

Q. You have chosen Bulgaria as one of the first places for your visits. For us it is a great honour. What do you expect from this visit to Bulgarian in general and to Plovdiv in particular?

A. I have most pleasant expectations. I am going to Bulgaria as a country in which a people close to us live, a friendly country as I have already mentioned speaking about our historical relations.

I am glad to meet with His Holiness Patriarch Maxim, whom I have known from my childhood. His Holiness Patriarch Maxim, when he had just been consecrated as bishop, came to the then Soviet Union, accompanying Patriarch Kirill. He came to Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, my native city. My father was the guide for the Bulgarian delegation, and I, a small boy, accompanied him. I remember very well the divine services celebrated at that time by young, energetic and handsome Bishop Maxim. I remember our talks. Though I was a child, we still talked. Even this personal point creates a very special tie and gives my visit a special optimistic tone. I am looking forward to meetings with people close to me, representatives of the episcopate, clergy and theologians. God willing, this peace visit to Bulgaria will contribute to the further consolidation of our fraternal relations.

Q. We all witnessed the support the Russian Orthodox society gave to the Church. How did you manage to mobilize such a great number of people for the noble purpose of support for the Church?

A. You know, we did not use any technology; we just appealed to people. There was no organization effort and the fact that so many Muscovites gathered together and such a great number of people came to Moscow was just a spontaneous move. People just realized that in no circumstances we should see a return of the hard years of persecution against the Church and destruction of the moral and spiritual foundations of our national life, because without these foundations our people will cease to exist as a historical community. What is at stake today is the preservation of the faith and identity of our people, and people are well aware of that. Therefore, there was no need for any special effort but just the ability to clearly articulate the need for such a prayer vigil, and people responded to it very quickly and with great spiritual enthusiasm.

Q. Your Holiness, I represent the Russian Today newspaper and I am chairman of the Bulgaria-Russia Forum. I would like to assure you that our people are looking forward to your coming with great joy and great hope. In this connection, I would like to ask you this

question. Sometimes there have happen some pauses in relations between our states and between our statesmen, sometimes influenced by others. Do you think our fraternal Orthodox Churches could become a key for understanding, a bridge for resolving such situations, so that the aspirations of our peoples to be together in today's global world may be realized?

A. I am convinced that no statesman, if his logic and historical memory are sound, can ignore the fact that we are people of the same faith, that there are common pages in our heroic history, which cannot be deleted or forgotten. And if these pages cannot be deleted or forgotten, then what can be done with them today? It is my deep conviction that they should be put to use. This community, this openness to each other, this sympathy so deeply rooted in the souls of the Bulgarians and Russians – all this should be rediscovered to build new relations on the solid historical foundation.

It is my deep conviction that it will be so. Indeed, policy is developed as action and reaction to action. In the 20th century, there were many things which provoked not the best feelings in people and their reaction was not always positive, including to the event of the second part of the 20th century. For this reason there was, I do not want to say 'a cooldown', but a certain decrease in the level of relations between our two countries. It may have not been restored to this day under the influence of this reaction to the last decades of the 20th century. We should not give way to our hang-ups and hold up this reaction for too long – we should go forward. And we can go forward with great inspiration since we have behind us all that I mentioned – our remarkable history marked with heroism and spiritual feat, mutual love and sympathy.

Q. I represent the Bulgarian National Radio. In the middle of the last century, the Russian Orthodox Church handed the property she had in the territory of Bulgaria, over to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. During your visit, do you intend to raise the question of recovering this property? I am asking because the Bulgarian press wrote a great deal about it the other day, and also that one of the purposes of your visit is allegedly to establish an independent autonomous Russian Church in the territory of Bulgaria.

A. My visit is called a peace visit. And if a visit to Bulgaria results in a church division, it is not a fraternal visit, not a peace visit. I wonder why people should develop such ideas and even statements in anticipation of my visit to Bulgaria. What happened in 1952 when the Russian Orthodox Church transferred a few monasteries and churches to the Bulgarian Church was a gesture of good will, it was a

gift. In no way it was a commercial transaction which can be reviewed. It is a gift. Are gifts taken back, especially from brothers? No ideas resembling what you have just asked have ever arisen among anybody in Russia and I hope will never arise.

As a token of the historical presence of the Russian Church in the territory of Bulgaria, we have a church representation in downtown Sofia, which, along with being a historical and architectural monument, plays today an important role, because through the Sofia representation of the Russian Church and through the Moscow representation of the Bulgarian Church we maintain everyday contacts between our two Churches, which we value very much.

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