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VATICAN - RUSSIAN RELATIONS UPGRADED

Medvedev Visits Benedict XVI in Rome

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 3, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to upgrade relations between the two sides to full diplomatic ties, the Holy See is reporting.

A communiqué from the Vatican press office confirmed that the two leaders met today for some 30 minutes in the Vatican, and that during the "cordial" discussions, it was "agreed to establish full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Russian Federation."

The two sides have maintained representation below the rank of ambassador since 1990.

Natalia Timakova, the spokesperson for the Russian president, confirmed that Medvedev "asked the foreign ministry to lead discussions to establish the relations and raise the level of representation to apostolic nuncio and embassy."

The meeting "showed the highest level of dialogue between Russia and the Holy See," she added.

The Vatican reported that Benedict XVI and Medvedev also spoke of "the international economic and political situation -- also in the light of the encyclical 'Caritas in Veritate' of which the Holy Father presented the president with a copy in Russian -- attention turned to the challenges currently facing security and peace."

"Cultural and social questions," such as the family and the contribution of faith to Russian society, were also discussed.

Before the papal audience, Mededev met with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Pope's secretary of state, who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states.

This was Mededev's first meeting the Holy Father.

Former Russian President Vladimir Putin had visited Benedict XVI in 2007. He had also visited Pope John Paul II in 2000 and 2003.