



## COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SLOVAK ARMED FORCES AND MOVEMENT COORDINATION CENTRE EUROPE PROJECT: AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*The air transport environment is very complex, and in its nature ever changing and evolving. Capabilities and capacities in transport are dynamic and dependent on many factors including the world happenings and situation. It's as well crucial to note that characteristics of the transport conditions are subject to compliance with the national and international agreements, laws, and other regulations.*

*On the top of that, most of the militaries around the world have limited operational budget, so there is a notable need in finding cost-effective solutions for transportation. That's one of the main reasons why international military transportation projects, such as Movement Coordination Centre Europe project, are progressively growing and expanding their scope.*

### KEYWORDS

*transportation requirements, military transportation projects, transport costs, air transport, transportation assets.*



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### INTRODUCTION

Slovak Armed Forces currently deploy their personnel and military assets in the multinational operations on three continents. The air transportation assets, available to the Slovak Armed Forces that support deployment of troops to operations can be defined as secured. However, from one point of view, it can be said, that Slovak Armed Forces have access to all necessary transportation means to support their transportation needs; on the other hand, execution of transportation requirements is not always utmost effective and cost efficient.

Slovak Armed Forces mainly, with a few exceptions, deploys relatively small troops to operations which creates a challenge in finding the most efficient method of transportation and in maximizing the transport cost savings. Transport to areas of operations depends on

various factors, such as time, destination, unit size, equipment, countries political situation, international regulations and restrictions, and others. Having to fulfill and take into consideration all factors, most of the available efficient and often cost-effective widely available options for ensuring the transport requirement are in many times unfitting due to the limited capabilities or capacities.

In recent years, the usage of own military air assets for securing transportation needs is becoming trend in armed forces. Even though it doesn't appear as the efficient means of transport, it is often inevitable. As an example, the Slovak Air Forces personnel have a set minimum practice flying hours fund, even if flying an empty flight. Those practice flights personnel and assets can be utilized for actual military cargo/personnel transportation purposes and thus the organization-wide transportation costs are at the end more efficient.

Assessing and applying military transportation trends to the current ways of working and operation procedures can improve flexibility, rapidity, and effectiveness of air transport in Slovak Armed Forces. Currently, the most effective strategy to maximize the use of transportation assets and minimize financial costs is cooperation in the international military transportation projects, such as the Movement Coordination Centre Europe project (hereinafter referred to as "MCCE").

The main objective of this article is to develop proposal for specific measures, which if put to practice, can strengthen accessibility, interoperability and flexibility of the transport options of the Slovak Armed Forces within international project MCCE. MCCE is currently the most effective tool for maximizing usage of Slovak Armed Forces transportation assets as well as costs minimization.

The article will primarily use scientific method of analysis for parsing individual researching elements as well as method of comparison to compare currently used processes with proposed measures.

## **1 MOVEMENT COORDINATION CENTRE EUROPE PROJECT – MCCE**

Movement Coordination Centre Europe project was established on 1st of July 2007 by merging two transportation organizations European Airlift Centre and Sealift Coordination Centre. MCCE is independent international organization, consisting of 28 member states. It's stationed in Eindhoven Air Base in the Netherlands.

The main purpose of MCCE is to optimize transportation costs through sharing of the transportation assets spare capacities between the member states. Member states benefit in having access to transportation assets of other countries, including the assets resulting from partnerships in various projects and national contracts.

The main principle of MCCE is voluntariness. Member states send information on their planned transports and requests to the MCCE head-office, where that information is incorporated into the database and shared between the member states. Member states can

access the information and react by either sending a request to share transportation or offer to support their request.

As an example, member state A has a planned transportation of cargo to Mali by their own transportation asset, with unused capacity for total 15 tons of cargo. State A would send this information to MCCE and offer spare capacity to other member states. Member state B would in our example need to transport 7 tons of cargo to Mali, sending the request to MCCE, looking to share the transportation. MCCE office reviews the information, informs, and connects both member state A and B on the possibility to share transport together. After acceptance/confirmation from both member states, MCCE coordinates the cooperation between the states.

Coordination of transportation usually requires flexibility and fast decision process from the requesting member state, in our example state B. Offering member state rarely changes their transportation plans to meet the requesting state preferences. It is the requesting member state, who needs to make concessions and changes in their plans to meet conditions set by offering/providing member state.

