**Conference**

"Annual Meeting of Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from SEE Parliaments: Flood Relief"

29th June - 01st July 2015

Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Co-organized with the Defence and Internal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

**Abstract**

On 29th June - 01st July 2015 RACVIAC- Centre for Security Cooperation together with the Defence and Internal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) co-organized in the city of Belgrade, Republic of Serbia the Conference "Annual Meeting of Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from SEE Parliaments". The Conference panel topics were selected around previously established Flood Relief topics and based on the RACVIAC 2014 Sarajevo Conference on "Floods in South-Eastern Europe - Lessons Learned and Future Steps". The Sarajevo Conference conclusions included the following key requirements: building capacities in line with the EU Civil protection Mechanism; identifying specific areas of regional cooperation in flood prevention and readiness reflecting the EU Flood Directive; development of flood risk management as part of the integrated risk management system, including its regional level. Due to the fact that these conclusions require an institutional approach based on a clear political framework, the Belgrade Conference agenda was developed to support the established initiative and to identify future steps to be made jointly.

Thus, the Belgrade Conference agenda primarily discussed the following topics: "Flood Risk Management as a Component of an Integrated Risk Management System", "Joint Preventive Measures and Flood Readiness - the EU Flood Directive", "Building Capacities - The EU Civil Protection Mechanism", "Rescue and Protection Operations - Existing Legal Framework and Existing Mutual Agreements on Cooperation - the Way Forward". At the end of the Conference, the Conference Joint Statement (Annex A to this report) was accepted unanimously.

**Activity Background**

Following the severe floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, Republic of Serbia and Republic of Slovenia in 2014, the European Commission, together with the French Republic and the Republic of Slovenia organised on 16th July 2014 the Donors' Conference to support the corresponding recovery efforts. One of the main conclusions of the Conference was the necessity of improving existing flood relief policies and regional coordination mechanisms. Close cooperation on these matters among the SEE countries has become imperative in order to ensure internal and cross-border action in flood mitigation management and disaster reduction and, thus, minimize the potential consequences on human security and well-being.

This 2015 Annual Meeting of the Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from SEE Parliaments, organized in partnership with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and
in cooperation with and support from DCAF - the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, represented an extension of these conclusions and addressed the identified topics in order to improve regional cooperation on disaster relief capacities, with a focus on flood prevention. Additionally, and, according to the minutes of the RACVIAC Sarajevo 2014 Conference on "Floods in South-Eastern Europe - Lessons Learned and Future Steps", the Belgrade Conference topics were handpicked in order to directly support a required unity of efforts, this time at the political level.

**Activity Facilitators**

Provision of expertise and overall organization were respectfully divided between RACVIAC as the Conference proponent and the supporting partners. All parties were at certain point included in organizational support, development of the agenda and speakers' invitations. RACVIAC developed and presented an initial activity concept and corresponding programme to the remaining parties, which was then additionally improved through direct consultations. Thus, all partner organizations were constantly engaged in the development of the event in line with the previously agreed and established main objectives.

The Conference itself was designed around four panel sessions chaired in turns by the leading representatives of the three partner organizations.

**Activity Venue, Duration and Participation**

This was the fifth SSR 2015 Programme activity, originally planned to be executed by RACVIAC in May, but due to intensive activities of some of the parliamentary defence and security committees delayed for the end of June.

In total 45 participants from the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Slovenia, and Kosovo*, including subject matter experts, members of RACVIAC and DCAF staff took part in the Conference.

The event itself had a standard Conference structure and lasted three working days, from 29th June to 01st July 2015, with 29th June and 01st July as the arrival and departure days.

*This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence (In accordance with Arrangements regarding representation and cooperation)
**Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name

**Activity Description and Content**

The Annual Meeting of Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from SEE Parliaments 2015 was organized around the Flood Relief topic, suggested by the parliament members at the previous joint annual meeting held in 2014 in RACVIAC HQ, Rakitje, the Republic of Croatia.

The Conference was designed with the goal to provide members of SEE parliaments with the clear common understanding of the most important issues to be resolved in order to have efficient and effective flood prevention, preparedness, protection and relief systems, both at the national and the regional levels.

