

POLISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE PROCURES BLACK HAWK HELICOPTERS FOR THE SOF COMPONENT

Mariusz Błaszczak, Head of the Polish Ministry of Defence, announced that he is to conclude agreement today (Friday, 25th January), with the PZL Mielec facility, concerning delivery of the Black Hawk helicopters for the Polish forces. Błaszczak suggested that the first lot with which the cooperation would begin is to be received by the Special Forces.

PZL Mielec acts as the manufacturer of the S-70i helicopter which is an export variant of the Black Hawk platform that has been, for instance, operated by the US Army since the 1970s. The factory in Mielec belongs to Sikorsky. Since 2015 the aforesaid company has been a part of the Lockheed Martin company.

Błaszczak announced the procurement on air, during a radio interview for the Polish "Jedynka" state radio station. He stressed that the military is acquiring proven and modern aircraft, also praising the Mielec-based facility, emphasizing its Polish location.

Tomorrow I am going to conclude an agreement with the PZL Mielec facility, concerning the delivery of Black Hawk helicopters for the Polish Military. (...) These helicopters will be received by the Special Forces. This is the first lot. In this way we are launching the cooperation.

Head of the Polish Ministry of Defence, Mariusz Błaszczak

The Minister refused to disclose any further details. According to the information we have obtained, the military would acquire four helicopters on Friday. Number as such has also been published by the IAR outlet, just before the interview with the MoD. The above has been confirmed by Błaszczak via Twitter. He stated that *"Friday will bring more good news for the military. I will be honored to sign an agreement concerning four brand new Black Hawk helicopters for the Special Forces, manufactured at the PZL Mielec facility."*

The head of the MoD also criticized the concept assuming that multi-role helicopters would be acquired, that had been valid during the term of office held by the PO-PSL coalition who had remained in power before the PiS government took over. The concept above resulted in selection of the H225M Caracal platform manufactured by Airbus Helicopters. The contract has not been signed, due to the fact that offset negotiation failed (carried out by the Law and Justice [PiS] government). PiS has been against the aforesaid procurement since the very beginning.

- *That concept turned out not to be good, not giving any added value for the Polish defence industry. This concept has also turned out not to be good for the Polish Military* – Błaszczak added.

Błaszczak's statement is surprising, since the only officially known helicopter procurement procedure is the one involving the WSK "PZL-Świdnik" facility acting as a contractor (the facility in question belongs to Leonardo Helicopters, offering the heavy AW101 platform). The aforesaid procurement process is aimed at acquiring a maritime SAR/ASW platform for the Polish Navy. The Świdnik-based facility was competing against Airbus Helicopters that, ultimately, has not placed an offer. PZL Mielec was not involved in the tender mentioned above. At the moment the Polish Ministry of Defence is negotiating potential acquisition of the AW101 platform with Leonardo.

The Polish Ministry of Defence has recently been working on a procurement procedure concerning rotary-wing aircraft for the Special Operations component. The aforesaid procurement began in February 2017, in parallel with a procedure concerning the Navy. It was ultimately cancelled in June 2018.

Since then the MoD has not announced any steps with regards to acquisition of helicopters for the Special Forces at all. If such procurement was run as a tender, the MoD would be obliged to publish an announcement specifying what is being looked for by the military, and knowledge as such would be available to the manufacturers and to the general public. Lack of announcement as such could mean that the Ministry was negotiating the deal with a single bidder. If so, then a question emerges as to why a procedure as such has been selected for the purpose of that acquisition.

Head of the MoD was also asked about the Black Hawk selection procedure during an interview in the TVP1 state TV channel. The answer was not clear: *"This procurement will be carried out in line with a procedure envisaged by the law. It concerns the operational requirements of the Special Forces. (...) This is an effective procedure, when it comes to the option of acquiring modern equipment for the Polish military"* - the Minister said. He also assured that this would not become the usual *"modus operandi"* adopted by the MoD.

Last year three Black Hawks have been procured by the Polish Police. The acquisition has been carried out through negotiation with a single bidder.