Cooperative Security Environment with Focus on Arms Control Pillar

“Open Skies Treaty Aerial Observation Course”
CSE-A4-C-18

19 – 29 March 2018, Jakabszállás – 59th Szentgyörgyi Dezső Airbase (Kecskemét), Hungary

Organised in cooperation with and sponsored by the MoD of Hungary with the financial contribution of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Introduction
Since 2002 RACVIAC has been organizing courses on the Treaty on Open Skies (OST). These courses have become one of the most distinctive RACVIAC products. This year RACVIAC cooperated closely with the Ministry of Defence of Hungary in order to execute yet another successful Course that was co-organised, hosted and sponsored by Hungary. The event was also supported by the Bundeswehr Verification Centre of Germany and the Italian Verification Centre with the provision of lecturers.

The purpose of the course was to train personnel from SEE countries to plan, organize and execute an Aerial Observation Mission based on the provisions of the OST, thus increasing the administrative capacity in the field of security cooperation.

The objectives of the course were:

- to recall the historical background and the development of the OST;
- to provide the participants with information about the current situation in the development and implementation of the OST;
- to overview the specified elements of the OST, highlighting the most comprehensive and commonly followed rules and procedures of its execution;
- to enable participants to prepare and conduct mission planning (in accordance with the OST);
- to carry out a training (Aerial Observation Mission), thus providing practical experience;
- to deepen contacts and build trust and confidence between the representatives of national organizations and agencies engaged in Arms control and/or security- and confidence-building measures;
- to increase transparency and the administrative capacity in the field of security cooperation among SEE countries.

Opening the Course on behalf of RACVIAC Director Ambassador Haydar Berk, LtC Servet Aya, Programme Manager in
RACVIAC CSE Pillar, said that “the Open Skies Treaty, developed during the last years of the Cold War as a mechanism to increase transparency between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, together with the Vienna Document, has gained a newfound relevance in the recent years”. He continued by saying that this Treaty "is one of the most important and effective military-political instruments aimed at building trust and increasing transparency. The South East European region is also a part of it and most of the countries are members of the Open Skies Treaty and benefit from it". LtC Aya finally extended his deepest gratitude to Hungary for hosting and co-organising the Course as well as for providing the observation aircraft.

Speaking on behalf of the co-organizer Major General László Domján, Head of Hungarian MoD Defence Policy Department, recalled for the participants the history of the Open Skies Treaty and reflected on its importance. Referring to the changed security environment and increasing security challenges in Europe as well as on global scale, Major General said that this Treaty is an important instrument that is able to provide greater openness and transparency and to enhance confidence-and security-building measures. He also underlined the significance of belonging to a family of experts on the Open Skies regime and sharing of experiences which is essential to develop and strengthen capabilities and cooperation.

The course was a combination of theoretical and practical part. The first phase, the theoretical part (20 - 23 March) was conducted as a mixture of presentations and a tabletop exercise. The presentations covered the provisions of the Treaty on Open Skies, the OSCE Decisions and Chairman’s Statements augmenting the original text of the Treaty, the notification system and the used formats, OS platforms and sensor suits used by Hungary and other Member States, certification procedures, pre-flight inspection, demo flight, on-hand experiences, film processing, duplication and procedures of access to information, mission planning, mission rundown and tasks related to receiving an OS mission, mission plan negotiation and preparation of the mission report, lessons learned from digital observation flights, digital sensors and inspection rules.

The tabletop exercise, finalizing the theoretical part of the course, was focusing on a mission plan as a preparation for the accomplishment of the training observation flight. During the exercise, participants were divided into three teams and practiced preparation and review of a mission plan by conventional methods, under the supervision of the lecturers.
The excellent lecturers covered all topics in a most efficient way also sharing their personal experiences gained during real OS missions.

Practical part

In the second week (26 - 28 March), the Kecskemét airbase was the location of the course. The activities were carried out in compliance with the OST and in accordance with the time schedule of a real OS mission. This phase included the training in point of entry (POE) procedure, real life meteorological and ATC briefings, pre-flight inspection, mission plan negotiation and mission plan review, preparation for the observation flight, observation flight, and development of the aerial photographs, preparation and signature of the mission report.

The participants were given detailed explanation of the different computer systems used by Germany and Hungary for the mission planning, mission plan and flight data verification. Also, the Hungarian AN-26 aircraft and the installed observation system were presented in detail by the Hungarian OS team. During the training flight, participants gained insights into the duties of the observing as well as of the escort team as well as into the operational aspects of conducting a flight.

During the visit to the PhotoLab in Budapest, the participants were informed about the equipment of film processing, the techniques of analysis and duplication as well as the development of the aerial photographs taken during the observation flight and the way of examining the results.

Conclusion

The Course has been considered a great success achieving all of its objectives. The highly professional lectures as well as the extremely active participants have contributed to the excellent outcome. In addition, the training observation flight, as a unique opportunity for a practical training, has also been a significant element contributing to the success of the Course.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.