

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0277

Venerdì 24.05.2002

Pubblicazione: Immediata

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● JOINT STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE AND THE PRESS OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Questa mattina, al termine della visita di cortesia del Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II al Presidente della Repubblica di Bulgaria, S.E. il Sig. Georgi Parvanov, avvenuta nel Palazzo Presidenziale a Sofia (*Cfr Boll. N. 0275*), il Direttore della Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, Dr. Joaquín Navarro-Valls e il Capo Ufficio-Stampa della Presidenza della Repubblica di Bulgaria hanno rilasciato il seguente Comunicato Congiunto:

1. The President of the Republic of Bulgaria Mr. Georgi Parvanov greeted His Holiness Pope John II and expressed his deep respect and recognition to the Holy Father for his contribution and active role aimed at strengthening peace in the world, at the building of a more just society and the promotion of a dialogue and understanding between religions and peoples. President Parvanov pointed out to the esteem of the Bulgarian people for the Holy Father, which excludes Bulgaria's involvement in the assassination attempt on his life.

[As a matter of fact, the Director of the Holy See Press Office stated:

I would like to add that the Pope has told the President that he had never believed in the so-called "Bulgarian

connection" which blamed a people whom he fondly likes and admires.]

2. Both sides emphasized the intransient value of the spiritual heritage of Sts Cyril and Methodius, celestial co-patrons of Europe.
3. Pope John Paul II confirmed that he has all along loved the Bulgarian people, holds dear its culture and spiritual tradition, and expressed his support for the ethno-religious model in Bulgaria and for its efforts to build a true democratic society that respects fundamental human rights.
4. Both sides confirmed the importance of respecting the principles of religious freedom and the freedom of conscience as the basic principles of democracy. A common desire to further develop bilateral relations in the social, charitable, scientific and cultural fields was expressed. Both sides also declared their readiness to start the preparation of an agreement between Bulgaria and the Holy See in that connection.
5. Both sides condemned racism, xenophobia and ethnic intolerance and called for active measures against terrorism, organized crime, illegal drug-trafficking and the traffic of people, child pornography and the exploitation of child labour. Globalization should go hand in hand with solidarity in order to prevent the growing gap between the rich and the poor countries. Mankind is to find solutions to the negative consequences of globalization, such as the rising poverty that leads to unemployment and illiteracy.
6. Both sides exchanged views on questions pertaining to peace, security and cooperation in Europe. Each and every European country is to work in favour of building the common European home, where every nation can enter and share with its partners its cultural, spiritual and religious richness. In this connection the historic role and significance of Christian churches in building the new Europe was emphasized.
7. The Holy Father voiced his support for the efforts of the Republic of Bulgaria to become a full member of the European Union in order to provide its contribution with its history and culture, which to a great degree have been forged by Christianity. Pope John Paul II pointed out to the European dimension of Bulgarian culture, of Bulgarian historical and spiritual heritage, as well as Bulgaria's importance as a "bridge" connecting East and West.
8. Both sides expressed satisfaction with peace and stabilization in South-East Europe and particularly in the Western Balkans. Conditions are being created for the transformation of this region into a place of peace, freedom and concord among all its inhabitants.
9. The Balkans are part of Europe. Both sides agreed that it is necessary to do everything in their power for the faster integration of the region into the European Union, for its economic and social revival.
10. Both sides voiced their deep anxiety over the ongoing violence in the Middle East. They emphasized that violence is to come to an end, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are to be resumed in the nearest future through the joint efforts of the two sides as well, backed by the international community, in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the conflict. A common belief was expressed to the effect that peace talks are the only chance to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the basis of the principle "land for peace" and on UN SC resolutions, by guaranteeing the right of all countries in the region to live in peace and security within the internationally-recognized borders.

[00882-02.02] [Original text: English]
