



Associação
Nacional de
Sargentos
ANS - Portugal



APR/2012 105th Presidium Meeting, Limerick-Ireland

National Report of ANS (Portugal)

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they **fight** you, then you win.”

This Ghandi sentence pretty much sums up what has been the associative movement concerning the military. Although we are far from winning, we have been having some big fights since last October 2011 Presidium.

On the 22nd October 2011, at a Lisbon University, a room with 600 seats was clearly insufficient to lodge the 2000 soldiers, sergeants and officers that wanted solutions for their problems, caused by the continuous attack on the Military Condition.

A national street rally for Lisbon was scheduled on that Meeting, for November the 12th.

Mobilization was nationwide, and as a result, over ten thousand military marched in Lisbon streets, on what it was the largest military demonstration ever in Portugal.

Big mistake to presume winning a battle means winning the war. A few days later the Government announces a 25% cut on the 14th wage, effective 2011, and future complete cuts on the 13th and 14th wages, valid from 2012 to 2014. This applying for the entire State sector, military included.

Not happy with that, the Government passed a law so that over 4000 military were sent back to the same values they earned in 2009, invoking “irregularities” on their transition to the new wage table, which had happened over more than one year before.

According to the Portuguese Law this is illegal, according to common sense it's immoral and an atrocity. We are fighting this decision by all means, but when it comes down to going to a Court of Law, the opening process fee goes around 450 Euros per process, and that scares many people away.

The Government is desperately seeking any sort of income, to continue to feed the voracious appetite of their friends inside the banking and the financial system. This extends to such malevolent behaviour that, within the Nation Budget Bill for 2012,

lost among many pages of fine print, many changes to previous laws are hidden, such as the Mourning Subsidy for the military: formerly if a military died, its surviving spouse would receive 6 times its basic wage e.g. if he/she earned 1500 Euros monthly, the spouse/husband would get around 9000 Euros, enough to pay for the funeral expenses and to hold on for four to six months, till the widow/widower pension came along. Nowadays Mourning Subsidy is 6 times the Social Index Wage (419.22 Euros), even smaller than the Minimum National Wage. From 9000 to 2500 Euros, hardly enough to manage funeral expenses. Again the Portuguese Military came on the streets, on November the 30th, to protest against this National Budget Bill for 2012, gathering over one thousand in front of the Presidential Palace, where a delegation with the three presidents (ANS, AOFA and AP) delivered a document, while all over the Country, in ten other cities, small groups of military gathered in front of their Mayor's offices, also stating their concern and disgust.

At the same time, we were debating with the Parliament Defence Committee, and all political parties therein, the Amnesty bill that we were proposing the Parliament to vote, through a Public Petition with over 4700 signatures, aiming to clear every record of punishment from the service sheets of all the military punished by associative reasons. In spite of we having in our records and files, and presenting, written punishment sentences that convict the military for "union" and "associative" activities, the MOD when asked who were the military punished for associative reasons replied stating that no military was ever punished by associative causes, and hence our public petition was dismissed.

At December 28th the military went back on the streets, this time to a vigil in front of the MOD, that gathered around 300 sergeants and soldiers (ANS and AP) protesting against the salary regressions.

2012 didn't brought us anything better: on January the 6th the General Chief of Staff granted ANS, AOFA and AP an audience that had been requested, on which he reported that the 4000 military whose salaries were going back to the values of 2009 were "the best deal possible".

The GCS referred to an original list of 7000 military, not 4000, implying that "breaking an arm was far better than 2 arms and one leg". Our reply was that the Military

Condition is not negotiable; the Military Condition is a statute, the only special compensation we have for the nights, holidays, weekends, extra hours that we put in for the mission's accomplishment. It's the only compensation for working miles from home, in extreme conditions at times, changing place every few years (like it or not), or ultimately offering your life for the sake of others. It's regrettable that a Military Chief might even consider this to be "negotiable".

In the beginning of February, the MOD, during a dinner closing a Defence Seminar, made a speech where he proclaimed the Portuguese Armed Forces as unsustainable and declaring the Government intention of making profound reforms.

