



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF ALBANIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 10 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I gladly accept the Letters with which Dr Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic, accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See.

As I cordially welcome you, through you I would like to thank the President for his kind words to me, and to assure you of the constant benevolence I feel for the beloved country you are called to represent.

Today's meeting reminds me of the visit God granted me to make to Albania on 25 April 1993, and of the heartfelt affection that so many of your compatriots showed me on that occasion. I constantly pray God that Albania may continue confidently on the path to prosperity and peace that she has taken, always preserving among her citizens mutual respect, dialogue and collaboration. If, indeed, you want to build a strong national unity, every citizen must believe in the values of rediscovered democracy and the benefits of social harmony and cooperate in consolidating the structures of the institutions, which must always prove effective in providing the people with the services they legitimately expect.

Your homeland, which can count on a rich treasure of ethnic, cultural and spiritual traditions, must draw from them the vital sap that will enable it to pursue with confidence the way of radical social renewal to which it is dedicated.

2. As you have appropriately emphasized, the bonds between the Apostolic See and the Albanian nation have been intense and have existed for centuries. They have enabled both to grow in

reciprocal knowledge and trust. Thus a fruitful collaboration was established which it was possible to resume after the unfortunate period of Communist dictatorship, in a climate of understanding and esteem. For this reason, I am therefore convinced that the problems you outlined, will be confronted and resolved positively, and that you will succeed in implementing the many projects you have now initiated.

The Albanian people will be able to appeal to the well known gifts of courage and determination that are their hallmark. As you appropriately recalled George Kastrioti Skanderbeg was a champion of these virtues and was often in contact with the Roman Pontiffs. In this regard I would like to recall the concern of my Predecessor Callistus III for the ventures of this "invincible soldier and athlete of Christ" (*Liber Brevium*, n. 298) whom he invited in the face of the Ottoman threat to persevere in the courageous defence of the faith (cf. *ibid.*, n. 302). What is more, how can we forget Conxha (Agnes) Bojaxhiu, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a daughter of the Albanian people, who brought honour and prestige to her nation and to the Catholic Church? Her activity and witness helped to keep alive in the world friendship for her country, even during the dark period of the Communist and anti-religious persecution.

The Albanian people constantly refer to these famous figures and are justly proud of their human and spiritual endowments. These virtues can help them achieve the targets of rebuilding and development that await them, as you have just stressed.

3. As part of the European cultural, historical and geographical context, Albania legitimately aspires to engage in a constructive dialogue with the other peoples of the Old Continent, wishing to contribute to building their common "European home".

This will for profitable competition is not only addressed to the neighbouring countries and, more generally, to the European Union. The Albanian people want to find their role in a broader, international framework, open to the whole world. However, the first condition and at the same time consequence of this just aspiration is the need for greater coherence and stability at home, which will give Albania more authority in the assembly of nations. In view of this, how is it possible not to praise and encourage on this occasion too, the practical efforts which enable the country you represent to go ahead with the process of healing the serious injuries inflicted by the tragic decades of tyranny?

4. Mr Ambassador, the Holy See will continue to do its utmost, as it has so far, to support the Albanian people in the search for true progress and stable peace. Good relations, marked by reciprocal trust and esteem shed light on the value of a new-found common language for the benefit of all Albanians. Proof of this is the recent Agreement for Collaboration which Albania and the Holy See have signed to normalize their relations [23 March], an agreement that now awaits ratification by Parliament, as you mentioned.

Although the Church's mission is essentially spiritual, she is well aware of the need to keep up a constant dialogue with society recalling, as reference points for all human activity, the eternal ethical and moral values. To build a country that is free and hospitable, Christians intend to continue to collaborate with the other religious denominations that are traditionally present, with which a respectful and fruitful understanding already exists.

5. Mr Ambassador, please convey my sentiments of deep respect to the President. At the same time I would like to confirm that you will find that the Apostolic See is fully prepared to welcome you, offering you its consideration and cooperation in carrying out the mission entrusted to you by your Government.

As I renew my fervent good wishes to you for the success of your activity, I accompany my wishes with the assurance of my prayer that with his gifts, Almighty God will help you, those who work with you, the authorities of your country and the Albanian people who are ever present in my heart.

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