

**WORLD VETERANS FEDERATION**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the**  
**Standing Committee on European Affairs (SCEA)**  
**Cetinje (Montenegro), 16.-19<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

**REPORT OF THE MEETING**

**“Veteran Support”**

**1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

All participants were welcomed by the President of the Republic of Montenegro, H.E. Filip Vujanovic, the Mayor of Cetinje, Mr. Alexandar Bogdanovic and Mr. Andrija Nikolic, the President of SUBNOR, the hosting veteran organization.

The Chairman of SCEA, Mr. Dan–Viggo Bergtun (Norway), then opened the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the SCEA. He thanked the Government of Montenegro and all hosts for their help and support to organize, administer and facilitate the meeting in the beautiful city of Cetinje. He especially expressed gratitude to Mr. Nikolic, President of SUBNOR.

Mr. Bergtun also warmly welcomed the President of the WVF, Mr. Hamid Ibrahim, the Executive Board, all delegates, observers and guests. He wished for a good and fruitful meeting and hoped that all participants would contribute to the discussions in the important matters that would be addressed.

H.E. Filip Vujanovic awarded the national “Medal for Service” to both Mr. Bergtun and Mr. Ibrahim.

After the opening ceremony the Chairman led a minute’s silence to honor and commemorate the veterans who have died since the last meeting. Col. Joe Falzon, delegate from the UK honored the late Mr. Robert Leader, Chairman of the British Members’ Council in a special eulogy.

**2. ROLL CALL OF THE DELEGATIONS PRESENT**

Confirmed by a roll call, the meeting was attended by delegates from the following 21 countries:

Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina\*, Bulgaria, Croatia\*, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany\*, Israel\*, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal\*, Russia, Serbia\*, Slovenia\*, Sweden, Turkey\*, Ukraine and United Kingdom. The delegation from Russia was present only on June 17<sup>th</sup>.

\*Countries with 2 or more delegations

South Korea, Morocco, and Swaziland (Members of non-European Regions of the WVF) also sent delegations.

Observers from the Ministries of Defence or Offices of War Veterans of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland and South Sudan were also present.

The full list of participants is available on the WVF Website or on request from the Secretariat.

**3. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The agenda was adopted unanimously.

#### 4. ELECTION OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL RAPPORTEUR

Mr. Dragomir Vucicevic (Serbia) was elected unanimously as Vice President of the SCEA.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Rainer Fiegler (Germany) was elected unanimously as General Rapporteur of the SCEA.

#### 5. REPORTS OF THE SCEA

##### a. Report of the Chairman of SCEA, Mr. Dan-Viggo Bergtun.

Mr. Bergtun drew a positive summary of the SCEA activities since the last meeting in Kiev and concluded that the WVF initiative "Friendship Across Borders" was showing promising results. The Chairman confirmed that he had visited 36 countries and had meetings with more than 80 WVF member organisations over the past two years. A lot of effort had also been made to visit government representatives in European countries to put the veteran issues on the agenda. The Chairman had also visited the UN, UNESCO, EU and other NGOs related to veterans affairs.

The Chairman added that in November 2011, the Working Groups of SCEA met in Oslo. The main issue on the agenda was to decide on future directions for co-ordination and co-operation among SCEA members.

The SCEA was also active in the planning and execution of the WVF Peace and Security Summit held in Stockholm in May 2013, with the theme "How can veterans take part in creating peace and security in society".

He also touched on the activities of the 6 Working Groups established in Kiev and at the General Assembly in Jordan (short description later under this paragraph). The Chairman drew special attention to the Veteran Health and Welfare Working Group led by Mr. Jos Weerts and a meeting of the Western Group of countries in Doorn (The Netherlands) in 2013. This led to the idea to hold a similar symposium in Montenegro and he thanked Mr. Weerts in advance for having agreed to organize it.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

##### b. Veterans Health & Welfare Working Group (VHWWG).

Mr. Jos Weerts (Netherlands) said that the SCEA had identified the following four themes and subjects that are relevant to the majority of the WVF member organizations in Europe:

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and other psychological problems;
- Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms;
- Premature ageing among veterans;
- Veterans support Veterans.

