

## **SPEECH**

of the SOVCG President, Nenad Cobeljic at the 113<sup>th</sup> EUROMIL Presidium Meeting in Podgorica, 22 April 2016

Dear President Jacob,  
Dear friends,  
Good morning and welcome.

First of all, let me greet you on behalf of the SOVCG and on my personal behalf with a wish that you have a pleasant stay here in Podgorica, Montenegro.

Five and a half years ago, when we established the SOVCG, we weren't even aware that Euromil exists. Today, five years since our first contact with you, the Trade Union of Defence and Army of Montenegro is a host of the 113rd (one hundred thirteenth) session of the Euromil Presidency and it is our honor and pleasure that it is so.

Our first meeting in June 2011 with President Jacob here in Podgorica and then in September the same year, meant a lot to us. Back then, you helped us maintain the unionism and SOVCG, and that is when you earned our unreserved trust. All this time of cooperation with you, helping and supporting us, only confirmed and reinforced that trust. And thank you for that. SOVCG membership and I personally, we are proud of being members of the EUROMIL family.

Our union path was bumpy and full of challenges. We endured and remained consistent with principles of trade unionism, we have achieved significant results but there are so many problems, tasks and challenges ahead of us. Low wages, housing problem, low levels of safety at work, abuse of the system of command for anti-union purposes, relations based on fear, unlawful conduct and privileges are, unfortunately, still a reality that we face.

We are deeply convinced that with establishing of trade unionism in the Army of Montenegro, and with our efforts to implement the Recommendations of the Council of Europe for protection of the rights and freedoms of employees in the armed forces, and with other activities, we contributed both to the democratization of the Army of Montenegro and our society and to the struggle for the rule of law and thus the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of our country.

Montenegro has received an invitation to join NATO, our country and Army are moving in that direction. Standards and other conditions are being adopted and met in order to obtain a full membership. We will ensure that this process includes standards relating to financial conditions, safety at work and other rights and freedoms based on work, and I am confident that we will have the unselfish cooperation, assistance and support of EUROMIL.

Members of the Army of Montenegro, for years, continually participate in international military missions. This is very important for us because we are there

with you where we contribute to the peace in the world. But it is also important to us that the Montenegrin soldiers participate in international missions as happy and respected citizens in uniform, and not to go on mission because of their devastating financial position and with the main motivation to earn money for the basic needs of their families and return the accumulated debts. I must also express my dissatisfaction with the fact that country further stimulates the departure of members of the Army to the mission with solving their housing problems but to the detriment of members of the Army who were not given the opportunity to participate in them. It is clear that this situation and actions are unacceptable and unsustainable and this should change.

Personnel changes at the head of the Directorate for Human Resources of the Ministry of Defence, brought more frequent communication which resulted in signing a cooperation agreement between the SOVCG and Ministry of Defence. We have started a series of activities and negotiations in order to improve housing for employees of the Army and the Ministry of Defence, we also negotiate about more significant increase in salaries and other issues and problems. All this gives us hope and faith in success.

Continuous progress in improving the rights and status of employees in the Army, constant joining of new members to the SOVCG and tangible results in the field of establishing and conducting social dialogue are confirmation that we are on the right track. High quality and continuity of social dialogue and material status worthy of man make us true 'citizens in uniform' ', that is a measure of our success and it is our goal. It is certain that as a result of such dialogue and mutual respect in near future we will start working on signing the collective agreement with the Ministry of Defence.

Finally, I want to emphasize that our membership in the EUROMIL provides us with security and gives us the wind in the back on our path towards the set goals. I hope that the SOVCG made some contribution to the EUROMIL as well and that we are a good example of commitment to trade unionism and struggle for 'citizen in uniform' 'and I promise that we will try to make our contribution more significant day by day.

Thank you.