

# FULCRUM

JASON O'MAHONY

EUROPE. THE NEAR FUTURE.  
GENERAL SILVANA KEADY HAS DEFEATED A RUSSIAN INVASION  
AND CREATED A HUGE REFUGEE SAFE ZONE IN NORTH AFRICA.  
TO MANY SHE SAVED EUROPE.  
TO OTHERS, SHE IS A TYRANT.  
TO ONE MAN, SHE IS A TARGET.



# **Fulcrum**

**A short novel about the future of Europe.**

**Jason O'Mahony**

**Dedicated to the residents of Brussels, Paris, Madrid, London, and any other European city that refuses to yield to the extremists.**

**Special thanks to Elina Talvitie for her advice and editing, and Karen Pappin for the cover design.**

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**In 1988, the people of Chile went to the polls to vote in a referendum. The choice was whether to extend the term of office of General Augusto Pinochet or to remove him.**

**Pinochet had ruled the country as a brutal dictator since toppling a democratically elected Marxist government in 1973, torturing opponents and 'disappearing' or murdering over 3,000 people.**

**Forty-four percent of voters cast their ballots in favour of keeping him in office.**

## Prologue

### Brussels, Belgium – the near future

The stiffening attitude of the sharpshooters on the roofs surrounding the school was the first sign that the motorcade was getting close. The covers were flipped on their telescopic sights and information conveyed into their throat microphones. The Close Protection section of EuroSec didn't hold with the "rolling thunder" model of their United States Secret Service counterparts, all wailing sirens and flashing lights. Their motorcades tended to drive fast, two Europol outriders leapfrogging with another two colleagues to clear the way through junctions for the half a dozen black BMW SUVs with their blackened windows. Two of the six vehicles had armed EuroSec agents in SWAT gear. The sixth SUV had a paramedic trauma team who specialised in gunshot and blast-related injuries.

A European Defence Force EuroTiger gunship helicopter, armed with heavy machine guns and anti-tank missiles, clattered above the convoy along the route.

The headmaster stood at the steps with a small number of staff and two students. The general had vetoed the media office's idea of getting a group of schoolchildren waving EU flags to greet her. She had known full well that the entrance of the school would be a high-risk target for an attack and so had not wanted to put so many people in harm's way. The ideal solution would have not met any civilians outside the school, but having the person in charge of Europe's safety scuttling from armoured car to secured building for fear of random nutcases with sniper rifles was not the image of Europe she wanted to create.

This wasn't an American elementary school. This was Europe.

The motorcade pulled up outside the school with practiced ease, various aides stepping out alongside the EuroSec agents who surrounded the third car.

People were always surprised by how small General Silvana Keady was. It wasn't a secret that she was just over 1.5m tall, but with her slim figure the word *petite* hovered on the lips.

Her size seemed to sit awkwardly with her *de facto* title, at least in the media, of "Europe's New De Gaulle", the most powerful woman in the world, indeed the most powerful person in Europe. The striking blonde in the modified German general's uniform gazing from magazine images looked far more imposing than this small, demure woman in an elegant if unflashy business suit.

"The General", as she was known to many, stepped out of the SUV, smiled at the headmaster and shook her hand, speaking to her in French. She then leaned down to take the flowers offered by the little girl, who was of Arab extraction and wore a hijab. She spoke nervously in French. Keady smiled and gave the little girl her full attention.

Given her military background, the general recognised the rattle of automatic gunfire a split second before her bodyguards, and lunged forwards to pull the two schoolchildren to the ground. She held them tight as her bodyguards piled over her to protect her.

On the roofs above, the sharpshooters opened fire at the commercial four-rotor drone just as it turned the corner of the street past a bakery and headed straight for the general's party. It ducked and swerved as it flew, performing what looked like a pre-programmed evasive pattern designed to avoid small-arms fire from the ground.

In the EuroTiger, the pilot lined up the drone with his helmet-mounted display firing sight and released the safety lock, before hesitating. The Nexter 30mm cannon fired at 2,500 rounds per minute, which meant that even a single-second burst at the drone would destroy it. But it would also fire 42 armour-piercing rounds, most of which would either miss or pass through the drone and end up in the apartments in the firing line behind the drone, killing God knows how many civilians. In a fraction of a second, he verified that the road beneath the drone was clear of traffic and pedestrians. Tilting the flying column forwards, he rammed the helicopter into the drone.

The fireball consumed both aircraft, with the EuroTiger buckling in mid-air, struggling to stay aloft, before dropping onto the road as if its aerodynamics had ceased to function. It hit the road with an excruciating crash, enveloped in flames, debris scattering across the street and shattering windows.

The EuroSec agents had the general into the one of the SUVs in seconds, despite her protests as she screamed and pointed at the two children. A EuroSec agent scooped the two children up in his arms and barrelled through the door of the school with them.

The motorcade did not spare the sirens and lights on the way back to the Berlaymont building.

As per European Defence protocol, the squad of soldiers in the Berlaymont took up positions to repel an attack. In Finland, the Baltic states and Poland, fighters on quick-reaction alert, sitting on the runway with their pilots in the cockpit, hit their afterburners and scrambled into the air.

All across Europe, the political and military infrastructure went on high alert. Europe was not going to get caught again.

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**EuroNews**

## **GUNSHIP PILOTS PRAISED FOR HEROIC ACT FOILING ATTEMPT ON GENERAL KEADY**

**Brussels, Belgium.**

Two European Defence Force pilots, Capt. Michel Tanguy and Lt. Ernest Laverdure, released from military hospital today with minor burns, have been praised by the Commissioner for Continental Safety, General Silvana Keady.

Both men will later be decorated by the French and Belgian governments for their action in ramming their EuroTiger helicopter into a remote-controlled drone loaded with high explosives, after taking the decision not to use the helicopter's on-board machine gun for fear of killing civilians.

The attack has been the fourth attempt on the life of General Keady since she took office six years ago following the Third European War. The terrorist group Free Europe has claimed responsibility.

The European Security Agency (EuroSec) is continuing to carry out operations against the group.

The leader of the anti-Keady Europe of Free Nations Group, Tom Batten MEP, told the European Parliament that while he condemned the use of violence to achieve political change, he could understand why some would turn to it.

“Who elected this woman who now controls the two and a half million soldiers of the European Defence Force, the half a million officers of EuroPol, and above all the 20,000 unaccountable thugs of EuroSec, our brand new environment-conscious gender-balanced Gestapo? General Keady holds power over this entire continent, over sovereign national governments, because of a power grab in the middle of this continent's darkest days. Of course, there are countless millions getting angry, and that anger will only continue to grow. If General Keady wants to prevent future outrageous like last weeks, she knows what she has to do: go!”



## Chapter One: The woman who saved Europe.

Lars Tiller's eyes adjusted to the darkness after one of the thugs pulled the thick bag off his head. He didn't bother pulling against the plastic ties that held him secure to the chair, as he'd already ascertained that they weren't coming off easy.

It looked like a warehouse that had not seen activity in a decade at least, lit only by an industrial works light that his captors had rigged up and that seemed to operate off a battery.

The two men looked at him. Both were dressed in forgettable street clothes, jeans and tight jackets, and had that look of ex-military about them, maybe ex-Foreign Legion. They'd grabbed him off a street in Hilversum where he'd been holed up, aware that a warrant was out in his name from EuroPol and therefore EuroSec .

They looked like EuroSec. He'd avoided EuroSec custody so far, but had heard the stories that it answered direct to the General and so its agents felt above the law. Neither the national police forces nor even EuroPol interfered with EuroSec. Europe's new Stasi, a continent-wide secret police operating from Portugal to Helsinki to Athens, some in the media speculated.

And now they had him. He looked at the car battery powering the light, and speculated as to whether they'd be using it on him soon.

Not that he could tell them much. Maybe the same house in Copenhagen, but even the Danish Police knew about that, and so EuroSec would have to tread with care. Ever since Denmark had left the EU, along with the British and the Irish, he believed that the word had gone out. The general, they said, would not want the Danish police grabbing a EuroSec unit, not when she was trying to coax the Danes back in.

But now he was back inside the EU, on EuroSec turf. Anything went now.

At the end of the warehouse, a door slammed. His eyes were still adjusting to the darkness and harsh glare of the lamp, but he could see a figure walking the length of the building and hear his footsteps echoing off the walls and through the puddles that had gathered on the cold concrete floor.

As he got closer he could see the figure shield his eyes from the lamp.

"Untie Mr Tiller. He's amongst friends here."

Tiller recognised the voice. It was a Dutch accent, with a hint of American as so many Dutch English speakers had. A product of watching American movies and TV programmes that are not dubbed but sub-titled, he was told once.

The figure stepped into the light just as one of the thugs cut the ties behind the chair, freeing his hands. He stood up, surprising both men who stepped in closer.

The newcomer was well dressed in a long warm coat and a stylish scarf. He waved his hands to reassure the two men.

“Please, everybody, let’s calm down. Nobody wants any trouble here.”

He pulled a sealed bottle of water from his jacket pocket and offered it to Tiller.

“Mr Tiller, I thought you might like some refreshment?”

Tiller took the bottle. It was ice cold, as if straight from a fridge. He looked at the man, and recognised him. Tight grey hair, mid-fifties, a bit jowly but not obese, with black framed Harry Palmer glasses.

Mark Villiers. Banker, businessman, one of the wealthiest men in Europe.

“I apologise if my fellows were a little robust, Mr Tiller. They’re used to people objecting to their requests. I assure you, all I want to do is talk, and then I’ll make sure they will take you wherever you want to go.”

Tiller cracked the seal on the bottle and downed half of it in a single gulp.

Villiers leaned against a pillar.

“You know who I am?”

Tiller nodded.

“Excellent. Well, I know who you are. And it may surprise you, but I believe that you and I have a mutual interest.”

Tiller laughed.

“I doubt that very much.”

“You want Europe free of the jackboot of the Keady regime?”

Tiller took another swig.

“I do. I can’t see why you’d want her out, though. I’d have thought your sort are quite happy with her and her concentration camps.”

Villiers smiled.

“Oh, she’s good for business, that’s true. I’ve even made some money out of KeadyVille and Cyprus. But money isn’t everything, you know.”

Tiller waved a hand at his surroundings.

“So, what’s the deal: if you lead EuroSec to my compatriots, you get what? The contract for the electric cattle prods?”

Villiers signalled to one of the men, who placed a sports bag at Tiller’s feet.

“Half a million in euros. A clean gun with ammunition, and a false EU-ID card. Yours to take as a gesture of goodwill.”

“Come with a free tracking device for a EuroSec drone to follow me, see who I meet?”

Villiers frowned.

“You’re very cynical, Mr Tiller. You’re a man of training and talent. Feel free to search every bundle, dismantle the gun, leave the bag, whatever you want. You can leave it all here, if you wish. It’s just a gesture of goodwill from me, to show you how serious I am. You can go, right now.”

Tiller began walking down the warehouse, past the industrialist.

“Or I can help kill the general,” the Dutchman said.

Tiller stopped, and turned on his heel.

“Just answer me this, Villiers. Why would they send you? You’ve never been even a moderate Eurosceptic. I’ve seen your interviews. You’re a big fan of the EU, European integration, all that rubbish. Why on earth would EuroSec think that you of all people would make me a recruit?”

Villiers folded his arms. He looked like he was enjoying himself.

“I am. I believe in Europe, in cooperation, the dream of One Europe, all that. But this isn’t it, Lars. This was a power grab. Silvana Keady is a brazen opportunist who created this structure out of chaos, not out of a democratic mandate. That matters. Once again, war has put a German dictator towering over a continent. But like the last time, the whole house of cards is held together by her. If she goes, the whole thing crumbles. Keadyville, Cyprus, EuroSec, everything. She’s the lynchpin.”

“How would I even get near her? That latest act of stupidity with the drone will have sealed her in. No one can get near her. EuroSec might as well have her in an underground bunker. Everything we’ve tried, the ambushes, the IEDs, the drone...”

“Supposing you don’t have to get near her?”

“What does that even mean?” Tiller asked.

Villiers took out a card from his pocket and held it out.

“You can get me on this line any time you want. I won’t insult your intelligence by giving you a burner phone. Make your own arrangements. But call me in three days. If I have a credible solution, we can proceed. If I don’t, you can decide to walk away.”

Tiller took the card, looked at the number, then tore up the card.

“And if I decide just to walk away now?”

Villiers shrugged.

“Then I try to find some other patriot. But I’ve gone to a lot of trouble in selecting you, Lars. I think you’re the real deal, and if I have a serious proposition, I don’t think you’ll walk away.”

Tiller said nothing, turned and walked away down the warehouse.

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***Excerpt from "Silvana Keady and the Europe she saved"***

Although they didn't know it at the time, the first time most Europeans and indeed people around the world saw General Silvana Keady was in that now iconic image taken during the Russian Special Forces attack on Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. The image, of the then youngest general in the federal German army crouched beside a burning military Mercedes, in formal uniform, beret neat over her tight blonde bun, firing an assault rifle at attacking Russian soldiers, has since become iconic, moreso when the media realised who it was that a Portuguese tourist had just happened to snap upon being caught in the middle of the gun battle and choosing to take pictures rather than flee.

Future historians will no doubt praise the young student's courage and/or recklessness in providing an image that so fitted into the eventual historical narrative of General Keady.

Napoleon's alleged quote about desiring lucky generals could apply to Keady. Whether it was her good fortune to be delayed in arriving at the NATO meeting in SHAPE's headquarters, and thus not be among the almost entire senior military command to be killed by the Russian missile attack that struck the building in Mons, Belgium, or the fact that her Irish father had left her with a clear and excellent command of the English language and a dry, droll and self-deprecating sense of humour that allowed her to communicate in a period when it was vital, luck placed Silvana Keady in the right place at the right time.

Having fought off the Russian assault, alongside NATO security police, Keady had been shocked to discover that she was the only senior-ranking general in NATO's European theatre who was not dead or incapacitated in the attack or missing. Activating the emergency protocol, Keady relocated herself and as many senior NATO officers as she could muster by helicopter to the secondary NATO command (NATO SecComm) post in Northern France.

It was en-route that she became aware of the chaotic picture. The Russians had launched a widespread assault on Finland, on Poland through Belarus and on the Baltic states. On top of that, civilian news sources were reporting a massive explosion at the summit in central Brussels attended by every EU leader. The French president was already confirmed dead, along with the Dutch, Belgian and Spanish prime ministers. The location of the German, Polish leaders was unknown, but it was assumed they were buried in the rubble of the European Council building hit by multiple Russian cruise missiles.

After the war, historians would speculate that the Kremlin under President Bulgarin, watching the EU disintegrating over the issue of refugees and Islamist terrorists, and watching the Irish, British, Danes and Hungarians convince themselves that nations could ignore global integration and thus leave the EU, had decided that Europe would collapse in short order. It would not need to be annexed, because the EU would descend into individual

countries pleading with the Russians, one on one, and surrendering to Russian domination. Finlandisation 2.0, the Kremlin had called it. Europe would cower before the stick that would never be needed to be used.

As for the Americans, they had their own problems amid a state of cultural civil war. Schoolchildren were being gunned down on a daily basis as armed militias faced off, the rednecks against the blacks, the Muslims against the Christians, all exercising their Second Amendment rights. Hysterical fools running for president. The US's much depleted military focused on the Pacific. Yes, the US would respond to its NATO obligations, but the Russians were sure that America would not put up much of a fight to save Europe if the Europeans were too lily-livered to defend their own continent.

The plan was simple. Cut off the head, strike fast, then call for a ceasefire from a position of unassailable strength, all of Europe clear who had won and who had lost, who was in charge now.

On arrival at SecComm, Keady determined that NATO forces were in chaos. Air defences had been neutralised by massed Russian attacks; ground forces had been overrun at the frontiers. Attempts to identify the alliance's political leadership failed, as the US president had been evacuated and the US was on Defcon Two, fearing a surprise Russian or Chinese attack with nuclear weapons.

Keady pulled together a shocked ad-hoc command staff. Some still had the blood of colleagues on their uniforms from the firefight at SHAPE. One Belgian colonel refused to relinquish his rifle. Keady decided that the priority was for the NATO forces to regroup, as per the countless planning and strategy war-gaming sessions. Given that NATO's communication system was also struggling under the strain of a massive attack, Russian jamming and a decapitated chain of command, she made the decision historians would later regard as the moment the Keady image was born.

Insisting that a Polish major and a colonel from non-member Finland who had been an observer at NATO join her, and placing a large EU flag behind her in the tiny TV studio, Keady waited for TV news channels and radio stations to cut live to her.

She introduced herself as the acting Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Europe, and explained the attacks. She asked for calm, and then proceeded to issue, live on television, coded instructions to NATO forces to head to their rally points. At the same time, NATO air forces were ordered to provide cover for retreating forces.

For years later, controversy would rage among historians over the broadcast. In later interviews, Keady herself acknowledged that all she had done was issue instructions that were part of a NATO plan prepared to deal with a surprise Russian attack. But from a public perspective, the broadcast took on a different significance.

From the initial early-morning reports of explosions in Brussels, to images of Russian armour pouring across the border, Europe was in a state of panic. Civilians in Finland, the Baltic states and Poland fled west. With stories emerging by midday that their political leaders were either confirmed dead or still buried under rubble, the appearance of General Keady, flanked by her colleagues, was the first clear picture that someone was in charge. The fact that she was a calm, rational woman speaking barely accented English also helped.

Within hours, Keady had bypassed the political shambles in the European capitals and gone straight to military commanders in the NATO countries. The US had activated its Atlantic Bridge, and forces were assembling in Eastern Seaboard ports, but they'd take a week to reach Europe. Spanish, Italian and Greek commanders were all quick to begin assembling forces to deploy. Keady was angered by the response from Turkey: the AK political leadership, undamaged due to Turkey not being a member of the EU despite being a NATO member, announced the country was neutral in the conflict and would not participate.

By early evening, repeated sorties by NATO air forces had slowed the Russian advance enough to allow NATO ground forces to begin to mass in Western Poland. The news was not as good in the Baltics or Finland. Tallinn had fallen to the Russian advance by late evening, and Russian forces were now fighting past Pärnu, with Estonia's volunteer defence league putting up a fierce if desperate resistance. In Finland, ground forces backed up by Norwegian and Swedish air-force support were fighting a frantic battle to hold the Russians at a line between Lahti and Kotka.

With Helsinki coming under constant Russian air attack, Keady ordered the airlifting of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Greek troops first to Turku and then by land to the front. The Finnish representative had expressed concerns about the Greeks, and had requested German, French or British troops, but Keady had refused, pointing out that all available troops from those countries were either in combat or on their way to the Polish front, and it was less disruptive to "leapfrog" the Mediterranean troops.

After the war, the Finnish colonel apologised for the request and admitted he had been wrong. In the world-famous battle of Loviisa, Finnish forces had attempted to evacuate the town's 15,000 residents when Russian forces broke through the lines and raced for it. The only NATO force between them and the town was a battalion of Greek marines, who, despite having no armour and being outnumbered, held up the Russian advance for over two hours in a ferocious firefight. Of the 300 Greek soldiers, 263 died, today all buried in an immaculate cemetery just outside the town, watched over by Greek and Finnish soldiers. To this day, a Greek flag flies alongside the Finnish flag over the town hall, and the town pays for the family of any of the fallen soldiers to visit the cemetery.

By the end of the first day of hostilities, NATO ground forces were in retreat everywhere except in Finland, but it was an ordered retreat to a plan. In the air, NATO aircraft were now battling to re-establish air control.

Keady, aware of the need for the conflict to be won in the media, appeared numerous times on TV to reassure both the peoples of Europe and Europe's soldiers in combat that someone was in charge despite the political chaos raging across Europe's capitals as substitute leaders were being appointed. Attention to detail was a big issue, with Keady ensuring that she was always accompanied by officers from Poland, Finland or the Baltic states on screen, and with an EU flag behind her symbolising that this was not a German issuing instructions but a continent united in self-defence.

By 9:30 that night, the news had come through that NATO forces had withdrawn from both Riga and Vilnius, and torrents of refugees were blocking the roads, fleeing to Poland.

At 10pm, the Russian president announced to the world's media that the operation was a limited action in response to provocation from Finland, the Baltic states and Poland. He assured the French and German governments that Russia had no interest in entering Germany or in occupying the countries Russian forces were attacking, but in degrading the military capacity of "fascistic" elements within those countries' respective governments and their ability to threaten Russia.

To the surprise of many, Keady responded to the remarks in person, announcing that the objective of NATO and allied forces would be the restoration of the full sovereignty of Finland, Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, and the complete removal of Russian forces from those countries. The announcement, without political authorisation, came as a shock to the new political leaders across Europe. Although he denied it for years afterwards, the new acting French president attempted to remove Keady, but was blocked by the new leaders in Finland and Poland, as well as being endorsed in public and with passion by the Baltic leaders who had been evacuated to Brussels.

By day two, through a massive overnight effort and 24-hour interdiction of Russian forces by NATO planes, Keady ordered the counter attack.

A large force of Swedish, British and Spanish armour was landed under air attack in Turku in Finland, speeding to join up with the bulk of the Finnish army to the north and west of Helsinki. At the same time, the biggest land force in Europe since World War II, consisting of armour from almost every NATO country, set out from western Poland and slammed into the Russian juggernaut.

Keady showed great pragmatism, contacting the Russian ambassador to NATO (who had remained in Brussels under heavy Belgian police protection) and advised him that NATO forces would not enter the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad provided it was not used for military purposes. He agreed.

The Russian advance was halted 20 kilometres east of Warsaw, as NATO forces, now supported by airpower flown in from the United States, began to inflict seriously degrading damage on the Russian ground forces.



By lunchtime on day two, Russian forces were in retreat from Poland. A second NATO force turned north and crossed the Lithuanian border, engaging Russian forces south of Vilnius. It was becoming apparent in the intensity of fighting that while the Russians had no intention of trying to hold Poland, the same might not be true about the Baltic states. Keady informed her command staff, and the visiting (and emotionally brittle) exiled presidents of the three countries, that the matter was not up for negotiation.

NATO would not stop until it had reached the Russian border.

In Finland, the combined Finnish/Swedish/NATO force was now in full-throated battle with the invading forces. NATO aircraft made considerable use of the long and well-designed rural Finnish and Swedish roads to land and replenish fuel and ammunition, as they had been designed to be.

By the end of day two, NATO forces were retaking Lahti and Loviisa.

On the morning of day three, Keady was summoned to an emergency meeting of NATO's new political leaders in London, where armoured vehicles and soldiers were on the streets and RAF and Royal Canadian Air Force interceptors thundered over the city.

Keady briefed her political leaders, and was then informed that they were very grateful for her service and leadership during the crisis, but that command of NATO forces would now be handed over to a US general, as was the standard NATO practice. General Keady accepted her dismissal, and returned to her hotel to get some much-needed sleep. Such was her exhaustion that she slept through the next extraordinary 12 hours.

The news that General Keady had been fired seemed to ignite a spark in the European public consciousness. The clear statements from NATO's media office that she had not been fired but rather replaced in accordance with protocol seemed to cut little ice with the public, and crowds started to gather outside the NATO summit in London.

Across social media, the hashtag #bringbackKeady caught fire.

The heads of government were shocked to be booed as they left the summit, and the Finnish prime minister was quick to declare that Finland, as a non-NATO member, had not been consulted but that he favoured the allied effort being headed up by General Keady. In Warsaw, a crowd of just under a million people took to the streets chanting Keady's name, resulting in the new Polish president announcing that perhaps General Keady's contribution to the NATO campaign had been underestimated.

The three Baltic presidents, who had reluctantly agreed to the dismissal, now dissented in public. The Estonian president in particular pointed out that Keady had not only filled the leadership vacuum, but had provided a focus point for the people of Europe.

The first Keady knew of any of this, having forgotten to charge her phone and fallen into a deep sleep, was when NATO officers, accompanied by a harried hotel manager, pounded at her door to inform her of her formal instatement as Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Europe.

After a quick shower, the still groggy general was taken aback to find a crowd of thousands outside her hotel who cheered when she stepped out. She waved before getting into the NATO car, which sped off with police escorts.

Keadymania had begun.

Sociologists have deconstructed the subject for years, concluding that it was a perfect storm of drama, emotion and an attractive candidate being available just when the public mood demanded it. The fact that (by her own admission) an unspectacular but solid junior general had been in place just when a continent in panic needed to at least believe it had a clear leader was the key.

Keady herself was not unattractive, but also blessed with her father's received pronunciation, which allowed her to communicate in what was the world's first language. She also had the sense from the first moment of command to recognise that having a German officer in command could grate with other Europeans, even in this time of crisis, and so had been very careful as to the optics. Without comment (and in clear violation of Bundeswehr rules) she had replaced some (but not all) German insignia on her uniform with EU flags.

Indeed, the use of the EU flag, an organisation perceived by many Europeans as a tolerable if necessary evil, turned out to be effective. Whatever people felt about the European Commission and bank bailouts and lawnmower regulations, the flag now took on a new meaning.

It was the flag of a continent united against the Russian invader. Even The Daily Mail, no fan of the EU and a key player in the referendum that had taken Britain out of the EU, but astute as to the changing zeitgeist, featured the flag behind an image of the general with the declaration that "Keady's back!"

Across the continent, her recall and appointment caught the public mood. Tabloid newspapers from Dublin to Vienna latched on to her as the face of Europe's resistance.

The image of her fighting outside SHAPE started to feature on everything from T-shirts to street graffiti.

On her return to command of allied forces, with a new US deputy in tow, the war was entering its final phase. The Russians were now in retreat from Finland and had withdrawn from Poland. The Russian president then called for a ceasefire, and for negotiations

regarding the Baltic states, perhaps with those countries being designated as neutral buffer zones.

Keady, concerned that her political leaders may well accede to the request, and before they could act to prevent it, ordered an immediate airlift of troops into the Estonian town of Narva, behind the Russian lines and with a clear run to St. Petersburg. She also ordered NATO aircraft to overfly the Russian city, an action made possible due to the deployment of Russia's limited available aircraft to Vilnius. The media spread a leak from NATO headquarters suggesting that NATO was about to launch a bold assault across the border and by sea on St. Petersburg, to humiliate the Russian president, who took great pride in his home city.

There's no question that the Russians were sceptical about the idea that NATO would dare land forces inside Russia, but public perception was everything. If the president could not keep NATO troops off the streets of his own home town... After all, this was a man who had built his reputation as the political hard-man of Russia.

