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Bosnia: UN Handover Causes Concern

There are fears that the European Union Police Mission, which takes over from the UN at the beginning of next year, may struggle to maintain regional stability.

By Julie Poucher Harbin in Sarajevo (BCR No. 393, 23-Dec-02)

As the new European Union Police Mission, EUPM, prepares to take over in January from the United Nations Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, UNMIBH, many analysts have voiced concern over the possible impact the switch will have on Bosnia's overall security, local economy and the battle against organised crime.

Most fears centre around the fact that the EUPM's mandate will be smaller than the UN's seven-year mission, which represented 96 nations and comprised more than 1,500 International Police Task Force, IPTF, monitors, a similar number of locally hired workers and around 300 international civilian employees.

There are also concerns over the tremendous economic impact of the UN departure, which, in addition to the loss of big-spending foreigners, also means the end of lucrative employment for some 1,500 local staff. Indirectly, this will have serious effects across the services sector and private businesses.

Most of the international staff will have left Bosnia by the end of the year, but 120 IPTF officers are to carry on as part of the EUPM to ensure continuity. High Representative Paddy Ashdown will hold the position of EU Special Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the current IPTF police commissioner Sven Frederiksen will head the EUPM.

The most obvious difference between the two missions is in their respective budgets. EUPM plans to spend 14 million euro in start-up expenses, and will have yearly running costs of around 38 million euro. This is dwarfed by UNMIBH's 145 million US dollar resources.

Whereas nearly 1,600 IPTF police were posted in some 200 locations throughout the country to train, equip and monitor police, EUPM's presence will be much less conspicuous, with only 500 monitors posted in 24 units.

And there are worries that the IPTF's success in tackling human trafficking and corruption through its Special Trafficking Operations Programme, STOP, may not be repeated under the new body.

In an interview with IWPR, STOP team coordinator Inspector John O'Reilly warned that the traffickers have been increasing their operations in recent months in anticipation of the handover to EUPM.

O'Reilly fears that the local police may not maintain the anti-trafficking measures at the same level. Despite some excellent Bosnian policemen who have the will to carry out the dangerous work involved, he said, "There is a lot

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of corruption - and a lot of people in important places don't want this to work."

Several local policemen - including a few from the STOP team - have been arrested over the past two years for participating in the trafficking business.

Stopping the smugglers, who use complicated routes across mine fields, forests and rivers, would be challenging without access to the intelligence that IPTF has collected over the past year, O Reilly said.

He noted that none of the IPTF monitors, who were on the STOP team and had planned to continue on with the EUPM, had thus far been invited to work with a new anti-trafficking team.

O Reilly was also concerned by the fact that as opposed to 50 IPTF officers on the STOP teams, only three EUPM officers will now be specifically tasked with the trafficking issue.

One western source familiar with the UN-EU switch said that more than half of the incoming monitors had no experience in the region, and echoed O Reilly's concern that valuable intelligence collected by IPTF in the field would be unused or lost.

Overall security, monitoring of ethnically-motivated crimes, related arrests and court proceedings, will be another serious challenge for the EUPM.

However, EUPM spokesperson Justin Davies assured IWPR that the mission is certainly prepared and will be fully deployed as of January 1, 2003 .

As the UN mission comes to a close, officials, local and international analysts and media alike, are assessing its successes, failures and flaws in order to identify lessons that can be relevant for the future of the region, and for other nation-building exercises elsewhere in the world.

Mark Wheeler, the head of International Crisis Group, ICG - the leading think-tank in Bosnia-Herzegovina - assessed that, in the end, the IPTF component of UNMIBH had been generally successful .

Everybody here started out with utterly and grossly inadequate mandates, including IPTF, Wheeler said. It took them several years to figure out what they were here to do, because the time of the Dayton peace accord was chaos. When you take that into consideration, then quite honestly the performance is not bad.

One of its biggest triumphs was the thorough reconstruction of the local police forces - which is bound to make the EUPM's job a lot easier.

As well as trimming the force from 44,000 in 1996 to nearly 16,000 six years later, the UN mission also retrained a number of senior policemen and put more than a thousand cadets through their paces at established police academies.

UNMIBH also helped to reform the Bosnian State Border Service, SBS, which assumed full control of the country's borders at the end of September 2002. As a result, the number of suspected illegal migrants entering the country was reduced from nearly 25,000 in 2000, to only a few hundred in 2002.

But perhaps the biggest stain on the UN's reputation were reports that several IPTF officers had links to the trafficking of women. These reports began to surface in local and international press in the spring of 2001, culminating in a Human Rights Watch study released last November, claiming that 18 IPTF monitors "engaged in illegal activities, either as customers of trafficked women or as outright purchasers of trafficked women and their passports." UN spokesperson Kirsten Haupt told IWPR that at least 18 IPTF monitors had been sent home after being "implicated in incidents of sexual misconduct by soliciting sexual services", but denied that IPTF officers had engaged in the trafficking trade.

Julie Poucher Harbin is a freelance journalist in Sarajevo.

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