

LEAN & MEAN

The recent 'Ušće' 2011 display exercise in Belgrade saw Serbia showcase a smaller, all-professional air force.

The Serbian Armed Forces (Voska Srbije, VS) 'Ušće' 2011 (Confluence 2011) display exercise was held in Belgrade as part of the commemoration of Serbia's National Day and Day of the Armed Forces — February 15. Staged on the preceding Sunday, February 13, 'Ušće' 2011 took place in a large park about a mile from the city center, located on the confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers. With the last conscripts due to leave the VS as this magazine went to press, 'Ušće' 2011 aimed to show a now fully professional, more efficient and re-equipped force to the Serbian public and high-ranking guests. Among the latter were President Boris Tadić, Minister of Defense Dragan Šutanovac, VS Chief of Staff Gen Miloje Milić, plus cabinet ministers and diplomats.

In line with Serbia's intention to become a respected member of the international community, the main focus of the exercise were those units dedicated to multi-national operations: a military police platoon, one CBRN platoon, and one motorized infantry company. Meanwhile, the Serbian AF (Vazduhoplovstvo i protivvazduhoplovna odbrana, ViPVO) displayed most of its assets. For the rehearsal days on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the weather was much more pleasant than for the Sunday display, but still challenging for flying VFR, with horizontal visibility described by participating pilots as 'very poor'.

'Ušće' 2011 was the largest single ViPVO operational activity so far this year, with a total of 106 flights and 57 hours 30 minutes logged by 17 aircraft during preparations and the display itself. Both main flying units, recently re-named from aviation bases to brigades, took part, namely the

Batajnica-based 204th Aviation Brigade (204. vazduhoplovna brigada) and the 98th Aviation Brigade (98. vazduhoplovna brigada) from Lađevci. These were joined by Lasta 95 primary trainers displayed by the Center for Flight Research, which is not formally under ViPVO command.

The ViPVO action began with the appearance of SA342L Gazelle 12879 reconnoitering the route for the following package. After the convoy was 'ambushed', some more potent helicopters were called into action: three SA341H Gamas (12806, 12820 and 12821) from the Lađevci-based 714. protivoklopna helikopterska eskadrila 'Senke' (714th Anti-armor Helicopter Squadron 'Shadows') to neutralize the ambushers. The Gama is a locally developed Gazelle variant (with the Serbian designation HN-42M and HN-45M) armed with up to four 9M14M Malyutka (AT-3 'Swatter') anti-tank missiles and two 9M32M

report and photos:
Igor Salinger



G-4 Super Galebs join two MiG-29s that are on 'combat air patrol' during the demonstration. Maj G. Savić

Strela-2M (SA-7 'Grail') anti-aircraft missiles. All the action took place above a very tightly confined 'range', measuring around 200m by 100m. The cramped airspace above made planning and co-ordination especially demanding, and credit for much of the organization goes to the ViPVO's Col Predrag Bandić and his crew on the ground, acting as forward air controllers. Shortly after the exercise, Col Bandić was appointed as the new commander of the 204th Aviation Brigade, replacing the retiring Brig Gen Mirko Vranić.

Needless to say, the aircraft carried no external stores, and no live munitions were fired. When the Gamas 'attacked' their targets, pyrotechnics were detonated on the ground. Just as the Gazelles departed, three G-4 Super Galebs from 252. školsko-trenažna avijacijska eskadrila 'Kurjaci sa Ušća' (252nd Training Squadron 'River-mouth Wolves') appeared on the scene ready to provide support, releasing flares to add realism.

A very welcome sight was the appearance of two MiG-29s on 'combat air patrol'. The aircraft comprised the sole remaining two-seater, 18301, that had been grounded for nearly two years due to an avionics problem, and single-seater 18102, the last Serbian 'Fulcrum' to undergo overhaul and a modest upgrade. Both returned to the air late last year and 18301 is now expected to resume pilot training and conversion to the type.

While the MiG-29s circled at an unrepresentative 1,000ft, Mi-8T 12269 appeared low over the Danube and landed on the range, delivering members of the Special Brigade in what appeared to be a medical evacuation mission. The helicopter itself was painted in a new and apparently experimental three-tone camouflage scheme. With the MiG-29s circling in tight turns above, the Mi-8 hovering, and other helicopters in 'waiting zones', it was somewhat surprising to see An-26 71364

flying low and picking its way through the traffic! The transport made a 'virtual supply drop' to the friendly forces below.

The final part of 'Ušće' 2011 included Special Brigade forces rappelling from Mi-8 12270 for a simulated counter-terrorist mission, with SA342L 12895 providing sniper cover. The display concluded with a demo flight by a new Utva Lasta 95 trainer. During the rehearsal it was interesting to see an Iraqi AF Lasta 95 (YI-173) in action, while for the display itself test pilot Lt Col Salko Hadžić elegantly flew first prototype 54011. On the ground, a white Lasta 95 was shown in Serbian AF markings but no serial — apparently it was an export machine, likely part of the fifth batch for Iraq, on its way from the Utva factory to Batajnica airfield for testing.

In a bid to make it more efficient, the Serbian AF is returning some technical staff to flying squadrons and trying to put back into service as many aircraft as possible, including two-seaters for pilot

This autumn the ViPVO will receive its first female pilots. Sandra Radovanović and Ana Tadić, seen here, have both soloed in the G-4 Super Galeb.





Above: Special forces troops spill from a Mi-8T in what appears to be a medical evacuation mission.

training. This autumn the ViPVO is also set to receive its first three female pilots, when they graduate from the Military Academy. Anja Krneta, Sandra Radovanović and Ana Tadić enrolled in 2007 as part of the 132nd Military Academy class. Krneta made her first solo in the Gazelle in October 2010; Radovanović soloed in the G-4 Super Galeb in December, while Tadić was due to solo in the G-4 in February.



This photograph: The pilot of SA342L Gazelle 12879 maneuvers aggressively as the exercise scenario unfolds.

