



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO LITHUANI AND ESTONIA  
(SEPTEMBER 4-10, 1993)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS\***

*Sunday, 5 September 1993*

1. I am happy to receive you at the Apostolic Nunciature in Lithuania. I thank your Dean, Archbishop Justo Mullor Garcia, for the words which he addressed to me in your name. He expressed your concern to help a people who can once again live in the freedom they have finally regained and your common desire to serve the cause of international dialogue. Ultimately, it involves peace in the world and particularly in the Baltic region. As I have already had occasion to say upon my arrival, it is a great joy for me to be in this country. The fact that during the course of my pastoral visit I can meet the Lithuanian authorities and people is a visible sign that we have just turned a page in the dramatic history of this region. From now on Europe is no longer radically divided by opposing ideologies: it has set out on the path of cooperation among peoples; there is a long term job to be done which demands patience and requires the participation of all the inhabitants of the nations concerned, who should renew the bonds of fraternity and solidarity with one another so as to overcome the rancor which has built up during preceding periods.

2. I am aware that I am speaking to a group of diplomats who in a certain sense should be considered pioneers. In the capital of Vilnius you are among the first witnesses of the rebirth of Lithuania and the Baltic peoples. You are highly qualified observers of the new situation which has been created in this region that is so rich in history and culture, and is progressively allowing the restoration of democracy. Accredited to Lithuania, you are in a privileged position to observe the profound meaning of these events as well as their human and social consequences.

3. For almost a half century, during which it suffered under a Marxist regime like the other two Baltic countries and many others, Lithuania was denied its national identity and political autonomy.

A centralized power exerted strong pressure and unbearable constraints on individuals and nations. Indeed, in 1918, when the world had just gone through a first bloody and destructive explosion, many European politicians still thought only in terms of national interests and war, of ideological power and social violence, instead of devoting themselves to building peace. That led to "secret pacts" and shameful alliances as well as to a new armed conflict which ended up wiping whole nations off the map. A veritable cataclysm buffeted the Western world, affecting it for five long decades.

Strengthened by the lessons of history, diplomacy must henceforth seek to support dialogue between the political powers of the nations that want to regain their legitimate unity and autonomy. It can and must do much to suppress at their root the seeds of discord, which can appear in every age. I know that the influence of special interests is still strong, as is the temptation to resort to violence.

A diplomat, however, concerned for the development of peoples and respect for the dignity of individuals, can encourage or promote initiatives which can be valuable contributions to Lithuania and the other two Baltic countries at the present turning point. The international community has the duty to foster in the nations emerging from a totalitarian regime the democratic life that recognizes the legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples for self government. The exercise of democracy requires a long, patient apprenticeship and a maturation that can be achieved only with the indispensable support of the countries that for a long time have mastered this form of government in which all citizens are involved in public life.

For a nation the negative effects of certain past diplomatic alliances must always be kept in mind. The interests of the great powers must never force a small State to become little more than a satellite to the advantage of an external power, nor suppress it as a free nation to conduct the collective destiny of the persons comprising it, nor place the citizens under the oppressive yoke of a foreign authority. Every government that wants to defend its own autonomy must also be concerned to defend the independence of other nations. It is the whole continent that, without a doubt, will see the strengthening of its political stability and its democracies, the indispensable support of peace among individuals and peoples.

4. Amid the many upheavals of recent years Lithuania became a symbol which can only encourage the search for negotiated solutions to all the conflicts still burning on this continent.

In the context we experience today, diplomacy is being led to take new forms; it has been given new tasks from which the people who have regained their unity expect much. Diplomatic missions have among their principal concerns today the desire to create opportunities for negotiation so that there will be less risk of conflict between cultural, ethnic or religious communities and that there will be closer cooperation between States, human dignity will be better respected, and peace affirmed. Keeping in mind the past which had a strong influence on individuals, peoples and

institutions, but which it is proper to acknowledge gradually and move beyond, one must be creative. Everything that promotes mutual trust among people and hope, which can now be glimpsed after the long years of darkness, is a leaven filled with the promise of constructive relations between peoples. Indeed, a nation and a continent cannot be built unless all the forces present in it are called to participate in serving the national and international community.

5. Solving the many difficulties rightly requires the help which the international community should strive to give. Indeed, on the regional and local levels, the value of solidarity is an essential resource for building a human community in a given country or among several countries. On its road to unity Western Europe greatly benefited from solidarity after the great and deadly conflict which it experienced. This massive aid contributed to its present prosperity.

Assistance of all kinds - placed at the disposal of human resources, technological cooperation, courageous financial investors - must have as its primary objective to serve the people of Lithuania, helping them to resolve their problems. Diplomats cannot be limited to upholding their own national interests. In Vilnius, as in every part of the world, a common understanding of man must be defended, an understanding without which bilateral or multilateral negotiations can eventually become meaningless.

