

MMF Background Paper

Flashback: From acknowledging Europe's Air-to-Air Refuelling gap to today's MMF signing

The contract for the acquisition of two A330 MRTT aircraft, which was signed on Thursday 28 July by OCCAR (Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation) on behalf of the buying nations (The Netherlands and Luxembourg) and Airbus Defence and Space (ADS), is a milestone in the Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Transport Fleet (MMF) project which started back in 2011. At that time, EU leaders remembering the experiences gained during the Kosovo (1999) and Libya (2011) air campaigns once again acknowledged that Europe was crucially lacking Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) capabilities leading to constant reliance on US tankers. Indeed, during the 2011 operation over Libya, 80% of all AAR missions were flown by US aircraft.

Meeting on 30 November 2011 at the European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board, European Defence Ministers endorsed AAR as one of the initial 'Pooling & Sharing' initiatives to be focused on by the EDA. They agreed that additional AAR capabilities should be developed in Europe as a matter of priority. At the December 2013 European Council, EU Heads of State or Government also endorsed AAR as one of four key military capability programmes, alongside GovSatCom, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) and Cyber Defence, to be developed by EDA Member States.

Even before the first ministerial call for action in 2011, the EDA had already developed a strategy aimed at increasing the overall AAR capacity; improving its efficiency as well as reducing fragmentation of the European aerial refuelling fleet. With this overarching goal in mind, and consistent with its role as an initiator and enabler of collaborative defence capability projects in Europe, the Agency started different workstrands each open to interested EDA Member States: on short-term commercial solutions to fill the AAR gap; on optimization of existing tanker assets and organisations; on AAR kits and clearances for the Airbus A400M; and on developing a pooled multinational Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) fleet.

The latter workstrand quickly evolved into a shared ambition of several EDA Member States to jointly acquire and operate a multinational pooled tanker fleet. In November 2012, Defence Ministers of 10 EDA Member States (The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Norway) signed a letter of intent in which they agreed to work towards pooling national requirements and acquiring new multi-role aircraft together, under the lead of The Netherlands. The declared aim was always to reach an initial European strategic tanker capability by 2020 which would be available for multinational and national use. The MMF, the Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Transport Fleet project, was born.

Having kicked-off the project, the EDA subsequently facilitated its technical work by supporting its participating Member States to agree on the tanker fleet's harmonized technical requirements and specifications. Importantly, a single configuration was selected for the future common fleet of multirole tanker transport aircraft: it has to be equipped with a flyable boom as well as underwing pods. It was also decided that all the tankers will have to meet very demanding requirements in terms of passenger transport, cargo movement and medical evacuation. The idea was to make sure that thanks to its modularity, the MMF tankers will also help to increase European strategic passenger, cargo transport and medical evacuation capabilities.

Based on its Member States' requirements, the EDA issued a Request for Information to industry in early 2014. In December 2014, a crucial landmark was reached when a vanguard of nations under the lead of The Netherlands decided, based on the assessment of the Request for Information, to move

forward together by entering discussions with Airbus Defence and Space (ADS) for the acquisition of a common fleet of A330 MRTT aircraft.

The MMF nations decided that the aircraft pooled in the MMF will be owned by NATO, that the procurement expertise of OCCAR (Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement/Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation) will be used to manage for NATO the MMF Acquisition Phase including the first 2 years of support and that the NSPA (NATO Support and Procurement Agency) will manage the Follow-on Support and Operations Support Phase. Therefore, the MMF nations established in 2014 a Support Partnership within the NSPO (NATO Support and Procurement Organisation).

In late 2014, NSPA and OCCAR signed a Cooperation Agreement that covers the management of the MMF Acquisition Phase and sets the framework and conditions under which OCCAR will manage this phase as NSPA's Contract Executing Agent.

The Request for Proposal was issued accordingly by OCCAR to ADS and the MMF Acquisition Contract was successfully negotiated with ADS by a joint NSPA/OCCAR team. The acquisition includes the procurement of two A330 MRTT aircraft for the MMF (with options for up to six more). Delivery of the first MRTT aircraft is planned for 2020. At this stage, the MMF Acquisition Contract signed with ADS involves just two buying nations (The Netherlands and Luxembourg) but other countries have already expressed their intention to join the program.

