

Regional Cooperation in Mine Action:

The Case of
South-Eastern Europe

Geneva International Centre for
Humanitarian Demining
Centre International de
Déminage Humanitaire - Genève



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The **Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining** (GICHD) supports the efforts of the international community in reducing the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). The Centre provides operational assistance, is active in research and supports the implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

7bis, avenue de la Paix

P.O. Box 1300

CH-1211 Geneva 1

Switzerland

Tel. (41 22) 906 16 60

Fax (41 22) 906 16 90

www.gichd.ch

info@gichd.ch

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The project was managed by Eric Filippino, Head, Socio-Economic Section, GICHD. (e.filippino@gichd.ch).

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Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of landmines and items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) contaminate South-Eastern Europe, largely the result of conflicts in the region in the 1990s. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia), and Serbia and Montenegro are all affected by explosive remnants of conflict, which continue to claim lives and limbs many years after the fighting was brought to an end. (See Box 1 for an overview of the extent of contamination.)

Mine action has tended to develop on a national basis, which is partly due to the nature of the landmine problem itself. In general terms, the mines that have been deployed are buried or placed in the ground and do not move over national borders. This is in contrast to other problems such as small arms, illegal drugs or diseases, which easily move across sovereign boundaries and obviously need to be tackled on a regional basis. In addition, various United Nations resolutions and the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) clearly state that “the primary responsibility for taking action against the presence of landmines lies with the concerned State”. Most donors have policies that reflect that position, and they set up or fund projects on a country-by-country basis.

However, the experience of South-Eastern Europe has shown that a broader, regional approach can bring greater effectiveness and efficiency to mine action projects and programmes. Of course, the South-Eastern European countries possess certain advantages over other regions: all have a common history and background, a similar government structure and most have the same spoken language. This is not the case in most other mine-affected regions.¹

The main achievements of this regional approach have been to lower costs for demining (especially through international competitive bidding) while seeking to promote a high quality of work, in particular through the quality management processes of the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF). The ITF also believes that its work has improved donor strategies for the region as well as priority setting for mine action operations.²

Box 1. Mine and UXO contamination in South-Eastern Europe*

Albania

Mine contamination in Albania stretches along the border with Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) from Shistavec in the south to Tropoje in the north. The affected area is 120 kilometres in length and the mines are laid up to 400 metres into Albania. Initial surveys predicted that some 15 square kilometres of land was mine affected. By 2005, some 6.5 square kilometres had been released after general and technical survey. Some 5 per cent of total mined areas have already been cleared.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

According to its national mine action centre (BHMAC) some 4.2 per cent of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina is suspected to be contaminated by landmines (totalling almost 2,100 square kilometres). It is believed that 18,600 minefields contain around one million mines and 300,000 pieces of UXO. By 2005, 39 square kilometres of mined areas had already been cleared.

Croatia

A total of 1,700 square kilometres of land are suspected to be mined in Croatia, representing 3 per cent of the total territory of the country. Of this total, 170 square kilometres are predicted to be minefields, areas containing low-density “nuisance” mines or other suspected areas. Some 15 per cent of total mined areas have already been cleared.

FYR Macedonia

A total of 21 square kilometres are suspected to be contaminated, mainly with UXO, in FYR Macedonia, which represents 0.07 per cent of the total country. Mines are expected to be found along the border with the province of Kosovo. By 2005, 17 per cent of the contaminated area had been cleared.

Serbia and Montenegro

In Serbia, according to the Serbian Mine Action Centre, 39 square kilometres of land is contaminated with mines and UXO (mainly cluster bombs), making up 0.04 per cent of the total territory of the country. A total of 40 locations are contaminated with around 60 large bombs and high calibre projectiles. In Montenegro, minefields are situated along the border area with Croatia. Items of UXO are believed to be found underwater in the coastal area of the country.

* Source: ITF (2005: 6). See also the ITF website: www.itf-fund.si

For the affected countries themselves, benefits have been an accessible mechanism for funding, through the work of the ITF, as well as a forum – the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council (SEEMACC) – to exchange views, information and knowledge on issues that have a common bearing on all the countries in the region. The focus of SEEMACC on mine action and not on political issues has been a unifying theme within a region that has seen bitter conflicts and divisions.