It was also, as Keady knew, a question of resources and logistics. Despite the myths created by the Russian president, Russia was not the Soviet Union, nor did it have the military resources of the former superpower. Russia's forces were as stretched as NATO's holding the frontier in Finland and now securing the Polish-Belarus border. The fighting outside Vilnius was intense but beginning to become unsustainable as US reinforcements arrived in France and the Netherlands.

The truth was, the Russian plan had hinged on a faster collapse of NATO, with the distractions of Finland and Poland being enough to force Europe to sue for peace. It had been a gamble, and it had failed, and the Kremlin knew that further fighting would only lead to Russia's defeat.

The Russian president, with the typical chutzpah of his dealing with the west, announced that Russia had made its point, that the fascists in the west had received their beating, and that the conflict was now over. He called all concerned parties to a summit to settle the matter.

The war ended as soon as it started. Russian forces in Estonia and Latvia headed eastwards to Russia, and the forces in Lithuania disengaged from NATO forces and withdrew.

Keady, who had been visiting the front in Vilnius, found herself heading an division racing north through Vilnius, into Riga and Tallinn and then to link up with the dug-in US, British, Lithuanian and Dutch paratroopers in Narva, who were surprised to see massive convoys of waving Russian soldiers trundling past them, soldiers waving. The NATO column was delayed not by its own efforts but by media attention announcing Keady's presence, which in turn brought crowds of cheering civilians onto the streets.

The Third European War, as it came to be known, was over.

The NATO/Russia summit held in Warsaw concluded a face-saving agreement and was most notable for the enormous crowds that cheered Keady's arrival as she stepped out of her helicopter to meet a sea of Polish, American and European flags. The general, in a short leather jacket and a formal wide-brimmed army cap, was likened in appearance to a female Rommel. One Polish minister waiting to greet her remarked to a colleague that he never thought he'd see the day when a Polish crowd would cheer a German general. Although led by the Polish president, the image that defined the summit was the cold handshake between Keady and the Russian president.

To millions of Europeans, the image was clear. *The General* spoke for Europe.

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## **BBC News**

### **UKIP MPs CALL FOR MILITARY ACTION AGAINST EU**

#### **London, England**

A group of backbench UKIP MPs led by Sir Charles Buffington has called on the government to consider a military show of force against the European Union, including the possibility of firing an unarmed Trident ballistic missile over the Berlaymont building in Brussels, headquarters of the European Commission.

Sir Charles was addressing his Surry South West constituency association at its annual Ian Smith commemoration dinner.

“It’s a damned outrage that having voted to leave the damned EUSSR we now find that our exporters still have to obey EU regulations and red tape to sell fine English produce to the bloody wogs and krauts. This is the world’s fourth fifth great military power, for God’s sake. The Armada! The Battle of Britain! The Falklands! The 1966 World Cup! Does this damned woman not realise who she is dealing with? She should be off cleaning behind fridges or whatever, not telling every manjack of us what to not put in our marmalade! I’m calling on the government to issue an ultimatum to the European Commissars: let us sell whatever we damn well please or we’ll send a 100% English Trident up your jacksie! And there’s more where that came from!”

Sources claim that Buffington is speaking for a considerable body of opinion on the Conservative/UKIP backbenches who feel that the exit of Britain from the EU seven years ago has not reaped the rewards promised. Many express disappointment at the fact that England still seems to be affected by outside global and European factors despite withdrawal.

“It’s like a country can’t hide behind its borders anymore. It’s a disgrace. Winston Churchill didn’t let foreign nonsense affect his decision-making, I can tell you that. Nor Mrs Thatcher!” an unnamed UKIP MP is quoted as saying.

A spokesperson for Commissioner Keady, when asked to comment on Sir Charles remarks, said “Who?”

## Chapter 2. The weapon

### *The European Union Refugee SafeZone, North Africa*

The old Arab leaned back on the steps in front of the district government office, pulling his tattered hat lower over his eyes to shield them from the midday sun. Merkel Square was under a canopy of noise, market traders selling everything from fruit to clothes to tobacco to toothpaste. Men and women of different races and appearances, from full burkas to Western clothes, haggled and bickered and laughed, old women squeezing fruit and arguing over the quality, their daughters holding too-short skirts to their waists for the opinions of sisters and friends. If there were some present who objected, and there were, they knew better than to voice their opinions of what Allah forbade or to impose their opinions on women. The female Belgian or Portuguese EDF soldiers patrolling the square had little tolerance for misogyny, and had the firepower to back it up.

Commissioner Blair, despite being a man of faith who enjoyed nothing more than a visit to one of the city's religious institutions for a discussion on spirituality, was adamant. Faith was to be tolerated and free and respected, but no one would be permitted to impose their values on others. The European Union Safezone Authority in eastern Libya would just not tolerate it.

This was to be a little bit of Europe in Africa.

Indeed, it was not just the threat of military power that kept order. Blair's deputy Ahern had been much more blunt. "Any nonsense from you lads and we'll fuck you out on your ear!"

The threat of expulsion from the zone was a serious stick to wave towards any of the 1.2 million refugees it was home to. Every single resident's biometric record, from fingerprints to DNA to retina scans, was accessible anywhere across the European Union. As a result, a criminal conviction or expulsion from the zone ruled one out of winning eventual asylum and residency within the continent.

That was the power of KeadyVille, as the zone was called in the media. Every year since it had opened in the chaotic years after the war, a fixed number of residents, once vetted, were given not only residency in the EU proper but the right to travel between both. That special blue EU-ID card was the most valued document short of an EU passport in the whole city, and EuroSec knew it, too. The commissioner had designed a points-driven system where, after vetting for extremist views, one could accrue points as a reward for cooperating with the peaceful life of the city. Obey the law: there are points for that. Volunteer for the militia that worked alongside the European Defence Force troops: points. Participate in the multi-faith organisations, more points.

The rule was very simple: behave like a European and you might get to Europe, and every year 50,000 refugees did.

It hadn't been easy. The refugee crisis had been seen by the Kremlin as an opportunity. Europe was in disarray, the EU falling apart, member states building fences and walls and trying to fob unwanted refugees off onto each other. Then the war came, and after that the waves of Islamic State attacks across Europe. Then the mob lynching of Muslims in Hungary and Slovakia, and hundreds dying in mosque fires in France and Germany as the new post-war governments struggled to maintain order.

It had been the General who did it, who announced how Europe would deal with the refugee crisis. The forces that landed in civil-war-torn Libya and seized control of an area big enough for Keady's plan, and the military engineers assembled the camps in record time.

She'd been savaged by the left, who accused her of building concentration camps and pursuing 21st-century imperialism to boot. They had tended to ignore the soldiers she'd dispatched to protect the mosques and Islamic schools, as well as the fact that the plan was popular with Europeans. The national governments, nervous of this woman who was supposed to be their creature, nevertheless saw the public reaction.

Someone was doing something. Someone was restoring order.

Many of the refugees had rebelled on hearing they were to be shipped to Libya, and dozens died in riots, but it happened. Just shy of a million unprocessed refugees were either airlifted or shipped to Libya.

In the beginning, the camps were rudimentary, but Keady bullied the European governments into raising billions in Eurobonds to turn it from a series of camps into an actual city where people could build a life. Schools, hospitals, roads, water plants, sewage, all were built, all the building materials and many of the builders sourced from Europe. Some Libyans fought a guerrilla war against the annexation, supported by Islamic State, but other Libyans found that they were given special status and preferred contracts to supply food and other goods to the city. Their streets were kept safe by EU troops. Their children could attend the EU schools and participate in the EU's Erasmus programme to study in European universities.

Keady then used her position to ensure that the residency programme was accepted by the member states, while also making sure that the city remained inside the eurozone and the European single market, its businesses finding a market on the continent.

It began to work. Six years later, KeadyVille was, after South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, the fastest-growing part of Africa.

The old Arab scratched his chin, looking at the market. A beautiful woman, tall and black, and dressed in colourful striped robes, moved with grace among the clothing and fabric displays. She was getting the attention of pretty much every man whose eyeline she crossed. Save for the old Arab. He got up and walked, bent over and in a less than straight

line, towards a whitewashed arch that lead from Merkel Square down a narrow lane and into another square.

Just ahead of him a young man, bearded and dressed in more layers than the heat seemed to warrant, increased his pace and exited the lane into Dreyfus Square.

On the square, a number of Christian churches, mosques and one tiny synagogue all faced each other and a large well in the centre of the clearing. Men and women of various religious backgrounds were gathered in the square talking. Outside the synagogue, which catered to the tiny number of Jews in the city, a jeep with six Muslim militiamen was parked. A rabbi was leaning against the jeep chatting, sharing a tray of tea and cakes.

It was a standard arrangement: the Christian and Muslim militia took turns guarding the synagogue. In the early days of the city, an Islamic State attack on the synagogue was repelled by six Muslim militiamen, who all gave their lives defending the building and the Jews inside. Their pictures graced the wall of the temple and all were prayed for every Sabbath by the congregation.

The young man stopped at the square, ascertaining where he was. Seeing the larger Catholic church, he pulled something from his jacket. Something on a wire.

The old Arab threw off his hat, revealing that he was not as old as he was dressed, pulled an automatic pistol from his own clothing and screamed in English into a cuff mike. He then identified himself as a EuroSec agent and ordered the young man to halt, gun pointed at him.

The young man stopped, hesitating, looking at the Arab, he then turned and ran towards the Catholic church.

The Arab fired three times, hitting the man in a tight grouping in the back, felling him on the spot. Around them people were screaming at running, the militia leaping behind their vehicles, automatic weapons at the ready. Two of them bundled the rabbi into the synagogue.

The Arab reached the young man, putting his gun away but holding a bright yellow EuroSec card over his head. Too many undercover agents had been killed by eager security forces responding to gunfire, arriving on the scene and shooting first.

The EuroSec man turned the body over, cursing. The accent had the slightest German tinge to it.

“What did you do that for, friend? That was just plain stupid,” he said, pulling open the man’s jacket to see the explosive vest. And the display on it counting down. This poor fella was going to die no matter what he did.



The EuroSec man felt the hard unyielding edge of the automatic pistol connect with that awful unnatural force when a human head comes into contact with a hard surface. He fell forward, not unconscious, but seeing unconsciousness jogging at a fair pace towards him.

On his side, he could see a tall Arab standing over him, bearded and eyes burning with a lack of love or mutual respect for European counter-terrorism agents.

“Hey!” a French voice said to his attacker, taking his attention away from the EuroSec man. He turned, just in time to see the stunning black woman from the market deliver a full-force palm to his face, followed by a twist, an elbow to his stomach and then the top of her arm into his nose, breaking it. He fell back screaming in pain.

The EuroSec man struggled to his feet, pointing at the man he’d shot.

The woman, who was keeping his gun on the man she’d put on the ground, looked at the vest. It was counting down. In seconds.

The EuroSec man lifted the body to his shoulders and ran towards the InterFaith Well. Having thrown the body into it, he then turned and shouted at those remaining in the square to take cover.

The bomb exploded, throwing up a mix of fire and water in a plume, ripping chunks of stone from the well’s wall and destroying the canopy and pump to one side.

The dust settled in a few moments, as a squad of EDF troops arrived, spreading out in the square. The two agents held up their EuroSec cards.

“You know Tony Blair himself paid for that well. To help aid interfaith prayer,” Corrine Dufour said as she cable-tied the man she arrested.

Henning Schmidt picked his old Arab hat off the ground, beating it off his leg.

“And it saved the lives of quite a few people in this square. That’s what I’ll put in the report. The power of prayer. Praise the lord.”

“You’re very cynical for a Muslim,” she said, handing the prisoner over to the EDF soldiers. She then leaned in.

“And bedding your partner within a week of meeting her, and her an infidel, that can’t be in the holy book.”

Schmidt put his gun away in his jacket.

“Yes, but in my defence before both you and the Prophet, I was pissed at the time. Now, we’ve been on leave for the last hour. If we get back to the compound we can catch a convoy to Tobruk where for a whole week there is a villa, a pool, good food and drink, a

local restaurant that is superb and a bed just made for beautiful French secret agents and their handsome German lovers.”

“And when is he coming, then?”

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### ***Herefordshire, England***

The major looked into the jeep’s mirror at the driver’s eyes. The corporal glanced back, then looked back at the road. The eyes hadn’t betrayed anything — no nervousness, no glance of the contempt for a disliked senior officer which NCOs had spent centuries perfecting in such a way as to avoid ever being accused of insubordination. This corporal’s eyes showed a sense of calm. Not relaxation, just self-control, self-confidence.

The sergeant in the seat beside him seemed to be dozing, save for the fact that every 20 seconds, to the second, an eye flicked open to take a quick look at the road. He wasn’t sleeping as such, just resting, the major thought. It irritated him a great deal.

“Are you sleeping, sergeant?” the major barked, the irritation not hidden very well despite his effort.

The eyes opened. Not a look of one startled, but of one well used to uppity officers.

“No, sir. Meditating.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Meditation, sir. I find it’s very good for stress release.”

“It is, sir, very good,” the corporal piped in.

“When I want your opinion I’ll ask for it, corporal. This is the Brit... the English Army, sergeant, not some hippie commune.”

The slightest hint of a smirk appeared on the sergeant’s lips, which made the major’s blood boil even more.

The two men had shown him the usual courtesies when they had collected him and the cargo from the RAF base, but had not liked his dressing down when he noticed both were carrying American small arms and not the standard English issued SA-80s. He knew why, as well. Both were dressed in proper uniforms, turned out proper, yet both had that stance of relaxed coil spring that he found with most members of their regiment.

That was the problem with the special forces, he felt. They believed their own hype. It also irritated him that these two had run an eye across his campaign ribbons, noting that he had not served in combat during the recent European war. Both of them had.

He'd served in transport logistics. It wasn't that he hadn't wanted to fight, but his commanding officer had felt that perhaps his "disposition wasn't the mae west for this campaign, old man."

It had been his own fault, he admitted. He had loathed the European Union and Britain having anything to do with it, and had been delighted when Britain had voted to leave. Then Scotland went afterwards, which hadn't bothered him that much anyway, ever since they'd got that bloody parliament and had gotten above their station.

The wave of anti-European feeling that swept the country in the months and years after the departure had suited him too, as had the expulsion of the bloody ungrateful Poles and the others too. British withdrawal had turned out to be not without its problems, as the EU just turned its back on Britain and British business found that even an EU ignoring them could still affect them.

Then the attack on the European Council and NATO happened, and he had launched into a drunken tirade about letting the Russians have all the wops and the spics and the frogs and the krauts and the rest. Sadly for him, the English government disagreed. England would fight to defend Europe, and so English and Scottish troops made their way across the channel and into action, and gave an honourable account of themselves in combat in Poland and Estonia.

Major Rupert de Cadenet, on the other hand, did not see as much as an air raid, left behind in barracks to "keep an eye on things, there's a good chap." His colonel didn't need this nasty bigot sneering at their continental allies when the Russians needed to be thrown out on their ear, not after listening to his pro-Kremlin diatribes. His commanding officer had rolled his eyes at the drunken ravings, pondering when a class of right-wing reds-under-the-beds Thatcherites started seeing that Russian fascist as a fellow traveller. Probably when he started queer bashing, the colonel told his husband.

And so the war had been won, and the regiment came back in one piece and with more medals than a North Korean staff officer between them, and de Cadenet was mocked by the younger officers who had fired their weapons in anger and felled the enemies of England while he had been shipping tinned goods to their forward locations.

"Very important job, old man. Chaps need their beans after a day fighting the Russian," the colonel had reminded him.

His wife had stopped speaking to him, sick of the cutting remarks over bridge from the other officers' wives. She half expected to start receiving white feathers in the post.

Deep within the recesses of his angry stewing bitter mind, thoughts and fury had knitted together as to who was responsible for his humiliation, for keeping him out of action the one time in a generation he had opportunity to show he was a man.

He'd seen her on the telly, of course he had, everybody had seen her, that bloody kraut woman. When the continentals were falling apart, when the Russians were going to sweep the faggots and socialists and the layabouts and the feminists and all the rest out of Europe and destroy this liberal godless quagmire at last, she had stepped in. He'd laughed at this tiny slip of a woman in her little pretend uniform telling soldiers what to do. But they had, and the Russian onslaught had been slowed, then stopped, then reversed, then the fucking bitch was like Montgomery or Patton leading a column of tanks up the road to Estonia surrounded by people cheering as if it was in "A Bridge Too Far". There she was in Warsaw, facing down the Russian in front of a sea of Polish and German and European flags, and all of a sudden she's a cross between Eisenhower and De Gaulle, and standing in that bloody awful parliament in Brussels telling that lot that Europe has to unite to stop the Russians chancing their arm again. Then the Muslims kick off, and the refugees swarming in, and she stages a bloody coup!

It's her fault. It's her fault the juniors in the mess sneer at him, and he now sleeps in the spare room and his wife looks at the gardener's son that the way when he's got his shirt off near the petunias. It's all that bloody woman's fault.

The package was secured in the back of the jeep, in a long rectangular metal box and a very secure lock. The Americans who had handed it over to him had not only taken his ID, but his fingerprints and retina scan and put them into some sort of device which verified that he was who he said he was. They'd then handed it over to him, and he'd brought it to meet these two yobbos from Hereford and "the regiment".

That was another source of disgruntlement with him, having to deal with these thugs and their reputation. Climb over one balcony with a gas mask on and interrupt the snooker, and you're regarded as an elite regiment. Half of them didn't go to the right school, and were nowhere near enough spit and polish for his liking. But that's these special-forces types: spend so much time doing cloak and dagger they start getting notions that they're James Bond. Don't have any respect for their betters.

"Oy oy," the corporal said, as the jeep pulled around the corner of a rural road and into a crash scene. A motorbike was on its side, the helmeted driver still on the road. A car, what looked like a battered Mondeo, was sticking out of a hedge, the engine still running.

The sergeant cocked his weapon and flicked the selector to three-shot bursts. The corporal slowed down, unbuckling his sidearm holster with one hand. The sergeant opened the door, stepping out with caution, weapon ready. It was dark, but the moon was full and some light was coming from a motorway lighting pylon in the distance, as well as the lights of the crashed car. On either side of the road were hedges.

The sergeant shook his head.

“Nah, don’t like this: call it in,” he said, just as the first burst of machine gun fire hit the jeep. The major yelled in surprise, diving down onto the back seat.

The sergeant hit the road, eyes flickering from side to side. The bullets had hit both the windscreen and the bonnet of the jeep, indicating a forward firing position.

“Didn’t see a muzzle flash. This is a professional job, let’s get out of here!” he said , moving off the road surface and into his seat. A second burst hit the windscreen shattering it just as the corporal, head crouched down behind the dashboard, expertly negotiated around the abandoned motorcycle as the prone motorcyclist leapt to his feet holding an automatic pistol. The corporal twisted the wheel, just missing the other man with the wing of the car, before righting it and speeding away from the scene.

“Now, that was just spiteful, corporal,” the sergeant said with a grin, before looking back at the officer in the back seat.

“You all right, major?” he asked, just as the major shot him point blank in the face.

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***Excerpt from "Silvana Keady and the Europe she saved."***

With the exception of her most poisonous detractors, both her admirers and critics admit that once the Treaty of Warsaw and the end of hostilities had been formalised, Silvana Keady had no intention of going anywhere near politics. Instead, it had been her intention to continue her military career in the Bundeswehr.

It was true that her contribution to the Allied victory and her fame meant it would have been impossible not to have given her a high-profile military appointment, possible as head of the German armed forces, but no one expected her to participate in public life. In the aftermath of the massacre of most of Europe's senior political leaders, it had taken time for parliaments and national assemblies to appoint new governments and prime ministers, and it was there that political attention was focused.

And so it would have been, had it not been for Islamic State and its belief that Europe, in a weakened state with the vast bulk of its military deployed on its eastern frontier, was open to receive a crushing and humiliating attack.

Black Wednesday is remembered not only for the beginning of the wave of attacks across the continent, but also for the situation it created. Attacks not only were launched in Paris, London, Dublin, Berlin, Madrid, Copenhagen and Rome, but remained active for a week. Dozens of IS fighters carried out spectacular outrages in some of the best-known public places in Europe, leaving over two thousand people dead from Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square to the Ku'damm to the Champs-Élysées. For a whole week, armed police fought pitched gun battles with small groups of armed terrorists in the streets of Europe's great cities, as the governments declared martial law and ordinary people hid terrified in their homes.

Everywhere from Google's European headquarters in Dublin to the New Synagogue in Berlin was targeted and witnessed urban fighting not seen in Europe since the Yugoslav civil war.

Then, after a week, with the authorities confident that the active units involved had been defeated, the anti-Muslim backlash began. Mobs gathered outside mosques. Muslims and indeed any dark-skinned bearded men were being attacked in the streets. Copies of the Holy Quran were being burned at rallies by right-wing politicians. In Paris, two mosques were torched, one with over a hundred worshippers inside. Refugee camps received similar treatment. One sailor on a Greek naval vessel opened fired at refugees in the water, killing ten, including three children, before being overcome by his fellow sailors.

In the reconstituted European Council, politicians struggled in bad-tempered meetings which descended into brawls, one live on television between the Hungarian foreign minister and his Romanian counterpart.

In NATO headquarters, Silvana Keady watched all this, and then did what she always did: analysed the problem and prepared solutions. Since the end of the fighting, she had concentrated on securing eastern border from Finland to Estonia through to Poland, and it worried her. She had no doubt, at this moment, as allied forces dug in, that Europe was secure from the Russians. The problem was that the national armies could remain there only for so long before national parliaments and national media started complaining about the costs and talking about “bringing our boys and girls home.”

The more she studied the problem, the more she was convinced of the interconnectedness of Europe’s borders and its security from both internal and external threats — from the Russians, who needed to be kept out by force, to refugees, who needed to be managed better. Everything, as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin said, she recalled, was connected to everything else.

On top of that, she watched the hard-right politicians from Britain to France to Hungary and the Netherlands all building a platform based on the genuine fear of ordinary Europeans.

It took a week to prepare, her research staff in NATO working throughout the night with her to gather the facts and costs, and then it was ready. If she was one thing, Silvana Keady was a brilliant organiser, and it was all in the document, ready for off-the-shelf implementation if adopted.

“Proposals to secure Europe.” the title page said. Nobody would ever remember that.

The Keady Plan would be the name millions would know it as. Or The General’s Plan.

She sat at her desk, the report and its supporting documents piled up in front of her, after she had thanked her staff for their work and told them to go home and not to bother coming in tomorrow.

This was it, she had thought. Her Rubicon. When she launched it, Berlin and Brussels and every EU national capital would go bananas. There’d be talk of McArthur and coups and Caesar and she may even be dismissed, perhaps even court-martialled by the Bundeswehr. This was a logistical document, outlining and justifying measures and how they would be implemented, but she wasn’t so foolish as to think that’s all it was. This was a political document, a manifesto even.

She knew the names she would be called for even suggesting some of the measures, but so be it. She and her staff had stayed up until all hours, surrounded by takeaway food, debating and discussing the options. Some had expressed doubt, as they knew she would want them to. But at the end of the process, none disputed the rational logic of the proposals.

She made her decision. This would be the last thing she did, but in the report put her ideas on the table, and she knew it would, so be it.

Keady picked up the phone, which connected her straight to the private switchboard of the Supreme Commander Allied Forces Europe.

“Helga, see if you can find me the president of the European Parliament, please.”

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**EuroNews**

## **KEADY DENIES ANY PLANS TO SEIZE CONTROL OF FRENCH NUCLEAR DETERRENT**

**Paris, France**

Speaking to journalists on a visit to the Élysée Palace to meet President Boutier, General Keady ruled out any attempt by the European Commission to bring France's nuclear submarines or missiles, strategic or tactical, under the control of the European Defence Force.

The general made the remarks after Deputy Gaston Deville (FN) attacked her in the National Assembly and suggested that if the French president refused to hand over control, Keady had a plan to seize them with EDF special forces.

"This is very creative and imaginative, but nowhere near the truth. I have no plans to request, annex, sequester or steal France's Force de Frappe. I am very comfortable with the current arrangement where the rest of Europe shelters under France's generous nuclear umbrella. While I support the need for Europe and NATO to maintain a nuclear option, my job is to ensure that Europe is strong enough with conventional forces to never have to use it. Unlike Deputy Deville, I was on Europe's side in the recent war, not the Kremlin's."

The deputy has since challenged the general to a duel.

France has four nuclear submarines carrying 16 ballistic missiles each. Each warhead has an 110-kilotonne yield. The Hiroshima bomb had a yield of 16 kilotonnes.

## Chapter Three: the plot

### Brussels, Belgium

Gianni de Pietro looked like somebody's grandfather who enjoyed a morning pain au chocolat with his coffee and a perusal of the morning's papers in the café, and why wouldn't he, a retired kind old gent like that. He was always polite to the waitresses, and while they knew he ran a quick eye over their posteriors, he never got fresh or busy with his hands, unlike some of their customers. He was a nice old gentleman.

The more observant of the café's staff would notice that he read a wide selection of newspapers and magazines in a number of languages, which was not unusual in this of all cities. Perhaps he was one of those former Commission or Council officials who had spent so long in Brussels that they couldn't go home, regarding their native land as almost a foreign country. That was not an unusual occurrence, either.

The very observant would have noticed that wherever he sat, three men with tight cut suits that seemed to have shrunk in the wash were always in his orbit, watching him and his surroundings, before escorting him as he thanked the girls for his breakfast, wished them a good morning, and went on his business, his silver-tipped walking stick clicking on Brussels' challenged pavements.

Just shy of eighty, he was more spry for his age than one would expect, and took care to dress with elegance, attention always given to his ties and a fresh buttonhole carnation he picked up from a neighbourhood florist on the way to work every morning. His silver hair was longer than one would see on a man of his vintage, and was always immaculately combed.

On reaching his workplace, he'd give a cheery greeting to the armed agents standing at the armoured glass front into the glass-fronted cube that served as headquarters of Europe's secret police, or the European Union Security Agency, to give it its formal title. Not that anybody ever called it that or even EUSA. EuroSec had stuck, as he had hoped it would. After all, if the whole world called the British Security Service by the wrong but famous and catchy name, he had no problem with EuroSec. Why would he? He'd created it.

De Pietro stepped out of the elevator into the corner office with its tinted glass walls looking out at the crisp Brussels morning, and took his seat behind the desk, where a single manila folder sat on the leather blotter.

