

500th Flight Marks Milestone in Open Skies Treaty

VIENNA, 26 August 2008 - A Benelux flight over Bosnia and Herzegovina on 20 August was the 500th flight conducted under the Open Skies treaty, which allows State Parties to carry out unarmed observation flights over each other's territories.

The treaty was negotiated under OSCE auspices.

The 500th flight also had observers from Canada, Norway and the Czech Republic on board.

"Since the Open Skies treaty came into force in 2002, there have been 500 flights under the Treaty across North America, Europe, and Eurasia. This is a remarkable achievement that has depended on the co-operation and goodwill of 34 countries in Europe, Eurasia, and North America. This treaty contributes to a valuable openness, transparency, and co-operation among nations," said Hugh Neighbour of the United States, which is currently chairing the Vienna-based Open Skies Consultative Commission that implements the treaty.

The treaty entered into force in January 2002. It was designed to enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants the possibility to obtain information on military or other activities of concern to them. Open Skies is the most wide-ranging international effort to date to promote openness and transparency of military forces and their activities.

The treaty continues to serve as a useful and efficient confidence-building tool, even with the availability of satellite technology. It has made a significant contribution to security and stability in the European area and beyond. The Open Skies flights could and have been used to address threats posed, for example, by natural disasters.

The treaty depositaries are Canada and Hungary. All are OSCE participating States.



A joint Greek-Benelux-Spanish flight over Georgia, 1 November 2006, under the Open Skies Treaty. (OSCE)