



# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 8/December 2008



Security has a social dimension

## EDITORIAL

2008, a year to remember!



2008 will probably be one of these years that go into the history books as an exceptional one. For most of us, normal working people, the worldwide economical and financial crisis came as a surprise. Yes, we all heard experts predicting a change of the economical climate and we have all witnessed the increase of oil prizes, but that this would lead us to a world crisis was a real wake up call for most of us. Devaluation of money, bankruptcy of financial institutions and worldwide companies, people losing their savings, houses and jobs are items that every day again fills our newspapers and television or radio news. A few days ago Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Director of the IMF said that 2008 was a bad year for world economics but that there is no hope that 2009 will be better. The IMF expects that there will be a negative growth all over the world, including the US and Europe.

When I make a link between the financial and economical crisis and our Defence Forces, I believe that there as well we have reason to worry for the near future. Most of the European Defence Forces are since

many years under restructuration and have to work with very limited budgetary means. We all know that in most of the countries Defence Forces are not the first priority of politicians and this has unfortunately negative effects on the defence budget. Very often Armed Forces are welcome when needed in crisis situations or as actors in foreign policy, but are forgotten once they are not longer immediately used. Considering this in relation with the serious economical and financial situation that is predicted for 2009, it could very well be that some or even most of our Defence Forces will have to go through some rough storms. We will have to be very attentive and convince our political leaders every day again that well equipped and trained soldiers are an investment in peace and security and may not be seen as a part of the economical cost of a country or as just another public service.

Personally I close 2008 with contradictory feelings. While we are discussing about the devaluation of our money and the possible negative growth in 2009, hundreds of thousands of people are bearing

an internal war in their own country. In East Congo people run from their villages to escape from the attacks of different troops, especially women and children suffer and are raped, abused or even slaughtered. It has become clear that the UN-mission in the area, MONUC, is not capable to stop this humanitarian catastrophe. The past weeks EU diplomats discussed the possibility to set up a temporary EU-force in East-Congo but did not reach a common agreement yet. In the Presidency Conclusions of the summit of the EU-leaders in Brussels of 11 and 12 December the word 'Congo' didn't even appear! The French President Sarkozy, President of the European Council until 31 December 2008, declared that they hope for a solution after a phone call of the President of Angola, President José Eduardo dos Santos, who is willing to deploy his Armed Forces. I just wonder whether it is still acceptable that we just watch, wait and refuse to help the population in East Congo?

**Emmanuel Jacob**  
President EUROMIL

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# Common European social standards for soldiers: a realistic goal!

**Dr. Otto Heiling gives his viewpoint why common European social standards for soldiers in international missions are necessary.**

Dr. Otto Heiling is the Vice-President of HOSZ (Hungary) and is a newly elected EUROMIL Board member

In the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of the EUROMIL Newsletter Chairman of the Dutch AFMP/FNV Wim van den Burg wrote about an interesting and prevailing topic: is it possible to create a common European standard of social welfare for European soldiers? What shall this common standard include? In his opinion it is time for such a common European social standard for those soldiers serving in common international missions. Common tasks and goals are uniting the soldiers but common social standards and terms and conditions of duty are still missing. And I can only agree with Chairman van den Burg, when he says that this practice is unacceptable.

After the democratic turn in the late 1980s, beginning 1990s the armies in east-Europe were downsized according to OSCE and other disarmament treaties in less than a decade. For Hungary this meant a reduction from 150.000 soldiers of the Warsaw Pact army to 45.000 servicemen- and women. In parallel, the Hungarian forces were transformed from a territorial land based army to an expeditionary army conducting international multilateral interventions.

This transformation included a technical modernisation, creation of new skills and capabilities, abolition of the conscription, concentration of garrisons and further reduction of manpower.

One could believe that this process ought to have lasted many decades, and under normal circumstances I would agree. But in Mid-and East Europe transformation went not – and is still not going – normal. Things happen sometimes very fast. After the Cold War, dynamic and young politicians pushed for fast and cost-efficient changes.

Today Hungary's armed forces have 25.000 soldiers integrated into NATO and the EU and are financed with 1.12 per cent of the GDP. Politicians believe to have achieved the creation of smaller, cheaper, but more efficient and more capable armed forces.

