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Regional Mine Action as a Confidence-building Measure

The mine-action cooperation through regional workshops described in this article tested the effectiveness of this cooperation as a confidence-building measure among neighbouring states and former combatants.

by Jernej Cimperšek [Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the OSCE] and Iztok Hobevar [International Trust Fund]

Mines represent one of the most significant security, humanitarian, environmental, economic and development problems of the international community. Areas covered with mines directly and indirectly impact a community. Mined areas potentially manifest themselves in a large number of civilian casualties and influence the population’s health in terms of losses in livestock, arable land, supplies, production and trade. Civilian communities have a constant fear and a feeling of animosity, distrust and intolerance as a result of mines.

Developing a Regional Approach

A regional approach to mine action has been slowly growing in southeastern Europe and the southern Caucasus. Slovenia, through the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, has been actively involved in mine-action activities in southeastern Europe since 1998, using a regional approach. Then, in November 2008, three national mine-action centres (Albania, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the ITF established the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council, a technical body whose goal is a southeastern Europe free of mines.

By 2004 other countries, including Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia, from the region joined the initiative and started to cooperate on joint regional projects as well as on the exchange of knowledge, technologies and equipment. Being a technical body, SEEMACC is providing an arena for countries in the region to discuss solutions to the landmine problem, one of the major factors preventing normal socioeconomic development in affected countries.

With good regional cooperation and proposed joint projects, affected countries managed to attract additional donor support, which is necessary in order to achieve the common goal—a mine-free region by the end of the decade. Similar initiatives should be started in other mine-affected regions to enhance confidence building and strengthen cooperation and trust among neighbouring countries.

To speed the pace of reducing the landmine threat that endangers populations in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and to strengthen confidence and security in the southern Caucasus, in 2004–2005 the U.S. Department of State implemented the “Reconnect Initiative,” an innovative multilateral program. Under this initiative, U.S. military personnel conducted joint humanitarian demining training of select groups of Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers and civilians. The government of Georgia hosted this training program at the Gori military base near Tbilisi, Georgia. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan each contributed 20 soldiers and civilians (for a total of 60 students) to be educated about modern humanitarian demining techniques by U.S. Army demining experts.

Regional Workshops Begin

The second initiative was the successful implementation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Cooperation and Capacity Building Seminar, held 1-2 October 2002, in Yerevan, Armenia, and co-hosted by the

Regional Cooperation and the OSCE

The OSCE has been a focal point for regional cooperation and confidence building and has also contributed to the implementation of international mine action programs.

The OSCE is a cooperative security body that monitors compliance with the Vienna Convention on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. The OSCE’s primary focus is to prevent, contain, and resolve conflicts in its area of responsibility, which includes the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), central Asia and other parts of Europe.

The OSCE’s main instrument for regional cooperation is the Regional Co-ordination Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which works with national authorities to promote the eradication of landmines and unexploded ordnance in the region.

The OSCE continues to support mine action efforts through its Mine Action Management Support Centre, which provides technical assistance, training, and coordination support to countries affected by landmines.

In addition, the OSCE has supported regional initiatives, such as the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council (SEEMACC), which was established in 2004 to promote regional cooperation in mine action and confidence building in the region.

Conclusion

Regional cooperation and confidence building are critical to the successful implementation of international mine action programs and to the prevention of landmine-related civilian casualties. The OSCE has played a pivotal role in promoting these initiatives in the South Caucasus region and beyond.

Future work on mine action in the region will continue to focus on strengthening cooperation and confidence building among affected countries, as well as on the implementation of international mine action programs. The OSCE will remain a key player in this effort, supporting national authorities and regional organizations in their efforts to eradicate landmines and unexploded ordnance.

References


Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia presented the landmine and UXO problem of the South Caucasus. Many workshops such as this one are full of some successes and many failures. The key is to keep pushing the workshops because success is being achieved, even if change is gradual.

Some consensus was observed on the desirability for all countries in the region to work toward becoming States Parties to the Ottawa Convention to the Ottawa Convention once peace agreements to regional conflicts are reached. Georgia and Azerbaijan have already made positive steps by announcing a moratorium on the use, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. The main obstacle for accession to the Convention is dealing with territory not controlled by national authorities. In the South Caucasus there are unresolved conflicts in the OSCE areas, including conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh).

