The European Front

Erich Weissenböck, Project Officer Engagement, European Defence Agency (EDA) Capability Directorate discusses the organisation's support for national Soldier Modernisation efforts

Q: The Project Team 21st Century Soldier System (PT 21st CSS) is the core to the EDA's soldier activities. Can you give me an overview of progress in the last twelve months?

A: The main topics of the EDA's work on the 21st Century Soldier System are: coordination of ongoing projects; reflection on lessons learned from national soldier modernisation programmes and on urgent operational requirements as well as information exchange on promising technical solutions. The driving factors for the work of the Project Team are to collectively address capability gaps and to further define capability requirements, especially to the benefit of the Category B programmes Combat Equipment Dismounted Soldier (CEDS) and Soldier Centric Identification for Dismounted Soldier (SCIS). In addition, Personnel Recovery was addressed with the elaboration of a European Concept and the definition of the Personnel Recovery system and architecture. These are important activities in view of the requirements for the equipment of the soldier.

Q: Combat Equipment Dismounted Soldier (CEDS) and Soldier Centric Identification System (SCIS) have been going for several years now and would appear (at least to me) to be the most mature. Is there any news regarding the status of a demonstrator?

A: The foreseen time horizon for the development of the European Combat Equipment for Dismounted Soldiers is 2015 and beyond. The delivery of the core Common Staff Requirement and the definition of modules and components, which are key to interoperability, are progressing on schedule. So, we are approaching the end of the capability elaborations. Based on capability requirements, which were evaluated against technology readiness, 14 technology gaps have been identified. These will be addressed by feasibility studies in the timeframe of the next three years by the nine Member States already cooperating in this project, thereby particularly reflecting the results from ongoing R&T activities within the EDA Joint Investment Programme on Force Protection.

Member States are addressing SCIS within a shorter timeframe and consequently, the definition of capability requirements is already connected to possible technical solutions. A demonstrator of one identified technical solution will be available at the end of this year. The technical readiness level of the second possible solution would need to be increased before having an equipment demonstrator available. Member States are currently assessing the possibility for further cooperation.

Q: Can you point to new projects that have begun to improve capabilities in a specific area of soldier modernisation? I noted for example the Joint Investment Programme Innovative Concept and Emerging Technologies work, looking at new materials and structures and navigation architectures

A: R&T activities, especially within the Joint Investment Programme on Force Protection (JIP-FP) will produce technology demonstrators and study results in the next two years – the first output will be available by mid 2010. Enhanced protective equipment for the soldier, innovative solutions for a wireless robust link for urban operations, possibilities for sensor fusion or on sniper detection represent some products, which will contribute to improving modules of soldier's equipment. A direct link is established between the study contractors and national representatives in the projects to get synchronised and tailored study results. Joint Investment programme Innovative Concept and Emerging Technologies (JIP-ICET) looks into technologies such as nano-materials and structures, remote detection and health monitoring. Results will come by early 2012. Findings will be integrated in CEDS via Member States, who are participating in both programmes.

Q: Beyond these projects, has the EDA begun or is planning to begin other future projects in this field that feed into PT 21st CSS?

A: Solutions for the recovery of persons in isolated locations in a theatre of operations, covering civilian and military activities, are developed in the Personnel Recovery project. The aim is to establish an interoperable capability connecting available national technical solutions as well as to harmonise long-term requirements. I would expect a good solution to be integrated in future soldier's equipment.

Q: Has the number of countries participating in the PT 21st CSS area grown at all?

A: The number of participating Member States has not changed – but I have the impression that there is a growing willingness to cooperate. Member States assess the value of cooperation in projects very accurately and consequently contributions are more reliable.

Q: Can you provide any insight into developments in regards to the EU-NATO Capability Group?

A: Soldier modernisation activities are on the agenda of the EU-NATO Capability Group. Both institutions already know the aim of each others' ongoing projects. On a daily basis the staff-to-staff contacts are of higher importance to avoid duplication and to develop synergies in detail. And the experts from Member States, who participate in respective working groups in both organisations, guarantee the complementarity of efforts by EDA and NATO.

Q: What is happening in the EDA's Materiel Standardisation Group and what progress has been made with EDSIS in support of soldier modernisation?

A: As NATO Standardization Agreements are used, no additional requirements have been identified so far. But coming closer to addressing technical specifications, there might be some needs in the future.

Q: Are there any developments in your work with the Soldier Prime Contractor Team?

A: In general, earlier proposals for R&T activities of the Soldier Prime Contractor Team are reflected in the JIP-FP and results will be of high value for national or

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multinational soldier modernisation programmes. As capability requirements are going to be finalised and conclusions on additional R&T requirements are already discussed within the CEDS programme, contributing Member States are organising capable companies via national industry focal points. This Industry Group will provide expertise for addressing identified R&T gaps.

Q: How is what the PT 21st CSS is seeking to achieve been affected by lessons learned from Afghanistan and how do you incorporate these lessons? I am also interested in whether when you synthesize requirements from that theatre whether there is a consensus amongst the nations or whether you have identified different requirements that you have had to reconcile?

A: We provide the platform to discuss national requirements and in addition we provide inputs from the European point of view. Discussions are also based on a Lessons Learned database, which is implemented in European Union Military Staff, and additional case studies, like an Afghanistan lessons learned study which was recently contracted by EDA. However, at the end of the day Member States decide how to address findings.

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Q: One of the requirements for PT 21st CSS is "new technologies". Is there anything genuinely new that is being worked on?

A: PT 21st CSS is a platform, where capability planners assess new technologies, trying to identify new applications. There are some areas, where new technologies will provide new capabilities. Through wall vision capacity could be one example. In addition, Joint Investment Programme results will soon provide more information on new technologies, which will improve soldiers' equipment.

Q: What are the particular challenges of coalition operations and complex groupings of friendly elements?

A: Interoperability is a fundamental requirement for joint, multinational operations. It requires harmonised concepts and procedures at all levels, technical standards and equipment synergy as well as a willingness to cooperate and commit resources in the development phases of equipment. In this regard, the identification of own forces is a very good example, where interoperability is essential. This remains to be improved. I strongly believe that SCIS initiatives will contribute to address capability gaps in this area.

Q: Do you feel that the immediate demands of meeting requirements for Afghanistan and other current mission can obscure the need for longer term plans which is an area that the EDA is well placed to meet?

A: I am deeply convinced that lessons from operations provide the guide for high quality equipment. Physical, psychological and personal capabilities of the soldier are to be reflected to develop the right tools for missions. Missions can be different; therefore modularity of the equipment is the key for success – even for long term plans: modules can be updated and renewed.

Q: The EDA seems to expand its coverage of its Soldier system activities a little from time to time but some areas always remain outside its scope such as weaponry and ammunition, protective eyewear and hearing protection for example. How does the EDA make its decisions about what to address and what to ignore or leave for later?

A: Nine Member States are harmonising capability requirements in all lines of development within the CEDS programme – protection and lethality are of course part of these elaborations. In addition, interoperability requirements are being identified. Consequently, there will not be a need to use the same weapons in crisis management operations, but identification of friends, software for the computer unit, power supply and communications could be identified to be common – the final discussion is yet to be conducted. The business case, which will lead to cooperation in procurement, will provide the final answer. ■