Croatia

Country Profile
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Croatia

by Adam Gosney [Mine Action Information Center]

Croatia gained independence in 1991, after intense fighting among various groups within the country, with the area known as Slovenia being a major battle-ground. In 1975, the CSR (Croatian Red Cross), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Cross Movement and the International NGO, CROMAC, in cooperation with the University of Belgrade, began to address the humanitarian needs of the war victims. Today, CROMAC is involved in mine action. 


In Croatia, landsmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) are “high priority” and include agriculture regions, houses and yards, infrastructure (roads, railroads, pipelines, electrical lines and forest exploitation), property, livestock, and animal species or even just as a fire-prevention area. There are also cultural areas, houses and yards, infrastructure (roads, railroads, pipelines, electrical lines and forest exploitation), property, livestock, and animal species or even just as a fire-prevention area. 

Case Study: Croatia

Croatia is a mountainous country, which has resulted in a number of abandoned landmines and ERW. Mine Action in Croatia

Clearance

In February 1998 the government of the Republic of Croatia established the Croatian Mine Action Center to manage and coordinate mine-action activities in Croatia. Several organizations are involved in mine action in Croatia. Some of these groups include Adopt-A-Minefield, the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, Norwegian People’s Aid, the Croatian Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Cross Movement, and many others. According to the UNCBLA (United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons) in 2004, the number of ERW-related victims was 273, with 101 being killed. As of 2004, 14 of 21 counties were believed to contain unmined areas, containing 2.7 million square kilometers (1.07 million square miles). By the end of 2006, Croatia served as president of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which consists of 56 member states. 

Georgia

by Jina Kim [Mine Action Information Center]

Georgia is bordered by six countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. During these conflicts, all sides have mined the regions. Landmines and other explosive remnants of war have remained on the ground for decades. Georgia is one of the worst affected countries in Europe. 

Georgia entered the OSCE in 1993 from the former USSR, and Georgia continues to be affected by the Soviet era’s problem of abandoned explosive remnants of war and of war and unrest that have disrupted the territory as of May 2007. 

Conclusion

Croatia has made significant gains in mine action. With such CROMAC projects as the Geo Information Project database and the Scan Center, Croatia is developing and using technology to identify MSAs at a rate never seen before. Several factors depend on 100 percent removal becoming a reality, but CROMAC is optimistic that with the continued support of the international community, this goal will be achieved. Croatia is on its way to becoming completely mine-free.

See Endnotes, Page

See Endnotes, Page

Georgia

Since Georgia claimed independence in 1991 from the former USSR, the conflicts of war and unrest have disrupted the country, particularly within the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. During these conflicts, all sides have mined the regions. Landmines and other explosive remnants of war remain on the ground for decades. 

Landmine/ERW Problem

Although the landmine situation in Georgia is of relatively low impact, and “overall, the mine problem in Georgia, outside of Abkhazia, is not large in scope,” some of the defense ministers have stated that “the situation has worsened.” Although these threats were made, no additional mines were laid and Bagapsh’s deputy minister continued to allow for demining to take place. 

There is also an ongoing conflict between Georgia and its breakaway region of South Ossetia. It has been reported that mines have been laid by both sides in these areas. At the present time, the security conditions and political climate in South Ossetia are not conducive to mine action. Although there is a significant problem of abandoned explosives, the war in Chechnya, inner Russia and the surrounding countries, and the recent reorganization of the Council, the issue is still open. 

Another contributory factor to the under-mining of mine action programs in Georgia is the country’s refusal to join the Mine Action Information Center. Georgia states that it is unable to join because of lack of jurisdiction concerning the civil unrest with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and thus would be unable to fulfill the Convention’s requirements. The HALO Trust is the biggest mine-action organization in Georgia and is in the final stages of implementing a fully integrated mine-action program in Abkhazia, which will see the territory declared “mine-free” by 2006. HALO also runs the Abkhaz Mine Action Center, which manages and disseminates all information regarding mine action and victims within the territory. 

In response to accidents occurring within a territory of abandoned military bases in Georgia, mine-education programs were carried out by the CICB, HALO, and other mine-action organizations. In February 2004, Georgian First Lady Sandra Roelofs requested that HALO conduct an emergency survey of abandoned military bases. Clearance could not occur due to “political reasons and the fact that some of the bases were still used by the Georgian military. In order to minimize the number of accidents occurring in these areas, HALO conducted emergency MRE operations in the territory of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.” 

Civilian Implications

The lack of an organized mine-action program in Georgia also makes it difficult for authorities to compile an accurate list of casualties and injuries caused by mines or ERW. The ICBL-Germany has collected data on 31 casualties and injuries caused by mines or ERW. “The ICBL-Germany has collected data on 31 casualties and injuries caused by mines or ERW. Since 2006 there have been reports by the Georgian press of four mine accidents in South Ossetia and one new mine accident in Abkhazia.” These statistics may not be entirely accurate due to unreported accidents and lack of an official mine-action program in the territory of Abkhazia. HALO keeps an accurate mine/UXO victim database and has recorded the names of 638 mine and UXO victims in the territory of Georgia as of May 2007. 

Future Prospects

It is difficult to predict what will happen in Georgia. It is still in transition and the continued unrest with Abkhazia and South Ossetia affects each party’s willingness to destroy mines. These factors prevent Georgia from being able to join the AP Mine Ban Treaty. Georgia is an “official organization” to demine the country. But there are signs of hope for the country as it tries to resolve its differences with the two territories. Georgia is currently lobbying to join NATO and the European Union, and thanks to the help of organizations such as HALO and the U.S. Department of State, the territory of Abkhazia will be declared mine-free in the near future. 

See Endnotes, Page

See Endnotes, Page

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Editorial Assistant, Humanitarian Assistance Program, Humanitarian Assistance Program, Washington, D.C.

E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

Zach Marsh

Program Director, Humanitarian Campaign

Adjunct Professor and HERO Program Director

E-mail: zmarsh@jmu.edu

Kristina Ikić Banićek

General Manager, Croatian Mine Action Center

E-mail: Kristina.ikic@hcr.hr

Fax: +385 44 554 142

Tel: +385 44 554 110

E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

David McMahon

Program Manager

Humanitarian Assistance Program

E-mail: david.mcmahon@jmu.edu

Jina Kim

Editorial Assistant, Journal of Mine Action

E-mail: jinakim@jmu.edu

David McMahon

Program Manager

Humanitarian Assistance Program

E-mail: david.mcmahon@jmu.edu

Jina Kim worked for the MAIC from January 2004 to May 2007. She graduated from James Madison University in May 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and social communication. Kim plans to pursue a career in nonprofit organization work.

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