The joint work started on 29th June with the Conference opening during which welcome addresses were given by:
- Ms Marija Obradović, Chairwoman of the Defence and Internal Affairs Committee, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia - Welcome Address
- Brigadier General Zdravko Jakop, MSc, Deputy Director, RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation - Welcome Address
Ms Teodora Fuior, Project Coordinator of Operations in Southeast Europe, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

This first working day was concluded with the Conference keynote speech, given by Mr Ivan Baras, Assistant Head of Sector for Emergency Management and Head of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia.

The Introductory Session opened the second day of the Conference. It included keynote presentation given by Mr Samir Agić, PhD, Assistant Minister and Head of the Protection and Rescue Sector within the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main purpose of his exposé was to provide a necessary introduction to the main conference subject due to the fact that the entire event was developed around the 2014 Sarajevo conference conclusions and how the political level of decision-making can influence these processes.

Conference Introductory Exposé
Mr Samir Agić, PhD, Assistant Minister - Head of Protection and Rescue Sector, the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ms Agić's presentation was immediately followed by the first panel on Flood Risk Management as a component of Integrated Risk Management System. It must be stressed here that all panels were designed as "parliamentary hearings" or, in other words, that each panel started with corresponding subject matter presentations after which participants had an opportunity to ask questions on specific topics of their interest. Panel I included a presentation by Mr Martin Angelmaier, Deputy Head of Department of Water Management in the Government of the Lower Austria, as an excellent example of well-arranged integrated system development following the experience of the Danube floods in 2013. The same topic on flood risk management was delivered by Col Katarina Štrbac from the Institute for Strategic Studies, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, who talked about Serbian military activities during the 2014 floods.

Panel II spanned the topic of Joint Preventive Measures and Flood Readiness, primarily the importance of integration of the EU Flood Directive provisions.

Panel III was dedicated to the required process of Building Capacities within the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
An introduction to this topic was given by Lt Col Stjepan Domjančić, PhD, Head of the Defence Planning Service, Sector for Defence Policy and Planning, Defence Policy Directorate, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, who delivered a comprehensive exposé on the role of the military in emergencies, entitled: "Why Disasters have Become Militarized in Modern Times?"

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Subject Matter Expert Presentations - Panel III

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The final panel brought an opportunity for the Conference participants to discuss modalities of Rescue and Protection Operations within the context of the Existing Legal Framework and Existing Mutual Agreements on Cooperation.

Conference Round Table - Panel IV

Subject presentations in this round table were provided by Ms Sandra Nedeljković, Deputy Director of the Flood Affected Areas Assistance and Rehabilitation Office of the Republic of Serbia and Mr Jože Papež, MSc, Head of Development and Projects in Hidrotehnik d.d., Republic of Slovenia.

The second day was concluded with the distribution of the draft Joint Statement to be reviewed by individual delegations. The opportunity to submit possible proposals or remarks was given to all conference participants by the end of the day and no additional recommendations were provided. Thus, the Joint Statement (Annex A to this report) is considered to be accepted unanimously.

Conference Conclusions and Recommendations

The event was judged as successful. It succeeded in being topical in view of the existing questions and coping with the latest and most critical challenges in the area of flood prevention, preparedness, protection and relief.

The main outcome of this panel was the possibility for the delegations to directly exchange individual visions on future cooperation modalities, the key reason behind the joint gathering in Belgrade.

One of the key international / regional-level recommendations include the revision of the existing legal framework and mutual agreements on cooperation in a way that includes prevention and preparedness measures relevant to cross-border disaster risk management.

This means that some new international risk assessments and instruments of flood protection should be incorporated in line with the mentioned EU Flood Directive.

Conference Round Table - Panel IV

Moderated by Ms Teodora Fuior, Project Coordinator, Operations Southeast Europe, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

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The second day was concluded with the distribution of the draft Joint Statement to be reviewed by individual delegations. The opportunity to submit possible proposals or remarks was given to all conference participants by the end of the day and no additional recommendations were provided. Thus, the Joint Statement (Annex A to this report) is considered to be accepted unanimously.

Conference Conclusions and Recommendations

The event was judged as successful. It succeeded in being topical in view of the existing questions and coping with the latest and most critical challenges in the area of flood prevention, preparedness, protection and relief.

