Mine Problem in the Region of Southeastern Europe: The ITF and SEEMACC

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Landmines in Europe & the Caucasus

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Mine Problem in the Region of Southeastern Europe: International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) and the Southeastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council (SEEMACC)

SE Europe is one of the most mine-affected regions in the world. This article examines the extent of the mine and UXO problem in each of the mine-affected countries in SE Europe, as well as discusses the steps being taken by various organizations in order to solve the mine-related problems in the region.

By Damir Gorseta, SEEMACC and Eva Veble and Sabina Beber, ITF

Mine Problem of the Countries in SE Europe

Unlike other multiethnic states, the former Yugoslavia has fallen apart as a result of war conflicts, which have left large mined areas all over SE Europe. Mine contamination has impacted all countries of the former Yugoslavia and also Albania. Consequently, SE Europe has become one of the most mine-contaminated regions in the world. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Macedonia and Yugoslavia face considerable mine and UXO problems, with BiH and Croatia being the most affected.

The table to the left show the extent of mine contamination in each of the respective countries.

Most of the landmines in SE Europe are of Yugoslav origin (i.e., they are the mines that were stockpiled by the Yugoslav army before the dissolution of former Yugoslavia). The following mines were most frequently used in the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

- ATMs TMM 1, TMA 5, TMA 4, TMA 3.2
- AP 2, PMA 1, PMA 2, PROM 1A, PROM 3A, PMR

Albania

Conflict in Kosovo contributed to destabilizing this part of the region. During the Kosovo crisis in 1998-1999, a large number of mines were laid along the Kosovo-Albania border and into Albanian territory. In addition, there were unexploded shells, rockets and mortars left in the area. The mine-contaminated strip contains 85 high-risk areas and a 120 km long stretch, stretching from Hoxhavci in the south to Tropojë in the north. Thirty-nine villages in Albania are directly affected by mines—27 people have been killed and 216 have been injured by mine-related incidents. In 1999, the government of Albania established the pillar of the Albanian Mine Action Program. The program policy and strategy were developed by the Albanian Mine Action Committee and implemented by the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE). The presence of mines and UXO on the Albania-Kosovo border in the northeast not only poses a physical threat to the population, but also prevents the use of the land.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Besides Croatia, BiH is the most mine and UXO contaminated country in the SE Europe. Mine-suspected area covers approximately 2130.6 sq km, which represents 4.17 percent of its territory. After the analysis was conducted, it was estimated that there are approximately 670,000 mines and 550,000 tons of UXO in approximately 10,000 locations. Mine suspected areas are defined as unused areas because of the possible risk of mines and UXO. The mine-suspected area structure is divided into three categories according to demining priority:

- The first category consists of locations for everyday use, areas planned for housing, reconstruction and rebuilding, areas of infrastructure and economic resources. Such areas cover 2,438 sq km of BiH territory, representing 11.26 percent of total mine-suspected area.
- The second category consists of locations for occasional use, zones of contact with the first category, agricultural land and forests. Such areas cover 590.1 sq km of BiH territory, representing 27.5 percent of total mine-suspected area.
- The third category consists of the remaining suspected land. Such areas cover 13,118 sq km of BiH territory, representing 61.44 percent of total mine-suspected area.
planned and scattered in Croatia. At the end of 2002, mine-contaminated area was estimated at 1,630 sq km (170 sq km of minefields and around 1,460 sq km containing individual mines—mine-suspected area not used by citizens). In 1996, the United Nations estimated the mine-contaminated area of Croatia to be 13,000 sq km.

