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

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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 7,000-strong operation constitutes the largest EU military mission to date. NATO retains a small headquarters presence in Sarajevo, with some U.S. forces, to assist with defense reforms, counterterrorism efforts, and the apprehension of wanted war crimes suspects, many of whom are believed to be hiding in or transiting through Bosnia. This report may be updated as events warrant. A related CRS product is CRS Report RL32392, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Issues for U.S. Policy*.

SFOR Background and U.S. Policy

Bosnia and Herzegovina is approaching the 10th anniversary of the 1995 Dayton peace agreement, which 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. Though IFOR's performance in fulfilling its military tasks was widely viewed to be a success, 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. The U.N. Security Council authorized NATO's original IFOR mission in December 1995, the follow-on SFOR mission one year later, and has

subsequently renewed its authorization for SFOR's operations on an annual basis.¹ In recent years, periodic mission reviews by NATO of SFOR operations assessed an increasingly stable security situation in Bosnia and prompted gradual reductions in SFOR's force presence over time. However, most assessments of Bosnia's postwar progress identified a continued need for an external military presence.

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 Bosnia. 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. By late 2004, the U.S. contribution was about 1,000 out of a total of 7,000-8,000 troops in SFOR. Throughout, the United States retained command over the NATO force in Bosnia; NATO's residual headquarters presence has likewise come under U.S. command.

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 multifaceted and increasing engagement in the western Balkans. Bosnia is in the process of becoming more closely associated with the EU under the Union's Stabilization and Association process 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. In Bosnia, about 525 international police personnel currently serve in the EU Police Mission (as of March 2005). Moreover, the chief international civilian official in Bosnia, High Representative Paddy Ashdown (United Kingdom), an office established by the Dayton accords, is "double-hatted" as the EU's Special Representative in Bosnia. By assuming peacekeeping duties in Bosnia, EU members aim 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. They also cited NATO's particular qualifications in apprehending indicted war criminals and in conducting

¹ The last U.N. resolution authorizing SFOR operations was U.N. Security Council 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 Dec. 2004.

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

counterterrorism operations.³ Some observers believed that strained trans-Atlantic 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 countered that NATO had its hands full with plans to engage in Afghanistan peacekeeping operations by mid-2003 and pointed to the fact that the NATO-EU handover in Macedonia 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 new 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 a more robust operational capability than just an advisory or support presence. Some European officials reportedly resisted plans that could lead 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,

³ Hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs (S. Hrg 108-194), Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 108th Congress, 1st Session, June 25, 2003. USGPO, Washington: 2003.

⁴ Plans to bring in an EU force in Macedonia in 2002 were postponed 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].

the military mission.⁶ In the final arrangement, EUFOR has the primary military stabilization role, while the NATO headquarters presence (with about 150 personnel) focuses primarily on defense reform. However, both share some operational tasks.

A total of about 250 U.S. forces remain in Bosnia in two capacities: 100 U.S. personnel serve as part of the NATO headquarters presence in Camp Butmir in Sarajevo and about 150 personnel remain at the U.S. Eagle Base in Tuzla. Uses for this combined U.S. presence include providing a staging area for military exercises, supporting the EU mission, and demonstrating the enduring U.S. commitment to Bosnia's security.⁷ Many observers look to the residual U.S. presence at both bases to be especially active 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.⁸

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. The ability of Karadzic, as well as former Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic (thought to remain largely in Serbia), to elude capture for many years has remained a conspicuous gap in peace consolidation efforts in the Balkans. It has also posed a significant barrier to Bosnia's efforts to gain closer association with the EU and NATO. While local authorities bear the primary responsibility for apprehending war crimes suspects, some observers believe that the lack of resolution of this issue has marred SFOR's cumulative record.

Prior to the December 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, have 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 fully integrate 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.

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

⁸ On the U.S.-led counter-terrorism effort in Bosnia, see Harry de Quetteville, "U.S. hunts Islamic militants in Bosnia," *Daily Telegraph* (London), July 26, 2004.

Key relevant political decisions made in 2004 include the following:

- On April 26, 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. At Istanbul, 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 (UK General John Reith) 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 in three military areas in Bosnia, each comprising a multinational task force.

EUFOR Outlook in 2005

The December 2 handover ceremony marked an historic end to NATO's longstanding mission in Bosnia and the beginning of an ambitious EU military undertaking. At the same time, U.S. and European officials emphasized that the transition should result in little if any discernible changes to the security situation on the ground in Bosnia. About 80% of the EU force derived from SFOR. 33 EU member and non-member states contribute forces to EUFOR.

Since the December handover, EUFOR has conducted several exercises and operations aimed at collecting illegal weapons, improving coordination with NATO, and disrupting organized criminal activity. EU Force Commander Gen. Leakey has also emphasized EUFOR's role in pursuit of war crimes fugitives such as Karadzic, Mladic, and former Croatian General Ante Gotovina, and in pressuring their support networks.⁹ One former Bosnian Serb policeman surrendered to EUFOR in January 2005.

Thus far, the EU transition in Bosnia has not incurred any major political impact in Bosnia. 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. By most accounts, U.S. participation in IFOR and SFOR lent essential credibility to the NATO operations, especially in the wake of failed U.N. peacekeeping missions (comprised largely of European forces) during the Bosnian war. In contrast, many observers within Bosnia and without believe that Europe as a whole still carries a credibility problem on security matters, both because of the relatively untested record of ESDP and because of Europe's unsuccessful record in handling the Balkan crises of the 1990s on its own. 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.

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 the precedent it may set for future potential mission handovers from NATO to the EU, for example in Kosovo and possibly Afghanistan. Operation *Althea* will likely be an important test of the EU's ability to utilize and integrate its military, political, and economic instruments. It will test EU military capabilities and may shape the future development of ESDP. The Bosnia case is also viewed as a significant practical application of the NATO-EU institutional relationship, as laid out in the Berlin Plus mechanisms.

⁹ Harry de Quetteville, "We'll break some bones in pursuit of war criminals," *Daily Telegraph*, January 22, 2005.