

## THE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SEE<sup>1</sup>

Honorable Rector, Professors and Students of Megatrend University, Civil and Religious Authorities, dear Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following other colleagues ambassadors who have done it already, I gladly accepted the warm pressing invitation of your new Rector, Slobodan Pajović, to give today, in this academic arena, a lecture on the Diplomatic Activity of the Holy See. This is particularly important because this year marks the hundredth anniversary of the Concordat between the Holy See and the then Kingdom of Serbia.

It may seem strange to many people that the Catholic Church should engage in diplomacy, given that diplomatic activity is the prerogative of States deriving directly from their being constituted as sovereign entities with respect to other States. So, I think it is appropriate to say something about this aspect of the Church's mission, to be followed with a brief history of the Papal diplomacy in general, its aims and the tasks of the Apostolic Nuncios.

### 1. A Terminological Clarification

To begin with, I would like to clarify at least two issues of terminology.

*First* Many commentators often speak of "Vatican diplomacy", and some question the value of accrediting diplomatic representatives to the Vatican, which is the smallest independent State in the world. In reality, Vatican City State, as such, does not maintain diplomatic relations with any State, although technically it could. Vatican City State exists merely to guarantee the autonomy of the Holy See, which for centuries, because of its spiritual sovereignty, has been recognised as a subject of international law. This was true even when the Holy See did not have any territory, namely, in the years between 1870, following the loss of the Papal States, and 1929, which saw the creation of Vatican City State, as a result of the signing of the Lateran Treaty between the Holy See and Italy. Even when he had no territory of his own, the Pope continued to send and receive diplomatic representatives, and the Holy See was called to mediate or lend its good offices

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\* His Excellency Archbishop Msgr Orlando Antonini, Apostolic Nuncio in Belgrade

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in no less than 13 international disputes, such as that of 1885 between Germany and Spain over the Caroline Islands.

*Second* What is the “Holy See”? In the narrow sense, the term “Holy See”, or “Apostolic See”, refers to the office of the Roman Pontiff. In the broad sense, which is the one more usually employed, the “Holy See” includes the offices and other institutions of the Roman Curia, which assist the Pope in the government of the universal Church. It is therefore to be distinguished from “Vatican City State”, a territorial enclave within the city of Rome which functions like other States and, as I already said, exists solely to ensure the autonomy of the Holy See from any political power and state.

## 2. Brief History of the Papal Diplomacy

The origins of Papal diplomacy are historical and began, one can say, as early as at the first half of IV century when, as you know, the Emperor Constantine transferred the Capital of the Empire from Rome to Byzantium-Constantinople, inaugurated during the year 330.

This event, that hastened the completion of the decline of Rome and of the western part of the Empire in those times, is commented by the historians in its geo-political, demographic and economic reasons rather than in its possible psychological repercussions on the Roman and western populations. They saw themselves downgraded and gradually abandoned to their sad fate by the byzantine administration and army, falling to the total mercy of the so-called Barbarians who, differently than in the East, for centuries desolated Europe, killing populations, destroying cities and monuments, upsetting all civil, social and ecclesiastic structure, and putting to an end the splendid classic culture. Those hard historical contingencies put the Bishop of Rome and the Latin Church in a situation which the Byzantine Church did not experience in the course of the following centuries, assured as she was by the byzantine emperors, until 1453, of her institutional and juridical status and being, in good substance, free and in peace. All that can partially explain this gradual reciprocal distancing and misunderstandings between the two worlds and the two Churches that generated conflicts and, finally, the great schism in 1054. On the other hand, the negative psychological repercussions in the West Empire after losing the Capital had to be so frustrating, that it can explain this deep resentment of the West towards the East which brought, after the reborn of the European society from the XI century on, to the well-known revenges of the West in the course of the second Millennium over the East, almost until now.

