

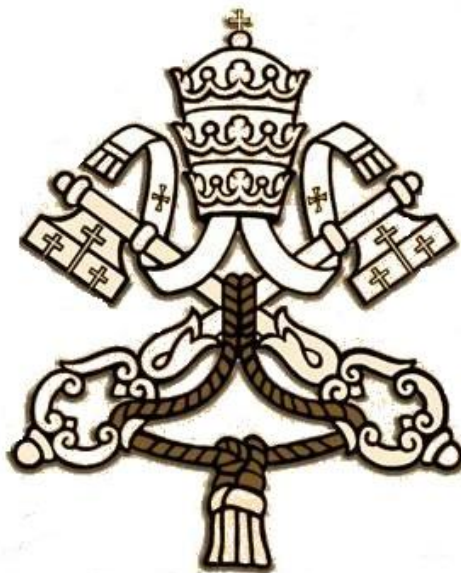


АТЛАНТИЧЕСКИЯТ КЛУБ В БЪЛГАРИЯ
THE ATLANTIC CLUB OF BULGARIA

MEMORANDUM

*Relationships between
the Holy See and The Atlantic Club of Bulgaria*

(1991-2016)



**The Atlantic Club of Bulgaria (ACB):
Boosting Bulgaria -- Holy See Relations (1990-present)**

ACB's track record: Driving force behind first papal visit to Bulgaria (2002)

A. Pope John Paul II era.

December 6, 1990: diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the Holy See were restored after broken off in 1949 by the then communist regime in Sofia.

July 9, 1991: the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See was opened in Sofia. Simultaneously Dr. Solomon Passy MP & his group create the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria (ACB), which facilitated these two processes and prioritize the relations between the two states.

November 18, 1994: HH Pope John Paul II gives the historic private audience to ACB which eventually led to the first ever papal visit to Bulgaria, after 12 centuries bilateral diplomatic relations. The forty-member ACB delegation included leading Bulgarian influencers: intellectuals, statesmen, sportsmen and journalist. Dr. Passy invited Pope John Paul II to Bulgaria and requested his opinion on the innocence of Bulgaria in the assassination attempt against him in 1981. At a tête-à-tête meeting with Solomon Pope's associates assured him that the Pope has never believed in the Bulgarian involvement in this attack and HH would deliver this message during his dreamed visit to Bulgaria some day.

Upon return from the Vatican ACB founded the National Committee for inviting the Pope and its activity in challenging domestic environment was crowned with success in 2002 with the Apostolic visit to Bulgaria on 23-26 May. At that time Foreign Minister of Bulgaria was Solomon Passy with Prime Minister King Simeon II whose enlightened Government had prioritized the Pope's visit, overcoming all political hurdles in front of it.

Two weeks before his Apostolic visit to Bulgaria, Pope John Paul II gave a private audience to Minister Solomon Passy in Rome. At the end of the meeting the Pope bestowed the "San Vincenzo i Anastasio" church to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. On the initiative of Minister Passy maestro Prof. Todor Vardjiev made the church altar and the iconostasis.

The visit concluded a two-decade period of defaming Bulgaria for the alleged participation in the 1981 terrorist attack. The Pope, keeping his word from 1994, announced the truth in Sofia. Minister Passy still believes that it is not a mere coincidence that, later in this same year 2002, Bulgaria got both the invitations to join NATO and the EU.

Minister Passy was the escorting host officer of the Pope in Bulgaria and took active role in the preparation of the bilateral meeting between Pope John Paul II and the Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim. Later there was a thanksgiving visit of members of the Bulgarian Holy Synod in Rome during which the cardinals who were accompanying Pope John Paul II in Bulgaria received the high state award Order of Stara Planina.

During the visit of Pope John Paul II Minister Passy shared with the Pope that Bulgaria won its place in history with three major achievements – the deed of Saints Cyril and Methodius; the salvation of its Jewish population in WWII, and the invention of the computer by John Vincent Atanasoff who was of Bulgarian ancestry. These facts greatly impressed the Holy See delegation especially in view of the fact that Pope John Paul II declared Saints Cyril and Methodius co-patron saints of Europe with the Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* of 31 December 1980.

ACB played the major role in organizing and hosting major public events during the papal visit and renaming “Freedom” Square in Sofia into “Pope John Paul II” and erecting Pope's monument on this same square as well as issuing a national philatelic set on the occasion.

In 2003 a memorial composition, authored again by maestro Prof. Todor Vardjiev, was erected in the Vatican Gardens, Rome – one of the very few foreign monuments there. It carries the inscription “To Pope John Paul II with love from the Bulgarian people”.

In 2004, as a Chairman-in-Office of OSCE Minister Passy launched the next OSCE Summit to be held in Moscow to serve Passy's ecumenical vision for a meeting between Pope John Paul II and the then Russian Patriarch Alexy II. Such bilateral meeting happened twelve years later in 2016 in Cuba between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill I.

On 1-4 October 2004 the Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Gruncharova (the future wife of Dr. Solomon Passy) was on a diplomatic visit to the Holy See where she met the Undersecretary of State for Relations with States Pietro Parolin. She discussed with him the Bulgarian initiatives in OSCE during the time Bulgaria presided the organization and asked him to visit Bulgaria.

ACB also took active part in the rebuilding of St Joseph Cathedral in Sofia whose corner stone was laid by Pope John Paul II and was inaugurated in 2006 during Cardinal Angelo Sodano's visit.

Another ACB achievement was naming in 2005 the Ioannes Paulus II Peninsula on the north coast of Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands, Antarctica after Pope John Paul II, by the Antarctic Place-naming Commission presided by the then Chairman of ACB Dr Lyubomir Ivanov.

ACB holds also occasional commemoration ceremonies.

November 2000: in commemoration of the sixth anniversary of its audience with Pope John Paul II and the 119th anniversary of the birth of Pope John XXIII (Angelo Roncalli, nuncio in Bulgaria), ACB presents “Benediktsiya” documentary of the film director Prof. Lyubomir Halatchev.

June 14, 2012: ACB & ICD - Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin organized a round table on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Bulgaria “John Paul II: The Man Who Changed the World”.

During the visit of Pope John Paul II to Bulgaria Minister Passy handed him a proposal for ordination of a Bulgarian cardinal -- a priority ACB still keeps on its agenda with the Holy See.

B. Pope Benedict XVI period

December 6, 2006: ACB attends with VIP delegation audience of Pope Benedict XVI and gives him a map of Livingston Island in Antarctica, showing the peninsula named after his predecessor.

February 6, 2013: ACB attends with 25-member VIP delegation audience of Pope Benedict XVI and in private talk invites him to visit Bulgaria. The Pope unexpectedly withdrew from the Apostolic See three weeks later.

ACB's future plans: with Pope Francis

- ACB is planning to initiate, promote and facilitate a visit of Pope Francis to Bulgaria.
- ACB is planning to erect a joint monument in Sofia of the two “Bulgarian” Popes – John XXIII and John Paul II.
- ACB is planning to invite the Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin -- during his expected visit to Bulgaria -- to deliver a public lecture at event organized by ACB.

Last updated: February 24, 2016