

Bosnia's political landmines

A call for socially responsible and conflict-sensitive mine action



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This research was funded in part by the Economic and Social Research Council, award PTA-030-2005-00533

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Published in September 2006 by Landmine Action, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP

www.landmineaction.org

Clarifications or corrections from all interested parties are most welcome

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record of this report is available from the British Library

ISBN-10: 0-9551923-2-3

ISBN-13: 978-0-9551923-2-6

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Printed and designed by Calverts 020 7739 1474

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1.0 Foreword

Landmine clearance can bring clear and tangible benefits to vulnerable populations. Those implementing this work inevitably want to focus on the concrete task in front of them – to get the mines out of the ground and reduce populations’ fear of their environment. However, these benefits may be undermined if the work is not organised and funded responsibly.

Where the state is weak, as it is likely to be in the wake of bitter fighting, criminal and factional elements can flourish. Limiting the influence of such groups should be an overarching goal of peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. Mine action, through its structures of contracting and financial allocation, can contribute to that goal or can work against it. This report explores how, in the aftermath the Bosnia conflict, the mine action sector failed to evaluate its interaction with criminal or political factions. Through this failure it may have set back processes of social reform and post-conflict recovery.

There is now greater recognition that post-conflict assistance must be undertaken with sufficient understanding of the actors and institutions that have caused or perpetuated conflict. It is inadequate for those funding or implementing projects to ignore these problems or to write them off as inevitable in such environments. Donors and implementing agencies need to respond to these risks and to show responsibility and accountability in that response.

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2.0 Executive summary

Mine action almost always occurs in a sensitive political environment. Landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination is a product of armed conflict which is a manifestation of political crisis. Despite this seemingly obvious statement, research on mine action has tended to focus on technical elements of mine and UXO clearance, the movement leading to the anti-personnel mine ban, or the socio-economic impact of landmines. There has been surprisingly little study of the politics of the clearance process itself.¹ Key questions have often remained unanswered: Who carries out demining and what was their record during the conflict? Who benefits politically from the aid given to support mine action? Who act as ‘middlemen’ between international donors and the local deminers and to what uses do they put their profit?

This report shows how, over a particular period, widespread ignorance of these political concerns had serious effects in Bosnia, where certain companies took advantage of the weak rule of law. As a result it suggests that corners may have been cut, lives put at risk and a significant portion of mine action funds appropriated by criminal-nationalist networks. Such outcomes were not in the best interests of Bosnia’s peace process.

Within the field of humanitarian assistance, there has been considerable introspection and hand-wringing over the impact of aid upon conflict. Researchers have shown how well intentioned aid programs can sometimes interact with the political economy of war in disturbing ways. Resource flows can be captured by warlords by direct seizure or by the collecting of bribes. Negotiations between aid agencies and warring factions may give such factions legitimacy and publicity.² Although mine action is generally recognised as a sub-sector of the larger world of aid, there has not been a comparable process of public and systematic evaluation – despite one mine action expert calling “allegations of corruption” the “Achilles’ heel” of many mine action programs.³

This report also suggests that mine action can avoid such problems if implemented in forms that are transparent and mindful of the political context.

The aim of this report is to use the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina to illustrate some of the ways in which mine action, specifically demining, interacts with the surrounding political economy. We highlight in particular the following dangers:

- While mine action tasks are contracted out to introduce competition and save costs, this occurs usually in the context of a weak state, which may be unable to enforce discipline and the rule of law on contractors. This means there may be strong incentives for contractors to cut corners and carry out risky practices to maintain a competitive price.
- Mine action resource flows or priorities may be captured by nationalist, particularist or even criminal interests, which often have positions of primacy in a conflicted society.

In response to such challenges the report recommends a conflict-sensitive and politically aware approach to mine action that:

- Pays attention to whom resources are allocated, and their role in the political context.
- Assumes the resource flows of mine action funding will attract the attention of many undesirable individuals and parties who wish to profit from it.
- Understands that policies conventionally considered wise may be hijacked and abused by special interests.
- Takes a principled and ‘arm’s-length’ stand from corruption and the illiberal political economy of conflict.

It is hoped that this report will further contribute to discussion in mine action policy and implementation circles about how demining should interact with the political economy of conflict. Such discussions could work towards a better understanding of how mine action actors and donors can systematically evaluate the political frameworks within which, or through which, this work is being implemented. Such systematic evaluation may have benefits not only for the direct outputs of the work (in terms of mine action quality) but also more broadly for the avoidance of further conflict and support to peacebuilding.

GLOSSARY OF COMMON ACRONYMS

ABC	American Broadcasting Companies
BHMAC	Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action
EUFOR	European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
ITF	International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance
MPRA	Mine Protection and Removal Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
OHR	Office of the High Representative
PIU	World Bank Project Implementation Unit
SIPA	State Investigation and Protection Agency
UNBiH	United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMAC	United Nations Mine Action Center
USTR	United States Department of the Treasury
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

3.0 ‘Contracting out’ in a weak state

It has become conventional wisdom that contracting out public services increases competition and thus leads to improvements in efficiency and price.⁴ This assumption has also been prevalent in the mine action sector,⁵ where a significant portion of mine clearance is contracted to commercial companies. Indeed, according to one study, “the mine action sector is probably the most commercialised sector of international humanitarian assistance.”⁶ The great majority of demining in Bosnia has followed this model. Governmental and multilateral public actors set the priorities, provided funding through budgets or foreign aid and monitored quality assurance. Actual implementation of mine clearance was performed largely by private profit or non-profit organizations.

