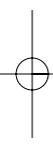




# A EUROPEAN AGENDA



# With the Irish Defence Forces seeking to move closer to European Defence arrangements, RACO recently became members of EUROMIL, the European Organisation of Military Associations. SIGNAL spoke to RACO General Secretary, Lt Col Brian O’Keeffe about the reasons and benefits of EUROMIL membership while also canvassing the views of EUROMIL Secretary General Andreas Pruefert and President Bauke Snoep.

## Lt Col Brian O’Keeffe (General Secretary, RACO)

“This is a positive step forward for RACO as an organisation. It is designed to give us both an ear and a voice on a European level, something which I believe is vital with the changing nature of defence arrangements within Europe and the greater integration of Europe generally. There are three primary reasons for RACO to become involved with EUROMIL. On a global level, there has been a shift from peacekeeping work for UN-led operations to regionally led operations. The primary reason for this is that it was found that as missions became more robust and complex the traditional method of putting together an ad-hoc UN led force was found wanting. Such forces did not have the assets or interoperability required for increasingly demanding missions. UN-led operations, for example, do not automatically have access to the more robust elements of military hardware, such as air support, nor do they always make use of more conventional military struc-

tures, both issues which are being addressed by regionally led peace enforcement operations. The Balkans conflict was a watershed in this area. In order to ensure that peace was enforced the assets and capabilities of NATO were required. So, the peace support operations in Kosovo - KFOR - and Bosnia - SFOR, both of which Ireland participates in, are UN mandated but NATO led.

The EU is now also developing its own peace support capability so that it is self-reliant in terms of conducting such operations within its own territory or in areas bordering it. As a result of this, the EU has established a permanent Military Staff and developed its own military strategies, with the Helsinki Headline Goal, which was determined in December 1999. The Capabilities Commitment Conference of November 2000 led to direct commitments from European Member States of resources to increase Europe’s crisis management capabilities. The aim is that by

1st January 2004 the EU will be able to field a force of up to 60,000 military personnel within 60 days and sustain them in the field for up to a year, with air and naval support as necessary, capable of conducting the full spectrum of Petersberg missions. These are humanitarian, rescue and peacekeeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management. These capabilities have been translated into the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF). The Irish Defence Forces have a commitment of 850 troops. By the due date, all committed forces must be fully interoperable and able to “slot into” the larger EU Force in an operational setting as required. So, logistics, transport and all other equipment and facilities must be interoperable both in terms of function and procedure. Of course, this isn’t something that we can achieve quickly or easily and for the past three years the main focus of the Defence Forces has been on meeting those commitments.



Andreas Pruefert, Secretary General of EUROMIL.

“As the professional focus of our members has shifted towards Europe it is vital that RACO adjusts to this development to play our part in facilitating members in exercising their evolving role. We must be in a position to know exactly what is happening militarily within the EU and what are the implications for our profession. We believe that joining EUROMIL at this time will help us to meet the changing needs of our members in this area.

“The second reason that RACO is becoming a member of EUROMIL is that the shift towards a European focus of the Defence Forces brings with it a requirement for the association to become more aware of what other Europe Forces have to offer us in terms of comparison of service benefits and conditions. Working closely with members of the Gardaí over the past 30 years made our personnel acutely aware of comparisons between the pay and conditions of the two Forces. The same is likely to happen with respect to the members of European Forces with whom our members will increasingly work in the future. In order for RACO to be able to maximise the benefits of this we need contacts throughout Europe and access to relevant information - EUROMIL can provide this for us. During the recent benchmarking process, we needed to do all our relevant research on pay comparisons in Europe ourselves and we found it a difficult and time-consuming process because we had few established contacts in Europe. This is a weakness that we must address.

“The third reason that we have decided to join EUROMIL is to give RACO a lobbying position at the heart of the EU. This is of growing importance to us given that a significant and increasing proportion of Irish

social and employment legislation now originates in Europe. EUROMIL will provide us with close contacts within Brussels to ensure that military personnel are fairly represented.”

While EUROMIL will make some of RACO’s tasks easier in terms of sourcing information and providing a pan-EU support structure, it will also mean extra responsibilities for the organisation.

“Our responsibilities within EUROMIL will mean an extension in the workload for the RACO executive and particularly its professional staff. However, as an organisation, RACO must align itself to Europe and must therefore establish formal representation at European level. It is an important and challenging step forward for RACO.”