Certainly, the Hungarian armed forces are smaller and

cheaper today but are they really more efficient? I really do not hope that the soldiers have to prove this in the coming years. Fact is, the defence sector is notoriously underfinanced and many plans and conceptions remain dreams. The only comfort for Hungarian soldiers lies in the fact that the defence sector is not alone with this problem.

Rather often the military leadership and politicians only deal with the big picture, strategic planning and major tasks of the armed forces than with the problems of the common soldier. They do not realise that the soldier and his family is bringing the real sacrifice of their plans. Hungary is no exception here. The conditions of soldiers manifestly changed during the transformation



Hungarian soldier on UN mission/Photo copyright HOSZ



“I believe common European social standards for soldiers on international missions are not an unrealistic goal. It is just a question on what level of standards to agree on and we in Hungary strongly hope European common standards will be orientated on Western European standards.”

of the armed forces but with the exception of the competences of the government, the ministers and the military command, the necessary judicial change did not follow accordingly. The Hungarian military is far from implementing existing national rules, not to speak of common European regulations.

The problems described by Chairman van den Burg appear in Hungary in much sharper manner. Although Hungarian soldiers can be sent on international missions abroad, a family-support programme exists merely on paper and in the heads of politicians but not in reality. Hungary does not have a law to support veterans or any other normative social provisions in case of injury or death of a soldier during a mission. It is no surprise to me that Hungary does not even have a specific medical system or an adaptation programme for soldiers and veterans. A discussion held in other nations is ignored in Hungary: PTSD is so far not an issue for our leadership.

According to reports from soldiers deployed on international missions they experienced shortcomings in their equipment and provision with supplies, medical and social care. Despite the fact that Hungary formally opposes opt-outs from EU-directives, the government practices an opt-out from the Working Time Directive (2003/88) for military personnel.

Dear reader, there is much to

do in Hungary in regard of soldiers welfare during international missions.

In this situation that Hungarian soldiers are facing, it would be a great help if the European Union would at least issue a recommendation for European common social standards to the Member states. Even better would be a more thorough and frequent control of the implementation of directives and regulations.

I agree totally with the recommendations of Chairman van den Burg published in the 7th issue of the EUROMIL newsletter as well as with the position of EUROMIL. Our member associations have to enhance their efforts nationally as well as internationally to support a common European social standard. The recommendations published by EUROMIL in the booklet “Challenges of European Soldiers in the Field - The Human Factor in Modern Military Missions” are a good summary of the problems to be addressed through common European social standards.

EUROMIL and its member associations have to set real goals and, knowing they are not to be achieved in a short term, concentrate our efforts to achieve the best for our soldiers. I believe European common social standards for soldiers on international missions are not an unrealistic goal. It is just a question on what level of standards to agree on and we strongly hope common European standards will be orientated on Western European standards. It should be a common interest for both, military associations and Ministries of Defence to achieve best training, best equipment, best medical and social care for our soldiers in international missions to minimise risk and maximise the chances of return and reintegration into society. Where duty and task are common also rights and provisions have to be common. Our soldiers deserve no less.

I believe that EUROMIL has to play a leading role in Europe and be visible and vocal for the soldier's rights in order to convince politicians and the public of the validity of our recommendations and to demonstrate its value for the member associations.



Hungarian soldier in Afghanistan/Picture copyright: HOSZ

# 12-15 November, Brussels: 3rd EUROMIL Congress

EUROMIL held its 98th Presidium Meeting and 3rd Congress in Brussels from 12-15 November 2008. High-ranking officials from the EU, NATO, Belgium and the European trade union movement honoured EUROMIL with their presence.



30 military associations and trade unions from 21 nations sent more than 100 delegates and experts to the EUROMIL Congress. The Congress is the supreme decision-making body of the European Organization of Military Associations.

The official opening of the Congress welcomed high-ranking dignitaries from NATO, the EU-institutions, the European Trade Union Confederation and the host nation, Belgium, who all expressed their support towards EUROMIL's work activities. This not only by their presence but also by impulses on a variety of social issues which are of particular concern to the European soldier today.



