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## **Position Paper<sup>1</sup> on Armed Forces & Migration**

### **A. About EUROMIL**

The European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions (EUROMIL) is an umbrella organisation composed of 33 military associations and trade unions from 21 countries. It is the main Europe-wide forum for cooperation among professional military associations on issues of common concern. EUROMIL strives to secure and advance the human rights, fundamental freedoms and socio-professional interests of military personnel of all ranks in Europe and promotes the concept of "Citizen in Uniform". As such, a soldier is entitled to the same rights and obligations as any other citizen. EUROMIL particularly calls for recognition of the right of servicemen and -women to form and join trade unions and independent associations and for their inclusion in a regular social dialogue by the authorities.

### **B. Background information**

The security environment in Europe has changed and armed forces are confronted to new challenges. In recent years, personnel across Europe have been requested to assume greater role and responsibility, including to perform non-traditional military tasks usually fulfilled by internal security forces. One of them is to control migration flows. In several EU Member States, including Greece, Hungary or Spain, members of the armed forces are nowadays assuming security and support duties they are not always trained nor equipped for. This implies important risks for the migrants, for the defence staff, but also for the armed forces and society as a whole.

While EUROMIL is convinced that in time of real need, armed forces and their personnel must be engaged in supporting the population, it considers that armed forces should only be requested to support civilian authorities in performing non-traditional defence tasks at national level if certain conditions are complied with. Necessary conditions are namely, a) the provisional measures do not become structural ones and are therefore limited in time, b) the needed personnel (on voluntary basis or particularly recruited for this task) receives the proper training and necessary equipment to execute this mission, c) enough personnel is available to deal with the mission without putting the normal work of the armed forces at risk and d) these "extra" tasks are legally covered, this means providing social protection to military personnel and covering their responsibility in the execution of these tasks.

Nevertheless, EUROMIL considers that tasking military trained personnel to deal with the migration issue is a bad solution as well for migrants and refugees as for

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the defence staff and the European armed forces as such. Firstly, members of the armed forces have less time to train and be prepared to perform their traditional defence tasks. There are also less people available to perform these tasks. Secondly, the work overload combined with the tasks staff members are not prepared for impact on their moral and motivation. The mission of the defence forces is harmed and military effectiveness is impaired. Thirdly, for what concerns migration, the armed forces will not deliver the needed social and human expertise to those who are mostly in need of professional support. Fourthly, some members of the armed forces may wish to exercise their right to conscientious objection and refuse to perform migration-related tasks. Denying their right to selective conscientious objection may once again impair on moral, cohesion and operational readiness. The military institution is therefore weakened in multiple ways and the whole European Union will suffer from it.

### C. EUROMIL recommendations

EUROMIL highlights that both traditional and new security threats are transnational and require a European response. Cooperation and coordination amongst EU Member States are needed to overcome the cross-border dimension of present and future challenges. However, the organisation underlines that further attention should be given to the internal-external security nexus and the involvement of military actors – traditionally associated with foreign policy - in responding to internal threats. Roles and responsibilities of the different forces engaged should be better defined. It therefore believes that Europe has a role to play on these issues and that a collective European approach should be adopted on the matter.

Moreover, in these times where EU Member States talk about further defence cooperation, EUROMIL believes that discussions on completing the security union should not be fully separated from discussions on achieving the defence union. On the latter, EUROMIL strongly supports any step that would be taken in establishing a genuine European Defence Union, including the further development, and strengthening of PESCO. It recalls, however, that security has a social dimension and that the men and women serving in uniform deserve to make their voice heard and be included in discussions on the future of European defence.

EUROMIL therefore calls on the European Institutions to consider how the different security and/or defence forces are used to tackle internal security threats in EU Member States and to clarify in their security and defence strategy which security and/ or defence forces is responsible for what kind of task and under what framework and conditions.

For what particularly concerns the issue of migration, EUROMIL agrees that in times of crisis, all support is temporary needed. However, it recalls that the involvement of military personnel in patrolling borders and controlling migrant and refugee centres entail multiple risks and goes beyond the responsibilities and mission initially assigned to the defence forces. Dealing with migration requires appropriate training and expertise. EUROMIL therefore underlines that as long as military personnel will not have acquired the necessary skills and tools to achieve



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related tasks, it will not support the use of defence forces to deal with migration flows.

EUROMIL thus particularly calls upon states:

- to ensure that migration is managed in full compliance with international law;
- to only use defence forces to support authorities in dealing with important migration influxes as a last resort solution;
- to guarantee that the mission entrusted to the military is temporary and clearly limited in a definite time period;
- to avoid that the core task of the military is affected by these exceptional duties and make sure that enough personnel is still available for the usual mission of the defence;
- to ensure that military personnel requested to interact with refugees and migrants are properly trained and equipped to perform their mission;
- to make sure that the personnel assigned to these functions participate on a voluntary basis and to recognize the right to selective conscientious objection to those who refuse to perform migration-related tasks;
- to provide social protection to military personnel for these additional tasks and legally cover their responsibility in the execution of these tasks.