

OBSERVATORY ON IAI EUROPEAN DEFENCE

APRIL 2015

In the spotlight

NATO Spearhead Force ends first exercise

9 April

The new NATO rapid reaction force (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, VJTF) completed its first exercises. More than 1,500 soldiers participated in "Noble Jump", the exercise designed to train the readiness of the Rapid Reaction Force. The exercise tested headquarters personnel of Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia, while troops were deployed at airports and railheads in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. The VJTF – fully operational only from 2016 – is a brigade of the NATO Response Force (NRF) which will be able to intervene within 48 hours and will include about 5,000 units in the event of a crisis. VJTF and NRF are intended to strengthen the Alliance's collective defense capabilities. The VJTF and NRF are part of the "Readiness Action Plan", agreed by the Atlantic Alliance's leaders at the Wales summit in September 2014.

20 April

Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council: new action plan on migration

At the last Joint EU Ministerial Meeting of Foreign and Interior Ministers – chaired by the High Representative Federica Mogherini and the European Commissioner for Migration Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos – a 10 point action plan was presented to address the crisis in the Mediterranean, stemming from the wave of migrants coming from politically unstable countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Mogherini and Avramopoulos stressed the need to show greater collective awareness in tackling "not a new nor a passing reality." For this reason, the Commission will present in May a European agenda on migration.

24 April

NATO "Locked Shields" exercise ended

A team of NATO cyber defenders from the NATO Computer Incident Response Capability Technical Centre (NCIRC-TC) won the sixth edition of the largest cyber defence exercise, the "Locked Shields 2015," organized by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. This year 16 teams from NATO countries took part in the exercise in addition to the NCIRC-TC. The NATO team won the competition, while Estonia and Poland took respectively the second and third place.

28 April

NSPA signs agreement with Ukraine

Mike Lyden, General Manager of NATO Procurement Support Agency (NSPA), participated with Ihor Dolhov, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to NATO, at the signing ceremony of the agreement between Ukraine and NSPA. The agreement establishes a formal framework that allows the NSPA to act as the Executing Agent for two of the NATO Ukraine Trust Funds. These funds, which concern Logistics and Standardization and Medical Rehabilitation, are part of a larger aid program established during the Wales summit.

28 April

New EU Security Agenda

The Commission adopted a new European Agenda on Security 2015-2020 to support better cooperation between Member States in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and cybercrime. According to the Commission, these transnational threats require common action at the European level and the new security agenda seeks to give greater weight to the Union collective response. Moreover, the Commission

and the High Representative presented a set of new proposals to provide the EU partner countries with the necessary means to face threats related to terrorism, internal conflicts and illegal traffics.

28 April

EU: €10 million to fight radicalization and "foreign fighters"

The Commission launched a new aid program to counter political radicalization in Maghreb and stem the flow of foreign fighters from North Africa, Middle East and Western Balkans. The High Representative Federica Mogherini stated that "foreign fighters are a threat not only to the region, but to the whole world." Europe has therefore allocated 10 million euros to support partner countries under a new program named "Countering Radicalization and Foreign Terrorist Fighters." The EU will allocate an initial sum of 5 million euros to finance the technical assistance to improve skills and capabilities of criminal justice officials. The second tranche of 5 million euros will fund instead the fight against radicalization in Sahel and Maghreb.

30 April

Norway leads NATO mission in Baltic skies

Starting from May 1, Norway will assume the responsibility of the NATO air-patrolling mission ("air policing") in the Baltic States. The rotation ceremony was held at the Šiauliai air base in Lithuania, where Italy formally transferred the command to Norway. Norway will lead the mission with four F-16, with the support of four Italian Eurofighters. Other four British Eurofighters will be assigned to the Ämari air base in Estonia, while Belgium will provide four F-16 based at the Malbork base in Poland. NATO has been protecting the Baltic skies since 2004, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the Alliance. The mission is thought to monitor the air space of these countries who do not have aircrafts to perform this task. NATO fighters have so far intercepted several Russian aircrafts near the Baltic States. In 2014, NATO scrambled its fighters more than 150 times in response to the Russian air activities, four times more compared to 2013.