Let us leave to the historians to discuss this. What matters to our subject is that those western events determined the necessity, for the Bishop of Rome, to send to

Constantinople his representatives who would stay there, to treat the affairs of the Holy See at the imperial court. The first papal envoys, ancestors of the modern apostolic nuncios, were the *Apocrisarios*, or *Responsales*, but also *Missi*, *Missi apostolicae sedis*, *Legati*, *Legati a latere*, *Legati missi*, *Legati nati*, *Nuntii*. Those, who could have been also local bishops and were common to other patriarchs and bishops for the relations between their Churches and with the Emperors, normally were not the permanent representatives, but rather appointed case by case with a precise mission. The *Apocrisarii* sent by the Popes presided the Ecumenical Councils of the antiquity organized by the Emperors, and many provincial Synods. Sometimes they were also permanent, but in force only for the lives of the Popes who appointed them and had only ecclesiastical tasks.

With the invasion of Italy by the Lombards, in 569, the byzantine rule was progressively diminishing in the West and, in such tragic circumstances; the papacy was becoming the only close by-authority available to the people, left insecure because of the gradual disintegration of the civil authority. And when, later, Constantinople could not send any more military help to Italy to face Lombards, the Pope had to appeal the Franks, who went down in Italy and in 756, once defeated the Lombards, left to the papal rule the Lombard central Italy territory. Hence the origin of the so-called temporal power of the Pope. With Charlemagne, who in the year 800 was crowned emperor at St Peter's basilica, it seemed natural to formalize, out of his religious authority, also the civil rule of the Pope not only over Rome and the land around about – the so-called Patrimony of St. Peter (*Patrimonium Sancti Petri*) – but over the mentioned regions of central Italy too, turning it into a true state: the Papal States. In that way the Pope became at the same time spiritual head of the Church and Head of State and, as such, had a regular state structure and thus, also diplomatic. Earlier this situation was supposed transitional, provisional; unfortunately, it was prolonged over the following centuries in the belief that having a true own rule was the only way to ensure the Papacy and the Universal Church the necessary freedom in front of the frequent political interferences of the emperors or kings, who wanted to control the Universal Church not only in her organization, jurisdiction and institutions, but sometimes even in doctrinal issues.

The turning point of the papal diplomacy is dated to the pontificate of Pope Nicholas I who, between 858 and 867, due to the intricate religious and political circumstances was determined to attribute to his representatives to the court of Franks the task of treating not only ecclesiastical but also political affairs. The Pontifical diplomacy in its present stable form was developed in the XV-XVI century, that is, when in Europe in were formed nation-states and the diplomats of the Holy See were called technically 'apostolic nuncios'. The first permanent, resident and plenipotentiary of them, accredited both to the States and the local Churches, were those sent to the courts of Venice, Florence, Naples, France,

Spain, Austria, Portugal, Germany, England, Poland, etc., and also to the States of the Latin America in the nineteenth century since their independence.

In 1870, in the frame of the Italian unification, the Piedmont's army occupied Rome and the Papal States, so the Pope declared himself 'prisoner' remaining closed in the Vatican palaces for very long time – sixty years! Well, in this long period of time, as I already said, you could see the curious but very significant fact that the states that previously had had diplomatic ties with the Pope continued to have them even if he had remained without territory, and regularly sent ambassadors and received nuncios. With that, it became clear that diplomatic relations are established between States and 'Holy See', i.e. with the central Government of the Catholic Church, not with the 'Vatican City', which represents only the minimum of territory 'sovereign', symbolic, with which it is given to the Pope and the Church the freedom and independence to better carry out its spiritual mission. Finally in 1929, with the Conciliation between the Vatican and Italy and with the Lateran Treaty, the present State of the Vatican City was created, where the said central government of the Catholic Church is installed and which is named properly Apostolic See or 'Holy See'. For this, the Nuncios are ambassadors not of the State of the Vatican City but of the Holy See, a subject of international law recognized by all the states of the world.

Please note, however, that those 60 years of a kind of 'house arrest' of the Pope served very usefully the Church, to realize that the exercise of civil power by ecclesiastics, as demonstrated in the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance and in the following centuries until the nineteenth, is doing great harm to the spiritual mission itself of the Church. Therefore, the fact that in 1870 the papacy was stripped of the state was then considered a providential event, a release, a grace of God.

