

## **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

### **On Dutch Training Ground**

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*There were several reasons why the Polish State Fire Service took part in the FLOODEX 2009 exercises organized by the Netherlands within the frameworks of the EU community mechanism. The participation in the exercises enabled us to check in practice the operational and logistical capabilities of the Polish rescue unit and its cooperation with rescue groups from other countries, to exchange experience with other rescuers and to learn civil protection standards binding in the EU Member States.*

The exercise scenario included a series of events related to a serious flood. It was based on the disaster of 1953, which is still in the memory of people. In Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom 2,100 people were killed; further 200 were lost their lives at sea that day.

### **Practical Skills Test**

Checking in practice the worst possible scenario was a difficult task both for the organizers of the exercise and for rescuers from five different countries. The host country – the Netherlands – put up, obviously, the largest team. It was composed of the representatives of the following ministries: of

Transport and Public Works, of Health, of the Environment, of Defence, of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs, as well as of representatives of the Police and Fire Service. The following facilities and means of transport were used directly in the exercises: vehicles and pump systems (including pump systems with the efficiency higher than 55m<sup>3</sup>/min and 83m<sup>3</sup>/min) of the Ministry of Transport and Public Works, vehicles, boats and helicopters of the Police, and military means of communication and Chinook heavy transport helicopter. The army was responsible also for preparing the base of operations and logistics. Medical Emergency Agency for Disasters provided also ambulances and helicopters.

The countries participating in the exercises had the following resources:

- United Kingdom – 105 rescuers with a command vehicle, two heavy container pumps (7000 l/min), two container decontamination kits, eight rescue boats, (logistical) support vehicles and two extinguishing vehicles;

- Germany – 100 persons (rescuers and experts), 22 vehicles of different type (pump systems, with boats, engineering and logistical ones), six rescue boats, rescue helicopter;

- Estonia – 25 persons, four rescue boats, logistics;

- Poland – a 20-man group had at its disposal:

- a container carrier with a logistical container, a trailer and a hose container,

- two heavy extinguishing vehicles with a high-output pump on a trailer,

- a quartermaster's vehicle with a foldable water tank,

- an off-road car with a trailer and a boat, a mini-bus,

- additional rescue equipment used for flood rescue actions and for water rescue.

Since the exercises were organized within the frameworks of an EU mechanism, the EU Expert Panel played an important role and was to coordinate work of all the foreign groups. The participation of the Polish module was Poland's second attempt to check this type of configuration of a rescue team for international projects involving sending a high-output pump module within the frameworks of the European Union community mechanism (the first test was during the UUSIMAA exercises in Finland in 2008).

The manoeuvres took place on a military training ground on 23-24 September. The camp was located on the area of a military unit in Bergen. Operational readiness was raised at 7 am and was effective until the action was finished on a given day. The tasks were presented to the base of operations by the EU Expert Panel via videoconference. With regard to the type of the assigned tasks, the group was divided into two teams: a pump team (five vehicles, 14 persons) and a team performing actions on the water (a vehicle with a boat, five persons).

On the first day, the pump team took part in an action on the Amstelmeer Lake together with teams from the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands. The scenario for all the teams included constructing hose lines to pump water 4 kilometres. For this task seven sections (500 or

600-meter-long each) were distinguished. On every section a given team put a pump, constructed a line and used it to delivered water to a tank. From the tank water was pumped away by another pump. In this task the Polish team used two high-output pumps and constructed two hose lines (110).

At the same time, the boat team, together with the British, German and Dutch teams, took part in an action on the lake near the town of Akersloot. The scenario for all the teams included action on the area of a flooded town. The Polish team conducted evacuation of people from the cut off area, provided protection, administered the first aid, evacuated casualties from a sunken car and evacuated people from a roof of a flooded building.

On the next day, the pump team participated in an action near Den Oever, also together with teams from the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands. Following the scenario, all the teams had to pump water from a bay using high-output pumps. During the task two Polish high-output pumps and two hose lines (110) were used. The German team also used trailer pumps, while the British team used container pump set with a hydraulic pump. In the same place, a Dutch company, which produced this pump set, showed its latest product: a container pump set intended for flood rescue. Contrary to the “extinguishing” set, the new one is not designed to deliver water over a long distance with hose lines. The large diameter lines are used only to pour out water (even contaminated), e.g. during and after a flood. The team with a boat took part in an action near Wervershoof together with teams from the United Kingdom, Germany, Estonia and the Netherlands and performed such tasks as on the previous day. At 4 pm the exercises in the zones were finished.