The Croatian Mine Action Center (CROMAC) has a database on minefields. The data is taken from original minefield records of the warring parties that laid the minefields. In the database, 132,186 APLs and 79,408 ATMs are recorded—totaling 211,594 mines overall. The database on mine-suspected areas is based on collected reports from various military personnel, as well as from civilians. Fourteen counties are considered to be mine-contaminated; the most mine-contaminated counties are: Osijek-Baranja, Sisacko-Moslavina, Vukovarsko-Srijem, Karlovac and Zadar. There is also a great concentration of mines around the cities that are located on the former confrontation lines: Vukovar, Karlovac, Knin, Oitok and Vukovar. Realizing all the problems that mine wars encompass, Croatia proclaimed a Moratorium on usage, production, export and stockpiling of landmines in April 1996. In addition, Croatia was one of the first countries to support the Ottawa process; it cooperated in the preparation of the Convention and signed it in December 1997. Croatia was the 12th country among the signatory states that ratified the Convention. Croatia finished destroying its stockpiled mines by the end of 2002.

Analyzing the mine action situation and the impact of mines on safety, humanitarian, environmental, economic and development problems of SE Europe, it can be concluded that Croatia impacts significant resources in mine action and that it achieves good results. The results can especially be seen through:

- Unity of all political, social and state factors involved in mine action activities and observance of the obligations of the Ottawa Treaty.
- Good results in mine-suspected area reduction, in demining and mine-suspected area marking, mine awareness education and mine victims assistance.
- Clearly defined mine action strategy proclaimed by the Croatian Parliament.
- First determination of Croatia to finance mine action programs, which enable its stability.
- Support of the academic community in systematically solving certain problems, assistance in decision-making and monitoring of the development of new demining technologies and their testing and introduction into operative use.
- Development of demining capacities that will provide professional assistance to the countries in SE Europe and beyond.

Macedonia

In Macedonia, mine-suspected area covers 21 sq km with 2,000 mines and 70,000 UXO, and spreads along the border with the province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro). There is no existing mine action system and mine action activities are carried out by Civil Defense Forces. Demining activities started in October 2001 and 30 villages and roads in the area of Tetovo and Kumanovo were cleared. During 2002, the ITF trained a part of the personnel to conduct mine action activities. During the same year, ITF contracted a non-governmental organization (NGO) from BH that cleared 3.5 million sq m and surveyed 5,000 houses and yards. The fact that the Albanian People's Army demined their minefields is quite unique for Macedonia.

In Macedonia, there are leftover mines from World War I and II along the Greek border near Delijsko-jeter, where 1,000 mines are located each year. The mine action activities in Macedonia serve as a positive example of a possible regional cooperation with a NGO from BH conducting a significant part of basic area clearance activities in Macedonia, in a quite short period of time. ITF's involvement through a "Train and Equip" training program to swiftly build a mine action capacity in Macedonia, also represents a positive step forward. Due to the small amount of mine-suspected area, well-coordinated activities by the UN Mine Action Office (UNMAO) and ITF, training of locals in all aspects of mine action, and arrival of trained teams from BH, it is likely that the impact mine in Macedonia will be eliminated by the end of 2003.

Serbia and Montenegro

Mines and UXO originate from the war in Croatia, from the Kosovo conflict, and from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Forces engagement in Yugoslavia. There are many discarded cluster bombs as a direct result of that engagement. Mine contamination covers approximately 46 sq km area. Twenty-nine sq km are contaminated with cluster bombs in several locations: Niz (total of three sub locations covering the area of two sq km); Kraljevo (total of three sub locations covering the area of one sq km); Sjenica (total of two sub locations covering the area of 16 sq km); Mendise (total of two sub locations covering the area of three sq km); Krsounik (total of two sub locations covering the area of six sq km); Cacak (one location covering the area of 0.7 sq km); and Vladimirovci (one location covering the area of 0.2 sq km).

The mine-contaminated area consists of 10 sq km and is divided into and along the borderlines with the Republic of Macedonia with 103 minefields covering 45.5 sq km that includes approximately 11,000 mines. There were no military actions in this area in the minefields were laid throughout the whole area, along the so-called "tank advancement lines," as well as to prevent the possible advancement of ground infantry. According to the available mine records of the former Yugoslav army, a number of minefields were "reinforced" by placing APs (PMA-1) under some mines in the minefields. Serbia and Montenegro signed the Ottawa Convention as the last state in SE Europe and ratified the agreement in June 2003.