### 3. Aims of Papal Diplomacy

"Diplomacy without weapons is like music without instruments": this was said in the nineteenth century by Bismarck, who loudly used its weapons to make hear the music unity of the Second Reich. But later, the same Bismarck at one point thought to appeal to Pius IX to negotiate with France a solid peace in the aftermath of the fall of the Second Empire. Yet the papacy at that time, i.e. in 1870 as I have said, had just lost the capital of the Christianity and the Pope had just declared himself as a prisoner in the Vatican Apostolic palaces! Evidently, the German Chancellor recognized in the Holy See the capacity to perform a music of mediation where Pope would have been the point of reference and the instrument of a prestige of moral authority in the European concert. The paradox was that the Holy See played the role of arbitrator on the international scenario and intervened in the foreign policy when the exercise of its diplomacy

– enabling to create a balance between rival parties – was brought back, as was right, just in the ecclesiastical sphere. Of course, like the civil diplomacy, also the papal diplomacy in the history not always registered successes. For instance: if Pope John XXIII on 1962 could avoid the war on the affair of the missiles in Cuba, or if John Paul II in the Eighties could solve the conflict of Beagle Channel, Pope Pius X and Pope Benedict XV couldn't prevent the First World War in 1914, nor John Paul II could prevent the bombing of Belgrade in 1999. That notwithstanding, the diplomacy of the Holy See is highly esteemed in the world for the texture of its networks, the secrecy and the quality of its information due to its own agents (nuncios, apostolic delegates and the official charge d'affairs) and its unofficial intermediaries. I don't know if all this is true; what I can assure is that our foreign policy that we are obliged to follow is a Church affair, not of territories. We defend our 'countrymen' – that is, our faithful – in every culture. But also we affirm our positions on the rights of peoples, the human rights.

What are, then, the aims of Papal diplomacy? The Holy See, while exercising its diplomatic activity in accordance with international law and established practice, differs from States in that it does not have particular commercial, military or political aims to defend or pursue. Rather, its diplomatic activity serves the universal mission of the Pope, which is essentially a spiritual mission, at the service of the Gospel. In this sense, the Holy See is often said to exercise "soft power" diplomacy, namely a diplomacy which does not depend on military, political or economic strength but on the ability to persuade. The Holy See, one could say, acts as a voice of conscience, at the service of the common good, by drawing attention to the anthropological, ethical and religious aspects of the various questions affecting the lives of peoples, nations and the international community as a whole. At the heart of this mission is a certain conception of the human person, who is seen as having an innate dignity, which must always be respected, ultimately because he or she is created in the image and likeness of God, and is endowed with reason, will and freedom. This vision of the human person is fundamental to the Church's social teaching, which is a body of teaching developed over the centuries, particularly over the past two hundred years, concerning the organisation of society and the promotion of an ethical vision of various issues which affect the human person in his or her social dimension and life, such as family, culture, politics, justice, human rights, development, economics, peace and the environment and, when requested, also the mediation of disputes. In its diplomatic activity, the Holy See continually refers to this teaching, which, to a large extent, is not dependent on one's particular religious beliefs, as a basis for peaceful social coexistence and a contribution to the common good.

The Pope makes use of the diplomatic system and possibilities available to him, not because it is intrinsically linked to his Petrine ministry in the sense of not being able to function without it, but because it is a useful and valuable instrument for exercising his ministry in the world. Papal diplomacy enables

the Pope to exercise his prophetic mission in the international forum and contributes to the defence of the Church's rights and freedom, human rights and religious liberty in different countries throughout the world.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the attentiveness of the international community to what the Holy See might have to say about a particular issue. It is not that the Holy See seeks to impose a particular religious view; such an attempt would in any case be rejected by the other players on the international stage. Rather, the Holy See, using the instruments of diplomacy available to it and arguing from rational principles, brings to the table a particular contribution, based on ethical and religious considerations, which serves to enrich the debate and bring to the attention of other participants insights which might otherwise go unobserved or be ignored.