Simple price comparisons seemingly vindicate this approach. In 2003, the average commercial team in Bosnia demined for 58% of the cost of a governmental one (see Table 1). Among private actors, commercial companies have lower prices than NGOs, say Darvin Lisica and David Rowe (both very experienced regarding Bosnian demining through work with BHMIC and UNDP respectively) because they are much more exposed to the discipline of market competition, forcing better productivity.⁷

TABLE 1: PRICE OF DEMINING IN BOSNIA, BY SECTOR.⁸

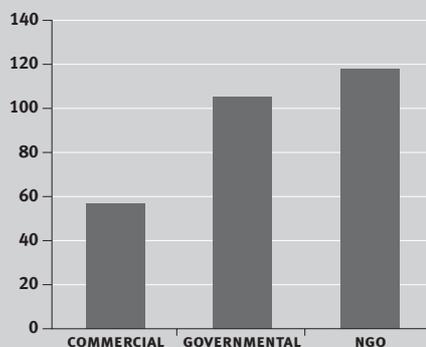
Type of Organization		Average Demining Price ⁹ (\$/m ²)	
		2002	2003
Private	Commercial	1.70	1.61
	Nongovernmental	2.47	2.25
Public	Governmental	2.00	2.82
Country Average		2.09	2.22

However, in the considerable academic literature on privatization, there is an acknowledgement that such simple price comparisons fail to account for other important factors. Firstly, commercial companies may avoid difficult and expensive tasks by choosing not to bid for them.¹⁰ Per Breivik, program manager of demining NGO Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), claims that one reason NGO average costs are higher is because they are driven by humanitarian concerns to address difficult tasks (like apartment blocks, rather than open fields, for example).¹¹ In contrast, a former senior official at the UN Mine Action Center in Bosnia (UNMAC) suggested that some commercial companies chose to clear easier areas. Such choices are perhaps inevitable if the complexity of the task is seen as likely to reduce the profitability of the contract. The following graphs, using mines and UXO found in a mined area as a rough proxy of the complexity and difficulty of a demining task, suggest that companies may have been undertaking easier work than that of government agencies and NGOs.

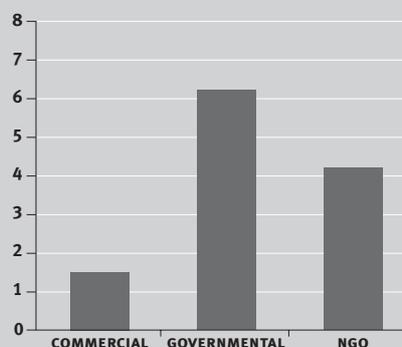
FIGURE 1: COMPLEXITY OF CLEARANCE TASKS, BY ORGANIZATION TYPE, 1999–2004

(BHMIC 2005)

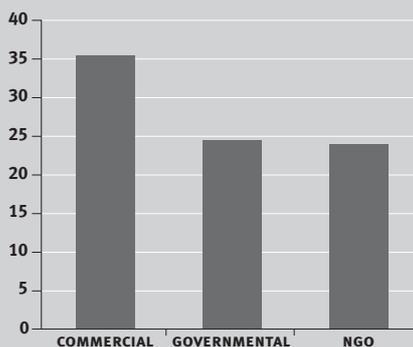
MINES AND UXO FOUND PER 100,000 SQR MTRS CLEARED, BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



MEDIAN DENSITY (MINES AND UXO PER 100 SQR MTRS) OF CLEARED MINEFIELDS, BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



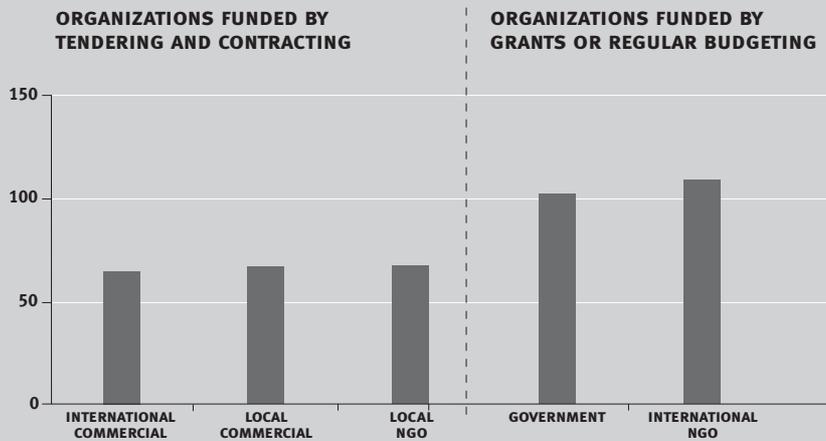
'MINEFIELDS' CLEARED WHEN NO MINES OR UXO WERE FOUND, AS A PERCENTAGE OF MINEFIELDS CLEARED BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



It is also worth disaggregating further – looking at organizations' funding arrangements rather than legal incorporation. International NGOs and government agencies, primarily funded by grants or public budgeting seem to have taken on more complex tasks than companies and local NGOs, funded by contracting. In short, contracted demining might be cheaper simply because contractors were able to choose to do cheaper tasks.¹² However, this is difficult to measure and there are a range of other factors that could contribute to the pattern suggested here (including the way in which tasks were identified and opened up to tender in the first place.)

FIGURE 2: MINES AND UXO CLEARED PER 100,000 SQ.M. BY FUNDING ARRANGEMENT, 1999–2004

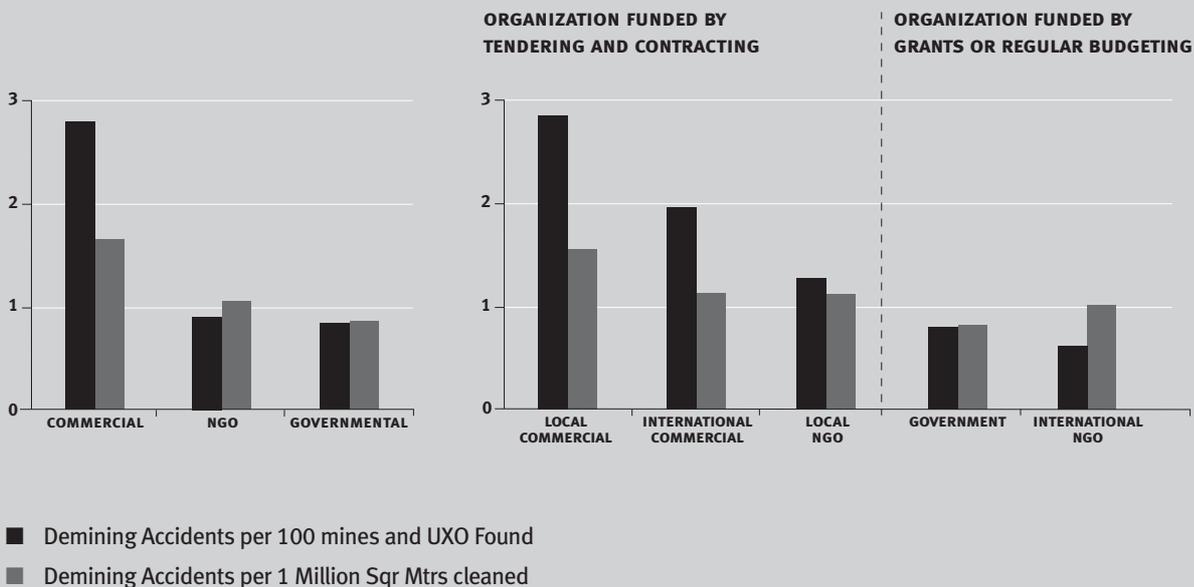
(BHMAL 2005)



