



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 748th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

29 JANUARY 2009

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
H.E. KAREL SCHWARZENBERG**

Madame Chairwoman:

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in congratulating Minister Schwarzenberg on the Czech Republic's assumption of the Presidency of the European Union for the first half of 2009, as well as in warmly welcoming him to his appearance before the Permanent Council in this role.

2. The Holy See has noted the priorities of the Czech Presidency of the EU as outlined by Minister Schwarzenberg and further developed in the *Work Programme of the Czech Presidency* under the title: *Europe Without Barriers*. These priorities fall under the broad categories of economy, energy and the European Union in the world. As is known, it is not the place of the Holy See to enter into issues which are strictly political and neither it wish to do so.

I would like to acknowledge, however, that the Czech Republic, bolstered by the sense of solidarity that enabled her to emerge courageously from the collapse of totalitarianism, desires to contribute to the welfare of the human family by enhancing international co-operation in the struggle against violence, hunger, poverty and other social ills. The clear goals you have set out, Mr. Minister, will allow you to exercise strong leadership in the shared endeavor of combining unity and diversity, national sovereignty and joint activity, and economic progress and social justice across the OSCE region.

3. The Holy See is well aware of the many challenges facing Europe precisely at a time when its nations aspire to build a more stable international community for future generations. To move forward, its leaders are called to recognize that human happiness and well-being cannot be achieved through structures alone or by any single stratum of social or political life. The realization of a genuine culture requires the harmonious

co-operation of families, ecclesial communities, schools, businesses, community organizations and governmental institutions. Far from being ends in themselves, these entities are organized in the pursuit of the common good.

4. My Delegation has noted the Minster's emphasis on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as the cornerstones of our shared values and principles. Among these rights and freedoms is the right to religious freedom. In fact, this right has become part of the culture of our times, for our contemporaries have learned from the excesses of the recent past, and have come to realize that believing in God, practising a religion and joining with others in expressing one's faith is the special expression of that freedom of thought and expression which takes its source not from a concession granted by the State but from the very dignity of the human person. The Holy See defends the right to religious freedom, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern discrimination against Christians and against the followers of other religions.

The idea that religion is a form of alienation is no longer fashionable, because, fortunately, the leaders of the nations and people themselves have come to realize that believers constitute a powerful factor in favour of the common good. Hatred and fanaticism can find no justification among those who call upon the name of the one God. This is another reason why God can never be excluded from the horizon of the human person or of history. God's name is a name of justice, it represents an urgent appeal for peace.

5. My Delegation would like to assure the Czech Presidency of the EU of its support in working to attain its goals, ultimately in favour of every believer and of every European citizen.

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman.