



**European Organisation  
of Military Associations**

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## **The President**

Dear friends,

First of all I want to thank you in name of the Board EUROMIL for the invitation to participate this evening at your 'social gathering'. I use these wordings because I hope that at least this definition of your meeting is acceptable for the political and military leaders of your country.

I remember being here in this same location in the beginning of this year criticising the disciplinary procedures against about 15 of our Portuguese colleagues. Today, almost eight months later, only the number of disciplinary cases changed, but the negative threatening of professional soldiers continues. Like yourself probably we were quite optimistic and happy when we heard that at least the juridical corps of Portugal listened with attention and an open and constitutional mind to you complaints. But unfortunately once again we were confronted with the fact that you can win a battle, but this does not mean that you immediately win the war! It is most regrettable, that a democratic parliament just changes the law to forbid their soldiers to act as every other citizen when the soldiers are of the opinion that their rights are neglected or overruled. Every citizen has the right to ask an independent judge for his or her opinion about the application of the law. In Portugal soldiers have no longer this fundamental right! Dear friends, it seems that we go back in time instead of making progress towards a democratic society wherein every citizen, even those in uniform, can enjoy all fundamental and constitutional rights! It is even more cruel to take these rights away from soldiers because they are just the ones that are sent around the world to reinstall and even enforce peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms. From a Government that respects their soldiers we expect another kind of treatment.

EUROMIL promised their Portuguese member associations, and thus also the members of these associations, to support them in their struggle. We could have chosen immediately for the hard way and a confrontation with the political and military leaders. However, it is our experience that this is not always the best way if you want to have positive results. Therefore we took some initiatives in the past months in the hope that a reasonable dialogue with the Portuguese leaders should be possible. Several letters have been sent from all over Europe to the Portuguese political leadership, questions have been asked to ambassadors and Mil Reps have been informed etc.

This week the Board of EUROMIL organised its meeting in Lisbon. We wanted to use this opportunity to organise some political talks with political and military leaders as well. Our goal is not to tell them that their way of behaving is bad, but to convince them that perfectly functioning systems have been worked out in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Hungary etc. These many countries that have granted full association rights for their soldiers have not experienced any loss of military efficiency or discipline. On the contrary, entering into a permanent dialogue with soldiers' associations on

their social and work conditions has helped to tie the servicemen closer to the military organisation and *de facto* increased moral and loyalty among the troops. If in these countries the dialogue between the social partners and the Government has no negative influence on the hierarchies, the discipline and the operational level of the armed forces, why should this then not be possible in Portugal?

We are happy that the MOD Dr. Teixeira and several political groups accepted our proposal to organise meetings between themselves and a EUROMIL delegation. Some of these meetings were already initiated in May when our Vice-President and our Portuguese Board member Antonio Lima de Coelho talked with military and political leaders during the NATO PA in Madeira about the situation of the Portuguese soldiers.

But let us not be naive. One talk will not change the mindset and behaviours in Portugal. The Portuguese associations, their members and we, EUROMIL, will have to continue to put the pressure on the political leadership. Let me state once again that EUROMIL will be there to support you in this struggle. Allow me to give you one advice before coming to the end of this statement. Stay faithful to your own culture! Don't try to copy situations and structures from other countries. Denmark is not Ireland, Ireland is not Italy and Italy is not Portugal! What I want to say is that you have to build up your own system based on your own culture but with the experience that you can get from your EUROMIL colleagues from more than 20 countries and 34 associations.

Dear friends, we wish you and the leaders of the Portuguese associations a lot of success, but above all courage, in your fight for democratic rights. The tunnel may be long, but I assure you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel!

Emmanuel JACOB  
President EUROMIL