After execution of transportation, supported member state (requester) is obligated to pay agreed price to the supporting member state (provider). Price for transportation is always negotiated prior to the execution of transport. Payment can be provided either by financial payment or non-financial settlement (exchange of services). MCCE uses several non-financial payment methods, as ATARES, mutual agreement known as Letter of Acceptance (LoA) and assets exchange in program SALIS.

Many member states don't accept financial payments for their services for various reasons; due to that MCCE established a system ATARES (Air-to-Air Refueling and Exchanges of other Services), which is based on providing and gaining spare air transport capacities. It uses a "currency" Equivalent Flying Hour (hereinafter referred to as "EFH"). One EFH is equal to costs of one flying hour of Lockheed C-130 Hercules plane. In our example, if a member state A provide transportation to member state B using C-130 Hercules, and total flight length will be 12 flying hours, member state A will gain 12 EFH and member state B is obligated to pay 12 EFH in system ATARES. Every member state has various transportation assets with different cargo or passenger capacity and costs for one flying hour. For that reason, each country sets EFH coefficients for their assets.

The second non-financial payment method used between members states in MCCE is using the asset exchange in project SALIS. Strategic Airlift International Solution project (referred to as "SALIS") is a multinational initiative of 9 member states founded to provide strategic airlift of oversized and overweight cargo through contracted carrier. A principle of the project SALIS is applying multinational approach to joint purchase of large volume transport services, for lower prices as if each country would have purchased them on their own. Contract is based on purchase of flying hours of 5 cargo planes (Antonov AN-124) from German company Antonov Logistics SALIS. The main advantages of project SALIS are access to

cargo planes AN-124, that can transport 100 tons of load to long distance and a continual assured access to 2 same planes that have to be on disposal to the member states on a very short notice from any suitable airport.

Third, and the last, non-financial payment method used across MCCE is a Letter of Acceptance (hereinafter referred to as “LoA”). LoA is a mutual agreement between two parties regarding support of transportation needs, whereas the conditions of each LoA can differ. Basic principle in LoA’s is exchange of transportation assets between the member states; either member state owned, contracted, or resulting from a membership of one member state in another transportation project. The common purpose of LoA is a direct exchange of transportation assets between the member states.

## **2 COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SLOVAK ARMED FORCES AND MOVEMENT COORDINATION CENTRE EUROPE PROJECT**

Slovakia is a member of the project MCCE since 1st of January 2015 and member of the system ATARES from 11th of March 2015. Since its accession to MCCE and ATARES, Slovak Armed Forces were involved in execution of 138 transports. In 95 cases, in the position of receiver of service and in 22 cases in the position of provider. 21 transportations were executed through the LoA with the other member states. While providing services for other member states, Slovak Armed Forces used all of their available assets except of Slovak Air Forces planes.

Communication with MCCE and coordination of transports is in full competence of the National Movement Coordination Centre of Slovak Armed Forces (hereinafter referred to as “NMCC”). Slovak NMCC creates and sends requests for transportations and analyses options to provide transportation for the other member states. It is also in competence for confirming incoming and outgoing payments in system ATARES, setting coefficients for usage of Slovak available assets, and attending MCCE steering and working boards.

Although the main principle of project MCCE is sharing of transportation assets between member states, Slovakia has limited number of assets available to offer. The main source of Slovak EFH income consist of offering prepaid flying hours in program SALIS. Besides that, Slovakia can offer its Air Forces assets, government planes and, in future, services of contracted carrier.

Slovak Air Forces currently has 2 tactical planes Alenia C-27J Spartan and 7 passenger planes L-410 Turbolet. Their usage for other member states is coordinated by Slovak NMCC but has to be approved by the Chief of the General staff of Slovak Armed Forces. The NMCC monitors requests from other member states and evaluates the Slovak planes being suitable and available for transport. Whenever NMCC finds a request that Slovak Air Forces is able to support, NMCC requests information on the availability of planes in requested dates from the planning department of the Slovak Air Forces. After the planning department confirms plane

availability, NMCC requests a usage of the Slovak Air Forces planes in favor of other MCCE member state. Once request is approved by the Chief of General staff, the commander of Slovak Air Forces orders execution of requested transport. Following that, the NMCC sends an offer to MCCE to support required transportation with the preliminary price calculation and proposed flight plan. If requestor member state accepts the offer, NMCC coordinates transportation with the Slovak Air Forces, MCCE and requesting member state. The process of gaining all necessary approvals can be in practice very time consuming and surely offers much room for improvement.