#### 4. The Apostolic Nuncios

As you can have deduced by what I have just exposed about its aims, Papal diplomacy have a double nature, ecclesial and civil, that is as part of its spiritual mission on one hand and, on the other, as a contribution to the good of humanity as a whole; double nature, which explains the double representation that, differently from the other Embassies, the Nunciatures have. In doing so, the Holy See can count not only on the support and advice of Catholic Church personnel throughout the world – I think in particular of local bishops, like your own here in Serbia, and academic institutions – but also on the valuable assistance of many people of good will outside the Church, with whom it is in constant dialogue on a wide range of issues to help resolving the numerous problems that affect the world today.

In particular, the Holy See counts in its diplomatic personnel, the Apostolic Nuncios. They are formed in a special School en Roma, called Pontifical Ecclesiastic Academy. It is the first school of this kind in the world – first in chronological sense; if it is also first at quality level, as many say, I leave this to your judgment... The Academy in fact was founded and opened en 1701 by Pope Clemens XI, and later 'copied' by all other states.

What are, then, the Apostolic Nuncios? They are churchman covered by Episcopal dignity and sent by the Pope as Ambassadors to two Entities:

- a) on one hand, to the States and the International Organizations for the solution of the problems which touch peace, justice, development of the peoples and the realization of the great human hopes;
- b) on the other hand and simultaneously, to the local Churches living in the different nations or regions, to face the questions of the ecclesial life which demand an instance higher than the local.

The current Code of the Church, receiving the decisions of the II Vatican Council and the doctrinal reformulation of Pope Paul VI in the *Motu Proprio* of 1969 *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*, establishes the functions of the Pontifical Representatives as follows:

- a) to promote and facilitate the relations between the Apostolic See and the Public Authorities;
- b) to treat the questions related to the relations between Church and State, in particular for what concerns the concordats or other kind of agreements to be signed and implemented;
- c) to make more firm and effective the bonds between the Apostolic See and the local Churches.

Concerning in particular the latter function, their responsibility is:

- 1) to inform the Apostolic See on the conditions in which the local Churches are living and overall on what concerns the life itself of the Church in a nation and the good of the souls;
- 2) to be of help to the Bishops both with the action and the advise, without undermining the exercise of the legitimate authority of them;
- 3) to foster close relations with the Episcopal Conferences, offering them all kind of help;
- 4) to propose to the Apostolic See, after an adequate confidential process according to a precise form of questions, the names of suitable candidates for appointment as bishops;
- 5) to work with the bishops to encourage a timely collaboration between the Catholic Church and other Churches or ecclesial communities, as well as with non-Christian religions, and to promote what concern peace, progress and consociation of peoples;
- 6) to protect in joint action with the bishops, at civilian governments, what concerns the mission of the Church and the Apostolic See, in particular in the political, cultural and religious situations difficult for the local Church communities.

It is for this great service to the local States and Churches, particularly for having as key stakeholders Heads of State and of Government on one hand and, on the other, Cardinals and local Bishops that makes convenient and opportune the praxis of investing of the Episcopal consecration the Heads of the Pontifical Missions. However, not being question here to entrust to the Nuncios a diocesan community, and yet as bishop being necessary to express his connection with her, is assigned to the Nuncio – like for the Orthodox Patriarchal Vicars – the title of an historical Episcopal diocese, disappeared or abolished. In my case, it was chosen the former Episcopal see of Formia, today included in the archdiocese of Gaeta, Italy.

