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Bosnia and the European Union Military Force (EUFOR): Post-NATO Peacekeeping

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Summary

On December 2, 2004, NATO formally concluded its Stabilization Force (SFOR) mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina and handed over peace stabilization duties to a European Union force (EUFOR). The mission of the EU's Operation *Althea* is to ensure continued compliance with the Dayton peace agreement and contribute to a secure environment and Bosnia's efforts towards European integration. The 6,300-strong operation constitutes the largest EU military mission to date. NATO retains a small headquarters presence in Sarajevo, with approximately 220 U.S. forces, to provide advice on defense reforms and to support counterterrorism efforts and the apprehension of wanted war crimes suspects believed to be hiding in or transiting through Bosnia. Ten years after Dayton, many Members of Congress remain engaged and interested in Bosnia's reforms and prospects for sustainable peace. This report may be updated as events warrant. See also CRS Report RS22324, *Bosnia: Overview of Issues Ten Years After Dayton*, by Julie Kim.

SFOR Background and U.S. Policy

The 1995 Dayton peace agreement ended a 3 ½-year war that pitted Bosnia's Muslim, Croat, and Serb communities against one another. NATO first deployed an Implementation Force (IFOR) of nearly 60,000 troops to Bosnia to enforce compliance with the military aspects of the Dayton accords. Although IFOR successfully carried out the military tasks outlined in the Dayton agreement, the continued need for an external military presence to provide a secure environment in Bosnia led NATO to replace IFOR with a smaller Stabilization Force (SFOR, initially about 32,000 troops) in December 1996. NATO extended SFOR a second time in June 1998, this time without a specified end-date. Instead, NATO outlined a number of benchmarks to measure progress toward a self-sustaining peace in Bosnia. Periodic mission reviews by NATO of SFOR operations assessed an increasingly stable security situation and prompted gradual reductions in SFOR's force strength over time. The U.N. Security Council authorized NATO's original

IFOR mission in December 1995, the follow-on SFOR mission one year later, and subsequently renewed its authorization for SFOR's operations on an annual basis.¹

The United States initially contributed close to 20,000 troops to IFOR, or about one-third of the total force. In 1995, President Clinton justified the U.S. contribution as an appropriate response to the suffering and instability caused by the Bosnian war and as a demonstration of U.S. leadership in NATO, although he pledged at the time that the commitment would not exceed one year. The Bush Administration frequently invoked the "in together, out together" policy with the European allies on maintaining an international security presence in the Balkans. As the smaller SFOR drew down over the years, so did the U.S. contingent, and its share averaged about 15% of the total force in the final years (for example, the U.S. contribution was about 1,000 out of a total of 7,000-8,000 troops in SFOR in late 2004). Throughout, the United States retained command over the NATO force in Bosnia; NATO's residual headquarters presence has likewise come under U.S. command and includes about 220 U.S. forces (as of late 2005).

Transition to EUFOR in Bosnia

Concept Evolution. EU heads of state expressed their willingness and readiness to lead a military operation to follow SFOR as early as 2002.² EU officials viewed the initiative to lead a follow-on peacekeeping force in Bosnia as an outgrowth of the EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), as well as a logical extension of the EU's growing involvement in the western Balkans. Bosnia has recently opened negotiations with the EU on a Stabilization and Association Agreement and aspires to eventual EU membership. The EU also has experience in fielding police training and advisory missions in Bosnia and Macedonia, both undertaken in the ESDP framework. The EU Police Mission in Bosnia comprises over 500 international police personnel. Moreover, the Dayton-mandated Office of the High Representative is "double-hatted" as the EU's Special Representative in Bosnia, and is expected to evolve into an EU-only office in 2006-2007. By assuming peacekeeping duties in Bosnia, EU members aimed to further develop ESDP on an operational level, as well as complement the broader EU integration strategy for Bosnia.

For most of 2003, NATO did not act on the EU offer on Bosnia. U.S. Administration officials cited several reasons why the United States believed a handover to the EU was premature at the time. One was that NATO had decided to maintain SFOR's troop strength at 12,000 for the rest of 2003, rather than approve further cuts, and that the EU was only prepared to deploy a smaller force. Officials also cited NATO's particular qualifications in apprehending indicted war criminals and in conducting counterterrorism operations.³ Some observers believe that strained trans-Atlantic

¹ The last U.N. resolution authorizing SFOR operations was Resolution 1551, passed unanimously on July 9, 2004, which extended authorization for SFOR for a further six months and welcomed the EU's intention to launch an EU military mission in December 2004.

² See Presidency Conclusions, Copenhagen European Council, December 12-13, 2002. European Council Press Release No. 15917/02, January 29, 2003.

³ Hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs (S. Hrg 108-194), Committee on Foreign (continued...)

relations over the U.S.-led war in Iraq in early 2003 may have contributed to a lack of consensus within NATO on the EU offer on Bosnia. Others counter that NATO was preoccupied with plans to engage in Afghanistan peacekeeping operations by mid-2003 and point to the fact that NATO's handover of a small Macedonia mission to the EU took place at the same time as the war in Iraq, with no apparent disruptive effect. In any case, by the December 2003 NATO ministerial meetings, some differences had been worked out and NATO members reached consensus on the concept, if not yet the details, of a follow-on EU military mission in Bosnia.

A fundamental principle agreed to early on was that any EU military mission in Bosnia should fall within the so-called Berlin Plus framework. Berlin Plus refers to arrangements finalized in late 2002-early 2003 on institutional and operational links between NATO and the EU that grant the EU access to NATO planning and assets for operations in which NATO is not engaged. The first test case for Berlin Plus occurred in early 2003 with the EU's takeover of the small NATO mission in Macedonia. NATO's Allied Harmony mission in Macedonia was concluded in March 2003 and replaced by the EU's Operation *Concordia*, a small and limited mission of 350 troops that ended in December 2003.⁴

Planning, Decisions, and Handover in 2004. Conceptual details of the transition evolved as NATO and EU planners worked to develop plans for mid-2004 summit meetings. Early agreed concepts included formally concluding SFOR and putting in place a new and distinct EU mission in a seamless transition. The EU mission was to emphasize broader reform objectives in Bosnia, including closer association with the EU.⁵ An issue of greater contention centered on the form and function of the residual NATO "headquarters presence." Early on, NATO officials called for a small military presence to carry out defense reform functions, such as training and inter-operability exercises in conjunction with Bosnia's expected future membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP), as well as intelligence collection, counterterrorism, and apprehension of persons indicted for war crimes. This proposed multifaceted set of tasks for the residual NATO presence suggested to some a more robust operational capability than just an advisory or support presence. Some European officials reportedly resisted plans that could have led the NATO presence to parallel functions of the EU force. They also emphasized the need for the EU to maintain full operational control of, and autonomous decision-making authority over, the military mission.⁶ In the final arrangement, EUFOR took over the

³ (...continued)

Relations, United States Senate, 108th Congress, 1st Session, June 25, 2003. USGPO, Washington: 2003.

⁴ The EU initially planned to deploy an EU force to Macedonia in 2002, but had to postpone because of delays in finalizing the Berlin Plus agreements. See also CRS Report RL32342, *NATO and the European Union*. For more information on the EU force in Macedonia, see CRS Report RL32172, *Macedonia (FYROM): Post-Conflict Situation and U.S. Policy*. In 2003, the EU also launched a peacekeeping mission in Congo that did not utilize the Berlin Plus framework.

⁵ Summary of the Report by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for CFSP, on a Possible EU Deployment in Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 23, 2004, available at [http://www.ohr.int/print/?content_id=31930].

⁶ Judy Dempsey, "US and EU in dispute on control of Bosnia force," *Financial Times*, March 9, (continued...)

primary military stabilization role, while the NATO headquarters presence was to focus primarily on defense reform. However, both share some operational tasks.

A total of about 220 U.S. forces remain in Bosnia as part of the NATO headquarters presence in Camp Butmir in Sarajevo and at the U.S. Eagle Base in Tuzla. The U.S. presence is used for providing a staging area for military exercises, supporting the EU mission, and demonstrating the enduring U.S. commitment to Bosnia's security.⁷ The residual U.S. presence at both bases has been involved in providing intelligence support, engaging in efforts to detain war crimes suspects, and working to deny safe havens for Islamist extremists and their supporters in Bosnia.

The war criminals issue has clouded the transition and the legacy of SFOR, especially with respect to former Bosnian Serb leader and wanted war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic. In 2004, SFOR and the Office of the High Representative embarked on numerous joint measures to increase pressure on Karadzic, including detaining his close associates and sanctioning or dismissing his alleged supporters. SFOR and local police also launched some unsuccessful raids against Karadzic in Republika Srpska. Despite ongoing efforts by NATO, EUFOR, and local authorities to apprehend Karadzic and increase pressure on his support network, he and former Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic have eluded capture for many years. While local authorities bear the primary responsibility for apprehending war crimes suspects, some observers believe that the lack of resolution of this issue marred SFOR's cumulative record of achievement in Bosnia.

Prior to the December 2004 handover, the United States appeared to send somewhat contradictory signals at times on the desired level of U.S. engagement in the Balkans. On the one hand, some U.S. officials, especially in the military, expressed an interest in concluding the U.S. military role in the Balkans in view of greater or more pressing U.S. priorities in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. For them, handing over operational security matters to the EU in Bosnia represents another opportunity, in a relatively secure environment in Europe, for global security burden-sharing. The larger EU role is also seen to be consistent with U.S. goals for the western Balkan region to eventually achieve full integration into the EU. On the other hand, some U.S. officials may be wary of French and other European long-term aspirations to build up European military structures separate from NATO. Those with this perspective might be concerned that a successful EU mission in Bosnia could work to diminish NATO's primacy — and possibly U.S. influence — on European security matters. Others also see a continued U.S. role in enhancing stability in the Balkans with a U.S. military presence.

