



EUROMIL aisbl

*(European Organisation of
Military Associations)*

Rue John Waterloo Wilson 78
B-1000 Brussels

Tel: +32.2.626.06.80

E-mail: euromil@euromil.org

N° Ent.: 0538.809.759

**Opening speech of the President, Emmanuel Jacob,
114th Presidium Meeting,
21 October 2016, Brussels**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, dear friends,

First of all, I would like to welcome you at the 114th Presidium Meeting of EUROMIL, the European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions.

Many of you were already in this meeting room yesterday and participated in the 5th Congress of EUROMIL. As usual, the Congress is the right moment to look back on the past mandate, but it is also the statutory meeting to introduce those who will be responsible for leading the organisation in the next term of four years.

Allow me to introduce them to our guests.

Our colleague Jörg Greiffendorf, from Germany, has been elected Vice-President. Renewed in his mandate is our Treasurer Ton de Zeeuw, from the Netherlands. The Board of EUROMIL is also composed of a maximum of six Board Members. Re-elected are Jesper Hansen from Denmark, Tom McCarthy from Ireland, Johan Öhlén from Sweden and Flemming Vinther from Denmark. Elected for the first time is István Bacskái, from Hungary, and Antonio Lima Coelho, from Portugal was already a Board Member in the past. Being elected myself for the fourth time as President, I look forward to a fruitful collaboration with my colleagues and thank them already at this point for their engagement.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, I would like to start with a quote from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, which seems to me appropriate under the current circumstances:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...”

Dear friends, our national armed forces are operationally and economically strained. The financial and economic crisis has led to a scramble to cut costs which, in turn, have led to the intense scrutiny of military budgets. While this may or not be warranted, one has to guard against short-term fixes with long-term consequences. We need to adapt military structures to current challenges, but the latter are not evident! Europe is facing a threat from the East and there is a need for a diplomatic solution without ignoring the need to show military forces. But at



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the same time, there is a threat from the South, which also has implications on the European continent. On one hand we have to deal with a migration crisis, which we have never seen before, and on the other hand we are confronted with terrorist attacks on our own territory.

This situation creates a debate in several of our countries, a debate on the organisation of the internal security and its consequences on external security. The armed forces and their personnel are of course one of the key factors in this debate. Organising this simultaneously when most of our armed forces are going through a profound restructuration is not always evident. We are confronted with limited budgets, shortcomings in recruitment and, in a certain number of cases, also a lack of equipment and relevant training. Isn't it paradoxical when at the same moment governments ask for more investment from their armed forces and flexibility from their personnel? One can easily answer yes on this, but can we take the decision not to participate in the protection of our fellow citizens in the framework of the internal security? This new situation calls for a profound national and international debate and a clear vision towards the future internal and external security and the link between both of them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If this is the "winter of despair", of scarce resources, of stretched capabilities and new challenges, it is also "the spring of hope". The hope that the situation will be changed and that the social and professional conditions of soldiers will be recognised and improved across Europe.

I believe that we are facing a "window of opportunity". The European security and defence structure is changing. At NATO level several decisions have been taken and some of them are already in the phase of implementation. Besides, several national leaders called on a deeper collaboration of their national armed forces by co-operating on investments, training and logistics, as well as by pooling, and where appropriate, specializing their defence means and capabilities. Only yesterday, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament voted on an own initiative report on the European Defence Union. Of course, some of these ideas are not new and to be fair, Member States are already co-operating bilaterally or multilaterally. Still, the Permanent Structured Cooperation or PESCO foreseen in the Treaty is "the" opportunity to set up the creation of a more structured form of co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, for EUROMIL it is an absolute must to bring also the social conditions of soldiers into play. Whether use will be made of this "window of opportunity", and whether we will succeed in exercising influence, will



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to a large extent depend on all of us. We need the full support of our member associations and through them their national authorities, but also the support from relevant international institutions and bodies such as the European Parliament, the Commission, the OSCE and other competent stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before concluding and before handing over the floor to our distinguished keynote speakers, I would ask you for a minute of silence to salute and honour our military colleagues from all over the world that lost their lives serving their country, serving their fellow citizens and protecting our freedom. Let us also salute in this moment of silence our colleagues who are somewhere in the world in operation or mission and hope that they will return safe and well to their families, friends and colleagues.

Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to stand up for this minute of silence.

Thank you.