 509; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 20 January 1993, p. 3).

The Catholic Church has never ceased striving to achieve a just and stable peace in that tortured region, which is geographically located in the heart of Europe. Today's solemn meeting gives me the opportunity to reaffirm once again the Holy See's determination to continue in this task, promoting dialogue and reconciliation with every means, so that the painful injuries inflicted by the recent conflict may be healed and a new era of prosperity may unfold for all with mutual respect and co-operation.

3. The Christian vocation of the peoples of both Serbia and Montenegro offer a rich heritage of human and spiritual values on which to rely during this significant phase in the Balkan crisis, as efforts are being made, with the international community's support, to start the process of rebuilding social and economic life.

In this regard, I would like to assure you that Catholic citizens will not fail to make their own contribution to the peaceful life of the Federation. The Catholic presence in the area has very ancient roots dating back to the end of the first millennium. Enlivened by a spirit of co-operation, Catholics will also continue on this path today, seeking an understanding with all the country's social and religious institutions, so as to encourage every project aimed at the common good and reconciliation.

The Federation of Serbia and Montenegro is called to bear witness to how two republics can co-operate for their mutual benefit by means of a legal framework which respects the legitimate expectations of each. Different peoples can thus overcome the temptation to imprison themselves in forms of nationalistic self-sufficiency, the harbinger of social misery and destruction, as recent painful experiences have demonstrated. To succeed, co-operation among all citizens requires not only wisdom and far-sightedness, but also sacrifices and genuine respect for the manifold variety of society's members, in accordance with what has been set forth in the many declarations of international organizations.

This witness to collaboration will be further reinforced by the climate of respect for the rights of ethnic minorities. This is a vitally important point, both for the proper administration of State institutions and for the creation of a climate of greater dialogue and mutual trust among the different nationalities.

4. After the difficult years when the peoples of the Federal Yugoslav Republic had to face terrible suffering due to the war, and also because of the consequences of the international embargo,

people are once again beginning to feel hope. It is urgently necessary for each individual to strive to heal the wounds of the past, not simply by letting the memories of suffering fade, but above all by being open to reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. In this regard, I appreciate your words stressing the need to achieve a reconciliation which transcends wrongs and revenge, and builds on what unites rather than on what divides.

The commitment to overcoming injustice and violence through forgiveness and co-operation is the high road to a new season of progress and peace for all South-Eastern Europe. I hope that this conviction will be increasingly shared by all those who have been involved in the Balkan crisis in any way whatever, so that the efforts being made on various fronts to re-establish the minimum conditions for peaceful and fruitful coexistence in the region may be effectively supported.

5. As I thank you once again for today's meeting, I hope that the Federation which you represent here will be able to face, courageously and generously, the serious challenges that await it. With this in mind, I pray the Lord to sustain all on the way they have undertaken towards a just and stable peace.

I hope, Mr. Ambassador, that you will be able to fulfil the important mission begun today to your satisfaction and benefit. I also hope that through your professional work, relations between the Holy See and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will be increasingly strengthened.

With these wishes I implore the blessing of Almighty God for your staff and for all the citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

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