On 23rd May the NATO submarine rescue Exercise Dynamic Monarch 2014 concluded in Gdynia, Poland, after eleven days of intense and realistic multi-national training.

Expertly hosted by Poland and conducted near Naval Base Gdynia, the exercise involved 18 nations providing seven ships, three submarines, helicopters, the NATO Submarine Rescue System, divers, medical personnel, and observers.

Dynamic Monarch tested international forces’ ability to respond to emergency situations involving a submerged, distressed submarine. The capability is vital for it enables the navies to be able to respond to the rare emergency and it provides for the everyday submariner and his family peace of mind that if a submarine were to become disabled rescue capability to save the ship’s company would be trained and available.

Captain Iain Breckenridge, Royal Navy, Assistant Chief of Staff Submarines at Commander Submarines NATO (COMSUBNATO), “Nations together can do this better, and we are proving that. As a submariner myself, that is good to know.”

International co-operation in exercises such as Dynamic Monarch permits the examination and sharing of new technologies, making it possible to prevent future tragedies and increase the ability to mount a rescue of stricken submariners.

“A focus of this exercise is the exchange of information about different underwater rescue systems that are being used and creating a universal one that would be adopted by all participating nations,” said Captain David Tucker (US Navy), one of the exercise’s planners. He added, “The exercise, I think, is really the only time we are able to interact with our counterparts from other nations and learn from them.”

Various systems tested included the NATO Submarine Rescue System (NSRS), a versatile submersible capable of submerging, travelling down to a stricken submarine, mating with the submarine and moving submariners to the surface and to safety. Another system tested was the relatively new Submarine Escape
Immersion Equipment (SEIE) which can be used in emergency escape from a depth of 180 metres. This system is self-contained and can be quickly utilized in an emergency. Normally used only as a last resort, the SEIE is a body suit and one-man life raft that permits submariners to quickly ascend from a sunken boat. The suit provides protection against hypothermia.

While a rescue submersible is preferable, in some situations such as when there are extreme time constraints, the SEIE suit allows survivors to make a more rapid egress from a disabled submarine. Use of an SEIE suit in a rapid emergency egress would necessitate the additional use of another component that was tested at the exercise, the hyperbaric chamber, where medical personnel monitor and treat submariners who have escaped after exposure to higher atmospheric pressure and need to be slowly brought back to normal atmospheric conditions.

Said Lieutenant-Commander Thomas Witkiewicz, Commanding Officer of the Polish Submarine ORP Sep, “Systems such as NSRS and the American PMI model are complimentary to one another. By working together, our countries can be prepared as much as possible for a submarine crew rescue operation.”

The final event of the exercise, called the “hot wash,” on 23rd May brought together exercise planners and syndicate leaders to discuss lessons learned from this latest in the series of NATO submarine rescue exercises.

Captain Breckenridge concluded by saying, “These Monarch exercises run every three years, so the last one was in 2011 and as soon as that finished, we started learning lessons to take forward. With Dynamic Monarch wrapping up, NATO nations are already planning for the next. We will reconvene in Turkey, who has volunteered to host the next NATO submarine rescue exercise in 2017.”

Photo captions
1. From The Netherlands, the submarine Bruinvis.
2. The Polish submarine Sep.
3. HSwMS Haland.
4. HNLMS Bruinvis.