He wasn't adverse to using technology, and was quite comfortable with his Apple computer sitting on the desk, looking out of place amongst the antique surroundings, but he still liked the occasional report on paper. The big things. Situation reports, policy papers, things that he liked to digest line by line with a big, fat and expensive fountain pen that had once been owned by Reinhard Gehlen.

Buying the pen of the former Nazi who had headed up the Gehlen Organisation, West Germany's forerunner to the BND and made up of former Wehrmacht intelligence officers had been an act of mischievous whimsy typical of the director of EuroSec. Indeed, some reports in the left-wing media had spotted the purchase and drawn a clear comparison with the two men, which had amused De Pietro no end. A former communist in his youth, he had served first in the Italian army, then military intelligence, then a spell in the now defunct United Network Command for Law and Enforcement under the brilliant Alexander Waverly, before returning to Italy's domestic security agency, SISMI, which became the AISE, which he then headed. It was from the AISE that he was asked by the general to take over as director of EuroSec. Many in the same left wing media had called him "Europe's New Himmler", and he had framed the various cartoons suggesting the idea.

The truth was that De Pietro had lost most ideology as he had got older, having come to a simple conclusion. There are, in reality, only two ideologies in the world: rationality and irrationality. Rational people look at a problem, discuss the facts and desired outcomes, and come to a calm conclusion. Irrational people concluded that religion and ideology held all the answers and proceeded on that dogmatic course. Religious fundamentalists of all hues, neo-Nazis and racists, hard-line anarchists and leftists, all fitted the irrational label in his book, and so had to be watched and if necessary stamped on if only to keep this continent smelling ever so slightly of lavender, as an old intelligence colleague would say to him. That was the approach he applied to his actions as head of Europe's secret police.

He leafed through the reports, scribbling notations which his secretary would then turn into orders to be circulated throughout the organisation and its 70 offices across Europe. No one could tell you what it was he was looking for as he read the reports, as he trusted his subordinates, all handpicked at his level, to do their jobs with diligence, which EuroSec did. Every year it foiled dozens of plots across the EU from extremists, and assisted EuroPol in its intelligence gathering. De Pietro just read and waited for it to leap off the page at him. It always did, and it did this morning.

The report from EuroSec's liaison with MI5 in London caused him to pause. It was one of the great ironies. Since England's withdrawal from the EU, and Scotland's entry, cooperation had improved a great deal. Both English intelligence services and the Metropolitan Police co-operated with EuroPol and EuroSec, sharing information and assisting EuroSec and EuroPol in their pursuit of terrorists and other criminals. De Pietro had laughed at the whole situation, and the weird reality that once the relationship was no longer transparent to the English public, and the blue EU flags vanished, the English state was happy to work more closely than when Britain had been a member. The average Englander was now unaware that their government shared vast amounts of data with the EU without the protection that being in the EU and EU human-rights laws had given them. Yet, they seemed happy with it because they couldn't see any blue flags anywhere. Bless.

He read it again, and underlined a phrase. He then picked up the phone.

“Lola, my dear, will you get me Dr Braun in Ordinance, please?”

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### ***The European Union Refugee SafeZone, North Africa***

Henning Schmidt ran a hand along his partner’s dark, smooth flawless skin, causing her back to glisten with the coconut oil he was applying. She purred, her eyes closed, as a cool breeze came in over the Mediterranean. Schmidt looked out over the pool at the sparkling blue sea. Further out to sea an EDF destroyer sat at anchor.

The villa had belonged to one of Colonel Gadhafi’s cronies and had been annexed, like many properties, by the SafeZone administration. It was now owned by the Safe Zone’s Tourist Agency who rented it and other properties and hotels out to local businesses, both Libyan and owned by refugees, as part of the recovering tourism industry. Although Tobruk was a Free Libyan city not under EU jurisdiction, both the local populace and business community were quite happy with the EDF troops providing order, the EU judges who kept local law enforcement honest, and the large number of business opportunities for tourism, food and consumer goods that the SafeZone offered. Commissioner Ahern had very amenable monthly meetings with local politicians to keep the peace, and money for the soccer mad local youths (and inclusion of local teams in the SafeZone’s successful soccer league) was a big greaser of wheels. The generous issuing of EU visa to locals did no harm either, as anti-SafeZone militants discovered when the local police and militia cracked down on them with EDF gunship and drone support.

He reached over to pull another Erdinger from the ice bucket, popping the cap and looking at her naked form. She was tall, taller by 10cm than him, and had the body of a successful supermodel, with legs that seemed just too long. He was a good looking man himself, ten years older than her 29 years, and in good shape, his tanned skin and sandy blonde hair still holding off the grey. His cobalt blue eyes were a weakness as a spy, so bright and striking as to make him hard to forget, and often requiring him to wear coloured contacts or shades to hide them, but whatever harm they did to him as an intelligence operative they helped when it came to women. He had what his mother called “smiling eyes”, that crinkled at the sides when they smiled and conveyed kindness, which was not far from his natural easy-going disposition anyway. Henning Schmidt was well used to having beautiful women in his bed, but even with that, Corrine Dufour was something different.

Although born in Somalia, she had been grown up as a refugee in France with her parents. Her father, a proud man who had always provided for his family took every opportunity to continue to do so, with all of them attending daily French lessons. He became fascinated by French history, believing that the country that had taken in his family and sheltered them was entitled to his absolute loyalty. Taking a new surname from a street that impressed him,

then finding work as a janitor in a school, his first indulgence had been the purchase of a second-hand painting of Charles De Gaulle to hang in their small but clean apartment.

In the hallway of the apartment, there was also a picture of him and his wife meeting President Chirac, who had attended the ceremony for new citizens. Afterwards, Monsieur Dufour had joined the local branch of Chirac's UMP party. He had attended meetings in his best clothes and been respectful, the members not sure what to make of this black foreigner; but as his French improved and his passion for French history grew, the established members soon welcomed him and the opportunity to regale him with stories of the general and the old days. By the time he had enough savings to open a kiosk selling newspapers and tobacco, he was a party official. Later, he was elected a local councillor on the party list.

His daughter subscribed to her father's views, although not to his remarks in later life as he watched Marine Le Pen on the TV and suggested that she had some good points, which would lead to blazing rows. But even he had been shocked at his daughter's decision not to continue the modelling she had done as a teenager but instead to join the police, which was trying to recruit new officers from minorities. In it, she had been quick to encounter the institutional racism of much of the French state, as well as the male officers who managed to both loathe her race and lust after her body. Yet, she had graduated and was seconded to undercover work against Islamic extremism, her gift for languages and her native Arabic and Somali giving her an advantage. Not that Islamic extremists were going to say much to a tall, beautiful Somali woman, but in a burka and hunched down, submissive and cowering, she found she could almost go anywhere, infiltrating mosques and cultural centres and reporting on extremists. A number of Islamic extremists were shocked to discover a weak and inferior woman towering over them in police raids and reinterpreting their take on the Prophet's will with hand-to-hand combat.

A joint operation with the Italians on an Al Qaeda unit operating in Marseilles had brought her to the attention of De Pietro, and in the tumultuous early days of EuroSec she found herself seconded at the request of the new director.

She had worked with Schmidt for a year now, for ten months of which they had been lovers. It had not been a practice of hers; indeed, romantic entanglements with work colleagues were top of her never-to-do list. She was never quite sure why she had allowed it to happen. It wasn't that she hadn't found previous colleagues attractive, and such was the nature of the job that a normal romantic or family life was almost impossible. It wasn't that he was an outsider, either, despite the fact that it was true.

Schmidt's father had been a policeman, too, his mother a second-generation Turkish-German who had kept her Muslim faith but had no time for those who used it to justify violence or misogyny. She had insisted that her son be raised aware of his faith, and the father had compromised with the insistence that young Henning be raised with a grasp of

what it meant to be a German, and so he grew up a Muslim with a passion for German beer. The police had offered an attractive career, followed by secondment to the elite counter-terrorist GSG-9 and then into EuroSec too, where he'd met Dufour. "The Muslim and the African" had formed an effective team since, in particular on the six-month stationing in the SafeZone that was required of all EuroSec agents.

He kissed the back of her neck, -moving down to the small just above her buttocks.

"You know that statue of Marianne they put in all the town halls?" he asked, taking a sip of beer.

She mmmmed in response.

"I think they should put a statue of your arse up as well. The perfect symbol of all that is good in France. Beautiful, multicultural..."

"And divided," she said, without opening her eyes.

His phone buzzed. He snatched it up.

"Yes, chief?"

He listened for a minute, and sighed.

"You know with all these deferred holidays I'll be retiring on full pension in about three years' time? We'll get the next EDF flight to Brussels."

She sat up, checking her own phone.

"Next flight is in 90 minutes, which means I've at least got time for a swim," she announced before standing up, her full nude form standing rigid before bending and plunging arms first into the water.

"Magnificent," Schmidt muttered to himself, not taking his eyes off her. He suspected there wasn't a single set of binoculars on the EDF destroyer not watching her, either.

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### **Amsterdam, The Netherlands.**

In building Free Europe, Lars Tiller had recruited individuals who shared his opinions on Silvana Keady and the Europe she ruled over, but had become very aware of two factors. The first was that EuroSec was now a very effective organisation, with a network of both agents and informers across the continent, and vast electronic surveillance capabilities. Secondly, as all four of the attacks on the general had revealed, she was well protected. The fourth attempt had come closest, but even then the ring of defences around her had hardened when a threat appeared.

There was also the added problem that each attack was used by EuroSec to justify its activities and resources, confirming everything about the threats to European security that she talked about on TV. Tiller was well aware of the paradox, that every failed attack made Keady stronger. Her opinion poll rating always shot up after an attack as Middle Europe clustered around her as the rallying point for security from terrorism and extremists.

It was helped that Keady and her henchman De Pietro refused to respond to the classic brutal manner of secret police in authoritarian regimes across the world. EuroSec didn't torture people, and it was very hard to get the mainstream voter upset about Facility Alpha when they saw interned Islamic extremists playing soccer and praying in the sun.

It was that which made him hate the general so much. She'd reinvented fascism, making it almost tolerable, knocking off the rough edges. She was forever being pictured visiting refugee centres, sitting with rabbis and imams, attending LGBT festivals, the hard fist that would defend European liberalism and tolerance. Her opponents weren't silenced or disappeared, but co-opted or just ignored.

In short, Tiller hated her because she was the most self-confident dictator that Europe had ever seen. She didn't fear criticism or opposition or demonstrations or people calling her names, and so didn't overreact. That was the problem: you can't build a popular movement against a suffocating police state if the police state refuses to suffocate you. The heavy hand of the British in Northern Ireland, or the French in Algeria had proven to be counter-productive, creating recruits to the cause they were trying to suppress. Keady left most of them alone.

They tried to be clever, of course. Some of them went on hunger strike, so Keady had them put into induced comas and fed intravenously, all in front of Europe's media. Every week in front of TV cameras they'd be woken and asked did they wish to continue with their hunger strike. Those who said yes were put under for another week. There were protests, of course, but Keady kept her eye on where mainstream opinion in Europe was, and the working man on the 46a bus in Dublin or the Berlin U-Bahn said the same thing: "Good enough for them! I wish I could go to bed for a week!"

That was the problem. Keady had to die outright because every failed attack was not a cry but a source of strength for her.

Sitting in the grotty hotel room with its dubious stains and even more dubious noises coming from the room next door, he sat with a blank notepad and pencil and planned the fifth attack.

If Villiers had told him the truth, and he could deliver the object, that changed everything. He was familiar with it, and its capabilities. He'd never used one, and although it alone would not make it a definite success, nor would it neutralise her advantage, it was a game changer. Especially if combined with something else he had planned. Three things were

required: first, the object had to be delivered, and second, he had to confirm the second part of his plan would work. Thirdly, he had to keep ahead of EuroSec.

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***Excerpt from "Silvana Keady and the Europe she saved."***

The President of the European Parliament, not a man known as a stranger to pomposity, had nevertheless been surprised to receive a call from General Keady. She had requested that she be permitted to present a report to the parliament on the conduct of the war, and then outline proposals she had for the future direction of Europe.

The European Parliament is not taken as serious by people who should know better. National politicians and national media constantly dismiss the institution as a talking shop and powerless body, which applied to the body in its early days. But neither group seemed to have paid attention to the fact that in the crafting of each new European treaty from the mid-1980s the national governments lobbed a bone at the parliament as a gesture towards the "democratic deficit". Each new power was stored away by the parliament until the member states woke up to realise that the parliament was now a de-facto equal player in most parts of EU policy making, including the appointment of the Commission and the setting of the EU's €100 billion budget. Such was the power of the toothless talking shop that it had, in the past, both opposed and prevented the British Prime Minister, a man in control of nuclear weapons, from blocking its nominee to be President of the European Commission.

The decision by Keady, who seemed to have a better grasp of the European Parliament than most British tabloids, to approach the president was taken with that full knowledge in mind. For the parliament's part, the idea that the most famous person in Europe wished to address it, bestowing yet another nugget of prestige on an institution that is very thin-skinned was to be welcomed. When and where, was all the president really wanted to know.

The news that she was to address the parliament was not secret for long, and a swell of nervousness broke over the national capitals. The weeks after the war and the attacks and the ongoing refugee crisis were not a time of political calm. It wasn't helped by the fact that many of the leaders were seen as stop-gaps rushed into place following the attack, and the public felt little enthusiasm or loyalty towards them.

The new German federal chancellor had been furious on hearing the news, and ordered the head of the Bundeswehr to order Keady, a serving German general, to withdraw her request to the parliament. Keady refused, and offered to resign instead, which caused panic among the chancellor's political advisors. It turned out that the German people had quite liked the scenes of a German general being lauded in Poland and the Baltic states, and German flags being waved alongside the other allied and EU flags. Keady was already appearing in polls as the most popular German in both Germany and the rest of Europe; indeed, many commentators were speculating as to whether either the chancellor's party or the opposition SPD might ask her to run as the candidate for chancellor. The advisors had made significant efforts to at least paint the chancellor in public as Keady's wise boss who had the

good sense to listen with care to her advice, and if she now resigned, they feared a party stampede for Keady as Chancellor. Instead, the chancellor's office issued a statement that it looked forward with great interest to the general's comments and observations on the future of the continent.

The speech itself received widespread coverage, with some suggesting it was the most ever for a speech in the parliament. When the general arrived, she was greeted by large crowds of people cheering, and at first she'd assumed that they were all employees of the parliament dragooned out by their employers. As an institution it had a notorious reputation for becoming its own vested interest, from its president downwards, and all knew that the eyes of many Europeans and elsewhere would be on it today. But as she worked the rope line she realised that for every EU employee there was an ordinary European, reaching out to shake her hand, hug her, take her picture. She had been delayed by over thirty minutes working her way through the crowd of well-wishers.

She hadn't worn her uniform, but dressed in a smart trouser suit, and after being greeted by the various leaders of the factions in the chamber, had been introduced and led to the podium amid cheering and applause. She let the chamber settle for a minute.

It is fair to say that Silvana Keady was a competent rather than inspiring public speaker, but the speech itself was in clear conversational tones. First she outlined the war, and paid tribute to the thousands of European, British and American troops who had died fighting. Then she launched into a diatribe against Europe's leaders who had let the continent's defences become so weak that the Kremlin had believed it had a very serious chance of defeating its opposition and dominating the continent, if not with direct control, then through demonstrated ability to dominate with military power. She then made the connection between Europe before the war and today, and the refugee crisis and the threat from radical Islam, and how all were connected. Not a vast conspiracy, but the fact that each as a challenge mishandled had contributed to a perception that Europe was weak, and continued to contribute to Europe's inability to solve common problems.

She turned to the people of France, who were weeks away from a presidential election, the front runner being the Front National candidate.

"The choice you have is clear. You can vote for a candidate who promises you a return to nostalgic days, of a France that stands proud and alone. A France no longer part of the euro or the European Union, or at least not an EU that is of any use to anyone. A France trying to hide behind its borders from the world. Well, as someone who has played a role in keeping France's border and Finland's border and Poland and Estonia's border secure, I can tell you that there are no national solutions. This is a European problem that is bigger than France or Germany or anywhere else, and needs a European response. And let me tell you something else: if you vote to hide behind the borders and abandon Europe, you will break up the single market and the euro and Europe itself. There may be many who will rejoice at such an

outcome. But I can tell you that it was European stability and prosperity that gave us the bare minimum resources to drive back the invaders, and if you want to see the flag of Russia or the Caliphate flying over the Tour Eiffel or the Élysée or the Louvre, before they burn it down, of course, then vote to break up Europe. That is your choice. But there is an alternative.”

She then proceeded to outline what would become known as the Keady Plan. A European Defence Force that replaced 60% of Europe’s armed forces, recognising that the defence of the continent, from the east and the south, was the business of all European nations. A European Police Force, expanded from EuroPol, which would not just coordinate national police forces, but pursue criminals and terrorists across the union, and take direct responsibility for the control of Europe’s borders. A European intelligence and counter-terrorism agency, modelled on the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution, with the specific task of crushing political and religious extremism. She then addressed immigration.

Europe, she said, cannot turn its back on immigration. We cannot tell children fleeing terror that there is no place for them in our continent. Immigration, if managed with care, can bring benefits to all. But management is the key, and immigration managed without care is counter-productive, not just spurring the rise of fascism (she spat the word out) but also turning European nations against each other, building walls and fences to try to force the problem onto one’s neighbours. Yes, we must provide refuge and safety, but on our terms.

She then explained her proposal to secure a location in Africa where Europe would build not a concentration camp but a piece of Europe itself, where all those seeking refuge will be taken to be processed and protected, and from where gradual immigration would be managed.

We will provide a safe zone, she said. But it will be on our terms. Europe will decide who comes to Europe, and when.

The far-right faction took to its feet in applause, with less enthusiastic applause from the centre-right. Large elements of the left booed.

Keady smiled, and continued.

“Let me be clear about one thing: while we need to control our borders, there are those who will equate what I am saying with Islamophobia. I would remind those who accuse me of it, and those who indeed support opposition to Islam in this continent of the fact that there is nothing un-European about Islam. Across our continent millions of Islamic Europeans obey laws, pay taxes, and build their lives for themselves and their families like every non-Muslim, and to equate being a Muslim with being a terrorist is to equate being a German with being a Nazi. I would remind us all of the Muslim policemen who gave their lives fighting extremism in France, of the members of the Muslim community who do

provide discreet warning to the security forces. We will oppose extremism in all forms, but know this: as long as I can draw breathe, those who decide to scapegoat any religion will be my enemy too. This is Europe: we have been here before.”

The speech launched a debate in Europe, because of both its content and ideas but also because of who delivered it. Amid Europe’s fighting mealy-mouthed politicians here was someone with a clear plan.

Both the far right and the far left attacked her, with the French Front National regarding her intervention as a disgraceful attempt by a foreigner to interfere in France’s internal affairs.

The speech itself, along with the actual document she submitted, was circulated across the continent. The Economist, The Times and others chose to publish it in its entirety. The European Parliament publications service reported that it was the most requested document in their history, with thousands of ordinary Europeans seeking copies.

Keady found herself surrounded by people in public asking her to autograph copies of it, and The Economist summed up the public mood with an image of Keady speaking before a European flag with the headline: “Finally: a leader for Europe.”

The real political impact happened when the French voted in the second round of the presidential election, where the Front National candidate had been leading in every single poll against her moderate conservative opponent. As the ballots were counted, it became very clear that she had been defeated by a solid margin. In the Champs-Élysées the victor’s name was chanted, and it wasn’t that of the successful candidate for President of the Republic.

In Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, Warsaw and Vilnius, the Keady Plan, despite some misgivings, was endorsed by the respective governments, who were still struggling to rebuild their scarred countries and maintain a de-facto war footing. All were aware of the desire of national governments to withdraw their troops, as indeed, they suspected, were the Russians. A combined European army was not perfect, but the least objectionable solution, despite the consequences. In Paris, the new president was very much aware as to how he had been elected against the odds, and so felt that although he had serious doubts about the defence implications of the Keady Plan, it now that offered a solution to the refugee and terrorist crises that looked more credible to the French public and others than the constant meetings in Brussels did. The Spanish, Italians and Greeks felt the same way, if even with more urgency.

It was not surprising that General Keady was asked to brief the European Council on her proposals. The council thanked her and sent her on her way, and so she returned to NATO headquarters, but not before letting both the French president’s advisors and the German chancellor’s that she would not sit in silence if the plan was not implemented in full.

Historians have long debated this meeting, with a number of the participants giving differing interpretations to other parties, although none of the three people in the room have ever gone on record. What is understood is that one of the advisors left the room with the impression that the general was threatening a military response if the plan was not implemented, and this shaped the response of the two main national governments. Keady denied this, and pointed out that it was doubtful to the extreme that at that time national forces under her command would have obeyed instructions to move against their own sovereign governments. Other sources in the French and German military have suggested otherwise, of course, but the debate is academic.

One thing is certain: the Keady Plan was debated by the European Council in an atmosphere of genuine fear about the ability of national governments to maintain order and control their borders, and that alternatives to the plan did not exude confidence.

After 12 hours of debate, with Hungary refusing to participate (perhaps as a result of Russian influence), the plan was accepted, and General Keady was appointed as Commissioner for Continental Security, answerable to the European Council and with a seat on the European Commission.

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### **Brussels, Belgium.**

Gianni De Pietro gripped his pipe between his teeth as he shuffled his papers. It wasn't lit, due to the draconian anti-smoking legislation that applied inside all EU institutions, but he was so used to it being there that it remained in situ as he briefed. He was quick to point out that Himmler wouldn't have taken any nonsense from the Health & Safety brigade.

Dufour and Schmidt, both looking tanned and cold, sat at the large circular table he used for meetings. Outside, sheets of wind and rain pelted against his window. On the street below, the brave residents of Brussels fought a valiant battle against the weather.

"I'm sorry to have had to call you back. I know this isn't any compensation for the sun-beaten dunes of Libya, but I think you'll find it important," he said, waving the pipe at the window with his hand.

The two agents unlocked their tablets, downloading his briefing file. He held up his manila file.

"Either of you familiar with an American 360 electromagnetic rifle?"

He slid the image across the table.

"I've used its predecessor, the 180, but I thought the 360 was a prototype, last I heard?" Schmidt said.

“So our friends in the FBI say. There are six of them. One was lent to the British, for testing by the SAS in Hereford. It’s been taken. An inside job, as they say. A disgruntled English Army major with a bee in his English bonnet about the EU. Killed two SAS men under his command and was then shot dead himself by unknowns. The weapon is now missing. MI5 are working with us on trying to determine any sort of link between him and Free Europe, IS and the rest.”

Dufour swiped through the details of the gun.

“This doesn’t look like the sort of thing we want on the streets.”

De Pietro nodded.

“Look at that range. Sample ammunition was taken too, and I’m told its on-board computer is extraordinary. It’s a mini rail gun. In a test last year it took out a Leopard II tank. A bloody tank.”

Dufour swiped through the specifications on her tablet.

“This on-board computer, we can’t track it with that?”

“No, it’s shielded. The US military weren’t too happy with the idea of their snipers being tracked by GPS. But the key is that this weapon takes its own weather reports, wind, topography, and adjusts itself. Then there’s the fact that a known anti-EU fanatic stole it. And, our friends in Denmark have lost sight of your Swedish friend Lars Tiller.”

Schmidt laughed out loud.

“Don’t,” De Pietro said.

“We could have had him!” Schmidt said, slapping the table.

“Yes, we could have. But the powers that be are trying to get Denmark back into the EU, and carrying out snatches on the streets of Copenhagen is not conducive to that. They’re not the Irish, they don’t let us bundle people onto planes in return for agricultural subsidies. The Danish parliament cares about this sort of stuff, and they’re watching us like hawks.”

“And now that nut who has already tried to kill her three times, that we know of, is back in the EU with this thing,” he jabbed at the photo on the table.

“Life’s interesting, isn’t it? Now, we don’t know yet if either Tiller or the weapon are in the union yet. EuroPol are on alert, but until we pick up something... Perhaps it’s time to visit his friend in Cyprus?”

“Cyprus?” Dufour asked.

“Before your time. Schmidt picked up Free Europe’s chief logistics man last year. Might be able to tell you something.”

“He’s been debriefed already?” she asked.

Schmidt smiled.

“Wait ‘til you meet him. Ivan du Beek. You’ve never been to the gulag, have you?”

“I’ll remind you, Henning, that particular phrase is frowned upon. And inaccurate too.”

“That’s saying something. It’s the only prison in the world were the prisoners have as much chance of getting gout as they do getting shanked.”

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## **Socialist Worker Weekly**

### **KEADY A PUPPET OF THE NEO CAPITALISTS.**

Like Pinochet, Franco and Mussolini before her, General Keady has been put in place by the capitalist class to ensure the compliance of a working class, open, through no fault of its own, to bewitching and misdirection through the false flag waving and false patriotism of the warmongers and their arms trade profiteering class co-conspirators in alliance with international finance in opposition to the working and oppressed classes across the world, and also through the demonization of those few governments like that of President Bulgarin of Russia or President Zang of China who dare to challenge the capitalist hegemony and its veneer of democracy and civil rights which the general does not even attempt to pay lip service to in her effort to bring half a billion people to heel whilst crushing the aspirations of a million refugees and their right to share in Europe's bountiful welfare state despite the fact that it has been sabotaged by the capitalist running dogs who stand with her in the national capitals... [*continues*]



## Chapter Four: Cyprus

The major had been surprised when the team leader had pulled the gun on him, and hadn't got a single word out before he was shot in the head. One of the other three men took the body by the arms and dragged it to the woods at the side of the road, while the other three carried the long metal box from the army jeep into the SUV. They moved at speed, aware from the major that the two SAS men hadn't managed to get a call out, but nevertheless acting as if they had. They were in the SUV and heading away from Hereford within five minutes of firing the first shot at the SAS men.

They drove just under the legal limit, crossing the country to Norfolk, stopping only once to take a piss and switch drivers. Three slept while one drove. All four had driven the route before, once to reconnoitre the road for the ambush and again that day setting it up.

They avoided main towns where possible, and reached their destination in rural Norfolk just before evening. It was a farmhouse and barn they had rented through an online firm that specialised in rustic retreats for upper middle-class families, and the farmhouse itself was very comfortable. That wasn't why the property had been selected by them during the stages of planning, however. That had been because of its isolated location, the barn which they had inspected and measured, and the fact that the field attached to the property was both long and flat. They had taken soil samples to verify its suitability, and anyone watching the property late at night would have seen men with night-vision goggles and survey equipment removing stones and other obstacles from the field.

Three nights earlier, that same illicit observer would have noted the men in the field, one with a handheld laser guidance device and another on a very powerful encrypted satellite phone talking to a remote pilot, who then guided a very quiet military drone into a silent wheels-down landing in the field. The observer would also have witnessed the men folding the drone's wings up and wheeling it into the barn, where it would be attached to a number of car batteries, each bought by cash by members of the team over a week-long period in different motor factor stores to avoid suspicion.

On arriving back at the farmhouse, the box transporting the rifle was opened and the key components and sample ammunition were removed and placed into a cargo hold inside the drone, where they were then secured.

The men then ate a small meal, tidied up the farm to ensure that it left no evidence of their presence, but also left the house dirty enough not to give the rental company any reason to suspect the guests had been anything other than the fictional family.

At midnight, they wheeled the drone, now charged, out into the field, pushing it as far back towards one end to give maximum take-off distance. A quick inspection of the field, all walking in a line, was carried out along the length of the field to ensure that no unforeseen obstacle had somehow entered the makeshift landing strip. Once satisfied, the team leader

then made contact with the satellite phone once again, and having received authorisation, signalled two men to operate the remote controls. The drone's engines came to life with a low-decibel buzz, and it trundled down the field, picking up speed. Its nose pulled up and it took to the air with runway to spare. The pilot on the ground steered it towards the continent before the team leader confirmed that the drone was now under remote control of others. The ground pilot turned off his remote unit and stowed it in a bag.

The team packed their equipment, and had left the farm five minutes later.

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### **Eurosec Maximum Security Facility Alpha, Cyprus.**

The EuroSec executive jet banked to line up with the runway, giving Schmidt and Dufour a clear view of the coastal facility. They could see the large double walls that surrounded it and the guard towers, and its isolated position with a single road coming through hills to it. The forest around it had been cleared by a kilometre to create what was referred to as a control zone, but which everybody knew to be a firezone for shooting escaping inmates.

Having said that, both the soccer pitches and the swimming pools looked busy in the sunshine. The minaret from the facility's mosque caught the sunlight beautifully.

Facility Alpha had been part of the Keady Plan, a vast prison run by EuroSec to house extremists for the duration of the state of emergency that existed across Europe. With Keady's appointment as Commissioner for Continental Security, she had authorised the building of a facility for holding over 30,000 suspected terrorists who could be detained without trial for up to one year. As with almost everything Keady did over the next seven years in office, it was both controversial and divisive.

The first reaction of the left was to call it Keady's Gulag or, given its location, Costa del Gulag, and it provided plenty of ammunition for those who condemned her as a would-be dictator. Indeed, much debate had been had as to where she would build it, with the assumption that it would be part of the SafeZone in Libya following the EDF invasion of that failed state. But the general had been adamant that this would not be Europe's Guantanamo and had insisted it be built within the EU. Initial reluctance by member states was calmed by her assurances that the facility' intended to source much of its food and supplies locally and that employees would need to live in the region and spend some of their not insignificant pay cheques there. Suddenly, it looked like a very attractive proposition, and soon Cyprus had negotiated a deal with EuroSec.

The plane landed at the facility's runway, where their EuroSec liaison, a Maltese agent named Gonzi, was waiting for them.

"Welcome to Facility Alpha," he said, offering a hand to both. He was short and squat, and struggling with the heat. Dufour towered over him.

Along the runway four EDF gunship helicopters were lined up, their pilots either working on them or working on their tans. Gonzi smiled.

“Don’t be too hard on those guys. They have to be in the air in under a minute thirty, and if this place is breached either internally or externally, they’re under orders to mow down anybody or anything in the control zone. Not something I think I’d be cut out for myself. It’s the first thing we tell the inmates when they arrive. The general’s orders.”

The three got into an open jeep, and Gonzi pulled on to a road leading towards the numerous flat-roofed squat white buildings that made up the facility. They drove past a number of fenced-in soccer pitches. All had matches playing with considerable crowds of spectators. There was a lot of noise, cheering and shouting.

“Al-Qaeda versus Islamic State,” the agent said.

“I’m sorry?” said Dufour.

“The soccer. Both groups have hundreds of young men who are crazy about soccer, so we set up a soccer league. The Islamists all play each other, then play off against the winner of the neo-nazi league. Assuming you get a winner out of that: the neo-nazis are forever having on-pitch brawls, accusing each other of being Jewish and stabbing each other with handmade shanks.”

“Do the anarchists not play soccer?” Dufour asked.

“Nah, too many rules for the anarchists. The socialists tend to play rugby. A nicer class of person, today’s hard left. All went to the finest schools, you know. We’ve as many Old Etonians here as your average English cabinet.”

The jeep sped past a pitch under construction.

“That’ll be a cricket pitch. The Islamists from Pakistan and Afghanistan are all cricket mad. The Taliban had to lift their original ban on cricket because it was making them unpopular. All part of the governing strategy here. We negotiate with different groups of prisoners, give them different facilities and other special requests in return for cooperation.”

“No waterboarding, then?” Dufour asked.

Gonzi laughed.

“Here? You’re joking. Any of that crap and the general would have us banged up ourselves. Anyway, it doesn’t work, torturing people. Much better to work out what someone wants. Everybody wants something, and we have a full intelligence unit here dedicated to working out a man’s price. Take last week: got some good info on Molenbeek from an imam in return for arranging to secretly stream gay porn to his residence. One of the neo-nazis loves Woody Allen movies. It’s the little things.”

“His what?” Dufour asked.

“His residence. They don’t call them cells here. Don’t forget, this isn’t a prison. It’s an internment camp,” Schmidt said.

“It has the look of a CentreParcs about it.”

“They advised on its construction. The general knew what would happen when she announced the facility, so we went out of our way to ridicule those who call it a gulag. I mean, look at this place!”

The jeep passed a crowded swimming pool.

“When it opened, every left-wing journalist in the western world hot-footed it here thinking they were going to make the next Michael Moore documentary. We let them in, let them film, talk to the inmates, and some of the inmates ham it up for the cameras, but everybody from the Red Cross to Amnesty have access, and this is no Guantanamo. One guy accused us of poisoning the inmates because the head chef has a few Michelin stars, and so we’re turning them decadent! IS have accused us of turning their captured brothers gay. There’s plenty of that, all right, as the number of female prisoners is very small, less than 200, and they’re kept segregated for their own safety. Interesting thing: the female prisoners run their own wing, and the Islamist women and the neo-nazi women get on fine. Take men out of the equation, eh?”

They stopped at one of the blocks.

“I’ve arranged for you to meet Ivan on his own. This block is empty at the moment, as we’re way below capacity. We were built for 30,000 but have never held more than 12,000. Director De Pietro seems quite picky about sending people here.”

They stepped through the security gate and into a clean timber-panelled building with soft lighting and cool air conditioning. All the residence doors were open, showing small but comfortable bare one-bed flats with TVs embedded in the wall and toilet and shower facilities behind a frosted glass brick wall for privacy. The bedclothes were colourful, and there were desks and seats for working, and empty bookshelves.

“It looks like an IKEA showroom,” Dufour said.

Gonzi smiled.

“Don’t tell me...” she said.

“Yup. Another little lever of persuasion. Could be a painting, or a throw, some even get their own fridge if they play their cards right. We had a delegation over from Guantanamo and one of them walked out in disgust. But this works. We get a steady source of information, some rehabilitation, and relative peace. There are some hard nuts whom we have to keep in

more traditional security surroundings, but only a few. The number of violent attacks and deaths here is small compared with actual prisons, and is mostly down to the more extremist elements getting into it over politics or homosexual love triangles.”

They reached the residence, which Gonzi opened by speaking into a small communicator to the control centre. The door clicked and slid open.

A short fat man looked up from his desk where he was writing. The cell was tidy, with a few throws and pillows, and the bookshelves full. An incense burner smoked on a windowsill.

“Hello Ivan: love what you’ve done with the place,” Schmidt said, stepping into the room. The Dutchman did not look happy to see the EuroSec agent.

Schmidt leaned against the doorframe, looking at the full bookcase.

“What do we have here? Piketty? Of course. Niall Ferguson? Both sides of the spectrum there, so... Jackie Collins? Ah, a little bit of spice for the lonely nights, eh? You’re looking well. Internment must agree with you. You’ve put on weight. You don’t see that in prison a lot.”

Du Beek smiled coldly.

“I have nothing to say to you, agent Schmidt. I’m just going to serve out my time here and go home. Even in Keady’s Europe they can’t keep you here longer than a year.”

Schmidt nodded.

“That’s very true, Ivan. The general, she’s funny that way. Of course, you can be kept here indefinitely if you request it. Your lawyer has to draw up papers, and a judge has to approve, but it has happened.”

“Is that the plan: coerce me into staying here? Amnesty might have a problem with that, you know.”

“Coerce? You? No, no, no, that’s not our way. No, you’re quite right. After twelve months we have to, what’s that American saying, shit or get off the pot. So we’re going to shit: all over you. We’ll advise the European Public Prosecutor to go ahead and press charges with membership of Free Europe, which as you know is a proscribed organisation. Between the wiretaps, the video surveillance and the emails and banking transfers, I’m happy enough we can get a conviction.”

“Bullshit!” Du Beek spat, leaning back in his seat. Dufour stepped into the small room, putting out a hand.

“Corrine Dufour: I’m Henning’s new partner. Nice to meet you, Ivan.”

“You’re good cop to him?”

“No, I’m more factual-confirmation cop. I’ve read your file, Ivan, and I suspect you think that Henning is playing you along. After all, if we had all the evidence, why would we put you in here for a year? Why not just prosecute you through the normal court system a year ago? Now, I’ve only being his partner for a year, so I’m still trying to figure out how his mind works, but I have a theory what game he’s playing here. Henning, would you like me to suggest my theory as to why you didn’t prosecute Ivan here when you first arrested him?”

“Please, Corrine, I’m fascinated to hear your theory.”

“All right, here it is: I think Henning reckoned you wouldn’t cooperate and we don’t do torture, so he waited a year, because he knew that the general was introducing a prison-pooling system across Europe. Have you heard of it? It’s where some member states with specific specialities or overcapacity make a pitch to sell that capacity within the EU prison system. Now, why is that relevant to you, you’re asking. Would you say that’s what he’s asking, Henning?”

Schmidt nodded.

“I’d say that’s exactly what he’s asking, Corrine. I mean, what would EU common prison-capacity policy have to do with Ivan?”

“And that would be a very good question: well, the answer is that only last week the Bulgarian ministry of justice was celebrating that it has won a contract to provide high-security prison places to EuroSec for convicted terrorists. That’s where the next batch of convicted terrorists will be going: Bulgaria. Now, the general’s very fussy. The Bulgarians have to meet human-rights standards of course, but it ain’t no Facility Alpha.”

“Nobody ever gets gout in a Bulgarian prison. Or lube, I’d say,” Schmidt speculated.

“I bet Bulgarian prison cells don’t look like this either.”

Schmidt shook his head.

“Almost certainly not. I mean, we use the word gulag in jest here, but in Bulgaria...”

Du Beek leapt from his seat, lunging at Corrine. She floored him with the heel of her palm to the face, bleeding his nose. He fell to the floor.

“There’s no point getting upset, Ivan, we’re just clarifying the union’s common prisons policy,” she said, cleaning her hand on a folded towel sitting on a sink.

“How do you get it so soft?” she asked, refolding the towel.

“You’re a fucking whore! I bet he fucks you every night!”

Corrine smiled.

“Not every night. Between his enormous penis and his exceptional talents in the bedroom, some nights a girl just has to get her sleep. Of course, for variety I sometimes use my strap-on on him. And I guarantee I’m far more considerate than your new Bulgarian cellmates will be.”

“She is very gentle, it has to be said,” Schmidt added.

“But there is an alternative, as we suggested. If you request another year here, EuroSec will support it. We just want to talk about your old friend Tiller.”

She offered Du Beek a hand, pulling him off the ground.

“Do you have a first-aid kit?” she asked Gonzi, who disappeared and returned a moment later with a large plastic box. Dufour set about cleaning the blood off Du Beek’s face as he sat in his seat.

“I told you everything I knew about Tiller,” Du Beek said.

“Come on, Ivan, I don’t believe that. You hear things, even in here. We believe he’s back from Denmark, and is awaiting a parcel. We want to know how he’ll get it in.”

“I don’t know.”

“Ivan, that’s Bulgarian talk!” Schmidt said.

“I’m telling you the truth. I’ve heard that after the last attempt on the general he lost faith in Free Europe. Reckons it’s riddled with your lot. Then he was recruited.”

“Recruited? Lars Tiller doesn’t work for anyone, Ivan. He’s one stubborn Swede.”

“I know, I know, but someone offered him help. Resources.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know.”

“Ivan...”

“I don’t know, all right. I’ll... I’ll try to find out, provided we can come to an arrangement...”

“You don’t have many cards to play with here.”

“I know, but let me try.”

Dufour finished cleaning the Dutchman.

Schmidt approved with a nod of the head.

“You look beautiful again. All right, Ivan, you find something for us, you get another year in IkeaTraz.”

They stepped out of the cell, and Gonzi closed the door.

“If he gets anything, I’ll be in touch,” he said.

Back on board the plane, Schmidt looked at the window.

“I’ll tell you what’s scary about this place: it’s the comfort. That’s what she’s done, and it’s really quite clever. You see how the tabloids cover this place. It gets attacked not for being too harsh but not harsh enough, you know, a holiday camp for terrorists. Yet it’s a serious source of intelligence and we get people we don’t want on the streets off them without brutalising anybody. It’s an iron fist is a lovely soft cuddly glove, but an iron fist all the same. She’s managed to humanise the police state.”

“Good job she’s on our side, then,” Dufour said, as she strapped herself into the seat.

Schmidt nodded, and tilted back his seat. He’d learned when to snatch a couple of hours sleep when he could. He suspected he’d need to store up as much sleep as he could.

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### **The North Sea.**

The detection, although weak and just below standard radar level, was enough for the air traffic controller to call over the EDF liaison officer. The EDF captain played back the contact the civilian had seen, and satisfied himself that there was something worth watching over the North Sea.

“There it is again!” the controller said, trying to determine a course.

“No transponder signal, coming from Norfolk in England towards Rotterdam.”

He tabbed his mike again.

“Unidentified aircraft, I say again, please identify yourself.”

There was no response.

“I suppose it could be Martians,” he said to the military man.

The military man was already onto military control.

“Martians? Muscovites more like. EuroDefence, EuroDefence this is EuroControl we have a bogey...”



On an EDF airbase in the southern Netherlands, a loud klaxon sounded and two Dutch fighters pilots launched themselves from their seats, coffee cups flying and raced towards their aircraft.

One minute thirty seconds later, two EuroFighter Typhoons roared down the runway on afterburner.

The decision to maintain radar surveillance of the North Sea at a higher intensity than was commonly known was a secret known only to EDF air defence command, given their concern that the Russians may once again attempt to test Europe's air defences with provocative test flights by bombers through the edge of European airspace. The Russian probes into EDF airspace had ceased since the war, with the general's clear public instruction that Russian aircraft in EU airspace would not just be challenged but shot down. The Kremlin had, up to this point, taken General Keady at her word.

EuroControl guided the two interceptors over a North Sea heavy with fog, but with intermittent contact and extrapolation were able to guesstimate the location of the contact.

The lead plane dropped beneath the clouds.

"EuroDefence, Gazelle One. We are seeing an unarmed drone on a heading for the Dutch coast. No markings, looks like a standard NATO configuration. Confirm it is of payload capacity size."

In previous days, intelligence and customs agencies would just as likely follow the drone to its destination in the hope of capturing its owners or their clients; but since the state of emergency, the others were clearer. Large drones like this could be carrying a nuclear payload, in the form of either a device or a conventional warhead, and fissile material as a dirty bomb to be exploded over a populated area, contaminating the whole district. Or chemical or biological weapons.

The standing orders were clear: as soon as it was safe to do so, shoot down the unidentified aircraft.

The colonel in charge of EuroDefence tapped his headset.

"EuroControl, please confirm area clear of authorised civil aircraft."

"Confirmed EuroDefence. Area clear. No contacts save for UIA."

"Gazelle One, you are cleared to fire."

"Roger, EuroDefence. Engaging target"

The lead pilot checked to make sure that his wingman was behind him, and locked onto the target with a Meteor missile, and fired, the Mach 4 missile closing the distance between the two aircraft in seconds and destroying the drone.

But not before a proximity alarm on the drone detected the incoming weapon and activated an emergency protocol of its own, jettisoning the cargo pod into the sea just off the southern coast of the Netherlands.

On hitting the water, the pod started transmitting an encrypted satellite signal for a number of minutes as the pod sunk.

Gazelle One dropped down to do a pass over the site.

“EuroDefence: please be advised that I may have seen the UIA drop a cargo pod before destruction. Can’t be sure but will mark GPS location.”

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**EuroNews**

## **EUROSEC SCHOOL TOURS PROGRAMME TO CONTINUE DESPITE CRITICISM**

### **Brussels, Belgium**

The European Security Agency (EuroSec), responsible for the EU's internal security and the suppression of political and religious extremism has confirmed that it will continue to provide school tours of its Brussels headquarters.

“The purpose of the tours is to explain to both schoolchildren and the general public what EuroSec does and doesn't do, including what powers we have but also what powers we don't have, and the human-rights laws we are obliged to respect too. We also run public exhibitions: last month, we ended a three-month exhibition on the Holocaust. Next month we'll be hosting talks on female genital mutilation, honour killings and forced marriages. The following month is LGBT rights month here at EuroSec,” the deputy director for public affairs, Mrs Hetherington said.

The statement was made following criticism by left-wing MEPs that it was “grotesque that the new EuroStasi is indoctrinating schoolchildren into thinking that it is normal to have a vast secret police apparatus spying on millions of Europeans.”

EuroSec Director Gianni De Pietro suggested that those who think that his organisation is comparable to the Stasi should “try and mount a few protests in Moscow and see how you get on with the FSB. Then come back and we'll compare notes.”

The director reminded the media that while human-rights organisations have objected in theory to the existence of the ESA and its Facility Alpha internment centre in Cyprus, there have been a “tiny number” of complaints of actual human-rights abuses, and those EuroSec agents responsible have been either prosecuted or fired.

“Indeed,” the director continued, “when we fire agents for even minor abuses of human rights, the same lawyers are then representing those same agents in Unfair Dismissal Tribunals telling us that we have been too harsh in dealing with the incidents in the first place. Lawyers, eh?”

## **Chapter Five: The Opposition**

### **The European Parliament, Brussels.**

Tom Batten MEP loved Europe and loathed the European Union. The son of an English father and a Dutch mother, he had been born in the Netherlands but studied in both France and the UK and saw himself as a European. He was fluent in five languages and after university had taken over and expanded his family's business interests, which he sold on entering politics, leaving him very comfortable.

In his native Netherlands, he had become famous as both a businessman and writer before dipping his toe into the European elections at the head of his own moderate Eurosceptic Tom Batten List, which won two seats.

Gregarious, generous and as interested in good food and good company as political debate, it had come as no surprise when he'd been chosen by his fellow MEPs to lead the Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the parliament.

Since the coming to power of the general, Batten had set himself foursquare against her and her agenda, and while the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats and Liberals in both the parliament and across the national governments had compromised with her, Batten was having none of it. It was fair to say that across Europe he was seen by both millions of voters and the media as her leading opponent. There were others against her, of course. Various Islamist groups had spoken out against her, but most of those were now in Cyprus, an action he had condemned at political cost (and losing MEPs from the group). The hard right and the hard left continued to protest against her, too, but in the eyes of the nervous mainstream, Tom Batten was the safe bet. In the last European elections, the ECR had run under the slogan "Who the hell voted for her?" and had emerged as the clear opposition to the pro-Keady majority in the parliament.

His staff, a mixture of young stagieres and old hands, took his opposition to the general seriously. The office was swept from bugs, and both EuroSec and EuroPol operatives were banned from the office suite. Nobody had ever tried to enforce it, of course, and the ECR had blocked the transfer of the parliament's security from its own security to EuroPol.

His own status was balanced with delicacy, he speculated. Neither he nor his staff had ever been intimidated by anyone connected to the general, or indeed by EuroSec, at least not that he was aware of. In fact, the only harassment he got was off the MEPs and the members of the other parties. He had to laugh. Keady, a professional soldier, had gotten the measure of them fast, pandering to them, flattering them, treating the parliament with a level of respect that had massaged their egos no end. She held conferences with them to hear their views, and even adjusted some of her proposals after being convinced by their "wise counsel". It was all bollocks, of course, but they went away feeling important and she still got her way.

And yet, when they overstepped the mark and tried to suppress the ECR and others, as they had a tendency to do, the word would come down from the general and the motion to cut resources or funding to “anti-European elements” in the parliament would be abandoned. It irritated him, the way the pro-Keady majority described everything as a search for consensus, and that he and the others were being “divisive”. It wasn’t that there weren’t people in the centre-right European People’s Party or the Socialists or the Liberals who didn’t have doubts about her power, either, but as long as she wrapped it up in a blue flag with twelve golden stars, they were afraid to ask questions for fear of being called, shock horror, Eurosceptics or xenophobic.

And so they turned a blind eye to the biggest political prison camp in European history since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a secret police with extraordinary resources and, above all, a de-facto dictator who controlled it all with only the vaguest pretence of accountability.

She was answerable in theory to Parliament and the European Council. In reality, she summoned them.

And now, he thought, this. He looked at the document in front of him.

One of the benefits of being the most visible opponent of the general was that those inside the Council or Parliament or Commission with doubts had someone to leak to. In a way, he thought, it was like Churchill in the 1930s being tipped off as to Britain’s military lack of preparation. He received all sorts of stuff, in the post, to avoid electronic tracing. He often wondered if it was intercepted by EuroSec on the way, and indeed some was hand delivered to his home or given to family and friends, or to his assistants.

A lot of it was nonsense, the ranting of lunatics who had latched onto him as a source for their deliverance. He was forever being told of giant shape-changing lizards running the world, and there was the usual stuff about the Rothschilds and the Jews and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and all the rest. He received, as an individual MEP, more post than the next two hundred MEPs, and had requested additional assistance, which the president of the parliament had refused almost with a sense of glee. But the word had got out to the general, and resources for ten new assistants appeared in the budget. It would make him laugh.

Every now and then something interesting would get to him and his team, often about EuroSec, but this was different. He tapped the papers with his pen.

At first reading, it was just the usual Commission gobbledegook about some sort of legal services. But the more he read, the more he realised it was about some sort of co-ordinating meeting between the Commission and officials from various member state ministries of justice and the interior. That had made him sit up.

Even with EuroSec and EuroPol recruiting the cream of their agencies and departments, the member states still had their own police forces and intelligence agencies, and guarded them. It wasn't like there wasn't a lot of cooperation at ministerial level, but this document seemed unfamiliar. Normally justice matters, still the jurisdiction of the member states, would be looked at by the Parliament. But this document, this he'd never seen before. This looked like it was worth looking at. Batten called in his research team.

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### **The southern coast of the Netherlands.**

The EDF sailor shivered again, and tried to pull his arms and coat closer in an attempt to ward off the night air. Not that it made the slightest bit of difference. Two hours ago he'd been in his bed, his warm dry bed, fast asleep, when they'd been roused and ordered out looking for some pod dropped from a UJA. All along a five-kilometre stretch of Dutch coastline, EDF and Dutch Navy divers were splashing about looking for whatever it was, he thought. He didn't really care. All he cared about was that he was freezing his ass off in the darkness.

It could have been worse, he admitted to himself. He could be one of the two poor bastards under the boat in wet suits looking for the damn thing. It was dark enough up here, with the fog and the moon hiding behind it. God knows what it was like down there.

As if on cue the two men broke the surface a few metres away. One spat out his mouthpiece.

"Jesus, Adriaan, get me out of this fucking water before my balls break off," the first one said, grabbing at the side of the inflatable boat. Adriaan pulled first him, then the second diver out of the water, and pulled out the flask of coffee and poured two plastic cups' worth. As the steam hit the night air, both men's teeth chattered as they grasped the hot cups like they were the most important things in the world, which at that particular moment in time they were.

"It's not that deep, but visibility is shit. I can barely see half a metre ahead of me," the second man said.

The first man nodded.

"Just stick to the grid and hope for the best. This is the far end of the current spread anyway, so it may not have reached this far. From the briefing, I wouldn't be surprised if it sank like a stone. The guys who own it probably have some sort of tracker."

They heard a splashing sound from the fog. Then another, then another. The sound of paddles hitting water.

"Not these fuckers again," Adriaan said.

“You’re in the wrong grid. Can you guys not read a GPS locator?” he shouted in the direction.

The paddling continued, and the shape loomed out of the fog.

“Hey, we’re right in front...”

The burst of machine gun fire killed him instantly. A second burst killed the first diver. The second diver hit the water just ahead of a third burst, cramming his mouth piece into place and willing himself to breath as he saw Adriaan’s lifeless body float past him.

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Schmidt and Dufour had been in the middle of being briefed by a Royal Dutch Navy commander on the search pattern when a lieutenant interrupted them with a report of gunfire being heard on the edge of the search zone. Two fast patrol boats of Royal Dutch marines were just leaving the harbour to investigate when the two EuroSec agents leapt on board, and the two boats moved at speed through the waves, all on board holding on tight as every crash against the waves threatened to throw them over.

“We’ve lost touch with one of the search teams. We’re heading towards the previous location, where the second team reckon they heard machine gun fire. I’ve a ship with radar on the way, should be more use in this fog, but he’s about fifteen minutes away. He can’t see anything but us at the moment.”

The lieutenant killed the engine, and the second boat did likewise, and they sat in the fog, listening, all eyes peering through the thick bank.

One marine pointed into the distance, and a vague shape loomed. As one the half dozen marines pointed their Colt Carbines at the dark form, its pattern clearing as it got closer. It was an EDF boat, with a dead diver in it. The lieutenant signalled one of the men into the boat, and he checked the pulse before shaking his head. Then they heard an engine start, perhaps 20 metres ahead of them.

The lieutenant signalled to start the engine again, and they moved towards the noise, engine just ticking over.

A yellow flash of gunfire lit up the bank of fog ahead, and every man and woman dropped to the floor.

