



Interview with Major General J.B. Andersen Danish Army, Deputy Commander of MNC NE.

Is it wise of Denmark to withdraw from HQ MNC NE?

- I often hear this rumour from Danes and unfortunately also from foreigners - and it is extremely regrettable that such false rumours can come into existence. Denmark does not withdraw from HQ MNC NE. On the contrary, Denmark's prioritisation of the Corps is clearly brought out in the Danish Defence Agreement. The reduction of 19 Danish posts has been fully in line with the other provisions of the Danish Defence Agreement but even so we are the abroad-based headquarters with the biggest number of Danish personnel. And the support, mainly from the Army Operational Command Denmark and Defence Command Denmark, fulfils the responsibilities that Denmark has towards the Corps and the agreements concluded with Germany and Poland.

How do the other nations perceive the Danish personnel reduction?

- Certainly not positively. From the HQ's perspective it is not easy to replace the Danish personnel. Not only because they all perform in a very professional manner, but also because all the Danish personnel is an important factor in the integration process. And even if the remaining personnel make an extraordinary effort, the daily Danish presence will be non-existing in some sections. And I am sure that this is going to hamper the integration process.

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How is it actually to be working at a multinational headquarters such as HQ MNC NE?

- Extremely exciting and interesting, but also challenging. Naturally, we follow NATO procedures but we also give due weight to respect the national characteristics of the 8 countries present at the HQ. It is important for us that everybody contributes with various angles. It is demanding, but the end product will often be a lot better than purely national solutions. We learn a great deal from our colleagues from the other nations. One learns to accept the fact that other people are not necessarily like Danes. At the same time, one realizes that a good product can be achieved with joint effort. We call it integration. It is not different from integration in the civilian society and we actually are rather good at it.

Can the families "survive"?

- Definitely yes. There is an international school and a good kindergarten and I believe actually that wives and children enjoy both the linguistic development and the dealings with other nations. And as always, the wives are more than busy. However, they are not only busy with taking care of the hard-working husband and the kids.

How is living in Szczecin?

- It is nearly the same as living in a Danish city with about 400 thousand inhabitants. You can buy everything and if there is something they do not have, they will get it for you. I think people are nicer and more helpful here, the traffic is more southern style-like and it is – still - cheaper to live here than in Denmark. The old cock-and-bull stories about your car that will be stolen as soon as you cross the border, that your house will be plundered regularly, or that you will be beaten up regularly, are anything but true. It is actually really good to be a guest worker here.

HQ MNC NE is not the most prioritised headquarters by Denmark. Does one move down the carrier ladder by choosing HQ MNC NE?

- Definitely no. We reflect the manning of any Danish place of duty. We promote personnel, send personnel to in-training courses and we send our colleagues back home to workplaces

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where they can employ the knowledge and experience they have gained here. No, people are dealt with in the same manner as anywhere else, maybe even better.

Does Denmark have more influence at HQ MNC NE than for instance at the HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Force (ARRC)?

- I am convinced about it. The sheer fact that Denmark participates as "Framework Nation" means that we can actively influence the development at the Corps. Denmark is a part of the Corps Committee and even presides it every 3 years. We participate in the daily management with one general, two colonels and a number of personnel that man important posts. This arrangement has not been changed, notwithstanding the Danish reduction.

Is one, generally speaking, "forgotten" when serving at HQ MNC NE?

- No. We have good contacts with the domestic authorities. We are often visited by colleagues from the Defence Staff, Defence Personnel Management, General Staff Course, Army Operational Command Denmark and Danish Division. Well, even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence representatives have often been here. The Chief of Defence takes the time to visit us and even though one visit of the Minister of Defence was scheduled, it had to be cancelled due to elections in Denmark. However, I am sure that the Minister of Defence will visit us as soon as there is place in his calendar. So we are definitely not forgotten, we receive very good support from Denmark.

You have passed the FOC test. What is it actually?

- FOC stands for Final Operational Capability. It is the test, which is to be passed by all the NATO HQs in the force structure (and the nations that make up HQ MNC NE) before they can declare their readiness. The test covers such areas as policy, operations logistics, communications and administration. It includes over 370 single criteria, which test the HQ's ability to meet the requirements in detail. The test is carried out by SHAPE whose 25 people dig into all details for 5 days. And we are actually quite proud of the result, as we have been the only HQ to pass the test without comments.

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Is this true that HQ MNC NE is going to Afghanistan?

- Yes. Presently, we are scheduled to assume the command in autumn 2007 for 6 months. Now, the structure of ISAF as well as the Headquarters' composition and tasks are being estimated. But we are scheduled to leave and we will prepare thoroughly for the task.

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