Opening of the FSF-MED Regional Seminar on 19 May 2016

**Dr. Erik Merckx, Chairman of the Conference**

Kalimera honourable guests.

Let me please welcome in particular the Director-General of the Israeli Civil Aviation Authority, let me also welcome the Director of the Aviation Research Centre of the Fischer Institute in Israel, and I welcome the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Communication and Works, of Cyprus.

Good morning, dear Ladies and Gentlemen.

I will in a few minutes introduce to you, in detail, one by one the speakers of this morning, the speakers who address, together with me, this Regional Seminar on “Aviation Safety for Off-shore Helicopter Operations and Search and Rescue”.

This seminar is jointly organised between the FSF-MED, based here in Cyprus, and by the Fischer Institute in Israel, with the support of the Department of Civil Aviation in Cyprus and the Civil Aviation Authority of Israel.

If you allow me to introduce my self, my name is Erik Merckx and I have the pleasure and honour to serve you as your Chairman for today.

I have been asked to tell you a little bit more about my professional activities. For those who are not that much interested, I will keep it rather short.

I retired as a Director from the EUROCONTROL organisation in Brussels, where I have been working with our stakeholders on a wide range of developments and harmonisation for Air Traffic Management, but I must say that my passion and my focus has always been on leadership in safety.

Also during the first half of my career, when I was working in the chemical industry, because I have to admit that my background is as a Doctor in Chemistry, safety management has always my passion and my genuine priority.

Anyway, enough about me.

It is a pleasure for me to be back in Cyprus, because the Greek word “ filoxenia ” (φιλοξενία), hospitality, really means something here: hospitality in Cyprus is a main value, and you will experience this.

To our friends from Israel, I would also like to say: “baroech haba”, welcome!

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the second conference of FSF-MED that I am chairing. During my long involvement in aviation, I chaired and participated in numerous international Conferences. Nevertheless, chairing the Conferences of FSF-MED gives me great pleasure and satisfaction. Though they are organised by a relatively small organization from a small country, they always generate great interest and produce tangible results. It suffices to say that ICAO has circulated the conclusions of the last international conference of FSF-MED to all its 196 Member states.

It is therefore no surprise that FSF-MED, despite its short existence, gained a lot of credibility at international and European level. This of course is the collective result of the dedication and commitment from many persons in FSF-MED, but above all from their CEO, Mr Christos Petrou, who has everlasting enthusiasm, energy, imagination and ability to transform ideas into action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have today an exciting list of presenters. When I was reading their CV’s, I was overwhelmed by the entire spectrum of diplomas, and I was deeply impressed by the vast experience that is brought together into this room today.

I am therefore convinced that we will listen to top quality presentations, and I would already want to thank all speakers in advance for being here today and for sharing with us their wealth of information.

As far as the programme is concerned, we made a small change.

The signing of the MOC between FSF-MED and the JRCC will take place at the end of this opening session and not before lunch as it was planned. The presentation of the Foundations’ Annual Award to AEGEAN Airlines with their Managing Director, Mr. Dimitrios Gerogiannis will be done just prior to lunch.

I wish you all a very fruitful and very enjoyable seminar, and a lovely stay in Cyprus.

By this, I declare this Seminar to be opened.

Let’s begin our proceedings by calling Christos to take the floor for some opening remarks.

P.S.: Prior to the speech of Alecos, a few words will be said by Dr. Evangelos Bekiaris, the Director of the Hellenic Institute of Transport (H.I.T), based in Thessaloniki, Greece.