The inappropriate innuendo that Armed Forces are supposed, just like any corporation, to be profitable, or at least self-sustained, caused a wave of indignation throughout the military and some civilian personalities. Like if it was possible to declare as losses the expenses made saving the life of hundreds of citizens every year, in several ways.

As for reforms, we ourselves have been proposing a lot since, or even before, our foundation in 1989, and although some cosmetic changes have been made, the core, difficult ones remain to be done. E.g. the infamous Career restructuring that already met four different Working Groups along almost 7 years, producing so far zero results.

One can wonder if this Government is merely whistling the tune of the song that will be used to transform the Armed Forces in some armed force, paving the way to some serious future economic cutbacks, because whistling the tune will make everyone else familiar with the song, and hence nobody will take notice when it sounds.

This statement, along with the salary regressions, the increase of Health related expenses and the fact that our careers have been "frozen" (no promotions or progressions) for the last years, were the *leitmotif* for the Concentration scheduled for February the 16th outside of the Prime-Minister's official residence. On this occasion the ANS board delivered a document to the Prime-Minister, through its Military Chief of Cabinet, denouncing these matters, and referring that, once again, against the law in force, the military associations were not being consulted before and during the process of legislating on military social and professional affairs.

ANS also requested, in between, audiences to the Chiefs of Staff, to talk about all these problems. When we were received by the Army Chief of Staff, a newcomer to the position, he told us that all personnel was going to deduct an additional 1,5% over the Military Condition Supplement (around 4-5 Euros per month) for Health benefits. But this would have a retroactive effect going back to January 2011 (adding up to 100-150 Euros to be paid immediately). The morning after this could be read in the Army Newsletter, broadcasted to everyone.

After a couple of weeks scoping every bit of law on this matter (and there are plenty) our Vice-president Mário Ramos came to the conclusion that this additional tax may not have legal coverage. We discussed this in a Board meeting and came to the same conclusion. Later that week we had a meeting as part of the Consulting Council of the Armed Forces Social Action Institute (IASFA), a private institution built on private military legacies, that the previous Government appointed (and oddly they accepted) as responsible for managing Military Health system (ADM).

In this Consulting Council take seat all the Military Associations, representatives from the three branches, 2 representatives from the MOD and the 3 Generals that compose IASFA Board of Directors. During this meeting ANS presented its views on the additional taxation projected, objected to it on grounds of no legal support. Everyone else, except the Generals, agreed to this, which came as a great surprise to us. Bottom line, on the next day, the online payment sheets (that already showed these additional taxations) were removed, and so far seems that this idea has been relinquished. We feel confident that new ideas will arise, new ways of squeezing every cent from our pockets, and we will remain vigilant.

In the beginning of March, we lodged a complaint with the Judicial Ombudsman, supported by over one thousand signatures of military personnel against the salary regressions. This so far has had no positive result except the fact that it was useful in terms of denouncing and debating the facts, inside the institution.

In the following week ANS decided to schedule the VI Sergeants National Encounter for May the 26th 2012. The mobilization work already begun, and we aim to produce and propose viable solutions for the problems affecting the Armed Forces and ourselves, in a modest but realistic way.

On March 28th the Secretary of Defence summoned us for a meeting on which he announced that the "freezing" of promotions would cease since January 2012, but promotions could only occur as long as the personnel expenses would not increase.

Interrogated on what would be the promotion criteria in such scenario, the Secretary replied that it would be up to each branch, depending on budget available.

That is completely unacceptable. If one is lucky enough to be in a branch that still has economical capabilities he might get promoted; some other guy, maybe even senior, compared to the first, because his branch has no money left will not be promoted at all?

Aren't we all military in the same Armed Forces? It's the State that is responsible for providing the Armed Forces with all the necessary capabilities for its normal functioning.

We're finishing this report on the dawn of April 25th. On this day, 38 years ago, the Portuguese Military overthrew a dictatorial regime and founded the basis of democracy. Tomorrow afternoon, the 3 Military Associations invited the Military Family, as usual for the last years, to march on Lisbon main Avenue, alongside with the people we emanate from, celebrating Democracy and Freedom.

We hope these ideals might once again arise and lead to a better life for all of us.

Lisboa, April 2012

ANS Board