

# Exercise DARK BLADE 2019



## Context & importance

DARK BLADE 2019 (DB19), the 13th helicopter exercise organised under the umbrella of the European Defence Agency's (EDA) Helicopter Exercise Programme (HEP), will take place at **Náměšť airbase in Czech Republic from 13 May until 1 June 2019**.

A total of 29 air assets (25 helicopters + 4 fixed wing) and some 600 military personnel from six countries - **Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia** - participate in this exercise hosted by the Czech Air Force.

DARK BLADE 2019 will allow crews to practice operations in various environments replicating the challenging conditions that participant forces are expected to encounter when deploying to a theatre of operation.

The exercise's main focus will be on enhancing interoperability at the tactical level between helicopter units by using the Composite Air Operations (COMAO) concept in a combined, joint, realistic and challenging environment.

A Distinguished Visitors Day (DVD) is planned for 28 May 2019 when representatives from all EDA Member States and representatives of Switzerland, Norway and the Republic of Serbia will have the opportunity to attend and observe various live training sessions. JAPCC and NSHQ are also invited to the DVD.

## Objectives

The objectives of DB19 are manifold, notably:

- » enhance tactical interoperability between helicopter units from the participating countries by using the COMAO concept in a combined, joint, realistic and challenging environment and to teach and learn helicopter Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs). The focus will be on Composite Air Operations (COMAO) with live firing and trooping;
- » train and practise Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) with/against fighter jets and electronic warfare means on the ground;
- » improve interoperability in training and operational tasks with Ground Forces involvement (NVG operations, low level flying, formation flights, FARP training, gunnery, etc.) in a live/simulated, full spectrum environment.

## Programme

Participating crews will fly diverse day and night COMAO missions and execute Air Assault (AA), Air Interdiction (AI), Air Transport (AT), Close Air Support (CAS), Personnel Recovery (PR) missions, night flights (with/without NVG) and other missions focusing on the command and control of forces at tactical level.

They will also train special procedures like marshalling procedures, fast rope and abseiling techniques, Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction (SPIE), pick-up and drop off procedures, air-to-surface live firing (helicopter door gunnery and sniper training).

DARK BLADE 2019 will also provide multiple opportunities to practice multinational and national formation and training with the SOF units (infiltration and exfiltration) and enhance crews' skills in using the HEP Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and COMAO planning procedures in the conduct of flight planning and operations.

## Concept

The exercise will follow a building block approach, meaning that it will start with a familiarisation phase and cross-training activities on small COMAO missions in order to create mutual understanding of each participant's equipment and standard operational procedures. As the exercise progresses, the complexity of each COMAO mission will also increase, as well as the number of flight assets involved. DARK BLADE 2019 will be based on the commonly agreed HEP SOP. During the planning of the exercise, the SOP was thoroughly reviewed to integrate the lessons learned during previous HEP exercises.

## Mentor Team

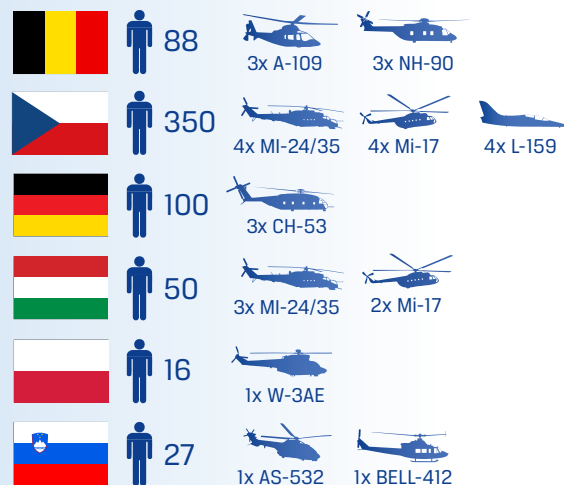
Six instructors from Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom trained in EDA's Helicopter Tactics Instructors Course (HTIC) accompanied with some Instructors from the Netherlands trained on the Dutch Helicopter Weapon Instructor (HWI) course will jointly form the DARK BLADE 2019 Mentor Team, ready to support the multinational crews during the preparation and execution of the COMAO missions. The EDA's Chief Instructor (CI) Team will manage and supervise the Mentor Team to ensure consistency and the best possible uptake of lessons learned coming from EDA helicopter activities (HTC, HTIC, COMAO planning and the EW Course) and operational experience.

## Background

The annual Blade exercise is part of EDA's wider Helicopter portfolio aimed at providing Member States with a joint European framework to develop, consolidate and share best practices in order to meet the challenges of

flying helicopters in a modern operational environment. Other components of this Portfolio are the annual HEP Symposium, the Helicopter Tactics Courses (HTC), the Helicopter Tactics Instructor Courses (HTIC), and the COMAO Planning and Electronic Warfare (EW) Courses.

### Participants



### Mentor team



### Observers

