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BENEDICT XVI GREETES RUSSIAN PRESIDENT

Analyst Notes New Era of Russia-Vatican Relations

By Jesús Colina

VATICAN CITY, FEB. 17, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI received in audience today Dmitry Medvedev, the president of Russia, during which the two spoke of a mutual desire to strengthen bilateral relations and collaborate in the promotion of human and Christian values.

A Vatican press statement released after the meeting stated that the "cordial" discussions also addressed "the positive contribution interreligious dialogue can make to society," as well as "the international situation, with particular reference to the Middle East."

Medvedev, accompanied by the minister for foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, also met with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states.

Robert Moynihan, the founder and editor of the monthly magazine "Inside the Vatican," told ZENIT that he considers the meeting to be a confirmation of a new era of collaboration between Russia and the Catholic Church.

"I find this meeting between the president of Russia and Benedict XVI a highly visible confirmation of a multi-year process of ever-improving relations between Russia and the Vatican," said Moynihan. "The two leaders are not talking about theological matters; they are talking about values, about how Russia and the Catholic Church can work together in the cultural and social field."

He continued: "I note that this meeting in Rome takes place just after a week-long visit of Russian orthodox metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, chairman of the Department of External Church Relations and a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow, to the United States, where he met with Protestant evangelical as well as U.S. government and Catholic leaders in New York, Washington and Dallas.

"Hilarion delivered precisely this same message everywhere he went in the United States: that Russia is ready to collaborate with the West on cultural and social matters such as support for marriage and the traditional family."

Clear message

"I see Medvedev's visit to the Pope in this context," added Moynihan, who is considered to be an expert in Russia-Vatican relations. "The message seems clear: Russian leaders are taking the initiative to reach out to the West with proposals of cultural and social collaboration. It seems to be a plan.

"In any case, it is one of the most interesting phenomena on the global cultural and political scene, and the pope's meeting with Medvedev is a punctuation mark in this process."

Moynihan said the next step "is still not clear, but I suspect it will be concrete cultural and social initiatives in which western Christians and others of good will will create structures to work with the Russians on some of the great moral challenges of our time."

"And I think," he added, "uniting the financial and spiritual strength of a resurgent Russia seeking its identity with the strength of the Catholics and evangelicals of the West could have dramatic consequences for the impact and success of what we may call those 'traditional values' initiatives in the years ahead."

"The next steps to watch for will be the launching of concrete common efforts, and then a meeting between the Pope and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch, Kirill, perhaps in two years time," Moynihan concluded. "But there are many forces opposed to this developing alliance,

so there are likely to be many potholes and obstacles on the road toward truly effective and culture-changing Russian-Vatican collaboration."