This publication, then, looks at the experience of mine action in this seriously affected region of Europe, focusing on the work of two regional mine action bodies: the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, headquartered in Slovenia, and the SEEMACC. It is hoped that their experiences in increasing the performance and efficiency of mine action will be helpful to other mine- and UXO-affected regions of the world.

The International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance

The International Trust Fund is a humanitarian, non-profit organisation, headquartered in Ig, Slovenia, which is devoted to the elimination of emplaced landmines in South-Eastern Europe and beyond. Established by the Slovenian Government in March 1998, the initial mission of the ITF was to help Bosnia and Herzegovina to address its landmine problem, and to assist mine survivors with physical and socio-economic rehabilitation. Subsequently, the ITF extended its work to other countries in South-Eastern Europe. Its mission is to make the region free from the impact of mines and UXO by 2010.³

Today, the International Trust Fund is supporting mine action in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, as well as further afield in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus and Georgia.⁴ A total of 19 staff work in its headquarters close to the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, as well as in its two “Implementation Offices”: one in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and the other in Sisak, Croatia.⁵ The Implementation Offices are responsible for the evaluation of demining

**Box 2. Donors and donations to the International Trust Fund
in 2004 (in US\$)***

Adopt-a-Minefield	382,126.92
Austria	1,739,569.86
BHMAC "Prijatelji protiv mina"	8,183.22
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,650,000.00
Canada	1,547,974.24
Canton of Sarajevo (Ministry of Urban Planning & Environmental Protection)	37,537.81
Community Novi grad Sarajevo	31,620.86
Community Stari grad	428,584.44
Community Vjece Vogošća	12,267.94
Coordinametni Donne	12,504.68
Czech Republic	50,000.00
DanChurchAid	575,309.11
Dean Haas	51.33
Dijana Pleština	2,332.53
EC Delegation in Croatia	1,210,017.09
Elektroprivreda Mostar	25,134.00
European Union	1,679,208.76
France	46,277.01
Germany	2,721,447.08
Ireland	154,726.10
Marshall Legacy Institute	30,000.00
Mobitel d.d.	10,799.74
Newspaper "Finance"	8,622.83
Night of a Thousand Dinners	35,311.17
Norway	4,231,807.82
Rotary International District 1910-4096	33,660.07
Sebastijan Gorenc	167.28
Slovenia	447,282.09
Switzerland	97,216.33
UN Development Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina	600,703.51
United States of America	9,941,000.00
United States Tennis Association, Inc.	4,000.00
USARDSG-UK (Bled Workshop)	8,800.00

TOTAL 30,764,243.82

* Source: (ITF 2005: 17-19).

projects before they are put to tender, and for on-site supervision during actual demining. The Implementation Offices are also involved in the technical evaluation of tenders for demining projects executed by ITF.⁶ Plans are under way to open a third regional office that will cover the ITF's growing work in the Caucasus.⁷

The work of the ITF

The ITF seeks public and private donors for mine action activities within and outside South-Eastern Europe. The ITF raises funds and administers the donations of public and private donors for the following mine action activities:

- Mine clearance operations, in accordance with set national priorities;
- Mine victim assistance programmes, ranging from physical to psycho-social rehabilitation;
- Mine risk education programmes, which follow international standards and guidelines;
- Support to national mine action capacities that oversee mine clearance, in cooperation and coordination with UN bodies and agencies;
- Training for the region in mine action; and
- Support and encouragement of regional cooperation through joint projects and the work of SEEMACC.

The ITF also works very closely with the governments and mine action centres of mine-affected countries in the region to guarantee that the donations are helpful and useful for the ultimate beneficiaries, that is to say the local population in regions and communities impacted by the presence of mines and UXO.

While government involvement and assistance is necessary in solving the landmine problem, the ITF believes that private partnerships also play an important role in mine action. The Fund has already managed donations from more than 20 countries and the European Union, as well as from more than 30 different organisations, companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), philanthropic foundations, civic associations, churches and other private donors. (*Box 2 lists donors and their donations for calendar year 2004, which totalled more than US\$30 million.*) The ITF proudly notes that all of the donor countries in 2004 were "returning donors", meaning that they had made donations to ITF previously.⁸ Since 1998, the ITF has received more than US\$150 million in mine action funding.

It is fair to say, however, that a critical building block in the success of the ITF has been the unstinting support of the United States of America (US). Following an initiative by George Voinovich, a US senator of Slovenian-Serbian descent,⁹ which was endorsed by the US Congress in May 1998, the US has provided a total of some US\$65 million in one-to-one matching funds annually to the work of the ITF.