The province of Kosovo is also mine-contaminated. Six hundred minefields covering the area of 30.5 sq km have been demined with 18,000 APLs, 5,500 ATMs and around 13,500 pieces of UXO cleared. There are still dangerous areas around former stockpiles that were bomarded during NATO attacks. The United Nations Office of Project Service (UNOPS) has played an important role in supporting the Kosovo mine action activities. It was UNOPS's judgment that allowed the mine and UXO problems in Kosovo to be minimized by the end of 2001. Experts say that the level of impact is similar, if not lower than the level of impact in other European countries still disposing UXO from World War II. For example, Slovenia still disposes of approximately 3,000 located items of UXO per year, mostly from World War II and III. UNMAC has trained several members of the Kosovo Protection Corps (7 teams), thus enabling them to tackle and solve the remaining mine and UXO-related problems.

Kosovo stands out as an example of fast and efficient UN capacity-building activities that led to the first successfully completed mine action campaign in the world. However, there is still a need to continue with mine action activities due to the fact that mine-contaminated areas are still recorded, as well as mine incidents, even though the UN operations have been completed.

Montenegro also has a problem with mine and UXO contamination. The Croatia and BH borderline areas are contaminated and still not fully surveyed. Cooperation with Croatia started in that particular area with joint survey teams assessing the level of mine and UXO contamination of the D‎ebel-Brije borderline area. That was a first and important step in cutting and still not fully surveyed. Cooperation with Croatia started in that particular area with joint survey teams assessing the level of mine and UXO contamination of the D‎ebel-Brije borderline area. That was a first and important step in the joint effort of the multi-state survey teams. UXO disposed into the Adriatic Sea also presents a problem for Montenegro.

The ITF's Role in SE Europe

ITF is a humanitarian, non-profit organization dedicated to clearing landmines in SE Europe and the world. When first established by the Slovenian government in March 2003, ITF was designed to assist BH in solving its landmine problem and help the surviving landmine victims in terms of their physical and socio-economic rehabilitation.
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MRE Programs

One of the main advantages for using the ITF for funding the mine action activities is our experience in the region of the issue involved because Slovenia used to be a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Unlike the other countries of former Yugoslavia however, Slovenia does not have a mine problem. We understand the history, mentality and language spoken in the territories of the mine-contaminated countries, which makes it easier to coordinate our activities with the relevant national and local authorities. ITF also offers "tailoring" of projects, and provides transparency and visibility in spending donated funds, as well as the matching-fund mechanism, some of the benefits that ITF provides are briefly discussed below.

Matching-Fund Mechanism

The US government has initiated a matching-fund mechanism, whereby every dollar raised by ITF is matched by an additional dollar provided by the United States government. This U.S. funds can be spent on the same project as the original donation (if the project has been deemed to qualify for funding by both ITF and U.S. government) or alternatively, the money in the matching fund can be used to finance other mine action projects in Europe.

Tailor-Made Projects

The donor decides which of the activities being implemented in the field of mine action in the region it wants to support. Consistent with the donor's will ITF will then develop and submit a proposal for a project to be funded. The project is thus designed in accordance with the preferences of the individual donor (country, activity etc.). However, it also takes into account wishes and needs of the mine-affected country as well as the local community.

Coordination with National Authorities

ITF is working closely with the authorities responsible for mine action programs in SE Europe in order to ensure that the help and assistance provided are of the form that is needed, and that the EOD course are trained and deployed are coordinated with the national plans.

Transparency

ITF's right internal financial management control and annual external audits are conducted by the European Union (EU). The biggest donors to the ITF are Canada, Croatia, Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United States. While the majority of the donated funds have been spent on demining activities and MVA programs, some have been directed towards capacity building, MRE and other mine action related activities.

