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POPE URGES MACEDONIA TO KEEP ITS ROOTS

Lauds Testimony of Religious Co-existence

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 22, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is expressing his hopes that Macedonia can come to form part of the European Union without losing its "human and Christian values, embodied in the life of the people."

The Pope said this today as he greeted Macedonia's new ambassador to the Holy See, Gioko Gjorgjevski.

"Beginning from this patrimony, the citizens of your country will continue building also in the future their own history and, strong in their spiritual identity, will be able to contribute their experience to the concert of European nations," he said.

The Holy Father also expressed his hope "that in a global context of moral relativism and of little interest in the religious experience, in which a part of European society often moves, the citizens of the noble nation that you represent will be able to make a wise discernment by opening themselves to the new horizons of authentic civilization and true humanism."

He suggested that to achieve this, "it is necessary to keep alive and firm, at the personal and community level, those principles that are also at the base of this nation's civilization: attachment to the family, the defense of human life, the promotion of religious needs, especially of the young."

Living as brothers

The Bishop of Rome also focused on the good relations between the Holy See and Macedonia, as well as praising the religious coexistence that succeeds there.

Macedonia's two million people are approximately 65% Orthodox and 33% Muslim, with Catholics being a small minority.

He said the "universal aspiration to justice and internal cohesion" that characterizes the country can "become an example for other regions of the Balkans."

"In fact," the Pontiff observed, "the bridges of exchange of more ample agreements and close religious relations between the different components of Macedonia society have favored the creation of a climate in which persons recognize themselves brothers, children of the same God and citizens of one country."

Benedict XVI lauded Macedonia for surmounting "the stage of the last World War, after the sad experience of a totalitarianism that denied the fundamental rights of the human person," and now being turned toward "a harmonious economic progress, giving proof of patience, willingness to sacrifice and persevering optimism, tenaciously directed to the creation of a better future for all its inhabitants."

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