

BALTNET- Baltic Air Surveillance Network and Control System

The Baltic region as a part of NATO Integrated Air Defence (NATINADS) has got a lot of attention and recent Baltic Regional Training Events have been reflected and published in media very well. At the same time it would be also interesting to take a deeper look at unique BALTNET project and its units.

The three independent countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have established a very close military cooperation. The cooperation of air forces is certainly one of the most successful contributions to the preservation of the integrity of NATO airspace on an everyday basis. The first BALTNET Agreement was signed by three Baltic Ministers of Defence in 1998 and incorporated air surveillance together with one combined unit, three national units, military/civilian radars and communication lines. Early on the support mainly from the USA, Norway and Denmark helped educate Baltic personnel, create operational procedures and install necessary equipment. Although Baltic States, at the time, were only Partnership for Peace member countries, it

offered an extremely good opportunity to achieve NATO compatibility in a very successful way.

The main principle of the BALTNET project was and has been until today the network-based exchange of information where the three countries share all required data and provide equipment for mission accomplishment. Each country is owner and custodian of BALTNET-assigned equipment and facilities that are located in its territory, while Combined Control and Reporting Centre (CRC) assets and property are commonly and equally owned by parties.

When joining NATO in 2004 the BALTNET system was meant to achieve an air surveillance capability only. Consequently, a Norwegian Air Mission Control Unit was deployed to Lithuania together with fighter controllers provided by NATO. It was a remarkable achievement that during four very busy years a sufficient number of Baltic own Fighter



Controllers, Fighter Allocators and also Master Controllers were educated and qualified to ensure 24/7 coverage. This would of course

have never been possible without the enormous efforts of other NATO members who encouraged us and showed their strong solidarity and deep friendship. All these efforts finally allowed us to decalre Full Operational Capability of the leading unit in BALTNET, Combined CRC Karmelava in Lithuania, on 1 October 2008.

The Combined CRC itself is certainly something very unique within NATINADS, since traditional CRCs are usually nationally manned units. At the same time each individual Baltic country is running 24/7 Control and Reporting Posts (CRPs) responsible for providing air surveillance information to the Combined CRC, grant back-up capabilities and fulfill national tasks. All operational positions at Karmelava are shared among three countries and personnel from each CRP is rotating into positions at the Combined CRC.

This year saw the first Baltic Tri-National Evaluation for Combined CRC Karmelava, Lithuania, and CRP Amari, Estonia, including the Command, Operations, Force Protection and Logistics elements. Preparation for the STARTASSESS foreseen in 2011 has demonstrated that many fields still have to be improved and that BALTNET main principles need to be developed to guarantee sustained operations and allow real back-up functions among Baltic countries. The desired end-state includes a strong network that provides each country with radar and flight plan data together with radio coverage across the entire Baltic region.



Ceremony to mark CRC Karmelava's Full Operational Capability, 25 September 2008
Photo by courtesy CRC Karmelava

