



OPERATIVE KEY 2001

be invited to join NATO at the Prague Summit in November 2002 despite earlier Russian concerns of future enlargements of NATO eastwards. Under a three-phase reform, Bulgaria has been restructuring and modernising its armed forces by creating a smaller and more mobile military force.

Bulgaria was the eighth country in Central Europe to join PIP – former President Zhelyu Zhelev signed the PIP framework agreement in 1994 – and the fourth to submit a PIP Presentation Document.

Besides the fact that PIP had developed a framework and process for non-NATO countries to work with the organisation it also established the norm that partners should be 'contributors' and marked a shift from purely multi-lateral dialogue to bi-lateral (partner and Alliance) relationships in the form of Individual Partnership Programs (IPPs) and self-differentiation, Bulgaria's active participation

A pair of Bulgarian Mi-24V Hind-Es seen while escorting two Austrian AB212s during a simulated combat search and rescue mission during CO-OPERATIVE KEY 01. A-10As also operated as an integral part of the rescue package. CARLO BRUMBER/FIAS

in the IPP-based PIP programme is aimed at preparing it for future NATO membership by improving the operational capabilities and readiness of its armed forces, and their interoperability with NATO forces. In line with the agreed IPP for 2001, Bulgaria committed itself to participation in some 500 NATO/PIP activities (including 16 NATO exercises and 34 hosted activities and some 50 activities 'in the spirit' of PIP), including the NATO/PIP exercises CO-OPERATIVE KEY 2001, CO-OPERATIVE SUPPORT 2001 and CO-OPERATIVE POSEIDONUS 2001, all three of which were held in Bulgaria.

Since 2000, the assessment of IPP has been conducted within the framework of the Planning and Review Process (PARP), a NATO-PIP programme designed to foster interoperability with NATO and prepare the

Partner Armed Forces for combined operations, these being the cornerstone of all CO-OPERATIVE KEY exercises.

Bulgarian Efforts

The 2001 exercises were similar to the previous year's CO-OPERATIVE KEY 2000 held by the Romanians at Mihail Kogalniceanu air base near Constanta. Bulgaria invited this year's participants to Graf Ignatievo air base, which now fully complies with NATO standards. Many of the buildings (including some of German Luftwaffe origin dating from World War Two) have been completely rebuilt, while other structures, such as the control tower, flightline operations centre, base HQ, cinema, housing and dining facilities and communications structure have undergone a