
PRESS NOTE

ILA BERLIN: LEONARDO EXHIBITS AW249 HELICOPTER'S NEXT GEN DESIGN AND VIGOROUS FLYING QUALITIES AS INDUSTRY VALUE-PROPOSITION INTENSIFIES TO FILL EUROPE AND WORLD MARKETS' CAPABILITY GAP

Fully supported by the National Armaments Directorate and Italian Army, Leonardo announces an AW249 international promotional strategy to extend modern deterrence, interoperability, industry collaboration opportunities and benefits to partners and allies

First and only all-new Western combat helicopter design with digitization, connectivity, sensor-fusion, and information superiority, a true force-multiplier in multi-domain operations

Italian Army's "Fenice" shows superior manoeuvrability and power during flying display public premiere

Berlin, 11 June 2026 – At its third public appearance in two years, the AW249 next generation exploration and escort helicopter showed its impressive flight characteristics for the first time at ILA Berlin, as Leonardo briefed visitors, stakeholders and international delegations on how the new type will bring operational superiority and opportunities through international collaboration.

The helicopter boasts a comprehensive package of breakthrough technologies and mission capabilities to enhance situational awareness and decision-making, while sustaining operational tempo and tactical manoeuvre, and pursuing and maintaining dominance in the battlefield against current and emerging threats. The programme can also deliver industrial and economic benefits to partnering nations, as Leonardo shared its vision of the AW249 becoming Europe's new combat helicopter. This would bring sustained investment, financial and supply chain efficiency and enable interoperability with other countries globally as they look to meet their emerging requirements.

At ILA Berlin, Leonardo, fully supported by the National Armaments Directorate and Italian Army, announced an AW249 international promotional strategy, setting out the programme's modern deterrence and interoperability benefits as well as outlining industrial cooperation prospects to partners and allies.

The result of strong collaboration between the Italian Ministry of Defence and Leonardo, the AW249 (designated AH-249A NEES - Nuovo Elicottero da Esplorazione e Scorta, and known as the 'Fenice') is the only Western clean-sheet combat helicopter design in development to meet stringent emerging operational requirements for the next 30+ years. It leverages unique capabilities and technologies neither available elsewhere today on the market nor expected to be mirrored by other platforms before several years from its operational readiness, uniquely and ideally bridging a further gradual evolution of military vertical lift.

To manage a rapidly evolving threat landscape, the AW249 features a complete open architecture with opportunity for significant further growth and integration of complementary capabilities in the future to respond to the operational landscape and demanding market requirements. The AW249 boasts high performance in speed, range, power margin and payload, Hot & High conditions and manoeuvrability for advanced nap-of-the-earth flight, and this performance is core to the AW249 in its ability to be fully integrated and interoperable in the modern multi-domain battlefield (air-land-sea-space-cyber). The AW249 features an advanced large area display human-machine interface with multi-touch screen recognition devices in the tandem-seat cockpit and a highly sophisticated Leonardo-developed Battle



Management System. These displays, paired with modern pilot helmets, enable the crew to rapidly access critical information on flight, navigation and the mission provided by multiple sensing and advanced connectivity. Artificial Intelligence and automation are exploited throughout the AW249 to generate capacity for the crew and aid in decision making throughout all phases of a mission.

The AW249 performs a variety of missions including aerial and ground escort, close air support, close combat attack and air interdiction. The helicopter can also execute reconnaissance operations, acting as information node within a complex C4 architecture (ISTAR), or using surveillance systems onboard or of cooperating units to scan the battlespace, identify friendly and adversary ground units for its own use, or to disseminate the information through a secure channel to a Command & Control Centre. The AW249 has been built to leverage advanced Crewed-Uncrewed teaming (CUC-T) opportunities as they emerge in the future. Powerful engines enable operations in the most extreme conditions, with shipboard operational capability designed in from the start. The AW249 is equipped with a flexible weapon system that includes guided and unguided 70mm rockets, air-to-air missiles, and air-to-ground missiles, in addition to a 20mm 3-barrell Gatling gun. Outstanding survivability leverages on an advanced Integrated Defensive Aids Suite (IDAS), together with armoured seats and ballistic tolerant fuel tanks, crashworthiness and low detectability – in addition to the superior situational awareness delivered by its navigation and sensor-fusion, as well robust cyber-protection. The AW249 is being developed with digital simulation capabilities and a state-of-the-art technical support and training service approach in mind, benefitting from high fidelity mission simulation, virtual reality and prescriptive maintenance via data gathering and analysis. This is further complemented by a newly developed design and mission scenario laboratory for system optimization, tactical scenario evaluation and testing in a sophisticated synthetic environment.

Lorenzo Mariani, Chief Executive Officer and General Manager of Leonardo, said: “The result of a farsighted vision shared by Institutions and Industry, the AW249 programme comes into play in a particular period considering the evolving global security landscape and, even more, Europe’s efforts towards stronger synergies in defence and security initiatives. The AW249 factually demonstrates Leonardo’s world-class expertise in platforms and electronics, allowing a full control of core capabilities while ensuring significant industrial collaboration opportunities and may represent one of our catalysts to support these European efforts. At a time when strengthening defence and security cooperation has never been more important, the AW249 stands ready not only to deliver operational superiority but also to create new opportunities for collaboration, on the continent and beyond.”

Gian Piero Cutillo, Co-General Manager of Leonardo and MD of Leonardo Helicopters, underlined: “The AW249 provides evidence of our commitment to making helicopters evolve far beyond their traditional role in terms of architecture and capabilities, proactively embracing and integrating the latest technological trends while investing in a clear long-term roadmap. Much more than a new combat helicopter, the AW249 will act as a command-and-control node within the battlespace, capable of collecting, processing, fusing and distributing information in real time, orchestrating assets across domains to enable faster, better-informed decisions and actions. Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Italian Ministry of Defence, the National Armaments Directorate and the Italian Army for their trust, support and close cooperation throughout this programme that now can evolve into a new teaming strategy.”

With a maximum take-off weight of 8.3 ton, the AW249 is being developed to replace the Italian Army’s AW129 fleet which is nearing the end of its life-cycle. An AW249 prototype carried out its maiden flight in summer 2022. Four aircraft have been built since then, with three being pre-production units. The programme entered its final stage of development and capability qualification earlier this year. Next,



environmental trials will be completed while progress on armament integration and testing, battle management system and human-machine interface configuration continues. Leonardo has already started working on CUC-T development to integrate the Italian Army's selected UAS system, while Air Launched Effects (ALE) and counter-UAS capability is being assessed for the future. Today, 19 units have been procured, while negotiation for an additional 14 is ongoing, out of a total requirement of 48 helicopters. Series production has already started, and deliveries to the Italian Army with initial entry into service are expected to begin in 2028.

Leonardo is an international industrial group that develops multi-domain technological capabilities for global security. A key player in the major strategic programmes in Aerospace, Defence and Security, it employs over 62,000 people worldwide and operates in the Electronics, Helicopters, Aircraft, Cyber & Security and Space sectors. The company has a significant industrial presence in Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and the United States, and is active in 150 countries also through subsidiaries, joint ventures and investees. Leonardo is a technological and industrial partner to Governments, Defence Administrations, Institutions and businesses. Listed on the Milan Stock Exchange (LDO), in 2025 Leonardo recorded new orders of €23.8 billion, an order backlog of €46.6 billion and consolidated revenues of €19.5 billion. Included in the MIB ESG Index, the company has also been part of the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI) since 2010.