“Floor it!” the lieutenant shouted that the engine man, who gunned the throttle and the boat charged forward, the lieutenant emptying a full clip in the direction of the machine gun burst. The boat travelled a hundred metres and then the lieutenant ordered a stop, and all listened. Silence again.

Then an odd clunk of metal on... what was it, wood? Schmidt looked at the lieutenant, who looked just as puzzled. Then he looked down at the only wood out there, the wooden panels that made up the floor of the inflatable boat. And at the grenade that had just landed on it and rolled under the panel.

“Off! Off!” Schmidt roared, grabbing Dufour and the lieutenant and forcing them both into the sea as the other marines leapt overboard from the other side.

The grenade exploded with a crump, the noise and flash almost held in place by the fog. Schmidt came out of the water to see Dufour and the lieutenant and the remaining marines all uninjured. The boat was on fire and sinking, and in the distance gunfire between the second marine boat and the unknown attackers could be heard.

“Well, lieutenant, is this the first boat that’s sunk under your command?” Dufour asked. The lieutenant smiled an unhappy smile.

A diver broke through the surface in the middle of the group. Three marines pulled their knives.

“EDF! EDF!” the diver shouted, pulling his mouthpiece out.

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The EDF pilot walked away from the varied pieces of metal and plastic that had been laid out in the corner of the Royal Dutch Air Force hangar, and wiped his hands clean with a paper towel. He looked down at his clipboard, scribbled something with a pen, looked back at the wreckage, and then strolled over to Schmidt and Dufour. Both were in EAF pilot jumpsuits as the base laundry cleaned and dried their clothes.

“Yeah, suspected as much, but had to check the NATO database. It’s British. Sorry, English, but you know what I mean.”

“It’s an RAF drone?” Schmidt asked.

“British Army. Listed as missing in Afghanistan about six years ago. ”

“Shot down?” Dufour asked.

“No,” the pilot said, looking at the clipboard.

“Funny one that, just listed as missing. Went on a routine supply drop to a long-range special-forces patrol, never seen again.”

“And you’re sure it’s British?”



“Matches all the serial numbers on file. Four of them. And the design and components are all what they should be. I suppose with the right knowledge someone could have manufactured it to look like a missing British drone, but seems like a lot of effort.”

Dufour thanked the pilot, who went off to have his breakfast, and the two agents stood looking at the remains of the drone.

“Just coincidence?” Dufour asked.

Schmidt shrugged.

“It’s possible. A drone crashes in Afghanistan, maybe some sort of accident, and someone captures it and sells it to the highest bidder. It ends up in the hands of Free Europe. It’s a high-value piece of kit. Poor man’s nuclear missile.”

“Or the alternative? You have your not-sure-I-believe this face on.”

The German went down on his hunkers, as if trying to look at the wreckage from a new angle.

“Or someone in England is helping Tiller. Someone very well resourced?”

“In the government?” Dufour asked.

“It’s implausible, I know, but not hard to believe. Europhobia has increased in Britain since they left the EU. The Eurosceptics convinced themselves that leaving would solve all their problems. Now they’ve been out just short of a decade and they’re still blaming us. There are paranoiacs in the UK who think we’re plotting to get them back into the union. Some of their newspapers even suggest that the general’s plotting an invasion, although that’s more just to sell papers. But that major who stole the American 360 isn’t alone.”

Dufour’s phone rang. She answered it, then hung up.

“The diver’s conscious.”

They got an EDF jeep to the military hospital where the diver, recovering from hypothermia, had been sedated and was only now conversant.

“When I came up I saw them pulling the pod onto their boat. We must have been pretty much on top of it.”

“Did you see any identifying markings, uniforms? Where they speaking a language?” Dufour asked.

The diver nodded.

“Yeah, I recognised the uniforms and guns from NATO exercises. They were SBS, you know, English Royal Marine special forces.”

Schmidt gave Dufour a look.

“Did you hear them talking?”

“Yes, but I couldn’t make anything out. Did you get them? The second marine boat, our guys?”

“No, I’m sorry. They exchanged fire but lost them in the fog. Nothing has turned up so far, except for your mate’s body.”

“Oh Christ. They were two good guys. I can’t believe the English did this to us. I only fought alongside them during the war, and now they’re stabbing us in the back!”

Schmidt squeezed its arm.

“I know it won’t be much consolation, but I’m not sure they were English. I think someone may be taking us for a ride. Thanks for your help.”

“Do you mean that?” Dufour asked as they left the hospital.

“It’s a bit elaborate, but I’ll tell you one thing: the SBS use silencers and flash suppressors as standard kit. If that was them, we sure as hell wouldn’t be able to see their position from their muzzle flashes. I’d say these guys had SBS uniforms just in case, but didn’t expect to be caught in a fire fight like that, possibly because they never expected for the drone to be shot down.”

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**CNN.**

**WARSAW UNVEILS KEADY STATUE.**

**Warsaw, Poland.**

The President and Prime Minister of Poland jointly unveiled a statue of General Silvana Keady in Warsaw's Old Town Market Place today to honour Europe's Security Commissioner for her role leading Allied forces in the Third European War seven years ago.

The statue is the third of Keady to be unveiled in Europe, the first two being in Tallinn, Estonia, and in Helsinki, Finland. All three countries suffered Russian troops on their soil and the most intense fighting of the war.

A monument in honour of the 15,000 European and American soldiers and civilians who died in the fighting will shortly be unveiled in Brussels.

## Chapter Six: A very dangerous piece of paper

### Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

Batten perused the gift shop of the ultra-modern surreally angled Hergé museum, and had decided that he very much needed a 1.2m matt-white porcelain statute of Tintin on a jaunty stroll. It was €5,000, but what, he had long decided, was the point being this wealthy if one could not indulge oneself on occasion. He'd been a Tintin fan since he'd been a child, and even now saw himself as a bit of a political Tintin, taking on the political powers that be in a daring adventure for truth and justice. He could even recommend a few MEPs who'd make fine Captain Haddocks. He placed the order with the very helpful shop staff, and then stepped into the café for a sandwich.

Walking across the main lobby of the building, two elderly Belgians stopped him to shake his hand and offer him their support, which he accepted gracefully in good humour. It was a regular occurrence for him to be recognised by people in public, and they often asked to shake his hand or for an autograph or a selfie. Not all agreed with him, either. The general was not without her supporters, but that didn't bother him. It was one of those things that people not involved in politics never seemed to grasp. Politicians didn't really mind people who disagreed with them voicing their opposition, provided they did it with civility. In fact, many of them enjoyed a good-natured debate with an opposing voter, and he was one of those politicians. But it was still nice for ordinary people to make the connection with his work in the parliament.

The young man in question was reading, as agreed, a copy of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, which made Batten smile. He introduced himself to the man, and after ordering a bottle of water and a sandwich, leaned forward to listen to what he had to say. He didn't introduce himself, said that he worked in the European Commission, and it was he who had sent the original document about the interior ministry meetings. He was a Spaniard, quite junior in his department, but had stumbled across this and had been alarmed, and felt that it needed to be put "into the right hands".

He was sweating, and his glasses slipped down his nose.

"I've been a supporter of General Keady, Deputy Batten. I think she's done things that needed to be done. But when I came across this, this is too far."

Batten's researchers had verified the original document as best they could. It seemed to have the correct filing details and codes that a genuine Commission document would have. He would like to verify the young man's identity, of course, but he'd enough experience dealing with informers (or whistleblowers, as his office deemed them) to not push the young man too far too soon for fear of scaring him off.

The waitress arrived with the sandwich and the water, and Batten ate as the young man looked around him, for EuroSec agents, one presumed.

"I've used here to meet people before. The tour is one way, so I tend to come an hour earlier to be able to see if anyone is following me. That and I'm a big Tintin fan," he reassured the young official.

"You mentioned you might have another document?"

The young man nodded, slurped down his Coke, before picking up a briefcase and pulling another sealed manila envelope from it. He placed it on the table, looked around, and slid it across the table to the politician, who picked it up to open it.

"Please, not here," the young man said. Batten nodded, and put the envelope flat on the table under his arm.

"Can you give me an idea what's in it?"

The young man leaned into the table.

"My department has been working on coordinating legislation across the union. That's not unusual, as you know, but I've never seen it done to this scale. This isn't a regulation, this is an actual law to be enacted almost simultaneously across the union, in each national parliament, the idea being that the bill will be law in each members state within a week."

Batten finished his sandwich and the bottle of water, and put them to one side.

"Go on."

"I believe this bill is a plan to turn Europe into a police state almost overnight. Now, I know that you think it already is, and I disagree, as I said, I've been a supporter of the general. She brought order to the Mediterranean and stopped my country and others from descending into chaos between the refugee crisis and Islamic State. But this goes too far."

He jabbed the envelope.

Batten agreed to consider the contents and they agreed a means of getting in contact. The young man left the building first, and after twenty minutes Batten gathered up the file and walked through the university town to the train station, where he caught a train back to Brussels.

Sitting alone by the window he opened the envelope and withdrew the papers. A quick scan revealed what seemed to be a draft Commission document. He began reading.

He almost missed his stop.

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## **Brussels, Belgium.**

“This is not going very well, is it?” De Pietro said, peering over the top of his glasses. He had just gone through Schmidt and Dufour’s report, and as a single narrative it didn’t impress.

“This man, Du Beek, you believe him?”

“I believe he wants to protect his own self-interest, and cooperating with us is the best way of getting that protection. His point about Tiller not trusting Free Europe any more is not without merit. We have penetrated a lot of what’s left of the organisation, or else riddled it with so much self-doubt as to be incapable of acting. The old Belfast Double Take.”

“The old Belfast what?” Dufour asked.

Schmidt stood in front of the window, hands in pockets, watching the rain piss down on the city.

“In the 1980s and 90s British intelligence organisations, from MI5 to Army Intelligence to the Royal Ulster Constabulary’s special branch had so penetrated the Provisional IRA that people began to suspect that some IRA meetings only consisted of British spies. It plays havoc with an organisation when every member thinks every other member is a mole.”

“That makes our task harder. If Tiller is operating independently of Free Europe, it’ll be much harder to trace him. Is the English option a possibility?”

De Pietro jammed his unlit pipe into his mouth.

“It’s unlikely, even bearing in mind what our people in London say about the Tory/UKIP government. It’s true that there are people in England with a fetish about the EU, but the idea that they would use English special forces against us, kill two of our soldiers, is just too far-fetched for my liking.”

“What about our friends in the Kremlin? Killing the general has all sorts of implications. It could destroy the new European arrangement. Or perhaps even for revenge. Who knows what goes through their heads in the dead of night,” Dufour said, viewing the map of Europe that dominated one wall.

“That has more credibility, although I’m not sure if even the Russians would be willing to provoke Europe that way. And anyway, Tiller’s an old fashioned leftie, not like some of those oddball new left who regard opposition to America and Europe as being the litmus test for everything. He’s no more time for the fascists in the Kremlin than we do. Either way, it means we’ll have to tighten security on her even more, perhaps even move her to CEDEC until this is resolved,” the Italian said.

Continental European Defence Command (CEDEC) was Europe’s brand new defence control facility outside of Brussels. It was designed to ensure that the surprise attack that started

the European War would not be possible again, with the facility buried deep in the countryside and manned permanently by EDF commanders. It was the most heavily protected place in Europe, and held well-resourced bunkers to sustain a large number of EDF senior personnel and European leaders for six months, with its own nuclear reactor, hospital, hydroponic gardens and water-recycling plant. It had cost billions to build.

“She’ll love that,” Schmidt said.

De Pietro leaned back in his seat.

“She just won’t do it. We restrict her public appearances as it is, and after the attack on the school the only argument that really works with her is that it might put members of the public in jeopardy. But she’s very clear. If we can’t guarantee the safety of the most powerful person in Europe, then the whole Keady Plan isn’t working. Of course, I tell her that the opposite applies, that we’ve managed to reduce terrorist attacks by making her the main target. You can imagine how that goes down.”

“But if we keep her out of the public eye, how can he get to her, even with the American 360? I mean, her home, the Berlaymont and her transport are all protected. We’ve 3D modelled every possible line of fire on her, there are air defences covering her, she’s surrounded by a security contingent that would have made Stalin feel claustrophobic, how the hell can he get near her?”

“We’ve three days to catch Tiller,” Schmidt said.

Both De Pietro and Dufour looked over at him.

Schmidt stepped back from the window, and pointed out towards the large European Council building in the distance. It was brand new, lit up with yellow and blue lights, and covered in the flags of the European Union and its member states. In the centre of its wide entrance atrium, reflected in the glass frontage, was a statue of a bare-breasted woman, Europa, holding up a torch which would be lit in a week in honour of the 24 out of 28 leaders of the European Union and the hundreds of NATO officers and EU officials who had also died in the Russian cruise-missile attack that had marked the start of hostilities.

Some local wags had already christened the enormous statue The General, which was unfair, as she had disliked it when she saw the draft for that very reason, but had refused to interfere in the commissioning process. It was to be opened in seven days by General Keady.

“We have to cancel, or at least she can’t attend,” Dufour said.

De Pietro shook his head.

“Not a chance. That was our 9/11. There isn’t a chance that she won’t attend. We’d have to shoot her ourselves first.”



“That’s off the table right? I mean, Corrine here is a good shot, just a little flesh wound.”

“That’s in very poor taste, Schmidt, despite you being correct. This is the one event that Tiller will know that she’ll attend,” the Italian said, keying in his password to his computer.

“But also the most protected. Not just for the general, but every European leader will be here too, every president, every prime minister, half of NATO, even the US President.”

“We’ll have helicopters, sharpshooters on every building, bomb detection. How can he think he’ll get near her? ThreatMap™ will put our people in every possible firing position, or at least get them to close it down and seal it,” Dufour said.

ThreatMap™ was a piece of software used by the world’s close protection units which carried out 3D line-of-sight analysis of every possible firing position on a given target, using everything from radar to Google Maps™ to determine possible threats, and then grading them on probability. It was very expensive and available to only the most well-resourced of security forces. But it worked very well.

“The American 360 is not a normal rifle, Schmidt. You two had better go through its technical specifications again, make sure that there’s not something that we are overlooking.”

“I presume the normal security arrangements will apply? She’ll speak from behind armoured glass and all the rest?” Dufour asked.

De Pietro nodded.

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that. Something I saw in one of Heckler & Koch’s labs, when I was there a few weeks ago...” Schmidt said to his superior.

“Oh shit,” Dufour said, looking at her phone. “Du Beek’s been killed.”

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## **Belgium.**

Tiller pulled the car off the road, making sure that it was well hidden from passing traffic. Not that there was much on this minor Walloon road, but he was a cautious man. After parking, he used his Swiss Army knife to cut some bushes to ensure that the car’s windscreen didn’t reflect too much light onto the road.

Tiller then removed a shovel from the boot of the car, and walked deeper into the forest, keeping an eye on the GPS tracker on his phone. He reached the designated spot, and started digging. The soil was heavier, damper than he expected, but softer too.

It took a good twenty minutes of solid digging before the shovel clanked against a hard metal surface. It took another ten until he had cleared the edge of the box. He then used

the shovel to jemmy up one end out of the clinging wet earth so that he could grip it and pull it out of the hole. He cleared the sticky mud off the box, just enough to open and peer inside without contaminating the contents, and saw what he expected to see. Closing the box, he returned to the car, took out some plastic sheeting and a large canvas sheet, and proceeded to lay them out beside the hole, the canvas on top of the plastic sheet to keep it clean and dry. He then unpacked the contents of the box onto the canvas, rolled it up and tied it, and returned it to his car.

He had placed the box back in the hole and had just begun to fill it with the fresh mound of soil when he heard the sound of boot on not quite dry twigs. He spun, his silenced pistol coming up just in time to see a Walloon policeman, a motorcycle cop, judging by his helmet, step into the clearing, gun drawn.

Tiller saw the cop a split second before the favour was returned and fired first, the bullet going through the policeman's heart and killing him in an instant, the body falling in a crumpled and awkward heap on the wet ground.

The Swede didn't move again, standing deathly still, listening for other police, the drama a single gunshot in a silent location initiates. Nothing.

After a minute he checked the policeman to make sure he was dead, then stepped out onto the road to see a police motorcycle resting on its stand by the side of the road. Tiller looked back at where his car was hidden from the position of the bike. He could just about see it. He laughed, marvelling at the officer's excellent eyesight. Got you killed, you poor unlucky bastard, he thought.

He wheeled the bike into the clearing, and ascertained his situation. He took out his knife again and proceeded to dismantle the bike's radio system to ensure that there was no anti-theft tracking device, as some police vehicles boasted. He then went through the policeman's pockets, found an iPhone, and proceeded to smash it up with the butt of his gun.

Tiller then looked at the bike, the dead policeman and the hole, and started digging a bigger hole. He was there for another hour.

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### ***Facility Alpha, Cyprus.***

Schmidt had stayed in Brussels reviewing security for the European Council, and going through the technical details for the American 360 while Dufour flew to Cyprus. She was met at the runway once again by Gonzi, who was surprised at her arrival.

"You would think Brussels doesn't have faith in my ability to do my job, sending you across the continent just like that," he said as they pulled up outside the cell block.

“De Pietro insisted, Michael. You can imagine how much pressure he’s under after that Dutch debacle.”

The door to Du Beek’s room was open. She sat at the late Dutchman’s desk, looking around her at the tiny room. Gonzi had his hands on his hips.

“I’ve gone through his papers, mostly to do with his own business affairs. He had his own accountancy firm before we got him, as you know. But nothing on Lars Tiller that I can see.”

She nodded, opening a drawer with a casual hand.

“He was stabbed out walking. That’s very unusual here, surely? Especially for someone like Du Beek. From what Schmidt told me, Du Beek was one of nature’s chameleons. Was able to fit in with anybody, be they Islamist or neo-nazi. Any leads as to who?”

“Nothing. We’re still investigating, of course, but unless someone talks...”

“And nothing on camera? Europe’s biggest prison and nothing on camera?” she asked.

“There are still blind-spots, regardless of how many cameras you have. This is a big place, Dufour,” Gonzi said, a hint of irritation in his voice.

Or was it irritation, she thought. She was a good judge of character, could read people well, and something didn’t sit right. The books had been adjusted, but all were still there... she had a notion and pulled down the Jackie Collins, and flipped it open. Du Beek would not do Schmidt or Dufour or EuroSec any favours, that was for certain. But if he feared for his life, like many people, he’d at least want the bastard who killed him caught. And there it was.

She replaced the book and stood, looking around the room one more time. Then pulled her phone out of her back pocket and sent off a quick text.

“Schmidt: very impatient. Imagine, an impatient German,” she said with a smile, and pointed at the door.

“Can I see the body?” she asked. He nodded, and guided her across a courtyard towards a separate white building.

“Of course, the camera blind spots would be a secret, wouldn’t they? I mean, there’s no point prisoners knowing where they can’t be seen, is there? If anything, blind spots tend to be closed down almost as they’re discovered in a place like this, I’d have thought?”

“It’s a big place, agent Dufour,” he remarked, slipping in the formality in a less than subtle manner.

“Of course,” she replied, and stepped aside to let him lead her into the morgue. In a chilled back room the body of Ivan Du Beek was laid out. Three clean puncture marks in his side were visible.

“There aren’t many killings here, as a rule,” she said, picking up the clipboard attached to the examination table.

“No, it’s not quite that sort of place. We try to keep the prisoners occupied here, and we’re well-resourced. Don’t forget: they’re not convicted criminals, just detained under the Continental Security Act. Having said that, if you put neo-nazis, anarchists and Islamists together you can expect friction.”

“Tolerable friction?”

Gonzi shrugged.

“We investigate every attack, it’s all on the public record. But let’s be honest, European tabloids aren’t getting worked up about violent fanatics killing each other.”

“Violent fanatics. I’d hardly call Ivan Du Beek violent. If Schmidt is anything to go by, he seemed like the sort of guy who could get on with anybody.”

“Terrorists are terrorists,” Gonzi said, looking ostentatiously at his ostentatious watch. His very ostentatious watch, Dufour noted. Her phone beeped, and she excused herself and pulled it out, read the text, and typed a reply.

“Bit of a jealous boyfriend, is he?” Gonzi asked. Dufour smiled.

“Did you look through his books?”

Gonzi paled.

“See the reference to Mark Villiers written on the inside of the Jackie Collins novel? Or are you a lazy agent as well as being on the take?”

She looked at Gonzi, who looked back, pupils dilated, then nodded and shook his head, bottom lip jutting out, knowing too little for his own good, protesting just a little too much.

He then lunged at her, but she had her sidearm out from her hip holster faster than he could get his out, and fired at close range. The bullet hit him in the right shoulder, spinning him and his sidearm hand away from her, but not enough to stop him pulling it from his hip holster.

She fired again, two rounds straight into his central torso, as she’d been trained to. He went down hard, his own automatic clattering on the hard tiled floor.

“Damn,” she muttered to herself, as the shouts of approaching EuroSec agents could be heard approaching the room.

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**BBC World Service.**

**EUROPEAN UNION READY TO OPEN ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP NEGOTIATIONS WITH TURKEY, CANADA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND.**

**Canberra, Australia.**

The EU's foreign minister has told an Australian parliamentary committee that the EU is willing to grant European Single Market access to four countries it regards as vital strategic partners. The proposal, which would give the four countries access to the common market without joining the EU, has been under discussion for a year now, and progress on the details has been moving at a very acceptable rate, according to sources.

Along with access to the single market and consultation on EU regulations, the EU and the four candidate member states have agreed a visa programme and mutual freedom to travel, study and employment rights for each other's citizens.

UKIP members of the English Parliament have reacted angrily to the proposal, calling the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand governments "traitors to the Commonwealth". Sir Charles Buffington MP has demanded that the prime minister request that King William instruct the respective Governors General of the three Commonwealth to dismiss their prime ministers for treason.

Buckingham Palace has said that it is not the business of the palace to interfere in the internal democratic affairs of Commonwealth members.

President Capaldi of Scotland has welcomed the proposed new members, as has Prime Minister Black.

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## **Chapter Seven: Line of fire**

### **Brussels, Belgium.**

It hadn't been an accident that Lars Tiller had got an American 360. As a former special-forces soldier, he had been familiar with its concept, but had never used one. But with it in front of him, with its technical manual and the accessories, it was only now that that he was appreciating the sheer power of the weapon. Its range alone was staggering, but that wasn't just it. Its on-board computer, ability to use GPS and infrared allowed it to do that most simple of things to a remarkably accurate degree. In short, the 360 could put a volley of depleted uranium ball bearings into the same target, to the millimetre, over two kilometres away.

The building he'd chosen was well outside the security zone, so much so that he'd even been able to carry out test firings, the gun's electric motor creating no more noise than a bare hum. The rounds had hit their target exactly as planned, its powerful camera able to verify the accuracy from an incredible distance.

He was in-situ in his firing position 36 hours ahead of target, and yet, something bothered him. He could have sworn he'd heard noises, other people moving in the building, which made no sense as it was empty, one of those older office blocks emptied by the great recession and struggling to find new tenants. It could be homeless people, and so he'd carried out a search of the building, but had found nothing, and returned to where he'd set up the gun and his sleeping bag and other equipment.

It was time to rest, he thought, feeling tired. He'd worked out the plan, Villiers had delivered the gun, and once he carried it out he had his escape route ready, an aging but well maintained second-hand BMW with a full tank and a change of identity sitting in the municipal car park next door to the building. The car park was accessible by a covered footbridge from the building he was in, doubling in the old days as the company's car park.

Then it was across the border into Germany and to a private airfield where he had a plane chartered to take him to Istanbul, where he intended to hide out and watch the general's Europe collapse in her absence. He'd made sure to keep Villiers at a distance from his actual operational details, as he didn't trust the billionaire, despite the fact that he had provided resources and the weapon itself. He still wasn't sure why Villiers wanted the general dead, but then, he didn't care either. Their interests were mutual and that was all that mattered.

Before he had joined the French foreign legion, Lars Tiller had drifted through life, dropping out of college, holding down minimum-wage jobs, doing some drug peddling, minor crime, always with anger he could never quite understand or control burning just below the surface. The foreign legion had been an accident, an idea when he found himself in Marseilles with no money, nowhere to sleep, and a vague idea that he would sign up, stay a few weeks over the winter, and then go AWOL.

Then the strangest thing happened: the harsh discipline, the training, the responsibility, all had connected. It made sense. It turned out, as much to his own surprise as others, that he'd been a born soldier. Pushing himself was not a chore but something that measured his worth as a man, and not just physically. He found himself reading, mostly history, and left-wing history at that.

He became very interested in World War One and in particular Gavrilo Princip, the Serbian nationalist who had killed Archduke Ferdinand in 1914, the event that nominally triggered the war. He became obsessed with the idea that the actions of one man could change the course of an entire continent.

Then the war with Russia broke out and Lars Tiller served with the French forces fighting in Poland and then the Baltics, and he came away, like so many of the soldiers, enamoured with General Keady and the way she had turned defeat into victory. But then came the chaos and the camps and the massacre at Naples, and he saw her for what she was, a tyrant who had used the fear of the European peoples to seize power and with every day seize more. He was honourably discharged from the legion and then found himself attending Free Europe meetings and finding he was almost alone among the children and the poseurs and the academics, a leader of men who had fought in combat. Many of the Free Europeans had been sceptical of a former soldier when so many former soldiers supported her, but he had convinced them, finding in himself a gift for oratory, drawing on his historical reading to paint a picture of what she was trying to do.

The truth was that Tiller was mentally ill, a functioning sociopath with obsessive tendencies. But he could also tell a tale, and connected the rise of Keady with the rise of the Frei Korps in Weimar Germany and the slow steps towards fascism, and soon he was leading Free Europe away from demonstrations and social-media wars and towards direct action, and all with the shadow of Gavrilo Princip at his shoulder and the certain knowledge that one man can make a difference.

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### **The European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium.**

Batten had the security team sweep the room for listening devices, and had then brought the team together. He'd spoken with them separately, especially with the researchers, in an attempt to confirm that the document was a real Commission document. Now he sat with his senior researchers, and a number of ECR MEPs whose judgement he trusted.

All had read the papers, and a decision now had to be made. Batten looked around the room, and smiled.

"Folks, remember this day. This is the day we saved European democracy or the day we all started our journey to Facility Alpha. Or worse. But either way, today matters," he said.

One of the older MEPs laughed. The researchers smiled nervously.

