



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR STAVROS LYKIDIS
AMBASSADOR OF GREECE TO THE HOLY SEE***

From the Gemelli Polyclinic, 7 March 2005

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to the Holy See. I am grateful to you for conveying to me the greetings of H.E. Mr Constantinos Stephanopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic. I remember with pleasure his visit to me at the Vatican and my own Visit to Greece during my Apostolic Pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Paul; I should be grateful if you would kindly express my cordial good wishes to him, for him personally and for all the Greek people. At the end of his mandate, I address my warmest greetings to him. I also greet H.E. Mr Karolos Papoulias who will be taking charge of the Country's destiny in a few days time.

2. I cannot mention your Country without recalling the Apostle St Paul, who founded the first Christian communities in Europe about 2,000 years ago. Today Greece does not forget its heritage of Christian faith which is one of the constitutive elements of the Nation. Greece knows that this heritage, far more than a memory of the past, will endure as a vital element of its culture and institutions. Greece also knows that the Christian heritage can bring its noble, lofty aspirations for humanity's future to new fruition, especially in Europe where the hallmark of Christianity is so deeply impressed on culture.

I feel sure, Mr Ambassador, that your Country can continue to play an important role in the European Union provided that the religious dimension, to which the Holy See and the Hellenic Republic are equally attached, is favourably recognized and expressed.

3. In today's world, debilitated by the risk of terrorism and the permanence of wars, long, drawn

out and ever threatening, the European Union appears in many ways a model of political will, in favour of the union of peoples for peace. The Holy See cannot but rejoice at this and ask the European nations bound to it to spare no effort to encourage dialogue and understanding between peoples, as well as to reinforce the international institutions that guarantee them. As I have frequently recalled, an effort of this kind can only succeed if it is accompanied by a desire for justice in the international community, and consequently, a courageous development policy for the least privileged countries, especially those on the African continent. The recent tragic events in Southeast Asia have highlighted the international community's ability to mobilize itself effectively for sorely-trying populations; likewise, the Olympic Games held in Athens last year were a brilliant example of the innate desire in men and women for brotherhood, which can overcome hate and violence. Thus, we must be able to hope confidently for an equivalent ongoing mobilization of nations and individuals for peace and at the service of humankind.

4. Mr Ambassador, may I offer a warm greeting through you to the communities of Catholic faithful who live in Greece. These small communities are few and far between but they cherish their faith and are eager to bear a lively witness to it among their Orthodox brethren. You emphasize, Mr Ambassador, the importance that your Government attaches to the presence in your Country of the Catholic Church. In this regard, it would be appropriate if the Catholic Church, pursuing an open and constructive dialogue with all the leaders concerned, were to possess the legal status that she lacks. This would be a sign that her rights were fully recognized, as is the case in the countries of the European Union overall. For her part, the Catholic Church has engaged in a fraternal dialogue with the Orthodox Church. She knows that the sole desire of her faithful residing in Greece is to live this dialogue daily, since they are also keen to play a full part in the economic, political and social life of the Country to which they are so deeply committed. I assure the entire Catholic community and its Pastors of the support and prayer of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter. I also warmly greet the Pastors and faithful of the Orthodox Church of Greece, especially H.B. Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens, who offered me a brotherly welcome during my pilgrimage. I rejoice in the bonds that we wove on that occasion, and I assure them once again of the Catholic Church's desire for fraternal dialogue.

5. At the time when you are beginning your noble mission of representation to the Holy See, Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for its success. Please rest assured that you will always find among my collaborators the welcome and understanding you may need.

I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, as well as upon all the Greek People and their Leaders.

