

The NH90 Successfully Completes Its First Flight in Software Release 3 (SWR3) Configuration

Aix en Provence, France 3rd August 2026 – NHIndustries (NHI), together with the NATO Helicopter Management Agency (NAHEMA), proudly announces the successful completion of the first flight of the NH90 Software Release 3 (SWR3) configuration, also dubbed 'Block 1'. The flight took place on the 21st July in Italy, where an Italian Navy SH90 helicopter was upgraded to the new SWR3 standard.

This important achievement marks the beginning of the flight test campaign for the SWR3 configuration and represents a major milestone in the evolution of the NH90 programme. It comes only two years after the signature of the landmark contract between NAHEMA and NHIndustries for the development and qualification of the SWR3 standard, reaffirming the shared commitment of the participating Nations and industry Partners to continuously enhance the operational capabilities of the NH90 fleet.

A major step forward for the NH90 programme

Software Release 3 represents one of the most significant capability upgrades introduced to the NH90 in recent years. It will implement major operational improvements for both NH90 variants, the Tactical Transport Helicopter (TTH) and the Nato Frigate Helicopter (NFH). Developed through the close collaboration of the NHI Partner Companies—Airbus Helicopters, Leonardo and GKN Aerospace, SWR3 positions the NH90 to meet and exceed the most demanding NATO future mission requirements.

The new configuration introduces a range of advanced technologies, including amongst others the world's first airborne Link 22 capability integrated on a helicopter, a next-generation high-definition Electro-Optical Observation System (LEOSS-T), enhanced antisubmarine Sonar capabilities with the OTS-90 Mark II and FLASH Sonars, an upgraded civil GNSS/FMS navigation system, and the integration of additional weapon capabilities.

SWR3 significantly strengthens mission performance across the full spectrum of maritime operations. The introduction of Link 22 provides secure Line-of-Sight (LOS) and Beyond-Line-of-Sight (BLOS) communications without relying on satellite connectivity, making the NH90 the first and only helicopter capable of operating with this NATO-standard tactical data link. This breakthrough considerably enhances real-time information exchange and interoperability in increasingly complex multi-domain operational environments.

The integration of the latest high-definition electro-optical and sonar technologies further improves long-range surveillance, target detection, identification, acquisition and tracking. Combined with the NH90's advanced naval mission system, these new

capabilities reduce crew workload while increasing mission effectiveness during demanding operations such as Maritime Security Operations, Search and Rescue, Anti-Surface Warfare and Anti-Submarine Warfare.

The first flight marks the successful integration of these new systems and represents an important step towards the qualification and entry into service of the SWR3 configuration.

Leadership statements

Michael Kohlhaas, General Manager of NAHEMA, said:

"The successful first flight of the NH90 in the SWR3 configuration marks a significant milestone for the programme and demonstrates the excellent cooperation between NAHEMA, participating Nations, NHIndustries, and Partner Companies. The flight is happening on schedule and in line with expectations considering a project of this scale. This achievement brings us one step closer to delivering enhanced operational capabilities that will ensure the NH90 remains a state-of-the-art platform capable of meeting the evolving requirements of our armed forces."

"Cristian Naso, Managing Director of NHIndustries, commented:

"The first flight of the NH90 in the SWR3 configuration is a major achievement for the entire NH90 programme and reflects the dedication and expertise of all our teams across Europe. SWR3 is a testament to our commitment to continuous innovation, operational excellence. By integrating cutting-edge technologies such as Link 22 and next-generation mission systems, we are ensuring that the NH90 remains the world's most advanced military helicopter in its segment, ready to support our Customers in the most demanding operational scenarios."

About NHIndustries

NHIndustries (NHI) is the industrial prime contractor for the NH90 programme and is jointly owned by Airbus Helicopters, Leonardo and GKN Aerospace. NHI is responsible for the design, development, production and support of the NH90, delivering one of the world's most capable multi-role military helicopters to customers worldwide.

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