In the case of accreditation to the governments, like for all other ambassadors it concerns the relations of bilateral character: they establish an official relation between two Entities, enshrined in the ensemble of customs and practices collected and codified in international law, which allows to understand each other, to collaborate for peace and progress, to ensure the accrediting State the peaceful aims pursued by the Church, to offer the support of the spiritual energies and the church organizations (like Caritas) for the achievement of the common good. There are also relations of multilateral character: those in the case of accreditation to the International Organizations. In such worldly forum, the Holy See seeks to ensure that the needs of weaker persons and peoples are not neglected and that the spiritual and moral dimension be present and considered in the international Conferences and Conventions appointed to find answers to the great problems of today: population and demography, woman, life, respect of human rights, extreme poverty, social inequalities, environmental pollution, the challenges of the globalization and the growing interdependence among the nations, threats to stability, ethnic tensions, lack of democracy.

As you can see, the Papal diplomacy, if it is true that alone it is not enough to adjust and to bring peace and consolidate it, however to this it tends, for this it works, efforts and multiplies, without getting tired, his attempts; art of patience, of being able to wait and endure, of produce peace. And, if the civil diplomacy tends to the unification of the world and fights in order that the reason prevails on the force and that the individual States progress in the harmonic concert of more and more extensive international organization, it can find in ecclesial diplomacy a point of reference to which it can look with utility, not thanks to the ability that the ecclesiastical diplomats can exert, or for the results that they can achieve – the one and the other may fail – but rather to the ideal order from which it starts and to which it aspires: the universal brotherhood of men.

The diplomacy of the Holy See holds, therefore, not ‘mundane’ but rather spiritual connotations. For this feature, representing in some sense the universal ethical and moral values, the Nunciatures present themselves, so to speak, as ‘neutral’ among other national or international diplomatic missions. This particular aspect has fostered the tradition that in Catholic countries, and not only in them, it is recognized to the Apostolic Nuncio the prerogative of permanent Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. However please note that the directives of the Holy See insist that the future Nuncios in the time of their formation in the Ecclesiastical Diplomatic Academy in Rome receive an adequate intellectual introduction to the theological, legal, sociologic and historic questions and a perfect knowledge of the principal international languages, but over all they insist that the priestly character of their diplomatic mission be deepened and lived. So, if you remove the outer appearances, the Papal diplomacy in reality is a severe ecclesial discipline and, like politics which in words of Pope Pius XI is one of the highest form of charity (when the politicians use politics for the com-

mon good and not for personal benefits), it is also a true school of higher charity, because it works as a form of love, the love of peoples. Certainly, as in all human institutions, even in this ecclesial service can enter deviations, ambiguities and errors, but this can only happen through the fault or defect of individuals, without remaining altered the religious dispositions that distinguishes the diplomacy of the Church by civil governments and states.

Today, as a result of the increased role of the Holy See on the international stage, no less than 180 States have full diplomatic relations with it. To these should be added the European Union, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and a Mission with special character, namely that of the State of Palestine. The Holy See is also represented at various international and regional organisations, of which it is either a member or an observer, such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the African Union, ASEAN, UNESCO, etc. Many countries, including Serbia, maintain a resident Mission to the Holy See in Rome. Including those of the European Union and the Order of Malta, there are at present 82 such Missions. In addition, the Mission of the State of Palestine and the offices of the League of Arab States, the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees maintain regular contacts with the Holy See through their chanceries in Rome.

For what concerns Serbia, you certainly know that first, on 1914, the Holy See and the then Kingdom of Serbia just days before the beginning of the First World War had signed and ratified a concordat which regulated the juridical condition of the Catholics in the Kingdom, even if later, due to the said war, it didn't enter into force. Normal diplomatic ties were established in 1920 with the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The first Nuncio was Mgrs. Francesco Cherubini. On 27 December 1952 the communist regime interrupted the relations, but they were resumed on 25 June 1966 with a signature of a Protocol. Since then, 9 apostolic nuncios alternated in the Papal Representation of Belgrade: Hurley, Oddi, Cagna, Cecchini, Colasuonno, Montalvo, Abril y Castelló, Sbarbaro, and lastly, who is now speaking to you, Antonini.

