



Bulgarian Fighter Aircraft Acquisition

OE Watch Commentary: As reported in various Bulgarian media, Bulgaria is currently going through the acquisition process for new combat aircraft to update their air force. One commentator, the former Bulgarian Minister of Defense, Nikolay Nenchev indicated that this should include canceling plans to repair the old MiG-29s and renting F-16s until the acquisition is complete. Nenchev further stated that during his time heading the Defense Ministry, Russia had threatened Bulgarian airspace and that Bulgarians were on alert as much as twice a day. This corresponds to incidences in 2016 when aircraft identified as Russian passenger planes breached airspace numerous times in October with the transponders turned off, the Bulgarians claimed. It is noteworthy that this in the same general period of the downing of the Russian fighter aircraft (in November 2016) and after Bulgaria refused overflight for Russian planes bound for Syria in September 2015 because of “serious doubts about the cargo onboard.” Reportedly, current offers to sell jets all come from Western countries, including the US, Sweden, and Italy. The acquisition would be the biggest military purchase in the contemporary history of Bulgaria and is not without domestic political concern. Vesselin Marsheki, head of the Volya party and Vice Chair of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, describes Bulgarians as having to choose between fighter aircraft and healthcare.

End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)

Source: “Николай Ненчев: България да избере Ф-16! И да скъса веднага договора за поддръжката на МиГ-29 (Nikolay Nenchev: Bulgaria to choose the F-16! And then immediately void the agreement for maintenance on the MiG-29),” *Epicenter*, 17 October 2018. <http://epicenter.bg/article/Nikolay-Nenchev--Balgariya-da-izbere-F-16--I-da-skasame-vednaga-dogovora-za-poddrazhkata-na-MiG-29/166017/11/0>

That is why Bulgaria must sign an agreement with the US to deliver the newest and more modern multi-purpose generation 4 plus, F-16. And then immediately break the MiG-29 maintenance contract!

(it) would allow us to rent several of their F-16s that our pilots would start training here on-site in the shortest possible time. Once the Bulgarian pilots have been trained, they will be able to take on the duty of the US-F-16 charter on duty until the introduction of our new combat aircraft. In parallel, we need to have more joint missions with NATO allies to guard Bulgaria's airspace.

Source: “Bulgaria refusing airspace access to Russian aid flights to Syria,” *Reuters*, 8 September 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-greece-russia/bulgaria-refusing-airspace-access-to-russian-aid-flights-to-syria-idUSKCN0R81J420150908>

Bulgaria has serious doubts about the cargo on board planes that Russia says it will fly into Syria with aid, and has refused them access to its airspace, the foreign ministry in Sofia said on Tuesday... “We have enough information that makes us have serious doubts about the cargo of the planes, which is the reason for the refusal,” a Bulgarian foreign ministry spokeswoman said...

“That is why Bulgaria must sign an agreement with the US to deliver the newest and more modern multi-purpose generation 4 plus, F-16.”



A Bulgarian Air Force MiG-29 Fulcrum aircraft lands on Graf Ignatievo Air Base, Bulgaria, Nov. 10, 2008, during exercise Nickel Javelin.

Source: By Ashley Wood, U.S. Air Force [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgarian_Air_Force_MiG-29.jpg