

POLISH MILITARY TO MODERNIZE ITS MI-24 FLEET

Polish Ministry of Defence is getting ready to upgrade its fleet of the Mi-24 helicopters. Both variants of the aircraft in question - Mi-24D and Mi-24W - would undergo the modernization.

The Armament Inspectorate announced that a technical dialogue has begun with regards to upgrades of the Mi-24 helicopters. The whole procedure is aimed at assessing whether the modernized aircraft would meet the initial requirements defined within the scope of their armament, communication, self-protection, navigation and electronic countermeasures.

Furthermore, it is assumed that cost of acquisition, operational use and decommissioning of the equipment, as well as the timeline for the whole process, are all going to be estimated as a part of the procedure. This also concerns the requirements related to logistics, handing off and supervision with regards to the equipment received.

The dialogue is to last from July until September but the term may be extended if the goals are not accomplished. Submissions will be accepted until 8th February. Alongside the contractual data, the application shall also include a declaration on being in possession of experience in the area of "maintaining, repairing and modifying or modernizing the Mi-24D and Mi-24W helicopters".

Detailed requirements will be contained in the RFI that is going to be issued once the applications are verified, and the RFI document would be received only by the entities "selected by the Armament Inspectorate that would offer complex solutions meeting the requirements of the Polish military".

The announcement also mentions the fact that completion of the task depends on the possibility to extend the Mi-24's lifecycle. Participation in the dialogue does not constitute a legal basis for the Inspectorate to request performance of the work. It also does not exclude the ability to submit an offer later on.

The Polish Ministry of Defence announced its plans to modernize the Mi-24 platform last year. The upgrades are going to act as a gap filler, before the Kruk new generation attack helicopters are procured.

The Mi-24 modernization plan along with the upgrade programme concerning the W-3 platform (currently - technical dialogue stage) assuming that the latter helicopter would act as a support means, are both aimed at restoring the anti-armour capabilities in the Polish military, based around ATGMs. As the Russian ATGMs stock (9K114 Shturm and 3M11 Falanga) has been depleted, the Mi-24 gunships have no capabilities as such at their disposal.

Modernization of the helicopters is also necessary due to the need to

meet the alliance obligations by Poland, both in front of NATO, as well as in front of the EU. We have declared that within a specific timeframe we will have a pool of helicopters available with proper performance and capabilities, and this role shall be played by the Mi-24, until the moment when the new platform is introduced.

Brig. general, rt. pilot Dariusz Wroński, independent expert, UAV&Heli Solutions owner, former Head of Air-Mobile and Motorized component

The announcement previously publicized by the MoD suggest that the upgrades shall include armament - a new type of ATGM and new 70 mm NATO-standard unguided rockets. The MoD also mentioned upgrades of the avionics. The exact scope of work however is yet to be defined.

The content of the announcement published by the Armament Inspectorate suggests that the MoD is willing to acquire a complex package including avionics and armament integrated by the programme leaders who also remain responsible for the helicopter's lifecycle. The RFI is going to be solely addressed to entities that remain in possession of proper know-how with regards to overhauls and upgrades. We will witness no drive towards acquisition of single components. The objective that has been set assumes that a complex upgrade package is integrated onto the gunships.

Currently the WZL-1 facility (belonging to the PGZ Group) working together with the Air Force Institute of Technology (ITWL) jointly deal with maintenance and support for the Mi-24 helicopters. This includes modifications. The ITWL is responsible for certification of the gunships. The Institute could also deliver a number of upgrade elements, including integrated avionics and comms suite or countermeasures (flares, flare dispensers). Apart from that, the Polish industry may deliver elements of the missile armament (Mesko) and guns (ZM Tarnów). - *It's not a secret that a major portion of Mi-24's equipment is obsolete, or troublesome maintenance- and operations-wise. It's becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain spares for the YakB-12.7 machine gun, as more and more users of the Mi-24 platform are resigning from using it - Wroński emphasized.*

The General added that other elements of the equipment, such as countermeasures or navigation and communications suites do not really meet the contemporary requirements. They shall be either replaced with new solutions or they should undergo an in-depth modernization. Some of those elements can be delivered by the domestic industry, however, in some cases foreign help will be required. - *In some cases, such as the fire control system, the new solutions are much lighter which means that by upgrading the avionics and adding new armament we may regain some weight and thus make the payload higher. Power to weight ratio would also be better - the General adds.*

Even though no details have been disclosed with regards to the upgraded armament, we know that the Spike ATGM is one of the possible options considered. The Spike ER 2 variant, which is the latest generation, has been premiered during the last year's edition of the MSPO event, with the Mi-24 and W-3 platforms in mind.

So far, no detailed schedule of the upgrades has been disclosed. The number of helicopters expected to undergo the modernization also has not been specified. The announcement made by the Inspectorate suggests that both the Mi-24W as well as the Mi-24D helicopters are considered as a viable candidate for upgrades. Around 30 helicopters of all versions are used by the Polish military as of now.

The budgetary bill for 2019 includes some assumptions concerning the upgrades. The above means that the agreement could be signed by the end of this year. According to the announcement made by

the Inspectorate, the technical dialogue is to last until September.

The above means that the procedures related to procurement itself and to conclusion of the agreement would need to be finalized at a rapid pace, with conclusion assumed to happen in 2019. The time framework adopted remains quite ambitious.

However, undoubtedly modernization of the Mi-24 helicopter is a necessary solution making it possible to rapidly restore and reinforce the anti-tank capabilities remaining at disposal of the Polish military. Attainment of combat readiness is a long-running process, even after the given platform is selected.

In mid-2018 the MoD suggested that Kruk procurement would begin "in the upcoming months" with the contract expected to be signed in 2019. Since that time no information has been published with regards to the acquisition of the new gunships. Hence, it shall be assumed that the upgraded Mi-24s would be operated in parallel with the new helicopters while the target quantity of gunships shall be higher than 32 examples originally envisaged in the Kruk programme. - *Transitioning to new and modern technologies, the principle is to operate the helicopters with so called generation-overlap that may take a decade or longer.* - General Wroński added.