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Spangdahlem, Mildenhall train to ensure Baltic air sovereignty

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*Air Force Maj. Cristin Marposon
U.S. Air Forces in Europe Public Affairs*

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany —
Aircrews from Spangdahlem Air Base
and Royal Air Force Mildenhall
participated in the NATO Baltic Air
Sovereignty Training Event April 7 with
the air forces of six other nations.

"This was a great opportunity to plan, fly,
and debrief with our NATO partners,"
said Air Force Maj. Brian Jackson,
operations officer with the 22nd Fighter
Squadron, Spangdahlem Air Base, and
lead pilot for fighter wing's participation.
"We definitely have a better
understanding of each other's
capabilities and are a more capable
combat team because of the event."

The one-day NATO BAST-E aimed to
improve how the multinational air forces
work together and integrate capabilities
in preparation for member nations'
rotational deployments to fulfill the
NATO Baltic Air Policing mission.
Airmen from the air forces of the Czech
Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia,
Lithuania and Poland participated.

"Besides the training value, BAST-E
was an excellent opportunity for NATO
to demonstrate commitment and
solidarity to the Baltic states," explained
German Air Force Lt. Col. Jimmy
Hartwig, the operations officer in charge
of BAST-E at CC-Air Headquarters
Ramstein, Germany, NATO's air
component headquarters north of the Alps.



A Polish Air Force F-16 receives fuel from a
U.S. Air Force KC-135 assigned to the 100th Air
Refueling Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall,
United Kingdom, during the NATO Baltic Air
Sovereignty Training Event April 7. Seven
nations' air forces, including U.S. Air Forces in
Europe, participated in the event, which took
place in the skies over Estonia, Latvia and
Lithuania. (Department of Defense photo by Air
Force Staff Sgt. Jerry Fleshman)

F-16 pilots from the 22nd Fighter Squadron at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, trained
with pilots flying Polish and Danish F-16s, Czech L-159s, Lithuanian L-39s and Estonian
An-2s, all of which operated from their home bases, to perform air policing and air defense.
Additionally, a NATO E-3A from Geilenkirchen, Germany, provided airborne warning and
control, while the Control and Reporting Centre at Karmelava, Lithuania, controlled aerial

activity from the ground.

The personnel and aircrew involved participated in air command and control training and practiced intercepts, cross-border air operations and air-to-air refueling.

To keep the aircraft training in the skies over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, KC-135s from the 351st Air Refueling Squadron at Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, refueled U.S. and Polish F-16s.

"These exercises are great for building relations between NATO countries," said Air Force Capt. Derrick St. John, aircraft commander for one of the two participating KC-135s. "It helps the Polish pilots maintain their currencies and prepares us to work together in the future."

While most of the activity took place at altitudes precluding spectators on the ground from seeing much, the participating aircraft performed fly-bys of the Baltic nations' capitals as a show of NATO presence in air defense. Two Spangdahlem F-16s flew over the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

To ensure the integrity of alliance airspace, NATO allies' air forces, including the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, have provided air policing assets since 2004 for member nations, including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which lack the full range of air defense capabilities.

The first BAST-E took place in October 2008 and others are expected on a recurring basis in the future.