



On the route to Santiago de Compostela!

A pilgrimage in 2004 to be led by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community and Archbishop Julián Barrio Barrio of Santiago de Compostela

“Look! How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together!” (Ps 133:1)

The year 2004 will be a historic moment for the European Union and for Europe as a whole. Ten more European nations will join the Union: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. For the other European states which are not yet members of the EU, the road to accession has also been mapped out.

Preparations for this crucial step towards the political unification of the whole of Europe within the European Union are moving forward. The countries wishing to join have made enormous efforts over the past few years to stabilise the democratic order, to establish a functioning market economy and also to ensure that the community law on which the European Union is founded also becomes their own law. The Convention on the Future of Europe is drawing up proposals for new forms of co-operation in an ever larger Union, which will be discussed by the Member States at an Intergovernmental Conference in 2003. The Church, which is present in all European nations, also wishes to contribute towards the success of this new stage.

The imminent accession to the European Union of the countries of Central and Southern Europe fills us with joy and we await it with confidence. At the same time, our thoughts are with those who regard this new phase of European history with concern for the unknown that it represents. For this reason, we are convinced that it is time to deepen the spiritual dimension in Europe because “If the Lord does not build a house, then those who build it work in vain” (Ps 127:1).

To express our trust in the Lord and our thankfulness and to give witness to our hope, we will make a pilgrimage in 2004 to the tomb of Saint James the Apostle of Compostela. We have gladly accepted the invitation extended by our brother the Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela to join in this pilgrimage on the occasion of the Holy Year of the Cathedral of Santiago, which is celebrated every year that the feast of Saint James falls on a Sunday.

We shall make this pilgrimage together with the faithful from our countries, with personalities from the political sphere, and with members and representatives of religious communities and organisations. We hope that many Europeans will also take the pilgrims' route to Santiago or other places of pilgrimage in Europe and join us in this way.

With the political unification of Europe approaching, ecumenical challenges become even more perceptible. It is therefore our dearest wish for representatives of other confessions to accompany us on our way to Santiago. The political union of Europe calls for ever-closer companionship of its spiritual and religious forces.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, with its network of routes stretching across Europe, is the perfect symbol of European unity. The proximity to Cape Finisterre on the Atlantic coast - the 'end of the world' - confronts us with a future as yet unknown, which in the age of globalisation will join Europe with the whole of humanity in a new way. In this way the pilgrimage to Santiago is also a spiritual journey which reminds us of the sense of European unification: the peoples and nations of Europe unite in the European Union and at the same time open themselves up to the world.

Brussels, 9 May 2003

+ *Josef Homeyer*
Bishop of Hildesheim
President of COMECE

+ *Adrianus van Luyn*
Bishop of Rotterdam
Vice-President

+ *Hippolyte Simon*
Archbishop of Clermont
Vice-President

+ *Julián Barrio Barrio*
Archbishop of Santiago
de Compostela

+ *John Crowley*
Bishop of Middlesbrough (England and Wales)

+ *Teodoro De Faria*
Bishop of Funchal (Portugal)

+ *Jozef De Kesel*
Auxiliary Bishop of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium)

+ *Joseph Duffy*
Bishop of Clogher (Ireland)

+ *Fernand Franck*
Archbishop of Luxembourg

+ *Egon Kapellari*
Bishop of Graz-Seckau (Austria)

+ *William Kenney*
Auxiliary Bishop of Stockholm (Sweden)

+ *Giuseppe Merisi*
Auxiliary Bishop of Milan (Italy)

+ *John Mone*
Bishop of Paisley (Scotland)

+ *Elias Yanes Álvarez*
Archbishop of Zaragoza (Spain)

+ *Václav Malý*
Auxiliary Bishop of Prague (Czech Rep.)

+ *Joseph Mercieca*
Archbishop of Malta

+ *Henryk Muszynski*
Archbishop of Gniezno (Poland)

+ *František Rábek*
Bishop of the Armed Forces (Slovakia)

+ *Anton Stres*
Auxiliary Bishop of Maribor (Slovenia)

+ *András Veres*
Auxiliary Bishop of Eger (Hungary)

Rev. Gintaras Grusas
Lithuanian Bishops' Conference

We support this initiative of the Bishops for a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and hope to be able to participate,

Mr Bertie Ahern
An Taoiseach
President-in-Office of the
European Council (1st half 2004)

Mr Pat Cox
President of the
European Parliament

Mr Romano Prodi
President of the
European Commission