

## **Contribution of the Republic of Slovenia to the success of KFOR**

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Republic of Slovenia has been contributing to international operations for 21 years, since 1997 when it deployed its first troops to an OSCE humanitarian mission Alba in Albania.

Currently, we have roughly 350 troops deployed in 12 missions and operations: two within UN, eight within NATO and two within EU operations and missions.

The main focus of the Republic of Slovenia in international operations and missions has always been the Western Balkans. It is therefore no surprise that the Republic of Slovenia has been actively engaged in Kosovo since the very beginning of the operation in 1999.

In September 1999, the Republic of Slovenia deployed its servicemembers to the UN civilian mission UNMIK and has been participating in KFOR since January 2000. The deployment of a larger number of SAF members began in 2004 when the SAF first deployed a platoon-level unit to Kosovo and later a company-level unit. In spring 2007, the conditions were set to deploy a motorized battalion battle group. The battalion operated in Kosovo for six months and as such represents our biggest contribution to any international operation or mission so far. The deployment of the battalion was a major logistic and organizational undertaking for the SAF outside Slovenia's national territory.

Between 2007 and 2010, the SAF and a company of the Hungarian Armed Forces formed an independent battle group with Slovenia as the leading nation.

The transformation of KFOR, and, accordingly, the SAF's contingent, followed the achieved security and general progress in Kosovo, the dynamics of the development of the KFOR operation, national abilities and interests, and the growing commitments and demands of other international operations and missions.

The continuing interest of the Republic of Slovenia was and remains to actively contribute to the security and stability of the Western Balkans and, therefore, we have been maintaining our significant presence in Kosovo. However, between 2010 and 2016 the situation in Kosovo improved and allowed for a reduction of troops. The SAF responded accordingly. Our commitment during this period was based on two manoeuvre companies complemented with support and Liaison and Monitoring Teams (LMTs), with several other smaller elements in other specialist areas.

It is also worth mentioning that, in 2013, the Republic of Slovenia was entrusted with a one-year mandate within the command structure of the operation, when an SAF Brigadier was appointed Deputy Commander of KFOR.

The SAF contingent deployed to KFOR in 2016 was further redesigned and reduced in size. Compared to the previous rotation, one motorized company and a helicopter were withdrawn, while most of other specialist elements were additionally strengthened. Consequently, at the end of 2016, Slovenian contingent in Kosovo comprised some 240 members, including four civilian functional specialists.

So far, the SAF has deployed to Kosovo a total of 7,824 troops which exceeds its current peacetime strength. At this point, the SAF has its 37<sup>th</sup> KFOR contingent deployed.

Throughout its participation in the operation, the basic tasks of the Slovenian KFOR contingent have been synchronised with the KFOR mission to ensure a secure and stable environment and freedom of movement. Additionally, SAF units and teams have been tasked with monitoring of the security and general conditions in the area of operations, control and patrolling along transit routes and checkpoints, protection of KFOR facilities and facilities of special importance, provision of rapid response forces and tactical reserves for the territory of Kosovo, as well as with the advisory role in support of the Kosovo security forces.

Direct and close cooperation of the military personnel from all the participating countries is indispensable and inevitable for any international operation. The majority of Slovenian KFOR contingent members have therefore traditionally been closely cooperating with members of the Italian armed forces who have also provided most of the logistical support to our efforts. Other major partners of SAF KFOR contingents include Hungarian, Austrian and Swiss armed forces.

Since individual tasks arising from the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 have not yet been fully realized, and the Kosovo security institutions are still unable to take over the responsibility for maintaining public order and peace throughout the territory of Kosovo, it is expected that the current spectrum of KFOR's tasks, and, consequently those of Slovenian KFOR contingent, will remain in full force in the period to come.

KFOR continues to gradually reduce and adapt its presence to the extent permitted by the situation on the ground. Successful comprehensive implementation of the Belgrade-Priština Agreement will be crucial in the upcoming period. Once the relevant conditions are met, KFOR will adjust.

According to the plans, the SAF will maintain the overall size of its KFOR contingent (up to 260 members) until the new changes have been brought into force. We estimate that Slovenian members in KFOR are entrusted with the most responsible managerial and command tasks, such as the management of the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC)

and the LMT Coordination Centre, or the duty of Deputy Commander of JRD-N and Deputy Commander of MNBG-W.

We are also entertaining the option of a possible contribution of a company to the reserve forces for the entire Balkan Joint Operations Area (JOA). In addition, the SAF is planning its further involvement in the advisory and support mechanisms through which the Alliance cooperates with the Kosovo Security Forces and the competent ministry. Given the substantial size of Slovenia's contribution to KFOR, it also has the ambition to assume additional positions in the operation's command structure.

To conclude, the experience of the SAF's participation in KFOR is certainly multifaceted. Examples of more or less successful practices provide answers to many strategic, operational and tactical challenges regarding the use of military capabilities in an extremely complex political and socio-cultural environment. The most important impact certainly seems to be the building of interoperability and skill of joint presence in an international environment, which includes the ability of successful integration into the command structure of operations. The SAF has significantly contributed to the security and stability in Kosovo and, consequently, in the Western Balkans. It is Slovenia's closest region where the potential for conflict is still substantial. We therefore remain committed to its further stabilization through our participation in KFOR and other means of defence and military cooperation in the region.