

ITF: A Look at the Past, Present and Future of MINE ACTION

by Dorijan Maršič and Iztok Hočevar | International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance

The International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) was established March 12, 1998, by the government of the Republic of Slovenia. The main activities of ITF are demining, mine victims assistance (MVA), training, mine awareness, mine risk education (MRE), Geographical Information Systems (GIS) development and regional cooperation. In the years since its inception, ITF has developed into the main regional actor in the field of mine action (MA) in the region of southeastern Europe (SEE). In addition, ITF is strongly involved in connecting the region through the Southeastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council (SEEMACC).

ITF was initially established as a way for the Republic of Slovenia to support Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in its efforts to clear the land of the “hidden killers,” i.e., landmines. ITF officially started its operation with the Memorandum of Understanding signed with BiH in

December 1998, which enabled the start of ITF activities in that country. It soon extended its operation to other mine-affected countries/territories in the region of SEE, namely Albania, Croatia, Kosovo and Macedonia, while continuing to serve BiH.

ITF’s managing board as well as ITF’s Board of Advisers—which includes 29 members: Austria, Belgium, BiH, Canada, Croatia, Croatia Without Mines, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, France, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), Germany, the Institute for Rehabilitation of Republic of Slovenia (IRRS), Ireland, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Norway, Qatar, the Red Cross of Slovenia, the Republic of Slovenia, SPEM (a Slovenian public relations company), the Survey Action Centre, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Kingdom and the United States—approved the

extension of ITF operations to Cyprus and the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia). This extension was within the limits of ITF capabilities and was granted under the condition that the focus of its operation remain in the region of SEE. Today, ITF has its headquarters in Ig, Slovenia, and two implementation offices, one in Croatia and one in BiH.

Fundraising and the Matching-Fund Mechanism

Despite a modest start in 1998, the level of donations today has risen to a satisfying one. Through February 2005, ITF has raised \$157.4 million (U.S.) for its activities. In 2004, ITF collected \$30.7 million.

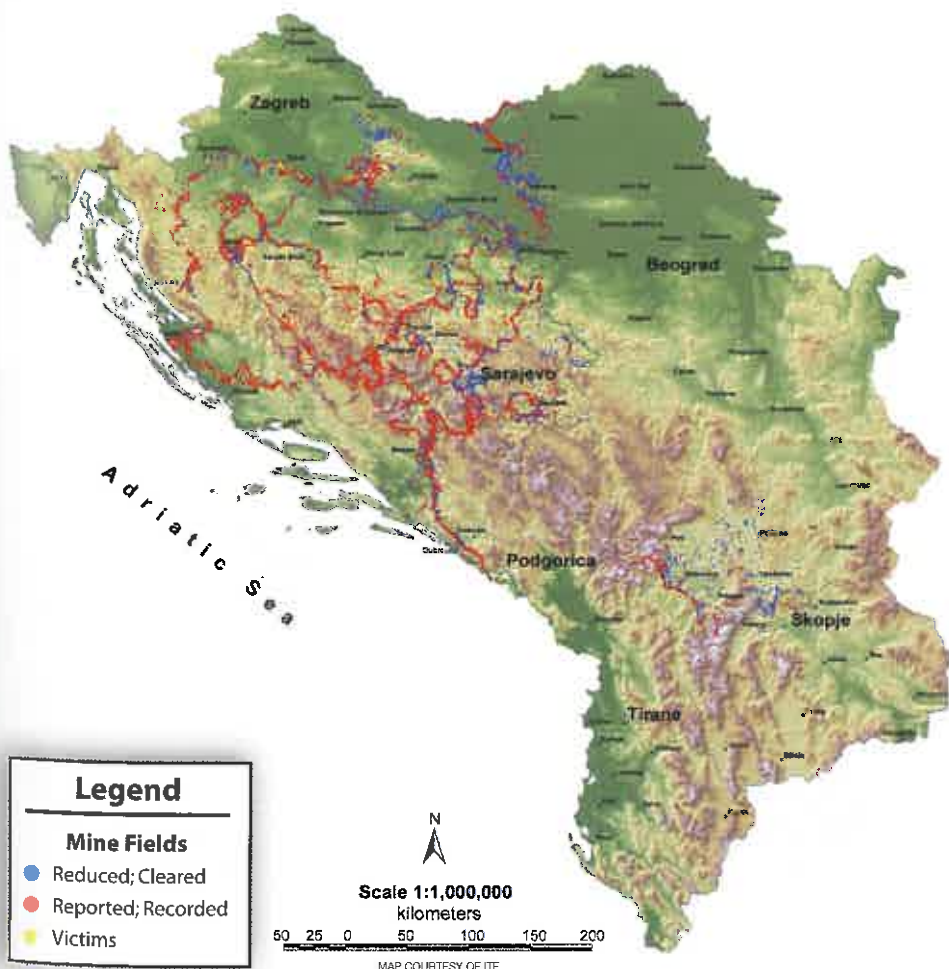
An overview of donations shows a rise in fundraising—and there is a substantial increase of interest in the matching-fund mechanism. This term means that for every dollar that ITF raises from donors, the U.S. government matches it, so the effect of the donation is thus doubled. This formula was later proven to be the one that attracted the most new donors. Implementing the mechanism was one of the biggest challenges in the early days of ITF’s operation and ITF successfully conquered it, which came as a surprise to some but was satisfying to even more.

