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MASG in the Balkans

Klaus-Peter Koschny

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MAG in the Balkans

In order for members of the Mine Action Support Group (MAG) to fully understand mine action programs and to study the implementation of mine action at the national level, several MAG representatives visited and met with government and UN representatives in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This article describes the discoveries and conclusions they made on their trip.

by Lt Col Klaus-Peter Koschny, German Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Introduction

To allow representatives of MAG to see mine action programs in the respective countries and to study the implementation of mine action at the national level, the representatives visited Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina from May 22 to May 22, 2003. Meetings were held with relevant government representatives of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Albania as well as with UN representatives accredited in these states.

Note: Pete Hindi is currently an unemployed technical advisor and can be contacted at his email address (see below).

All pictures courtesy of Peter Hindi.

Contact Information

Peter Hindi
Former Canadian Soldier
5 Karupsa
ARRBIH
BSSWI-2
Cekripe, Priroba Minefields
Bihac, Bosnia
Email: phindi@gmail.com

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The Albanian Mine Action Program

A survey carried out in 1999, illustrates the mine threat in Albania. In northeastern Albania, a 120-km border has 102 areas contaminated with anti-personnel mines and anti-tank mines from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as unexplored North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ordnance, covering an area totaling some 15,255 km², with no available records. The defining efforts of the international community and those of the Albanian Mine Action Centre (AMAC) have not only reduced the contaminated areas by half, but have also led to substantial progress in the area of mine risk education (MRE) and victim assistance. The strategic objective of AMAC from the effect of mines and UXO by 2005, seems realistic, although not easy to achieve. Nevertheless, a shortfall of $5.58 million (U.S.) for the demining program in Albania for this year was noted. For the next two years, $3.5 million per year will be needed to reach the goal of a mine-free country.

The ITF

The ITF is headquartered in Slovenia, the only mine-free country in the Balkans. ITF activities are focused on the other Balkan states and are also being extended to be mine-adjusted states such as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Its activities comprise demining, mine victim assistance, support for demining structures and training. Further, a Geographical Information System for Demining in Southeastern Europe is being developed under the ITF’s auspices. During the five years of its existence, the ITF has raised a total of $111.2 million. Eighty percent of these funds were used for demining, with roughly half of this...
Landmines in Europe & the Caucasus

Modest in high priority. As a result, the 
Croatian Foreign policy and also of the
Croatian landmine action policy and the main
points for the future.

In the afternoon, the group went to
Stak to visit Croatian Mine Action
Centre (CROMAC) headquarters and
to be briefed by its director, Oto
Junwricht, and his staff on the centre's
activities and achievements. It was noted
that 80 percent of the mine action budget
comes from the state budget. This shows
the full responsibility the Croatian government has
assumed for its mine problem.

On the other hand, with the
exception of Norwegian
People's Aid (NPA), which is
working near the Dalmatian
coast and is funded by Norway,
only Croatian companies are
allowed to work in the country.
One result of this is that
demining in Croatia is more
low-commercialized. Under
these circumstances, some
donors are not allowed to
spend money for demining purposes
under their legal obligations.

The next important step will be to
start with technical surveys. This method
will make it possible to dramatically reduce
the size of mine-infested areas. On the
following day, the group visited two
demining projects, one near Stak, the
other near Karlovac. The vehicle near Stak
was managed by DOK-ING, while the
remote-controlled MV-4 mine flail was
to use. While in Karlovac, the
RAM-81—a converted doing
armoured vehicle—was
demolished.

Mine Action in the Republic of Croatia

The basis of the latest estimates,
made in 2003, 1,630 km² are potentially
suspected, containing some 709,000
landmines and UXO in the Republic of
Croatia. Of Croatia's 21 counties, 14
are mine-suspected. Mined territory
spreads from the far south up to the eastern
part of the country, mostly along the former
conflict line. The landmine/UXO
problem in Croatia is assessed by a
balance to high impact and, therefore,
remains a problem (among others) of

According to CROMAC's tasks include:
- Collecting information on
mine-suspected, mine-affected, and mine-
affected areas and maintaining a database
of this information.
- Marking and fencing mine-
suspected areas.
- Awarding demining work through
public tenders.
- Performing quality assurance and
certification.
- Conducting MRE.
- Providing mine victim assistance, including rehabilitation and reintegration of
mine victims.
- Researching and developing new
demining technologies, field testing
methods and techniques.
- Advocating the ban on
anti-personnel landmines

CROMAC develops annual
demining programs and submits them to
the government for approval. After
governmental approval, CROMAC,
with its regional offices in Osijek,
Karlovac and Zadar, is responsible for
the realization of the annual demining
plan. Subsequently, 27 demining companies

transport helicopter Medical Emergency
Relief International (MERLIN) and
continued on to Sarajevo. From the air,
three things became clear: the beauty
of the country, the scars of war and the
changeability of weather conditions in this
area.

