



## **EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY PRESS RELEASE**

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### **“GAP 09”: EDA CONDUCTS A MULTINATIONAL HELICOPTERS EXERCISE**

**A multinational helicopters exercise, conducted by the European Defence Agency and hosted by France, is taking place from 6 to 20 March 2009 in Gap (in the Alps, South East of France). It will bring together aircraft and crews from Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Hungary and Spain, as well as personnel from nine other EU Member States.**

At their bilateral Summit in March 2008, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy underlined the need to improve the availability of helicopters for crisis management operations. Following this high-level meeting, the Steering Board of the European Defence Agency (EDA) selected “Increasing Availability for ESDP Operations” as one of the twelve priorities, when endorsing the Agency’s Capability Development Plan.

The Agency’s work strand for near-term results is “training” to quickly improve helicopter availability. Helicopter crews in some European countries are not trained to fly in more austere conditions, like the mountainous terrain. The Agency is developing a “Helicopter Tactics Programme” (HTP) for such training at the European level. This HTP will become operational in 2010.

In the context of preparing the HTP the Agency is conducting two practical exercises, with help from the two nations who started the initiative. France is hosting “Gap 09” and the UK is conducting language training and operational field training in April.

The aim of “Gap 09” is to develop interoperability through mutual understanding. As it is the first exercise of its type, lessons learned from the exercise will be important, in particular to assess how series of such exercises can be organised in the future.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

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### Goals of the exercise

They are twofold:

- Aircrew training, mainly on *Support Helicopters* (which are a specific shortfall), during their pre-deployment phase, through a focus on interoperability (procedures, language and tactical skills, lessons learned and best practices sharing) and mountain flying (one of the main features of crisis management theatres of operations, where participating crews will be deployed);
- Carrying out a test bed exercise with a view to building up future exercises and possible other initiatives adapted to aircrew training requirements, based on the gained experience and additional studies - currently ongoing through EDA.

### Participating Member States

The number of participating helicopters has been limited to fit with optimum results and facilitate a responsive exercise organisation in terms of logistics. Participating member states and helicopters are the following:

- Belgium: one A 109;
- Czech Republic: three Mi 17;
- France: two Gazelles Viviane and up to three Tigre;
- Hungary: one Mi 17;
- Spain: one CH 47 and one Cougar.

Moreover, “Gap 09” is supported by Luxembourg and by around 25 experts from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden and United Kingdom. Other organisations (EDA, EAG, JAPCC), acting with specific roles in the exercise, will also participate.

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**Link to the EDA Annual Conference on “Helicopters – key to mobility” (keynote speeches/press conference movie/briefings):** <http://www.eda.europa.eu/newsitem.aspx?id=433>

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## EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY

### - Background information -

The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established by the Council on 12 July 2004. It is designed "to support the Council and the Member States in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the ESDP as it stands now and develops in the future". More specifically, the Agency is ascribed four functions, relating to:

- a) defence capabilities development;
- b) armaments cooperation;
- c) the European defence technological and industrial base and defence equipment market;
- d) research and technology.

These functions all relate to improving Europe's defence performance, by promoting coherence in place of fragmentation.

The EDA is an Agency of the European Union. High Representative Solana is Head of the Agency, chairman of the Steering Board, which acts under the Council's authority and within the framework of guidelines issued by the Council.

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