Activities: Demining/Battle Area Clearance

The ITF's demining and battle area clearance operations are taking place in Albania, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro. The demining work is usually started through an open bid procedure that is conducted by the ITF. The demining work can also be awarded directly if this is an explicit wish of the donor. The work is closely monitored by the ITF staff as well as the professional monitors employed by the ITF that visit the demining sites daily. Hence, the execution of the demining work, more than 30 different companies and eight NGO's executed demining work and cleared more than 37 million sq. meters of land with 17,956 mines and 16,867 UXO found.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of mine victims is an important component of the program implemented by the ITF. When ITF was established in 1998, it set a goal of earmarking 15 percent of all donations for MVA associated programs. Today 6.3 percent of funds have actually gone towards MVA. For that reason, the Workshop on Assistance to Landmine Survivors and Victims in SE Europe was organized July 1-2, 2002. The goal of the workshop was to identify possible strategies and venue for regional resource sharing, cooperation and coordination in the field of landmine survivors and victim assistance. The goal of the workshop was achieved by presentations that included status reports, perspectives on gaps and services in regional approaches, and NGO and donor viewpoints. The workshop included extensive discussion among the participants on how to meet MVA needs and coordinate efforts more effectively.

The ITF MVA program is thus implemented on three different levels: a national level, at the regional level (between ITF and SEEMACC) and a sub-regional level (between the four MVA programs in Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, and Montenegro). These programs are in cooperation with several other organizations, both within and outside the region. The main purpose of this program is to support and coordinate the work of all the organizations involved in mine action activities.

The ITF is also assisted by a number of experts from other countries, including Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. The ITF is also assisted by a number of experts from other countries, including Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. The ITF is also assisted by a number of experts from other countries, including Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. The ITF is also assisted by a number of experts from other countries, including Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.
action to a great extent depends on sound management skills. UNDP in partnership with Cranfield University (UK) has initiated a series of management training courses for national managers of mine action programs. The first senior management course funded by ITF took place from January 21–March 1, 2002, at the Training Center for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief in Ig, Slovenia. Sixteen senior managers of regional programs from Albania, BiH, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro including the province of Kosovo, Azerbaijan and ITF attended the training. The course was of great importance as it was the first regionally based course of the series of UNDP Mine Action Senior Management Training programs. The participants attending the training course expressed their satisfaction with the course, which was implemented by the Centre for Management Development and Training at the Faculty of Economics (CSEF) at the University of Ljubljana.

Regional Approach: Does It Present a Value-Added?

Regional cooperation in SE Europe has proven invaluable in many areas of mine action, ranging from a technical type of cooperation like identifying common demining project barriers of neighboring countries, to efforts of political significance in the process of post-conflict rehabilitation. The cooperation process was formalized in SEEMACC, in which ITF has become a focal point. It is ITF's firm belief that regional cooperation has contributed, and will continue to contribute even more so in the future, to a more efficient use of resources for mine action in the region, as well as to the sharing of knowledge between the countries in the area of mine action. A regional approach can also be seen as a vehicle for a better utilization of available resources. The work done in the scope of SEEMACC is presented in the next sections and the lessons learned in this region could perhaps prove invaluable for the other mine-contaminated regions in the world.

SEEMACC

Several organizations and initiatives are active in SE Europe, which all intend to assist in solving the mine problems in the region. They are: the United Nations, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Ottawa Convention, the Stability Pact for SE Europe, and the ITF. SEEMACC was also created as a regional mine action experts’ initiative. The directors of national MACs in SE Europe have expressed their wish for cooperation in mine action in order to improve the mine action programs. The common interest was shown in the agreement on the establishment of SEEMACC. Directors of the Albanian, Croatian and BiH MACs signed an agreement on November 10, 2000. Later, on November 30th, 2001, the agreement was signed by Montenegro and Yugoslavia MACs. On February 16th, 2002, the process was continued when Azerbaijan became a full member of SEEMACC. The signatories emphasized the need for cooperation and support in the following fields:

- Exchange of expertise, experience and knowledge in the field of mine action in SE Europe and the field of training deminers and managing post-exploration.
- Promotion of the regional approach in the planning of demining programs and in the fundraising for mine action.
- Exchange of information on testing of the new technologies in demining.
- Promotion of the achievement of common standards in the field of procedures for mine clearing in SE Europe.