The **President of the European Parliament Dr. Pöttering** suggested in his opening speech an intermediary stage between the current reality of autonomous national armed forces and a distant common European army. Mr. Pöttering called it SAFE, Synchronised Armed Forces Europe, based on an opt-in solution where voluntary member states create joint capabilities. SAFE would include the definition of social norms and common rules of engagement for European troops. Mr. Pöttering stated that only if the level of training, rules of engagement and degrees of operational freedom are comparable European soldiers will be able to rely on one another fully. He proposed therefore a common statute that addresses such issues as duties and rights, rules of engagement and social standards, as well as equipment quality, medical care and social security arrangements in the event of death, injury or incapacity.

The **General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation John Monks** stressed the problems of equipment encountered in Afghanistan and the medical problems of former military personnel once they have returned to civilian life, as well as the fact that social costs of soldiers are covered to very different degrees depending on the countries from where the different national contingents come. He welcomed

the work of representation done by the military, and said "we do not hear that voice hard enough" and that it is not sufficiently taken into consideration. Giving ETUC's support to EUROMIL he called for a "new deal" for armed forces in Europe.

**Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, head of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)** stressed in his speech the need to limit the restrictions placed on soldiers'



rights to a maximum. Such restrictions must be proportionate and non-discriminatory evoking in particular, voting rights and rights of association. Restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms should in general be met with suspicion.

**General Egon Ramms, commander of NATO's Joint Force Command,** reminded in his speech among others that all operations will in future be multinational. He hoped that minimum social norms for





**General Egon Ramms, Commander JFC Brunssum, NATO**

these would be gradually set in place. General Ramms added that the strain put on soldiers and in particular their close family because of multiple deployments abroad is an issue to be taken seriously. Family support is therefore an important element for the working conditions of soldiers. The increase of multinational expeditionary missions necessitated an adaptation within the armed forces, so that the soldier is better equipped to work under the changing circumstances. He proposed to harmonize national policy, doctrine and standing operating procedures to common standards with the aim of more interoperability.

**Belgium's Defence Minister Pieter de Crem** reminded at the EUROMIL Congress that defence forces should in general not expect an increase in funding. Among the challenges that will have to be faced by defence

forces are the increasing costs of technology, the fact that Europe is lagging behind in defence research and technology, and also recruitment and training. He emphasised that soldiers need to be well-equipped and in particular mentally prepared for more demanding international missions. High-tech equipment, solid language skills and cultural understanding should therefore be a vital part of training. Priority for him is also to attract highly-skilled staff into the defence forces and that defence should not lose the "war for talent"

Different workshops were furthermore organized during the Congress to discuss specific concerns that European soldiers have.

Read about these workshops in the following contributions in this newsletter.



**Pieter de Crem, Minister of Defence Belgium**



**Newly elected Board during 3rd Congress**

**F.l.to.r.:** A.L.Coelho (ANS/Portugal), F.Vinther (HKKF/Denmark), F.Bengtzen (CS/Denmark), President of EUROMIL E.Jacob (ACMP/Belgium), T.d.Zeeuw (MARVER/FNV/The Netherlands), A. Tichoniuk, (KON-WENT/Poland), Treasurer of EUROMIL, D. Granville (PDFORRA/Ireland), O. Heiling (HOSZ/Hungary).





98th  
Presidium  
Meeting  
and  
3rd  
Congress  
12-15  
November  
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# New and old veterans in the starting blocks

## Expert panel discusses peer-to-peer support programmes for veterans at EUROMIL workshop “Coming Home-Reintegration after service in out-of-area-operations” during 3rd EUROMIL Congress



Mark Sandmann, Trauma Psychologist and Combat Veteran

The workshop was opened by **Mark Sandmann**, a Trauma Psychologist and Combat Veteran of the 101st Airborne Division, from California, USA. His presentation focused on issues of US-soldiers when they return home and promoted a peer-support-programme. Veterans and soldiers have issues not comprehended by the regular fellow citizen. During their mission deployment their family life has gone on in spite of their absence. Once they return, the “psychological bond” has to be adjusted – from the comrade, with whom he shared very stressing moments in the field, back to family and friends. Veterans who are still active soldiers have to worry about future deployments. Hence he/she cannot allow him/herself to settle in and become adjusted.

Mr. Sandmann explained to the delegates and guests that although there are programmes, funds and psychologists, it is observed that veterans are not seeking help. Reasons for this aversion might be mistrust of the government, fear of endangering the military career and the feeling that psychologists

(mostly civilians without own combat experiences) simply do not understand their problems. Hence, the essence of the peer-programme is to have a partner who is just listening and understanding without judgement in order to overcome negative experiences and to enable the veteran to adapt and to change into

civilian life. Entailed

in those programmes are selected specialists for follow up programmes as

and retraining schemes. Mr. Sandmann promoted an expanded focus to be placed on veterans adjustment issues (mental health, medical support, etc.).

