



# CO-OPERA

Marnix Sap and Carlo Brummer (MIAS) review the annual CO-OPERATIVE KEY exercise, held during 2001 in Bulgaria.

**T**HE CO-OPERATIVE KEY 2001 exercise was the fifth in the series of annual exercises held since 1996. It consisted of live air exercises planned and led by NATO's Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) and marked the first time that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation alliance had officially graded members of the Partnership for Peace (PIP) programme. Following almost 12 months of preparation, the year's most important PIP exercise took place in Bulgaria from September 11-21, in the area between Graf Ignatievo and Krumovo air bases. These are north and south respectively of the country's second largest city Plovdiv, with the Koren mountain range some 75 miles (120km) to the southeast. Despite the shadow cast by the September 11 terrorist attacks in the USA, NATO and its PIP partners took the decision to

go ahead with the exercise, not only because of its importance to all the participants, but to underline the organisations commitment to stopping potential crises and fighting terrorism through dialogue and co-operation.

Other than the three US Navy MH-53E Sea Dragons which were called back to their home base at NAS Sigonella, Sicily, all the participants and aircraft stayed until the end of the exercise. No missions were cancelled, and more than 450 sorties were made out of Graf Ignatievo and more than 70 from Krumovo.

The largest NATO/PIP exercise to be held in 2001, CK '01 involved ten NATO participants (Belgium, Canada, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and the USA), plus 14 PIP countries (Austria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Georgia, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania,

Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland). A total of 32 fighters, eleven transport aircraft, 20 helicopters and 1,600 troops took part. New elements to the exercise were the official introduction of assessment, combat search and rescue (CSAR), the use of photo-reconnaissance aircraft and co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Bulgarian Red Cross and other non-military organisations.

## Bulgaria and NATO

As host nation, Bulgaria had prepared itself for the exercise by teaming up with organisations promoting Euro-Atlantic and regional security. Bulgaria considers co-operation with NATO, and eventual membership of it to be the way to can guarantee its own security. Bulgaria hopes to