The main reason for this can be found in the fact that it managed to involve a comprehensive forum of experts, enabling members of SEE parliaments to get a unique opportunity to directly witness latest experiences and unsolved issues in this significant field of interest that, by its nature, overcomes national boundaries and requires close bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

As it was stated during the concluding session by Ms Teodora Fuior, this gathering for the first time stepped away from exclusively military topics and tackled other elements of national security systems.

All dialogues were open and sincere and thus provided the MPs with the real impression of the current situation and their own responsibility to support the required efforts when the political decisions have to be made, primarily regarding sufficient resources and international cooperation.

Brigadier General Zdravko Jakop underlined that all discussions led towards a single conclusion:

Flood prevention and preparedness is of highest importance in this particular field of interest.
the ultimate importance of well-developed and functional flood prevention and preparedness systems. This event provided good examples and suggestions for mutual cooperation; in this case, the parliaments are ultimately responsible to enable it through establishment of an appropriate legal framework for the required practical application.

General Jakop announced two nominations for the future 2016 annual parliamentary meeting, voiced by the Macedonian and Bosnia and Herzegovina delegations.

In this context, the possible follow-up event that could perfectly sum-up the series of activities on floods, which conveniently started in Sarajevo, could be the study trip to Lower Austria as an excellent example of a highly successful flood protection system. This proposal has been discussed as an unofficial one at the Conference margins and was not presented during the Conference. RACVIAC will initiate the process of its formalisation and execution within the 2016 Programme and it will timely inform the Belgrade Conference participants about its final result.

In conclusion, Ms Marija Obradović expressed gratitude to all parties being involved in the organization of the event, and especially to her colleagues - members of SEE parliaments - who actively contributed to the ultimate success of the Belgrade Conference.

Annex A: Conference Joint Statement
Annual Meeting of Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from South Eastern Europe Parliaments
Belgrade, 29th June – 01st July 2015

JOINT STATEMENT

The third Annual Meeting of Representatives of Defence and Security Committees from South Eastern Europe Parliaments took place in Belgrade, from 29th June to 01st July 2015.

The conference, attended by representatives of eight Defence and Security committees, was hosted by the Defence and Internal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, and supported by RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation in South Eastern Europe and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

The topic of the conference was Flood Relief Cooperation in Southeast Europe.

Guided by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, which underlines the need to promote a “culture of prevention”, and by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which underlines the responsibility of states to prevent and reduce disaster risk including through international, regional, sub regional transboundary and bilateral cooperation;


Recognising the contribution of European Union’s Programme on Civil Protection Cooperation with the Candidate Countries and Potential Candidates and IPA Civil Protection Programme II - IPA CP 2 to strengthen resilience to disaster in the SEE region; and the Programme for Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Floods in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Turkey - IPA FLOODS to strengthen resilience to floods in the SEE region;

Underlining the importance of bilateral and regional cooperation of the SEE Governments based on regional ownership, such as the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe, and as recommended by the works of the 2014 RACVIAC Regional Conference "Floods in South Eastern Europe – Lessons Learned and Future Steps";
Conference participants have agreed to consider encouraging and fostering governments in the region to take concrete steps in the near future for the completion of the following processes / or measures:

1. Developing a regional strategy for disaster management in the SEE region as a high priority on the collective effort to make the region safer from the risk of disasters;

2. Developing civil protection capacities for continued effective flood risk management, in line with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Floods Directive; this should include sound plans on flood risk management, promoting sustainable land practices that improve water retention, and working on flood defences and climate resilient infrastructure;

3. Introducing early warning systems at all levels, and upgrading contingency planning and emergency measures;

4. Adapting intergovernmental communication in case of disaster situation, making it more effective, faster and thus easier to avoid delays;

5. Cooperating regionally on river basin management, and continue the good practice of implementing the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin;

6. Providing priority support to most vulnerable groups of populations, in particular for housing solutions as well as ensuring access to health and education;

7. Ensuring transparency, efficiency and accountability in the use of financial assistance received;

8. Ensuring standardized, up to date, national databases shared among regional authorities;

9. Achieving clear division of responsibilities and accountabilities of all institutions and actors in flood prevention management.