More importantly, a simple financial approach does not take into account the human cost of contracting out potentially hazardous operations like demining – as one study on privatization said, “other values than efficiency are at stake.”¹³ For instance, in the period for which reliable data is available in Bosnia, the safety record of government and NGO demining units consistently outperformed commercial companies:

FIGURE 3: SAFETY RECORD BY ORGANIZATION TYPE AND FUNDING ARRANGEMENT, 1999–2004

(BHMAL 2005; author’s compiled demining accident dataset from BHMAL, ICRC, GICHD and the press)



Analysis of demining accidents has suggested that in excess of 80% might be considered avoidable, caused by lack of proper management, supervision or training.²⁴ On this basis, the relatively poor safety record of commercial deminers in Bosnia may be a proxy for the quality of their demining. Many observers say that commercial companies are often under considerable pressure to increase profits by speeding up the demining process.²⁵ Some companies paid deminers by square meter cleared – a practice that may encourage deminers to rush their work irresponsibly.²⁶ Increasing the risk of mines being overlooked puts both deminers and the future users of land at greater risk. Some analysts have expressed concern that a competitive tendering such as that used by the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance (ITF), the main demining funding conduit for Bosnia, might push the price so low that it is difficult to conduct demining according to internationally respected standards.²⁷

Information on demining accidents can provide some indication of how organisations are orientating themselves to these pressures. The following quotes from UNMAC inquiries into accidents by companies point to procedural and managerial shortcomings:

- *“The Team Leader acted irresponsibly and the site was marked inadequately.”*²⁸
- *“[I]nappropriate emphasis has been placed on field workers to complete a stated minimum square metres each day.”*²⁹
- *“Mines were stored in an unacceptable way and were not destroyed at the end of the working day.”*³⁰
- *[T]he flagrant disregard of such a fundamental and common-sensical procedural regulation as the appropriate minimum distancing between deminers constitutes in the Board’s view a gross deficiency in supervision at all levels.”*³¹
- *“[There is a] lack of a firm quality assurance and quality control policy in the company.”*³²

While local NGOs (funded through the same tendering process as companies) have also had many accidents, international NGOs have not. According to UNMAC, this is because:

*The NGO demining process is normally not so productivity-orientated as commercial organisations are and can progress at a rate not driven mainly by the financial aspects of an operation.*³³

In short, the Bosnian experience suggests that while a competitive tendering process may reduce financial costs of demining, there can be additional human costs (accidents) which are connected to the model of funding.

The results of this study confirm what the larger literature on public service privatization has generally found – that cost savings in contracting out often come with the risk of reduction in quality and/or safety. In some countries, these problems have been largely solved by constructing effective systems of regulation that hold poor performing contractors to account. However, this is difficult to achieve in countries with a weak state, especially in a conflicted context. Effective systems of governance are rarely established and rules can be bypassed through extra-legal measures such as bribery and favouritism.³⁴ Once one company cuts corners and is able to bid for contracts at lower cost, it forces other companies to ruthlessly lower costs also. This creates a strong incentive for companies to break the rules. If there are not effective disciplinary structures in place to enforce compliance with the authorised demining standards the fierce competition created by contracting out will only encourage poor quality demining. As David Rowe, UNDP advisor to the Bosnian demining program said, commercial companies will “always go to the line” of what is permissible, “they always require closer controls, and... better quality assurance over them.”³⁵ In a conflict or post-conflict situation, these ‘close controls’ may not always be available.

This pattern is very visible in Bosnia, where the confused and diffuse governmental structure was unable to enforce adherence to authorised standards. Several commercial companies were able to have repeated accidents and not have their contracts suspended. The next section explores in more depth how this lack of accountability and transparency might have arisen.

4.0 The political-criminal nexus

Analyses of public services fall short if they only examine the price and quality of provision. Services are provided in a political context – who provides and who receives them has a political impact. It is thus essential for any analysis of mine action to consider these factors. This is especially important in Bosnia, since its “abnormal” political economy²⁶ is dominated by what security scholar Roy Godson calls a “political-criminal nexus,”²⁷ comprising an elite that rose to power in the war, through smuggling, looting, arms trading and misdirecting international aid.²⁸

Some advocates of privatization have argued that contracting out services will reduce corruption and increase the rule of law by forcing efficiency and minimizing politically motivated distribution of resources.²⁹ However, it is unclear in such an analysis why a corrupt government should handle a privatization process more cleanly than it would run the program itself. Experience in many parts of the world has shown that privatization can create just as many opportunities for corruption as public provision.³⁰ Without sufficient transparency and accountability in a weak state, “various nomenklatura, mafia types, speculators, profiteers and other undesirables,”³¹ can use political connections to create patronage machines, in which government officials provide contracts and protection from investigation in return for favours or kickbacks.³² Though privatization is ostensibly undertaken to introduce competition, patronage machines hijack the process by enforcing monopolies or cartels, sometimes leading to a reduction in service quality.³³ Moreover, a patronage machine can destabilize the political situation, by empowering and enriching a criminalized elite.³⁴ For instance, the UN has described the Bosnian privatization process as “chaotic,” saying that “with large sums of cash available, organized criminals are in a position to bid for public tenders and contracts – often in collusion with corrupt officials.”³⁵

A significant portion of Bosnian demining followed this very pattern, and was reportedly “much criticized – for poor results and seemingly endemic corruption.”³⁶ In 1996 a Bosnian Mine Protection and Removal Agency (MPRA) was set up to oversee mine action. Within each of Bosnia’s decentralized entities – the Federation (populated mostly by Bosniaks and Croats) and Republika Srpska (populated mostly by Serbs) – there was a Project Implementation Unit (PIU), staffed by people from the entity government, which administered World Bank money. This system was quickly corrupted, with some local companies using government connections to gain contracts and increase profits.³⁷

In response, the international community pressured the MPRA to shut down and created a new system. The highest Bosnian mine action authority became the Demining Commission, with three Commissioners, each representing a constituent ethnic group (Bosniak, Serb and Croat). This was advised and assisted by an internationally staffed UN Mine Action Center (localized in 1998 as the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Center or BHMIC). However, the patterns of corruption seemingly adapted to the new institutional organisation, creating three ethnically based patronage structures that operated until at least late 2000. Each Demining Commissioner functioned effectively as patron and protector of a local demining company representing their ethnic group.³⁸ As one former senior UNMAC official said, “Local mine action was based firmly on nepotism and the patronage of unscrupulous men in high places.”