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session with an expert panel, comprising of British **Colonel Cuthbert-Brown**, a combat veteran and active garrison commander; **Mrs. Wendy Faux** a retired UK Major and family support specialist; **Mr. Gielt Algra**, a political scientist from the Dutch Veterans Institute and **Mr. Vinther**, chairman of the Danish HKKE, addressing a wide range of issues.

Veterans are showing a particular difficulty to communicate with their relatives. Especially during the deployment this poses a serious stress



Expert panel: Major (ret.) W. Faux, Col. Cuthbert-Brown, Mr. Gielt-Algra, Mr. F. Vinther, Mr. M. Sandmann

well as efforts to encourage universities, employers and the government to allow special and comprehensive access to specific and expanded new training

factor on the soldier as well as to the dependants at home as both parties are unaware of each others problems. A network-programme for dependants



Major (ret.) W. Faux

at home as a first address for problems and to support each other might be a solution. Also the children have to be involved. The panel acknowledged that children pose a very special problem since children rather keep to themselves than to deepen the worries of the parents. Programmes and sensitised teachers in schools can help here.

A cultural shift in the UK armed forces is taking place, which removes the taboo of seeking help. Since commanding officers as well as enlisted personnel are commissioned multiple times for missions the attitude has changed as almost anybody has shared the experience and understands those who seek help. As such, commanding officers nowadays are better equipped to seek and to lend support.

In order to facilitate the transition from mission to life after deployment, the UK MoD has now a programme, where soldiers returning from missions go through a “decompression”-phase in a controlled environment.

The panel also discussed the issue of reintegration into civilian labour markets. Push and pull factors cause the trend that veterans often accept jobs related to their duties in the military. The panel agreed that in order to raise the chances of employment, soldiers should receive training on how to exploit and present their skills to the private job market. Where jobs are not the problem, but technological developments which change the job description, retraining or new academic training have to be established.

Veterans are not trained psychologists or therapists. Therefore, veterans active in peer-support-programmes should be carefully monitored and professional specialists are needed as intermediaries in peer-support-programmes.

In a final remark Mrs. Faux reminded the delegates and guests that the term “PTSD” should not be used too soon and too liberal to describe a normal human reaction to an abnormal, drastic situation or experience. PTSD is defined by the medical community and it has to be more careful determined when PTSD can be diagnosed. Nevertheless, PTSD has to be recognised as a serious long term occupational disease that affects a minority of veterans. According to

Mr. Vinther, 85% of soldiers returning from missions do not show any symptoms of depression or PTSD, 15% are showing difficulties to adapt from missions and only 1,5% from those suffering from PTSD. It was added that in the UK and the USA depression and PTSD are widely accepted among soldiers and veterans.

The panel agreed that a high percentage of veterans are actively in favour of peer-support-programmes, but they oppose a focus on depression and PTSD and rather seek a place where they can share also positive experiences from their time on mission.

“(...), the essence of the peer-programme is to have a partner who is just listening and understanding without judgement in order to overcome negative experiences and to enable the veteran to adapt and to change into civilian life.”

The Workshop was concluded by the remark of the EUROMIL President Mr. Jacob that politicians and military leaders should recognize the issues unions and associations are dealing with and accept that these are valid and relevant issues for soldiers as well as for the government. Mr. Jacob reminded the audience that unions can be legitimate partners for the government and military leadership.

TML



LtCol U. Kirsch, new Chairman German Federal Armed Forces



# EUROMIL Working Group on International Operations

This working group has been mandated by the Board for the duration of one year with the task to scrutinize the operational welfare concerns of European soldiers in international operations by exchanging their associations' experiences and sharing inside knowledge. Experts from the EUROMIL member and observer associations ACMP/CGPM, AFMP, CS, DBwV, HKKF, MARVER, PDFORRA, RACO and on separate invitation from BAFF (British Armed Forces Federation) are members of the working group.

The 98<sup>th</sup> Presidium/3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of EUROMIL was the perfect occasion for the second meeting of the EUROMIL Working Group on International Operations.

