

Not only Danish, German and Polish servicemen

Written by AG

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Interview with Commander Multinational Corps Northeast, General Egon Ramms, conducted by Jan Zarzycki.

Multinational Corps Northeast with the Headquarters in Szczecin has been operating for already seven years. What has changed concerning its structure and tasks within that time?

The Corps in Szczecin was established under the decision of Ministers of Defense of Denmark, Germany and Poland and its initial purpose was integration of Poland into NATO. It was a political very proper decision. Servicemen of three big formations – Danish Mechanized Division from Haderslev, German 14th Armored Grenadiers Division from Neubrandenburg and Polish 12th Mechanized Division from Szczecin. Servicemen of those three formations were to start cooperation as part of NATO which had been joined by Germany and Denmark long time before, and Poland was a new member.

We are talking about 1999...

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In 1999, on 12th of March Poland joined NATO and on 18th September 1999 Multinational Corps Northeast started its work in Szczecin.

There have been also other significant events with that seven years of the operation of the Corps.

There have been several important steps: initiation of cooperation with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia within Partnership for Peace Cooperation and sending officers of those countries to Szczecin. In 2003 the importance of the Corps increased as it was given the rank of operational Headquarters. The latter resulted in starting intensive trainings the following year and increasing the manning from 156 to 198. The decision to increase the manning was issued by the Framework Nations – Denmark, Germany and Poland. Thus, currently there are more, German and Polish officers than at the moment when the Corps was established. Additionally there are officers from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as well as two officers from Czech Republic and eight officers and two non-commissioned officers from Slovakia. Moreover, further increase of manning of the Headquarters is planned. We have invited Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria for cooperation.

At the beginning of Headquarters' operation there were three generals and six colonels? Has anything changed in that respect?

The number of generals and colonels has not changed.

The result of the recent exercise was amazing.

The exercise was held last year in November. For ten days 23 NATO officers evaluated full operational capability of the Headquarters including support operations, communication and command post's organization. We managed to reach the best result in the history of NATO Headquarters testing.

Do authorities of the city of Szczecin and Westpomeranian province meet expectations of HQ MNC NE? What problems still need to be solved?

There are no problems to be solved. The cooperation with local authorities is very good. This year and the last year I had a meeting with Mr. Marshal – Mr. Zygmunt Meyer and the President of the City, Mr. Marian Jurczyk. I know what is the situation of Szczecin and the province and both gentlemen are acquainted with the matters related to MNC NE. As the opportunity arises I would like to thank once again Mr. Marshal for his support with establishment of international school where children of the servicemen of the Corps attend. Three years ago we got some problems with the school. However, with the support of Mr. Marshal all the problems were solved quickly and competently. We have also a good cooperation with the University of Szczecin and Maritime Academy. Our staff has organized a trip to Germany for about sixty students from Maritime Academy. They will visit bases of the Navy and they will have a chance to look into the organization and the work of the German Navy.

How do German and Danish servicemen as well as their families organize their time in

Szczecin?

They are satisfied with living in Szczecin. They are getting to know the city, its citizens. They participate in the social life of the city. Small children attend kindergartens, older ones schools and the oldest ones universities. Young children and adolescents integrate very fast. It is amazing how quickly they acquire a language. They are members of sports clubs, they have Polish friends and they live in Polish environment. Their parents have more difficulties to learn Polish language but they try not to lay behind. They often go to Philharmonic concerts, opera and make use of commercial offers of the city. I am talking also about servicemen of Baltic States, Czech Republic and Slovakia. They all rent flats and houses from Polish families. They do not live in isolated districts. This situation facilitates integration. Many servicemen spend their vacations with families in Poland. They go to Mazurian lakes, Carpathian Mountains and to the seaside. Additionally there are organizing tourist trips to the famous cities of Poland like Kraków, Gdańsk and Warszawa. Recently, there has been organized a trip to Wrocław.

In July next year MNC NE will face a difficult test – an operation in Afghanistan. What is the level of preparations for this task?

It is not a test. It is a military operation. Ministers of Defense of the Framework Nations have taken the decision, and we treat it as a natural course of action. The Headquarters has been developing and increasing its manning since its establishment in 1999. The combat readiness of the MNC NE has been shown and now it is time for real life operations. As a consequence we will introduce changes to trainings and character of the exercise. We will start to train situations, which may occur in Afghanistan, such as peace support operations and crisis management operations. I believe there is no need to explain the importance of such trainings. We have also started to train civilian and military cooperation and also we are getting acquainted with the history and the religion of the country. We are learning how to cooperate with governmental organizations of Afghanistan and international non-governmental organizations. Our aim is to practice all potential situations, which may appear including situations related to contacts with civilians in Afghanistan.

How many servicemen of the Corps will go to Afghanistan?

About one hundred ninety. Using the opportunity I would like to mention a very important issue – families of the servicemen who will go on a mission to Afghanistan. All those families will stay in Szczecin and they will get support from HQ MNC NE and not only. They will need support from the President of the City and Mr. Marshal I will apply with such request to both gentlemen during our planned meeting. Civilian employees will provide support in contacts of families of servicemen who will go on a mission with representatives of city and province authorities.

Thank you for the interview.