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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (22-25 September 2018) – Departure from Vilnius and Telegram to the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Official reception, Welcome ceremony in Latvia, Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic and Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

Departure from Vilnius and Telegram to the President of the Republic of Lithuania

Official reception at Riga International Airport

Welcome ceremony in Latvia

Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Latvia and Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

Departure from Vilnius and Telegram to the President of the Republic of Lithuania

This morning, at 7.00 local time (6.00 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis left the apostolic nunciature and transferred by car to Vilnius International Airport, where at 7.20 (6.20 in Rome) he left on board an airBaltic CS 300, destined for Latvia.

As he left Lithuanian territory, the Pope sent the following telegram to the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė:

HER EXCELLENCY DALIA GRYBAUSKAITĖ
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA
VILNIUS

AS I DEPART FROM LITHUANIA TO CONTINUE MY APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO LATVIA AND ESTONIA, I

RENEW MY DEEP APPRECIATION TO YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE BELOVED PEOPLE OF LITHUANIA FOR YOUR WARM WELCOME AND GENEROUS HOSPITALITY. IN OFFERING THE ASSURANCE OF MY PRAYERS FOR PEACE AND HARMONY IN THE NATION, I INVOKE ABUNDANT DIVINE BLESSINGS UPON ALL OF YOU.

FRANCISCUS PP.

Official reception at Riga International Airport

The aircraft carrying the Holy Father, which left from Vilnius this morning, landed at 8.10 local time (7.10 in Rome) at Riga International Airport in Latvia.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the President of the Republic of Latvia, Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, and by two children in traditional dress who presented him with flowers.

The ambassador of Latvia to the Holy See, Ms. Veronika Erte, the president of the Episcopal Conference and bishop of Rēzekne-Aglona, H.E. Msgr, Jānis Bulis, and the archbishop of Riga, H.E. Msgr. Zbigņevs Stankevičs, were also present.

Then, passing before the Guard of Honour, the President of the Republic accompanied the Pope to the VIP Room, where he was awaited by young people in traditional dress who performed Latvian music and hymns.

Immediately afterwards, the Pope transferred by car to the Presidential Palace of Riga.

Welcome ceremony in Latvia

Upon arrival at the Presidential Palace of Riga, Pope Francis was received by the President of the Republic of Latvia, Mr. Raimonds Vējonis.

Then, following the anthems, military honours and the presentation of the respective delegations, the President accompanied the Holy Father to the second floor of the Presidential Palace where the courtesy visit took place.

Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Latvia and Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

The President and the Pope proceeded to the “White Room” of the Presidential Palace, where the signing of the Book of Honour and the exchange of gifts took place.

The Holy Father and the President then transferred to the adjacent “Ambassadors’ Room” for the private meeting. At the end, in the adjacent room, the President introduced his family to the Pope.

Immediately afterwards, they passed to the room where, at 9.20 local time (8.20 in Rome), in the presence of around 500 people, a meeting was held with the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps.

After the welcome address from the President of the Republic of Latvia, the Holy Father gave an address.

Finally, the Pope, accompanied by the President, took leave of the Presidential Palace to transfer by car to the Monument of Freedom.

The following is the Holy Father's address to those present at the meeting with the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr President,
Members of Government and State Authorities,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of Civil Society,
Dear Friends,

I am grateful, Mr President, for your kind words of welcome, and for the invitation to visit Latvia that you extended to me during our meeting in the Vatican. I am happy to be here for the first time, both in Latvia and in this city, that, like the entire country, has known difficult social, political, economic and spiritual struggles, the fruit of past divisions and conflicts, yet today has become one of the principal cultural, political and shipping centres of the region. Your contributions to culture, art and music in particular are well known beyond your borders. And today I also was able to appreciate these on my arrival at the airport. With the words of the Psalmist, you can indeed say: "You have turned my mourning into dancing (*Ps* 30:12). Latvia, the land of the Dainas, has turned its sorrows and pain into singing and dancing, and has sought to become a place of dialogue and encounter, of a coexistence that is peaceful and looks to the future.

This year you are celebrating the centenary of your nation's independence, a significant moment for the life of society as a whole. You know all too well the price of that freedom, which you have had to win over and over again. It is a freedom made possible thanks to your roots that, as Zenta Maurina, who inspired so many of you, observed, "are in heaven". Without this ability to look up, to appeal to greater horizons that remind us of that "transcendent dignity" with which all of us, as human beings, have been endowed (cf. *Address to the European Parliament*, 25 November 2014), the rebuilding of your nation would not have been possible. That spiritual capacity to see more deeply, as expressed in small and daily gestures of solidarity, compassion and mutual assistance, has sustained you and in turn has given you the creativity needed to generate new social processes, despite the currents of reductionism and exclusion that always threaten the fabric of society.

I am happy to know that the Catholic Church, in cooperation with other Christian churches, is an important part of those roots. This cooperation shows that it is possible to build communion within differences. It happens when people are motivated to leave superficial conflicts behind and to see one another in their deeper dignity. Indeed, when we, as individuals and communities, learn to look beyond ourselves and our particular interests, then understanding and mutual commitment bear fruit in solidarity. Such solidarity, understood in its deepest and most challenging sense, becomes a way of making history in a region where conflicts, tensions and even groups once considered inimical can attain a multifaceted unity that gives rise to new life (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228). The Gospel has nourished the life of your people in the past; today it can continue to open new paths enabling you to face present challenges, to value differences and, above all, to encourage "com-union" between all.

The celebration of this centenary reminds us of how important it is to treasure Latvia's freedom and independence. These are certainly a gift, but also a task for everyone. To work for liberty is to commit oneself to the integral and integrating development of individuals and the community. If today we can celebrate, it is due to all those who blazed trails and opened a door to the future, and bequeathed to you that same responsibility: to open a door to the future by looking to everything that stands at the service of life, of generating life. At the conclusion of our meeting, we will go to the Freedom Monument, where children, young people and families will be present. They remind us that "the motherhood" of Latvia – analogously echoed in the theme of this Visit – is reflected in the ability to promote truly effective strategies centred more on the concrete faces of these families, elderly persons, children and young people, than in the primacy of economy over life. Latvia's "motherhood" is

also manifested in her ability to generate employment opportunities, so that no one will need to be uprooted in order to build a future. The index of human development is likewise measured by the capacity to increase and multiply. The development of communities is not produced, much less measured, solely by the amount of goods or resources they possess, but rather by their desire to engender life and build for the future. This is only possible to the extent that they are rooted in the past, creative in the present, and confident and hopeful in looking to the future. Then too, it is measured by their capacity for self-sacrifice and commitment, in imitation of the example of past generations.

Mr President, dear friends: As I begin my pilgrimage in this land, I ask God to continue to accompany, bless and prosper the work of your hands in the service of this nation.