**The first meeting** in July 2008 initiated the networking among the participants. The experts exchanged experiences and discussed issues, which are currently evident in the Armed Forces, represented by the EUROMIL member associations, and are affecting military personnel.

Mutual points of concern are the down-sizing of personnel, shortcomings of medical, family and veterans' care, the increasingly short time intervals for recreation between the end of one mission and the beginning of the preparation for another international operation, cumbersome political mandates and rules of engagement, the lack of specialists for various international operations, and last but not least inadequate personal equipment.

There was consensus among the participants that the limits of a defence budget can not be used as an excuse for the aforementioned deficiencies.

Major Koos Stauthamer was elected Chairman of the expert working group.

**The second meeting** of the ExWGIntOps held during EUROMIL's 98<sup>th</sup> Presidium/3<sup>rd</sup> Congress in Brussels on 14 November 2008 was divided into two parts. In the first part the Associations' Chairmen and the EUROMIL ExWGIntOps came together to re-



Members of the EUROMIL Working Group on International Operations

evaluate and to scrutinise the 10 Recommendations published in the EUROMIL booklet "Challenges of European Soldiers in the Field - The Human Factor in Modern Military Missions"<sup>1</sup>.

These recommendations are divided into three phases: pre-mission, during deployment and after deployment on international missions. They content EUROMIL's support to diminish caveats and to establish common rules of engagement, increase common training of multinational troops, to improve personal equipment, logistics and armour of vehicles,

to emphasise physical and psychological medical care in all phases of a mission as well as on long term medical and psychological care for veterans, to establish family support programmes, to establish vocational training and re-training schemes for veterans and to establish employment schemes for injured military personnel.

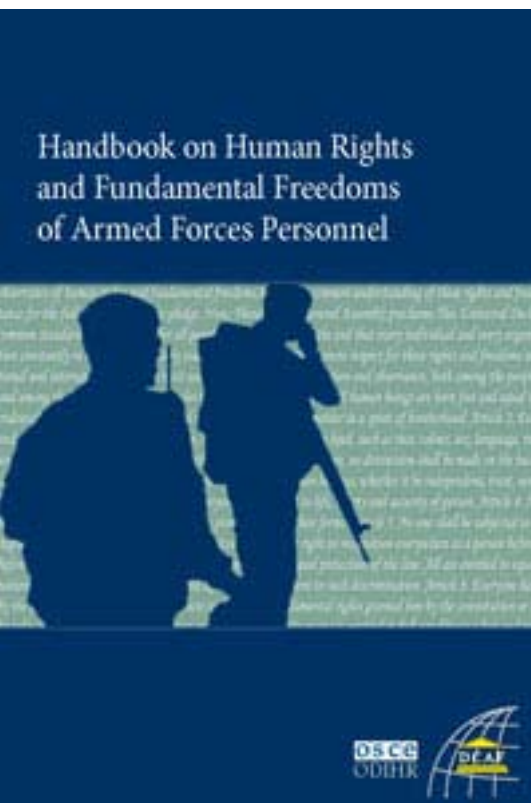
The working group will continue its work at its next meeting in February.

**TML**

<sup>1</sup> This EUROMIL publication is the result of the EUROMIL workshop held in October 2007 in Paris.

# Best practice and national experiences: Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Armed Forces

A workshop “Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Armed Forces” took place on 14 November 2008 during the 98th Presidium meeting/3rd Congress in Brussels. Members of EUROMIL’s military trade unions and associations discussed the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in their armed forces with expert input from the OSCE-ODHIR Office in Warsaw.



The aim of the workshop was to discuss and to mirror the different national realities in relation to international standards and to compare and exchange experiences on the situation in each individual EUROMIL member country.

Central points of discussion were the recognition of representation and trade union rights of service personnel in Europe, as well as case examples of the lacking implementation human rights and fundamental freedoms in the defence forces.

Robert-Jan Uhl, Human Rights Officer at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human

Rights in Warsaw contributed as an expert to the debate. He presented the Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel edited by the OSCE-ODHIR Office and DCAF to the members of the Presidium.

Carlos Pires from AOFA (Portugal) moderated the stimulating discussion with contributions from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

During the debate it crystallized that a general lack of human rights training within the Armed Forces can be observed in some countries and that it is therefore necessary to integrate human rights training into the curriculum of military training courses. The discussants welcomed the idea introduced by the EU to introduce an Erasmus exchange programme for officers. This could be an appropriate forum to fill the gap in human rights training to reach those EU countries where human rights’ training is not part of the curriculum.

