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Tennessee and Bulgaria Celebrates 30 Years of Partnership

SOFIA, Bulgaria – This year, the Tennessee National Guard and the Bulgarian Armed Forces celebrate more than three decades of cooperation as one of original partners in the National Guard’s State Partnership Program. To mark this milestone, the two organizations held more than 30 bilateral engagements throughout the year culminating in a two-day conference and celebration held in Sofia, Bulgaria, Sept. 28-29.

The multifaceted conference served as both a tribute to past achievements and an opportunity to plan future military cooperation projects and exercises.

“As one of the initial 13 teams to join the State Partnership Program in 1993, I am proud to say that over the past 30 years, we have formed a bond that goes beyond borders.” said Brig. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee’s Adjutant General. “We have learned from one another and cultivated a mutually beneficial relationship founded on trust with a shared goal of global peace and security.”

Since becoming partners, Tennessee and Bulgaria have collaborated on over 600 bilateral training exercises and cultural engagements through the State Partnership Program. Each of these events strengthen both organizations and make them stronger partners.

“As we look towards the future of our partnership, we will continue to prioritize modernization, upgrade equipment, boost readiness, and enhancing mobility; we will continue to foster cultural exchanges, deepen personal relationships, and create long-lasting friendships between our nations,” said Ross.

The Tennessee delegation visiting Bulgaria included the state command team and leadership from all five of the Army National Guard’s major subordinate commands; Chattanooga’s 230th Sustainment Brigade, Jackson’s 194th Engineer Brigade, Knoxville’s 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Smyrna’s 117th Regional Training Institute, Tullahoma’s 30th Troop Command, and the three Air National Guard Wings; the 118th Wing in Nashville, the 164th Airlift Wing in Memphis, and the 134th Air Refueling Wing in Knoxville.

On Sept. 28, each leadership team partnered with their Bulgarian counterparts at the Rakovski National Defense College to discuss their capabilities and how they can continue contributing to and advancing the partnership and continue improving each nations capability.



“We discussed potential options for comprehensive optimization of planning based on the priorities in terms of preparation, which arise from the process of modernization of the defense system of the Republic of Bulgaria,” said Bulgaria’s Deputy Chief of Defense, Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov.

The conference also held working groups that discussed key topics, which included integrated base defense, joint operations, combined aircraft operations, women's peace and security, medical academics, emergency response, and enlisted and officer professional development.

“Bilateral cooperation in the field of training and exercises is a key factor in building capabilities, combat readiness, and interoperability,” said Stoykov.

Following the working groups, and on the evening of Sept. 28, the Bulgarian delegation hosted a 30th anniversary celebration dinner in the courtyard of the Lozenets Residence in downtown Sofia. The celebration included traditional Bulgarian cuisine, cultural exchanges, presentations, and a performance by the Representative Ensemble of the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

In addition to the Tennessee delegation, special attendees at this dinner included Andrea Brouillette-Rodriguez, the U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission, and Todor Tagrev, Bulgaria’s Defense Minister.

Among the exchanges, and on behalf of the Governor of Tennessee, Bill Lee, Brig. Gen. Ross presented a state proclamation celebrating July 14, 2023, as the 30th anniversary of the State Partnership between the Republic of Bulgaria Armed Forces and the Tennessee National Guard.

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Brig. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee's Adjutant General, presents Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov, Bulgaria's Deputy Chief of Defense, with a special plaque during the 30-year anniversary and celebration conference between the Tennessee National Guard and the Bulgarian Armed Forces held in Sofia, Bulgaria, Sept. 28-29. (submitted photo)



Representatives from the Tennessee National Guard and the Bulgarian Armed Forces pose for a photograph in Sofia, Bulgaria, Sept. 28. (photo by Capt. Kealy Moriarty)

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