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NATO Completed Tenth Baltic Air Policing Training Event at Karmelava, Lithuania

Ramstein, 28 November 11 – “BRTE events are always a challenge for the Baltic States,” Colonel Antanas Jucius, acting Commander of the Lithuania Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Lithuanian Air Force, “we are glad to have our NATO partners in Lithuania and train ours soldiers together to ensure and increase safety of our countries.”

The tenth BRTE was completed today at the Baltic Control and Reporting Centre (CRC) in Karmelava, Lithuania. Aircraft from NATO nations executed air operations which were controlled by the CRC, the DARS¹ – a NATO deployable air control unit currently on the Karmelava compound – a NATO E-3A and the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) at Uedem, Germany. Plans had initially included additional US fighter and tanker aircraft, which, however, could not participate because of poor weather conditions at their home bases in the UK.

“We are pleased to be back in Lithuania to help orchestrate another BRTE,” Royal Air Force Group Captain Stephen Richards, presenting HQ AC Ramstein during the event, sums up the event, “despite the weather, we will still achieve our aims of enhancing interoperability and safety for NATO’s Air Policing Mission in the Baltic States. With each BRTE we increase our collective confidence in this mission by providing realistic training and by introducing new scenarios which help build and confirm capability. With this cooperation we are also demonstrating NATO solidarity in the region and reinforcing our ability to police the skies over all NATO Nations.”

One aspect of NATO cooperation was the DARS deployment to Karmelava for an exercise. The organisers of BRTE took advantage of this and included the deployable NATO air control unit in the scenario. It was linked in the BRTE surveillance and control process with the E-3A and the Baltic CRC Karmelava.

“I believe in the power of diversity,” says the commander of the DARS, Colonel Gijs van Daatselaar, Royal Netherlands Air Force, “the NATO DARS is a diverse organization by itself, because it is multinational. Every day we can learn from each other. That is our strength. This deployment to Lithuania and the cooperation also with Estonia and Latvia has amplified this effect of diversity. The exercise gave DARS personnel the opportunity to execute live operations in a new and challenging environment in close cooperation with other organizations. The deployment has shown what integration, interoperability and solidarity is about. I have seen a lot of smiling DARS faces of people happy to be part of this event.”

The tri-national Baltic CRC was the central part of BRTE X. They were involved in the control of all BRTE X activities. “The close cooperation and integration was a great opportunity,” says Lieutenant Colonel Fredi Karu, Estonian Air Force, Commander of the Baltic CRC at Karmelava, “the connection to DARS and E-3A provided valuable training for our controllers. And to practice no-notice diversion procedures and routines for the launch of the SAR helicopter for a simulated recovery of a pilot ejected from his aircraft certainly helped our controllers’ proficiency.”

HQ AC Ramstein, NATO’s air command for the airspace north of the Alps will be back in the Baltic region in March 2011 for the 11th sequel of the BRTE series in Estonia. One highlight for that event is the participation of Partnership for Peace aircraft in a classic air policing scenario, involving a loss of communication and an intercept by the Quick Reaction Alert (Intercept) aircraft, which will then be provided by Germany.

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¹ Deployable Air Control Centre Recognized Air Picture Production Centre/Sensor Fusion Post