This report had been presented earlier, in 2008 in Portugal. Following the recommendations, the VHWWG had been asked to elaborate on these themes and to develop practical activities implementing these four themes. As a result, the 2013 meeting in Doorn was organized, which focused on "finding a new meaning in life for veterans". In the symposium during this meeting the theme of "Support for Veterans" would be on the agenda.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

##### c. WG on Women (WGW).

The Chairwoman, Mrs. Inge Nedergaard (Denmark), presented the report of her WG and appealed to all participants to always consider what can be done for women, who both as veterans and as family members of veterans, need specific support.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

**d. WG on Eastern Europe Countries (WGEEC).**

Mr. Sergei Chervonopisky (Ukraine)

The full report was not yet available. It will be published on the website as soon as it is made available.

**e. WG on Southern Europe Countries (WGSEC).** Mr. José Arruda (Portugal)

The full report was not yet available. It will be published on the website as soon as it is made available.

**f. WG on Northern Europe Countries (WGNEC).** Mr. Tom Asplund (Finland) presented the report of the four Nordic countries highlighting the great variety of actions performed and activities planned.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

**g. WG on Western Europe Countries (WGWEC).**

Lt Gen (ret'd) Remco Seijn (Netherlands) had his report circulated in advance. He underlined the results of the meeting in Doorn which led to the symposium in Montenegro. In this meeting were also representatives from the WGEEC, WGNEC and VHWVG.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

**h. WG for Caucasus Veterans (WGCV).**

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Gia Toratze (Georgia), Mr. Vucicevic (Serbia) informed the delegates about the status of this WG.

The full report is available on the WVF website or on request from the WVF Secretariat.

**i. WG for the International Veteran Rally (WGIVR).**

Mr. Gennady Shorokhov (Russia) informed participants that the March of Battle Brotherhood had recently started in Russia. The detailed route and all relevant critical dates would be made available on the WVF website. .

**6. COUNTRY REPORTS**

Member associations had been requested to prepare a report on their main activities over the last 2 years. Reports from the following 19 countries were submitted and/or orally presented:

Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom,

All country reports were distributed during the meeting and are available to member associations on the WVF website or on request from the Secretariat.

The reports submitted by the following countries drew particular interest:

- United Kingdom - New developments to fund veteran affairs and ongoing research concerning the needs of veterans.
- Norway – The current inquiry about deficiencies in veterans affairs
- Sweden - Comprehensive approach in legislation for veterans

**7. FOLLOW UP TO DECISIONS taken at the 22<sup>nd</sup> SCEA meeting held in Kiev (Ukraine) on 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May 2011 and the resolutions adopted by the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Jordan on 18-22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012.**

The Secretary General, Mr. Mohammed Benjelloun, reported that the following four recommendations of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of SCEA were subsequently adopted by the 27<sup>th</sup> WVF General Assembly:

The first concerned the convention on rights for disabled persons adopted by the UN. Member associations were called upon to encourage their governments to ratify the international convention. The WVF would be interested to be informed about the measures taken by the member nations in this regard.

The second recommendation concerns the health and wellbeing of veterans. Association are encouraged to press their governments to work to improve health services. The WVF would also appreciate being informed of any developments or interventions in this regard and whether any measures have been taken by governments.

The third recommendation concerns assistance to refugees and displaced persons. Member associations are requested to keep the WVF informed of measures taken by their respective governments in order to help any refugees or displaced persons that wish to do so to return to their countries. Also, the necessary measures for re-establishing their rights.

Finally, the fourth resolution concerns xenophobia and racism in Europe. Members are called upon to undertake any possible action in their countries against the development of xenophobic and racist movements in Europe. The WVF would appreciate receiving a summary of action taken in this regard.

