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Serbia and Montenegro

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By Rachel Canfield [Mine Action Information Center]

T en years after gaining independence, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia faced the uprising of an armed group, which resulted in damage to the country and greater civil rights. The hostility between the ethnic Albanians—who called themselves the breakaway Province of Ohrid—and the Macedonian government lasted seven months and ended with the signing of the framework agreement on August 2001. This conflict, in addition to World Wars I and II, left Macedonia with contamination from mines and unexploded ordnance remains of war along the northern border with Kosovo and Albania and the southern border with Greece. Five years after the end of the internal conflict, Macedonia completed mine clearance and continues to work towards clearance of other ERW.

Landmine/Unexploded Ordnance Contamination

After the fighting between the NLA and Macedonian government, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre and the International Trust Fund for Mine Action conducted surveys to assess the ERW threat. The northern region of the country, specifically the northern mountainous parts of Kosovo and Albania, was found to be rife with landmines. During the NLA’s period of operations, the surveys established that “the greatest threat by far came from UXO.” 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 November 2002, the United Nations Mine Action Office assessed the UXO problem in the southern region of the country—specifically regions of North Macedonia, the Thessaloniki Front, the 250-kilometer (155-mile) border with Greece, which was found to be contaminated by areas of Gerakasidi, Kavadarci and Bitola.

Macedonia’s landmine threat was considered “localized and easily defined” because the NLA laid mines specifically in areas that led to their defensive locations. 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. An estimated 40 people have died and 1,043 injured by mines and UXO from 1965 to 2003.

The Road to Clearance

Macedonia became a State Party to the Ottawa Convention1 on 1 March 1999 and is a State Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.2 Macedonia completed stockpile clearance two and a half years before the Ottawa Convention-man- dated deadline. In September 2006, four years after starting, Macedonia completed landmine clearance.3 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 the problem of having a hospital built there.

Organizations that participated in clearance of the region conducted an assessment of the 2001 conflict were Handicap International, MineTech International (contracted by CARE International) and the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance.4 The U.S. Department of State also contributed to mine action in Macedonia through the ITF and by funding the deployment of six demining teams from Bosnia and Herzegovina.5 By the end of 2004, 200,000 mines/UXO had been found and destroyed.6 A United Nations Mine Action Office was established in September 2005 after the UNMCC survey;7 and the Ministry of Defense took over in 2003. Shortly thereafter, the Protection and Rescue Directorate was formed, becoming the only body responsible for mine/UXO clearance in Macedonia. The Directorate began its work in 2005. The Directorate’s role in mine action is to oversee the clearance of residual landmines and UXO on the coast of Montenegro, some of which date to the Ottoman Empire.

In the province of Kosovo, the danger from anti-personnel mines is decreasing, but the threat of cluster bombs and other UXO remains large. Due to conflict, these bombs and other UXO lie in many areas, including heavily forested ones.

Mine Action

The Mine Action Center of Serbia was formed in March 2002. It was originally part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but then came under the General Secretariat’s control in 2003. When a new government was formed in 2004, the mine action center was made party to the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) for mine action activities independent of government interference. The Serbian government supervises the activities of the MAIC but is not a signatory to the Ottawa Convention. The MAIC is being considered for full country membership in the future.

In 2005, the MAIC was able to make progress in clearing UXO. In 2005, the MAIC was able to make progress in clearing UXO. In the second quarter of 2006, the MAIC’s RCO was able to clear 719 AP mines, 977 cluster bombs and 1,378 pieces of UXO in UXO in 2005.9 From June 2006 to the end of 2005, an estimated 41,488,255 square meters (10,252 acres) of land were cleared.

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 Centre have helped all the countries in the region share the burden of the landmine problem. Even though the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Organization currently seeks to make all the countries in Southeast Europe “mine free” by 2010.6

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 has 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.7 A meeting in Sarajevo in April 2005 between the Mine Action Center of Serbia and the Mine Action Center of Montenegro should be declared free of land- mines if demining projects at the border with Albania progress as planned.8

References

1. Developing national capacities and establishing international and national partnerships. This phase is a continuing process. 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 incineration plan. This contamination is expected to be cleared by 2009.

2. The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro has faced many political and social difficulties since the dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.2 On 15 August 2003, the then-unified coun-
try of Serbia and Montenegro acceded to the Ottawa Convention, becoming a State Party on 1 March 2004. In June 2006, Montenegro declared independence from Serbia. The National Assembly of the Convention as a separate country; Serbia remained bound by the original agreement. Both countries acceded to the Ottawa Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, having assumed the obligation to destroy all anti-personnel mines. The simplified ratification bill was drafted by the foreign ministry and sent to the defense ministry for finalization while Serbia and Montenegro were united, but neither country has yet to become party to the 1996 Amended Protocol II on landmines.

3. The Road Ahead

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

1. Developing national capacities and obtaining equipment. This phase has been completed.

2. Conducting surveys to establish future clearance priorities. This phase is set to take two years and should be completed by 2008.

3. Developing operationally and establishing international and national partnerships. This phase is a continuing process. 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 incineration plan. This contamination is expected to be cleared by 2009.

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