

Kosovo Force – KFOR III

THE EUROCORPS IN KOSOVO

The Eurocorps' designation

On November 22nd, 1999, the Common Committee met in Luxembourg and officially suggested to NATO that the Eurocorps Headquarters should form the headquarters' core of the force deployed in Kosovo (KFOR).

Already at the beginning of December and anticipating the corresponding decision, the Staff and HQ Battalion service members started an intense preparation for a six-month deployment.



On January 28th, 2000, the North Atlantic Council accepted the suggestion made by the five nations. The event was a first for several reasons: indeed, the first Eurocorps commitment was also the first operation for which a European staff, not belonging to the Alliance's integrated military structure, took the command of a NATO force.

KFOR II relief

A month later, the first elements left Strasbourg flying to Skopje and Pristina where the KFOR CP Rear and Main were respectively located. The relief of the LANDCENT headquarters [Allied Land Forces Central (Europe), which became meanwhile the NATO "Joint Headquarters Center"] began. It took place smoothly, the Eurocorps progressively taking over most of the key posts.

The relief was completed on April 18th, 2000 with the change of command from General Reinhardt to General Ortuño, Commander Eurocorps, under the authority of General Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). On that day, approximately 350 Eurocorps service members were on the spot. They represented approximately 40% of the manning of both KFOR III headquarters, forming their framework.

The KFOR III mission

General Ortuño was operating under SACEUR's direct command and had an unchanged mission in comparison with his predecessors' from the ARRC (Allied Rapid Reaction Corps of the Allied Command Europe) and then from LANDCENT. It consisted in realizing the military part of the United Nations' resolution 1244, which meant: create a climate of security on the ground and introduce basic conditions allowing the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to set up multi-ethnic civil administrative structures.

But, if the mission itself remained unchanged, the data were indeed different. Winter had been rigorous and the predecessors had been obliged to attend to the most urgent things first in difficult conditions. The spring coming, the reconstruction phase in the province had to be started first thing. The aim was to restore the fundamental (economical, political and social) structures needed for restarting a normal life in Kosovo. The tasks were huge: The UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army) had to be transformed into a civil defence body, violence and organized crime were still raging, judicial structures were non-existent, legislation itself still had to be defined, a multi-ethnic police body had to be formed, the public health situation was preoccupying and the medical infrastructure had to be rebuilt. Moreover, the municipal authorities had to be urgently installed as the former ones had gone with the Yugoslavian authorities. This meant elections had to be organized. But also here, everything still had to be done: a census had to be taken in order to establish electoral lists, electoral rules had to be developed and political parties formed, instructed and acknowledged as democratic parties, the electoral campaign and the elections themselves had to be organized. All these steps needed of course important security measures. Also during the presidential elections held in Yugoslavia, similar security measures were put into place. They were meant to allow a smooth progress of the poll organized by the Serbian community in Kosovo.



The KFOR III approach



The relations KFOR III was maintaining with international and non-governmental organizations on the spot were becoming more numerous in order to co-ordinate the efforts made. The rhythm of the working meetings was intense up to the highest level. General Ortuño, for instance, met Dr. Kouchner, the special representative of the United Nations' Secretary General, every day. This close co-operation reached its crowning achievement in August as Operation Vulcain was executed in an exemplary way thus closing the lead production plant of Zvecan, the pollution of which had become a danger for public health.

In order to allow a reconstruction of the province, KFOR redoubled its efforts in order to maintain a security climate making the other organizations' work easier: 800 patrols were carried out each day on the whole territory and more than 1000 soldiers were assigned to the guard of sensitive spots. The results spoke by themselves: crime decreased and within six months more than 4500 illegally held weapons were seized and destroyed. Moreover 67 tons of weapons and ammunition were discovered during the one and only Operation Leatherman conducted in June. Nevertheless KFOR III voluntarily chose a low profile, only intervening in case of need in co-ordination with all partners, preferring dialog to force and encouraging the population to solve some problems by themselves. But if force turned out to be necessary, as for the closing of the Zvecan plant, KFOR was able to act with determination and execute well-prepared and co-ordinated military operations.

KFOR also directly contributed to the province's reconstruction by repairing some 325 road-km and by participating in re-putting into operation the railway connecting Kosovo-Polje to Zvecan. Towards the end of the KFOR III period, this train allowing the Serb community to move safely reached an average occupancy rate of 500 passengers per journey.



In addition to that, an intense information campaign on the danger represented by mines and other unexploded explosive ordnance very regularly led KFOR service members to schools for practical prevention trainings. The results spoke by themselves: the number of accidents decreased.

Balance of the mission



If asked about the Kosovo mission, General Ortuño readily recalled that one of his best memories remained the remarkable cohesion within the force though it was made up of contingents from 39 countries. The different commanders exchanged their experiences and united their efforts, which were as many key elements of the mission's success.

There was still a lot to do in Kosovo as General Cabigiosu became KFOR VI Commander in mid-October. But our servicemembers kept a good memory of the mission and were convinced that their work had helped improving the situation in the province. The Eurocorps was unanimously praised for the way it executed its mission. This image-enhancing and enriching experience allowed the Eurocorps better preparing its coming commitments.