These companies, UNIPAK (Serb), SI/OKTOL (Bosniak) and DECOP (Croat), had deep familial and political ties to the key persons in the government. The deputy director of the Federation PIU was the brother of Adnan Gradasic, the director of SI/OKTOL. Gradasic was also close friends with and a former colleague of Enes Cengic, the Bosniak Commissioner, the former head of the discredited MPRA. Radislav Ilic, initially director of the Republika Srpska PIU and an early Serb Demining Commissioner, was brother-in-law of UNIPAK’s owner Radomir Kojic, and director of his import-export company UNIPAK Trading. According to a former senior UNMAC official, DECOP saw the Croat Commissioner, Berislav Pusic “as their boss,” regularly coming to his office to confer.³⁹

A report from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) notes that:

[There were] numerous allegations of corruption, including clearance tasks undertaken to benefit specific individuals ... kickbacks for the award of contracts ... burying meat on test sites for explosives detection dogs to distract competitor's dogs during accreditation trials, and re-laying landmines on sites cleared by competitors.⁴⁰

These patronage structures also played into the nationalistic logic of Bosnia's conflict. Funded, equipped and trained by the international community, ethnically based companies supported by ethnicized political structures were able to enrich and strengthen nationalist elites. For instance, GICHD noted allegations that several demining tasks were done "in pursuit of the chauvinist objectives of the nationalist parties."⁴¹ Moreover, there are reasonable grounds to suspect that several key actors in the demining machines were deeply implicated in the nationalist-criminal networks that have paralyzed the peace process.

Former Demining Commissioner Berislav Pusic had been the 'Head of the Service for the Exchange of Prisoners and Other Persons' in the breakaway Bosnian Croat statelet, the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna. Currently awaiting trial for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Pusic's 2004 indictment alleges he ordered "deportation of Bosnian Muslims" from the Herzeg-Bosna region.⁴²

UNIPAK owner Radomir Kojic has been accused of organizing the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs from Pale,⁴³ supervising torture centers⁴⁴ and commanding a unit shelling Sarajevo.⁴⁵ Since the war's end, press reports have further accused Kojic, one of the biggest investors in Pale,⁴⁶ of illegal and ultra-nationalist activities,⁴⁷ most notably supporting the network protecting Radovan Karadzic, one of the most wanted war crimes fugitives.⁴⁸

Although considered by many to be "better behaved" than the others, Bosniak Commissioner Enes Cengic, was still a strongly politicised figure; he was a member of the Bosniak nationalist party and holder of several influential political positions in Sarajevo local government during and after the war.⁴⁹

Studies on the political economy of conflict have shown that the nationalistic patronage machines like those in Bosnia are not simply local problems. They often interact with, receive funding from and collaborate with international actors.⁵⁰ In Bosnia, as we examine in more detail below, several international companies and NGOs were intimately involved in the murky political economy of demining. Channelling millions of dollars, they brokered between international donors and the local companies and were vital to the patronage systems.

The World Bank contracted 14 commercial companies to implement its demining program in Bosnia. However, over 60% of the project funds went to just two international contractors – Mine Tech International and RONCO Consulting Corporation.⁵¹ Mine Tech teamed up with UNIPAK and worked in the Republika Srpska and RONCO worked with SI/OKTOL and DECOP in the Federation. Mine Tech left Bosnia in 1998, and RONCO took over as the main intermediary between international donors and the three main local companies until 2000. RONCO claims credit for shaping SI/OKTOL, UNIPAK and DECOP into viable commercial operations and ran its demining operations through them via subcontracts.⁵²

However, in 1997, the World Bank suspended contracts awarded to RONCO by the Federation PIU, after reportedly determining that "regulations had been violated in awarding the contracts."⁵³ In response, the U.S. State Department took its money out of the World Bank fund and made contracts directly with RONCO.⁵⁴ Another point of concern arose when the State Department donated \$3 million worth of demining equipment to the Demining Commission in 1997. This was intended to be lent or hired to commercial companies. However, in 2000, *The Associated Press* reported that RONCO, working with the three main local companies "didn't return the equipment," giving "the three Bosnian subcontractors an advantage over other Bosnian deminers in competing for contracts."⁵⁵ It is not clear on what evidence *The Associated Press* allegations were based and RONCO left Bosnia later that year, with bitter complaints of a "smear campaign."⁵⁶ After repeated attempts to get comment from RONCO, their President Stephen Edelmann said in 2006, "it's been five years" since they were in Bosnia and so they "don't have the institutional memory" any more.⁵⁷

By 1999, the corrosive effect of the ‘demining machines’ had become an embarrassment to the international community. The World Bank launched an undercover investigation and in summer 2000 Bosnian Financial Police raided the offices of several demining companies.⁵⁸ As a result, the three Demining Commissioners were removed from office in October 2000 by the Bosnia’s international High Representative, citing “misuse of office,” “breach of public trust” and “widespread conflict of interest.”⁵⁹ The next week, local newspaper Slobodna Bosna ran a major expose on the demining sector.⁶⁰ It and another publication, Dani, claimed that an estimated \$6.7 million of demining funding remained unaccounted for.⁶¹ The World Bank was quite shaken by the whole episode, an evaluation of the demining program damned it as “highly unsatisfactory.”⁶² The World Bank has never since funded demining in Bosnia.

