

GEORGIA: SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF DEMILITARIZATION PROJECT

November 2009



Mr. David Towndrow, NAMS Representative giving a speech at the closing ceremony of Georgia II

On 30 November 2009, the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMS) marked the successful completion of a NATO PfP Trust Fund demilitarization project in Georgia by way of a closing ceremony, held at the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel. The event was attended by a number of parties directly or indirectly engaged in the project – representatives of NATO/NAMS, the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, non-governmental organisations and accredited foreign missions.

The NATO PfP Trust Fund project, led by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and executed by NAMS, was aimed at destroying stockpiles of obsolete unguided rockets. In addition to the Lead and Host Nations, contributions were received from six NATO nations, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom and the United States, and three Partner nations, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland.

The project, with a budget of EUR 478,214, began in October 2008. The disposal of 8,751 unguided rockets, including 1,051 Air-to-Surface S-8 missiles and 7,700 anti-hail Alazan and Kristal rockets, was achieved in less than 11 months, well in advance of the planned completion date. The anti-hail rockets have frequently been used by irregular forces in conflicts in many post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, during the last two decades.

As the NAMS representative Mr. David Towndrow noted at the closing ceremony, the success of the project was largely attributable to the excellent collaboration between the Georgian MoD, the Lead Nations and Delta, the main demilitarization contractor.

This was the second time that Delta, an MoD-sponsored private organisation, has acted as NAMS's contractor for a NATO PfP Trust Fund project in Georgia. A similar project, to destroy 314 Surface-to-Air guided S-75 and 216 "Krug" anti-aircraft missiles, was carried out in 2003-2006. Delta has also successfully undertaken tasks to destroy artillery and aviation munitions on behalf of the OSCE and has recently completed a project funded by the US State Department, to demilitarize S-125 missiles.

This latest NATO PfP Trust Fund project was carried out at Ponichala facility (25 km from Tbilisi) and consisted of two phases, a Preparation Phase and a Main Works Phase, with EUR 110,000 and EUR 199,240, respectively. Rockets were transported to Ponichala from two different military bases in Georgia, Dedoplistkaro and Vartsikhe. As part of the Preparation

Phase, which lasted four months, several buildings were refurbished at Ponichala to be used as demilitarization workshops and for the storage of rockets and propellant. A large element of the budget was used to repair the road leading to the base and to provide an uninterrupted electricity and water supply to the facility.



At the demilitarization workshop in Ponichala

Before commencing demilitarization activity, Delta developed a comprehensive Quality Plan and other documentation, later approved by NAMSA, which established a framework ensuring that the highest possible technical and safety standards were employed during the project. Many of the rockets demilitarized under NAMSA's project were in poor state, partly because of their age – they were produced in the mid and late 1980s – and partly because of the inadequacy of storage conditions.

It was identified during receipt of the munitions at the Ponichala base that about 16% of the total number of Alazan and Kristal rockets were damaged or had been partially dismantled.

After a relatively slow start, which was mainly caused by the need to streamline the technical procedures, Delta doubled its projected production rate to over 100 rockets per day, thus completing the main demilitarization works in July. The last task of the demilitarization process was a disposal of the propellant extracted from the rockets. It took several trials to find a technically sound and safe method to dispose of 24 tons of propellant that were recovered from the rockets, at a special burning site in Ponichala.



Disposal of recovered propellant at special burning site in Ponichala

Although the demilitarization project is over, NAMSA will stay engaged in Georgia. A new project, which aims to assist the country in addressing the problem of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) – a legacy of last year's conflict with Russia –, is planned to start soon. The project will enhance the capabilities and capacities of the Military Engineers' battalion with much needed training and equipment, thus enabling it to successfully cope with the problem.