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Hungary Marks First 10 Years of Gripen Operations

Senior representatives of the Hungarian government, the Hungarian and Swedish Armed Forces, the Embassy of Sweden to Hungary, Swedish Defence Materiel Administration and Saab, came together on 4 March 2016 to celebrate Hungary's first 'Gripen decade' at MH 59, Szentgyörgyi Dezső Airbase, Kecskemét.

The Gripen ceremony was attended by senior representatives of Hungarian and Swedish governments, headed by Tamás Vargha Deputy Minister of Defence, along with Brigadier General Albert Sáfár, Air Chief of Hungarian Defence Forces Joint Force Command, Brigadier General Csaba Ugrik, commander at HDF 59th SZD Airbase, Major General Mats Helgesson, Swedish Air Force Chief of Staff and Captain Johan Stridh, Commander of the Swedish Air Force support group in Hungary.

Brigadier General Csaba Ugrik, base commander at HDF 59th SZD Airbase, Kecskemét, said that the past 10 years of experience show Gripen to be a very capable, reliable, and affordable aircraft, which gives the Hungarian Air Force full control of the air domain, both now and in the future.

“Co-operation with the Hungarian Air Force has always been smooth and effective and we are pleased to work with a team that has achieved so much success at home and in all its international operations,” said Jerker Ahlqvist, head of Gripen, Saab business area Aeronautics.

The ceremony included a hand-over to the Hungarian Air Force by the Swedish Air Force support group that helped with the introduction and transition to the Gripen system, along with day-to-day support for Hungary over the last 10 years.

“We are very thankful for the long and intensive support of the Swedish Air Force support group that helped us to operate our fully NATO interoperable Gripen fleet with such success in the past 10 years,” said Brigadier General Csaba Ugrik.

With the introduction of Gripen, the Hungarian Air Force successfully transitioned into a modern and effective NATO air force. This was recently underlined when the Hungarian Air Force successfully completed its participation in the Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission. Four Hungarian Gripen fighters and about 80 personnel deployed to undertake the BAP mission in September 2015. The Hungarian contingent assumed responsibility for the air defence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania for four months, ensuring the security of the region and the NATO Alliance.

Saab AB (publ)Postal address
SE-581 88 Linköping
SwedenTelephone
+46 (0)13 18 00 00Telefax
+46 (0)13 18 72 00Registered office
LinköpingRegistered No
556036-0793VAT No
SE556036079301Internet address
www.saabgroup.com



Recently the Hungarian Air Force has started to train for night flying missions using newly-delivered night vision goggles (NVGs). This capability will further enhance the combat readiness of the Hungarian Air Force and boost the contribution of Hungary's Gripens to international missions.

In 2001 the Swedish and Hungarian governments entered into a lease-purchase agreement, with a further modification in 2003, which included 14 Gripen C/D (12 single-seat plus two twin-seat) aircraft. All Gripens were delivered in 2006 and 2007 and, by the end of 2008, the 14 aircraft were in operational service with the Hungarian Air Force. In January 2012, the leasing agreement with Sweden was extended until 2026.

For further information, please contact:

Saab Press Centre,
+46 (0)734 180 018,

presscentre@saabgroup.com

www.saabgroup.com

www.saabgroup.com/YouTube

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Postal address
SE-581 88 Linköping
Sweden

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+46 (0)13 18 00 00

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