

## **General Assembly Mars & Mercury Europe 2022, 21 October 2022**

### **Report of the General President**

Aside the pandemic Covid-19, 2021-2022 has been marked by the build-up of the Russian armed forces at the borders of Ukraine and the full-scaled invasion, „special military operation” starting on 24 February 2022.

Allow me to extend on this operation and on the global consequences of this war.

It has been eight months since Russia invaded Ukraine, and it's still not obvious who's "winning" the war. The full military impact remains unclear. Finland and Sweden have applied to join NATO, and NATO has collectively reacted by planning major increases in its military capabilities, but there are no clear plans as of yet that has shown what NATO's 30 - and possibly 32 in the near future - nations will actually do over time, how they will reshape and modernize their warfighting capabilities, how well they will improve their readiness and interoperability, and how they will redefine their capability to provide extended deterrence.

In contrast, the EU has already shown that it may not be the ideal forum for collective military action - particularly compared to NATO - but it can be an effective forum for conducting economic and political warfare, can cooperate closely with the US, and one that can escalate at a political and economic level with far less risk than using military force directly against Russia.

Both NATO and Russia also seem likely to be involved in major military build-ups for half a decade or more that will raise their military spending by several percentage points of GDP and that will have an additional impact on their economies while creating a massive arms race that will greatly expand their capability to threaten the other side's population and economy.

The most noteworthy of the take aways is that the war situation has consequences not for just the parties involved, but for the whole world. Ukraine is on life support, Russian troops are suffering significant losses, and the rest of the world is dealing with acute food shortages, skyrocketing inflation, the possibility of a nuclear calamity, and other challenges brought on by a brutal conflict that has no sign of coming to an end soon.

These aspects of the "spillover" of the Ukraine war will also occur in a vulnerable global environment. At least in the near-term, the combined impact of Covid-19, climate change, global inflation, population pressure, and an almost endless list of sectarian, ethnic, and tribal tensions - coupled to the ambitions of many leaders and failed governance - offer opportunity after opportunity to Russia and China.

The war is likely to push Russia to align itself more closely and visibly to China, and it may encourage Russia to find political and economic ways to exploit every tension and opportunity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America - as well as seek new bases and opportunities to win military influence.

More generally, the Ukraine War - and the longer-term US, NATO, EU, and Russian reactions to it - will affect the plans and actions of North Korea, Pakistan and India, Iran and the Arab states,

Turkey, and other major regional military powers like Israel and Egypt. The de facto confrontation between Russia and the US and Europe is almost certain to play out as much in the third world as in Europe, and in terms of both arms transfers, security assistance, military bases, economic investment, trade agreements, and diplomatic and political support. This will be especially true if any increase takes place in combined or coordinated Russian and Chinese action.

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Let me turn now towards Mars & Mercury Europe business.

### **Vice-Presidency of the Board of Mars & Mercury Europe**

I reported during our GA last year that we lost the Vice-President of the Board of Mars & Mercury Europe, Eddie Van Raemdonck due to professional reasons.

With the agreement of the President of Mars & Mercury Belgium, a new candidate, Eric Debois has been identified, as he volunteered to fulfill the function of Vice-President.

Eric is the actual President of the Club Namur of Mars & Mercury Belgium. I will introduce him to you and sincerely hope that you could confirm him in his new function.

We spent of course extensive time to introduce Eric in the Board, as we coopted him in our midst to discuss with him every issue of the Board and the GA of Mars & Mercury Europe.

I would like to thank him for having volunteered to take over the function of Vice-President and I am looking forward to work very closely with him.

### **Extension of Mars & Mercury Europe**

Concerning the issue of enlargement or extension of Mars & Mercury Europe, you are certainly aware that, since our last GA, we are intensively in contact with the association Circulo Ave Fénix of Spain. This association definitively shares the same values as Mars & Mercury Europe. I am most happy to report that our extensive exchanges since then and the common meeting we had in Madrid, 4 July were very fruitful in the sense that the President of the association Circulo Ave Fénix, BrigGen (ret) Gonzalo Sanchez Urbon expressed his intention to join the Mars & Mercury community, pending of course your decision and that of the GA of Circulo Ave Fénix in the first quarter of next year. We are looking forward to a fruitful cooperation.

I continued to try to push forward with contacts in Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Portugal to seek ways of cooperation, without great success I must admit. The enlargement process is indeed a very thorny and difficult issue and it is a real long time issue which needs permanent contact with nations to look for associations which might share the same values as Mars & Mercury Europe.

Finally, I want to share too that I am in contact with Finland, in particular with the Chairman of the Finnish Officers' Union. After some exchanges, we identified some common factors between the Finnish Officers' Union and Mars & Mercury Europe, but the business part in the Officers' Union is much narrower in their scope.

Indeed, according to a study which has been done last spring, roughly 50% of the retired officers (+- 6,300) are willing to work in the civilian market. Actually, the retirement age is 56 years and is moving gradually to 57 (62 for colonels and generals). This does not leave too many years left for work.

However, the Officers' Union Retired Working Group arranges training for those planning / preparing to retire and willing to seek a job or found a business of their own.

I will continue the exchanges and plan for a common meeting in Helsinki.

### **Vision – mission – roadmap of Mars & Mercury Europe**

As I indicated during our last GA and following the approval of the vision and mission of Mars & Mercury Europe, we hold a series of brainstorming sessions to approach the definition of the roadmap by using a method based on the “Balanced Scorecard” (BSC). We set up first a draft of the SWOT of our organization Mars & Mercury Europe.

Indeed, the SWOT analysis is a technique frequently used in strategic planning. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is a simple, but powerful framework for leveraging the organization's strengths, improving weaknesses (internal factors), minimizing threats and taking the greatest possible advantage of opportunities (external factors). It helps to identify what is happening internally and externally.

After having drafted the SWOT, we then set up a draft of the BSC.

My intention is, as I indicated to you in my last letter, to hold a brainstorming session during the GA. To prepare this session in the best possible way, I asked you to complement the SWOT of our organization for further staffing before the GA. I joined attached to the latter letter our draft SWOT analysis, as the SWOT is the prerequisite of the BSC, and our draft of a BSC.

The brainstorming session will be focused on setting up the BSC. Be prepared to issue national statements.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Gaston