EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY

Fact sheet

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Air-to-Air Refuelling

Air-to-air refuelling (AAR) is a critical enabler for air power projection and it is required to enable sustained air combat operations. As a unique force multiplier, it is a fundamental technical characteristic embedded in modern aircraft design; not just in combat aircraft, but across the full spectrum of air platforms – including in the near future Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems.

In the past, European armed forces have relied extensively on American assets. This was clearly demonstrated in the Kosovo campaign in 1999 and confirmed during the operations over Libya in 2011.

Today Europe is able to field 42 tanker aircraft of 10 different types, which when compared with the US resources of over 550 tankers of three types is a clear indication of the European challenges in this field.

A Pooling & Sharing Initiative

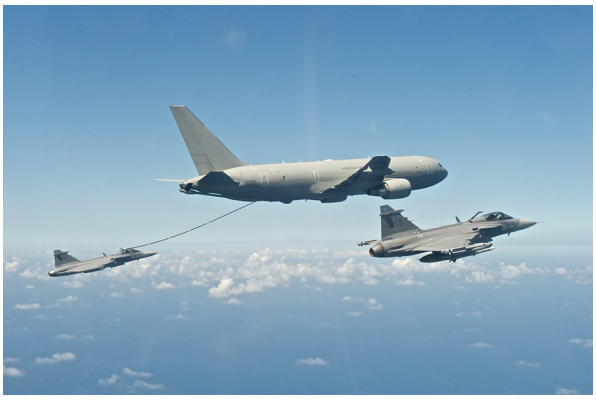
Air-to-air refuelling was endorsed by the EDA Steering Board on 30 November 2011 as one of eleven Pooling & Sharing priorities. At the subsequent board meeting on 22 March 2012, Ministers declared their willingness to support further development of air-to-air refuelling capabilities and to better coordinate them. They agreed that aerial refuelling capabilities should be developed in Europe as a matter of priority; and that these capabilities should be made available for potential use during EU, NATO, or other framework operations.

Global Approach

EDA has developed a global approach with three objectives: increasing the overall AAR capacity, reducing fragmentation of the fleet, and optimising the use of assets. This work has led to four complementary work-strands, on some of which EDA is cooperating closely with other agencies and organisations like OCCAR, the Movement Coordination Center Europe (MCCE) and the European Air Transport Command (EATC).

1. Short term gap filling solutions including access to commercial AAR services

Solutions to increase the amount of European tankers are expected to only take effect by the end of this decade. Pressing as the AAR shortfall is, the Agency evaluated and proposed short-term solutions to Member States: leasing of existing platforms or contracting commercial



AAR collective clearance campaign, Italy, September 2013.
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AAR. So far, Member States have not shown an interest in the leasing option but asked EDA to further investigate the commercial option. Omega Air – currently the only commercial AAR service provider in Europe - proposed a concept demonstration trial to take place in 2013. Unfortunately no Member State took on the lead for this project and hence the trial is on hold.

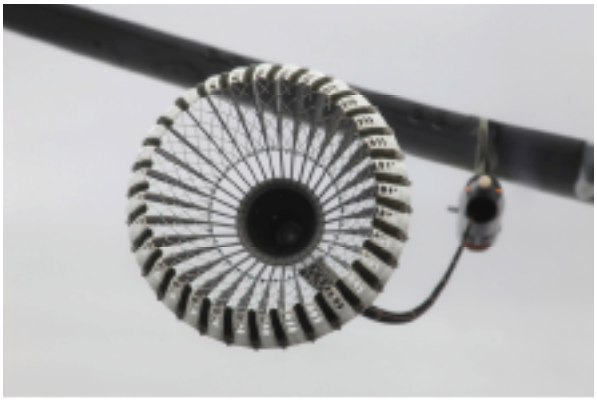
2. Optimisation of existing capabilities

Europe's military tanker fleet is fragmented. Missing technical and operational clearances are one of the reasons why planning of available resources during operations is difficult leading to inefficient use of the existing platforms. While clearance campaigns for receivers were until now organised on a bilateral basis, EDA, Italy and MCCE jointly prepared the first collective European AAR clearance trial on the Italian KC767A. Sweden and France participated in this first campaign with fighter aircraft that took place in Italy between 5 and 12 September 2013. A second clearance trial on the IT KC767 will be organised from 3 till 13 March 2014. Further clearance campaigns – including receivers other than fighter aircraft – are also envisaged. Organising a collective campaign facilitates the certification procedures for Member States, increases interoperability and saves time as well as human and financial resources.

3. Optimisation of the A400M fleet AAR capability

Under this work strand, EDA proposes that non-A400M Member States acquire A400M AAR kits for use on their platforms when contingency planning asks for it. Additionally, A400M operators that haven't yet acquired an A400M AAR capability could look at buying AAR kits for their platforms in order to satisfy EU and NATO targets. The second proposal looks at combining the potential surplus

of A400M airframes with the strategic transport and AAR requirement. EDA believes there is an opportunity here to have a SAC C17-like approach fielding some of the A400M aircraft in excess to be used in all roles, including AAR. Although approached on several occasions, so far no Member State showed interest in the proposed solutions to optimize the AAR role for the future A400M fleet.



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4. Increasing the strategic tanker capability in Europe by 2020

With a letter of intent signed by ten Member States on 19 November 2012, Defence Ministers from Belgium, France, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Norway have agreed to consider acquiring new multi-role aircraft together. The initiative – led by the Netherlands – has the objective to contribute to reducing the existing shortfalls in the field of air-to-air refuelling and strategic transport whilst contributing to streamlining the European inventories. The aim is to reach an initial operational capability of a European strategic Multi-Role (AAR, transport, Medevac, etc.) capability by 2020. EDA expects that the pooled acquisition will result in important synergies in terms of initial overall investment, interoperability as well as through life costs.

Documents like the technical specifications, concept of operations and concept of support have already been drafted and an MoU should be ready by the end of 2014. Meanwhile, an RFI will be sent out in January 2014 to industry to provide participants a better understanding of the market. OCCAR is the management organisation for acquisition, supported by EDA. A contract award is expected by mid-2015. Ownership of the fleet will be NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) who will set up an NSPA Partnership in order to lead the pooled operation and in-service support phases.

Air-to-Air Refuelling at a glance

TODAY: characterised by important shortfall (80% of Libya sorties flown by US assets) and fleet fragmentation resulting in reduced overall efficiency (both from an operational and cost point of view).

TOMORROW: taking stock of the phasing out of old platforms and of the more versatile/multirole future platforms as well as lessons from recent operations and of planned procurement programmes, EDA works towards pooled future fleets and to establish synergies with existing military organisations to build a balanced and efficient European tanker fleet combining tactical and strategic platforms and systems.