



Working group on European Security and Defence  
Minutes of the meeting of Tuesday, 18 March 2009 on  
*BRIDGING THE HELICOPTER GAP FOR EU MISSIONS*

Chaired by Karl von Wogau MEP, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence

Introduction by

- Karl von WOGAU MEP

Speaker:

- Giuseppe SECCO, Capabilities Manager Manoeuvre, European Defence Agency
- Henrik DAM, Head Joint Armaments & Industry Section, NATO Armaments Directorate
- Hartmut BÜHL, International consulting EU Security & Defence Policy and NATO

## 1 Karl von Wogau

Introducing the topic, Mr von Wogau reported that one lesson learned from ESDP missions and operations such as for example EUFOR TCHAD/ RCA was that the member states of the European Union lack deployable helicopters. He welcomed the speakers and gave the floor to Mr Secco.

## 2 Giuseppe Secco

Mr Secco gave an overview over the role of the EDA in improving the availability of deployable helicopters. He stressed that there was no conflict or duplication with NATO because EDA coordinated with NATO. Mr Secco reported that the perspectives of EDA and NATO concerning helicopters were not the same; while NATO had an urgent requirement for Afghanistan, the European Union had a medium term perspective. He said that EDA concentrates on training but that wouldn't solve the long term problem. He reported that two studies had been undertaken by EDA, one focusing on stocktaking (what is available in the European Union, simulators and real flying time, simulation can replace 70% of percent of flying time, we need both, but simulation is very important, because it helps saving a lot of money) and a second one focusing on training of helicopter crews.

Mr Secco also reported about ongoing efforts to upgrade existing MI 8 helicopters (engine, electronics and protection). He said that NATO will deploy a multinational unit of MI 6 helicopters under Czech leadership in Afghanistan. He stressed the need to spend more money on helicopters.

## 3 Henrik Dam

Mr Dam reported that NATO member states possessed about 5000 helicopters, among them 1700 from EU member states. Five to seven percent of the 5000 helicopters were currently deployed, e.g. in Afghanistan or Chad. Mr Dam pointed to the fact that many of these helicopters are very old and were built for operations in Central Europe, therefore not being equipped to be flown in harsh environments. He also stressed the need to spend more money on helicopters. Mr Dam reported about a British-French initiative to upgrade helicopters in Eastern European countries. He also reported about a Czech led task force with the aim to establish a multinational unit of MI helicopters for Afghanistan and added that the participating countries will share the cost for maintenance. He reported about the coordination between the European Union and NATO in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

Mr Dam also reported that NATO had studied the possibility of leasing helicopters. NATO had already used that option by leasing former soviet helicopters. He pointed out that NATO also studies substitute solutions such as dropping cargo from planes.



## 4 Hartmut Bühl

Hartmut Bühl showed his uneasiness about the progress made in bridging the transport helicopter gap. NATO is for two years now looking for new capabilities without visible success and EDA is doing study programmes within the British–French helicopter proposal without the chance of rapid progress. On the other side there are about 220 Russian sourced airframes available in the new member states waiting for refurbishment and training opportunities by simulation. Referring to the 2008 Kuhne report on ESDP (Art 24), a European industrial consortium submitted an unsolicited proposal (Helibridge) to EDA in September 2008 to bridge rapidly the gap by standardized simulation and refurbishment centered on M-18/MI -17 platforms.

Hartmut Bühl mentioned that central European partners need urgently means to keep their platforms in service and that those nations are ready to allocate refurbished Platform and trained crews to EU and NATO and also give the standardized logistical support. The use of modernized Russian sourced transport helicopters has several advantages: at first Central European Countries will be not be obliged to order new Russian platform to close their own helicopter gap and can continue planning to buy European in the next decade, supporting thus European helicopter Industry; secondly other nations, the big providers, can – by supporting an investment programme- preserve flight hours and stay in the life cycle process of their platforms; and last but not least EU and NATO may have transport helicopter capabilities for the mere asking.

## 5 Discussion

In the discussion some people criticised the practice to upgrade old soviet helicopters. By doing this, the western countries would only help the Russian industry to modernize. It would therefore be better to buy new helicopters.

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