ITF has by now gained a certain reputation and its results guarantee relatively constant donor support, which is evident also from the fact that 18 of the 24 donor countries associated with the ITF have donated more than once.

Use of Donations

By the end of 2004, ITF had spent \$140.5 million for its activities in MA. Fifty percent of all the resources were used for its activities in BiH, 21 percent for activities in Croatia, 16 percent for activities in Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo), followed by Albania (6 percent) and Macedonia (1 percent). Five percent was spent for regional activities. Only three percent of donations is spent for ITF’s administrative and project costs, which makes ITF one of the most cost-efficient humanitarian organizations.

The majority of the funds were spent on the demining activities (74 percent) and 6.3 percent



in support of programs for MVA. Other activities that ITF financed include trainings (0.5 percent), support to mine action centres (MACs) in the mine-contaminated countries in the region (6.5 percent), regional activities (2.42 percent), MRE and other activities.

Lessons Learned and Innovative Solutions

ITF is recognized as one of the best practicing organizations in MA. Through six years of operation in the region of SEE, the following important qualities of ITF have been recognized:

Tailor-made projects. The donor decides which of the activities it wants to support. In line with the donor's wishes, ITF will then develop and submit a proposal for a project to be funded. The project is thus designed in accordance with the preferences of the individual donor; however, it also takes into account the needs and wishes of the mine-affected country, as well as the local community.

Coordination with national authorities. ITF is working closely with the authorities responsible for MA programs in SEE to ensure that the assistance provided is in fact needed and that the programs being implemented are coordinated with the national plans.

Transparency. ITF's tight internal financial management control and annual external audits ensure that donated funds are properly accounted for and organized.

Visibility of donations. The donor is assured of the visibility and good use of its donation in the field. The donors are also recognized in periodic ITF publications and reports.

U.S. matching-fund mechanism. U.S. funds can be spent on the same project as the original donation, or alternatively, the money in the matching fund is used to finance another MA project in SEE.

Monitoring and evaluation. Prior to clearance, demining sites are inspected by ITF staff from the implementation offices to evaluate the demining priority of a given area. Relevant assessment and other reports must be written, taking into account various factors. Subject to donor request, ITF also employs a monitoring firm to oversee and monitor the work of the demining company on a daily basis, thus ensuring that the removal of mines is carried out in accordance with applicable standards and safety requirements.

Post-clearance checks. ITF conducts post-clearance checks in order to determine and assess the results of mine

clearance activities. With minor modifications and tailoring, the format used can also be applied to the evaluation and assessment of other MA projects that are being implemented by ITF.

ITF is also promoting innovative approaches to MA in the donor community and helping to develop a universal model that could be applied in mine-affected countries worldwide. One of these approaches is ongoing in BiH. Through the Landmine Impact Survey in BiH, and financed through ITF, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMACC) developed a national strategy, but more importantly created a system of integrated community mine action plans based on task assessment and planning in an impacted community.

