

BULGARIA: MIG-29 OVERHAULS IN POLAND. MEMORANDUM REGULATING THE MILITARY COOPERATION

During his visit to Sofia, Tomasz Siemoniak - Polish Minister of Defence, and Nikolay Nenchev, his Bulgarian counterpart, signed a memorandum covering the issue of cooperation within the field of defence, between Poland and Bulgaria. Secondly, a letter of intent was signed, pertaining the collaboration involving the defence industries of both states. These documents make it possible to overhaul the Bulgarian MiG-29 fighter jets in Bulgaria. The issue is quite urgent, as the agreement regarding the maintenance of the Bulgarian fighter jets, signed with the Russian RSK MiG company, is going to expire on 9th September.

The memorandum signed with Poland is a result of the high cost of the overhauls realized by the Russian RSK MiG company. Secondly, the agreement involving Warsaw constitutes a realization of the NATO requirements - the member states are obliged to suspend their military cooperation with Russia due to the Ukrainian crisis and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

The intergovernmental memorandum covers the cooperation within the scope of the humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, military training and other areas related to security and cooperation within the NATO framework. The most important aspect of the agreement, at least for Bulgaria, is related to repairs and modernization of the military equipment.

The above refers, above all, to the MiG-29 fighters - according to the NATO commitments, Bulgaria shall be in possession of at least 12 examples of these jets. Currently only 4 of the Bulgarian Fulcrums maintain full operational capability status. Furthermore, the service life for two of those jets ends in mid-2016.

We have signed a letter of intent which constitutes a milestone in our mutual relationship. (...) It is significant that Bulgaria selects Poland, its ally, as a partner within the scope of overhauls and modernization of the Air Force's MiG-29 jets. We are aware of the significance of that decision, and of the fact that this step has a geopolitical character.

Tomasz Siemoniak, Minister of Defence

The letter of intent, meaning of which was referred to by the Polish Minister of Defence, covers the widely understood collaboration between the Polish and Bulgarian defence industries. The document also constitutes a legal basis for executing the overhauls and modernization of the Bulgarian Fulcrums in Poland. These works would be executed by the Bydgoszcz based WZL-2 and Warsaw based WZL-4 facilities, under the supervision of the Polish Air Force and the Air Force Institute of Technology (ITWL).

As there is an urgent need of concluding the relevant agreements that would make it possible to carry out the overhauls of the Bulgarian fighters, the delegation from Poland included the President of the Polish Armament Group – Wojciech Dąbrowski, as well as the President of the WZL-2 [Military Aviation Works No. 2] facility, Leszek Walczak. They were involved in the process of execution of the bilateral negotiations related to the technical and financial details connected with the contract.

The Bulgarians are interested – primarily – in carrying out the overhauls of the engines and the power generators for three MiG-29 fighters in the first half of 2016. Another three examples are going to go through the same process until the end of next year. In the future, the fighters may be upgraded at the WZL-2 facility in Bydgoszcz, up to the same standard as the one applicable in case of the Polish Air Force's jets.

This would still be a temporary solution, since the Sofia government has authorized the Ministry of Defence to start negotiations related to acquisition of the Western-made fighters. Acquisition of the second hand jets could be realized, according to the experts, with an amount of BGN 1.5 billion (ca. EUR 750 million).

Overhauls and modernization of the Bulgarian combat aircraft, even despite the significance of the process, were not the only topic covered during the Siemoniak's visit to Sofia. In the talks involving the Bulgarian President – Rosen Plevneliev, and the Bulgarian Minister of Defence, Nikolay Nenchev, also covered the issues related to the NATO military cooperation, the upcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw, geopolitical situation in the Balkan region, as well as the current geopolitical status of the Mid-Eastern Europe.

Tomasz Siemoniak also laid flowers in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.