



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

TED STRICKLAND, GOVERNOR

MAJOR GENERAL GREGORY L. WAYT, ADJUTANT GENERAL

Oct. 20, 2010
Log # 10-58

For Immediate Release

Ohio Guard hosts bilateral defense consultation with partner Serbia

By 1st Lt. Kimberly D. Snow
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs Office

COLUMBUS, Ohio—One week after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised the Ohio National Guard's partnership with the Serbian military, the Ohio Guard hosted a bilateral defense consultation Oct. 18 at its joint force headquarters in northwest Columbus.

"We have this unique relationship between the Serbian military and the Ohio National Guard, which is a real model," Clinton said according to an interview transcript on the state department web site.

Maj. Gen. Gregory L. Wayt, the Ohio adjutant general, hosted Serbian and U.S. defense delegations in the state capitol in part to review the previous year's cooperative events, but mainly to plan for the future. In recent meetings with Serbian officials, including President Boris Tadic and Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac, Wayt said discussions have centered on moving past familiarization to conduct more small unit exchanges and collaborate in Partnership for Peace exercises.

“Quite frankly, where we all agree is, we want to get more involved in exercises together versus briefings,” Wayt said.

The event offered the Serb delegation, led by Dr. Zoran Jeftic, the Serbian state secretary for defense policy, the opportunity to discuss issues and areas of interest for future cooperative events and even to clear up some misunderstandings and misperceptions, Jeftic said. It is a partnership he considers not only successful, but valuable to the Serbian people.

“We worked with Ohio on humanitarian assistance in [the] southern part of Serbia,” Jeftic said. “It was a great thing for the citizens of the local community there. And now we are ready to go with some other courses of cooperation. We started with military-to-military cooperation, and today we discussed military-to-civilian and civilian-to-civilian cooperation.”

The Ohio National Guard and Serbian military have worked very closely together through the National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program – a part of the larger NATO Partnership for Peace program – since they first partnered more than four years ago. In 2011, the Ohio Guard and Serbian military partnership activities will comprise by far the greatest single percentage of activities among the U.S. and Serbia in the Partnership for Peace program, at 44 percent.

“Success is not the number of activities, [although] we have an appropriate number of activities, but what we did and how we established relations,” Jeftic said.

Dr. Joseph McMillan, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs and leader of the U.S. delegation, applauded Serbian cooperative efforts within the State Partnership Program, especially considering the

partners' unique challenges. He also spoke of the "political courage" demonstrated by Serbia at a time when popular support might have waned.

"In the case of Serbia, we have a very different situation than we do with a lot of other state partners who have aspirations to join NATO. Serbia is looking for a way forward working with the west without joining NATO, and this program has some special challenges that some of the other state programs don't face," McMillan said. "Ohio has managed those very adeptly, and they are tailoring what they do to meet the Serbians' needs very effectively."

Jeftic said the focus for 2011 is the opening of a new base in southern Serbia. The delegation visited Ohio's Camp Ravenna Joint Military Training Center Oct. 18 and has been working closely with an Ohio delegation to gather expertise and knowledge aimed at developing the camp as a base from which the Serbian military can stage and deploy in support of peacekeeping missions.

The final phase in military to military cooperation – a joint peacekeeping operation – looms near, Jeftic said.

Since the Ohio National Guard first partnered with Serbia in September 2006, that relationship has grown steadily, despite periods in which larger political issues may have impeded U.S.-Serbian relations, Wayt said.

"The plan we have laid out today for 2011 and beyond will continue to deepen our friendship," he said.