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Report of the President about the period 2013 to 2014

Good morning again dear friends and comrades of our community!

It's now the third time that I raise my voice. This time I feel it is time to tell you, what happened within AMI since the last conference in CELJE/SLOVENIA, which goals we followed and follow, which measures I took, what has changed in my personal life and what I want to offer to you.

First I think that our last conference was an extremely interesting and fruitful one. All people worked in an excellent way and contributed to the results. I really was grateful for all what you members of the conference had done. Concerning this I want to mention father Dolan, who took the responsibility to put together all results for a short resume.

My special thanks I express to the General Vicar of the Slovenian Armed Forces, Mons. Dr. Joze PLUT. And of course his excellent team. They organised our conference in a really positive way.

This first slide I show to you is to be seen in context with our conference. It shows not the largest Italian WW I monument in Redipuglia, north-eastern part of Italy, where our Holy Father prayed for peace a week ago, but the modest Austrian-Hungarian WW I cemetery, maybe one kilometre away, where our Holy Father prayed, too.

Today I would like to look back to 2012 too, that was Retie in BELGIUM, because it was my first conference as president of AMI. Beside all results of the conference we got deep inside – looks to the political and social situation in Belgium and I like to say thank you again to the Military Bishop of Belgium, His Eminence Andre LEONHARD, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels and all responsible working for the conference that they made it possible in this specific way.

We worked on the following themes:

BELGIUM: How to deal with dead and injured persons after conflicts,
SLOVENIA: Gaudium et Spes and Pacem in Terris,

And this year:

100 years after – what experiences do we have and what challenges will we face. WW I contributes the title, but it is meant to talk about experiences during the whole period, that brings me to the next slide, showing a wooden cross in the Cathedral of Vezelay in Burgundy/France. After the end of WW II, in 1946, allied soldiers organised a pilgrimage to

the Cathedral of Vezelay, intending to pray for peace. Somewhere in the environment a PW-camp for German soldiers had been erected, and the prisoners asked to take part in this pilgrimage. Christian soldiers for Christian soldiers allowed it. Thus some fifteen wooden crosses are lined up, the German one in the choir of the church since the late forties.

All themes I mentioned above were and are important for soldiers and responsible military personnel.

From my point of view we discussed problems worth to be discussed and important enough to find clear words if not solutions.

Talking about the past is not possible without thinking about the future. It is one year we have been starting to prepare the conference of 2015, the fiftieth anniversary of AMI. That brought me to my intention to apply for another three-year's period as president of AMI. So I would like to inform you about my thoughts concerning the upcoming three years: The upcoming three year's-period should remain under the all over umbrella:

The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace. "To live authentically according to the Word of God and to spread the gospel".

Beneath it we will organise a program, of which at the end a further document of AMI should be possible to be published.

We will do the first step with our next year's conference, which will take place in Santiago de Compostela in SPAIN. It is great, that after a little bit longer period SPAIN is again on board and will share with us time, problems to be solved and friendship. I am happy that you all are with us.

One project will be to prepare for our conference next year the publication of a book about AMI, its goals, tasks and work. Theoretical background and practice shall be represented. Honestly, it is not easy to organise it and my vice-president Michael Jedlicka first took the responsibility to put together all ideas and to formulate it as an abridged version, on which the book shall be based.

Unfortunately Michael will leave from his function as vice-president of AMI due to his other professional obligations, and LtCol. Andreas Preuss from GERMANY has accepted to take over and do his best to bring our project to an end. Thank you both, thanks to all authors, who have accepted the invitation to write an essay for our publication.

I once like to mention that all member or associated states are invited to contribute to the content of our publication. It is another opportunity not only to describe the situation in your respective country, but also to explain how Christian life should be organised from your specific point of view.

One of the goals will be widen the frame of our organisation. Maybe the presence of father Peter O'Keefe from AUSTRALIA is an encouraging momentum in this respect. It is first time that all continents are gathered. Isn't that great?

What I to undertake is to get into contact with the Latin-American world. To be honest, it is not my idea because Pope Francisco went to Saint Peters Throne; I started my attempts already the year before.

