Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Country Profile
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Landmine/Unexploded Ordnance Contamination

After the fighting between the NATO and the Yugoslav army, organizations such as the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre and the International Trust Fund for Mine Action conducted surveys to assess the ERW threat.9 The northern region of the country, specifically the northeastern border with Kosovo and Albania, was found to be rife with landmines.

During the period of 2002, landmines posed a serious threat, the surveys established that “the greatest threat by far” came from UXO.4 According to government authorities, mines and UXO from the conflict contaminated 80 villages, including the regions of Kumanovo, Tetovo and Skopje. During the conflict, 70,000 people fled their homes, and mine contamination hindered their safe return.

In 2001, the United Nations Mine Action Office assured the US the problem in the southern region of the country was under control.2 The Thessalonica Front, the 250-kilometer (155-mile) border with Greece, was found to be contaminated in the areas of Gevgelija, Kavadarsi and Bitola.2

Macedonia’s landmine threat was considered “isolated and easily definable,” because the NLA laid mines specifically in areas that led to their defensive locations.2 The threat was limited to certain areas where minefields locations were identified. However, this knowledge does not extend to the UXO threat. ERW have still prevented the use of land while also affecting economic development, communication and tourism.6

The Road to Clearance

Macedonia became a State Party to the Ottawa Convention1 on 1 March 1998, after a State Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.4 Macedonia completely stockpiled clearance two and a half years before the Ottawa Convention-mandated deadline. In September 2006, four years after starting, Macedonia achieved landmine clearance.4 The Macedonian government set priorities for mine clearance, which began in 2002. Among the greatest concerns were areas that prevented internally displaced persons from returning home and Shipka village, because a hospital was to be built there.

Organizations that participated in clearance of the region contaminated by landmines in 2002 were Handicap International, MineTech International (contracted by CARE International) and the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance.7 The U.S. Department of State also contributed to mine action in Macedonia through the OFDA and by funding the deployment of mine clearing teams from Bosnia and Herzegovina.8 By the end of 2004, 200,000 mines/UXO had been found and destroyed.3

A United Nations Mine Action Office was established in September 2001 under the UNMACC survey;4 and the Ministry of Defense took over in 2003. Shortly thereafter, the Protection and Rescue Directorate was formed, becoming the only body responsible for UXO clearance in Macedonia. The Directorate began its work in 2005. The Directorate’s role in mine action involves surveys, clearance, mine deconstruction, marking and mine fields, and medical treatment of victims.4

Mine-risk Education

The 2001 conflict and resulting border contamination created a need for mine education campaigns in the northern region of the country. The International Committee of the Red Cross led an MRE program through two years of activities along with UNICEF’s involvement in 2001 resulted in over 17,000 individuals being reached.4

The Road Ahead

The Directorate formulated an action plan in 2005. The plan details the period 2006 to 2010 and involves three phases:2

1. Developing national capacities and obtaining equipment. This phase has been set up to take two years and should be completed by 2008.
2. Developing operationally and establishing international and national partnerships. This phase is a continuing process.2
3. Although landmine clearance has been completed, UXO still pose a threat to the southern region of the country, and the Directorate’s role is to carry out its clearance plan. This contamination is expected to be cleared by 2009.

Landmine and UXO Problem

Serbia was declared a UXO-free country, and as of March 2006, cluster bombs remained in six main areas of Serbia, affecting approximately 4,414 kilometers (2.75 square miles).1 The Regional Center for Underwater Demining, which was founded in March 2003, cleared UXO and focused primarily on underwater mine and UXO removal but also oversees general demining activities.4 As of March 2006, Serbia had found that contamination consisted of about 46 minefields of unknown size containing approximately 10,470 antipersonnel mines.1 Border territories around Serbia and Montenegro remain contaminated by landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Cluster bombs and large aerial bombs from the NATO attack in 1999 are spread throughout the area. There are also significant amounts of landmines and UXO on the coast of Montenegro, some of which date to the World Wars.

In the province of Kosovo the danger remains large. Due to conflict, these bombs and other UXO lie in many areas, including heavily forested ones.5

Mine Action

The Mine Action Center of Serbia started in March 2002. It was originally part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but then came under the General Secretary’s control in 2003. When a new government was formed in 2004, the mine action center was made responsible for mine action activities independent of government interference. The Serbian government supervises the MAAO, but it works with non-governmental organizations to clear landmines.

The state of Montenegro was declared free of landmines in 2001, as of March 2006. In Montenegro, the RCUD was able to clear 634 mines and 27 cluster bomblets destroyed.5 Additionally, 1,373,520 square meters (336 acres) were cleared in 2005 with 634 mines and 27 cluster bomblets destroyed.5

In 2005, the RCUD was able to clear the Visegrad trench in the Bay of Kotor in November 2004 with financial help from the United Nations.7 The United Nations also included UXO clearance in other locations in the Bay.5 Also, demining of UXO around the coastal resort of Budva has been successful, along with on-shore demining around the town of Ulcinj.6

In 2006, demining in Kosovo was very successful with the help of several different organizations including the Kosovo Protection Corps, the internationally-staffed Kosovo Protection Force, Handicap International, and MSF.

They were able to collect 719 AP mines, 30 anti-personnel mines, 977 cluster bomblets and 1,378 pieces of UXO in 2005.7 From June 2009 to the end of 2005, an estimated 41,488,255 square meters (10,252 acres) of land were cleared.4

The Future

Even though the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia led to the formation of new countries, relationships have not been severed. Organizations such as the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council have helped all the countries in the region share the burden of the landmine problem.6 The organization currently seeks to make all the countries in Southeast Europe “mine free” by 2010.10

Serbia and Montenegro, under Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, must destroy all AP mines under their control no later than 1 March 2014. Serbia plans to clear all anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines by the end of 2008, which could be achieved given that the country is well underway with minefield clearance.1 A meeting in Sarajevo in April 2003, however, included a resolution stating that Montenegro should be declared free of landmines if demining projects at the border with Albania progress as planned.1