Moreover it

was emphasized how important it is that the Parliamentary Recommendation of the Council of Europe (1742) and the Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is presented by national associations to their parliamentary representatives. A dialogue with the government should be installed were a recognition of the positive human rights’ catalogue is lacking. Not only the Council of Europe recommendation but also the Handbook are instruments to install a constructive social dialogue between the military trade unions and associations with their respective Ministries of Defence.

CJ



Carlos Pires, (AOFA/Portugal), Robert-Jan Uhl (OSCE-ODHIR Warsaw)



# Fundamental rights of soldiers remain controversial

## Working group to re-examine draft recommendation in 2009

EUROMIL is a participating observer at the Council of Europe’s (CoE) Working Group on Human But due to the opposition of some Member States the Working Group will reconvene twice in 2009 to re-

freedoms can not automatically be put on ice during peace-keeping operations. Several member states opposed EUROMIL’s positions.



Among others the scope of the recommendation was sensitive for some member states. They want to see the recommendation to be limited to “normal” service during peace-time and in general want the draft recommendation to be “re-examined”, i.e. to be cut down. Other member states, in particular Nordic countries support the text as it now stands.

Rights of Members of the Armed Forces. The task of the Working Group, consisting of 13 member states and a handful of NGOs, was to draft a recommendation for the Council’s Committee of Ministers. The Working Group finished its work in the October meeting and was able to agree on a draft recommendation.

examine the draft recommendation. EUROMIL had argued in this working group that members of the armed forces are citizens in uniform who must enjoy the same fundamental freedoms as any other citizen. EUROMIL particularly emphasized in its advocacy the right of association and that fundamental

The draft recommendation contains nothing revolutionary, but merely principles which are standard and practice already in several member states of the CoE. EUROMIL is thus concerned about any efforts to weaken the text as it now stands, as this would be a step backward for many member states.

MH

### *EUROMIL Calendar*

19	January	Board meeting	Brussels
16	April	Board meeting	Berlin
17/18	April	Presidium meeting	Berlin
13-18	May	Council of Europe Working Group Fundamental and Human Rights in the Armed Forces	Strasbourg
7-9	October	Council of Europe Working Group Fundamental and Human Rights in the Armed Forces	Strasbourg



# Portugal: For a better condição militar now!

**Portuguese military associations ANS, AOFA and APA organised a peaceful march in Lisbon for the dignity of military personnel and their relatives.**

*By Paulo Contreiras, ANS*



On Saturday in October 2008 more than 4000 people, military personnel of all ranks, active or retired, veterans and relatives marched in Lisbon for the rights and the dignity of soldiers and the military as an institution.

Members and supporters of all three Portuguese associations ANS, AOFA and APA marched from Rossio Square to the Black Horse Square where the Presidents of the Portuguese military associations, Antonio Lima Coelho, Carlos Manuel Alpedrinha Pires and Luis Medeiros Reis, held speeches. The rally was supported by a delegation from the Irish association PDFORRA including President Willie Webb, Denis Granville and Ken Holland. Denis Granville also functioned as representative of the EUROMIL Board assuring the solidarity of all 35 EUROMIL member associations.

The Portuguese associations are faced with a Military Health System which accounts the military reserve and retired personnel as "surplus/redundant capability" and that may call into question operational capabilities. Therefore, they called for a proper health care system for every soldier. They highlighted the importance of an effective network for the support of retired and active combat veterans and that the rights of seriously injured veterans are restored.

Moreover, the Portuguese military has seen its social conditions deteriorated in recent years due to the

freezing of careers and the annual increase of salaries below the official inflation rate. The associations and their members will not accept the current financial crisis as an excuse for not solving existing problems. It is paramount for the armed forces' professionalisation to respect the incentive package created for volunteers.

Furthermore, for the Portuguese associations the failure of the government to comply with dozens of existing legal decrees - including the law which guarantees the military associations' competences - is not acceptable in a democratic system. Portuguese associations still experience continued and systematic exclusion from working groups and advisory bodies for matters of social and professional interest of military personnel. Despite this the Portuguese associations are well prepared to contribute with studies, analysis and propositions to health, assistance and social welfare measures.

