

News Brief

Balkan Flooding Exacerbates Landmine Crisis

Record flooding in spring 2014 in Bosnia–Herzegovina and Serbia killed an estimated 57 people and displaced more than 50,000 at the height of the natural disaster.¹ As of 2014 June 13, 7,500 people were displaced and living in temporary shelters.¹ The Red Cross reports that, in addition to destroying agricultural land, flooding caused thousands of landslides, displacing landmines buried during the 1992–1995 conflict associated with the break-up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as well as the warning signs marking contaminated land.² Authorities estimate that more than 120,000 mines contaminate Bosnia–Herzegovina.³ According to the U.N., 70 percent of the flood-affected areas may contain landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), and 800 sq km (309 sq mi) of suspected contaminated areas are flooded.⁴

Residents in flood-affected areas in Bosnia–Herzegovina and Serbia reported mine and UXO sightings. A landmine in Brčko, Bosnia–Herzegovina, exploded underwater with no casualties reported.⁵ In addition, mines were documented in the following areas: Bosanska Krupa, Olovo, Semizovac and Visoko.⁴ As floodwaters carry mines downstream, currents could send mines as far as the Black Sea.⁶ Furthermore, there is growing concern that floating mines may become trapped in the turbines of a hydroelectric dam.⁶ Bosnia–Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC) official Sasa Obradovic warns that residents must take precautions as they clean up their homes and lands from receding floodwaters.⁷

Moreover, mines threaten the relief effort and landslides worsen the situation. While Serbian and Bosnian demining units are trained in clearing landmines and UXO under normal working conditions, the flooding complicates circumstances, requiring different approaches for shifting land and underwater mine clearance.⁵

The EU allocated EU€65 million (approximately US\$88 million as of 20 June 2014) to Bosnia–Herzegovina, and Serbia, and the International Monetary Fund is prepared to double its funds to



Areas affected by flooding in the Balkans in May 2014.
Map courtesy of ArnoldPlaton/Wikipedia.

€190 million (approximately \$258 million as of 20 June 2014).^{8,9} The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) deployed two separate Quick Reaction Force (QRF) teams, each consisting of three civilian explosive ordnance disposal experts, on 25 May 2014. The QRF teams assisted the BHMAC and Serbian Mine Action Centre in assessing the landmine situation following the floods, identified gaps in assistance, and provided recommendations to U.S. and local authorities on demining program needs. Bosnia–Herzegovina also received outside support from countries including Germany, France, Italy and the U.K. ©

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