On the next day, i.e. 25 September, before the Polish team left the base of operations, there was a final meeting of the organizers, EU experts, the evaluation team and commanders of all the teams. The meeting was to present some initial conclusions, first impressions of the participants and some critical remarks concerning logistical preparation.

### **New Experience – Other Challenges**

- During the exercises, the tactical and logistical capabilities of a high-output pump module were checked. The module was created out of the resources from the Lubuskie province. It was possible to test also the preparation of the module to conduct rescue actions abroad. The experienced gained during the exercises confirms that the knowledge and skills of the rescuers and proper selection of equipment allowed them to accomplish their tasks.

- The conditions of natural disaster, like a flood, can require in some cases pumping over lots of water. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider adding to the pump modules some container pump sets with the efficiency higher than  $15\text{m}^3/\text{min}$ , whose work was observed during the exercises.

- It is necessary to consider the possibility of creating in Poland a high-output pump module as a rescue module created within the EU. The FLOODX exercises, similarly to the previous

UUSIMAA exercises, proved, that the equipment used there, selected also with regard to the EU requirements, met expectations. To submit the module through CECIS to the SFS resources intended to use within the frameworks of the EU community mechanism, it is necessary to follow a decision of the Chief Commandant of the SFS (a team has to meet requirements of self-sufficiency, its members need to have appropriate trainings completed, etc.).

- According to previous settlements, the teams were to be self-sufficient, while the organizer was to provide sanitary accommodation. It turned out that only eight toilet units were provided for 400 exercise participants (two days later another 12 units were added). For washing there was bottled water and a military tent with showers, which was opened on the second day and was available on certain hours. These resources were insufficient for such a large group. Moreover, there were significant problems with fuelling cars – the head of logistics prepared this improperly despite the fact that all the teams had submitted earlier calculations concerning planned fuel consumption.

- Individual daily food rations of the Polish team were assessed positively by the rescuers. It is possible to notice a significant progress in the menu offered and in the technology of food preparation.

- Experience gained during previous and current exercises show that it is necessary to correct uniforms of Polish rescuers. During the foreign trips it has been proved that it is necessary to change the uniform design, e.g. to adapt them to the ones used by search and rescue groups or foreign teams (style, colour, fabric). The specific nature of these exercises allowed us to compare equipment and personal protective equipment for action on the water used abroad (in the case of the latter we have not reached the optimal level yet).

- The coordination of the rescue works conducted by several international teams in one zone should be performed by the representatives of the receiving country. If the host country does not have resources, a representative of another country should be selected – provided that there are appropriate resources (mainly that it is possible to communicate with others). In the exercises this issue was not solved in a fully satisfactory way. The structure of staff teams in the exercises was different than the one used during previous EU exercises. This influenced exchange of information, especially as the exercise leaders, members of the evaluation team and of logistics team – unlike in Poland – had their own mobile phones as the only means of communication. This was noticed also by the representatives of the European Commission.

- On the previous exercises it was customary for all the participants to meet and receive a certificate confirming the participation of a given team in exercises. Organizer of the FLOODDEX exercises did not plan such an event.

- Polish rescuers cooperated during the actions with rescuers from other countries. This enabled them to exchange experience and learn what personal, logistical and rescue equipment is used in

other countries and how the actions are performed. Therefore, participation in such projects is reasonable.

- Both during the exercises and afterwards, the exercises organizers, evaluators, observers and participants emphasized frequently the professionalism and commitment of the Polish rescuers. The Polish rescue team fully completed the tasks specified in the scenario and intended for the team in the exercises.

- The Polish team was the smallest one (20 rescuers). The British team was composed of 105 persons, the German team – of 100 persons and in the Estonian team there were 25 persons.

- It was a very good idea of the organizers to engage students of journalism for preparing two issues of a daily with description of the course of exercises. The daily was distributed among the participants, observers and VIPs.

- It is reasonable to introduce a questionnaire for an internal assessment of exercises of this type for all the members of a rescue team. This would allow us to draw some additional conclusions concerning the preparation to the exercises and the performance.

- A detailed summary and assessment of the exercises will be prepared by the evaluation team. Outcomes and conclusions presented in a form of a final report will be discussed on a special meeting in Brussels and sent to the countries participating in the exercises.

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**photo Maciej Iwko**

### **Photo Captions**

1a and 1b Preparing water intake

2a and 2b The British rescuers present their skills and equipment

3 Latest Dutch container for flood rescue