Batten held up a copy of the papers. The originals were well hidden, with only him and one other person knowing their location.

“We have to decide whether this proposal by Commissioner Keady is real. Is she really about to bring every national police force and national armed force under her direct control as part of the European Defence Force or EuroPol? If this is real, and if she is planning to do this, it is nothing short of a planned coup d’état. The reality of politics on this continent is that we have an individual who controls most of the armed forces on the continent, and a continent-wide police force and secret police. But she does not control everything. The French police are still loyal to France, the Bundeswehr still loyal to Germany. This changes all that. Within five years of this, she would be appointing the heads of every security organisation in Europe. Is that a fair summary of the document?”

There was nodding around the table. A Polish MEP leaned into the table.

“I would suggest, Tom, that it is even worse than this. With the European Defence Academy training the vast majority of military officers in Europe, and its amalgamation with the various national military academies and officer training colleges, she will be controlling what sort of officers even go into the military, no doubt all loyal to ‘Europe’ over their own countries. This is almost like a form of mass hypnosis.”

“We’ve seen this before, loyalty to the party over everything else,” another MEP said.

Batten nodded in agreement.

“Right, so we’re agreed what it means. Now, is it real? Jessica?”

Batten looked over to his young senior researcher, who was, he suspected, the smartest person in the room.

She pushed her glasses up her nose, and blushed, as she always did when attention focussed on her. Thorsten, her boyfriend, fellow researcher and almost intellectual equal willed her on silently. Batten smiled, knowing that the two would have spent hours all night preparing for this meeting. She deserved to be an MEP in her own right, but as an English citizen was not eligible to run. Batten had already put started working on getting her Dutch citizenship. On hearing this, she had gone off and taught herself Dutch. That was four weeks ago.

“The co-ordinating numbers on the document, as we have said, do fit within the sequences of documents of this sort of the Justice and Home Affairs Directorate. Now, what is interesting is not the content, but what the document alludes to. This seems to be an as yet unseen piece of national legislation to be voted through the various national parliaments and assemblies almost simultaneously. We’ve spoken to friends in the Bundesrat, , Cortes



and others and they have no knowledge of any incoming emergency bill, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Our friends in Dáil Eireann, who having left the EU are signed up to everything anyway all seem to be attending something to do with ploughing. I don't know if that is a euphemism or not. Finally, we identified this individual, Manuel Treviso, as an official who does work in the Justice Directorate in the division dealing with draft regulation and directive preparation."

She held up an image on an iPad.

"Tom has confirmed that this is the man he met. In short, this threat is credible."

"Thanks, Jessica: I think we have enough concerns about this to at least brief colleagues in the national parliaments and start assembling a united front. I'm a little uneasy about going to the media yet about this, as there is always a possibility that this is some sort of trap to make us look like hysterics. But it is important that we be ready to resist it if it is real."

"Hear, hear," the Pole said, and slapped the table a few times. A number of the MEPs joined in. Jessica blushed again.

There was a knock on the door, and Batten's personal assistant came into the room. She apologised with a grimace, but pointed at his mobile phone, which she took care of when he was in meetings.

"You'll want to take this," she said.

Batten took the phone, and held it to his ear.

"Tom Batten."

He recognised the voice.

"Deputy Batten, Silvana Keady here. Thank you for taking the time to take my call, as I can imagine you're very busy. I wonder, would you join me for supper tomorrow evening?"

Batten agreed, and the general promised to have her people make the arrangements. He then hung up, and put the phone down, looking at the silent group around the table.

"I'll tell you one thing: either we've got a mole, or that woman is fucking clairvoyant. Either way it scares the shit out of me."

Jessica blushed again.

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**EuroSec Headquarters, Brussels.**

"Mark Villiers," De Pietro said, leafing through the file for the second time.

“Of course, we’d have a much better idea if you hadn’t shot Gonzi,” the director added.

“I was feeling selfish at the time, sir,” Dufour said, looking over at Schmidt, who rolled his eyes out of eyeshot of their boss.

“All right: so we have Gonzi with a mortgage on a... what was the word you used to describe the late agent Gonzi’s villa in Cyprus, agent Schmidt?”

“Decadent, sir. Quite decadent. Horizon pool overlooking the Mediterranean and nine bedrooms, sir. Even for Cyprus standards.”

“A mortgage from Villiers Private Banking to fund this decadent dwelling. Not illegal, I understand. He was paying the mortgage, after all.”

Schmidt leaned over beside his superior, and searched for a piece of paper.

“Yes, sir, he was. Now, our people in Cyprus say that the villa had been sold by a shell company to Gonzi at a generous price.”

“Which we haven’t traced to Villiers?” De Pietro asked.

“Which we haven’t traced to anybody. It’s Enron complex in terms of shell companies inside shell companies. The complexity itself is indicative.”

“We won’t be making that point in front of a judge, but I get your point. Expensive shielding for someone selling a villa, no matter how grand?”

“That’s our thinking sir, even with the Russian involvement in Cyprus. Now, we got the banking unit to look at the mortgage payments. All legit, as far as they can see. But they did come up with this.”

He shifted the sheets around.

“On the same day the mortgage payments go in, an exact payment goes into a credit card for a Joseph Vargas. A credit card which is used in Polis, the town between Facility Alpha and the villa. A credit card found hidden in Gonzi’s flat on the base. Gonzi was pretending to pay the mortgage but is in reality getting the money back. He got a free villa for his trouble.”

“Circumstantial, but let’s run with it for the moment. Du Beek points us in the direction of Mark Villiers, and Gonzi is Villiers’s man inside Alpha. But why does one of the richest men in Europe need a man in Facility Alpha?”

“Gonzi had access to prisoners and EuroSec files as part of his interrogations. Well placed if you want to recruit people,” Dufour suggested.

“Recruit for what? And where’s the Tiller connection?”

“As soon as we start asking Du Beek questions about Tiller, a man in the pay of Villiers murders him. Tenuous, yes, but we can’t ignore it,” said Schmidt.

“No, we can’t. But we can’t just go charging in after Villiers either. Not with his bank balance. And he’s not a public enemy of the general either. I’m not sure he’s even that political. Anyway, you can look at Villiers later. Tomorrow is more important. You’ve something about the American 360?”

Schmidt tapped on a tablet, bringing up the technical details.

“This thing is incredible. What I mean is, if you have a good idea where your target is, you don’t necessarily have to have a line of fire?”

“What do you mean?” De Pietro asked.

“I’ve asked the Americans for a copy of the 360’s software, and they refused. They’re livid that the English lost the damn thing in the first place. But they have downloaded the tactical map we use in Brussels, and they’re coming up with a list of possible firing positions. We should have it by midnight at the latest, and when we get it we need to start searching.”

De Pietro picked up his phone and hit the hotline for the commander of EuroPol Brussels.

Schmidt’s phone rang.

“Yes, excellent, thank you for coming back so fast, yes.... How many possible... How many? Fucking hell... Sorry, my apologies... Yes, thank you.”

Schmidt hung up, tapped on his phone, and the both De Pietro and Dufour’s phones beeped.

De Pietro frowned, and handed his phone to the Frenchwoman.

“Here: aside from getting it to play opera, I can’t make this thing work. Put the list on the big screen.”

She tapped, and the large screen on the wall displayed a list with a United States Secret Service logo. It was not a short list.

“One hundred and twenty possible firing positions? All outside the control zone? How powerful is this bloody thing?” De Pietro shouted, standing up and stepping closer to read the list.

“The secret service has listed them in order of probability of success. From his file, Tiller was a trained marksman, and he’ll know we’ll have access to this software, so he won’t take one of the top ten, maybe twenty possibilities. He’ll take one of the middling ones, a difficult one. But we need to search every one.” Schmidt said.

De Pietro emailed the list to EuroPol and the Brussels Police.

“Right, I’ll coordinate from here. You two, take locations twenty to thirty, and get going. And put some body armour on.”

“Body armour? If this thing hits you, you might as well be wearing ice cream,” Dufour remarked.

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### **Brussels, Belgium.**

The gun hummed as he lined it up against the first target, checking with the app on his phone to make sure the 360 was dead on target. He adjusted the gun slightly, until the phone beeped. Then he fired a single round, and 500m away a small panel of glass cracked but didn’t shatter. The weapon had the power to reduce the velocity of the rounds it fired, thus controlling the damage it could do. The electronic sight zoomed in to give him a high-definition image.

He fired again, and this time the tiny panel shattered in almost silence, leaving a small spray of tiny glass shards in the corner of an insurance office.

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Anna Du Fries much preferred their old apartment overlooking the Square Ambiorix in central Brussels. The two-bedroom apartment was small, but painted bright and with high ceilings and worn timber floors. It had a delightful view over the park on one side, and a nosey neighbour’s paradise view into a courtyard overlooked by other apartments and houses, with a church to one side. She and her girlfriend would stand on the balcony on a warm summer’s evening with a glass of wine and make each other laugh with scandalous speculations as to what their neighbours’ sex lives consisted of. They were convinced, for example, that one man in a house on the far side of the courtyard enjoyed making love dressed as a bishop. Unless, of course, he was an actual bishop.

Not that they deprived their own neighbours of gossip and the occasional erotic glimpse, as both enjoyed both sleeping nude and making love with the only the flimsiest of blinds over the window, lifted on occasion by the cool night air.

It had really suited her work as a translator in the Berlaymont building, too, which was only a short walk along the Rue Archimede. The area had its fair share of local convenience stores and specialist food shops. Anna had loved living there.

Then her girlfriend had gone and saved Europe from the Russians, and everything changed. She hadn’t wanted to move, and in fairness neither had the general, but the EuroSec people had been adamant. They had sat down with both women and pointed out that aside from the disruption to the building, involving the removal of many of the tenants, the reality was

that an attack on the building would attempt to destroy the whole edifice, endangering all in it. It was that fear that forced them to move.

And now Anna found herself living outside Brussels in home of a wealthy 19th-century Flemish landowner. Not that one would know that, distracted as one would be by the large communication mast in the rear garden, or the armoured vehicles on the perimeter, or the polite but armed EDF and EuroSec agents visible from near every point on the house. Or the helicopter pad in the large field to the rear of the house. Or the anti-aircraft missile battery attempting to be discreet under camouflage netting at the edge of nearby woods.

The house itself was quite airy and had been modified to a modern specification, and with the exception of a small office on the ground floor remained a family home, at least until the President of the United States or President of France or German Chancellor paid a courtesy call.

It had also ended Anna's casual commute to work, instead now involving two bodyguards and an armoured BMW every morning. As she arrived back from a late-night run she noticed three armoured BMWs in the driveway, and yet more young men in suits and earpieces standing around.

Silvana Keady met De Pietro at the door of her study, and after welcoming, guided him to the casual sofa in front of the fire where she preferred to conduct all her political meetings. Her military meetings all took place standing around the large dining table, which she preferred, as they nearly always involved maps or charts. That was her observation about the difference between politics and military affairs. Modern military management involved facts and data. She'd assumed politics in the modern age should not be that different, but after seven years in the political sphere, she'd found otherwise. Hence casual chats by the fire.

"Director, I appreciate your taking the time to come all the way out here to visit me, but my feelings haven't changed. I cannot drop out of tomorrow's event. This is too important. If I can't ensure my own safety at an event commemorating modern Europe's darkest day, how on Earth can I claim Europe is safe?"

"You've read the report on the weapon?"

"I have. It's terrifying and, believe me, you're not the only person who wants to cancel today's event. President Warren is coming under pressure from her Secret Service not to attend. I don't blame them, but if she doesn't turn up and I do, it sends all sorts of signals. Fox News tends to get a little hysterical."

"Nothing compared to the actual outcome of you being shot, general."

"I'm sorry director, but my answer is no. Now, tell me how the search for the assassin is progressing."

De Pietro opened his file.

“It’s a slow process. The US Secret Service have given us exact locations, but we still have to search entire buildings in case Tiller is hiding elsewhere in the building. Then we have to secure the building after searching. Even for us it’s eating up resources.”

“I’m sure your people are doing their best. I do appreciate the effort being made, director. Just in case, as you know, I have signed an executive order appointing Commissioner Bayrou as acting Commissioner until the Council can decide what to do, if the worst comes to the worst. Now, there was something else you wished to mention?”

“If we are to go ahead, there’s something else we’d like to try. Something our technical people have been working on.”

“You’re not going to do some hologram nonsense again? Last time we tried that I ended up looking like Princess Leia.”

“No, we’d like to try something else this time.”

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**White Europe Newsletter.**

**KEADY IN THE POCKET OF HER JEW PAYMASTERS AND MUSLIM PUPPET MASTERS.**

The sooner someone puts a bullet in the race traitor dyke Keady and returns Europe to its rightful owners, the God-fearing white Christians, the sooner this continent and the white races of Europe can reach their destiny, interrupted as they were by the Jewish puppets of America and the sub-human Slavic hordes of Stalin.

There are some who claim that the bitch should be lauded for her halting of the gene debasing sub-human filth that had been invading Europe, the so-called refugees. Do not be fooled! Despite being a contaminated pervert and a defender of the mixing of the races and debasing of racial purity, Keady is clever. She has attempted to lead many Aryan brothers and sisters from the true path with this trickery of KeadyVille, but what is it?

Is it a place where a final solution to the diseased Muslim and his filthy plans against our pure women can be executed? No! It is merely a distraction and a platform from where the Muslim can be trained by their Jew paymasters as to how to hide and burrow their way into the toxic liberal landscape she defends. Where they are trained to let the queers and the Jews and the sluts be, so that they can sully our most pure bloodlines.

The dyke-bitch must die!

88!

## Chapter Eight: Target!

### Brussels, Belgium.

The Brussels Police car pulled up outside the building or, rather, the frame of the building, as it was still in construction phase, and a mixture of concrete pylons and floors with plastic panelling, mostly to shield the workers from high winds. It was only six stories high, but it was on the list and so the sergeant and his three men were there to do their duty.

None of them were happy about it. They'd been called back on duty at 1am and five hours and four buildings later they were cold, hungry and bored. The searching alone was tedious, but then there was the waiting around for a backup unit to secure the buildings after the search.

"All I'm saying, Sarge, is that it wouldn't be that hard for them to send us a few sandwiches and a flask of coffee," one of the officers said as they got out of the car.

"Yes, I heard the first three times, Domini. Now, bring the torches. It's getting bright, but we might need them for staircases."

"A load of nonsense. Some supercomputer in Washington telling us where this guy is hiding. We're miles away from the cerem..."

The burst of machine gun fire cut him and his partner down. Domini was dead, the other hit in the stomach and on the ground. The sergeant pushed the remaining officer behind the car just as another burst raked the car, shattering most of its windows and showering them in glass.

"This is 47, at location..." The sergeant paused, releasing his radio to look at the map, "17. We are under automatic gunfire at location 17. Two men down. Two men down."

The controller acknowledged. The young officer attempted to look over the bonnet of the car and aim his automatic pistol.

The sergeant held him in place.

"Leave it, son, even if you see the fucker you'll never hit him at this range. De Clerq? You still with us?" he shouted at the man holding his stomach.

De Clerq groaned.

The sergeant reached out from the vehicle, grabbed the fallen police officer by his shirt collar, and pulled him behind the police car. In the distance, police sirens could be heard.

"Sit tight, lads, here comes the cavalry."

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## **The new European Council Building, Brussels.**

A large platform had been built around the statue of Europa to host the various dignitaries, shielded by a long stretch of armoured and polished glass. The podium itself, behind which General Keady sat, surrounded by what looked like a glass cage, again made of armoured glass. Behind them, European national and EU flags, and the flags of NATO, the US and Canada flew. The large crowd was gathering in front of the platform, all invited, all security inspected, and behind them an even larger public gathering. On every rooftop, every balcony was a mixture of Europol, Brussels Police, national secret services and EuroSec operatives, all armed with either spotting equipment or long range rifles. Large numbers of media vehicles, something Brussels was no stranger to as capital of the EU, blocked up the streets approaching the building. The media had received enough tips from loose-tongued policeman to know that something serious was happening.

The platform was filling with the leaders of the smaller nations, all with their humiliating lapel badges which informed security officers who probably didn't know who the prime minister of Finland or Portugal was that this individual (a) should be there and (b) should be accorded respect. Both the general and the German Chancellor always wore the badges, too, even though both didn't need to, but felt it made them less awkward for their less well-known colleagues. The President of France had no such compunction.

Keady's Airbus Super Puma helicopter was taking off from her home, with the President of the United States with whom she had had a breakfast meeting. The EDF helicopter was accompanied by two gunships and Marine One, the US presidential helicopter as back-up, at the insistence of the US Secret Service. The take-off was covered live on television.

Keady pointed at the large media crew filming them taking off.

"I never quite forget that the reason they film us taking off or landing is because we might crash," Keady said to the president.

"Or that if we crash off camera, this will be the last footage of us," Warren replied.

"That's a cheery thought. When you put it like that, I'm sort of happy I got my hair done," the general said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Schmidt and Dufour ran to the helicopter on the roof of EuroSec headquarters just as the rotors started turning.

"Where to?" the pilot asked as the engine picked up speed.

Schmidt looked at the map of the locations spread on his lap. It was covered in notes and updated information on the search.

“There’s been a shooting here,” he pointed at a location to the east of the Council building.

“We going there?” the pilot asked.

Dufour leaned in between the two, adjusting her headset.

“Henning, it doesn’t make sense. They opened fire on the cops on the street, giving the cops a chance to call for support. Surely they should have killed them in the building with less attention?”

The German nodded.

“Yeah, that was my thinking too. This has decoy all over it. Anyway, the responding units are all over it. So, if it is a decoy, let’s go where they might be trying to draw people away from.”

He tapped an as yet unsearched building on the other side of the city.

“Can you put us there?” he asked the pilot.

“Sure. Or we’ll die trying,” the pilot said with a wink, and the helicopter took off.

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He fired again, a single shot cracking another glass panel. He had to be careful as he got close to the control zone. The sound of breaking glass on a street might be ignored by the public, but not by hyped-up sharpshooters. He marvelled with every shot. This really was an extraordinary weapon, more like a surgical tool than a rifle.

He squeezed the trigger again, and the panel cracked, then shattered. That had been four windows, one desk in the way, and one nosy janitor who had witnessed one of the panels cracking.

That left two glass panels, and possible a Brussels policeman.

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### **The new European Council building**

The helicopter set down on the roof of the building. Various military helicopters circled it to disrupt the line of fire to the roof as the general and the president were escorted into the building, and down the glass elevators overlooking the spectacular open atrium of marble and polished steel. In its centre was the preserved but damaged foundation stone of the original building destroyed by Russian cruise missiles. The surrounding walls listed out every person, from the President of France downwards, who had died in the attack, all etched into granite.

“Already we have had requests from family members to be permitted to take rubbings from the walls, you know, with paper and charcoal? Like the Vietnam Wall in DC? Not the families

of the prime ministers or foreign ministers, but the office workers, security guards, maintenance workers. See how everybody's name is the same size? This, Elizabeth, is why I couldn't call this off today."

The elevator arrived at the ground floor, and cameramen followed the two leaders out onto the platform. Large screens attached to the building showed close-ups of the arrival to the waiting crowd, who cheered when the general appeared. In the distance, behind riot police, large groups of leftists, anarchists, fascists and Islamic protestors booed and blew whistles, chanting "Keady Out!" in unison.

The general smiled at the chant.

"I've only ever wanted to bring people together," she said with a mischievous grin to the US president, before waving at the crowd.

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The pilot brought the helicopter in close, hovering on the roof, just low enough for the two EuroSec agents to leap on-board, and he was into the air again. Schmidt pointed at another building on the list.

"She's on the platform," the pilot said, as he turned the helicopter towards the next building. "They've stormed that building. One cop dead. Whoever was shooting at them abseiled down the back."

"Probably got out after the second shot. Just a distraction. Here we go," Schmidt said, pointing at the next building.

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He fired again, shattering a large window in an office block. He would have tried for a smaller, less noisy target, but the firing line had selected itself, passing through three buildings. The police marksman covering the window on the far side of the floor of that building spun on hearing the noise, and was hit with a burst of twenty rounds, which penetrated his body armour and killed him dead. His partner died a second later.

He then adjusted the scope to the final window, which looked out over the ceremony site. The digital screen adjusted, at the very edge of its range but still functioning very well. He moved the weapon, scanning the platform. The French President, the Polish President, the Prime Minister of England with his unruly mop of blonde hair, the President of the United States. He paused at her.

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Schmidt and Dufour reached the metal door on the roof leading to the stairwell. It was locked. She attached one of the small explosive charges they'd been using to get access to

buildings all morning, and imagined the string of insurance claims arriving in EuroSec Headquarters on Monday. They stepped back, shielded their eyes, and blew the door. A large twisted hole remained where the locking mechanism had been. Dufour pulled the door open, and the two moved down the stairs, Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine guns ready.

The list directed them two floors down.

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He smiled at the US President. One burst to shatter the final window on the building, another longer one to shatter the armoured glass, and a final burst to kill her. He tapped the pre-programmed sequence into the iPhone. That was the brilliance of the 360. It could fire hundreds of lethal rounds in a second, in a prepared sequence with took account of barriers like shielding to allow for defection. Yes, the armour may deflect dozens of rounds in the storm of shattering glass, but he only needed one or two of the rounds to reach their target. Their speed and mass combined with the explosive decompression of impact would tear the woman apart, ripping meaty chunks off her body.

The US President. To enter the realms of those who felled Lincoln and JFK. That was not his task today. He moved the scope onto Keady, who was obscured by the podium. The podium himself he knew would be armoured, perhaps even lead lined, but he had time to wait for her to rise. Any minute now.

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They reached the designated floor and stopped, listening. They could hear the wind blowing, which was unusual in a building this modern and this high, unless a window panel was open. Dufour took the lead, moving through the deserted floor, from column to column.

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The general was introduced by the President of the European Parliament, who had been politely warned by her office that anything other than a one-minute introduction would be frowned at. The windy politician was renowned for a passionate and sexually arousing love of the sound of his own voice, and had been nothing short of ecstatic when the general's office had invited him to give the introduction, live on most of the world's 24-hour news channels. She regarded it as a major political chip to be called in later.

He did as instructed, sitting down to polite applause and not a little disappointed that the assembled mass had not taken to its feet in uproarious appreciation of his oratory. Which they did when the general stood, waved with a certain awkwardness, and stepped to the podium.

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He had her clear in the centre of the digital sight, just as she bent her head to read a note she had written to herself, regardless of what was appearing on the teleprompter. He adjusted and pulled the trigger, initiating the pre-programmed sequence.

The first burst of 150 rounds left the rifle, shedding some on the way due to wind deflection, passed through the first building with its removed small window panels, through the air to the second building and over the body of the dead janitor, and through the third building over two dead policemen and into the final window overlooking the ceremony itself.

As the window shattered from the 102 rounds that had survived the two kilometre journey a second group of rounds arrived to pass through the now glass-free space and into the armoured glass barrier shielding the VIPs. This was the toughest barrier, but even it, surviving the first burst to hit it, couldn't survive the second which arrived, passed through it, and hit the cage around the general, shattering it with the aid of another arriving burst.

A thousand rounds had left the American 360, 330 of them reaching the cage surrounding General Keady.

The last thing the gunman would have seen through his digital sight as the glass cage around the general shattered was the general relocating in an instant three metres from where she had been standing.

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"Tiller!" Dufour shouted, as the Swede looked up from his rifle, which he was in the process of dismantling. He hesitated for a second, then lunged for his pistol on a nearby table he'd set up.

Dufour fired a clear burst, hitting him square in the chest.

Schmidt moved in close beside her, weapon still trained on Tiller.

On their headsets, the message "Unity is Down" was being shouted out.

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**EuroNews.**

**BREAKING: SPANISH, GREEK PRIME MINISTERS DIE IN TERRORIST ATTACK IN CENTRAL BRUSSELS. COMMISSIONER KEADY ALSO INJURED.**

**Brussels, Belgium.**

A sniper using a powerful multi-round weapon has killed both the Spanish and Greek prime ministers in an attack on the ceremony to open the new European Council building.

The attack, which security sources believe was aimed at Commissioner for Continental Security General Silvana Keady, occurred just after ten am this morning.

During the attack the two leaders, along with six body guards and four civilians in the audience were killed by deflected rounds.

Security sources confirm that the commissioner was injured by ricochet rounds after it was revealed that the protective cage she was in utilised angles to give a false impression as to where the commissioner was standing.

A suspect with a rifle was shot dead by EuroSec agents within minutes of the attack.

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**Fox News.**

**ATTACK ON EUROPEAN LEADER PROVES INHERENT WEAKNESS OF THE UNITED STATES UNDER THE DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION.**

**Washington DC.**

Fox News presenter Jessica Hytner (Miss Alabama 2021) has attacked the Warren administration following the attack on European Union Commissioner Silvana Keady.

“There was a time when the President of the United States was the most important target on a platform, the target worth killing. Now thanks to the liberals our president isn’t even worth murdering? What sort of America are we living in? This is what happens when you let homosexuals marry.”

**Servantsofthelluminati.com**

### **LARS TILLER IS A PATSY!**

The recent murder of the Spanish and Greek leaders was part of a conspiracy by General Keady to start a second war with Russia. This blog can reveal, after speaking to VERY well connected sources, that an elite EDF unit was in a nearby building ON THE SAME FIRING LINE and it was that EDF unit that fired at the new European Council building. Furthermore, this secret unit knew that Keady would not be in the visual position she appeared to be in because of the armoured glass case surrounding her, and fired in the knowledge that she would not be seriously injured.

Furthermore, there was a THIRD unit operating that fired a very careful shot after the initial attack, as pre-arranged with Keady, to give her a superficial wound to create public sympathy.

Comments:

Sheeple\_watcher: Of course it was a set up. Keady is in the pocket of the arms industry.

Pure\_Blood: No, that's ridiculous. This was the work of the Rothschilds. It has their sticky fingerprints all over it.

Sheeple\_watcher: That's rubbish. The Rothschilds would never work with a German. They're Jews.

Pure\_Blood: You're an idiot. The Rothschilds ARE German!

Agenda\_Spy: You're both wrong, it's the Lizards. Once again. Roswell, Kennedy, the Moon landing, now this. It all fits together. Keady is one of them. Or at least works for them.

Sheeple\_watcher: Oh fuck off Karl. Don't start with your lizard shit again.

Agenda\_Spy: And once again you close down any mention of our real masters. Who's pocket are you in? CIA? EuroSec, SD6? THRUSH?