Second Slovak Air transportation asset being offered to the MCCE member states, the Slovak Government flying service (GFS) is in competence of Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Their fleet contains following planes: Airbus A-319 VIP – with capacity 90 passenger, Airbus A-319 VIP – with capacity 34 passenger, FOKKER 100 – with capacity 32 passenger, FOKKER 100 – with capacity 31 passenger. Usage of government flying assets is defined in agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Whenever Slovak Armed Forces need to use government planes, approval from the Minister of Internal Affairs is required prior to flight. Only the Minister of Defence or person appointed by him is authorized to request the government planes. In Slovak Armed Forces, the request competence is appointed also to the Commander of Slovak NMCC. Similarly, as for the Slovak Air Forces assets, also for the GFS assets the process of gaining all necessary approvals is in practice very time consuming.

Third, and the last Air transportation assets the Slovak Republic currently offers to the MCCE member states, is Slovak pre-paid flying hours in the multinational project SALIS. Slovak Armed Forces rarely need to transport overweight or oversized cargo, which is the main advantage of SALIS planes, but at the same time need to have assured access to that capability. According to contract with German company, Slovakia has 20 prepaid flying hours each year. Those flying hours can be used to support Slovak transportation needs or, more frequently, offered to support transportation requests from the other MCCE member states in exchange for EFH in ATARES. Usage of SALIS flying hours in favor of other states is pre-approved by Minister of Defence on yearly basis; and their spending is in competence of the Commander of Slovak NMCC. Usage of prepaid flying hours in project SALIS for other MCCE or SALIS member states is the main method how Slovakia is obtaining EFH in system ATARES.

Until the summer last year, Ministry of Defence had framework agreement with the civilian sector to ensure its transport requirements. Framework agreements provided the Slovak Armed Forces with access to all means of transport available throughout the world. Currently, Slovak Armed Forces are in process of procurement of new suppliers from civilian market to fulfil gap in availability of transportation assets. Once the procurement process is completed and new contract signed, Slovak Armed Forces will be able to offer services of contracted carrier to MCCE member states.

### 3 AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Slovak Armed Forces processes within MCCE are specified in national standard operational procedures for system ATARES. It can be said that these processes are set up in an effective manner, yet in practice we can identify several pain points and improvement opportunities, especially in the area of streamlining the decision and approval processes. In order to increase effectiveness and interoperability between Slovak Armed Forces and project MCCE, it is crucial to speed up the end-to-end process from receiving of request from the MCCE member state to providing an offer using national transportation assets.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the opportunities for improvement of the cooperation between the Slovak Armed Forces and the MCCE project are an outcome of analysing the current processes of Slovak Air Forces, GFS and potential contracted carrier assets usage in prospect of MCCE member states.

#### 3.1 Air Forces

Slovak military SOPs - Standard Operational Procedures, recognises two options for usage of Air Forces planes in favour of other MCCE member states. The first being merging planned Slovak military flight with part-load from another member state, and the second executing the direct flight for MCCE member state (either cargo or passenger transport).

The merging of planned military flight with other MCCE member states part-load is not possible without informing NMCC about planned flights. According to the current procedures, Slovak Air Forces is not required to share information about planned flights with NMCC. The revision of national SOPs to define the requirement for Slovak Air Forces to mandatory share information on all planned flights with NMCC. This change would deepen the cooperation between NMCC and Slovak Air Forces and would result in improving of the gaining and saving funds of Slovak Armed Forces within MCCE project.

