Mikoyan MiG-29

The MiG-29 is currently the only Russian-built, air-superiority fighter in Polish Air Force service. It is also the only Russian-built fighter in service with some NATO countries. During the late 1980s and early 1990s it replaced the worn and increasingly obsolete MiG-21 (NATO codename ‘Fishbed’) as well as the slightly younger MiG-23 (‘Flogger’). The new fighter was to be the counterpart of the American F-16 “Fighting Falcon”, then entering service with NATO.

Initial negotiations regarding procurement of the new aircraft for the Polish Air Force took place on 23-26 October 1985. The Polish delegation, under the Head of Aircraft Technology, Gen. Mieczysław Sikorski, was invited to Moscow, and then visited Kubinka air base, where a presentation had been prepared. During the meeting the Polish side defined their needs: at least 36 combat aircraft and 6 trainers. The new aircraft were going to arrive in Poland by the end of 1995, to equip three fighter regiments.

In July 1987 the Polish MoD placed an official order for nine aircraft of the 9-12A version and three 9-51A combat trainers. After documentation was supplied, the contract was signed in March 1989. Delivery of MiG-29s to Poland was due, so in the autumn of 1988 a group of 20 pilots was selected from the 1. PLM (1. Pułk Lotnictwa Myśliwskiego – 1st Fighter Aviation Regiment), to undergo initial selection for conversion training on the new aircraft type. None of them was aware what type they were going to fly in the future. The data available to them at the time said that the selected personnel would be trained on “high manoeuvrability aircraft”.

The selection was very strict. Doctors selected those candidates who were able to endure an 8g force for 30 seconds. After subsequent tests 12 top pilots were selected: płk Zenon Kida, mjr Ryszard Brużdziel, mjr Czesław Ciodyk, kpt. Ireneusz Piasecki, por. Zdzisław Lackowski, kpt. Kazimierz Michalik, por. Henryk Choluj, por. Waldemar Łubowski, kpt. Marian Zięba, por. Wiesław Rec and por. Jacek Wojtaszczyk. On 28 February 1989 a Soviet Il-18 transport aircraft took the selected pilots and ground personnel to Frunze in the USSR (now in Kyrgyzstan).

Several months before, air and ground training had been completed there by Indian and Romanian Air Force personnel.

A group of Czechoslovak pilots and technicians were undergoing training at the same time as the Polish team. The regiment there had a total of some 18 MiG-23s and 38 MiG-29s that allowed smooth training for everybody. According to the accounts of the trainee pilots all aircraft were very well maintained and despite high daily numbers of flying hours faults or failures were rare and mostly minor.

Final exams of the theoretical course took place on 23-28 March, after which flying training commenced on MiG-29UB two-seat combat trainers. Four local instructors started to train the Polish pilots, each of the tutors being in charge of three Poles.

First flights took place at 6 o’clock on 12 April 1989. The initial take-offs were to acquaint the Polish pilots both with the aircraft and the flying sector. After two days of dual-control flying they started to go solo. According to the contract each of the trainee pilots was going to accumulate 15 flying hours in the subsequent stages of training: local flying, medium and low altitude flying, pair flying, interceptions, and ground attack training on a firing range. In the final stage the pilots made stratospheric flights.

Flying usually commenced early in the morning and continued until almost noon, when it was interrupted due to high...
No further procurements from Russia followed, despite the ambitious original plans. It had been planned to purchase some 110 aircraft of the type, to replace all the MiG-21s (PFM, M, MF, and eventually the latest 'bis' variants) by the end of 1998. In 1995 it became possible to acquire MiG-29s formerly used by the Czech Air Force. The contract was for nine single-seat and one two-seat aircraft with spares and armament in exchange for eleven brand new Polish PZL Sokół helicopters with additional equipment. Despite some criticism, the transaction proved a success. Despite several years of operation the aircraft were in very good condition. Additionally, all the aircraft had been withdrawn from use and properly stored.

The first five ex-Czech aircraft, serial nos. 2960532038, 2960532359, 2960526377, 2960526392 (single-seaters) and N50903014528 (trainer) landed at the snow-covered Mińsk Mazowiecki air base on 22 December 1995. The next machine, no. 2960526386, landed seven days later, and was the last one delivered before the end of the year.

The last four aircraft, nos. 2960532040, 2960532054, 2960532056 and 2960526383, were delivered on 8 January 1996. All the aircraft delivered from the Czech Republic were easily distinguished from those obtained directly from the USSR during 1989-90. They were finished in a darker camouflage scheme of different colours and carried four-digit code numbers on their fins. It was decided that until a major overhaul the aircraft would not be repainted. Only the Czech markings were going to be replaced with Polish ones and the code numbers changed according to the Polish standard. The latter would be reapplied on the sides of the air intakes and abbreviated to the last two digits of the serial number, in line with other Polish MiGs.