Through this procedure, donors have been encouraged to channel funds through the ITF and thereby effectively double their contribution. The funds are allocated and disbursed based on a process of internationally competitive bidding, as described below. It is also noteworthy that, although the idea did not originate from the US Department of State (DoS), the Department has become an enthusiastic supporter of the ITF. Indeed, one senior official from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement at the DoS described the ITF as “the jewel in the crown of Slovenian diplomacy”.¹⁰

The ITF takes an overhead of only 3 per cent from donations to the Fund;¹¹ the fee is set to cover all ITF costs associated with individual donations i.e. the tender process, awarding of contracts, contract monitoring and supervision, project evaluation and reporting.¹² The administration and project costs covered by the fee also include the operating expenses of the ITF Headquarters at Ig and the Implementation Offices in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, monitoring visits by ITF staff in the field, organisation of meetings of the Board of Advisers as well as the organisation of workshops and production of reports and related materials.¹³

The ITF endeavours to ensure that activities meet the needs of the affected countries (while reflecting donors’ wishes) and conducts quality assurance of the mine action operations funded to monitor their compliance with humanitarian standards, in particular the International Mine Action Standards. Moreover, the ITF’s experience in supporting demining in the region has resulted in a high level of cost-effectiveness: from costs for mine clearance in the region that in earlier years could reach around US\$50 per square metre at the very worst, the ITF is now able to guarantee that contract costs do not exceed US\$2.3 per square metre.¹⁴

Central to this achievement in reducing operational costs has been a process of internationally competitive bidding. As noted above, every project using matched funding is automatically put out to open tender. Funding is normally earmarked for a specific country within South-Eastern Europe,

although not necessarily for a specific task. Where a task is not earmarked, the ITF will ask the respective national authority, typically the Mine Action Centre (MAC), for a suggested priority task. The ITF will review the MAC request. If accepted, it is then put out to open tender.

Selection of the winning bid is made by an Evaluation Commission made up of the ITF, the donor or donors, the MAC of the country where the activities are to be implemented and a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Commission will hold a physical meeting to make their decision. Criteria for selection for a contract in South-Eastern Europe include the bidding organisation's experience in the relevant area of mine action, the equipment it has available and its successful accreditation to operate in one of the countries of the region. The ITF has a standardised technical evaluation of bids, which is made available to all the members of the Commission.

Prior to clearance, demining sites are inspected by ITF Implementation Office staff to determine the priority rating of a given area in terms of demining. If requested by the donor, ITF may also employ a monitoring firm to oversee and monitor the work of the demining company or organisation on a daily basis, thus ensuring that the removal of mines is carried out in accordance with the applicable standards and safety requirements. In 2004, the ITF employed two monitoring firms – Teleprom and Explore – both of which were selected by tender.¹⁵ After completion of the works, post-clearance evaluations are also randomly carried out to check if the sites are used as planned before the clearance.¹⁶

ITF allocation of resources to mine action

The bulk of donations to the ITF are being allocated to mine and battle area clearance, as can be seen from the figures set out in Box 3. The disbursement of more than US\$16.5 million resulted in the clearance of more than 6 square kilometres of land across the region and the destruction of 6,257 landmines and 1,239 items of UXO.¹⁷

The ITF also notes that funding for victim assistance programmes is “again decreasing in comparison with other programmes. This should spur ITF on to put even more efforts in fundraising for mine victim assistance programmes since mine casualties figures continue to climb, adding to the 7,000 known mine survivors in the region who will require special health care for the rest of their lives.”

Box 3. Allocation of donations to the ITF by mine action activity in 2004*

In 2004, US\$25,076,166 was disbursed by the ITF as follows:

- US\$16,555,472 on mine and battle area clearance. (66 per cent);
 - US\$5,872,349 on support to local mine action structures (23.4 per cent);
 - US\$1,492,791 on regional activities (6 per cent);
 - US\$717,358 on mine victim assistance (2.9 per cent);
 - US\$215,375 on mine risk education programmes (0.9 per cent);
 - US\$122,139 on the Landmine Impact Survey (0.5 per cent);
- and
- US\$100,682 on training (0.4 per cent).

* Source: ITF (2005: 21).