The execution of air transport for other MCCE member states using Slovak Air Forces assets is possible, however for it to work in practice, it is critical to eliminate some of the crucial pain points. Main identified pain points include the time-consuming approval process and the need to simplify diplomatic permissions granting process. To increase the interoperability and streamline the end-to-end processes the following improvements are recommended:

1. Delegate the power to approve MCCE air transports to commander of the Slovak Air Forces directly, omitting the mandatory Chief of the General Staff approval. Alternatively, delegation of authority to approve MCCE air transport could be replaced by the pre-approved usage of the Slovak Air Forces aircrafts in prospect of other MCCE member states, similarly to the existing pre-approved usage of SALIS flying hours. In this case, Chief of the General Staff would pre-approve an amount of flying hours for each month/year that could be used for MCCE member states in exchange for ATARES EFH's. The cost of the transportation would be financially

covered from accounting budget dedicated to pilots training. Current approval of transport request process, with regards to military SOPs, usually takes 7-14 days. Implementing proposed measures, the duration of the end-to-end process could be reduced to 2-3 days.

2. Streamline process of requesting diplomatic permissions for overflights and landing between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Main pain point are many handoffs between the various departments in both ministries, which often result in requests arriving to the concerned Slovak embassies in a non-timely manner. The process can be streamlined by delegating authority to Slovak NMCC to directly communicate and request diplomatic clearance from Slovak embassies all over the world, keeping the currently involved departments only informed. The rationale is that in practice the departments “in the middle” are mainly acting as messengers and don’t add much value. Implementing proposed measure, the duration of the process would be significantly reduced.

### **3.2 Contracted Carrier**

Slovak Armed Forces can, as mentioned, offer assets to the MCCE member states resulting using the contracted carrier. At this point Slovak Armed Forces is in negotiation with carriers and the tendering process is not yet completed.

The usage of contracted carrier in favor of other MCCE member states is predicted to be guaranteed by the future framework agreement. From past experience, there is a critical restriction where according to the current Slovak SOPs, each order above 10.000 EUR has to be approved by the Minister of Defence. In practice, as nearly every air transport is above 10K, it results in each transport needs to be approved. The approval process is long and involves many handoffs between various department.

The recommendation is for the Minister of Defence to pre-approve an amount of 300.000 EUR per year, for the execution of transportation requests in prospect of other MCCE member states. The proposed 300K/year is based on the statistical data from the previous framework agreement. Abovementioned recommendation would significantly reduce duration of the approval process and would enable NMCC to react faster to the MCCE requests and gain funds by offering available assets.

### **3.3 Slovak Government Flying Service - GFS**

Currently, Slovak NMCC can offer government aircrafts to other member states only within planned own military flights as a part-load or to use empty leg during transportation. Every GFS transport for Slovak Armed Forces has to be approved by the Minister of Internal Affairs,

which makes execution process time consuming. This also applies when transporting for other MCCE member states.

Revision of agreement between Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs could bring new possibilities for extension of cooperation between Slovak Armed Forces and MCCE. Removal of the mandatory Minister of Internal Affairs approval and direct flight booking between NMCC and Government Flying Service could improve flexibility and speed up the process. An alternative option is to gain Minister of Internal Affairs pre-approval for flights requested by the Slovak Armed Forces, including those executed in prospect of MCCE member states. In practice, the flights would be approved directly by the Director of Slovak Government Flying Service, based on availability of the aircrafts.

As a result, NMCC could set ATARES coefficients for GFS aircrafts and could offer them in prospect of other MCCE member states, which would result in gaining ATARES EFHs, fostering experience for pilots and crew, and deepening relations between Slovakia and MCCE member states.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main purpose of this article was to present and propose measures for Slovak Armed Forces to improve the interoperability, flexibility, and cooperation with Movement Coordination Centre Europe project.

In a rapidly changing military transport environment, there is not always ample time for detail planning, so being fast and flexible is a must. That is the reason to why national decision, approval procedures and end-to-end processes have to be set in the most unobstructed way. A good example was the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, when every country had to react in a rapid manner to meet their nation medical equipment requirements and the transport complexity was brought to the center mainly due to the existing regulations not predicting such situation and the world transport capabilities and capacities becoming limited. As seen, many transports have due to the inadequate national processes often resulted in disproportional and at cases utmost transport costs.

Although Slovak Armed Forces are an active member of MCCE project, there are still improvement opportunities that can be explored. Slovak Armed Forces are regularly in the role of transport receiver, but also take on the role of provider. Being a provider and sharing national assets with MCCE member states has a positive impact not only on membership in the project, but also on development of the national capabilities. Gaining experience, presentation of Slovak Armed Forces in the multinational environment and saving funds are only a few advantages of active membership in project MCCE – and the proposed measures would help to ensure just that.



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