Although the MiG-29 was introduced into service at the time of a booming tendency to apply regimental and flight badges, the type did not see many spectacular schemes. During 20 years of operation with the Polish Air Force the type has displayed just a few unit badges and a few personal emblems. Individual aircraft bore occasional special or personal markings, and certain machines had interesting and attractive markings. The camouflage colours did not differ between aircraft, with a few exceptions. The situation changed after the ex-Czech, and then ex-German, machines were introduced into service.

The initial MiG-29s introduced into service with the 1. PLM featured the original factory-applied camouflage scheme, no different from that on aircraft built and used in the USSR. The scheme consisted of two colours: light grey on lower and upper surfaces of the aircraft and areas of darker grey on upper surfaces and fins. All aircraft had radomes and fin tips in dark grey. A black anti-glare panel was applied forward of the windscreen. Code numbers and maintenance stencilling were in red.

The camouflage was applied with semi-matt paints. All the aircraft delivered to Poland had the same general pattern, with the sole exception of no. 67, which featured a different pattern on the fuselage, wings and fins, while retaining the same digits of the serial number, in line with other Polish MiGs.

### Scheme name | Aircraft delivered in Czech camouflage colours | Four shades of green and brown on uppersurfaces as follows: Dark Olive-green – FS 34079 Light Green – FS 34277 Light Brown – FS 30227 Dark Brown – FS 30045 Light Grey-blue – FS 36495 on undersurfaces. Aircraft have same general pattern with sole exception of no. 67 which featured a completely different pattern. Nose radome, panels on LERX and spine as well as vertical tails in Dark Grey – FS 36118. Black anti-glare panel. Gun vent and leading edge of horizontal tailplanes were left unpainted.

### Scheme name | Aircraft delivered in Czech camouflage colours | Dark Olive-green – FS 34079 Light Green – FS 34277 Light Brown – FS 30227 Dark Brown – FS 30045 Light Grey-blue – FS 36495 on undersurfaces. Aircraft have same general pattern with sole exception of no. 67 which featured a completely different pattern. Nose radome, panels on both sides of LERX, panel on top of spine, top parts of vertical tails were painted in Medium Grey Black anti-glare panel. Gun vent and leading edge of horizontal tailplanes were left unpainted.

### Scheme name | Aircraft after overhaul at WZL-2 in Bydgoszcz (December 1997-April 2007) | Three colours as follows: Light grey – FS 36270 and Dark Grey – FS 36118 on uppersurfaces Blue-grey/Light Grey – FS 36375 on undersurfaces Each aircraft has individual camouflage pattern. Black anti-glare panel.

### Scheme name | Aircraft after the second overhaul at WZL-2 in Bydgoszcz. Since April 2007 | Three colours as follows: Light grey – FS 36270 and Dark Grey – FS 36118 on uppersurfaces Blue-grey/Light grey – FS 36375 on undersurfaces Each aircraft has individual camouflage pattern. Black anti-glare panel.
The aircraft upon delivery to Poland. Note the national markings of the Czech Republic, the ‘tiger’ motif on the fins and the emblem of the 1st Squadron, 11th Fighter Regiment at Žatec.

In Polish service the aircraft had Polish national markings and the 1. PLM emblem applied, but the ‘tiger’ motif was retained on the fins. The Czech code nos. on the fins and the Czech unit emblem were removed. Two-digit code numbers were applied on the sides of the engine air intakes. Mińsk Mazowiecki, December 1995.
[54, 55]: Take-off and landing of an aircraft at Mińsk Mazowiecki, December 2009.


[96]: An aircraft in the Czech camouflage. Note the ‘tiger’ motif on the fin. The machine has Polish markings and the new code no. 59 applied on the air intakes. It was used in this scheme by the 1. PLM for four years.


[104-106]: The aircraft with special emblems to celebrate 65 years of Skrzydła Polska aviation magazine. Silhouettes of the pre-WWII light sports aeroplane and the MiG-29 were applied on the air intakes. These were then overpainted during the same year. The aircraft was then used in this scheme until a major overhaul in 1998. Mińsk Mazowiecki 1995.
MiG-29 no. 2960526377, ‘77’ of the 41. elt, Malbork, 2009.
Aircraft in the post-overhaul scheme (2nd period).

[167]: MiG-29 ‘77’ photographed in June 2009 at Malbork air base.
[283]: Deblin, August 1998. Upon return from Israel Polish markings were reapplied, as was the 'Mermaid' badge on both sides of the forward fuselage. The aircraft shows numerous patches of new paint on wing edges and upper surfaces, on wing-fuselage joints, vertical tails and around the cockpit.

[284]: '115' in flight at high altitude. Patches of new paint can be seen on the wings and the overpainted French badge on the fuselage shows through as the coat of paint has peeled off. The aircraft has a new nose radome with patches of new paint on it.