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ITALY CONFIRMS OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY OF SAMP/T AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM WITH TWO ASTER 30 MISSILE FIRINGS

The Italian Army has successfully conducted two test firings of its Aster 30 missile as part of the operational evaluation of the SAMP/T air defence missile system.

The SAMP/T is a land-based air defence system, incorporating the MBDA ASTER 30 missile, designed to protect land forces and sensitive sites and zones from conventional threats such as aircraft, UAV's, helicopters and the new generation of stand-off missiles and short range ballistic missiles.

The two firings were carried out by the army at the PISQ (Poligono Interforze Salto di Quirra) joint armed forces test range in Sardinia. For both firings, the full operational configuration of the SAMP/T weapon system was tested entirely autonomously by the Italian army unit. The system included an additional Command Module to manage the system deployment and the links with the upper defence network.

For the first firing, conducted on 22nd May, the Aster 30 missile was launched against a Mirach 100 aerial target flying at low altitude at approximately 150 metres. The system correctly tracked the target at a range of 25 km from the battery and intercepted it target within 15 km over the test range waters.

During the second firing, on 26th May, a more complex scenario was demonstrated. This involved a patrol of two Mirach 100 targets flying towards the SAMP/T system Flying Control Unit. Under the scenario, the system tracked the patrol, correctly identified the selected "attacking" target and intercepted it at 21km during its evasive manoeuvre.

Both trials were a total success with the complete range of test objectives achieved.

SAMP/T MBDA Project Head in the Aster missile systems directorate, Moreno Bossini, said: "This is a key moment for the programme as our customer, the Italian Army, has tested the capability of the SAMP/T system using a fully trained unit carrying out an operational procedure".

Underlining the importance of the firings, Antoine Bouvier, MBDA's CEO, said: "These firings mark an important milestone for European cooperation in the ground-based air defence sector, paving the way as they do for the entry into service of a world-beating air defence capability for the Italian Army as well as for the French armed forces."

Both firings were conducted as part of the ATOC (Acceptance Test of Operational Capabilities) that the Italian Army and the French Army and Air Force are conducting throughout 2008.

Notes to editors

The ASTER modular family of vertically-launched missiles is being developed under the leadership of MBDA within the Franco-Italian FSAF (Future Surface-to-Air Family) programme. Under this programme, France and Italy agreed to develop and produce a family of air defence systems for the armed forces of both countries.

These comprise:

SAMP/T: The land-based medium-range area defence system using the Aster 30 (120km

range) missile for the French and Italian armies as well as the French air force. SAMP/T comprises a fire control system based on multifunction electronic scanning radar and a Vertical Ground Launcher, mounted on Italian Astra/Iveco and French Renault-TRM 10000 trucks, capable of firing eight missiles in rapid sequence. The Aster 30 missile system offers high-level tactical and strategic mobility and due to its high rate of fire is capable of countering saturating threats. Ten systems are on order for France (for the army and the air force) and five for Italy. This includes the evolved Block 1 version of the missile, which, with its extended TBMD capability, will be capable of intercepting missiles of the 600km class. MBDA is also developing a further system growth known as Aster 30 Block 2, capable of countering theatre ballistic missiles with a much longer range.

The SAMP/T ASTER 30 munition qualification trials were concluded at the end of 2003. SAMP/T ASTER 30 is now available for the export market and the munition is in series production.

SAAM (Surface-to-Air Anti-Missile): A naval point defence system using the Aster 15 (30km range) missile for the French and Italian navies.

PAAMS (Principal Anti-Air Missile System): A subsequent trilateral agreement signed between France, Italy and the United Kingdom resulted in the development of a third naval air defence system forming part of the Aster family, known as PAAMS (Principal Anti-Air Missile System). PAAMS utilises a mix of Aster 15 and Aster 30 missiles to provide self-defence for the host ship, local area defence of nearby vessels as well the wider defence of the fleet.

With an annual turnover exceeding €3 billion, a forward order book of over €13 billion and over 90 customers world wide, MBDA is a world leading, global missile systems company. MBDA currently has 45 missile system and countermeasure programmes in operational service and has proven its ability as prime contractor to head major multi-national projects.

MBDA is jointly owned by BAE SYSTEMS (37.5%), EADS (37.5%) and FINMECCANICA (25%).

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