

GICHD's Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia Outreach Programme

by Faiz Paktian [Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining]



EECCA workshop participants visit the ERW response center of the Ministry of Interior of Belarus.
Photo courtesy of GICHD.

Within the Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA) region, fifteen countries affected by landmines and/or explosive remnants of war (ERW) use Russian as a communication language: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Mines and ERW pose a serious hazard to the lives and livelihoods of the people in the EECCA. Residual contamination impacts many of the countries. In Belarus for instance, 20,879 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) were found and destroyed in 2014.¹ Significant amounts of UXO were also recovered from Estonia, Moldova and Russia. More recent conflicts led to considerable mine and ERW contamination in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In Ukraine, clearance priorities from the current conflict superseded

clearance of WWII ERW. In 2014, 36,500 items of UXO in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk were reportedly destroyed.

Aging and poorly managed ammunition stores also resulted in numerous unplanned explosions that killed many civilians living close to depots in several of the EECCA countries. Furthermore, insurgents use poorly secured or abandoned ammunition as sources of highly explosive material for the production of improvised explosive devices. To improve human security and the safety of civilian populations in EECCA, clearing mines and scattered items of ERW is imperative as well as securing and managing all ammunition stores to recognized international standards.

In June 2015, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) established a platform of affected states and regional organizations to advance human security across the region through improvements in the mine

action sector. The purpose of the Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia Outreach Programme (EECCA-OP) for mine/ERW action is to promote safe and efficient implementation of mine/ERW action projects and programs, to enhance regional cooperation through information and experience sharing, and to embed the best mine/ERW action practices throughout the region. The EECCA program will assist national mine action authorities and local operators to accelerate capacity development through access to international standards, training material and advisory services in a more accessible language.

First EECCA Regional Workshop in Minsk

GICHD, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus, organized the first regional workshop in Minsk 9–12 June 2015. Thirty-five participants from 10 countries and representatives from international organizations active in the region attended the workshop.

Workshop objectives were as follows:

- Assess and thereby understand the scope of the mine/ERW problem and the challenges faced by different countries in the region.
- Promote best practices and share lessons learned in ammunition-safety management and mine/ERW action.
- Enhance cooperation in planning and implementing mine/ERW action programs among all states in the region.
- Discuss priorities and initiate regional workshops and activities that benefit mine/ERW programs and military personnel in the EECCA region.

Workshop Recommendations

The workshop concluded with the following recommendations for GICHD's EECCA-OP:

- Establish a mine action website for EECCA in the Russian language.
- Translate International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) and other relevant documents into Russian.
- Hold a regional, annual gathering for EECCA countries and partners to review progress and establish priorities.
- Invite countries absent during the first EECCA gathering, such as Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia and Uzbekistan, to future gatherings.

- Organize a visit for the national authorities to a well-established mine action program in the region.
- Offer technical regional workshops in Russian on the following topics: development of national law and standards, IMAS application, strategic/annual planning, ERW survey and clearance, ammunition-safety management, accreditation and contracting, risk education, and victim assistance.

Action Plan 2016

GICHD's EECCA-OP plans to deliver the following in 2016:

A mine action website in Russian. The website will be a platform to post and disseminate mine action information and news, including up-to-date information on mine action programs and topics in the Russian language. Russian-speaking visitors can sign up for news and information as well as participate in discussions on mine action issues. The purpose of the website is to make essential mine action information and documents available in Russian, and to promote common mine action terminology and best practices throughout the region. GICHD will be responsible for maintenance and content.

Translation of IMAS and IATG into Russian. IMAS, IATGs, and the associated documents and tools in the Russian language will increase understanding and promote a common and consistent approach to the conduct of mine action operations and ammunition-safety management. They will assist the national authorities to adopt best practice, develop national standards and assist implementing organizations to improve standing operating procedures. As a result, these will contribute to the safety, efficiency and quality of mine action operations and ammunition-safety management in the region.

Field seminar to the mine action program in Azerbaijan. A visit to the mine action program in Azerbaijan in consultation with the Azerbaijan National Mine Action Authority is planned for 2016. Its purpose is to expose the countries of EECCA to an established mine action program in the region. During the visit, representatives of mine/ERW action programs and military personnel engaged in humanitarian tasks will have the opportunity to exchange views and experiences on all aspects of management and field operations, including risk education and victim assistance.