### Andreas Pruefert, Secretary General of EUROMIL

“Here at EUROMIL, we greatly value the addition of RACO to our panel of member organisations. For RACO members, affiliation to EUROMIL will provide support for national initiatives and international initiatives on behalf of military personnel. It offers RACO the solidarity of being part of a

European family. RACO coming on board offers further evidence that EUROMIL is attractive to military organisations. Since EUROMIL was established in 1972, the need for European solutions to defence-related issues was evident. In 1994, EUROMIL established a permanent secretariat in Brussels. While we have member associations in 18 European countries at present, we are constantly seeking to influence the growth of military organisations within other European nations. We have a structured lobbying ability with European security structures and organisations, which have an influence on Europe. For instance, we are in frequent talks with representatives of OSCE and have been invited to a conference in Central Asia to discuss our opinions of how the military can work inside a democratic framework. We have also lectured at other OSCE seminars on security issues. We are respected as a competent European partner by OSCE. In regard to NATO, we are involved in negotiating a formal treaty which will recognise the formation of military organisations for reserve troops. We also have a strong working

**The EU is now also developing its own peace support capability so that it is self-reliant in terms of conducting its own territorial operations.**



“There are both ideological and material benefits for RACO in joining EUROMIL,” says President Bauke Snoep.

relationship with the Director of European military affairs within NATO, General Schubert. It is a sign of progress that EUROMIL has been recognised as a respected partner by the UN, OSCE and the European Union. In this respect, EUROMIL also operates on an information gathering level, while also putting across our message through public relations and the media. We are able to instigate specific dialogue at a parliamentary level in Brussels to reinforce our demands for better human support structures within the military. However, a lot of hard work remains to be done, we must constantly work to provide tangible improvements that will promote EUROMIL and encourage its growth.

“On an Irish level, we are very pleased that RACO has decided to join EUROMIL. We are looking forward to the experience, the expertise and indeed the questions that they can bring to the table.”

### **Bauke Snoep President of EUROMIL**

“There are both ideological and material benefits for RACO in becoming a member organisation. The ideological benefit is that RACO are now part of a European Military family, with all that family’s support structures. The material benefit is that EUROMIL is based permanently in the heart of Europe, in Brussels, and have the power to influence within that influential sphere. When I was speaking to RACO General Secretary Lt Col. Brian O’Keeffe, I told him that I literally wanted RACO’s intelligence, expertise and common sense to work for the benefit of both EUROMIL and RACO. For EUROMIL to function properly, it is vital that all member organisations contribute; we have only a small permanent Secretariat. The issues which EUROMIL is constantly dealing with are for the most part associated with human rights and social rights for military personnel. We need assistance, knowledge and finance to help deal with these issues from associations such as RACO. Associations which represent Commissioned Officers are a welcome addition to EUROMIL. Within the organisation there has been a tradition of NCOs being the first to seek representation. I’m glad to say that this is changing, and not just on a representation basis. The historical divide between the two ‘classes’ has been greatly reduced. In terms of how some organisations are structured in certain EUROMIL member countries, Germany,



*EUROMIL President Bauke Snoep.*

Holland and Belgium have associations, which represent everyone from Private to General. But this isn’t always the right move for every country, and there are national circumstances and concerns to be taken into account. As I mentioned already, civil rights for military personnel are at the forefront of

America and the unilateral action, which the US & UK have recently taken. We are concerned that this has disturbed international relations. While these aren’t issues that we comment on in terms of policy, they are issues which concern us as members of the European defence community.”

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EUROMIL’s agenda. There are countries in Europe where military personnel have no rights of association, and EUROMIL is working hard to address this. We are also looking at the social policy of the EU and how it can be applied for military personnel. For member nations outside the EU, they are encouraged to use EU social policy as a template. We are also looking at the issue of pensions harmonisation within the European Union. This is a potentially delicate issue, which we are looking at closely. In a broader sense, we have concerns about the development of European security and defence. We are worried about political indifference within the EU over the war on Iraq, the growing political imbalance between Europe and

**EUROMIL is a union of democratic associations representing military personnel. EUROMIL currently has 29 member associations, which represent 350,000 people (approx). RACO became members on 9th May 2003 at a meeting which the President and Gen Sec attended. A report on this meeting will be carried in SIGNAL 2.2.**