SEEMACC Vision

The SEEMACC vision is to make SE Europe mine-free by 2010, where the economical and social development will not be impaired by the threat of mines.

SEEMACC Mission

The mission is to develop sustainable regional programs that will contribute to the mine-contaminated countries developing the capacities to demine and return the land to the local populations and enable economic, agricultural and tourism development. The programs are designed to prevent mine incidents, rehabilitate mine victims, help national programs to raise awareness of the mine problem, develop new technologies for mine detection, reduce mine-affected areas, train and educate experts in the region and raise necessary funds. Assistance to national programs in developing common standards, procedures and techniques of demining through the introduction of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards will be based on the experiences from the region. Also included in SEEMACC’s mission is the development of common programs for training of EOD and demining personnel including management, the testing of demining technologies and the training of mine detection dogs (MDDs).

SEEMACC Basic Principles

The principles are setting the framework for the values and policies that the mine action activities will abide by in SE Europe. Mine action is presenting all the aspects of national strategy for solving the mine problems in each country. The main goal of mine action is to re-establish the safe environment that will enable the rehabilitation, recovery and development of the communities. The basic humanitarian principles of neutrality and humanity have to be respected in solving the mine problem so that the most mine-affected communities are helped first. The principle of partnership includes standard and procedures in SE Europe, and SEEMACC tries to integrate expertise, experience and recommendations into mine action of the region.

SEEMACC Strategic Goals and Tasks

The strategy involves six strategic goals in 27 tasks reflecting the needs expressed in mine-affected communities. The six goals are listed below to show the complete list of tasks, check out the SEEMACC website at http://www.se- demining.org/main.html and click on the introduction heading and go to “strategy,” where the complete SEEMACC strategy is listed:

1. Retain the donors in SE Europe
2. Develop prioritization methodology
3. Develop and adopt regional operational standards
4. Train personnel in the region
5. Implement a unified mine information system

MAGS in the Balkans, continued from page 21

The 6. Test new demining technologies and machines

Conclusion

There is significant public and political awareness of the mine problem and the enormous impact that landmines have on safety, as well as on the humanitarian, economic and social development of SE Europe. The real victims are civilians—mines impede the return of the population to their homes and prevent the production of necessary resources, even in the pure areas. Populations living in mine-contaminated areas need to see the mine threat reduced. Then perhaps, the establishment and maintenance of peace, the reintegration of refugees and returnees, the revitalization and reconstruction of communities and even the economic development of SE Europe, will soon become a reality. The regional approach of SEEMACC presents an important development in the cooperation of the region and it is also promoting pro-conflict political rehabilitation in the region. SEEMACC’s approach can be an example to be followed in other regions of the world.

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Regional Approach: Does it Present a Value-Added?

Regional cooperation in SE Europe has proven invaluable in many areas of mine action, ranging from a technical type of cooperation like identifying common demining projects on the borders of neighboring countries, to efforts of political significance in the process of post-conflict rehabilitation. The cooperation process was formalized in SEEMACC, in which ITF has become a focal point. It is ITF’s firm belief that regional cooperation has contributed, and will continue to contribute even more so in the future, to a more efficient use of resources for mine action in the region, as well as to the sharing of knowledge between the countries in the area of mine action. A regional approach can also be seen as a vehicle for a better utilization of available resources. The work done in the scope of SEEMACC is presented in the next section and the lessons learned in this region could perhaps prove invaluable for the other mine-contaminated regions in the world.