Box 4. ITF-funded demining in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004*

In 2004, 69 demining contracts were awarded for the clearance of 141 sites across Bosnia and Herzegovina. In total, almost 2.6 square kilometres was cleared, with the destruction of 2,111 mines and 747 items of UXO. The ITF also started the execution of technical survey in 2004, through which more than 1.1 square kilometres of land was released.

There were nine restricted and four open tender procedures for the implementation of demining and technical survey projects. Eight NGOs and eight commercial companies were selected for the execution of those works and services.

In 2004, the ITF also received a donation to continue support to the Entity Armed Forces through the European Force operating in Bosnia. The 2003 funds were used for mechanical ground preparation of more than 370,000 square metres of land. Subsequently, the Entity Armed Forces carried out manual clearance and monitoring.

In 2004, a total area of 1,492,053 square metres was cleared of mines by commercial demining organisations while a total of 1,102,963 square metres was cleared by NGOs.

* Source: ITF (2005: 46).

In terms of 2004 allocations by country, 56.1 per cent of the funds were spent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 21.9 per cent in Croatia, 11.3 per cent in Albania, 0.3 per cent in FYR Macedonia, 5 per cent in Serbia and Montenegro while 3.3 per cent was allocated to regional activities in South-Eastern Europe. Altogether 2.2 per cent of the funds were spent outside the region: 1.2 per cent on activities in the Caucasus and 1 per cent on activities in Cyprus.¹⁸ Thus, the original *raison d'être* for the ITF – support to Bosnia in its efforts to address its landmine problem – has remained a core activity for the Fund.

Mine and battle area clearance

As already mentioned, the bulk of ITF funding goes to support mine and battle area clearance in South-Eastern Europe. In 2004, this assisted operations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Box 4), Croatia, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro. The ITF also continued, albeit on smaller scale, to support demining activities in the Caucasus and in Cyprus. Demining projects were being carried out by partner NGOs, commercial companies and local organisations.¹⁹

The nature of cleared areas included: land and structures designated for resettlement and reconstruction (demining of houses, yards and places in the vicinity of populated areas); farming land (fields, pastures, grazing areas); and infrastructure (railways, roads, power lines and pipelines). To further ensure that resources are allocated in accordance with needs and priorities, the ITF (through its Implementation Offices) conducts thorough inspections of sites prior to clearance to assess the socio-economic impact of clearance on the area.

In addition to clearance activities, in 2004 the ITF initiated, for the first time, support for technical surveys, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Croatia. Altogether 2.18 square kilometres of land were released through technical survey in these two countries during the year.²⁰ (Technical survey is used to better define the area that need to be cleared, as well as the appropriate methodology for clearance.²¹) South-Eastern Europe is also a good example of how regional cooperation can facilitate clearance of common border minefields. In particular, as Box 5 describes, the ITF has funded clearance of minefields close to or along the borders between Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro.

Victim assistance

Support for victim assistance programmes includes direct treatment at the Slovenian Institute of Rehabilitation (especially for those victims who were

Box 5. Cross-border clearance in South-Eastern Europe*

Demining of the Montenegrin/Croatian border started in May 2003 on two locations and was completed by the end of June (before the start of the tourist season). A total of 247,000 square metres was demined, with 90 mines found.

In June 2003, the call for tender to demine the Croatian/Serbian border on the Serbian side was issued for projects funded from a European Union donation to the ITF, and in August 2003 a tender was issued for the demining of locations in the same area funded by a German donation. The operations financed by Germany got under way in September 2003, whereas the works on the three demining projects financed by the EU commenced in October 2003. In total 485,320 square metres were cleared in the Community of Šid with the destruction of 1,518 mines and 365 pieces of UXO.

Two tenders were issued in 2004 in Serbia (using German and EU funds) for clearance operations in the border area between Serbia and Croatia. By the end of 2004, 732,400 square metres of land had been cleared by six projects with 1,390 mines and six pieces of UXO found and destroyed.

Sources: ITF (2004: 48) and (2005: 54).

Box 6. Procurement of surgical equipment for Kukes hospital*

Kukes regional hospital is the only medical centre for mine-affected districts in northern Albania, but had little surgical capacity to treat heavy injuries. Landmine survivors in mine accidents therefore had to be taken across the border to Kosovo.

In 2004, equipment procured (X-ray and orthopaedic surgery kit) through ITF funding enabled Kukes hospital to treat landmine victims and other amputee cases. The donation for this activity was provided by the United States of America which has also earmarked additional funds for continuing the support to the hospital.