The attitudes of the international community to the Bosnian patronage machines reflected the wider context of international intervention, which from 1999 to 2001 saw a major increase of external involvement in Bosnian politics. There were more decisions imposed by the High Representative, including the dismissal of the Republika Srpska President⁶³ and a swell in the capture or surrender of war crimes fugitives. This change in policy, from accommodation to conflict with the nationalists, coincided with the World Bank investigation and the High Representative’s moves against the Demining Commissioners.

The US State Department’s reaction to the unveiling scandal, however, bucked this trend for several years and it continued to fund several of the companies involved from 1998 to June 2003 through the ITF. The table below shows how UNIPAK did especially well.

TABLE 2: ‘DEMINEING MACHINE’ COMPANY CONTRACTS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL TRUST FUND FOR DEMINEING AND MINE VICTIM ASSISTANCE⁶⁴

Company	Period	Number of Tasks	Approximate Area	Estimated Value	Donor
SI/OKTOL	2000–2003	2	47,000	\$60,000	US
Decop	2000–2001	3	110,000	\$200,000	US
UNIPAK	1999–2003	31 (8 as subcontractor to RONCO, UXB or CFB)	1,220,000	\$1,800,000	About \$1.3 million from US. Rest from other donors, including EU, UK, Sweden, Ireland, and Adopt-a-Minefield

The ITF only stopped funding UNIPAK after the European Council banned its owner Radomir Kojic from travelling to the EU in July 2003 for his connections to the network hiding Karadzic.⁶⁵ The US finally moved against him six months later, freezing his assets.⁶⁶ Later that year Kojic’s home was raided by NATO troops looking for information about Karadzic.⁶⁷ On August 23, 2006 Radomir Kojic was arrested in Pale by the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), following a warrant issued at the request of international organised crime prosecutor Jonathan Ratel.⁶⁸ Kojic’s relative, Radislav Ilic surrendered to SIPA on 27 August. The two men were arrested on suspicion of money-laundering, tax evasion and abuse of office relating to their demining companies and involvement in the network protecting Radovan Karadzic.⁶⁹ Banking documentation shows that within a single day, Radomir Kojic channelled more than 1 million euros in demining funds, mainly from the Slovenian International Trust Fund, from his account in Slovenia via Privredna Banka Sarajevo (PBS),⁷⁰ a bank described by the United States and the Office of the High Representative (OHR) as a money-laundering operation for Radovan Karadzic’s protection network.⁷¹ The transfer from Kojic’s off-shore account was made to Privredna Banka on 26 February, 2003.⁷² On 7 March, 2003, the OHR ordered the freezing of all Privredna Banka Srpsko Sarajevo bank accounts.⁷³

RONCO has continued to be a favoured demining contractor for the State Department. In addition to contracts with ITF, RONCO won a five year worldwide demining contract worth up to \$250 million from the State Department in October 1999.⁷⁴ It was one of three contractors which won the renewal of this contract, worth up to \$500 million over five years in 2005.⁷⁵

5.0 Politically sensitive mine action

When contacted by the authors, both the US Department of State and the UK Department for International Development (DfID) denied any knowledge of UNIPAK owner Radomir Kojic's wartime activities and connections to Radovan Karadzic before 2003. If this is true, it suggests a politically naive approach to mine action by two of the key mine action donors. This kind of blindness is problematic in a post-conflict environment. Indeed determination to avoid the potentially negative effects of such blindness are a foundation of the drive for 'conflict sensitive' approaches to humanitarian and development assistance in countries emerging from conflict. Along with calls for better integration of international action, and the development of more strategic approaches, conflict sensitivity is central to 'peacebuilding' as a frame of reference. Without conflict sensitivity such interventions may work against the overarching peacebuilding agenda rather than for it.

Indeed, growing concerns about the integrity of the Bosnian demining programme threatened donor trust, creating a "budget crisis" in 2000 and leaving the programme "on the verge of collapse"⁷⁶

Recognition of the inadequacy of naïveté as a response to these issues has led to three alternative politically sensitive approaches to mine action being implemented or suggested in Bosnia today:

5.1 The blacklist approach

In discussions with US State Department officials in Sarajevo, Belgrade and Washington DC, the authors discovered the existence of what some have unofficially called "the Blacklist." Any organization on this list, drawn up by the Embassy in Sarajevo, is discreetly barred from receiving US government funds. In particular, the State Department has decided not to work with any organization which has or allegedly has had links to the Karadzic network.

The advantage of the 'blacklist' is that it should prevent US aid money going to undesirable individuals. However, it is still a reactive process. Firstly, it requires the addition of new companies to the list as organizations morph into new forms.

Secondly, the list seems to be drawn up by the US Embassy in Sarajevo, and this information has not been shared effectively with other US Embassies. For instance, in August 2005,⁷⁷ a Washington-based US diplomat emphatically told one of the authors that the Bosnian demining company MEDECOM would no longer be receiving US funds, because of connections to Kojic. However, MEDECOM started a US funded demining project in Kapaonik, Serbia that very same August. In response to questions on this some US officials have denied that any list exists and thus this allocation of funds is not significant.⁷⁸ However, other State Department sources indicated to the authors that bureaucratic inertia had prevented the news that MEDECOM was blacklisted from reaching the US Embassy in Belgrade.

Unfortunately, during the clearance process at Kapaonik, MEDECOM had the only demining accident in 2005. Moreover, the organization contracted to monitor and inspect MEDECOM's efforts was Terra-Prom. International prosecutor Jonathan Ratel stated during the preliminary proceedings at Bosnia's State Court organised crime division that documentation seized during raids by EUFOR, NATO and the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) showed that Radislav Ilic, Radomir Kojic's brother-in-law, was an "authorised signatory of both MEDECOM and Terra-Prom, a demining monitoring company."⁷⁹ In addition to officially owning Terraprom and controlling MEDECOM through signature authorisation, Radislav Ilic was a director of the Republika Srpska PIU and an early Serb Demining Commissioner at a time when his relative Kojic, via Unipak, received World Bank and other international funds.⁸⁰

The fact that both MEDECOM, the demining company, and Terra-Prom, the company charged with ensuring that MEDECOM performed to proper standards were owned and controlled by the same individual suggests a possible conflict of interest.