SEEMACC:

Several organizations and initiatives are active in SE Europe, which all intend to contribute to solving the mine problem in the region. They are: the United Nations International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Ottawa Convention, the Stability Pact for SE Europe, and the ITF. SEEMACC was also created as a regional mine action expert initiative. The directors of national MACs in SE Europe have expressed their wish for cooperation in mine action in order to improve the mine action programs. This intent was shown in the agreement on the establishment of SEEMACC: Director of the Albanian, Croatian, and BiH MACs signed an agreement on November 10, 2000. Later, on November 30, 2001, the agreement was signed by Montenegrin and Yugoslavian (BiH) MAC. On February 14th, 2002, the process was continued when Azerbaijan became a full member of SEEMACC. The signatures emphasized the need for cooperation and support in the following fields:

- Exchange of experience, expertise and knowledge in the field of mine action in SE Europe and the field of training deminers and managing personnel.
- Promotion of the regional approach in the planning of demining programs and in the fundraising for mine action.
- Exchange of information on testing of the new technologies in demining.
- Promotion of the achievement of common standards, guidelines and procedures in the field of demining in SE Europe.

SEEMACC Vision:

The SEEMACC vision is to make SE Europe mine-free by 2010, where the economical and social development will not be impeded by the threat of mines.

SEEMACC Mission:

The mission is to develop sustainable regional programs that will contribute to the mine-contaminated countries developing the capacities to demine and return the land to the local populations and create economic, agricultural and tourism development. The programs are designed to prevent mine incidents, rehabilitate mine victims, help national programs to raise awareness of the mine problem, develop new technologies for mine detection, reduce mine-affected areas, train and educate experts in the region and raise necessary funds. Assistance to national programs in developing common standards, procedures and techniques of demining through the introduction of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards will be based on the experiences from the region. Also included in SEEMACC mission is the development of common programs for training of EOD personnel, dealing with management, the testing of demining technologies and the training of mine detection dogs (MDDs).

SEEMACC Basic Principles:

The principles are setting the framework for the values and policies that the mine action activities will abide by in SE Europe. Mine action is presenting all the aspects of national strategy for solving the mine problems in each country. The main goal of mine action is to re-establish the safe environment that will enable the reintegration, reconciliation and development of the communities. The basic humanitarian principles of neutrality and humanity have to be respected in solving the mine problem so that the most mine-affected communities are helped first. The principle of partnership includes contributions of the different states, including the United Nations, especially the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and UNDP, the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and donors in each phase of mine action activities in order to integrate expertise, experience and recommendations into mine action of the region.

SEEMACC Strategic Goals and Tasks:

The strategy involves six strategic goals in 27 tasks reflecting the needs expressed in mine-affected communities. The six goals are listed below (see the complete list of tasks, check out the SEEMACC website at http://www.seem- demining.org/main.htm and click on the introduction heading and go to “strategic," where the complete SEEMACC strategy is listed).

1. Return the donors in SE Europe.
2. Develop prioritization methodology
3. Develop and adopt regional operational standards
4. Train personnel in the region
5. Establish and/or strengthen the mine information system

6. Test new demining technologies and machines

Conclusion:

There is significant public and political awareness of the mine problem and the enormous impact that landmines have on safety, as well as on the humanitarian, economic and environmental development of SE Europe. The real victims are civilians—mines impede the return of the populations to their homes and prevent the production of necessary resources, even in the pure areas. Populations living in mine-contaminated areas need to see the mine threat reduced. Then, perhaps, the establishment and maintenance of peace, the reintegration of refugees and returnees, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities and even the economic development of SE Europe, will soon become a reality.

The regional approach of SEEMACC presents an important development in the cooperation of the regions and is also beneficial to solving the mine problem in the region at a faster pace through exchange of experience, expertise, lessons-learned and regional pooling of resources. It also promotes post-conflict political rehabilitation in the region. SEEMACC’s approach can be an example to be followed in other regions of the world.

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MAGS in the Balkans, continued from page 21

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The timeline stipulated by the Ottawa Treaty within 10 years. This is not the only problem the country faces in this area. Funding, depends, more or less exclusively, on donor activity and initiatives; only 10 percent of the overall costs of €32 million for 2003 are for the so-called Council of Ministers. For the ensuing years, a total increase of the demining to be achieved in the calculated amounts. Funds from the donor community of up to €98 million per year would be needed to meet this goal."