

NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION of the FEDERAL PRESIDENT H.E. Dr. HEINZ FISCHER

ADDRESS

by

H.E. Archbishop Dr. Edmond Farhat
Apostolic Nuncio
Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps in Vienna

Unofficial Translation

Mr. Federal President!

As Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Austria, this year I am being granted, once again, the great privilege and honour of wishing you, Your Excellency, and the Austrian people, the very best as well as prosperity and God's rich Blessings for the year 2009, both on my own behalf and on behalf of my colleagues. Feeling very much linked to you, we thank you for your goodwill and confidence, and for the calm hand with which you, Mr. Federal President, are striving to bring a solution to political tensions and are setting inspirational goals.

As we look back on the year 2008, now behind us, we necessarily take distinctive views of what happened and – depending on our own positions – differ in our assessment of events in Austria, in Europe, and in the world. And while we have seen many problematic decisions, distressing or painful situations, sorrowful incidences and unsettling surprises, equally we have witnessed a whole series of positive events, and signs of transformation, renewal and hope.

The negative memories of 2008 include, most certainly, the situations a number of regions in the world are faced with, which remain constant threats and bring unspeakable sorrow to the people affected, and the global financial crisis which all of a sudden has intruded upon today's often carefree and easygoing lives. This is exactly why Pope Benedict XVI wanted to call to mind the connection between poverty and discord. In his message for peace to all nations delivered at the turn of the New Year, His Holiness invited all of us to "fight poverty and to build peace".

The election of a new government in Austria on 28 September, held in the wake of growing tensions within the old government, should help bring about greater stability and resolve in the interest and for the benefit of all Austrians, so that they can aspire to reach "the goals of a human and liveable society" ever more closely, as brought to our minds in your New Year address. At this point I would like to call on the responsible decision-makers not to be afraid of

the future. When refugees who are legitimate, honest and peace-loving are looking for a decent and worthy life in Austria, the doors should not be closed to them!

Among the many positive events I could mention, I will pick out the European football championships Austria hosted so masterly last summer. Austria organised and generated motivation for this event with great even-handedness and circumspection. We thank the Austrian Republic for this commitment and for those weeks that were sustained by such widespread enthusiasm for sport.

Another positive aspect is the sense of prudence with which stability is being created in times of economic crisis, with which financial security is given to the citizens and viable guarantees for the national economy, to aid economic recovery. Within the European Union, Austria plays a crucial role in coping with the current crisis on the levels of economic and financial policy.

Your Excellences, Mr. Federal President!

The speech you delivered at the ceremony commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Austria was constructive, reassuring and encouraging. In a measured way, and with deep respect for its history and its people, as well as with tactfulness and sensitivity, you took stock of the 90 years of existence of the Republic in objective and respectful terms. You spoke of theses and antitheses, of shadow and light, of hope and idealism, of bread and work, of enthusiasm and resistance. In the light of the current global situation and the threatened economies, you rejected attempts to give in to apprehension, fear or radical tendencies.

Looking back on the positive realities of history, we find that there is burgeoning hope for things to turn out for the better through the joint efforts of the community of nations.

Viribus unitis (with united forces) has long been the motto of Austrian politics. And it is this very motto I would like to call to our minds in these current times – times of a crisis we are commonly witnessing, but times also of sincerely sought solidarity. We will master the difficulties of the present, and those inherited from the past, with the united forces of solidarity and an eagerness for peace. May Austria and its new federal government advance and indeed thrive “with united forces” under Your Excellency’s wise presidency.

Cum renovatis votis omnia fausta ac prospera pro eventuro anno MMIX ominor et exopto Felix Austria, vivas, crescas, floreas!

Vienna, 13 January 2009