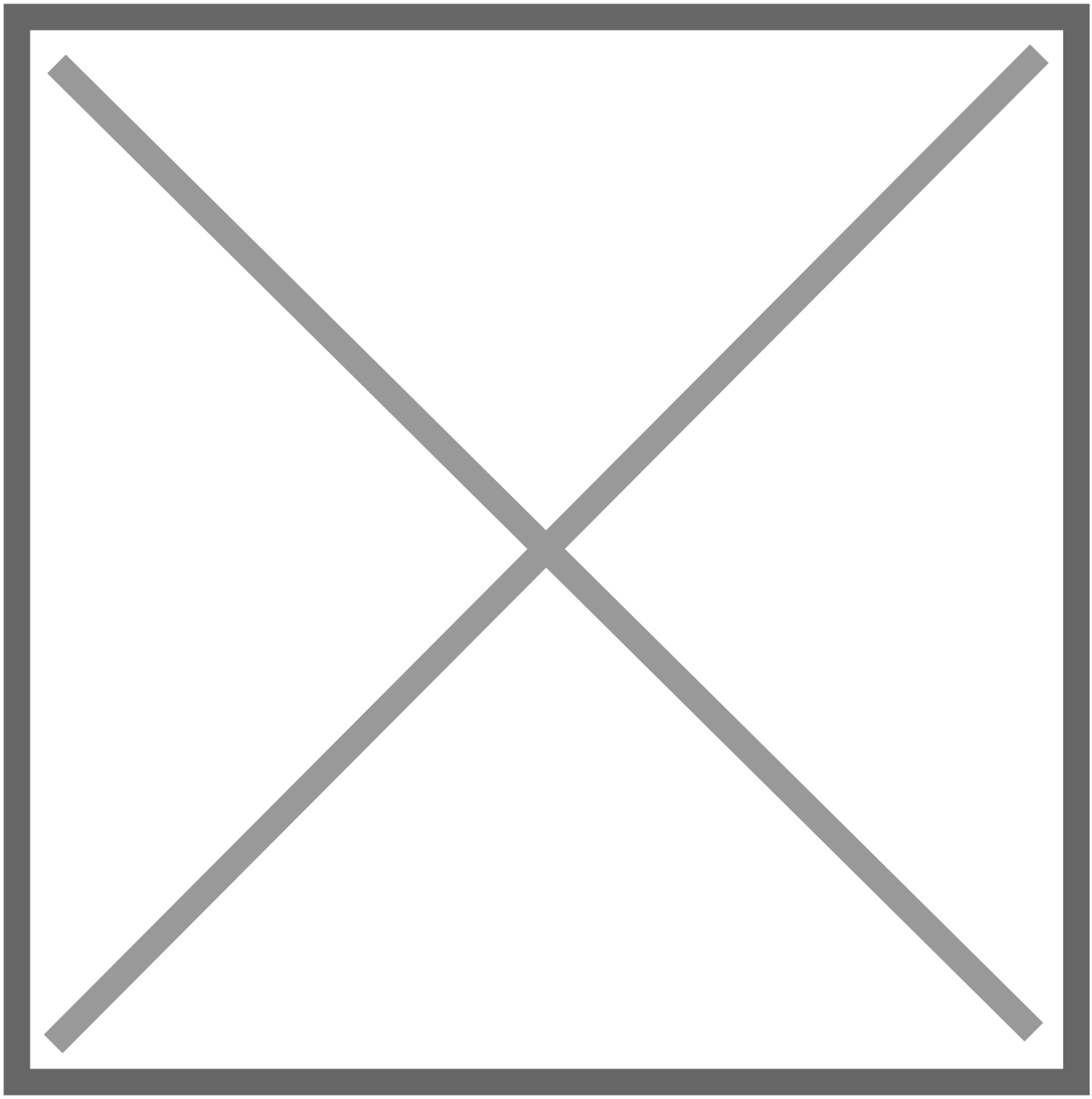
Vatican
News



Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Minsk, Belarus, speaks to reporters at his cathedral after returning to Minsk Dec. 24, 2020. Pope Francis has accepted the retirement of the archbishop, who had been banned from re-entering Belarus. (CNS/Reuters/Stringer)

Carol Glatz

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Vatican City — January 4, 2021
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Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Minsk, Belarus, who had been blocked from entering his homeland for four months until negotiations between the Vatican and the Belarusian authorities allowed him back in time for Christmas.

The Vatican announced the archbishop's retirement Jan. 3, the day the archbishop turned 75 — the age at which canon law requires bishops to turn in their resignation to the pope. It is unusual for the pope to accept the resignation of a bishop the day he turns 75 and for the Vatican to make such announcements on a Sunday.

The unusual nature of his immediate retirement led some to believe it was part of the agreement to allow his return to Belarus.

With the archbishop stepping down, Francis appointed Auxiliary Bishop Kazimierz Wielikosielec of Pinsk as apostolic administrator of Minsk; he celebrated his 75th birthday in May.

The Catholic agency AsiaNews wrote Jan. 3 that in his 31 years as a bishop, Kondrusiewicz "has been one of the main engines of the Catholic revival in the ex-Soviet world, reopening over 100 parishes, rebuilding dozens of Catholic churches and structures, including the seminary of St. Petersburg and that of Grodno, and

finally becoming the symbol of popular protest against the last Soviet satrap, the Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko."

Kondrusiewicz, who had gone to Poland in August, was blocked from reentering Belarus Aug. 31. The previous weekend, the archbishop had a statement read in Belarusian churches warning that the country could be on the brink of civil war because of violence and demonstrations protesting the Aug. 9 presidential election. Lukashenko declared himself the winner for a sixth term in the widely disputed election.

The archbishop's treatment was seen by many as part of the effort by Lukashenko and his supporters to halt criticism of his government and to sideline those who might support people criticizing Lukashenko's government.

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