



#### Bulgaria – Mi-17 (above)

Bulgaria offered to host CK'01 in September 2001 and used its completely renovated Graf Ignatievo and Krumovo airbases for hosting the largest ever CK exercise, with 24 nations contributing more than 32 fighter aircraft, 11 transport aircraft, 20 helicopters and 1,600 soldiers. This exercise saw the official introduction of assessment, combat search and rescue (CSAR), the use of photo-reconnaissance aircraft and civil-military co-operation (CIMIC). As well as Mi-24 'Hinds', the Bulgarians have participated in several CK exercises with Mi-8 and -17 'Hips' from the 24 VAB at Plovdiv-Krumovo, used for medevac and air transportation tasks.

#### Bulgaria – Mi-24 (above – Mi-24V foreground, Mi-24D background) –

Based on experiences from Kosovo, combat search and rescue (CSAR) was introduced in 2001 in Bulgaria as a new CK exercise element, when a downed pilot behind enemy lines had to be rescued. In a pre-planned CSAR operation, a helicopter formation comprising two Austrian Bell 212s packed with US and Austrian special ground forces was guided into hostile territory by the AOC and AWACS, protected by Bulgarian 'Hinds' which shadowed the formation, looking for possible threats. The rescue package also included A-10s circling around the formation at altitudes of between 600 and 1,500 ft to provide air cover. The downed pilot identified himself by using a simple hand-held mirror. With the pilot located, the pair of Augusta-Bell 212s landed. Immediately after the go-ahead was given, US and Austrian Special Forces disembarked to set up a perimeter around the helos and escorted the downed pilot into the cabin. During this phase of the operations the Bulgarian 'Hinds' kept their distance in order not to give away the position of the downed pilot and to distract possible hostile forces.

#### Slovakia – Mi-17 (below)

Co-operative Key '97 was held in Slovakia at both Slac and Piestany airbases and saw the participation of some 20 combat and transport aircraft, 12 helicopters and 800+ personnel in search and rescue (SAR), medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), close air support (CAS) and peace support operations (PSO) missions. The Slovakian helicopter participation included one of its Mil Mi-17s from 34 Letecká Základňa Presov, located in the eastern part of Slovakia. The 34 Vrtulníkové Kridlo (34VrK), was established in late 1995 and has four squadrons: 1 and 2 Bitevná Vrtulníková Letka with Mi-24 gunships, and 3 and 4 Vrtulníková Letka with Mi-2s and Mi-17s.