A suggestion to include mine-action activities on the agenda of peace negotiations within the OSCE Minok Group was widely supported, as well as the option to meet jointly in Georgia’s offices with Georgia acting as a mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the second part of the workshop, the representatives from three central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) presented the mine problems in their countries. Common problems are mines that lie on state borders, especially on the border with Uzbekistan. Only Tajikistan has joined the Ottawa Convention, possibly serving as a role model for other countries in the region. Largely because of its status as a State Party to the Ottawa Convention, Tajikistan’s mine-action program receives financial support from several donor countries. All three delegations from central Asia supported the idea of developing a follow-up regional workshop in the near future.

The Tbilisi workshop ended with a roundtable discussion in which participants discussed possible next steps in mine action. The following cooperation was suggested:

- Continuation of joint training
- Cooperation in mine-victim assistance
- Encouragement to announce a moratorium on the use of anti-personnel mines and to voluntarily submit reports on each country’s respective landmine situation in accordance with Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention
- Marking of all known minefields
- Including the mine problem in negotiations within the OSCE Minok Group
- Developing a follow-up workshop in Central Asia in the near future.

Conclusion

Cooperation in mine action among countries is one of the first steps for confidence building in the region, as experience from southeastern Europe shows. A simple conclusion can be drawn from the Tbilisi workshop: Demining is considered a complementary activity of the OSCE, not a central one. However, since demining makes way for the core activities of the OSCE—primarily disarmament, human rights and environmental issues—to be truly effective, successful mine-action activities are essential for OSCE.

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### Demining of Underground Adits in Ukraine

During World War II the Soviet Union established ammunition depots with over 10,000 metric tons (11,023 U.S. tons) of explosives around the Ukrainian towns of Sevastopol and Kerch. Stored in adits, these explosives threaten the peaceful lives of present-day Ukrainians. In 2002, teams began the task of removing unexploded ordnance, landmines and debris. They encountered many problems while pursuing their goal of eliminating these stockpiles by 2010. Their efforts are described in this article.

by Yuri Koliyanyk | Ukroboronservice State Company

In spite of the fact that 60 years have already passed since the biggest and the most severe war of the 20th century, the problem of clearing a large number of unexploded ordnance from Ukrainian territories is still topical. Engineering and demining units from the Ministry of Defense completed partial clearance of the territories in Ukraine in the mid-1970s. Despite the considerable work the deminers have done and are still doing, there is still a need for further demining, particularly in Ukraine.

Nowadays, the government of Ukraine is improving the procedures of mine action in accordance with the requirements of International Mine Action Standards and plans to set up a specialized governmental body for coordinating all mine action in the country.

Clearing unexploded objects from Ukraine’s territories is the obligation of the Ministries of Emergency and of Defense. Ukroboronservice State Company (through its structural subunit, the Center of Humanitarian Demining) specializes in carrying out commercial projects in Ukraine and abroad. This company has played the leading role in establishing humanitarian demining in Ukraine.

The area most contaminated by unexploded objects is the Crimea Peninsula, namely the towns of Sevastopol and Kerch, where 30 people have perished or been injured due to WWII unexploded objects in recent years. In January 2001 the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a state program—“Clearance of WWII Unexploded Objects in the Area of Towns of Sevastopol and Kerch until 2010”—based on the results of investigations the specialists of Ukroboronservice State Company had done. This program will run until the end of December 2010.

The Inkerman Adits Ammunition Depot

The main area that needs to be cleared of explosives within the framework of this program is the destroyed Inkerman Adits located two kilometers (1.3 miles) from Sevastopol. The Inkerman Adits were destroyed due to an ammunition explosion in June 1942. Before the explosion, they served as the Soviet Army ammunition depot, storing more than 10,000 metric tons (11,023 U.S. tons) of ordnance. A considerable amount of ammunition (approximately 1,000 to 3,000 metric tons (1,102 to 3,307 U.S. tons)) did not detonate during that explosion and is now accessible to it has been obscured. The intact areas of the galleries are practically inaccessible. The majority of the ammunition that did not detonate has been mechanically and thermally damaged as well as affected by weather, such as erosion and the periodic influence of ground heave.

Examination of the destroyed adits has shown that the rock massif over them consists of separate blocks (more than 1,000 cubic me...