* Source: ITF (2005: 43).

not able to receive proper treatment in their own respective countries) and support for the development of local programmes in the affected countries themselves. (See Box 5 for an example of support to victim assistance in Albania.) In 2004, 33 mine victims were rehabilitated at the Institute of Rehabilitation of the Republic of Slovenia (16 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15 from Albania and two from the province of Kosovo). Since 1998, a total of 738 mine victims from the region have been rehabilitated at the Institute.

As part of the ITF's rehabilitation training programme, five new students (three from Bosnia, one from FYR Macedonia and one from Croatia) enrolled in the prosthetics and orthotics technology course at the School of Health Studies, University of Ljubljana, in 2004. Since 1998, 314 specialists have completed their rehabilitation training – ten of them in 2004.

Geographic Information System for South-Eastern Europe

One of the ITF's most important regional activities has been the development and maintenance of a regional Geographic Information System (GIS), in cooperation with the mine action centres in South-Eastern Europe. The aims of the project were to:

- Provide high-definition maps, including information derived from satellite-transmitted data;
- Establish a reliable GIS, including the identification of minefields and mined areas, along with related socio-economic conditions, security issues and priorities; and
- To provide relevant training and create a regional network of local experts.²²

This system is believed to be the only operational regional GIS system.²³

The focus of GIS-related activities in 2004 was on imagery and map development for MACs in the region. In January 2004, for example, the ITF delivered the results for Bosnia and Herzegovina to the BHMAC, which included digitally corrected photographs (orthophotos) and digital maps of contamination to a scale of 1:1,000 and 1:2,500. The digital orthophotos for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina includes the mine-affected area of the Lasva river valley (including parts of municipalities of Travnik, Novi Travnik, Vitez, Busovaca and Zenica) of 176 square kilometres, at a map scale of 1:2,500, and 40 square kilometres at a map scale of 1:1,000. The digital orthophoto maps for Republika Srpska, include mined areas in Pelagicevo municipality. The total size of the contaminated area is estimated at 268 square kilometres, with a map scale of 1:2,500.²⁴

Box 7. Workshop on Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building through Mine Action

The ITF, together with the OSCE, organised the workshop on 5-6 October 2005 in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. The Government of Georgia hosted the workshop, which was funded by Canada, the Netherlands and Slovenia. More than 70 participants attended, including delegations from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and a number of NGOs and international organisations involved in mine action.

The goals of the workshop were to provide an overview of the mine problem in the South Caucasus and Central Asia and to establish a proper environment for dialogue between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as countries from Central Asian region. Discussions focused on models and possible ways to cooperate in mine action that could serve as confidence-building measures and lead to enhanced cooperation between countries in the two regions.

The workshop also provided an occasion for the OSCE to demonstrate its support for mine clearance and other mine action activities, as a way to improve overall security and the socio-economic situation in the region.

In a final statement, all participants agreed that a follow-up workshop should be organised in Central Asia to intensify relations and cooperation towards the goal of making South Caucasus and Central Asia mine free.

The Regional Mine Detection Dog Centre

A Regional Mine Detection Dog Centre was established in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2003 with the aim of providing mine detection dog (MDD) resources for South-Eastern Europe. In 2004, the first five mine detection dogs were accredited by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMACE). With ITF help, another 12 dogs have been undergoing training and will soon be handed over to three local NGOs: Stop Mines, Provita and BH Demining.

The Regional Centre for Underwater Demining

Conflicts in South-Eastern Europe have left explosive hazards not only on land but also underwater. The Regional Centre for Underwater Demining was officially established on 24 September 2002 in Bijela, Montenegro (Serbia and Montenegro). The ITF contributed funds for the renovation of the Centre complex as well as computer and diving equipment.²⁵

The Centre has conducted a number of regional training courses. For

example, on 20 February to 7 March 2004 an underwater explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training was held for 12 divers from five countries (Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, and Serbia and Montenegro).²⁶

The Regional Centre has also conducted demining operations. In early October 2004, underwater investigation and clearance started in the Verige area of the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro. The purpose of the project was to determine the mine/UXO situation in the Bay in order to assure safe navigation of the water paths. The project, which was implemented by the Regional Centre for Underwater Demining, finished at the end of November. A total of 65 tons of UXO were removed and destroyed, and 2,500 square metres of underwater surface were cleared.²⁷

Advocacy for mine action

The ITF has also played a broader role in advocacy for effective mine action outside South-Eastern Europe. Box 7 describes a workshop on “Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building Through Mine Action” held with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2005.

