

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO BULGARIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA  
[5-7 MAY 2019]  
**MEETING WITH THE AUTHORITIES, WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE  
DIPLOMATIC CORPS**  
**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS**  
Atanas Burov Square (Sofia)  
Sunday, 5 May 2019

[Link](#)

Now, at this particular moment of history, thirty years after the end of the totalitarian regime that imprisoned its liberty and initiatives, Bulgaria faces the effects of the emigration in recent decades of over two million of her citizens in search of new opportunities for employment. At the same time, Bulgaria – like so many other countries of Europe – must deal with what can only be called a new winter: the demographic winter that has descended like a curtain of ice on a large part of Europe, the consequence of a diminished confidence in the future. The fall in the birth rate, combined with the intense flow of emigration, has led to the depopulation and abandonment of many villages and cities. In addition, Bulgaria confronts the phenomenon of those seeking to cross its borders in order to flee wars, conflicts or dire poverty, in the attempt to reach the wealthiest areas of Europe, there to find new opportunities in life or simply a safe refuge.

Mr President,

I am aware of the efforts that the nation's leaders have made for years to ensure that young people, in particular, not be constrained to emigrate. I would encourage you to persevere on this path, to strive to create conditions that lead young people to invest their youthful energies and plan their future, as individuals and families, knowing that in their homeland they can have the possibility of leading a dignified life. To all Bulgarians, who are familiar with the drama of emigration, I respectfully suggest that you not close your eyes, your hearts or your hands - in accordance with your best tradition – to those who knock at your door.

Your country has always distinguished itself as a bridge between East and West, capable of favouring encounter between the different cultures, ethnic groups, civilizations and religions that for centuries have lived here in peace. The development of Bulgaria, including her economic and civil development, necessarily entails a recognition and enhancement of this specific trait. May this land, bordered by the great Danube River and by the shores of the Black Sea, rendered fruitful by the humble labour of so many generations, open to cultural and commercial

exchanges, integrated in the European Union, and with solid links to Russia and Turkey, offer all her sons and daughters a future of hope.  
May God bless Bulgaria, keep her in peace and ever hospitable, and grant her prosperity and happiness!