Our contemporaries are rightly paying more attention to the definition and defence of human rights. Indeed, the true interest of nations cannot be thought of solely in terms of political strategy or economic development. The new world order that presupposes social unity, above and beyond political models and economic diversity, cannot be achieved without respect for the primary values of justice, peace and the dignity of the human person. The indispensable national restoration cannot be achieved to the detriment of fundamental human values. May individuals and peoples never rise up against each other again! Each time a conflict breaks out it is the whole world that suffers and is disfigured! Countries are first of all human communities, composed of living, thinking women and men who pray and work together according to freely accepted laws and who have inalienable rights and duties which they possess by their very nature.

Human rights lie at the origin of international life; the most fundamental of these is the right to life and to live in dignity, the right to freedom of conscience and religion, as well as the right to a family, the primary cell of society and the driving principle of public life. It is only on the condition that these freedoms are respected that the other aspects of international life can find their full sense without a human dimension, indeed, geopolitics, economic and financial exchanges and intercultural dialogue would be limited merely to the logic of special interests, which is never far removed from the logic of force.

I am aware that I am expressing a moral demand tied to the values that constantly sustain your activity and the specific contributions of your respective countries in regard to Lithuania, but this demand is sometimes difficult to translate into expressions readily perceived by the peoples

concerned.

6. The Pope who is speaking to you is the witness of the situation of the world today which he has had the opportunity - as well as the joy - to travel as a pilgrim of peace, I seek to proclaim the Christian faith that gives full meaning to life and which at the same time demands the commitment of all in building a society in which every person can find a place. During my travels all over the world and my contacts with people of different classes and various responsibilities, I have been able to see the many human aspirations, and particularly those of Europe's young people. Since distances are becoming increasingly insignificant the world is becoming - or should become - a world in which bonds are ever stronger. Despite the activism of certain minority groups, the new generations hope to live in a society in which people will act in solidarity and weave a social fabric which overcomes borders and barriers of a linguistic, cultural or religious nature. In this context, cultural exchanges and tourism can only promote mutual knowledge and be the occasion for human contacts and personal enrichment.

7. However, because of the effects of deplorable ideological conflicts or even, on the contrary, because of the peace which certain countries now enjoy, the phenomenon of migration has assumed unprecedented proportions. International dialogue is becoming particularly necessary so that each person can find a land to settle in, where he can earn a living and support his loved ones. If one takes a close look at the complex situation of interdependence in today's world, one element must be particularly emphasized for this region: imperialistic policies from the past and ethnic, ideological or religious fanaticism are becoming more anachronistic every day.

At a time when war, including economic and commercial warfare, is being condemned on all sides, dialogue and negotiation alone are the attitudes worthy of man and capable of resolving the questions bearing on the transition from a state of foreign occupation to one of total national independence and mutual recognition, the redistribution of a region's resources, the movement of persons and goods, and the just solution of the problems of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities.

The Baltic countries are a microcosm which clearly manifests serious problems but to which solutions can be found. At the side of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian communities - who quite rightly want the peace and national independence of which they have been deprived - there are other human communities that originated in neighbouring countries. Their presence is evidence of a long history which, despite the deplorable suffering, wounds and misunderstandings, must be interpreted in a perspective of fraternity and coexistence. Regardless of the fact that they were sometimes forced, the waves of migration can promote moments of exchange which, in the long or short term, are of benefit to all the communities involved.

In the three Baltic countries we see the problems posed by the previous settlement of Russian nationals belonging to what in the past were called occupation forces. On the other hand the

international community - and the Holy See with it - recognizes the aspirations of the citizens of Russian origin seeking to exercise their human rights in the land where they live. Many times it has expressed the desire that expressions of cordial understanding among all the peoples living in the same territory be found without delay. This requires that everyone make reasonable requests, that they listen to the claims of the other parties present and be able to rid themselves of the spirit of revenge and the temptation to take by force what can only be established on a permanent basis by good sense and negotiations.

Very useful in reaching this goal would be the presence of the various Central and Eastern European States in the international organizations concerned with Europe, such as the Council of Europe and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Through contact with the other countries of the continent and with their eventual cooperation, the good-neighbour relations established following the full recognition of national independence by all can become closer and more lasting.

8. In its own specific mission, the Holy See's foremost concern is peace and the advancement of individuals and peoples, with full respect for the independence of legitimate authority. It wants to recall both in season and out of season that political forces must take into account the spiritual values which the Christian message bears. The local Catholic Church, supported by the universal Church, has the duty to proclaim the Gospel and to affirm the values she has received from her Lord. Christians are aware that they have a social role to play in the patient reconstruction of the various national institutions. This leads Lithuanian Catholics to be even more committed, with their brothers and sisters in humanity, to serving their country vigilantly in its political, economic and social institutions, with an active responsibility and a generous cooperation on behalf of the common good (cf. *Christifidetes laici*, n. 42).

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\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.36 p.5, 8.