

Your Eminence, Your Excellency,
dear members of the diplomatic service,
dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

the lives and work of Saints Cyril and Methodius left an indelible legacy. This holds true for the whole Europe but, especially, it holds true for the countries of the central and eastern European region. A legacy, which penetrates all spheres of national existence and is not limited in time, we call a tradition. For our nations, the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition is still alive, to which testifies also the fact that in many countries of the region, including the Czech Republic, the day of these saints is celebrated as a national holiday.

Thanks to their shepherd's attitude focused on the communication of a revealed truth to new nations with respect to their spiritual peculiarities, Saints Cyril and Methodius became living models and spiritual supports for all Christians in every period. Moreover, for our region, their mission has a unifying meaning. In that sense we can say the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition is also the spiritual foundation of the Visegrad Group, over which the Czech Republic has presidency, roughly for a year already.

The legacy of the Solun brothers Constantine and Methodius is so rich and profound in all respects that it cannot be limited to one sphere of the national existence only. Immense was the contribution of their mission in the sphere of religion, culture, writing, education, and the like. However, their mission had also a nation-forming and state-forming dimension. With their baptismal efforts the beginnings of our existence among the cultured nations are connected.

They had always been led by the ideal of uniting new Christians in Christ. Their ceaseless effort in spreading the news about Christ's incarnation and the salvation of the world had always combined with the inward respect for the people, among whom they carried out their mission.

Through the fact that they adapted the rich and beautiful liturgical texts to the language of the local Slavs, they opened to them a world of ancient traditions and experience, the depth of spiritual thinking of the Old as well as of the New Testament.

Worship in the Slavonic language gave to our forefathers the feeling of being free children of God, equal among the equals in the family of European nations. The unique, for Slavonic sounds adapted writing created by Constantine-Cyril, served for the creation of translations and stimulated original literary activity.

The mission of the Solun brothers provided a number of other stimuli in the sphere of hymnography and iconography, contained practical instructions and models from the sphere of preaching and patristics. In their work we can find also

political and diplomatic stimuli, as well as instructions for the development of agricultural skills.

Not even after the death of Saint Methodius was the legacy of the first missionaries forgotten or totally suppressed at Velehrad. As our famous literary historian Albert Praoák noted, the Slavonic language used in the church services had such a tremendous load capacity that it became the historical matter of the presence of Bohemia on the European crossroad – here the Czech historical tradition was born, the defense of nation and language.

Perception of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition has surely been changing in the course of the centuries. The spirit of the age, interests and anxieties of the age got reflected in it. However, the incessant effort in the integration of our nations into the Christian community as of equal members with full rights and obligations remained steady.

In every period, beside the religious content of the Cyrillo-Methodian theme, there also emerged cultural and political aspects, the principle of regional mutuality had been emphasized. Even though the nature of the Cyrillo-Methodian cult was transnational, this tradition has always played an important role in the strengthening of patriotism of our nations, in the growing awareness of our nation of itself.

The Cyrillo-Methodian theme penetrated deep into the plebeian classes, it became a means of defense of national and ecclesiastical rights. In the hard times of subjugation Moravian Velehrad had always become a place of hope and trust in the better future of the nation.

During the celebrations of the 1100th anniversary of Saint Methodius' death in 1985 the Velehrad pilgrimage became a real demonstration against the totalitarian regime . tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks acknowledged allegiance to the spiritual legacy of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission, to Christian faith, traditions and foundations from which our state emerged and on which it developed.

The Solun brothers were and remain a living model for the Church and for missionaries of all times. They accomplished what should be the purpose of missionary work: to integrate the Gospel into the local culture, and thus integrate it into the life of the universal church. It is love for the community of the universal church . be it in the East or in the West . that is characteristic of both the brothers.

Their appeal has not lost its validity even for us, Europeans of the 21st century . it is still the same ecumenical invitation to the building of a community, in which it would be possible to find a visible unity again, which is a gift from God but, at the same time, also a gift of people to God. Thus, we will celebrate the

anniversary of the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia also with claiming allegiance of our region to the Cross, which . as Cardinal Dominik Duka said . % is not only a symbol of suffering of Jesus Christ, but also a symbol of the meeting of the great love of God with freedom.+

An answer to this need, to preserve and develop the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy of freedom, is also the Visegrad initiative, a positive project, which allows us to take real responsibility for the central European space.

When the German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited the Bratislava summit of the Visegrad Group on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its founding, she said, %Freedom is nothing that can be taken for granted; it is something that needs to be fought for every day.+We know that in this everyday struggle we can lean against the historically approved and to our nations so close Cyrillo-Methodian tradition.

I wish you a beautiful artistic experience.