



SUMMARY OF THE FEEDBACK TO THE REPORT OF FR. RUPNIK AND THE ROUND TABLE

drafted by Fr. Mariano J. Sedano on behalf of the Executive
Committee

We are grateful to the Lord who allowed us to live these days in Albania, the land of eagles! It was a true experience of community, that is, of ecclesiality. It is not about doctrine, but life. We understood that when we say 'Church' (Ekklesia or Koinonia), we are talking about a new life that has been given to us as a gift, without any merit on our part. This is why, when we reflect on our role as witnesses and shapers of communion in Europe, we are dealing first of all with a change of mentality. It is not about making our own projects, in which the point of departure and arrival is always ourselves, but about delving into a gift that we are to develop. This is flying high. Letting Him lift and carry us on the wings of the eagle, as God himself reminds us (Ex 19: 4-5).

The Church experience, when lived as a new way of life in Christ, is the recovery of the memory of the original man created by God, i.e. as created for communion and love lived in the form of self-giving, and for the discovery of our own face in the face of our brother or sister. When humans are closed onto themselves and self-referential, they do not understand this any longer, because they live isolated in their self-affirmation. We can experience this new paradigm if we are attracted by the beauty of ecclesiality. Monks, religious, and consecrated people have historically been a living experience of ecclesiality, and for this reason, they have testified it. Let us live in such a way as to show that life would not make sense if God did not exist, because it is the experience of the 'Thou' of God that makes us live in communion, in an outgoing status that enables us to affirm and love the others.

The Church documents say that we are in the very heart of the Church (VC 3), because we are the heart of the Church experience, that is, we are the living memory of the communion that makes the whole Church become what it already is by its own vocation and by the gift it received. When we give witness to communion, we also realize what the whole humankind is called to be. Our witness becomes, then, humble craftwork which slowly and patiently, but with all the strength of symbol, gives rise to another always new and fascinating reality, in our context of European men and women religious – despite the fact that we are declining in number, increasing in age, so often perplexed in the face of so many challenges, and tired of our many failed attempts.

After the work of these days, first of all we want to express our faith in the Lord who has given us the gift of consecrated life, which "renews your youth like an eagle's" (Psalm 103.5). With our eyes on His eyes, even if we are no longer so young as before, such gift "will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings" (Is 40: 31). We have new challenges to face before us, but also precious gifts to share. This is why we dear to say:

- We believe in the historic strength and effectiveness of our prayer, which bears witness before all to our filiation. We have hope because we have a Father. We exist because He has called us to the existence and deification, i.e. to live as God Trinity lives. In prayer, especially in the liturgical prayer of the Church, we remember, relive and anticipate a deeper experience of communion and of humanity reconciled in God. But even in prayer we experience the problems of our world, the dreams, the joy and hardships, the expectations and sufferings of all humans. St. Teresa of Avila - whose 500th anniversary we celebrate this year – used to say: "What would happen in the world if there were no

religious?"¹ Actually, she did not think of men and women religious dedicated to educational, social, charitable, or missionary works. The world keeps going thanks to the communion of prayer of believers. An Orthodox monk of Mount Athos shares this same experience: "When there will be no more monks on earth, the world will collapse. The world is alive thanks to the prayers of the monks."²

- We believe in the living and symbolically effective testimony of our fraternal life in community. We feel the tension and disappointment that our European society arouses, and which provoke an ever increasing violence. We see with horror the new threats of terrorism on a global scale. And with this background, our European continent, which is increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious, seems a very complex scenario for a communion, which ought to be something more than a pact of non-aggression. We, European men and women religious, are not politicians or economists, but we have a treasure to share with everyone else: the gift of life in a community. It is a true gift, a miracle indeed. Throughout the ages, this gift has proven solid and humanizing. In this year in which we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Benedict as a patron saint of Europe, we still believe that peace is a possible ideal, built by working hand in hand as craftsmen with brothers and sisters of different origins and ideas, and asking humbly in common prayer. The religious must be experts of communion, as Pope Francis reminds us by citing Pope St. John Paul II. This is a gift that you only learn together with others. Our community must be, therefore, theophanic places for the transfiguration of people, but at the same time, laboratories or schools of a new language of communion, where the 'other' has the preference, and people will learn the truth about themselves by looking at the face of their brother or sister.
- We believe in the fundamental validity of the steps we have already taken on the path of communion and collaboration among us, among our institutions and national Conferences, and among our pastors, laity, and Church movements. We believe in the validity and necessity of UCESM as a witness and instrument of communion between the various Conferences of our continent and the other Church bodies in Europe. Faced with the new European and global challenges, we must start rethinking the role of UCESM and its objectives to turn it into a real instrument at the service of a more concrete communion among the religious in Eastern and Western Europe. A forum for discussion and mutual enrichment, which is not afraid of differences and the possible conflicts that the very life of our Conferences may cause, which has the power of launching initiatives at the continental level as part of our mission, and which is the polyphonic, but harmonic voice of consecrated life in Europe. We want this to be a choral and enlarged reflection to the maximum extent, where everyone - from the Roman Congregation up to each individual - can express themselves with freedom and creativity.

In these days in Albania, a land marked by peaceful coexistence among the different religions, but also by the violence of State terrorism and the 'single thought', we have begun a journey of deepening and renewal of our vocation - to be witnesses and shapers of communion in the coming years in Europe. May God help us to listen to what He wants to say to the Churches: pay attention, and do His will, for His glory, "which is the life of man."

Tirana, March 26, 2015

¹ TERESA DE JESUS, *Libro de la Vida*, cap 32, 11.

² IEROMONAJ SOFRONIË, *Starets Siluan*, 169.