Sheeple\_watcher: Maybe I'm in the pocket of the fucking lizards! Fucking asshole.

Pure\_Blood: The lizards and the Jews, they're the same thing, right?

Agenda\_Spy: What? Of course they're not. Why would the lizards care about our superstitious nonsense?

Pure\_Blood: I'm sure they're the same thing. I read it somewhere.

Agenda\_Spy: Of course they're not the same thing! That's a ridiculous idea. Read a book will you?



Sheeple\_watcher: Wait, we're supposed to believe in giant six foot shape changing lizards but not that they might be Jewish lizards? That's going too far?

Agenda\_Spy: You're a dick, Steve. I'm not surprised Lucy dumped you.

Sheeple\_watcher: Fuck you Adam. She didn't dump me. She's a lesbian now. She's finding herself.

Agenda\_Spy: She wasn't a lesbian when I boinked her.

Pure\_Blood: Or when she did me either. Or Dave.

## Chapter Nine: Manhunt

### EuroSec Headquarters, Brussels.

“What?” Schmidt said, dropping the croissant he had been eating. Dr Braun, the EuroSec ordinance specialist, repeated himself.

“Lars Tiller did not carry out the attack.”

“We caught him with the 360!” Dufour said.

“No you didn’t. You caught him with a plastic printed copy of a 360. A very good one, almost perfectly weighted. But it isn’t a functioning 360. We’ve looked at the firing trajectory. The firing line is a building just up the street. They fired through three buildings. Hell of a piece of shooting.”

Schmidt stood up, flinging the food on the floor.

“You’re telling me that Lars Tiller, a combat trained veteran, couldn’t tell that he had a dummy gun?”

“No, it’s more complicated than that. Maybe he did have the real thing at some stage, and maybe he even fired it to clear most of a firing line. I’ve my people reverse examining the firing line from his building. What I’m saying is that someone switched the guns. From the time of death of the janitor I’d say maybe two hours before the attack. And here’s your final proof. We did an autopsy. Lars Tiller was drugged for a couple of hours. Both his coffee and water had been spiked. I’d say he only woke up a few minutes before you arrived.”

“Someone spiked his food and drink, got in, replaced the weapon, and carried out the attack themselves?”

“Leaving a patsy in place,” De Pietro said.

“But a patsy we’d uncover as soon as we examined the weapon. It doesn’t make any sense,” Dufour said.

“It does in creating a window from which to escape,” Schmidt said. He leaned down, and picked up the croissant from the floor, looked at it and dumped it in the bin.

“There’s been a force operating behind Tiller all this time. A force which helped steal the 360, steal a drone to transport it, deploy a force to stop us recovering it, and carry out two attacks in a single day,” De Pietro said.

“And bribe a EuroSec agent,” Dufour replied.

“We need to look at this from a strategic level. Who gains from an attempt to kill the general?”

“The Russians, radical Eurosceptics, radical Islamists, the far-right, far-left, the usual suspects.” Schmidt said.

“Yes, but that’s our problem. The usual suspects are who we are looking at. Tell me this? Does Mark Villiers count as a usual suspect?”

“Quite the opposite. He’s only interested in making money,” Dufour said.

“Which would make you think he’d support the general, you know, stability and all that,” Schmidt said.

“But supposing he doesn’t. Supposing the general’s policies cost him money?”

“The energy union,” De Pietro said. “It’s one of her key policies, that Europe will not be held ransom by Russia its energy needs. She’s pushed through the gas pipeline to Iraq, the new nuclear plants, the investment in infrastructure and renewable energy. Perhaps that hurt him more than we realise. I think we need some expert help here.”

The Director picked up the phone.

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### **The Westbury Hotel, Dublin, Ireland**

Dufour spotted Eddie Trevor across the large lobby of the Westbury when they reached the top of the stairs, and headed in his direction. Both she and Schmidt were dressed like a couple of young and successful investors, smart but not too flash.

The same could not be said for Trevor, whose tie and pocket square, both a bright silvery orange, were screaming for attention against his dark charcoal-grey suit.

Trevor was in his very early forties, but looked five years younger, taking care of himself. His eyes lit up on seeing Dufour, and he rose from the seat.

“Agent Dufour, agent Schmidt. Pleasure to meet you both,” He shook hands with both, Dufour longer. Schmidt didn’t blame him.

He offered them a seat on a sofa, and sat opposite them, the three away from the open space of the lobby. He signalled a waitress, who came over, took an order for coffee, and went on her business.

“I like to meet here. It’s well away from the Financial Services Centre, prying eyes and bending ears and all that, as you can imagine. You’re more like to get well to do ladies of a certain vintage meeting here, you know, up in town for the boutiques. The afternoon tea here is a bit of a local legend. Hint of Claridge’s, cream buns and triangular sandwiches and oh I shouldn’t but I will. That and a bit of casual adultery with their tennis coach.”

His eyes flickered in a mischievous flare, which reminded Schmidt of the late William F. Buckley.

“How do you know Director De Pietro?” Schmidt asked, after the coffee was left on the table.

“Ah, the director is a bit of a magpie, as I’m sure you’re aware. Goes around picking up useful people to store away for later use. Of course, no harm having the head of Europe’s secret police owing you a favour. One thing about him, he pays his debts. I specialise in wealth management, and he tapped me for information, oh, 15 years ago when he was with Italian intelligence. I was a young fella, a bit flattered, charmed, helped him out, didn’t really cost me anything, was more explaining how something works than giving him information. Then five years ago I get into a spot of lady trouble in Dubai, all looking very serious. Irish embassy can’t do anything for me. Looking bad, talking about ten years for immoral practices, whatever that is. Then I remember, and send a text message. Two hours later two heavies turn up at the station with diplomatic passports, get me out, take me back to the hotel, get my stuff, and escort me to the departure gate, no questions asked. So, when the director asks for a favour, he gets a favour.”

Dufour smiled.

“Yes, he does keep a list of who has been naughty and nice. He mentioned we wanted to talk about Mark Villiers, the Dutch billionaire?”

Trevor nodded, taking a sip of coffee.

“Yes, the mysterious Mr Villiers.”

“Mysterious?” Schmidt asked.

“To anyone looking deep at the details, definitely. Yes, everybody says he’s this incredible trader, a brain who is two steps ahead of everyone else, it’s all bullshit. His funds make money, there’s no question, but you can’t help thinking they’re designed to.”

“I’m sorry, Mr Trevor, you’ve lost me,” Dufour said.

“The theory behind the fund is that Villiers invests your money with great wisdom, in profitable companies with rising share prices, and with a mixture of dividends and nimble sales grows your money. The problem is that the companies Villiers picks sometimes do what they’re supposed to do, and sometimes they don’t.”

“Isn’t that normal?” Schmidt asked.

“Oh yes, and as a result sometimes you make money, and sometimes you don’t. Except Villiers always does. Always. Every reporting period some minor company he has invested in will surprise everyone by winning a big government contract or a mobile phone licence,

driving its share price up. Always some outside factor, nearly always controlled by one thing. Either the Russian government, or someone under Russian influence.”

“Ah,” said Schmidt, topping up his coffee.

“You can prove this?” Dufour asked.

Trevor laughed, and patted her on the knee.

“Nope. Too many variables. If a successful Serbian phone company announces it’s buying a tiny software company that Villiers owns, and then a month later Russia announces a few billion in soft loans to the Serbs, how the hell do you prove anything? There are patterns, but it’s like trying to grab mist.”

“But surely it means he’s constantly losing money? His fund?” Dufour said.

“Oh yeah, and financially, that should hurt him, and discourage future investors, which it would if the point of the fund, as I said, was to make money in the normal fashion. But it isn’t.”

“Laundering,” Schmidt said.

“There you go!” Trevor said, pointing at Schmidt.

“The whole point isn’t to make big money at all, in fact, they don’t want that, it’ll attract too much attention. The point is to have profits coming out of what is seen as a legitimate investment. Clean money. Which then goes into...”

“Villiers Private Banking,” Dufour said.

“Villiers Private Banking, a dinky little boutique bank based in Amsterdam, with discreet little arrangements in Grand Cayman, Jersey, here, you know the drill. And cash and assets of around €60 billion.”

“Jesus Christ,” Schmidt said.

Trevor waved the waitress over, and asked her for a plate of biscuits.

He helped himself to a chocolate digestive, which he dipped into his coffee, melting the chocolate.

“Before I got into my current game, I did some trading in Russia. Timber, scrap metal, trucks, some aircraft. As you’re no doubt aware, you’ve got to be well connected. But you know what? No matter how well connected these guys are, FSB, army, police, they’re all still afraid that one day you’ll get Khodorkovsky treatment. Go from being a very wealthy connected guy to freezing your ass off in some cell on some trumped-up charge of fraud, tax evasion, embezzlement. Ever notice it’s always that? It’s like in the Muslim countries they always do

you for being a bum bandit. In Russia it's always fraud and embezzlement. They bury you in paper. That fear is always there. So no matter how legit you are, or how well connected, you want to keep most of your money outside the country."

"Wait a minute, are you saying that it isn't Villiers' money?" Schmidt asked.

"I'm saying that every dodgy Russian oligarch or ropey ex-KGB apparatchik may want to bend the rules in Russia, but he wants to keep his own money somewhere where the rule of law stops other thieving bastards from lifting it on a fantasy warrant. Deal with a Russian company and you'll find, more often than not, when it comes to handing over cash, that you're dealing with a reasonably respectable European bank. You'll find that with Villiers Private Banking. The money may be suspect, but the bank itself will pass any ECB inspection."

Schmidt sat back in his seat, thinking.

"So who uses Villiers Private Banking?" Dufour asked.

Trevor smiled wolfishly.

"That's the billion-rouble question, isn't it? Who knows? But I can tell you one thing. Villiers's father was a successful businessman in his own right, and funded his son's first excursions into the former Soviet Union as it was allcoming down, and the story is that Villiers fell in close with an older but rising star in the party. A deputy defence minister with a reputation for getting things done and a taste for Western suits, booze, fancy women, and a nice bundle put aside somewhere safe for a rainy day. Villiers made his first million there. The minister was one Yuri Bulgarin."

"You're suggesting that Mark Villiers is the personal banker to the President of Russia," Dufour said.

Trevor hunched his shoulders, palms up in a supplicant shrug.

"I can't prove a damn thing. That's all a mixture of hearsay, but not without some truth. Villiers made a fortune exporting Red Army trucks and helicopters back in the day when Yeltsin was drinking himself to death and hard cash, ideally in Deutschmarks, Swiss Francs or US dollars were all the rage. Everybody from ministers to local commandants had their hands out, but Bulgarin had the ability to make it happen. Get the right permits, even get them shipped on Soviet navy transports."

A tall Eastern European looking blonde in a criminally short skirt came up the stairs, and looked around.

"Now, agents, if you'll forgive me, that's my bit of afternoon adultery awaiting me," Trevor said, standing up. He shook hands with Schmidt, and kissed Dufour's hand.

"If I'm ever in Brussels, I will just have to buy you dinner," he said, winked, and walked off across the lobby, stopping only to give the waitress a generous tip and a pat on her backside. She looked like she was used to it.

"If I'm ever in Brussels!" Schmidt said, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, I don't know..." said Dufour. "See those shoes he was wearing? €800 a pair. Handmade in Milan. I mean, you're charming and all, but he's worth €150 million."

"Well, shoes aside, what do we make of that? Villiers as banker to Bulgarin. Could he be Bulgarin's fixer in Europe? Maybe paid off the various individuals needed to put an American 360 into Lars Tiller's hands?"

"It's not that hard to believe. Even Bulgarin would want to have an exit strategy, a rainy-day fund, just on the off chance the wind changes in Moscow. Bit ironic, though."

"What?" Schmidt asked.

"Tiller being funded by Bulgarin. Did he not hate him even more than the general?"

Schmidt nodded, just as his phone rang. He pulled it out and listened, then hung up.

"We're needed in Tallinn. De Pietro just got a tip off that the people who attacked the European Council are making their way by road down the Baltic highway to Russia."

"By road? Why on earth?" she asked.

"That's what he said. Jesus, we should be paid by the kilometre."

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### **Narva, Estonia.**

The joint EuroPol/Estonia Police & Border Guard checkpoint had reduced the traffic to a trickle, the tailback going back a kilometre as the security forces inspected each vehicle. Most cars got a quick look and a wave, but commercial vehicles, jeeps and anything with more than one man was more closely examined.

The four men didn't like the look of this, despite their reassurances. All four had diplomatic passports, and had been assured that both they and their vehicle would make it across the border without trouble.

When he'd received instructions to head to Russia via Estonia, the commander had argued with the man giving him the instruction over the phone. It made more sense to either get out from a small private airstrip, or failing that, go into Kaliningrad. They'd even been willing to go with a military extraction by helicopter from a rural area. Their paymaster had dismissed all of those options, saying that he was receiving information that EuroSec had

had secured the Kaliningrad frontier, and that every private airfield had been put on a 48-hour freeze with no flight cleared without a EuroPol search. The other man on the phone had laughed at the idea of a military extraction.

“Are you for real? Try and put a helicopter across this border and you’ll have a dozen EDF interceptors scrambled in a minute!”

The group commander had gritted his teeth and hung up, telling the others to get their passports out of their hidden compartments. The passports were only supposed to be the last act, a final tool to lubricate what should already be a smooth exit from the EU. They’d been issued as a just-in-case option. But this, this he wasn’t sure about at all.

Ahead in the distance he could see the blue lights of a EPBG vehicle, a four-wheel-drive jeep, blue lights flashing at the side of the road. He could also make out a number of Estonian policemen in their flak jackets holding submachine guns.

The Estonian Police & Border Guard weren’t your normal police force. Being such a small country, the functions were combined and as a result of sharing a border with Russia they were tough and well used to dealing with Russians who had notions about their country. Many a drunken Russian who believed he had some sort of right to break laws in Estonia, or that their tiny 5,000-strong police force weren’t up to handling themselves, found himself nursing a bloodied nose in an emergency ward. The commander had fought against a combined Baltic unit during the war, and they were motivated, tough and just as hard as his men, and he also knew that nearly every Estonian cop had fought in the war. Now they were backed up with EuroPol officers too. No, he didn’t like this at all.

The passports were good. In fact, they were the real thing, but EuroSec sometimes had the swagger of the old KGB about itself. There was a time when the border nations surrounding Russia would never dare disrespect a Russian diplomatic passport. But since the war, and the general, and the EDF, Europe didn’t see itself playing second fiddle to anyone, and detaining a few Russian diplomats for a few hours wasn’t the big deal it once had been. What would the Kremlin do? Threaten to invade?

Even from the road, looking out into the thick forests on each side, he could see the glint of dull camouflaged metal. An EDF tank or command vehicle, sitting, waiting. The whole border was an iron wall.

The problem wasn’t the passports, he thought. It was the boot of the jeep that was the problem. The boot and the American 360 in it that the paymaster had insisted they bring back to St. Petersburg. He’d thought that was madness, too, but then the original plan had been a dash over the border into Kaliningrad and flight home. He could understand why they wanted to keep it; it was an extraordinary weapon. One squeeze and the American president would have been gone. But now it sat wrapped in paper in the boot, the ticket to



them spending the rest of their lives in a Belgian or Spanish or Greek prison. Not that fucking holiday camp in Cyprus, anyway.

Or maybe the English would want to put them on trial for killing the two SAS men and that whining major. Didn't the British hang people now, since they left the EU? Live on television sponsored by some DIY chain?

Or the Dutch, for killing those two sailors.

No, he thought, and turned the jeep just as they passed a minor country road going into the forest.

"What the fuck?" the man in the passenger seat, his sergeant, asked. The two on the back seat had been sleeping, but were alert on hearing him swear.

"I don't like this at all. We need to find another way," he said to the other three.

"But our passports..." one of the men on the back seat said.

"Fuck our passports. The security on the border, it's too tight. They're looking for us. We ditch the gun and make our way across on foot."

"Ditch the gun? We'll be horsewhipped when we get back. We have clear..."

"I've decided. We find a spot, mark it, bury the gun, come back and recover it when the situation is more calm. Better delay getting the gun across than get caught with it."

The sergeant nodded, and pulled a map from glove compartment.

"Up here, on the left. Better than nothing. We're very close to the town itself, but if we're not leaving it for long... We bury it there, then what? Try the border crossing without it? If we keep our mouths shut, they may even hold us for a few weeks, but then they'll let us go. Even the general insists on some evidence, and there is nothing but our weapons linking us to the hit. Everybody wiped the gun shot residue?"

The two in the back nodded. The commander hadn't needed to, having only used the electric weapon. All four had ditched any clothes they had used in Brussels.

The commander pulled the jeep into the side clearing, and into the forest until the lights from the road were dim. He stopped the vehicle, got out and ordered the others to access the boot. Two snow shovels were extracted, along with a large parcel of plastic-coated heavy-duty paper. As the two juniors started digging with the snow shovels, the sergeant took out the parcel.

The commander checked the GPS location of the hole for later use.

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An EDF EuroCouger helicopter clattered over the dark Estonian countryside towards the Narva crossing point. In a delaying tactic during the war, the Estonian Defence Forces had blown almost every bridge into Russia. With the exception of the main one into the centre of the city itself, none had been replaced, nor were the Estonians in any rush to do so. As a result, it made the remaining bridge the only crossing point into Russia, and very busy at the best of times. With a EuroPol alert on, Schmidt could see the long tail of lights stretching out from the city.

“If they try to cross on the bridge EuroPol and the Estonians know what to do. I just hope the Estonians aren’t too trigger happy. The general’s very popular here, you know. There’s a statue in Tallinn. But if I were them, I’m not sure I’d risk the bridge, not if they have the rifle with them.”

“Very specific, this tip-off,” Dufour said with the slightest hint of sarcasm.

“Yeah, I was thinking that, too. Do you ever get the impression we’re getting played here?”

“Imagine that,” she said, and pointed off to the north of the city.

“If they have any sense, and we have no reason to believe these guys aren’t top of their game, they’ll ditch the rifle. Maybe they have already. Then either try the bridge or maybe even swim for it. Signal the far side with a prearranged code, maybe even have an inflatable with them.”

“The tip-off mentioned the bridge,” he said.

“Yes, but we don’t know how much of this tip-off is correct. And anyway, how much of the grand plan survives after contact with the EPBG? Would you risk the major crossing point between the EU and Russia after an attack on Europe’s leader?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Schmidt agreed, and signalled to the pilot to turn and move up the river separating the two countries.

An EDF EuroTiger in central European combat camouflage, all greys, greens and browns appeared beside them. The pilot advised his colleague in the EuroTiger, and both turned north.

“Just in case these boys decide to get stropky,” Schmidt said.

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## **Outside Brussels.**

Batten’s staff had been afraid just before he left for his meeting. Jessica had suggested perhaps holding a press conference, just in case he was made disappear by EuroSec, but he

laughed. He was confident enough that if the general had really wanted to get rid of him she'd have him fall under a subway train or choke on a pretzel.

The car from EuroSec picked him up, and the agents, after frisking him for weapons and listening devices, escorted him to their vehicle and drove him to the general's residence. On the approach road, the vehicle was stopped at a check point and inspected by EuroSec agents, and he verified his identity.

"Haven't these two already done that?" he asked the agent checking his ID card.

"What makes you think we trust these two?" was the reply.

"Good point," Batten replied, before waving at the agents as the car proceeded down the road and into the driveway. He could make out at least four rifle sights pointed at him, and those were the ones he could see.

He got out, where he was met by a young smartly dressed woman who led him into the hallway and down a corridor with yet more agents, and then knocked at the door before opening.

It was a study with a patio and doors open out into the garden. In the distance, beyond the end of the garden he could see an EDF mobile radar truck.

The general was dressed casually, in jeans and a light blouse. He was taller than her.

"Deputy Batten, thank you so much for coming," she shook his hand, and directed him towards a table set up near the patio. The table was set for supper with some bread and cheese.

The assistant took his coat, and he took his seat at the table.

The general sat down, the light blouse not quite preventing her bandaged shoulder from being visible.

"How's the shoulder?" he asked, arranging his napkin.

"Stiff. I was very lucky just to be grazed by the round. Apparently, if it had hit me full on the shoulder, I would have lost my arm. Or worse. Awful weapon. Elizabeth Warren and I are thinking about banning them."

He nodded, and looked into the garden.

"How do you live with that sort of thing in your life?" he gestured at the radar truck.

She smiled.

"Counting the attack on NATO headquarters seven years ago, there have been six actual attacks on me. EuroSec has stopped about forty serious attempts from happening. One has

to be philosophical about these things. I suppose I must be doing something right if they're trying to kill me?"

A housekeeper stepped into the room and served the two a bowl of beef stew. The general thanked her, and she left.

"I think you're doing everything wrong, but I promise I won't try to kill you," Batten said, once the door closed.

The general stopped eating, and looked at him.

"You really do, don't you? You call me a dictator in parliament. Do you really believe that? That I'm a tyrant?"

"Oh yes, definitely. Now, don't get me wrong, and I'm reluctant to insult you in your own home, as your guest..."

"Your taxes fund this home, or at least most of it, so you have every right to speak in it. Although I would stress that Anna and I do pay a market rent," she said, picking up her spoon again.

"Of course, general. Well, you're not a Hitler, or a Mao or a Pinochet. You're not a psychopath. I do not believe that you ever set out to harm anyone. But you have put in place the system that will permit it. Naples alone..."

"Naples was an unfortunate..."

"Your soldiers killed forty refugees being sent to KeadyVille. They opened fire with automatic weapons. That is a fact, general."

"Yes, I know. But it was an accident, an inexperienced officer panicked when a mass of people rioted."

"They were protesting being shipped by force across the Mediterranean. By force."

"We shipped half a million people in under a year, with tiny casualties, deputy. We solved the refugee crisis, restored order, saved Schengen and stopped the rise of the far right across Europe."

"You made them go to a place they didn't want to go. They wanted to live in Europe, not the world's biggest refugee camp."

"It's not that now. It's a thriving city under European law where people can raise their families in relative peace and tolerance, and don't forget: nobody is forced to stay in the SafeZone. You can renounce your residency and leave whenever you want."

"But not come to Europe."

“Thousands of legal residents of the zone come to Europe every year to live, work, study, all legally. But they come under our rules. Anyway, you can hardly call me a dictator if the SafeZone is your problem. You’ve seen the same polls I do. The zone is my single most popular policy. If anything, it’s more popular than I am. Even without me, I doubt European governments would scrap it.”

She lifted up a basket.

“Bread?”

He refused.

“It’s indicative of a bigger issue. KeadyVille is popular, as indeed is Cyprus. The EDF is popular in Finland and Poland and the Baltics. Your taxes not so much, but then they never are. But the issue, general, is quite simply this: who the hell voted for you?”

She ripped a bread roll apart, and started buttering it.

“The European Parliament approved my appointment. I know, you voted against me.”

“The European Parliament my arse, general. Unlike many of my eurosceptic colleagues in the member states, I think the Parliament deserves more credit than we get. But we can’t claim to be the People’s House. Europeans just don’t think of us that way.”

“The member states had to nominate me.”

“And that’s the crux right there, general.”

In the garden, a radio crackled and two uniformed EuroSec agents with machine guns walked past the doors.

Batten finished his stew and rested the spoon.

“The reality is that they were afraid not to. Europe was in turmoil, refugees were streaming across the Mediterranean, and then Islamic State launched their attacks. Nobody even knew who these new leaders were. But they did know that blonde woman on the telly who had just saved us all from the Russians, and took advantage of it with the Keady Plan. Of course they voted it through, they hadn’t a clue what else to do. A European army, a continental police force, a Stasi, even a Gulag, you grabbed power, and didn’t let go, and now, they’re afraid to take it off you.”

“Afraid?”

“Yes, afraid. It’s the big question that everybody knows but doesn’t want to ask. In parliaments, in the chancelleries, in the pubs across this continent. If we tell the general to go, will she?”

Batten stopped, and reached down, opening his briefcase. He withdrew a file.

“What happens if they summon you before the Council and tell you to go? Do you retire, bid farewell to a grateful continent, or do you do a Caesar and order the EDF to march on the Élysée and the Bundeskanzleramt and the Belweder? Drop special forces on them and that’s that?”

“Do you think they will obey me?”

“They will after this!” Batten said, throwing the file on the table.

“Ah. The security forces amalgamation proposal?”

Batten nodded.

The general pressed button on the wall beside the table, and a minute later the housekeeper appeared.

“Would you like more stew?”

“No, I’m fine, thank you. It was very nice,” Batten said to the housekeeper.

She smiled, and took away the dishes.

“What did you think of the proposals?”

“They’ll cause a civil war across Europe. There is no way even this generation of weak politicians will just vote through a law to give you this amount of control. This will just turn the EDF into the SA.”

He let the phrase hang provocatively, as he knew it would.

“You assume that if I gave the word to the EDF to march on Paris or Berlin or Warsaw, they’d obey me. They may be EDF, but they are Polish and German and French. What would happen if a million Germans or Poles took to the streets to oppose them, to oppose me? Do you think I’d order them to open fire? Do you think they’d obey me? Or even better, what happens if another million Poles march in support of me? It’s not impossible, I see the same opinion polls you do.”

“Then it’s a European civil war, which even you don’t want, general. Not if you believe what you claim to believe,” said Batten.

“You’re quite right,” she said, and stood up without a word, and walked to the door, opening it. She beckoned to someone. A moment later a young man stepped into the room. He wore a business suit, and looked nervous.

“You’ve met Herr Treviso? Works in the Justice Directorate?”

The young man nodded at Batten, who recognised him from the Hergé museum.

“I asked Herr Treviso to join us just so I could ensure you understood that I knew about the proposals and you receiving them. I asked him to give them to you.”

She turned to the young man.

“Thank you, Herr Treviso, and thank you for coming all the way out here. Get yourself some supper in the kitchen before my fellows drive you home.”

She sat back at the table as the housekeeper wheeled in a trolley with tea, coffee and cake.

“You have to try Frau Holger’s cake. It’s excellent,” she said, pouring the tea for Batten.

“You’re quite right about the proposals. They’re absolutely terrifying, as I knew they’d be when I dreamt them up. I must admit I did enjoy myself. Did you like the combined officer training? SA indeed!”

“They’re not real?”

