



# Black Blade 2016

*Exercise 'Black Blade 2016', a Special Forces helicopter tactical training exercise facilitated by the European Defence Agency (EDA), was held from 14 to 30 November 2016 at the Florennes air base in Belgium. 'Black Blade' is one among a multitude of multinational helicopter exercises conducted in Europe.*

The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established in 2004, addressing a need perceived by several European States for a common security and defence policy. One of the tasks of the EDA is to facilitate a training programme in which helicopter units in Europe work together. The EDA helps participating Member States in addressing military helicopter-related issues with a central training element under the Helicopter Exercise Programme (HEP). The HEP currently has fourteen participating Member States: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. To improve operational skills of helicopter crews throughout Europe, the HEP plays an

increasing role in the deployable helicopter capabilities for contingency operations. HEP exercises focus on individual, environmental and multinational training, increasing interoperability through practical experiences, sharing of operational experiences and developing common tactics, techniques and procedures. The aim of the HEP is to be integral part of the reinforcement of European capacity and interoperability within a time frame of ten years. Between 2009 and 2016 more than 206 helicopters, 1,320 aircrews, and almost 13,000 staff members in supporting roles, have participated in various HEP exercises. Exercises take place in several countries such as France, Spain (Ex *Azor*), Italy (*Italian Blade*), Portugal (*Hot Blade*), Finland (*Cold Blade*) and Belgium (*Green Blade* and *Black*

*Blade*). In addition to these field exercises, the Helicopter Tactics Symposium has been held in Luxembourg a total of four times, during which delegations from Member States discussed ideas and theories.

## Special Forces Exercise

*Black Blade 2016* was focused primarily on operations with the Special Forces and fast tactical missions. *Black Blade* participants had a unique opportunity to practice planning and execution of these kinds of missions within a common framework of European partners. Several European partner countries participated in this exercise, with helicopters supplied by three countries: Belgium, Austria and Slovenia. Belgium, which was also the host nation for the exercise, took part