

RHEINMETALL ON LEOPARD 2 TANKS MODERNIZATION: OUR PROPOSAL - COOPERATION

"In terms of technology and functionality, we're offering a top-quality product here. At the same time, we are very interested in establishing a long-term relationship with the Polish defence industry - all the more so as we consider the Polish market to be particularly interesting, with plenty of opportunities." - as Dr Michael Kara, a member of the board of management of Rheinmetall Landsysteme GmbH said in an interview with Defence24.pl.

Jacek Raubo: The Polish Ministry of Defence is interested in modernizing the country's Leopard 2 main battle tanks which is why we would like to know about the proposal put forward by Rheinmetall.

Dr Michael Kara, a member of the board of management of Rheinmetall Landsysteme GmbH: One should narrow things down a bit. Under the modernization programme we are acting as a potential subcontractor, responsible for supplying a Leopard 2 modernization package. Our package involves providing a product equivalent to the German Leopard A5, defined by the requirements of the Polish MoD. And I assure you that Rheinmetall's concept is completely up to the task as far as capabilities and capacities are concerned.

How will this process actually work?

As I have said, Rheinmetall Landsysteme will be a subcontractor and partner in the modernization process but ultimately PGZ/Bumar Łabędy is going to carry out the actual modernization process, while we'll be responsible for defining the design, developing the prototype and for training the Polish staff at PGZ/Bumar Łabędy. We will also be in charge of advisory services during the modernization process. Thus, once modernization of the initial 18 tanks is completed - five in Germany and twelve in Poland under the auspices of Rheinmetall Landsysteme - the whole process will be transferred to the PGZ/Bumar Łabędy facility.

Are you planning to partner with other companies, including Polish ones?

Yes, definitely. The Polish company PCO will serve as a second partner under the programme. In fact, work on integrating the Polish thermal imaging system, with solutions provided by Rheinmetall Defence Electronics in Bremen, is currently underway. Another important priority - crucial to the whole project - is to establish a dialogue between PCO and Airbus Defence and Space. However, in this case, the key technological information and detailed knowledge on the progress of the negotiations are both in possession of Airbus. We are convinced that Polish components will ultimately play a pivotal role in the modernization of the tanks. IBD is another important partner that merits special mention. This company is responsible for upgrading the ballistic protection of the vehicles. And of course the protection solution fully complies with the requirements of the customer. At the same time, I should add that IBD intends to involve the Polish industry in the production of the

protection solution.

What are the highlights and advantages of Rheinmetall's current proposal for modernizing Poland's Leopard tank?

We should start by admitting that the original Leopard 2 A5 modernization concept mentioned above is ageing quickly. One could go so far as to say that the concept is 17 years old. The current proposal by Rheinmetall consists exclusively of highly advanced solutions and cutting-edge technologies. Here, third-generation optical systems, including components and products from Polish manufacturers, offer a good example. Moreover, all of the command and control systems prepared by us under the modernization programme will include new features and applications. In fact, all of the elements for the Leopard tanks included in our modernization package are state of the art. Our advantage lies in the fact that we're able to offer one-stop shopping at Rheinmetall – everything from system and integration competence to optronics, simulation and training and weapons and ammunition expertise. Basically we're able to cover the full scope of the upgrade programme on our own, meeting every requirement.

What are the most important elements of the philosophy behind the current Rheinmetall Defence proposal, especially in light of the modernization programme for the Leopard MBTs, not forgetting the controversy surrounding the Polish tanks?

In terms of technology and functionality, we're offering a top-quality product here. At the same time, we are very interested in establishing a long-term relationship with the Polish defence industry – all the more so as we consider the Polish market to be particularly interesting, with plenty of opportunities. Besides Leopard MBTs, you also manufacture a whole fleet of other military vehicles. So, in the long run, we can easily imagine cooperating with Polish partners in future projects, including combat support vehicles or new IFVs. In this context, not only do we recognize a chance to sell our products, we also see an opportunity to share our experience in this area. This is why "Polandization" in the modernization programme is so important to us.

The Ukrainian crisis - there's no doubt about this - has changed the dynamics of European security thinking and the role played by heavy equipment in the armed forces. Therefore we would like to ask you about the future of the main battle tank on the modern battlefield. Why is it worthwhile to modernize these vehicles?

Three or four years ago, people said that the days of the main battle tanks were over. However, once you look at the issue in the light of the last 12 months and take the Ukrainian crisis into account, it's clear that the situation has completely changed. For example, Germany recently decided to go ahead with the programme to develop a new Main Battle Tank, something which would have been practically inconceivable just three years ago. Thus it's fair to say that the tank is undergoing a renaissance, and continues to be an important element in maintaining the balance of power. In fact I think that MBTs will always be necessary for defending a country's territorial integrity. And our military leaders obviously agree with me, as they're planning to increase the quantity and quality of tanks in our armed forces.

Thank you for the interview.