

### RUSSIAN PLANES ON NATO BASE HELP PORTUGAL TO TACKLE WILDFIRE

*Portugal was facing serious forest fires recently. As ever in the dry summer season this occurs easily but the amount and intensity of fires in Southern Europe were on a dramatic scale. Every firefighting equipment, civil or military, was heavily used. In overwhelming situations countries call for international help. Portugal was responded by Russia, sending two Beriev Be 200ES Altair firefighting planes owned by the Russian Emergencies Ministry of the Russian State.*

Portugal was facing serious forest fires recently. As ever in the dry summer season this occurs easily but the amount and intensity of fires in Southern Europe were on a dramatic scale. Every firefighting equipment, civil or military, was heavily used. In overwhelming situations countries call for international help. Portugal was responded by Russia, sending two Beriev Be 200ES Altair firefighting planes owned by the Russian Emergencies Ministry of the Russian State.

### LIMITED ASSETS FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

The aircraft were based on the NATO base Monte Real near Leiria which of course is a strange sight. Portugal however was very pleased by the international back up of Russia and prime minister Antonio Costa personally thanked the Russian Emergency Ministry. Alexei Vagutovich, head of the press service of Russian Emergency Ministry says 'We are always ready to help but only if we will receive the go-ahead from the government'. Portugal initially adopted the European Civil Protection Mechanism on August 10 which is supposed to help the country deal with emergencies such as wildfires.

However the European Union announced that the availability of air assets is limited because of serious forest fire in the whole Southern Europe region. After that Portugal sent a request to Russia, the two Berievs arrived from Ramenskoye airfield (Zhukovsky) near Moscow on August 13 and were also seen in September at Monte Real. The forestfires were threatening villages with thousands of people. Travelling from Porto to the southbound in the direction to Lisbon kilometers of burned forest could be observed on both sides of the main highway in the Aveiro area after the successful extinguishing. Also fire spread in the direction of the Sierra de Estrela National Park in the east of Portugal was prevented by the Russian planes.

### BE-200ES EFFECTIVE

Russia was performing a first class job and was helped by two Spanish Canadairs and two Moroccan planes. The Beriev Be-200ES Altair is one of the world's most effective aircraft in extinguishing forest fires. The plane splashes down on a lake, and in only a few seconds it takes up 12.6 tonnes of water in an internal bay which it then drops over the fire. The aircraft's crew is used to work in difficult conditions and has extensive experience in fire-fighting. The Be-200's of Russian Emergencies Ministry saw previous action in Serbia and Greece but were never that far in NATO area like Portugal. Curious was also to see the planes on the concrete of Monte Real facing Belgian and Portuguese F-16's training for an air fete on Monte Real at September 18th.

### BATTLE AGAINST FOREST FIRES IS ALSO A POLITICAL ISSUE

Portugal faces every year this problem and might as well call Russia again. Thousands of men are involved in the battle against the forest fires, they are called 'Bombeiros'. The Major of

Lisbon Fernando Medina replied proudly on questions of the press about what progress was made in fire-fighting in the recent period including this Russian aid during the annual manifestation at September 11<sup>th</sup> of the Bombeiros in Lisbon.

---

Kees Otten & Wim Das

---