



2nd Air-to-Air Refuelling Conference

co-organised by EDA & NATO

Brussels, 17 October 2019

Opening speech by EDA Chief Executive Jorge Domecq

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

- General Sams, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,
- First of all let me thank Eurocontrol for hosting this Conference. Eurocontrol is a long standing partner of both EDA and NATO and we very much appreciate being able to use this facility today.
- Allow me to also welcome you for another edition of the Air to Air Refuelling Conference in Europe, organised together with NATO after a first successful event last year. This is yet another testimony of pragmatic cooperation, to ensure complementarity of efforts and avoid unnecessary



duplications, as called for by the EU-NATO Joint Declaration.

- I am very appreciative that the Dutch Minister of Defense, Mrs Ank Bijleveld, although she was not able to join us today, shared her personal thoughts in view of this conference by video. The Netherlands has been at the forefront of the establishment of the Multinational MRTT Fleet. I highly appreciate the multinational political support she personally and her country have generated to make this project the success it now is.
- Furthermore, I want to welcome back General Sams as our moderator. I am thankful, General, that you have accepted to moderate this year's Conference, which also testifies of the close, fruitful and good relationship EDA, NATO and ARSAG enjoy since many years.
- For those of you who attended last year's conference, they may recall that **the main conclusion was that there was still a remaining shortfall in AAR to be tackled**, in spite of all the progress made over the years. And while this shortfall has not yet been mitigated, I would like to take a moment to **highlight the progress that has been made over the last year:**

- First, we witnessed a very successful and expanding AAR exercise (EART) organised by the European Air Transport Command (EATC);
 - Second, the A440M is gradually entering into service and successful clearance campaigns between the A400M as a tanker and various receivers have been performed;
 - Third, the Multinational Multi Role Transport Tanker Fleet is still growing and consist now of 5 and soon 6 Member States; the multinational unit that will perform the operation has been created; and the first Multi Role Transport Tanker aircraft for the MMF performed its maiden flight.
- As you can see, good progress is being made. However it is not sufficient. What we really need is to **ensure that the AAR shortfall**, like capability gaps in other areas, **is addressed in a more systematic way**.
 - To this end, I would like now to highlight **how we address this challenge from a defence planning perspective in the EU context**, while ensuring coherence of output with NATO's defence planning processes.

- To this end, the reconfirmation by MS that AAR remains a priority area identified in the 2018 revised EU Capability Development Priorities, is paramount. And I am pleased to recall that we achieved full coherence of the 2018 EU Capability Development Priorities and the NDPP capability shortfalls, including of course as regards AAR, thanks in particular to staff to staff contacts.
- To implement each of the identified priorities of the Capability Development Plan, EDA participating Member States have developed and agreed related Strategic Context Cases, or SCCs.
- Each SCC describes a picture, as comprehensive as possible of the respective capability landscape, including the security challenges, and identifies the avenues of approach in the short, medium and long term in order to close the identified capability gaps and to contribute to the coherence of the capability landscape. The SCCs are living documents and will be gradually updated over the years and these updates will also provide a good opportunity to discuss about the implementation of the EU Capability Development Priorities and possible new trends.
- Air-to-air refuelling is embedded as a dedicated module within the SCC Air superiority. You will be pleased to learn

that all the workstrands this community has been working very hard on over the last years, have been incorporated in the Avenues of approach and are still completely in sync with the AAR roadmap within NATO.

- It would take too long to go through all the avenues of approach here, but to illustrate the construct of the SCC's I do want to highlight a few AAR related challenges associated with the respective avenues of approach:
- **For the short-term, the main challenge is to optimise the use of the existing AAR assets available in Europe.**
- We can do that through, for example, increased participation in annual European AAR Training (EART).
- But we can also increase interoperability by increasing AAR clearances. This is an issue on which the conference paper circulated ahead of the conference focused on, and where you can find more details. But in simple terms, a tanker without a clearance is not a tanker.
- An AAR clearance consists of two parts, a technical part and an operational part. From the perspective of a non-technical expert, I could easily see that if you connect two aircrafts in flight, **the certification of that activity is clearly an airworthiness aspect.** And progressively I see

that airworthiness authorities in the AAR field realize and agree on the fact the technical assessment of an AAR clearance is their responsibility. In fact, several MAA¹ representatives confirmed this understanding during a workshop recently organised by JAPCC, NATO and EDA.

