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Serbia and Montenegro

by Matthew Voegel [Mine Action Information Center]

The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro has faced many political and social difficulties since the dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On 18 September 2003, the then-unified country of Serbia and Montenegro acceded to the Ottawa Convention,¹ becoming a State Party on 1 March 2004. In June 2006, Montenegro declared independence from Serbia. Montenegro subsequently acceded to the Convention as a separate country; Serbia remained bound by the original agreement. Both Serbia and Montenegro are party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons,² having assumed the obligation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Though a ratification bill was drafted by the foreign ministry and sent to the defense ministry for finalization while Serbia and Montenegro were united, neither country has yet to become party to the 1996 Amended Protocol II³ on landmines.⁴

Landmine and UXO Problem

Serbia has recorded 710,000 mines and, as of March 2006, cluster bomblets remained in six main areas of Serbia, affecting approximately 24 square kilometers (9.27 square miles).⁵ The Regional Center for Underwater Demining, which was founded in 2002, controls mine action in Montenegro and focuses primarily on underwater mine and UXO removal but also oversees general demining.⁵ As of April 2006, RCUD found that contamination consisted of about 46 minefields of unknown size containing around 424 mines in Montenegro.⁴

Border territories around Serbia and Montenegro remain contaminated by landmines and other explosive remnants of war.⁶ Cluster bombs and large aerial bombs from the NATO action 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 First World War.⁷

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 formed in March of 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 solely responsible for mine-action activities independent of government interference. The Serbian government supervises the MAC but the center refuses to allow federal institutions (i.e., the army) to participate in demining operations in civilian areas.⁵

In Montenegro, the RCUD observes all aspects of mine action. It was established by the government of Montenegro in 2002 and organized by its Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is recognized as a public institution and yet works independently to achieve the tasks set forth by the government of the Republic of Montenegro.⁷

The Office of the Kosovo Protection Corps Coordinator, under the authority of the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General, handles all mine action and explosive ordnance disposal in the province of Kosovo. As the status of Kosovo is still being decided, there is no current mine-action organization run by Kosovo citizens; however, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Management Section of OKPCC, which currently serves as the national mine-action authority, has plans to become an actual mine-action organization as soon as Kosovo's status is decided.⁹

Progress

Demining in the region has taken a turn for the better. Serbia, which began to destroy its stockpile of anti-personnel mines in August 2005, destroyed a total of 649,217 cached mines, nearly half of its stockpile as of 2 March 2006.⁵ Additionally, 1,373,520 square meters (339 acres) of land were cleared in 2005 with 634 mines and 27 cluster bomblets destroyed.⁵

In Montenegro, the RCUD was able to clear the Verige trench in the Bay of Kotor in November 2004 with financial help from the United States.⁵ Additional projects included UXO clearance in other locations in the Bay.⁵ Also, demining of UXO around the coastal resort of Budva has begun, along with on-shore demining around the town of Ulcinj.⁵

In 2005, 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, HALO Trust and others.

They were able to collect 719 AP mines, 30 anti-vehicle mines, 977 cluster bomblets and 1,378 pieces of UXO in 2005.⁹ From June 1999 to the end of 2005, an estimated 41,488,255 square meters (10,252 acres) of land were cleared.⁹

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 and work together to resolve it. 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.⁵ A meeting in Sarajevo in April 2005 concluded that, "similarly, Montenegro should be declared free of landmines if demining projects at the border with Albania progress as planned."⁴

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Matthew Voegel has been an Editorial Assistant for the Journal of Mine Action since October 2006. He is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in print journalism at James Madison University.
Contact Information

Matthew Voegel
Editorial Assistant
Journal of Mine Action
Mine Action Information Center
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu