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## **U.S., EASTERN EUROPEAN PARTNERS CONDUCT TRAINING IN BULGARIA**

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Ukraine joined with the United States, Bulgaria, and Serbia this month to bolster defenses and strengthen security across the greater Black Sea region in a five-day, live-fire combat training exercise at the Shabla Air Defense Firing Range here.

The Shabla Multinational Joint Live Fire Exercise ran July 14-18 and featured U.S. Army units together with air force, army, and naval units from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Ukraine. It was one of several training exercises taking place this month in conjunction with Saber Guardian 2017, an annual exercise that U.S. European Command and several European partner nations participate in each year together under U.S. European Command's Joint Exercise Program.

Saber Guardian's training events engage multiple air, land and naval forces in a variety of coordinated activities throughout the exercise joint operations area. The Shabla training event's focus was short-range missile capabilities.

In some Shabla drills, troops from all four countries launched surface-to-air rockets from stationary launch pads and vehicles at aerial targets deployed by Bulgarian helicopters and jets overhead. In other drills, Bulgarian fighter jets fired missiles at targets floating on the sea.

### **Partnership**

"You have seen here a lot of components launching from the air, from the surface, from surface to air. This is something I call 'multi-functional exercise,'" said Lt. Gen. Leonid Holopatiuk, deputy defense minister of Ukraine. "This is the practical example of how partnership works."

The exercise closed July 18 with a public live-fire demonstration in which Stryker vehicles launched missiles and aircraft flew maneuvers above an audience that included the Bulgarian president, the Bulgarian chief of defense, military officers and personnel from all four participating countries, and members of the international media.

"We have to cooperate with our Black Sea neighbors to create a new security structure on the Black Sea. We have to build up our armed forces and navy. And cooperation among our militaries on the tactical level is very much important for that. That's why we're here," Holopatiuk said.

He added, "We've brought our crews here. We have launched. And we have seen our soldiers out there with their Bulgarian, Serbian, and U.S. partners. They are all like one team. There are no divisions or political influences coming between them. They just care about professionalism, about cooperation, about how to help each other. This is the future."

Army Maj. Gen. Timothy McGuire, deputy commander of U.S. Army Europe, attended and praised the cooperation among the U.S. and European troops. He told reporters that multinational exercises like Shabla not only improve each military force's weapons capabilities, but also deepen their shared camaraderie, intercommunications and skills at operating with each other in a crisis.

"Any time you can get nations together to train together, we learn from each other," McGuire told reporters. "That interaction enhances our interoperability, enhances our readiness, and makes sure that we are better prepared to maintain the peace here in Europe."

#### Anti-Aircraft Artillery

The Shabla exercise's focus on short-range defense artillery capable of fending off enemy aircraft is also important, said Col. David Shank, commander of the 10th Army Air and Missile Command. He said that the U.S. Army's Office of the Chief of Staff lists procuring anti-aircraft artillery as one of its top three priorities, and that these systems will be present in many more U.S.-Europe exercises in the next few years.

"You will see, in the near future, the activation of Stinger formations, the growth of air-defense short-range artillery systems," Shank said.

While Shabla was not a NATO-led exercise, Col. Valeri Tsenov of the Bulgarian army said his country hosts the exercise, in part, to keep up its commitment to NATO's collective security. Bulgaria has been a NATO member since 2004 and participates in numerous exercises with NATO partners, including air-defense exercises, Tsenov said.

"We are an element of NATO's integrated air and missile defense. And our ground structures here form a small, but significant, part of this system," he said. "And air defense is part of the overall defense process."

By Rick Docksai

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1260222/us-eastern-european-partners-conduct-training-in-bulgaria/>

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