The Secretary General categorized the 34 resolutions adopted by the last General Assembly as follows:

- 9 resolutions concerning amendments to the WVF constitution and rules
- 7 resolutions concerning internal affairs
- 8 resolutions concerning social affairs
- 10 resolutions concerning future activities

He added that WVF Secretariat would ensure that all the approved amendments to the WVF constitution and rules would be incorporated in the new re-print of the WVF Constitution.

The Secretary General concluded by saying that the WVF Secretariat had already received numerous reports from member organizations concerning the progress and status of their follow-up action to adopted resolutions. He encouraged everyone to follow this example so that the Secretariat would be able to prepare a full report of all actions taken in this respect for circulation at the next General Assembly in Poland.

**8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were adopted:

1. 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of victory in the Second World War.  
Submitted by the War Veterans Union of Bulgaria. The recommendation was adopted with one vote against.

2. Charter of Rights for Disabled Armed Forces Personnel (Revised)  
The recommendation was submitted by the Veterans League Portugal and adopted unanimously.
3. Protecting the benefits provided to veterans during the economic crisis (Revised)  
The recommendation was submitted by the Veterans League Portugal and adopted with one abstention.

In addition an Appeal, forwarded by the President d'Honneur of the WVF, Mr. Serge Wourgaft , to put an end to fighting in Ukraine was unanimously adopted.

The same applied for an Appeal forwarded by Portugal to commemorate the outbreak of hostilities in the First World War (without a written text proposal).

The texts of the adopted recommendations and the appeal were distributed to the delegates.

## 9. Symposium “Support for Veterans”

The general theme of this symposium was: Support for Veterans. The Chairman of the Working Group, Mr. Jos Weerts (Veterans Institute, Netherlands) pointed out, in his introduction, that there are three perspectives to support for veterans:

- support by professional institutes and organizations,
- support by veterans’ organizations and
- support by veterans for other veterans.

This symposium was organized in co-operation between the VHWWG and SCEA, with a surprisingly high and good response to the invitation for member organizations to send proposals for presentation. Eight countries had indication their intention to contribution to the symposium.

During the symposium there were presentations on the three above perspectives as well as on special projects and activities by the following organizations and persons:

- Prof. Dr. Sophie Pinkas (War Veterans Union of Bulgaria) reported on the socio-economic support and health care for the 6000 surviving veterans of the Second World War (now all in their 90s), for whom, amongst other benefits free health care and free public transport are guaranteed by law.
- Mr. Joaquim Rodriguez (Veterans’ League, Portugal) informed the meeting on the Centers for Medical, Psychological and Social Support (CAMPS), created by his organization.
- Mr. Sebastian Lohmüller (Union of the Armed Forces, Germany) highlighted the newly created ‘Soldiers and Veterans Foundation’. The post presentation discussion focused on the aims and purpose of the Foundation - Mr. Lohmüller acknowledged that there was a danger that the Foundation might inadvertently pick up roles and responsibilities normally expected to be within the remit of government.
- The issue of ‘Veterans Support’ was elaborated on by Ms. Jelena Surlan (Veterans Organization of Serbia) and by Col Bjarne Hesselberg (Blue Berets, Denmark). Ms. Surlan spoke about the Veterans Clubs and the Mutual Support and Self-Help Groups in her country; Col. Hesselberg informed the meeting on a specific initiative in Denmark known as “The Partner Model”, in which the government, military trade unions and veterans’ organizations collaborate to run a network of ‘Comrade Support’, initially developed by the Blue Berets veterans.
- Lt Col (ret’d) Joseph Falzon (British Member Council, United Kingdom) mentioned the impact throughout UK of “The Two Worlds of Charlie F’, a creative theatre

production, which serves to empower individuals, boosting confidence and self-esteem.

