

Operation ALTHEA

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Allen
reports on the progress of the new
European Union Force EUFOR
in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Tanaiste Mary Harney reviews EUFOR troops with the senior Irish officer, Lt Col Paul Allen, on a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While Bosnia and Herzegovina may be long gone from the headlines, the bloody conflict it played host to still looms large over this small territory. It has been visited by several peacekeeping forces, the latest of which is the European Union Force (EUFOR). This peacekeeping mission is the first time Irish troops have worked with other member states as part of an EU operation.

EUFOR's presence in the country is rooted in tragedy. Formerly a constituent republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence in

March 1992. Often simply called Bosnia, the country is an intricate patchwork of ethnic and religious communities and has a history of periodic inter-communal violence. Because of its ethnic diversity, many observers had long regarded it as the Yugoslav republic where civil war was most likely and most believed that conflict there would be especially bloody if Yugoslavia disintegrated. Unfortunately, they were right. In the three and a half year civil war that followed independence, 200,000 lives, mainly civilian, were lost; over 2,000,000 people were forced to leave their place of residence and 80% of the infrastructure

was destroyed. Now, almost ten years later, only half have returned, 12,000 people are still missing, two million mines remain to be cleared and 50% of the population are on or below the poverty line.

The ethnic cleansing by all sides during the war has, in reality, split the country into two ethnic identities – the Muslim (Bosniak)/Croat Federation and the Serb Republika Srpska – despite international attempts to reunite it.

Various peace-support missions, from the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in 1992, through the NATO led Implementation Force (IFOR) and the Stabilisation Force



Tanaiste Mary Harney with EUFOR's Irish contingent.

(SFOR) in 1997 to the European Union Force (EUFOR) have all sought to address the problems of this tormented area, with varying degrees of success.

At the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, NATO decided to terminate its successful SFOR operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU agreed to provide a UN mandated peace support force to replace SFOR and EUFOR assumed responsibility for the area on 2nd December 2004. This EU mission, called Operation ALTHEA, is its largest peace-support operation to date and is the first that the Defence Forces has participated in. Accordingly it fully meets Ireland's triple-lock requirements.

EUFOR consists of three Multinational Task Forces. On transfer of authority from NATO to the EU, two of these remained basically the same and just changed hats; Multinational Task Force North (MNTF(N)) however, was totally changed with the US contribution being replaced by EU forces and troops from Turkey.

The total Defence Forces commitment is 54 with 14 serving with EUFOR HQ in Sarajevo and forty with MNFT(N) based at Camp Eagle Base in Tuzla. MNFT(N) is a force of 1,300 and the Defence Forces personnel are deployed in its "Civil Military Cooperation – Joint Military Affairs Branch", the Military Police Platoon and the Verification Platoon.

Co-operation and joint operations

Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) is the co-ordination and co-operation between the

military force and the civil environment, including national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organisations and agencies.

The CIMIC dimension of Peace Support Operations is a relatively new concept. As recently as 1996 the then commander of IFOR, Admiral Leighton Smith explained: "In November (1995), we had never heard of CIMIC, we had no idea what you did ... now we can't live without you."

Today, CIMIC is an integral component of EUFOR operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is essential in winning the "hearts and minds" of local populations. Basically, CIMIC personnel and the civilian population work together to support stabilisation and reconstruction. One of CIMIC's core functions is to provide contact between those in need and those that are willing to assist. CIMIC personnel identify needs and projects for rebuilding of civil infrastructure and institutions. CIMIC conducts a variety of projects including water supplies (digging new wells, sanitising existing wells), health and education initiatives, restoration and construction of public buildings and infrastructure, provision of basic necessities, supply of school materials (pens, paper, text books, desks), provision of emergency services and support to returnees.

In addition to these activities, CIMIC from MNTF(N) cooperates with a number of large international organisations to provide assistance to the local population. These

include the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), the EU Police Mission (EUPM), the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH).

CIMIC has identified two construction projects in MNTF(N) area of operations and has recommended them for EU funding, the total cost of which is in the region of €300,000. Both projects, one in the Federation and one in the Republika Srpska, involve the provision of gymnasias for multi-ethnic schools.

Recently, CIMIC coordinated the delivery of 1,750 school packs and sports equipment, donated by a Belgian NGO "Children of the World" to various schools in Srebrenica and Zvornik in the Republic of Srpska. A total of 14 schools benefited from this donation.

Joint Military Affairs (JMA) incorporates all activities between EUFOR and the armies of both the Federation and the Republika Srpska. The section chief, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Allen, is responsible for ensuring that the military forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in MNTF(N) area, comply with the terms of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP, Dayton Accord 1995).

Verification

The field arm of JMA is the Defence Forces' led multinational Verification Platoon commanded by Commandant Paul Clarke. The terms of the GFAP demand that each entity's armed forces store their weapons, ammunition and military equipment in designated storage sites, that all military



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Captain Oisín Green, Infantry Weapons Wing, Curragh, on patrol in Bosnia.

training and movement must be approved and supervised, that the export of weapons and ammunition must be verified and that all de-mining must be monitored. The Verification Platoon enforces these terms through weapons and ammunition storage site inspections, government ordnance factories inspections, training and movement authorisation and supervision, de-mining monitoring (only monitoring, the Verification Platoon do not conduct de-mining) and by maintaining direct contact with the military forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in MNTF(N) area.

The Verification Platoon also takes part in ongoing operations, either in conjunction with other MNTF(N) assets, or as exclusive JMA operations e.g. verifying the status and use of the numerous military bunkers in the area and ensuring that unofficial storage sites are not used.

This multinational Verification Platoon, consisting of Irish, Portuguese and Finnish personnel, conducted their pre-deployment training in the United Nations Training School of Ireland (UNTSI) in the Defence Forces Training

Centre in the Curragh in October 2004. The nations then deployed independently prior to the Transfer of Authority on the 2nd of December 2004.

Military Police platoon

The Defence Forces led multinational Military Police Platoon includes personnel from seven different nations and is commanded by Commandant Patrick Quinlan. It conducts the normal Military Police duties in addition to participating in the various operations undertaken by MNTF(N). Their normal duties are traffic control in Camp Eagle Base and on the main supply routes (MSRs), road safety campaigns, liaising with local police, Provost Patrol law, random security checks, monitoring Camp security systems, providing high value cash escort duties and VIP escorts, maintaining operational vehicle Check Points, assisting with air medical evacuation with the Aviation Company, as well as route reconnaissance

and marking for tactical and strategic reserve units when deployed.

The future

The June 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration confirmed that the future of the Western Balkans is with the EU. The Stabilisation and Association Process is the framework for the European course of Bosnia and Herzegovina, all the way to future accession. It is within this wider context of European integration that a comprehensive policy for addressing Bosnia and Herzegovina's security needs has to be situated. EUFOR will assist in creating the conditions to deliver the long term political objective of a stable, viable, peaceful and multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina, co-operating peacefully with its neighbours and irreversibly on track towards EU membership.



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