The South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council

One of the major achievements at the regional level has been the formation of the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council. The need to exchange views, expertise and experience in mine action was recognised at the first meeting of Directors of South-Eastern Europe MACs, held on 13 April 2000. The agreement to establish SEEMACC was signed by the directors of the MACs of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia together with the ITF on 30 November 2000. In December 2001, Serbia and Montenegro, and in February 2002 Azerbaijan, also officially joined SEEMACC. In 2003 UNMIK/EOD Management Section in Kosovo as well as the regional MDD Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina acquired observer status at SEEMACC. In 2004, the Croatian Centre for Testing, Development and Training also joined as an observer.

SEEMACC works towards a South-Eastern Europe free from the impact of landmines and UXO by 2010. This means achieving economic and social development without hindrance from mine or UXO contamination.²⁸

Box 8. The 15th SEEMACC Meeting in Bijela, Montenegro*

The 15th SEEMACC meeting was held on 13 October 2005 in Bijela, Montenegro. The opening speech was delivered by Aleksandar Moštrokol, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Montenegro. The main purposes of the meeting were to discuss new SEEMACC rules of procedure and implementation of a common project proposal for the common border between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro. The idea was to prepare one comprehensive project proposal on which all of the national mine action centres would cooperate. The next SEEMACC meeting is planned to be held in Šibenik, Croatia, in April 2006.

* Source: ITF News, October 2005, available at: www.itf-fund.si.

SEEMACC objectives are to:

- Exchange expertise, experience and knowledge in relation to mine action in South-Eastern Europe;
- Promote a regional approach in the planning of demining programmes;
- Promote a regional approach in relation to fundraising for mine action;
- Exchange expertise, experience and knowledge in relation to mine action training of deminers and managing personnel;
- Exchange information on the testing of new technologies in demining; and
- Promote common demining standards and accreditation procedures in South-Eastern Europe.²⁹

In 2004, three SEEMACC meetings took place in Sisak (Croatia), Baku (Azerbaijan) and in Tirana (Albania).³⁰ An informal SEEMACC meeting was also held during the international conference on humanitarian demining in April in Šibenik, Croatia. The ITF serves as president of SEEMACC with the hosting country serving as co-chair.³¹ Box 8 describes the most recent SEEMACC meeting, held in Montenegro.

The most important results of SEEMACC's work in 2004 were as follows:

- Standing operating procedures (SOPs) for mine detection dogs, prepared by the MDD Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina, were approved by all SEEMACC members and observers;
- SOPs for humanitarian underwater demining in South-Eastern Europe, prepared by the Regional Centre for Underwater Demining

- in Montenegro, were approved by all SEEMACC members and observers;
- SOPs on the use and testing of demining machines in South-Eastern Europe, prepared by the Croatian Centre for Testing, Development and Training (CTDT), were approved by all SEEMACC members and observers; and
 - SOPs on “Required Knowledge and Skills for the Implementation of Mine Action Activities in South-Eastern Europe”, prepared by CTDT, were approved by all SEEMACC members and observers.

The maXML project

SEEMACC has also played an important role in the maXML project. The eXtensible Markup Language was published as a standard in 1996 and has since gained wide acceptance as a data storage format.³² The maXML project was first conceived as the result of a request by BHMACH for assistance with the deployment of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a regional basis.

The project aims to improve the ability to import and export data in different types of mine action database. It does so by defining a neutral data structure for mine action through which mine action databases can communicate. Funded and managed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) as part of the IMSMA project, the maXML project has succeeded in defining a neutral data structure and will provide the import/export mechanisms for IMSMA.

The original maXML project proposal divided the project into three distinct phases. The first two phases were completed in early 2004, with the field implementation of the maXML Pilot Project established to support the South-Eastern Europe Data Harmonisation Project backed by SEEMACC and its members. According to the ITF, successful completion of the first two phases of the project has already improved the ability of MACs and the donor community to monitor the effectiveness of mine action.

In September 2004, the ITF received approval from the US Department of State to release funds for the third and final phase of the maXML project – as well as the European Commission’s confirmation of support for IMSMA system integration and maXML data exchange in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is envisaged that all MACs in the region will participate in the sharing of

information and the final product will include a complete regional coverage of harmonised information on mined areas, suspected areas as well as non-suspected areas and background information (land cover, topography and demography).