Organization of a side event during the National Directors Meeting. GICHD will organize a side event at the International Meeting of National Programme Directors and U.N. Advisors in Geneva. Representatives of EECCA countries at the meeting will be invited to share ideas and

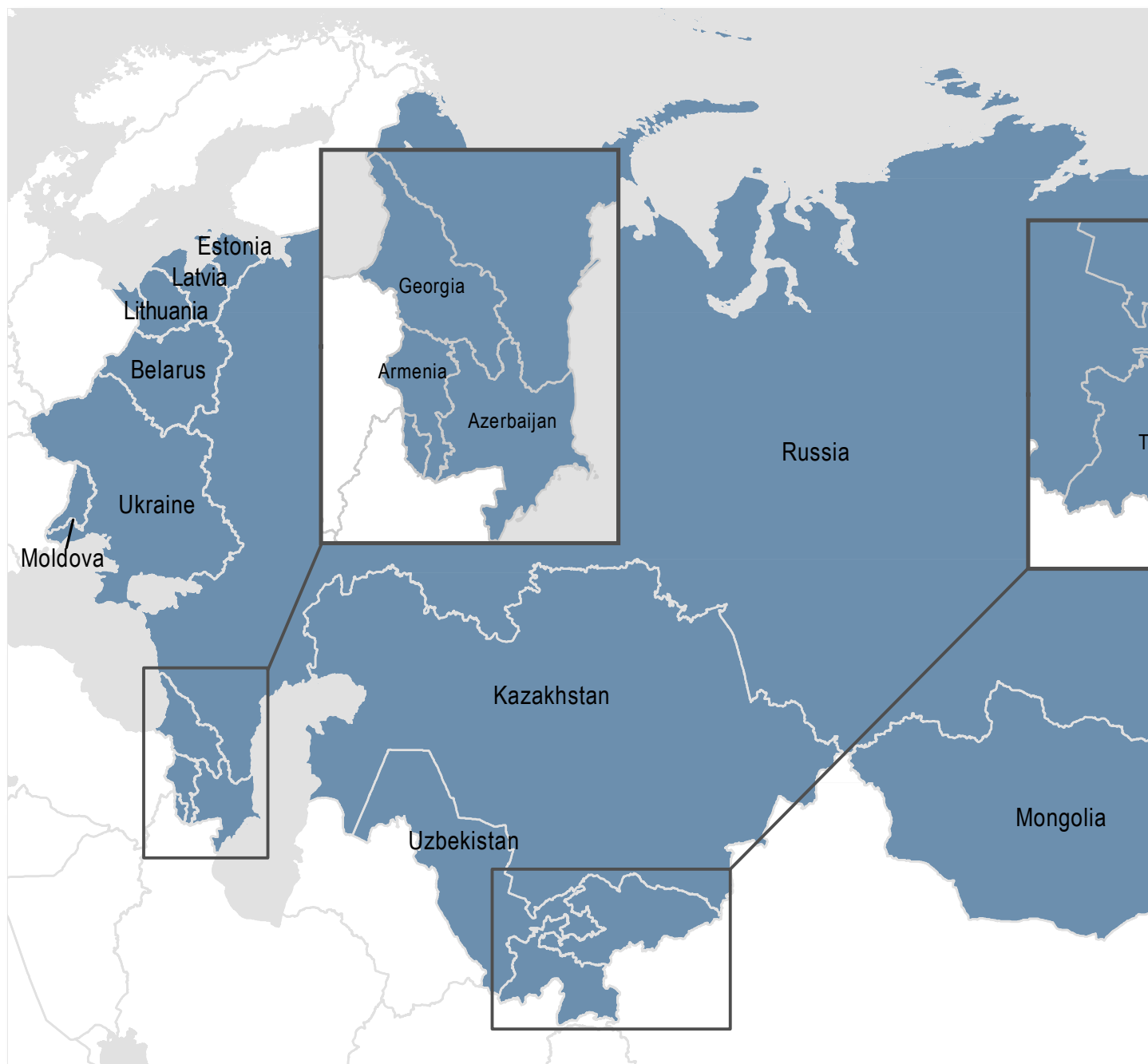


Figure 1. Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) Outreach Programme. The GICHD supports national authorities, international and regional organizations and NGOs in their efforts to improve the relevance and performance of mine action. It serves as the leading multi-lingual knowledge hub for mine action practitioners. The GICHD furthers knowledge and promotes norms and standards in Russian, fostering regional and intersectoral cooperation. Disclaimer: The map above is for illustrative purposes and does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the GICHD concerning the legal status of any country or territory or concerning the delimitation of frontiers or boundaries. Some countries/territories highlighted in this map may not have landmine/ERW contamination.

Figure courtesy of GICHD.



thoughts on upcoming events and the future of the EECCA-OP. The event is a valuable opportunity in February 2016 to inform the group about its activities and encourage financial, in-kind and academic contributions of the partners, as well as review progress and plans.

Second EECCA Annual Conference

The second EECCA annual gathering is planned for the second half of 2016. In this event, national authorities in the region will not only discuss progress made but also share lessons learned, future challenges, and updates on mine action operations and ammunition-safety management. The needs of the programs will be assessed in order to identify priorities for 2017.

Technical Workshop

GICHD will organize a technical workshop in an EECCA country with a focus on norms, standards and legislation. Countries will share their norms and laws with regard to mine action and ammunition-safety management as well as discuss challenges and lessons learned regarding these topics. ©

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