A third point of concern regarding the ‘blacklist’ approach relates to transparency. The list is not published or publicized because the State Department does not want the companies on the list to challenge their inclusion, or run the risk of a law suit. However, this means that other donors may not be aware of the problems with a company. For instance, money from the NGO Adopt-a-Minefield was used in ITF tenders to MEDECOM in Bosnia till late November 2005.⁸¹ They may have looked more closely at such arrangements had they had access to the US Embassy list. In fact, the State Department denies publicly that such a politically motivated list exists. Rather it has been asserted that such decisions are made on ‘business’ grounds – but with a recognition that “unsavoury business techniques” need to be considered in that.⁸² It has also been commented that central funding would not contradict advice from the embassy in country.⁸³

Given these problems of transparency there is no way to publicly determine the reasoning behind placing a company on the list and there does not seem to be a recognized method to appeal against inclusion. This raises the potential possibility of a company ending up on the Blacklist as a result of hearsay and slander rather than hard evidence. There is also a question of even-handedness; only companies linked to Kojic seem to have ended up on the Blacklist. It is not clear whether other possible points of concern are factored into this process.

Therefore, the US Embassy Sarajevo’s Blacklist approach, while an important step towards more politically sensitive mine action, has several major problems that need further thought.

5.2 The pragmatic approach

A very different, but equally politically aware approach has been suggested by, among others, David Rowe, who was a UNDP advisor to BHMAC. He argues for a realist or ‘pragmatic’ approach to demining, which acknowledges the inherently complex and ‘dirty’ situation that is conflict politics. Rowe told one of the authors that rather than worry about people’s war records and skeletons in the closet, mine action policy should focus on whether such groups do the job properly. He said, “if the government came to me and said ‘Well what do you think about UNIPAK, and their association with whomsoever?’ I’d say I don’t know about their association with whomsoever but what I do know is they’re very effective. So I’d use them until they get closed down.”

This places the policy focus on quality, rather than on what he considers unrelated political concerns. Moreover, by encouraging potentially undesirable people to profit from reconstruction work, mine action funding can provide an incentive to engage with the peace process. Rowe said he feels he was able to get diverse “interested parties to work together for the betterment of mine action.” Moreover, while acknowledging that mine action can hardly “change dreadful people who carry guns into peace loving humanitarians,” it is “not a bad transition” for demobilized soldiers, who have “been associated with weaponry and explosives ... and [are] used to rough work in the field.”⁸⁴

Likewise, Larry Crandall, who was vice-president of RONCO when they were in Bosnia, said recently that there was awareness that some of the local demining partners were “thugs,” but that “the fact was we were able to get some demining done through these thugs. What do you do at the time? If you want to wait till you can get a missionary-type group to be formed that you can work with, you might be waiting for a long time and the minefields stay out there and nothing happens.”⁸⁵

While the pragmatic approach is certainly better than political naïveté, it might have disturbing implications for mine action. It turns a blind eye to illiberal and particularistic activities and focuses only on the outputs of demining, rather than the political and economic impact of the program as a whole. In many ways it is an assertion that the end justifies the means. While some element of pragmatism will be necessary in a conflict environment, it is surely problematic to see mine action as being undertaken in a political vacuum, with no responsibilities towards the broader society.

5.3 The arms-length approach

The academic literature has come to an acknowledgement that “the way privatization is managed is terribly important.”⁸⁶ The new policy consensus calls for a privatization sensitive to political economy. It argues that if transparency and accountability controls are in place, state assets or public services can be privatized to companies that are at an “arm’s length” from both the state and from illiberal networks.⁸⁷ One World Bank suggestion is to contract foreign firms “with no close ties to the country” to ensure separation from internal vested interests.⁸⁸ This did not seem to work with RONCO, which quickly became entangled with the local ‘demining machines.’ However, it does appear to have succeeded with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry’s funding for Bosnian demining, channelled exclusively through Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), an NGO that grew out of the Norwegian labour movement. The biggest private organization still involved in demining in Bosnia, NPA was one of the first to begin operations in 1996. NPA is almost universally respected in Bosnia by deminers, bureaucrats, and competitors alike.⁸⁹

Most significantly, NPA tried hard to avoid capture by vested interests. Their working process includes basic socio-economic studies for each task to discover the potential uses of the land and how it will affect the local political economy – to “make sure we’re not demining the back garden of the mayor of Sarajevo.”⁹⁰ They have also refused to negotiate with illiberal elites. Said Breivik, NPA’s program manager:

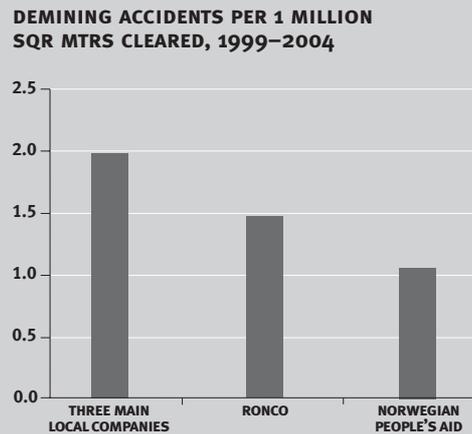
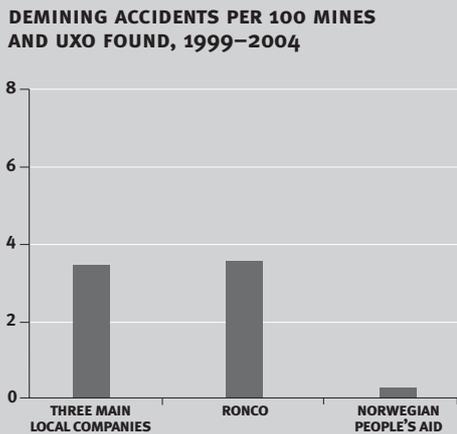
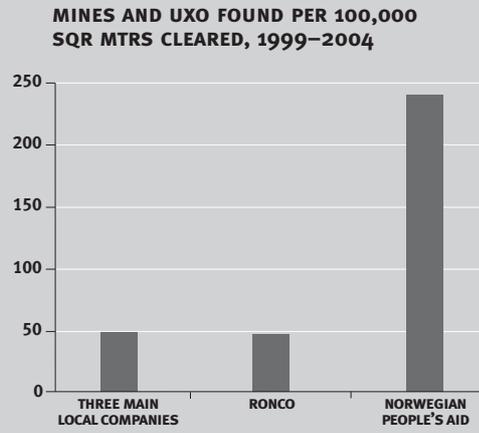
“I think that has been clear to most players at that level... that we’re not going to be pushed around and told what projects to do, we take the projects we feel are relevant for us to do. That’s been our stand from the start and I think those who tried just found out it’s not working and so just gave up.”⁹¹