After touchdown at Sarajevo
Airport and transport to the hotel,
the group was led to the infamous "sniper alley," where many memories of the
war were refreshed. A brief visit to the
old parts of Sarajevo afforded a wonderful
view of the beauty of the city, as well as
its diversity of cultures and religions.

A reception at the UNDP Office, headed
by Mr. Henrik Rolinrud, introduced the
group to the "local actors," among them
members of the Federation's cabinet
of ministers, ambassadors of countries
active in mine action, Commander STOR
and the head representatives from
UNDEP UMINAS, "United Nations
International Children's Emergency
Funds (UNICEF) and various other organizations.

The last day of the field mission
started with a UNDP briefing on the
situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The
group was then welcomed by the
Minister of Civil Affairs, Prof. Serret
Halilovic, who oversees all
demining activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina
and, with his deputy Mr. Zares
Tesarovic, briefed the participants on
the specific mine situation in his
country. In Civil Affairs and the press,
Ambassador Braun acknowledged the
demining achievements of the
Bosnian and Herzegovinian
government but at the same time made it
clear that further improvement can
only be achieved through more
governmental efforts,
including much stronger financial
support by the national and
regional governments and
donors.

The trip ended on Friday
afternoon with a detailed briefing
at BHMAC headquarters on all aspects of the
demining situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

MINE ACTION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina has the largest mine/UXO contamination problem in southeastern Europe. More than 670,000 mines and 650,000 pieces of UXO are spread over an estimated area of 2,099 km² (4.1 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina territory) in an estimated 10,000 locations. Records are available for 60 percent of the minesfields. Demining activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 1995, at that time under the auspices of the United Nations Mine Action Centre.

In 1998, the Head Coordination Centres and BHMAC, as the coordinating body, took up and continued the demining task. As a legal framework for
demining in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in February 2002 a new demining law was adopted. A unique state-level BHMAC structure and a national annual
demining plan, to be closely monitored by
the Council of Ministers through the
Demining Commission, were created. Eight regional offices in Tuzla, Sarajevo,
Mostar, Bihać, Travnik, Boko, Banja Luka
and Pale carry out the BHMAC work in the
country. Forty-two governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and commercial companies are accredited; 82 mine detection dogs, 32 ground preparation machines and 2,000
Regional Cooperation: 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 SEE MACC, in which ITF has become a focal point. It is ITF’s first 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 SEE MACC 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.

SEE MACC

Several organizations and initiatives are active in SE Europe, which all intend to assist in solving the mine problem in the region. They are: the United Nations, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Oslo Convention, the Stability Pact for SE Europe, and the ITF. The SEE MACC was also created as a regional mine action experts’ initiative. The directors of national MAGs in SE Europe have expressed their wish for cooperation in mine action in order to improve the mine action programs. Their intent was shown in the agreement and establishment of SEE MACC. Directors of the Albanian, Croatian and BiH MAGs, as well as the ITF signed the agreement on November 11, 2000. Later, on November 30th, 2001, the agreement was signed by Montenegro and Yugoslavia MAGCs. On February 14th, 2002, the process was continued when Azerbaijan became a full member of SEE MACC. 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 actions.
- Exchange of information on testing of the new technologies in demining.
- Promotion of the achievement of common standards and accreditation procedures in the field of demining in SE Europe.

SEE MACC Vision

The SEE MACC 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.

SEE MACC 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 local to the local populations. To 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. The tasks included in SEE MACC’s mission is the development of common resources for training of EOQ and demining personnel including management of mine action programs, training of demining technologies and the training of mine detection dogs (MDDs).

SEE MACC: 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 revitalization, reconstruction 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 the federal states and countries, 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.

SEE MACC Strategic Goals and Tasks

The strategy involves six strategic goals as well as three tasks. The six goals are listed below (to see the complete list of tasks, check out the ITF website at http://www.see-demining.org/main.htm and click on the introduction heading and go to “Strategy,” where the complete SEE MACC strategy is listed):

1. Reunite the donors in SE Europe.
2. Develop prioritization methodology.
3. Develop and adopt regional operative standards.
4. Train personnel in the region.
5. Implement a unified mine information system.
6. Test new demining technologies and equipment.

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 imperative 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. They 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 SEE MACC presents an important development in the cooperation of the region and it 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 is also promoting post-conflict political rehabilitation in the region. SEE MACC’s approach can be an example to be followed in other regions of the world.

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Contact Information

Dmitri Gorbata
Southeastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council
E-mail: gorbata@zf-fund.si
Website: www.see-demining.org

Veselin Stojanovic:
Head of the Department for International Relations
International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance
E-mail: v_stojanovic@zf-fund.org
Website: www.itf-fund.org

Sabina Beber
International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance
E-mail: beber@zf-fund.org

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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 on donors, but less or more critically on donor activity and initiatives. Over the period of 10 years, the cost is estimated at some $300 million. The Technical Committee reported on the status of the activities in the July 2002 meeting, which is not possible for Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the