“Of course not! If there is one thing we have learnt on this continent, it’s that putting everything under the control of one man is, well, unwise. Why do you think I avoided merging all Europe’s armies and police seven years ago? Aside from the political shit-storm it would have caused, it’s bad policy. It’s the fear of the holder of this office dropping special forces on the elected leaders of Europe which is why national armies and police must be maintained. Yes, we need the EDF to pool our resources, give us a stick big enough to wave at Moscow and others, but it’s for external use. We’ve seen what happens when the Putins and Bulgarians and Erdogans of the world get to hold all the cards, and it’s ugly.”

Batten didn’t know what to say.

“It’s times like this I wish we did bug the meeting rooms of the ECR. I’d love to have heard the debate over that!” she said, with a girlish laugh and a mouthful of cake.

Batten laughed himself.

“But why all the subterfuge...?”

“Ah, well, you see,” she put down the cake and took a sip of tea to wash it down.

“The subject is fake. The method, to pass a bill across the EU’s legislatures is real. There is something I want to do which is outside the treaties. So I either convene an inter-governmental summit to amend the treaty, which, as you know, is guaranteed to give one a nose bleed, or ask all the member states to do something they have the power to do nationally. Parallel to the treaties, as such.”

“Ask them to do what?”

The general rose from the table, walked over to the desk, took a file from it, and then walked to the door, opening it.

“Helga, can you bring more coffee please. Deputy Batten is going to need it.”

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## **Narva, Estonia**

The two helicopters worked their way up the north shore of the Narva river. Schmidt and Dufour both had infrared night-vision goggles on, and were scanning both the shore and the river itself. A group of teenagers sitting around a fire overlooking the river were startled by the two helicopters hovering over them for a moment, but Schmidt waved and the aircraft moved on.

After the third sweep, Dufour instructed the two pilots to move inland over the forest, as both sets of goggles had short range.

“I’ve something,” the EuroTiger pilot said over the headset.

“Looks like a vehicle, three individuals... No, make that four. The vehicle isn’t moving, but I can still see heat from the engine, so it’s only been there a short time.”

“Roger, keep close, we’ll have a look,” Schmidt said, pointing the pilot towards the approximate area of the sighting. As their aircraft got closer their own goggles started to pick up the shapes in the darkness, human heat against the cold surrounding them.

On the ground the four men heard the sound of the helicopters approaching before they saw them. They weren’t the sort of men prone to panic, and would have gone about their business in the hope of not drawing attention. But digging a hole in the dark in the middle of a forest in Estonia topped the list of suspicious activity. They looked to the commander, who also realised the situation. The helicopter would be Estonian security forces or, worst still, the EDF or EuroPol, and they only had handguns which would be of little use against an experienced pilot who’d know to keep his altitude out of range. There was one other weapon, though.

The EuroCougar hovered over the area, Schmidt and Dufour both getting a clear view. Four men around a jeep, digging a hole. Then Dufour saw the shape.

“Out of here! Now! Now!” she screamed at the pilot, as the commander on the ground pulled the American 360 out of the packing paper they had tied it up in. He turned its battery on, hearing the tiny whine that confirmed that it was functioning, and brought it up to his eye just as the digital sight came on line.

Dufour grabbed the searchlight attached to the side of the door for search and rescue missions, and turned it to full power, aiming it directly at the commander. Even the advanced sight on the rifle struggled to readjust to the sudden change from night vision and infrared to almost daylight, and it blinded the commander just long enough for him to fire a burst just below the previous location of the helicopter. It didn’t stop a handful of rounds hitting the fuselage, punching three fist size holes straight through the side and slamming into the inner wall on the other side of the cabin.

“Fucking hell!” Schmidt swore, bringing his Heckler & Koch up to his shoulder and losing off a burst at the ground, as they opened fired with their handguns as a defiant gesture more than anything else.

“What the fuck is that thing?” the pilot shouted, pulling the helicopter away from the site.

“The thing that’ll kill us all if we don’t move fast. Angel 2: shoot that fucker!” Schmidt shouted.

“Roger,” the EuroTiger pilot, said, flipping on his 30mm cannon. He’d been well briefed on the American 360 and the fact that it could take down his aircraft, armour or no, and so wasn’t taking chances. He’d seen the man on the ground fire, and had dropped down until he was very low on the other man’s firing line, hovering less than a metre above the river.

He knew damn well that the trees would give him very little protection, and was relieved to have got the order. If he was going down, he was going down in combat. He moved the helicopter forwards towards the digging site, staying close to the top of the trees, watching the infrared image of the four men getting clearer as he closed on them. He hoped they had only thought they were up against a single aircraft.

The trees whipped past under the EuroTiger and then he saw the clear shape. Three standing firing, arms outstretched in classic two-handed steady firing pose. The fourth wasn’t. He was turning to point something at the EuroTiger.

The pilot pulled the trigger, and thirty rounds crashed through the trees. Twenty-nine of them missed the commander, the pilot having misjudged the angle of fire, tearing into the trees behind him, toppling a dozen of them. The thirtieth round connected with the top of his head, scalping it clear off and pulling the rest of his head off with a tumbling motion which send it spinning over 30 metres into the forest. It would take the EPBG two days to find it in a bush.

The body, still holding the rifle, stood for a moment as if processing the information, than collapsed in a heap.

Schmidt, watching from a distance, whistled.

“Your tax euros at work, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, before signalling the pilot to return back over the site.

The remaining three men stood in front of the hovering EuroTiger, illuminated by searchlight from the returning other EDF helicopter. They could see the EuroTiger pilot looking at them, gun trained at them, and he wagged his finger. They dropped their pistols and raised their arms.

In the distance the blue flashing lights of EPBG and EuroPol vehicles were speeding up the forest road.

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## Chapter Ten: Endgame

The lights transformed the general's desk, lighting up the EU flag behind it. She had to avert her eyes as they adjusted it so that she could read the teleprompter, as she had moved her seat during the rehearsal. A moment later, she was ready.

The TV people had wanted her to wear her uniform, but she had refused, her political people breathing a sigh of relief. It would have been too Franco, too Pinochet, and anyway: had nobody noticed that she had not worn her uniform in public in six years? It was one of those things, folk memory. People, in their mind's eye, always pictured her in her uniform, even though she didn't wear it anymore. Of course, it wasn't helped by the fact that the media used either old images or stylised graphics of her in her uniform. There was also that picture of her outside NATO headquarters seven years ago, with the machine gun. She could hardly blame them for remembering that image. That, and her first TV address giving instructions to NATO forces and the public, that was what people still remembered. The anarchy, the panic, and then this woman in a military uniform taking control and restoring order when all the old familiar leaders were dead or missing.

She'd read polling about herself, which was a weird experience, the contradictions being so bare. Women liked that she was a strong woman, but felt that her being a lesbian and childless meant she didn't quite understand them. Men were intimidated by her, but liked her decisiveness. Liberals hated her for KeadyVille and Cyprus, yet respected her firm crushing of the far right and tolerance towards Muslims. Conservatives hated her social liberalism, yet agreed with her on KeadyVille and Cyprus. Muslim men disliked her, Muslim women loved her.

Central and Eastern Europe thought she was far too soft on foreigners, but respected her for defeating the Russians. Western Europe feared she was a tyrant in the making, but had stopped the far right and restored order. Southern Europe though she was a pushy Kraut who had nevertheless brought order to the refugee crisis.

Mix it all together and you had a divided continent, where 40% hated her and called her a fascist or a Muslim lover or indeed a dyke, while another 40% felt safer because the general was in Brussels, in control.

She looked at the camera operators and the sound people and the producer. This was what Batten had meant. Here she was, just another European Commissioner answerable to the President of the Commission and Parliament and the national governments, about to address the 450 million people of the European Union. Nominally, this broadcast would only go out live on Euro News, but everybody knew that the BBC and CNN and SKY and even Fox News and Russia Today would pick it up and run it. Does any other Commissioner get such a privilege? Does the President? Of course not. But she did, because she controlled the EDF and EuroPol and EuroSec and Facility Alpha and there was always that niggling fear, as

Batten had said. That the general was going to go on telly and announce to the world that the game was up.

The producer gave her the hand signal, and counted down as the room quietened, and then the light above the camera came on.

“Good evening. As you are aware, it is a rare occasion for me to request time from our broadcasters to speak to you. It is not something I like doing, as I’m sure you have better things to be doing than listening to a European Commissioner using up your evening time with your family. I’m speaking to you tonight because I wish to inform you of a decision I have arrived at, which I feel is important that you be informed of directly by me. It is a decision which will have a major impact on how this continent is run both now and into the future.

Seven years ago, in the aftermath of the Third European War, I was appointed as Commissioner of Continental Security to restore order to the continent after the invasion. As Europeans, we feared attack from the east, a flood of migrants from the south and attack from extremists, both religious and political, within our own cities. I proceeded then to implement the policies which came, in public, to be called the Keady Plan.

Only three days ago, the attack on the new European Council building and the deaths of ten people have underlined, once again, the need for us to remain vigilant against those who threaten our values and our way of life.

In the days following the attack, the attempt to murder me has been met by two general responses. Many of you, on social media, by post, by telephone and with generous gifts have been very kind and wished me well in my recovery from what is a minor injury.

I have been genuinely touched, and I thank you deeply for your kindness.

A smaller number of you welcomed the attack, declaring me an unelected tyrant who should be removed by any means necessary.

These expressions of opinion are not new. Every day across Europe, in the national and European parliaments, across social and traditional media, there are those who echo a similar feeling, that I am unaccountable to the people. They may not support violence against me or the institutions of the European Union, but they do question my legitimacy.

I have never sought power for its own sake. From that day seven years ago to now, I have tried to bring about what I believe is in the common interest of the vast majority of those who live here, both European and immigrant, Muslim, Christian, atheist, Jew and others: a safe, tolerant and prosperous Europe.

But still the endless criticism. Europe may be at peace, they say. Our economy is recovering. The continent is safe. Our borders are secure. All faiths and none, both here and in the SafeZone, can go about their business in peace.

But Europe, they say, is not free. Because nobody voted for the general. That is the truth. All across Europe are people, some who have supported much of what I have done, who nevertheless fear me, and fear what I may do to this continent, the birthplace of democracy, the rule of law, liberty, equality and fraternity.

They fear that I may order the European Defence Force to move and make real what many hint to be real already: one Europe under the heel of one person.

I do not apologise for what I have done. There have been mistakes, of course, but I ask you to recall the ineffectual Europe of before the war, with its pandering politicians and right and left-wing populist demagogues promising easy solutions built on hate, and the borders appearing once again within Europe itself, and desperate people in boats and the lifeless bodies of children washing up on our beaches.

I do not apologise for ending all that, as we have done.

But the charge stands. I have not been elected by your ballots. As Deputy Tom Batten, one of my more eloquent critics has pointed out: who the hell voted for her?

It is a fair question which demands an answer, and so it shall be answered. One hour ago, I requested the European Council to convene to consider a piece of legislation, to be passed in each member state in the next month. The legislation will provide for the direct election, by you, the people of Europe, of a European citizen to the nominal office of President of the European Union for a five-year term, three months from now. The candidates shall be chosen by both the European Parliament and the national parliaments. Under the legislation, the national governments will agree to nominate the victor of the election to the current positions of President of the European Council, President of the European Commission, and to merge my current office into that position.

I informed Tom Batten of my decision yesterday, and he asked me a very pertinent question. If I lose the election, will I accept the result? The answer is an emphatic yes. Even, he asked, if I lose to him, who intends to dismantle most of the Keady Plan. Again, the answer is yes. I believe that Tom Batten will be a candidate in the election, and I look forward to many interesting debates between us on our competing views of the future of this continent and indeed the policies we have implemented in the last seven years.

Tom Batten asked me a final question. What if, following my possible defeat, I was to be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court? I do not believe such an event is very likely, but if it happens, I will stand in The Hague and defend what I have done without shame.

There is no point being Europe and defending Europe if Europe does not mean anything. Well, it does. It means that I, in command of over three million European Defence Force and EuroPol and EuroSec armed soldiers and agents, the most powerful person in Europe, must still be accountable to those who walk into a polling station in Galway or Helsinki or Nicosia.

That is what it means to be European, either speaking to you tonight or shedding ones blood in the snows of Finland or Estonia or Poland fighting a common enemy. To stand for freedom and democracy and accountability and the rule of law.

Not for us the oligarchs and one-party states of those to our east, for this is Europe. This is where freedom lives.

Good night.”

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### **St. Petersburg, Russia.**

The convoy of cars, a mass of flashing lights and noise, had pulled up outside the Kempinski Hotel just long enough to disgorge its passenger and his phalanx of bodyguards to sweep through the bright lobby of the hotel. The manager, who had received the news of his guest less than an hour ago, was standing with some of his senior department heads, ready to greet their guest, but he ignored them, walking straight to the lift and into it.

Yuri Bulgarin, President of Russia, liked the Kempinski, and had enjoyed many an evening there as both mayor of the city, defence minister and now President of the Russian Federation. It was elegant, with an excellent restaurant and that attention to detail that separates a great hotel from a merely good one.

When he stepped from the lift and down the corridor, he saw the two men standing at the door to the suite. He smiled. FSB, US Secret Service, Royal Close Protection Unit, they all looked the same, had that same look of permanent suspicion, along with suits that seemed too small.

One of the men at the door knocked, and the door opened. The President of Russia stepped into the suite, signalling his bodyguards to stay outside. They knew not to argue with him.

The Hermitage suite, overlooking the museum and a canal in front of it, gave a view of the embankment that revealed why St. Petersburg was considered Russia’s most European city.

General Keady was standing at the window, looking at the lights of the Hermitage against the night sky.

“General Keady. I know I should call you Commissioner or some such nonsense but why interfere with the truth?” he said, extending a hand.

“President Bulgarin,” she said, and shook his hand.

He joined her beside the window.

“You feel at home?” he asked, pointing at the EU flags on the various consulates on the far side of the canal.

“Did you know, I’m the third Petersburger to be president in a row. In other countries, there’d be complaints. But this city is special. Truth is, it should be the capital again. But then, I suspect Hitler would have agreed. Maybe you too, eh?”

He smiled, walking over to the bar and poured himself an orange juice. He waved a hand at the drinks, offering her something.

“I’ll take a Coca-Cola,” she said.

He nodded, and went behind the bar, pulling out glasses and ice. He found a lemon and started slicing it.

“You worked in a bar in the US in your youth?” she asked.

“Boston. A number of bars. Irish mostly. The Russians and the Irish have a lot in common. A love of hard alcohol and a belief at laughing when life fucks you over,” he said, with a smile and placed her drink on the bar.

She sat at the bar as he wiped it down with a cloth. The habit of a bartender.

“Mr President, I have a problem,” she said.

He said nothing, but kept wiping.

“Twelve hours ago, EuroSec agents were tipped off about and arrested three men in Estonia with Russian diplomatic passports. They killed a fourth one who fired on a helicopter. They also recovered the weapon which they are convinced was the weapon that was used to murder the Spanish and Greek prime ministers and attempted to kill me.”

Bulgarin took up a clean glass, looked at it, and started polishing it.

“Now, EuroSec believe that the passports are genuine, and that these men were a military unit acting on behalf of the Russian Federation.”

“That sounds very serious,” Bulgarin replied.

“I now have to decide whether to hand these men over to EuroPol and the European Public Prosecutor, and announce their arrest. As you can imagine, there will be geopolitical



implications. Not war. But certainly a return to the sanctions regime that came in after the war. A freezing of trade, banking, assets of Russian citizens, right back to where we were seven years ago. Europe will not tolerate people murdering our leaders.”

The president was now enjoying his orange juice.

“The question I have to ask myself, Mr President, is why? Why would Russia want to carry out an attack like this? Revenge for the humiliation of the war?”

She looked at him, and he smiled back. It was a thin smile.

“Or perhaps it was part of a plan, my murder followed by another surprise attack, a second invasion?”

She stepped away from the bar, and went back over to the window.

“Neither makes sense. Revenge? Yuri Bulgarin is far too pragmatic to make decisions based on something as emotional as revenge. A precursor to an invasion? Makes no sense, either. Whatever about seven years ago, Europe is now armed to the teeth and expecting an invasion daily.. Not only is Europe ready, we’d turn you back and be on these beautiful streets in 48 hours. I promise you that, and I should know,” she turned to face him.

“A long-term plan maybe? Kill me and European resolve will gradually go back to the complacency of the Putin era. Perhaps. But still, it doesn’t ring true for me. But then I put down my EuroSec file and look instead at the file prepared for me by the European External Action Service. Now they paint a very interesting picture as to what is happening inside Russia.”

Bulgarin poured himself another juice, and took a seat facing her.

“They tell me that the president of Russia is under pressure internally, with democrats on one side and hardliners on the other, the hardliners backed by oligarchs and not happy about the failure of the war. Rumours of powerful forces moving against the president. The possibility of a lot of money to encourage people to examine their loyalties. Then it hits me. You have the vast power of the state. The FSB, the SVR, the interior ministry, the army. But they have very very large amounts of money, eye-watering amounts sitting in European bank accounts ready to mobilise to undermine you. But if Europe announced sanctions against Russia...”

The president raised an eyebrow.

“Then these people, all of a sudden, are cut off from their money. Indeed, you’re cut off from your not-so-little nest-egg too, I understand. But you still have your security forces. So I have to ask myself: what does Europe want? Prosecute these men, trigger sanctions, and let you eliminate your enemies? Or respect their passports, send them on their way with our

discreet apologies and see if we get a new President of Russia. Potenchin perhaps? He seems almost liberal by Russian standards. I could certainly do business with Potenchin.”

Bulgarin snorted.

“Potenchin is a windbag. If hot air was power, he’d be president in a landslide.”

“Yes, you see, that’s my problem. The EEAS agree with you. They tell me that Sergei Tomasarev is your most likely successor. Not only is he stupid, but he is an actual fucking Nazi. They believe he really will round up the gays and the Jews and the Muslims, and lead Russia into another war with us. So, there’s my choice. Tell Europe that the Russian it hates for invading tried to kill me, or let an actual fascist into the Kremlin.”

“It’s quite a predicament,” Bulgarin said.

“Of course, Gianni De Pietro suggested a somewhat outlandish third theory to me today. So bizarre that I don’t know what to make of it. He suggested that the attempt could have been made by elements within the Russian state, but not sanctioned by the Kremlin. That there is a far-right faction planning an attempted coup against the legitimate president of Russia, and that if we were to publicly inform Russia of this belief, well...”

Bulgarin narrowed his eyes.

“Go on,” he said.

“Well, if the Kremlin announced that it had investigated the claim and that it was true, that there was a group of oligarchs around the fascist Tomasarev, and if the Kremlin then asked the EU for assistance in freezing the assets of the fascists as it moved against them... well, as I said, it’s just a theory. I’m not sure what to make of it. What do you make of that theory, President Bulgarin?”

“I think Director De Pietro is a very fine intelligence agent, and his advice should be given very serious weight.”

She walked over to the bar to get herself another drink. Bulgarin stood and went behind the bar, opening a bottle for her.

“Europe doesn’t want a fascist in the Kremlin. But helping to prop up the man who invaded Europe... I have an election to win, as you know. On the other hand, if I were to show that the Kremlin was making serious efforts, that there was clear water between it and the fascists... If it released, say, 82 democracy, gay-rights and freedom-of-the-press activists, that would go some way...”

She produced an envelope inside her jacket, and slid it over the bar.

Bulgarin opened it, pulled out the sheet, and smiled at some of the names.

“All right general, I think progress can be made here. I think you will find that the FSB will investigate any suggestion the EU makes about a possible fascist terrorist group operating inside our two borders. FSB director Riskin will take the matter very seriously indeed.”

“You trust him?” she asked.

“Oh yes,” he said, topping up his own orange juice. “He’s the epitome of Russian loyalty: when he’s bought he stays bought.”

He raised a glass to Keady.

“General Keady, a toast. The Devil You Know.”

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**The Times.**

## **LARGE CROWDS AT FINAL RALLIES FOR BOTH KEADY AND BATTEN AS CAMPAIGN COMES TO AN END.**

**Warsaw, Poland.**

An extraordinary three months of campaigning across the European Union comes to an end at midnight tonight as Europe prepares to elect its first president.

For Commissioner for Continental Security and former Supreme Commander Allied Forces Europe Silvana Keady, finishing up at a rally in Warsaw, it's not just a question of a political future but her legacy. For all her bland title, Keady has been the de facto leader of Europe for the last seven years, the great unspoken secret of the continent. In tourist shops in Brussels, the EU capital, you can buy T-shirts with the image of Keady fighting outside NATO headquarters with the slogan "Our dictator can beat up your dictator!"

It's a symbol that sums up this continent's curious flip-sided view of the former German Bundeswehr general. Indeed, it's hard to even know if a person wearing a T-shirt like that is pro or anti-Keady. She graces every newspaper and magazine, and every news report. The Economist nicked named her "The Great European Row-Maker" on account of the reality that if one brings her up in discussion with a group of Europeans, of whatever creed, colour, nationality, age or gender, one is almost guaranteed an argument as half of them denounce her as an autocrat, and the other half declare her the saviour of Europe and its way of life.

There are things that can be agreed on about her. There is no question that she is the most powerful person in Europe, the supreme commander of the European Defence Force and controlling authority of Europe's sprawling EuroPol police force and its "secret police" EuroSec. She almost singlehandedly forced through the creation of all three forces and the annexation of Eastern Libya.

Nor has anyone voted for her, despite the endorsement of the European Parliament and the council of ministers to whom she is responsible in theory.

"It's all bullshit," her opponent, Dutch MEP Tom Batten, ending his final rally in Athens says. "She is the dictator of Europe, simple as that. Nobody elected her, yet she has vast power and the national capitals are just plain afraid of her."

Batten, articulate, good-looking and self-deprecating, has taken the fight to "the general" on behalf of the alliance of moderate Eurosceptics of both right and left known as Europe of Free Nations.

"She's not a brutal dictator, nor is she obsessed with controlling public debate. That's her strength. She's not like Erdogan or Bulgarin or those clowns who create more enemies by cracking down heavy-handedly. She's way too clever to do that. She's the ultimate type of

New Tyrant, who recognises that you can leave the media alone and let people demonstrate and as long as you don't go too far, most people just change the channel. She's quite brilliant that way. Look at Cyprus: she managed to build the first political prison in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall and half the continent doesn't give a toss. That's skill, that is. That's why she is so dangerous. By not torturing people half of Europe can look away with a clear conscience as EuroSec practice extraordinary rendition in public! Then she gives the prisoners a pool and a soccer pitch and Netflix and half of Europe thinks "Well, it can't be all that bad!"

Despite his strong language against her, Keady and Batten are apparently on good terms personally, as was evident in the four debates they have had during the campaign. Although Batten is the better and wittier speaker, Keady has held her own against him. Some commentators have equated it to a married couple who bicker but still love each other.

For Keady, there's also the slim possibility that losing may result in her being tried by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Batten has dismissed that he'd seek to indict her ("That's the sort of things the Russians do: jail your opponents after beating them just to be sure!") but Keady has said that if she's indicted she will stand trial, confident of her record on human rights and who she has interned.

Facility Alpha, along with the annexation of Eastern Libya, continues to be controversial. Although endorsed by the centre-right European People's Party and the centre-left Socialists under the banner of United Europe, the two policies in particular have driven many moderates to Batten's side. Yet both remain divisive policies because they either repel or are very popular, both seen by other Europeans as a reasonable and measured response to Europe's refugee and Islamist extremist crisis. The fact that Keady is loathed by the far right, far left and Islamists, all for opposing reasons has become a key attractor for liberals and centrists nervous of her tough security policies.

EuroNews political editor Yves St. Clair agrees: "The more Nazis who protest against her, the more United Europe are delighted. It gives a clear message to moderate voters who are a little worried about her. If the Nazis hate her this much! Same with the Islamists and the anarchists. Her campaign has that Nixon quality. She reaches those voters who are middle of the road and don't like the idea of a dictator or special prisons or invading North Africa, yet when she explains it, it all seems so reasonable. And when they see Muslim women in headscarves hugging her, and red-faced racists calling her a dyke and a Muslim whore, they can go into the polling station and mark the box for the general."

Polls put the result right down to the wire, with all sorts of voters whose votes should be easy to predict still being in the balance. Batten will attract many far-right and far-left votes despite being both Jewish and economically to the right of Keady. Keady, as the candidate of stability, has attracted business support despite advocating a Europe-wide corporation tax. Left-wing women call her a racist. Muslim women will vote for her in droves.

Keady has promised more of the same. Batten has pledged to pull out of eastern Libya, dismantle the EDF (which has ensured he will not carry any of the border states which still have raw memories of the Russian invasion) and close Facility Alpha.

Even Paddy Power are refusing to call it, but all accept one thing. Tomorrow, the future of Europe will be decided.

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**BBC News.**

**VOTING IN THE SECOND ROUND OF THE EUROPEAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BEGINS.**

**Brussels, Belgium.**

Polling stations opened in Finland and Estonia at 7am this morning in the second round of the race to elect the European Union's first elected president. The two candidates, Commissioner Silvana Keady of United Europe and Tom Batten MEP of Europe of Free Nations, are both expected to vote in Brussels later this morning.

Both candidates outpolled the other candidates of the Green, far-right, far-left and liberal parties in the first round two weeks ago.

Polls have Keady ahead by 3%, which is within the margin of error. Both campaigns are expecting a close election, with counting expected to continue long into the night.

At Commissioner Keady's request, and with Deputy Batten's support, the United Nations has provided election observers.

An offer by President Bulgarin to provide election count assistance was politely refused by the European Commission, with one Commission official pointing out that it would "inevitably lead to an overwhelming victory for President Bulgarin, despite the minor detail of him not being on the actual ballot."

Voters in Scotland are expected to back Commissioner Keady following a savage attack on her by the English Foreign Secretary Nigel Farage.

**The End.**

Jason O'Mahony writes a column on politics for The Times (Ireland edition), and has written previously for The Sunday Business Post, The Irish Times, Marketwatch.com, The Dubliner, Phoenix magazine and others. He fought the 1999 Dublin City Council elections as a Progressive Democrat, where he got his electoral clock cleaned.

He lives in Dublin, Ireland, and has campaigned in a number of European referendums, and writes an award-winning blog ([www.jasonmahony.ie](http://www.jasonmahony.ie)) about politics, history, books and TV shows from the 1960s and 1970s when men could handbrake turn a car without being asked were they compensating for some sexual failing.

Jason O'Mahony has a beard. As a result he is regularly fondled in airports by a wide selection of European security operatives.