In addition to having avoided substantial corruption, NPA also avoided being linked to a single ethnic bloc.⁹²

The programmes of two of the biggest demining funders, offer stark comparisons. The Norwegian programme funded a relatively transparent organization that steered clear of the clandestine political economy, had a low accident rate, and demined complex tasks. The World Bank initially, and the US later, contracted organizations with relatively poor accident rates and an intimate interaction with ethnicized patronage machines. The following graphs comparing RONCO, the three ‘Demining Machine’ companies and NPA are illustrative:

FIGURE 4: COMPARING THE THREE ‘DEMINEING MACHINE’ COMPANIES, RONCO AND NPA ON TASK COMPLEXITY AND SAFETY RECORD

(BHMAL 2005; Author’s Compiled Demining Accident Dataset)



One can see from this data that in contrast to those who argue the necessity of a “hard-nosed” and “pragmatic approach,” NPA’s record shows that a principled approach was both possible, and probably more effective.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The data from Bosnia presented in this report suggests that contrary to some received wisdom, using private actors for demining, indeed any public/merit good in weak or fragmented states, may risk not only reduced quality, but also capture by illiberal, criminal and clandestine networks. Indeed, the agencies that received their funding from regular public budgeting, such as international NGOs and governmental agencies, tended to perform better than those agencies that competed for contracts.

This is not to assert an opposition to privatization per se. Rather it is to argue that privatization in post-war situations operates in the complex arena of conflict politics, not the sterile and rarefied atmosphere of simple economic models. Indeed, when a state is weakened by conflict, it may be unable effectively to enforce discipline and compliance with authorised mine action standards. This can create economic incentives for a ‘race to the bottom’ – agencies which refuse to lower their standards in order to cut costs are quickly priced out of the market. Moreover, the state itself may have been ‘captured’ by particularist, even criminal, interests that may not always have the general ‘public good’ at heart.

Mine action cannot, therefore, afford to be naive of the politics and economics of the conflicts in which it necessarily operates and must cultivate a political awareness. Donors should strive to investigate the backgrounds of the main recipients of their funding and understand how the institutional structures of intervention, priority setting and contracting may interact with the political context. The example of NPA in Bosnia suggests that a strong approach to the political economy of conflict is to take a principled stand against corruption or mono-ethnic hiring practices. Not only was this correlated with better demining, but probably had a less corrosive effect on the peace and reconstruction process. A conflict sensitive approach is not only about avoidance of harm, but may be about mine clearance having a positive role in support of peacebuilding beyond a narrow focus on the safe land it produces.

It is hoped that this report will further contribute to discussion in mine action policy and implementation circles about how demining should interact with the political economy of conflict. This interaction has been subject to little rigorous and transparent analysis and it would be valuable for researchers and academics to compare the Bosnian experience with other parts of the world. Such discussions could work towards a better understanding of how mine action actors and donors can systematically evaluate the political frameworks within which, or through which, this work is being implemented. Such systematic evaluation may have benefits not only for the direct outputs of the work (in terms of mine action quality) but also more broadly for the avoidance of further conflict and support to peacebuilding.

Note on methodology

The graphs and statistics used in this report use a dataset constructed by Matthew Bolton, using information from the BHMIC, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) demining accident databases and press reports. The data prior to 1999 was particularly poor, especially in terms of reporting accidents. Therefore, the statistical elements of this report have focused on the five year period from 1999–2004.

Regarding the more qualitative elements of the report, techniques such as participant observation and “thick description” were used to understand the complex systems of relationships involved in their specific context. The authors also interviewed knowledgeable but trusted sources like public officials, journalists and deminers. However, apart from a few informants who gave permission to be named in the paper, most interviewees remain anonymous and off-record comments are kept strictly confidential. Since this makes it difficult for others to verify the information from interviews, such data was ‘triangulated’ – allowing the ethnographic data to be corroborated with a more positivist historical approach, trawling for facts in organizational documents and hundreds of printed sources. Rumours and hints from the interviews were thus compared with the public record. Using the journalistic rule of thumb, the authors have only printed claims confirmed by at least two reliable sources, one of which was published or official.