OCCAR will execute the management of the acquisition contract with ADS including qualification, certification, acceptance, delivery and first two years of support. NSPA and OCCAR, cooperating for more than 10 years on other programmes, will ensure a seamless transition to the Follow-on Support of the fleet.

The EDA will continue to support the MMF project in the next steps and, in particular, will encourage additional EDA Member States to accept the open invitation to join MMF.

Airbus Defence and Space will provide the two aircraft from its Getafe tanker conversion line near Madrid where "green" A330-200 aircraft assembled in Toulouse are converted into A330 MRTTs. The company will also support the aircraft under an initial two-year service contract.

EDA profile

The European Defence Agency (EDA) is a Brussels-based EU Agency which was established in 2004, "to support the Member States and the Council in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the European Security and Defence Policy as it stands now and develops in the future". The EDA acts as a catalyst, promotes collaborations, launches new initiatives and introduces solutions to improve defence capabilities; it is the place where Member States willing to develop their capabilities through cooperation do so. The EDA is also a key facilitator in developing the capabilities necessary to underpin the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the Union. The Agency is headed by Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy. Its staff is composed of experts in capability development, research and technology, armament cooperation as well as industrial matters from all 27 EDA Member States. The Agency is organised in three operational directorates: Cooperation Planning & Support; Capability, Armaments & Technology; and European Synergies & Innovation.

NSPA profile

The NATO Support and Procurement Agency is NATO's premier logistics and procurement provider and offers integrated multinational support solutions for stakeholders and customers. NSPA is a customer-funded agency, operating on a "no profit - no loss" basis.

All 28 NATO nations are represented in the NATO Support and Procurement Organisation, Agency Supervisory Board (ASB) which directs the activities of the NSPA. Currently the Agency employs approximately 1,100 staff and is headquartered in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (Capellen), with operational centres in Luxembourg, France, Hungary and Italy.

NSPA's capability portfolio offers products and services across the Agency's business units – Central Europe Pipeline System Programme, the NATO Airlift Management Programme and Logistic Operations segment. Their integrated capabilities serve our customers, stakeholders, NATO and industry partners in the following five domains: - Support to Operations and Exercises; - Logistics Services and Project Management; - Systems Procurement and Life-Cycle Management; - Fuel Management; - Strategic Transport and Storage.

OCCAR profile

OCCAR (Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement) is a European international organisation for the management of cooperative armament programmes. The OCCAR Member States are currently Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. The cooperative OCCAR structure also allows other states to participate on equal terms in specific OCCAR programmes without being a Member State. Non-member Participating States are currently Finland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg (represented by Belgium in A400M), Poland, Sweden, and Turkey.

OCCAR's core business is the through-life management of cooperative defence equipment programmes. The OCCAR programme management and governance are based on a set of common rules agreed by the Member States.

The OCCAR Programme portfolio currently includes 13 important armament programmes with an operational budget in 2016 of about 3.1 Billion €: The A400M airlifter, the BOXER armoured vehicle, the COBRA weapon locating radar, the ESSOR software defined radio, the FREMM frigates, the FSAF-PAAMS air defence system, the LSS logistic support ship, the MMCM maritime mine countermeasures, the MUSIS satellite image sharing system, the PPA multipurpose patrol ship, the TIGER attack helicopter and now the acquisition of the MMF Programme (Multinational Multi Role

Tanker Transport Fleet). In addition, the European MALE RPAS Programme (Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System) is currently being integrated into OCCAR.

OCCAR operates from several locations across Europe, with a Central Office in Bonn/Germany and Programme Divisions/offices in Bonn, La Spezia, Paris, Rome, Seville and Toulouse.

Airbus Defence and Space profile

Airbus Defence and Space is a division of Airbus Group formed by combining the business activities of Cassidian, Astrium and Airbus Military. The new division is Europe's number one defence and space enterprise, the second largest space business worldwide and among the top ten global defence enterprises. It employs some 38,000 employees generating revenues of approximately €13 billion per year.
