
Mobile DISAM Foreign Purchaser Course Holds First Baltic Region Graduation

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On June 4th, 1999, Home Guard Colonel Gundars Abols, Chief of Staff of the Latvian Armed Forces presided over a ceremony marking the graduation of eighteen Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian students from the Mobile DISAM Foreign Purchaser Course. The course was taught at the United States Information Service Center in Riga, Latvia, and was the first of its kind in the Baltic region.



Home Guard Colonel Gundars Abbols, Chief of Staff of the Latvia Armed Forces is presented with a DISAM Plaque by Dr. Larry Mortsof, Deputy Commandant DISAM, while Ms. Gundega Berzina and Lieutenant Colonel Victor Bunde, USA, SAO Latvia look on.

This course marked the culmination of months of careful planning and preparation on the part of the Security Assistance Offices in Estonia, Lithuania, and principally Latvia, as well as the Ministries of Defense and State, and the National Armed Forces of the represented countries.

The purpose of the DISAM Foreign Purchaser Course is to prepare foreign government personnel to better understand and more effectively participate in the security assistance (SA) decision-making process with United States Government security assistance organizations, most notably in the realm of Foreign Military Sales (FMS). According to Dr. Larry Mortsof, DISAM's Deputy Commandant and the Team Chief to Latvia, active participation by foreign governments in courses of this kind mark a maturation of the relationship between the United States and

participating governments, reflecting the increasing sophistication of a country's ability to determine defense requirements, manage resources, and negotiate international agreements.

Participants in the course included key members of the countries' military acquisition organizations, logisticians, and financial managers. The importance that the participating countries placed on the course was underscored by the high-level interest it generated. DISAM team members met with Ambassador James Holmes, Home Guard Colonel Raimonds Graube, Latvian National Armed Forces Commander, and Ms. Una Kuple, Latvian Deputy State Secretary, for individual briefings and consultations prior to the course start. Further, Ms. Kuple hosted a press conference involving all of the major Latvian and Baltic news services to herald the importance of the course to security cooperation in the Baltic States.

The press conference involved direct participation by students who were questioned by the media and candidly answered concerning the positive impact of this course on their ability to perform required security assistance planning and requisitioning actions. DISAM team member, Associate Professor Robert Hanseman, pointed to the importance that enhanced understanding of the United States military logistics system, including terminology and processes, would have on the participants' ability to interact with U.S. security assistance organizations. According to Hanseman, such an understanding is critical to FMS planning, purchasing/requisitioning, and problem solving. This course was specifically geared to address those issues.

For the first time ever on a mobile DISAM course automation training was an integral part of the curriculum. Computers hooked into the Internet were placed in the back of the classroom for student use, and classroom instruction centered on security assistance resources available electronically such as the Defense Acquisition Deskbook and the DISAM web page. Whether it was information on much-needed surplus medical equipment or single-channel radios available through the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service (DRMS) web page, the students left much better informed as to the wealth of security assistance information available on the Internet. Some students, in fact, used computers for the very first time during this course, developing a skill of immediate benefit and growing necessity.

The eighteen students trained in this mobile Foreign Purchaser course certainly do not represent the largest class that DISAM has ever trained, nor was the high level of interest afforded to this course by the participating governments unique. The class was, however, important and meaningful in that it brought together key individuals from neighboring partner countries with the express purpose of learning more about the United States foreign policy and security assistance apparatus. The knowledge gained by the students, and the free-flowing exchange of ideas and methods throughout the course by motivated and interested students underscored the critical importance that education of this kind plays in fostering greater cooperation and understanding between the United States and its allies.