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Endnotes

- 1 The only major work on this subject was written seven years ago and focused on Southern Africa: Boulden & Edmonds 1999.
- 2 e.g. Anderson 1999; De Waal 1998; Keen 1994.
- 3 Maslen 2004, p. 124; cf. Purves 2001, p. 72; Bure & Pont 2003, p. 18–19
- 4 Bendick 1989, p. 107; Dinavo 1995 p. 14–17; Carnaghan & Bracewell-Milnes 1996, p. 318–319; World Bank 1997, p. 6; Hodge 2000, p. 107.
- 5 Fitzgerald & Neal 2000.
- 6 Horwood 2000, p. 31.
- 7 Lisica & Rowe 2004, p. 53; cf. Fitzgerald & Neal 2000.
- 8 Adapted from Lisica & Rowe (2004, p. 53).
- 9 The Bosnian currency is the Convertible Mark (KM); it is pegged at ?0.51 . On April 24, 2005 $1\text{KM}=\text{US}\$0.67$ or ?0.35 .
- 10 cf. Bendick 1989, p. 107.
- 11 Breivik 2005; cf. Eddy 2000; Maslen 2004, p. 148.
- 12 cf. Eddy 2000.
- 13 Smith and Lipsky 1993, p. 11.
- 14 Smith 2000; cf. Trevelyan 2000; Maslen 2004, p. 50.
- 15 Trevelyan n.d., p. 2 & 1999; UNMAC 1997c; ICG 1997, p. 14; Hubert 1998, p. 326; Eddy 2000; Spearin 2001, pp. 9–10; Mitchell 2004, p. 866.
- 16 UNMAC 1997c, p. 3, 11; Eddy 2000; McKenzie 2005.
- 17 Mitchell 2004, p. 866; Breivik 2005; McKenzie 2005.
- 18 UNMAC 1997b, p. 7.
- 19 UNMAC 1997c, p. 3.
- 20 UNMAC 1999a, p. 9.
- 21 UNMAC, 1999b, p. 7.
- 22 UNMAC 1999c, p. 7.
- 23 UNMAC 1997c, p. 3.
- 24 Ott 1999, p. 36; Stiglitz 2002, pp. 157–160; World Bank 2003, pp. 56, 163, 196–198; Dickie 2004, pp. 95–99, 277–288
- 25 Rowe 2005.
- 26 Kaldor & Bojicic 1999.
- 27 Godson 2003, p. 259.
- 28 Pugh 2002; Andreas 2004.
- 29 Krueger 1974, p. 291–303; Vickers & Yarrow 1991, p. 113; World Bank 1997, p. 105–106.
- 30 Smith & Lipsky 1993, p. 13; Glinkina 1999, pp. 112–114; Stiglitz 2002, pp. 56, 58; Rodrik 2004, pp. 25–26.
- 31 Weitzman 1993, p. 252.
- 32 Ott 1999, p. 36; Stiglitz 2002, pp. 157–160; World Bank 2003, pp. 56, 163, 196–198; Dickie 2004, pp. 95–99, 277–288.
- 33 cf. Stiglitz 2002, p. 56; Dickie 2004, pp. 277–288.
- 34 Dinavo 1995, p. 7; Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2000, pp. 107–108; Stiglitz 2002, pp. 56, 157–160; World Bank 2002, p. 106.
- 35 UNBiH 2004, p. 16.
- 36 Maslen 2004, p. 42
- 37 ICG 1997, pp. 14, 22; cf. House of Commons Select Committee on Defence 1997, para. 65.
- 38 cf. ICG 1997, p. 14; Hubert 1998, pp. 323–324; Eddy 2000; Savic & Fazlic 2000.
- 39 Savic & Fazlic 2000. Confirmed by several interviews with senior UN officials.
- 40 GICHD 2003a, p. 32, note 77, 33.
- 41 GICHD 2003a, p. 33.
- 42 ICTY 2004, Para. 13–14.
- 43 Crncalo 2004, pp. 5292, 5321, 5348.
- 44 UN Human Rights Committee 1993, para. 54.
- 45 Traynor, et al. 1994; Mojsilovic 1994; ABC 1994.
- 46 C.A. 2004.
- 47 Dnevni Avaz 2001, p. 5; Pecanin 2002; Ruchala 2005.
- 48 Les Courrir des Balkans 2002; European Council 2003; USTR 2004; Griffiths & Jelacic 2004; AFP 2004; Delic 2004.
- 49 bpo 1994, p. 22; OHR 1997.
- 50 cf. Johnson & Blomqvist 1996, pp. 10–11; de Waal 1998; Keen 1998, pp. 55–70; Duffield 2001, pp. 1–2, 13–14, 196–201; Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2002, p. 83; Devine 2005, pp. 2–4.
- 51 van Praag 2004.
- 52 Buse 2000.
- 53 Eddy 2000.

- 54 Savic & Fazlic 2000; Eddy 2000; GICHD 2003a, p. 32.
- 55 Eddy 2000.
- 56 RONCO 2000.
- 57 Telephone conversation 03 August 2006, Matthew Bolton with Stephen Edelmann.
- 58 Internal UNMAC report seen by authors; RONCO 2000.
- 59 OHR 2000a, 2000b & 2000c.
- 60 Savic & Fazlic 2000.
- 61 Kapetanovic 2000; Savic & Fazlic, 2000.
- 62 World Bank 2004, p. v.
- 63 OHR 1999.
- 64 Decop and SI/OKTOL figures are author's calculations from data available on the ITF's website at <http://www.itf-fund.si/demining/polja.asp?id_tip=1&id_drzave=1>. The estimation of the total worth of the contracts was calculated by multiplying the total US-funded square meters in a year by the average ITF commercial price for that year (the average BHMAL price was used for 2002 as this was the only data available) listed in Lisica and Rowe (2004). This was then converted to US dollars using the average exchange rate for the year on <<http://www.oanda.com>>. UNIPAK figures from author's calculations and Gacnik (2004).
- 65 European Council 2003.
- 66 USTR 2004.
- 67 AFP 2004. Delic 2004.
- 68 EUPM 2006.
- 69 Court reporter's note of the preliminary hearing, the State Court of Bosnia & Herzegovina, 24 August 2006 and 28 August 2006, and reported by BHTV1, Federation TV, Hayat TV, evening news reports, 24, 28 August
- 70 Nova Ljubljanska Bank d.d SWIFT and banking transfer records relating to the International Trust Fund for demining, Slovenia, Pro Vita demining company Bosnia & Herzegovina, Weseutsche Landesbank, Dusseldorf, Germany, Credit du Nord, Paris, France.
- 71 US Embassy Sarajevo 2003. OHR statements
- 72 SWIFT Transfer documentation obtained by authors.
- 73 OHR 2003.
- 74 USDoS 1999.
- 75 USDoS 2005.
- 76 Scott 2002.
- 77 "Minefield: Kapaonik." http://www.itf-fund.si/demining/polje.asp?id_polja=1594
- 78 Kidd 2006.
- 79 Preliminary hearing, the State Court of Bosnia & Herzegovina, 24 August 2006. An "authorized signatory" under Bosnian law grants the holder privileges identical to that of the named owner or director, including the ability to sign contracts on behalf of the company and withdraw funds.
- 80 World bank documentation supplied to the authors.
- 81 "Minefield: Domaljevac -amac." http://www.itf-fund.si/demining/polje.asp?id_polja=1500
- 82 Kidd 2006.
- 83 Kidd 2006.
- 84 Rowe 2005.
- 85 Crandall 2006.
- 86 World Bank 1997, p. 6. c.f. Williamson 2000, p. 258; Stiglitz 2002, p. 54.
- 87 Bendick 1989, p. 113; World Bank 1997, p. 6; Williamson 2000, p. 258.
- 88 World Bank 1997, p. 106.
- 89 Hubert 1998, p. 327; McKenzie 2005. For example: "NPA is the big performer" (Rowe 2005); NPA is "a standard-setter for the demining effort." (ICG 1997, p. 6.); "NPA are the only ones who actually follow the standard operating procedures and care about the quality of their work" (former deminers interviewed by author.)
- 90 Breivik 2005.
- 91 Breivik 2005.
- 928 cf. Valecky 2005.

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