As often things are not thus easy than expected. First it is a problem of language, and secondly a problem of money. Because I always am positive thinking, I am convinced, that both problems are to be solved.

Up to now I do have excellent contacts to Military Bishop Both from BRASILIA, and Brasilia intended to send a delegation to this year's conference, but unfortunately due to the changes in the Military Ordinariate of Brasilia, they had to cancel their attendance. You can see Bishop Both on this slide.

Beside this, letters of invitation to ARGENTINA and CHILE are on their way, and I expect to receive answers soon.

It is even necessary and important, to bring back our European Catholic friends. Very often relationship is depending on single persons, and if they leave, even the contacts end. To foster it and make them durable is really a challenge. I got into contact with the Military Bishop of Italy and France. But I have to wait for answers.

ASIA with the PHILIPPINES and AFRICA, this year represented only by GAMBIA are present. Hopefully in the upcoming years even other African countries will be able to take part. To sum up this aspect - I will try to get as much countries as possible on board.

Another goal has to be the discussion under which conditions and in which environment within Armed Forces Catholicism is possible to be practised. When looking on Pacem in Terris, we recognize, that most of the described developments are NOW on the way, causing beneath others diminishing interest in Christianity and Christian values, growing attention to obscure circles and para-religious organisations. Christianity is pushed to privacy, and even in military organisations we more and more have to recognize that there is no space for religiosity. Or has Christianity lost its fascination?

The so-called professionalism as well as political and society resistance against Christianity are main obstacles. Sure, maybe I speak about a mainly Western European problem, but it is not to be excluded that it can arise in other parts of the world too.

So let me turn to the events of daily life of AMI:

It is marvellous, the Austrian institution, run by the Military Ordinariate, Institute for Religion and Peace, organises every year an Enquete, which forms the frame for talks and meetings. Even AMI presidency met October last year there to talk about this year's conference and to get in contact with many Bishops from foreign countries.

In November we travelled to Rome, later in December the presidium met again for talks in Vienna.

In December I had the opportunity to talk with the Nuncio in Austria about the developments in the Austrian Armed Forces, Association of Austrian Catholic soldiers and, of course, AMI.

In early January we again met in Marianka for talks with Military Bishop RABEK.

In January I had the opportunity to assist World Peace day of the German Armed Forces in Cologne and to talk not only Cardinal Meisner, but the German Chief of Defence Staff, too.

In March we again met Bishop Rabek and his team to discuss our conference.

Maybe not thus interesting, but remarkable, I had the opportunity to hold a lecture about the relationship between the Emperor Francis Joseph and a Regiment of the British Empire, who's owner he was until the beginning of WW I.

On May 6, I assisted a holy mess to honour Military Bishop of Austria, Christian Werner, on the occasion of his 25th Bishop's anniversary.

May 23, I held a lecture about AMI during the so-called "Long night of Churches" somewhere in the Federal County of Burgenland.

Later on we met again for talks in Madrid, concerning next year's conference, and finally a last internal preparatory meeting took place in Carinthia.

Last aspects – changes in my life.

At the mid of the last year it became clear, that I would retire end of November after 42 years of military service. Honestly, time started running in a not foreseeable way and so many events became the "last one"!

After the conference of 2013 I travelled with the promotional class of 2013 to Italy in the region of the Isonzo and Piave-river. The young officer-cadets became insight in the Front and the fights and talked about historical battles.

End of September the last Promotion under my command took place.

I travelled to the Military University of Sibiu, to which we are connected extremely well and received there the degree as a Senator of Honour of the University.

Later the year I visited the Military Academy of Estonia in TARTU and took part in the talks of Academy Commandants in Vilnius/Lithuania and where I said good-bye as the elder commandant.

October 26, I assisted last time the military festivities of our National Holiday.

Finally I, of course, took the responsibility for my own military farewell-party November 30. It was the best moment to leave, brings me more time for AMI, my family and especially my wife Ida, who stands by me since 1973, and my interests.

And to come really to the end: a short joke:

How a General recognizes not longer being General?

He enters his car, saying to the driver let's go – and nothing happens!

This ends my report. I thank you for your long lasting attention!