NATO, EDF Advance Next-Gen Rotorcraft Projects

On Nov. 29–30, representatives from six NATO countries formed the Acquisition Support Partnership (ASP) of the Next Generation Rotorcraft Capability (NGRC) initiative, a project to define the requirements of a next-generation medium-lift helicopter. The agreement between the six countries — France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK — allowed for the formation of a program office dedicated to the NGRC, which as of late January was partially activated, according to FlightGlobal. Canada, currently an observer nation, is expected to join the Partnership in early 2023. The NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA), the project manager for the concept definition stage, expects to begin issuing contracts for work on the concept stage in mid-2023. NSPA is also the agency for the NH90 (shown), which is one of the helicopters the NGRC will replace.

Meanwhile, Airbus and Leonardo Helicopters have launched a study of next-generation rotorcraft, a project funded by the European Defence Fund (EDF). A meeting in late January involved representatives from the two European-based helicopter manufacturers and those from their 19-member team of industrial partners. It was the first meeting of the 42-month-long European Next Generation Rotorcraft Technologies (ENGRT) project, which aims to study the operational rotorcraft needs of European armed forces beyond 2030 and define the key technologies and propulsion systems underpinning future military rotorcraft. The EDF is providing up to €40M ($43M) for the ENGRT project, which is expected to complement NATO’s work on the NGRC.

Hochul Vetoes Bill Restricting Helicopters

On Dec. 15, New York Governor Kathy Hochul vetoed a bill restricting helicopter flights in New York City. The legislation targeted the West 30th Street Heliport on the Hudson River and would have banned non-essential flights from operating from the location. The bill would also have allowed individuals to sue helicopter operators for an “unreasonable level of sustained noise.” In response, Hochul argued that that bill would have impinged on the federal government’s authority to regulate aviation. “Certain elements of this legislation run counter to the federal scheme regulating New York’s airports and airspace,” said Governor Hochul in a written statement accompanying the decision. The bill was the result of a grassroots effort known as “Stop the Chop” that aims to ban non-essential helicopter flights from the New York Metropolitan Area.

Helicopter Firm to Use KULR Vibe

KULR Technology Group announced on Dec. 21 that it will provide a US-based commercial helicopter operator with the KULR VIBE, a vibration reduction solution. KULR, which is headquartered in San Diego, California, and specializes in energy management solutions, said in a press release that the contract with the unnamed client, reportedly one of the world’s largest civilian helicopter operators, is a six-figure annual subscription agreement. According to the company, the KULR VIBE suite of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven products and services can help customers identify areas in their helicopter fleet that are suffering from excess vibrations, which if left unresolved can lead to increased maintenance and downtime. KULR formally launched VIBE in October 2022 and has previously helped the US Marine Corps resolve the causes of excess vibrations in some of its rotorcraft.

Airbus Racer Powers On

On Dec. 21, the European Union’s Clean Aviation initiative — formerly known as Clean Sky 2 — announced that the Airbus Racer had conducted a successful power-on test to evaluate the aircraft’s systems. The test occurred at the Airbus Helicopters facility in Marignane, France. “The POWER ON is a significant technical milestone which validates the readiness of the aircraft’s core avionic systems, software integration compatibility, and electrical harnesses,” said Tomasz Krysinski, head of research and innovation at Airbus.