We can affirm that the relations between Serbia and the Holy See have always been good, only with the interruption I mentioned between 1952 and 1966 and the question of the concordat of 1935-37, which was signed but later not ratified by the Parliament. In any case today the Holy See prefers to establish not concordats but conventions or partial agreements in determined fields. For instance this year, the 27 of June, we signed a general Agreement of cooperation on higher Education and, in September 2014, another Agreement of cooperation between the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and the National Library of Serbia – in the Vatican there are ancient manuscripts concerning Serbia which are not in Serbia and which can be known and studied by Serbian scientists and exposed in Belgrade.

Also in the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs you can read this text about our present good diplomatic relations: *“Relations between the Republic of Serbia and the Holy See are good and stable although they are, in more ways than one, specific and determined by number of circumstances which are not present in Serbia’s relations with other states. There is a closeness of views on many important issues of the modern world. There is similarity and even congruence in the approach to certain general principles on which international relations should be based on. That is a good starting point for further intensification and enrichment of the cooperation, especially in international organizations and in facing the regional challenges. Serbia is committed to further development and enrichment of the relations through continuous political dialogue, as well as through closer cooperation in international organizations. Vatican has not recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. Position of the Holy See has remained within the framework of advocating for the preservation of peace and stability in the region, meeting all the standards set, lasting guarantees of human rights of all citizens and protection of the Christian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. The Holy See supports the integration of all the Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, into the EU, with the aim of ensuring the lasting stabilization of the region and as a stimulus to ecumenical dialogue. Vatican’s position is that the process of European integration should not be hampered by additional conditioning, something that did not exist in the case of other countries in that process. Officials of the Republic of Serbia who visited the Holy See are: 2004 - Vuk Drašković, Minister of Foreign Affairs; 2005 and 2009 – Boris Tadić, President of the Republic of Serbia; 2009 – Vuk Jeremić, Minister of Foreign Affairs; 2012 – Ivica Dačić, President of the Government of the Republic of Serbia; 2013 - Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia attended the inauguration of Pope Francisco”. Vice versa in “2003 - Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Holy See, J. L. Tauran, officially visited Belgrade. Delegation of the Holy See attended the enthronement of Patriarch Irinej in 2009 and in 2012, the inauguration of Tomislav Nikolić, the President of the Republic of Serbia”. Furthermore, “in June 2004 the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Lateran University in Rome signed the Agreement on the exchange of professors and students between the two high education institutions”.*

Finally I would like to outline that, although the weight of history sometimes can hinder our good path, when it is able to do that, the Holy See demonstrated its closeness to Serbia being of not little helpful for her in some important moments of its history. For what the ancient times concerns, it helped in the formation itself of the Serbian state: its first independence was sponsored precisely by the Vatican, indicating that at least until the XI-XII and XIII centuries the kingdom of Serbia looked to West Europe. Two Serbian kings asked the Popes to be crowned: first was Mihailo I Vojislav, who was crowned by Pope Gregory VII in 1077 and obtained also the title of Archbishop of Antivari, so that Serbia constituted for first time an autonomous ecclesial circumscription; and in 1217 the

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king Stefan II Nemanja was crowned by Pope Honorius III, allowing in that way the recognition of Serbia as a sovereign state by the 'international community' of those times. In the recent times, 1999, Pope John Paul II, as I already evoked, was the only opponent in the West to the bombing of Belgrade not without criticism from some Western governments. Evident sign and prove of that is the fact that during the bombing the Apostolic Nuncio of that period, Msgr Santos Abril y Castelló, now Cardinal, didn't leave Belgrade and became the practical point of reference, as a shadow-Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, of the ambassadors who have remained here. Moreover, the Holy See and the Catholic organizations always rush to the aid of Serbian people in the events of major natural disasters as the earthquake in Kraljevo on 2011 and, in particular, the devastating floods on June this year. On this occasion the Holy See and the Caritas of different countries came in rescue of the populations affected by the disaster, bringing a 2 million Euro in aid: a fact that has been recognized and praised by the government of Serbia itself.

With that, I take of this nice opportunity to anticipate to you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And may God accompany us always towards a more and more better future. Hvala!