Concluding remarks

Mine action has tended to develop on a national basis, which is partly due to the nature of the landmine problem itself. In general terms, the mines that have been deployed are buried or placed in the ground and do not move over national borders. This is in contrast to other problems such as small arms, illegal drugs or diseases, which easily move across sovereign boundaries and obviously need to be tackled on a regional basis. In addition, various United Nations resolutions and the IMAS clearly state that “the primary responsibility for taking action against the presence of landmines lies with the concerned State”. Most donors have policies that reflect that position, and they set up or fund projects on a country-by-country basis.

However, the experience of South-Eastern Europe (and the Balkans in particular) has shown that a broader, regional approach can bring greater effectiveness and efficiency to mine action projects and programmes. Of course, the Balkan countries possess certain advantages over other regions: all have a common history and background, a similar government structure and most have the same spoken language. This is not the case in most other mine-affected regions.³³

The main achievements of this regional approach have been to lower costs for demining (especially through international competitive bidding) while seeking to promote a high quality of work, in particular through the ITF's quality management processes. The ITF also believes that its work has improved donor strategies for the region as well as priority setting for mine action operations.³⁴

For the affected countries themselves, benefits have been an accessible mechanism for funding, through the work of the ITF, as well as a regional forum – SEEMACC – to exchange views, information and knowledge on issues that have a common bearing on all the countries in the region. The focus of SEEMACC on mine action and not on political issues has been a unifying theme within a region that has seen bitter conflicts and divisions.

At the **political level**, there are already a number of organisations that deal with South-Eastern Europe on a regional basis, such as the OSCE and the Stability Pact. These organisations should be encouraged to develop programmes to strengthen the linkage between mine action and other sectoral responses. Some years ago, the “Reay Group” was formed under the auspices of the Working Table III of the Stability Pact to address the landmine situation. While the Group has probably yet to reach its full potential, it does bring together senior government officials from the region on a regular basis to discuss the political issues relating to landmines. SEEMACC deals with more practical issues of coordination at the operational level.

Probably the greatest area for cooperation at this level lies with the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. The goal of a “mine-free South-Eastern Europe” now seems achievable with the recent accession by Serbia and Montenegro to the Convention. All of the obligations of the Convention, including the requirement to clear all mines in ten years, are achievable in this region.

At the **strategic level**, it is most unlikely (or unnecessary) that a regional mine action strategy would be developed for South-Eastern Europe. However, it would be useful if all the national strategies or action plans developed by the countries contained common elements. The use of common terminology and standard reporting (based on the IMSMA information management system developed by the GICHD) is making elaboration of the mine problem more logical, and easier to gauge progress. The development of national standards based on the IMAS is allowing for consistency of operations, as is a common accreditation system for mine action operators in the region. For example, if a mine detection dog company or a mine risk education operator is accredited to work in one country, that accreditation is recognised by the ITF and entitles them to bid in a tender to work in another country in the region.

The most possibilities for **regional cooperation** probably exist at the operational level. There are already operations under way to clear border minefields between Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia. Shared use is also being made of expensive or high technology equipment. The allocation of specialist training responsibilities to avoid duplication has also started – with the mine detection dog centre in Bosnia and the underwater demining school in Montenegro. The IMAS provide a common basis for activities such

as minefield marking systems, mine risk education messages, joint purchase of high volume items and the sharing of lessons learned.

At a more **technical level**, the conduct of joint trials or testing of equipment at the demining test centre in Croatia is also resulting in savings. With regard to information exchange, the current work by the GICHD on the maXML project is allowing different databases to “talk” to each other and exchange data.

The final area to be considered is **funding**. The competition for donor funds, national budgets, responsibilities of governments when taking out World Bank loans and the project nature of funding, tend not to favour a regional approach. However, the establishment of the International Trust Fund has introduced a new element to this situation in the Balkans. Despite some initial scepticism when it was established in 1998, the ITF has been able to serve as a conduit for other donor funds to the region – mainly due to the dollar-for-dollar matching arrangement with the US. The fact that the ITF is located in Slovenia (a non-mine-affected country in the region) has added an air of neutrality about its operation, and they have been able to develop standardised tendering and contracting arrangements. The ITF has also been able to fund some regional coordination activities, such as the work of SEEMACC, which has helped them to function without drawing on national funds.