Regional Approach

The regional approach is a vital dimension of ITF's activities. ITF believes regional cooperation is necessary since the region could address many issues more efficiently and cost-effectively if the countries in the region would help each other towards their common goal of a "mine free" land. The exchange of experience and information, excellence, and know-how are crucial in achieving their objectives.

The agreement to establish SEEMACC was signed by the directors of the mine action centres (MACs) of Albania, BiH, Croatia and ITF on 30 November 2000. The Survey Contact Group (SCG) and Azerbaijan officially joined SEEMACC in December 2001 and February 2002 respectively. Member meetings focused on aligning the accreditation procedures among the member countries of SEEMACC, exchanging information among the MACs, and organizing common projects such as the following:

- Reciprocal accreditation recognition for mechanical demining equipment between BiH on one side and Croatia on the other
- The SEEMACC website, www.see-demining.org

- Regional Centre for Underwater Demining in Montenegro and the school for mine detection dogs (MDDs) in BiH.

The ITF representatives actively participated in a regional conference at which the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) were presented, and followed the process of their adoption. The regional standards for MDDs, underwater humanitarian demining, training and equipment testing were developed according to IMAS, and SEEMACC adopted them in December 2004. ITF strongly believes that it is possible to apply the experience of SEEMACC regional approach to other mine-affected regions.

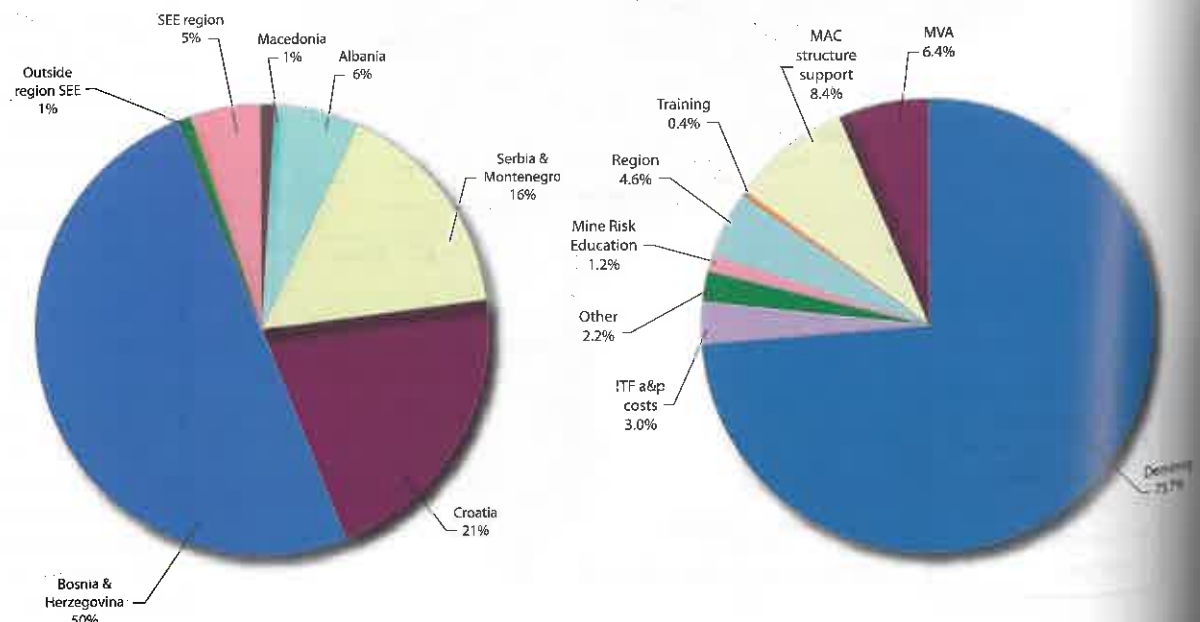
"Mine Free" Region Initiative

Notable progress has been made in SEE, but the unforeseen complexity of removing landmines has given the impression that demining might never come to an end. Donors are asking more and more for conclusive timetables for the full completion of MA activities. For this reason, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia initiated the establishment of an informal, open-ended core group of donors that would lead efforts to make SEE "mine free" by the end of the decade. The main purpose of the core group is to examine how to best mobilize available resources and bring the countries of SEE to a "mine free" status, thus fostering their socio-economic development.