- Col Bjarne Hesselberg (Blue Berets, Denmark) and Mr. Abraham Yanai (Zahal Disabled Veterans Organization, Israel) reported on the value of recreational and competitive sports and adventure training.
- Finally, Ms. Heilwine Bakker and Mr. Richard van Holsteijn (Balans & Impulse, The Netherlands) presented, in a challenging and exciting way, their newly developed application, which can now be downloaded, called 'The Traffic Light'. Soldiers, veterans and others (such as police officers) can use this application as a tool for self-assessment and self-management.

Presentations and hand-outs are available on request.

References:

Soldiers and Veterans Trust: [www.soldaten-veteranenstiftung.de](http://www.soldaten-veteranenstiftung.de)

Veterans Organization of Republic Srpska: [www.borackars.net](http://www.borackars.net)

The Two Worlds of Charlie F: see youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I16M5sgt6PI>

Veterans and Sport: Caddick, N. and Smith, B. (2014). The Impact of sport and physical activity on the well-being of combat veterans: A systemic review. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15: 9-18. (Scientific article, abstract available at:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1469029213001027>)

Traffic Light: [www.trafficlighttool.eu](http://www.trafficlighttool.eu)

## 10. Future Activities

- Mr Dan-Viggo Bergtun stressed that SCEA would strongly participate in the necessary acquisition of new funds.
- A new Working Group South-Eastern Europe had been established. It would be headed by Mr. Sekulic from Montenegro.
- Mr. Bergtun announced that he planned for a co-ordination meeting of the SCEA Board and all Chairpersons of the established working groups in Bæreia ( Norway) from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014.

## 11. OTHER MATTERS

- Lt Col (ret'd) Joe Falzon (United Kingdom) requested that the well-established "WVF/SCEA Rules of Procedures" should, in future, be circulated in advance of an SCEA Meeting and then strictly adhered to. This will serve to eliminate anomalies in the critical processes of elections and dealing with recommendations. Subsequently, a copy of the "WVF /SCEA Rules of Procedure" was distributed to all participants. The Chairman acknowledged that these Rules of Procedure would be applied in future SCEA meetings.
- Lt Col (ret'd) Falzon also requested that delegates receive a financial update from the WVF Treasurer General.
- Lt Gen (ret'd) Remco Seijn informed the meeting that following the recent sale of the WVF Head Office in Paris, the WVF was solvent until 2017. He added that the Executive Board continues to explore all available avenues to improve the financial state of the WVF.
- Dr. El Ktiri from Morocco provided a briefing on the status of veteran welfare.

## **12. DATE AND PLACE OF THE 24<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

It was decided that the 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SCEA will be held in 2017. The place and exact date will be fixed later. Both Portugal and Norway have expressed an initial willingness to host the meeting.

The decision will be taken by the end of the year.

## **13. CLOSING OF THE MEETING**

WVF President Ibrahim addressed the meeting, giving special emphasis to the financial situation of the WVF. He stressed that even though some reserves had been made available as a result of the sale of the Head Office property in Paris, there is still a permanent deficit caused by the high number of member associations failing to pay their annual dues. He pointed out strongly that if this situation persisted then the WVF would be faced with a financial collapse in 2017. The President announced that, as already mentioned by the Treasurer General, a variety of projects were under consideration to try and improve the financial situation. He also indicated that in the same context the corporate identity of the WVF needed to be changed so as to attract a new and younger veteran population.

He announced that a Working Group under Vice President Godfrey Giles is tasked to look into the necessary upgrade of the internet appearance of the WVF and our Public Relations efforts.

He repeated his vision of a WVF Institute for Veterans Affairs which could co-ordinate all aspects on a global scale and appealed to the delegates to support the Veterans Walk for Peace.

After a short outlook on future WVF- events in 2014 and 2015, he congratulated SCEA for a very successful and productive meeting.

Thereafter the chairman closed the meeting,

Rainer Fiegler  
MajGen (ret'd)  
General Rapporteur