For the future it appears likely that the ITF will further develop its work outside South-Eastern Europe, while continuing to concentrate on the region it knows best. It is more than willing to offer its experience and expertise in promoting a regional approach to mine action to other areas of the world that may seek to follow its lead.³⁵ If and when funding for mine actions begins to decrease, the financial benefits of such regional approach offer a powerful incentive for working in greater harmony with one’s neighbours.

Endnotes

¹ The response to the mine problem in Central America is another example of a regional approach. It has been coordinated by the Organization of American States, but has tended to function mainly on a military-to-military basis, with a focus on mine clearance. Their work has also been facilitated by shared culture and language.

² Interview with Dorijan Maršić, Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

³ ITF (2005: 5).

⁴ *ibid.*, 56-59.

⁵ Interview with Dorijan Maršić, Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

⁶ ITF (2005: 13).

⁷ See *ITF News*, 27 July 2005, accessed on 15 October 2005 at: www.itf-fund.si.

⁸ ITF (2005: 16).

⁹ In May 2005, Senator Voinovich was decorated by the President of Slovenia, Janez Drnovsek, for his work in promoting friendship between Slovenia and the US. Among other things, President Drnovsek specifically highlighted Senator Voinovich's role in the formation of the ITF. "President Decorates US Senator for Supporting Slovenia", Press release by the Government of Slovenia, Ljubljana, 3 May 2005. See: www.uvi.si/eng/slovenia/publications/slovenia-news/2014/2017/index.text.html.

¹⁰ Interview with H. Murphey McCloy Jr., Senior Demining Adviser, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, US Department of State, Washington DC, 18 August 2005.

¹¹ It is believed that the 3 per cent overhead will not be sufficient to cover ITF's costs for operations conducted outside the Balkans, for instance in the South Caucasus. Interview with Dorijan Maršić, Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

¹² ITF (2005: 25).

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Interview with Goran Gacnik, Deputy Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

¹⁵ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, quality assurance is also carried out by BHMACE.

¹⁶ ITF (2005: 30).

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 29

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ A Technical Survey is a specific operation related to a suspected hazardous area and is normally a contracted piece of work. A Technical Survey is conducted to gather the detailed technical and topographical information of known or suspected hazardous areas. Such areas will usually have been previously identified during the General Mine Action Assessment process. The primary aim of a Technical Survey is to collect sufficient information to enable the clearance requirement to be more accurately defined, including the area(s) to be cleared, the depth of clearance, local soil conditions, and the vegetation characteristics. This will enable the preparation of a tasking order and allow subsequent clearance operations to be conducted in a safe, effective and efficient manner. *IMAS 08.20: Technical Survey*, Second Edition, 1 January 2003 (as amended), p. 1.

²² ITF (2005: 34).

²³ ITF (2004: 30).

²⁴ ITF (2005: 34).

²⁵ ITF (2003: 36)

²⁶ ITF (2005: 54)

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ SEEMACC (undated: 2).

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Normally four SEEMACC meetings are held each year. All the minutes of SEEMACC meetings are available at www.see-demining.org.

³¹ In future the ITF would prefer a rotating presidency. Interview with Dorijan Maršić, Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

³² For further details on information management technology, including the maXML project, see GICHD (2005: Chapter 9).

³³ The response to the mine problem in Central America is another example of a regional approach. It has been coordinated by the Organization of American States, but has tended to function mainly on a military-to-military basis, with a focus on mine clearance. Their work has also been facilitated by shared culture and language.

³⁴ Interview with Dorijan Maršić, Director, ITF, Ig, 7 September 2005.

³⁵ *ibid.*

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Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

BHMAC	Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre
CTDT	Croatian Centre for Testing, Development and Training
DoS	US Department of State
FYR Macedonia	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
IMAS	International Mine Action Standards
IMSMA	Information Management System for Mine Action
ITF	International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance
MAC	mine action centre
MDD	mine detection dog
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SEEMACC	South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council
SOPs	standing operating procedures
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America
UXO	unexploded ordnance



Geneva International Centre for
Humanitarian Demining
Centre International de
Déminage Humanitaire - Genève

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

7bis, avenue de la Paix

P.O. Box 1300

CH-1211 Geneva 1

Switzerland

Tel. (41 22) 906 16 60, Fax (41 22) 906 16 90

www.gichd.ch