Cooperation and Partnership

ITF operations in the region of SEE established excellent cooperation with all major actors in dealing with stabilisation and development, especially with actors in the field of MA. Cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) dates back to the very beginning of ITF's activity in BiH and operations in Macedonia. ITF also cooperated with Kosovo forces in the period of battle area clearance in Kosovo.

LEFT: Distribution of funds by country 1998–2004 RIGHT: Distribution of funds by purpose 1998–2004



In 2000, ITF signed the first contract with the European Union (EU) and subsequently continued to strengthen cooperation with the European Commission in all countries that received EU funds (Croatia, Macedonia, Albania). ITF cooperates with U.N. agencies such as the UNDP and the U.N. Mine Action Service. The mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Slovenia is chairing OSCE in 2005) is regularly informed of ITF performance through the Board of Advisers. ITF cooperated with the Office of the High Representative in BiH (OHR), especially during the OHR's co-chairmanship of the International Board of Donors. An important cooperative relationship was established with the GICHD in the form of Geographic Information System/Extensible Markup Language (GIS/XML) projects for the region.

The Relationship with AF BiH, SFOR and EUFOR

The Armed Forces in BiH (AF BiH) are important to the country's demining process. In 2003, the total demined area in BiH was 6.41 square kilometers (2.48 square miles). The AF BiH succeeded in demining an area of 1.31 square kilometers (0.51 square mile) or 20.5 percent of the total area demined in 2003 in BiH. Thirty demining teams (300 deminers) are engaged in all Entity armies. In 2003 and 2004, mechanical ground preparation cleared 753,296 square meters (0.29 square miles) and mine detecting dog (MDD) operations cleared an additional 153,492 square meters (0.06 square miles) through ITF financing. The Stabilization Force Demining Cell (now overtaken by European Union Force [EUFOR]) together with BHMACH, performed overall supervision and coordination. ITF considers the cooperation a success, since the engagement of the AF BiH showed optimal employment of military capabilities, and from the donors' point of view, the low cost for mechani-

A demining machine during clearance operation in BiH.

cal ground preparation (€0.28/square meter [1.20 square miles]) was positive, since the salaries are financed from the BiH national budget and the insurance costs covered by EUFOR. At present, ITF is consulting donors to get them to co-finance equipment for military demining teams. Additionally, in close cooperation with EUFOR, ITF is participating in senior and middle management training courses.

Vision of Future ITF Activities

ITF is aware of the fact it will be hard to expand the number of donors to the fund. The ITF focus will be on cooperation with existing donors, while still searching for new public and private donors. The U.S. Congress approved an additional matching fund of \$10 million for 2005, but ITF still has to be prepared for the decline of funds. Nevertheless, ITF expects to raise \$20–25 million per year for the period of 2005–2010. Donors will also be encouraged to give unilateral donations for the specific areas in mine-affected countries where MA programs have proven successful and efficient. Special ITF attention shall be focused on the EU, since it will probably be more involved in support to MA activities in the region of SEE and worldwide.

ITF demining operations will continue at the same pace as they do currently. The executive

office is able to demine 10–12 million square meters (3.86–4.63 square miles) per year, together with the preparation of projects, public tenders and internal control. ITF will continue to support local capacity building with management training in the mine-affected countries of SEE, since it will contribute to efficiency in distribution and use of funds.

At first, ITF planned for 15 percent of funds to be spent on MVA. The IRRS will continue to be the leading ITF partner in the field of MVA activities in the SEE region. On the other hand, ITF's vision is that mine-affected countries in the SEE region should develop their own rehabilitation capacity; therefore, the need for training in the field of MVA will increase.

Regional cooperation will continue to be coordinated through SEEMACC as the main player in the coordination of MA for the region of SEE and probably even broader. Through these efforts, ITF strives to contribute to the goal of a world safe from landmines by the end of 2010. ♦

See "References and Endnotes" on page 105

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Training in underwater humanitarian demining in Bijela, SCG.



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