The rally culminated with thousands of people singing the national anthem, their voices echoing over the square, bringing the remembrance of the past, when the people of Portugal were given their democratic rights some 34 years ago.

The motion read by the Secretary of the Board of AOFA José Tasso de Figueiredo, was then delivered to the President of the Republic of Portugal, the Prime-Minister, the Ministry of Defence, military leaders and the political parties represented in the national parliament.



D. Granville, Treasurer EUROMIL, K. Holland (PDFORRA), W. Webb (President PDFORRA)





# A Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

to all our readers from everyone at  
the  
EUROMIL Office

## ITS CHRISTMAS DAY ALL IS SECURE

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS  
HE LIVED ALL ALONE  
IN A ONE BEDROOM HOUSE MADE OF PLASTER AND  
STONE  
I HAD COME DOWN THE CHIMNEY WITH PRESENTS  
TO GIVE  
AND TO SEE JUST WHO IN THIS HOME DID LIVE

I LOOKED ALL ABOUT A STRANGE SIGHT I DID SEE  
NO TINSEL NO PRESENTS NOT EVEN A TREE  
NO STOCKING BY THE MANTLE JUST BOOTS FILLED  
WITH SAND  
ON THE WALL HUNG PICTURES OF FAR DISTANT  
LANDS  
WITH MEDALS AND BADGES AWARDS OF ALL KINDS  
A SOBER THOUGHT CAME THROUGH MY MIND

FOR THIS HOUSE WAS DIFFERENT IT WAS DARK AND  
DREARY  
I FOUND THE HOME OF A SOLDIER ONCE I COULD SEE  
CLEARLY  
THE SOLDIER LAY SLEEPING SILENT ALONE  
CURLED UP ON THE FLOOR IN THIS ONE BEDROOM  
HOME

THE FACE WAS SO GENTLE THE ROOM IN SUCH DIS-  
ORDER  
NOT HOW I PICTURED A LONE BRITISH SOLDIER  
WAS THIS THE HERO OF WHOM I'D JUST READ  
CURLED UP ON A PONCHO THE FLOOR FOR A BED

I REALISED THE FAMILIES THAT I SAW THIS NIGHT  
OWED THEIR LIVES TO THESE SOLDIERS WHO WERE  
WILLING TO FIGHT  
SOON AROUND THE WORLD THE CHILDREN WOULD  
PLAY  
AND GROWNUPS WOULD CELEBRATE A BRIGHT

## CHRISTMAS DAY

THEY ALL ENJOY FREEDOM EACH MONTH OF THE  
YEAR  
BECAUSE OF THE SOLDIERS LIKE THE ONE LYING  
HERE  
I COULDN'T HELP WONDER HOW MANY ALONE  
ON A COLD CHRISTMAS EVE IN A LAND FAR FROM  
HOME

THE VERY THOUGHT BROUGHT A TEAR TO MY EYE  
I DROPPED TO MY KNEES AND STARTED TO CRY  
THE SOLDIER AWAKENED AND I HEARD A ROUGH  
VOICE  
'SANTA DON'T CRY THIS LIFE IS MY CHOICE  
I FIGHT FOR FREEDOM I DON'T ASK FOR MORE  
MY LIFE IS MY GOD, MY COUNTRY, MY CORPS'

THE SOLDIER ROLLED OVER AND DRIFTED TO SLEEP  
I COULDN'T CONTROL IT I CONTINUED TO WEEP

I KEPT WATCH FOR HOURS SO SILENT AND STILL  
AND WE BOTH SAT AND SHIVERED FROM THE COLD  
NIGHTS CHILL  
I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE ON THAT COLD DARK  
NIGHT  
THIS GUARDIAN OF HONOUR SO WILLING TO FIGHT

THEN THE SOLDIER ROLLED OVER WITH A VOICE  
SOFT AND PURE  
WHISPERED 'CARRY ON SANTA ITS CHRISTMAS DAY  
ALL IS SECURE'  
ONE LOOK AT MY WATCH AND I KNEW HE WAS  
RIGHT  
'MERRY CHRISTMAS MY FRIEND AND TO ALL A GOOD  
NIGHT'

xxx

THIS POEM WAS WRITTEN BY A PEACE-KEEPING SOLDIER STATIONED OVERSEAS



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