



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

TED STRICKLAND, GOVERNOR

MAJOR GENERAL GREGORY L. WAYT, ADJUTANT GENERAL

September 14, 2010
Log # 10-51

For Immediate Release

Ohio National Guard state partnership played “critical role” building U.S. relationship with Serbia

By Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill
National Guard Bureau

BELGRADE, Serbia (9-10-10) – The National Guard's State Partnership Program has played a key role improving relations between the United States and this Balkan republic, the U.S. ambassador said here Friday.

“The State Partnership Program between the Ohio National Guard and Serbia has been very important and valuable to us,” Ambassador Mary Burce Warlick said. “We believe that the defense and security partnership between the U.S. and Serbia is very strong and that the Ohio National Guard in particular has played a critical role.”

Air Force Gen. Craig McKinley, the chief of the National Guard Bureau touched down here early Friday morning aboard an Ohio Air National Guard Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker and immediately went into a dawn-to-dusk series of engagements with State Department officials, Warlick, the Serbian media, military leaders and Parliament members.

“I have the opportunity as the chief of the National Guard Bureau to see 62 partnerships around the world in all the combatant commands,” McKinley said. “The partnership between Serbia and Ohio is a relationship with a country who desperately wants to interact with the United States of America. So all that chemistry makes this one of the most outstanding partnerships that I've observed,” he said.

McKinley is here as the guest of Army Maj. Gen. Gregory Wayt, the adjutant general of the Ohio National Guard, who brought a delegation of Citizen-Soldiers and –Airmen along to take part in a military-to-military exchange to cover medical, noncommissioned officer professional development and other topics.

The Ohio National Guard has conducted more than 75 exchanges with Serbia in the four years since the two established the partnership in 2006.

Ohio has the second-largest concentration of Serbs in the United States, and the state already had a long-standing partnership with Hungary, which borders Serbia, so it was a natural fit when the opportunity came up to partner with Serbia in 2006.

-more-

"A month doesn't go by that either we're in Serbia or Serbia's in Ohio," Wayt said. "It truly has been a rewarding experience for us.

"It's important that our Soldiers learn to work with different countries and different coalition members. ... As we go forward as the United States, we always need coalition partners, side-by-side with us," he continued.

"The Serbian armed forces, is a professional military force and as professional military members we always learn from each other as Soldiers," Wayt said.

The National Guard SPP aligns nicely with State Department goals by providing training, partnership, experience, humanitarian assistance, NCO development for the Serbian military and other contributions, Warlick said.

"Mentoring is as important as anything else," she said.

SPP exchanges "have helped strengthen the broader relationship by strengthening the people-to-people ties," Warlick said. "We're very much looking forward to deeper and broader engagement. ... We're looking for ways in which we can broaden the partnerships between universities and youth and culture. I'm very optimistic."

Guardmembers have rehabilitated Serbian schools and Ohio has sent trade delegations, among numerous other activities.

"This state partnership is valued by every member of the Ohio National Guard," Wayt said.

"There are strong personal and institutional relationships that are being developed here," Warlick said. "It provides a real and focused commitment that may not be possible when dealing with the broader bureaucracy, which has many other ... priorities. The partnership at this level has been very, very helpful."

"We're a bridge in the National Guard between the Department of State and the Department of Defense," McKinley said. "We fill a void militarily. ... The National Guard has created so much goodwill around the world that I would hate to see this program diminished or reduced or taken out of the Department of Defense. It's the right place, it's the right niche, and we're spending appropriately to create these wonderful partnerships that have lasted almost two decades."

States have pockets of populations that make them a good fit with specific countries to form partnerships, he said.

Guardmembers that offer civilian-acquired skills from their civilian careers in addition to their military expertise and relationships are more personal at the state level, McKinley said.

"Today it's gone beyond that," McKinley said. "It's the profession of arms. ... It's working side-by-side, military-to-military to teach each other the best practices – all in the interests of protecting our citizens, promoting democracy, promoting the rule of law and working with business, industry, religious organizations and schools to make sure we transfer knowledge and friendship in a way that is non-threatening."