- Moreover, let's not forget **another key player in achieving an AAR clearance: industry**. This is the reason why we chose to dedicate this year a large portion of the agenda to manufacturers of tankers or AAR equipment. Because of their role in data sharing, in testing, in achieving clearances and thus increasing our interoperability and capability. I am curious to hear later how they see their role in this process to achieve a clearance.
- **For the medium-term the challenge is to reduce the capability shortfall in AAR** and to cover the peak demand in AAR during the initial phase of a conflict when air superiority is not yet assured.
- One way to overcome this challenge is to increase the participation in the MMF. Still 3 more optional aircraft (*aircrafts 9, 10 and 11*) in the present contract enable other MS who are in need of this important capability to benefit from the present window of opportunity. EDA stands ready

¹ Military Aviation Authorities



to assist interested MS in the process to explore their potential participation in this important project.

- The second option is to develop joint procurement and operation of A400M AAR wing pods. Besides being a very capable strategic and tactical airlifter, the A400M is also capable of AAR with hose and drogue. Right now, A400M nations are fielding their A400M fleets and the AAR capability of the aircraft is being certified.
- In fact, the European A400M nations have bought far less kits than A400M airframes. The idea is that nations - even nations with receivers only - could jointly procure/lease a pool of pods (kits), store them and use them under the available A400M when needed. This could have a huge impact on the strategic reach and operational flexibility. The idea has already been shared with MS and is being explored, and we hope it can receive support. Of course all the potential caveats and hurdles need to be identified but I am positive that a creative and pragmatic approach could lead to a successful project.
- **For the long term, the challenge is to close the remaining capability gap, both in strategic and tactical AAR.** The SCC identify the following approach to overcome this challenge: Develop automated/autonomous air to air



refuelling systems (A3R) as a useful complement to manned AAR capabilities.

- It is indeed evident that the future of AAR will be automated. And already Industry partners are developing such automated AAR systems. It even has its own acronym, A3R. Over time, an A3R platform would reduce life cycle costs, technical and operational risk as well as human workload.
- In order to avoid industry developing work strands diverging from defence capability requirements, it is imperative for national leadership to set harmonised requirements for future A3R systems now. To this end, EDA will organise a Workshop on the 28th of January next year to bring together MS and industry to discuss the way ahead on the avenue of approach.
- During last year's conference, we also discussed **commercial AAR as a complementary solution** to potentially help alleviate some of the remaining shortfall. I then pointed at the still hypothetical nature of these business development initiatives, having also in mind that EDA participating MS did not support, back in 2016, pursuing this idea further.

- However, I also said we do not rule out any solution that could be beneficial to our MS. If at some point concrete commercial solutions (also for boom-receivers) become available and prove to be certified and complementary to ongoing military projects, this could and should be re-addressed and price and availability may then be compared.
- By now you have a much better idea on how we ensure a more systematic approach in the EU framework to tackle the AAR shortfall. By enshrining it into our defence capability development process, and identifying the relevant ways to address the related challenges in the short, medium and long term, we pave the way to addressing the capability shortfall and ensuring MS will have the required capabilities, also as technology evolves.
- The endorsement of the SCC's and the substance of the Avenues of approach fuels my optimism and I do believe that we are on the right track. Additionally, I am very pleased that we were able, as the EDA was developing the SCCs, to take into account views of the main stakeholders, namely NATO, ARSAG, EATC, OCCAR and Industry for AAR.



- But ensuring AAR is sufficiently prioritised upstream is not enough. What we need is to **ensure that we implement these ideas and turn initiatives into capabilities.**
- Here, let me highlight how we can **leverage the European Defence Initiatives.** They provide, with the CDP as a key reference, a coherent EU end to end defence planning framework. The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) will help identify concrete opportunities for cooperation between EU MS, to take forward the avenues of approach identified in the SCCs. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) gives us options to tackle it in a collaborative manner. And the European Defence Fund (EDF) will act as a powerful financial incentive for the identified defence cooperation.
- To sum up, building on progress that was achieved, on the prioritisation of AAR capabilities in our defence planning effort and by making full use of the European Defence Initiatives, **we are paving the way to fully mitigate the shortfall.** And of course, this will not be achieved if nations, organisations – in particular EU and NATO - and industry do not work hand in hand to support MS and Allies efforts. This is why events such as today's conference are so important, in addition to regular contacts between all stakeholders.



- I would like to highlight to finish, underlining how the work that we are carrying forward in EDA has a direct benefit for both EU Defence efforts and our collective defence in NATO. It is a paradigmatic example of strategic autonomy – or “strategic responsibility” if you prefer – in the sense of making the EU a stronger partner also to the benefit of NATO. More capable to act alone if necessary but always with partners if possible. Separable but not separate. We are supporting directly with the EDA activities on Air to Air Refuelling the development of a set of more capable, deployable and sustainable capabilities and forces in Europe. And I’m very happy to be able to work on this key enabler of Air Superiority with NATO and other actors like ARSAG, EATC, JAPC or OCCAR.
- Wishing you a successful conference, I should thank for your attention.