⁶ (...continued)
2004.

⁷ Statement by Maj. Gen. James W. Darden, U.S. European Command, at a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee, July 12, 2004.

Key Dates.

- On April 26, 2004, EU members endorsed a “General Concept” for an EU-led mission, including a military component of about 7,000 troops, in Bosnia. The concept established the broad strategy for the EU’s engagement in Bosnia. It called for the EU military operation to fulfill the military tasks of the Dayton peace agreement, have a mandate authorized by the U.N. Security Council under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, and come under the political authority of the EU Council’s Political and Security Committee (PSC).
- At its June 28-29 summit meeting in Istanbul, NATO nations confirmed the decision to conclude SFOR by the end of the year and welcomed the EU’s readiness to deploy a new and distinct mission. NATO members agreed that NATO’s residual military presence would have the “principal task” of providing advice on defense reforms and would also “undertake certain operational supporting tasks, such as counter-terrorism...; supporting the ICTY...with regard to the detention of persons indicted for war crimes; and intelligence sharing with the EU.”
- On July 9, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1551 which welcomed “the EU’s intention to launch an EU mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, including a military component, from December 2004.”
- On July 12, EU members adopted a “Joint Action” on the EU military operation in Bosnia, named *Althea*. It designated the Deputy SACEUR at NATO to be EU Operation Commander and named U.K. Maj. Gen. David Leakey as EU Force Commander. It reaffirmed the EU’s comprehensive approach toward Bosnia and support for its progress toward EU integration.
- On October 11, the EU Council approved the Operational Plan for the EUFOR Operation *Althea*.
- By a unanimous vote, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1575 on November 22. Acting under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, it authorized EUFOR to be the legal successor to SFOR and to carry out a peace stabilization role for an initial period of one year. EU officials have estimated that the EUFOR in Bosnia could be extended to a period of about three years.
- At a ceremony in Sarajevo on December 2, NATO formally concluded the SFOR mission and the EU launched Operation *Althea*. *Althea* operates out of three military areas in Bosnia (Tuzla, Mostar, and Banja Luka), each comprising a multinational task force, and also has an integrated police unit and theater troops. A total of 33 countries (22 EU member and 11 non-member states) contribute forces to EUFOR. Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom lead troop contributions.

- On November 21, 2005, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1639, which authorized EUFOR and the NATO Headquarters in Bosnia for a further twelve months.
- On November 21-22, the EU Council took several decisions on the EU's relationship with Bosnia including: opening Stabilization and Association Agreement negotiations, continuing an EU police mission in Bosnia, and keeping an EU military presence in Bosnia at basically unchanged force levels for the coming year.
- On the date of its first anniversary on December 4, EUFOR held a change of command ceremony, with Italian General Gian Marco Chiarini taking over as EU Force Commander.

EUFOR Outlook

The December 2004 handover ceremony marked an historic end to NATO's longstanding mission in Bosnia and the beginning of a new EU military undertaking. Many U.S. and European officials believe that success in handing over the stabilization mission in Bosnia from NATO to the EU is important not just for Bosnia's future but also for EU aspirations to assume greater security responsibilities. EUFOR is seen as an important precedent for future potential mission handovers from NATO to the EU, for example in Kosovo. European support for EUFOR's continuation appears strong, although EU members are likely to consider changes to EUFOR's size and/or mandate after the 2006 Bosnian elections and as Bosnia makes progress in its efforts to integrate with the EU.

In 2005, EUFOR conducted several exercises and operations aimed at collecting illegal weapons, improving coordination with NATO, and disrupting organized criminal activity. EUFOR has worked closely with Bosnian law enforcement agencies on combating organized crime, including conducting joint anti-crime operations and arrests. Small units of Liaison and Observation Teams (LOT) have been stationed to increase EUFOR visibility in local communities. Both EUFOR and the NATO presence remain engaged in the pursuit of war crimes fugitives and in pressuring their support networks. A EUFOR raid on January 5, 2006, on the home of a war crimes suspect in eastern Bosnia resulted in gunshot injuries to the suspect and the death of his wife (*AFP*, Jan. 5, 2006).

Thus far, the transition to an EU force has not incurred any major political impact in Bosnia. During the EUFOR planning stage, Bosnian government officials accepted the concept of a European follow-on force, although they emphasized the need for a continued NATO and U.S. presence. Bosnian officials often cite the critical role of U.S. leadership in eventually bringing an end to the Bosnian war in 1995, especially in the wake of failed U.N. peacekeeping missions (comprised largely of European forces) during the Bosnian war. On the other hand, European integration today represents the ultimate strategic perspective of all of the western Balkan states, including Bosnia. The European force in Bosnia aims to add a further security dimension to Bosnia's overall relationship to the EU and enhance Bosnia's prospects for EU integration. The small residual U.S. presence in Bosnia can perhaps address both perspectives by symbolizing a continued U.S. commitment to Bosnia, while ceding primary security responsibility to the EU.