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Date: 28MAR01

Memorandum

EUROMIL - Rome Presidium

Subject: Health and Safety and the Portuguese Armed Forces

One of our main objectives to reach during this mandate it's to start a large discussion on the present subject and produce some specific documents on this matter in order to give to our associates the necessary knowledge for them to achieve the importance of health and safety.

Portuguese society, in general, doesn't have a strong consciousness about the health and safety concerns. This is a cultural problem that probably just the next generation, our sons and daughters, will accomplish, once this matter has been taken, in the last few years, some increasing coverage on educational programs, in order to put young people with a complete understanding of the importance of health and safety in their future professional daily life. In fact, this situation is identical for the concerns with environment protection. Nevertheless, Portuguese legislation and regulations on these subjects are very advanced and transcribe all the EEC directives. In reality, we have some delay on these subjects, in relation to the more developed countries in Europe.

The above is a brief picture of our society, and as military citizens don't live apart, all this problems are present in the Portuguese Armed Forces. In fact they are even worse, because health and safety legislation doesn't apply to Armed Forces and that, in accumulation with successive low budgets for the Defense, turns very difficult any intention of implementation and development of the health and safety regulations.

At the moment, Portuguese Armed Forces branches have distinct levels at implementation of health and safety rules.

Common to Navy, Army and Air Force is the fact that there are no "work medicine" services and there's no regular individual medical examination program. In fact "work medicine" specialized doctors should be no more than twenty, in all Portuguese Armed Forces.

Army and Navy don't have any health and safety structure implemented and these subjects are still in a primary level. The health and safety practices are implemented locally in an uncoordinated form and covers not more than the use of individual protective equipments, most of the times not even the appropriated ones.

Air Force is on a more advanced stage. There's a safety organization, with representatives at all levels, from command to execution. There are manuals, instruction is given at entrance level and there are courses for the people assigned to safety functions, most of the time in accumulation with their main functions. There are, also, directives that appeal for safety rules accomplishment but, normally, these are impossible to execute because there are a general lack of conditions.

Following is a brief list of some of the health and safety problems on the Portuguese Armed Forces:

- No regular medical examinations;
- No regular auditory examinations and noise level measurements;
- No control on radiation levels on Radar stations and maintenance shops;
- Use of inadequate or uncertified individual protective equipments or no use at all;
- Contact with asbestos and other "cancer hazard" or toxic substances, without the necessary cares and information, namely "safety sheets";
- Deficient working conditions, degraded installations and lack of "safety signalization";
- Inadequate uniforms;
- No, or not regular, maintenance on building's air conditioning systems;
- Lack or insufficient number of "first aid boxes" on installations;
- No quality control on preparation of meals at Galleys and Dinning-halls;
- Deficient lodging conditions;
- No hot water for the daily bath, in some cases;
- Inadequate work shifts and disrespect for the rest periods;

For all these reasons, we salute the EUROMIL initiative of proposal of alteration of health and safety European legislation in order to apply it to the Armed Forces with the necessary limitations, which should be very well defined, nevertheless. Also of great importance is the intention to reverse the necessity for the worker to proof the relation between the disease and work. As we don't have any regular medical examinations, it's almost impossible for the military to make this proof and the financial compensation isn't attributed, in most cases.

This memo and our availability to participate in the discussion are our modest contributes to the ambitious task of EUROMIL to include Armed Forces on health and safety legislation, which is of great importance for all military people in their affirmation as "citizen in uniform".

Lisbon, 2001, March 28th