



# "Soldat 2015" to Soldat der Zukunft

Lt. Col. Johannes Bogner, Head of Project Team, Soldat der Zukunft, discusses Austria's two-fold policy to provide both near term capability enhancements and a formal soldier modernisation programme

***Austria's Future Soldier or Soldat der Zukunft programme began in 2008 with the commencement of work in preparation for a roughly two year definition phase, due to conclude in 2011 at which point a decision would be made on moving to the procurement phase of the programme which is now expected not to begin before 2015.***

Lt. Col. Johannes Bogner, Head of Project Team Soldat der Zukunft explained that during that time the Austrian defence budget has, like others in the soldier community tightened. This factor as well as observations from the Austrian project team that other programmes around the world that had begun prior to that of Austria were also experiencing delays has helped determine the country's current Soldier Modernisation strategy.

Lt. Col. Bogner said, "We discussed this at length in the Ministry of Defence and the decision that was made has two main elements. First that we will continue the programme on an extended timeline after 2011 by elaborating the planning documents. We have also extended the programme accordingly to harmonise our national programme with the European Defence Agency Cat B Programme, Combat Equipment for Dismounted Soldiers (CEDS) where we are a contributing member state. Second, as we are nevertheless contributing to different theatres we still have some capability gaps which have to be closed. We are trying to close those capability gaps with what we internally call Soldier 2015."

## **Soldat 2015**

The Soldier 2015 programme will be focused on troops tasked to deploy overseas with Lt. Col. Bogner citing Austria's contribution to the EU Battlegroup as one example.

Lt. Col. Bogner said, "The priority areas for the first stage are protection and C4I or, more accurately elements of C4I. A new radio, new headsets and hearing protection and we are also trying to create some kind of head system. It is not a helmet system but a head system, consisting of protecting different areas of the head, eyes, ears and so on."

The 'head system' will consist of a helmet which must have at least the same protection as the current system, being lighter and more comfortable and must also be compatible with some additional sub-systems. As examples Lt. Col. Bogner cites hearing protection, eye protection, NBC mask, hearing protection headsets and it must also be compatible with the ballistic body posture.

He added, "There are some open points which still have to be discussed but this is more or less the system as it will work. The helmet is one of the main components by the requirement. There are also some operational demands because we need some equipment very, very quickly and it could be that some other components could be procured in advance of this."

Whether equipment acquired under Soldat 2015 will be phased into Soldat der Zukunft has yet to be determined. Lt. Col. Bogner said, "If it is usable in the next two to three years after it is acquired it will, as much as possible be part of the Soldat der Zukunft programme. However, we are not yet talking about acquiring Soldat der Zukunft, we are still at the planning stage and the procurement phase will be started after this is completed."

The background to this is the EDA's CEDS programme which has now changed from the Definition Stage to the Research & Technology Stage. Lt. Col. Bogner said, "We have detected some capability gaps that can only be closed by research and technology activities

and the results of this work will find itself in the CEDS requirements document. It is a living document and we are contributing to that document. In parallel, we are working on our national planning documents but using CEDS outputs. We are a financial contributor to CEDS so it is entirely normal that we would also use these results for our national programmes."

## **Soldat der Zukunft**

The legacy equipment that will be brought into the programme has already been defined. Lt. Col. Bogner said that the current clothing had recently been acquired and that currently, there were no plans for fully integrated CBRN equipment.

Addressing lethality and Austria's in service Steyr AUG /StG 77 assault rifle, Lt. Col. Bogner said, "The weapon systems itself will have to be modified because the regular soldier's weapon does not have a Picatinny rail and instead has integrated optics. We have other versions of that weapon but we certainly have to improve the StG 77/A1."

A part of recent modernisation efforts, Austria acquired a new range of HF and VHF Combat Net Radios (CNRs) from the now Elbit Systems Land and C4I – Tadiran. These radios have recently begun fielded to the first battalions and is due to conclude next year. Lt. Col. Bogner explained that no BMS had been acquired as part of this programme although requirements do exist and that as part of the Soldat der Zukunft planning phase there was a requirement both to interface with these CNRs and to operate with any future BMS. ■