

5.1 - Report of the General President

The year 2022-2023 was again marked by the conflict in Ukraine and the NATO summit in Vilnius, the most important meeting in summer this year.

Let me elaborate about the outcomes of this summit.

As Russia's war in Ukraine continues, the security of the European continent remains at the forefront. The world watched in late June as Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of Russia's state-funded paramilitary group Wagner, directed his troops to move on Moscow, demonstrating just how unpredictable the situation continues to be in Russia. Accordingly, European security is the primary concern and NATO must remain steadfast in its support to President Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine.

The Alliance so pledged its continued support to Ukraine. Decisions and assurances were made regarding lethal and non-lethal material support, funding, intelligence assistance, as well as continued training for the Ukrainian military. In addition to sending a reassuring message to Ukraine, this pledge also sends a message to Moscow and other actors not aligned with NATO's security interests, that it will remain committed to its mission and prevent miscreant leaders from thwarting NATO's interests.

Though Ukraine aspires to be a NATO member, it is wise to shelf the discussion about a set timeline for the foreseeable future, as a decision taken along these lines would risk putting the Alliance in direct conflict with Russia under the provisions of Article 5.

NATO continues to serve as a deterrent to Putin and his military, showing the resolve of the trans-Atlantic bond; and demonstrating that expansion of the conflict to contiguous NATO member countries will not be acceptable. NATO leaders must be committed to contributing forces to the new NATO Force Model. Likewise, the Alliance must continue to invest in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) construct as it looks to still be able to support NATO Response Force (NRF) operations. More to the point, the devil will be in the details as NATO looks to build on the regional defence plans agreed to at the summit.

The efforts of the Secretary General and other NATO leaders to address Türkiye's security concerns in allowing Sweden to join the Alliance realised success. With Türkiye's and Hungary's acquiescence, the process to welcome Sweden into NATO can now move forward. Finland joining in April and Sweden following suit helps to ensure a more formidable defence along NATO's northern flank. Likewise, and moving beyond the Alliance, at the summit in Vilnius, NATO leaders committed to deepen collaborative efforts with partner nations, particularly those in the Indo-Pacific region, who share values of peace and security.

During the summit, NATO leaders committed to expanding deterrence and defence. This stems, in part, from the threat of nuclear confrontation that has become more worrying in recent months. Russia has pulled out of the New START treaty and made frequent nuclear threats in the context of the war in Ukraine. NATO has been, continues to be, and will serve as a conduit to demonstrate to Putin that other options are available in the interest of security that goes beyond capabilities centred on nuclear weapons. Leaders at the summit agreed to increase defence spending to counter threats and to bolster defence. They also committed to the modification and creation of new plans to protect member countries from future threats via new regional defence plans, and to ensure the ability to deploy up to 30,000 troops within just 30 days. These initiatives look to increase the number of forces that could come under NATO's command, guaranteeing higher readiness of forces in member countries, and aligning both forces and capabilities to defend specific geographical areas while NATO continues to support battle group efforts in Eastern Europe.

Finally, more needs to be done to deliver on promises like developing details on regional defence plans, moving forward with force generation conferences regarding new troops on standby, and

remaining unwavering in supporting Ukraine in its fight with Russia. Though the war in Ukraine is a calamity, it has strengthened the resolve of NATO countries.

In conclusion, NATO is now stronger and more united than ever before and, as an organisation, must be committed to building on the successes of the 2023 summit.

Let me turn now towards our business

- Concerning the issue of extension of Mars & Mercury Europe, we are intensively in contact with the association Circulo Ave Fénix of Spain, association which definitively shares the same values as Mars & Mercury. I reported to you during our last GA that our exchanges since then and the common meeting we had in Madrid were very fruitful in the sense that the President of the association Circulo Ave Fénix expressed his intention to join the Mars & Mercury community. During our last GA in Maastricht, the President presented himself the aims of Circulo Ave Fénix.

So, I am happy to report that we are now ready to sign the agreement accepting the association Circulo Ave Fénix in the Mars & Mercury environment. Welcome back, Spain. I reported also that I continued to try to push forward with contacts in different countries, without success. 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, or might cooperate with Mars & Mercury Europe, on a lower level, as an associate member.

We are still in contact with the Chairman of the Finnish Officers' Union in Finland. Indeed, after some exchanges, we identified some common factors between this Union and Mars & Mercury Europe, but the business part in the Officers' Union is much narrower in their scope. However, as already stated, 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 in the beginning of next year.

- As stated in a letter of the President of Mars & Mercury Denmark, they followed the development of Mars & Mercury Europe during the last years and feel that the aims of Mars & Mercury Europe are not in accordance with the interests of Mars & Mercury Denmark. I had personally a couple of phone calls with the President and finally a VTC call together with all members of the Board of Mars & Mercury Europe to convince the President that we don't see the above mentioned discordances. Nevertheless, M&M Denmark finally stated that they will not stay as an ordinary member from 2024 and that they are looking forward to consider a proposal for an associated membership including a reduced membership fee. I suggest that we should accept their proposal and that their membership fee should be limited to the fixed part of the total fee.
- As a consequence of the changed membership status of Mars & Mercury Denmark, the Board worked out a revised version of the statutes and standing orders to allow for this membership status. These revised versions include also some other minor changes, in particular in relation with the exclusion of an effective member.
- Due to some concerns of a nation, the Board revisited the vision and mission statements of Mars & Mercury Europe and forwarded a revised version for your comments. In consequence, the website of Mars & Mercury Europe was adapted to harmonize its content with these revised statements.
- Mars & Mercury Europe organized a BENELUX event, a visit to the headquarters of NATO, 28 March 2023. On completion of a guided tour in the new headquarters' building, the

delegation was received by the Military Representatives of the BENLUX countries to the Military Committee after which the Military Representative of Ukraine to NATO gave a detailed briefing on the armed conflict in Ukraine. The lunch buffet was followed by an outline on 'Emerging and disruptive technologies' by the Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, after which the visit was concluded.

- Moreover, Mars & Mercury Europe is working on organizing a next multinational event, a videoconference to be held on 24 November 2023. The speaker, yet to be confirmed will be the CEO of BAYER BELUX and the theme presented will be : “Management of large scale companies in crises environment”.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Gaston REINIG
General
President

This report, sent in advance to all participants, did not give rise to any comments.

5.2 - Report of the Secretary General

Since the General Assembly on October 21, 2022 at the NH Hotel in Maastricht, we have experienced a large number of M&M EU Board meetings, mainly in virtual form, and some notable activities. Of the meetings, I will not mention the traditional points: welcome from the President, review and approval of the previous report, financial situation, situation and evolution of the web page and the LinkedIn group, extension to other nations and planning of the following meeting - but only the topics and highlights of these meetings:

- November 24, 2022 - VTC
 - Debriefing and finalization of the general report of the AGM
 - Discussion of the presentation of the Circulo Ave Fénix association
 - Launch of the idea of organizing a NATO visit and holding a video conference at M&M EU level
- Januari 23, 2023 - VTC
 - Discussion regarding M&M Denmark's proposal to change membership status
 - Exchange of views on the M&M EU roadmap
 - Exchange of ideas regarding the status to adopt for the Circulo Ave Fénix association
- February 10, 2023 – VTC
 - Exchange of ideas from the M&M EU Board with the representatives of M&M Germany, Stephan Howaldt (President), Ulrich Hermann (Vice-President) and Wolf-Arthur Kalden (Hon Gen President M&M EU)
- February 27, 2023 - VTC
 - Preparing for the membership of the Circulo Ave Fénix association
 - Review of the M&M EU vision, mission and roadmap
 - Looking for a secure solution for M&M EU archives
 - First program ideas for the 2023 AGM in Strasbourg
- March 28, 2023 – Visit to the NATO HQ
 - M&M BENELUX delegation received by the 3 MilReps: LtGen Claude Van de Voorde (BEL),

LtGen Michiel van der Laan (NLD) and Col Marc Assel (LUX)
Conference of MilRep of Ukraine to NATO, GenMaj Sergii Salkutsan and Deputy Assistant Secretary General “Emerging Security Challenges” James Appathurai

- April 03, 2023 - VTC

Exchange of ideas from the M&M EU Board with the representatives of M&M Denmark, Mr Torben van Lowzow (Pres) and Mr Peter Vinther Christensen (Tres)
Internal debriefing of the Board and study of the necessary adaptation of the statutes following the proposal from M&M Denmark to change their membership status to associate member

- April 20, 2023 - Recognition in Strasbourg for the 2023 AGM

Participants: Hon Gen Gaston Reinig and Mr Philippe Gielen
Study of the program, visit to the hotel, the meeting room (Cercle Mixte Militaire) and the restaurant (Chez Soi)

- May 08, 2023 - VTC

Preparing for the membership of the Circulo Ave Fénix association
Preparing for the video conference with M&M Denmark
Review of the vision, mission and roadmap of M&M EU
Action to secure M&M EU archives
Discussion on the results of the recognition of Strasbourg
Study of the 2023 GA budget

- June 05, 2023 – VTC

Preparation of the membership document for the Circulo Ave Fénix association
Control of statuses concerning “Associate Members”

- June 29, 2023 – VTC

New study of the 2023 AGM budget following proposals from M&M France

- July 13, 2023 – VTC

Preparation of elements of the 2023 AGM, mainly the agenda
Implementation of the video conference (November 2023)
Debriefing on contacts with Finland

- August 23, 2023 – Meeting at the administrative headquarters, Aardbruggenstraat 61 in Alken

Preparation of the 2023 GA

- October 02, 2023 – VTC

Last coordination 2023 GA

- October 20, 2023 – General Assembly in Strasbourg

- November 24, 2023 – Video Conference

Subject “Leading large companies in a crisis environment”.
The speaker will be Ir Werner de Prinz, CEO of Bayer BELUX

Miscellaneous

We note important changes in the Steering Committees of the national Circles:

New Presidents : Belgium: Marc de Brackeleer
France : Remy Walter
Germany (2024): Ulrich Hermann
Switzerland : Lucas Schmutz

- February 2023: Following the call for collaboration from Hon BrigGen Gonzalo S Urbon (President Ave

Fénix) on the subject of geological penetration radar, a number of contacts, mainly Belgian, were made.

- April 27, 2023: The members of the Circulo Ave Fénix (ESP) association issued, during their General Assembly, their association agreement with M&M EU. Given the agreement obtained by the members of M&M EU during the AGM of October 21, 2022, all the conditions of association are

met. This will be officially finalized during the M&M EU AGM on October 20, 2023.

- Participations by members of the M&M EU Board :

May 12, 2023 : “Koningschieten” in M&M Club North-Brabant/Limburg (NLD) : Ph. Gielen

May 18, 2023 : Participation as a panel member in the debate of the “International Defence Fair”

in Madrid organized by the Circulo Ave Fénix association with the theme

“The advantages of incorporating soldiers into civilian companies”: G. Reinig

Septembre 28, 2023: Concert of the Provincial Commandment of BEL Limburg and Mars & Mercury Limburg & Kempen : G. Reinig

Philippe GIELEN
Secretary General