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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Multi-National Brigade (East)
Camp Bondsteel
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Multi-national Brigade East Conducts Cordon and Search in Firaja

Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo - On 17 April elements of Multi-national Brigade East and KFOR Multi-national Support Unit conducted a cordon and search of Firaja in response to threats to a safe and secure environment. The operation, which started at 9:00 a.m., focused on searching five locations for illegal weapons and ammunition in the Strpce Opstina village.

Members of the brigade's Polish-Ukrainian Battalion established vehicle checkpoints to control traffic and ensure civilians did not come into harm's way, while other soldiers of the brigade plus members of the MSU cordoned and searched the five objectives. All elements were supported with helicopters from the brigade for transportation and aerial surveillance of the target areas. "The main reason for having so many soldiers and MSU members involved was to ensure innocent civilians were protected throughout the entire operation," said Lt. Col. Jeff Bertrang, the brigade operations officer.

After the initial searches uncovered illegal weapons such as pistols, rifles and semi-automatic weapons and ammunition the brigade's military police moved in to secure the evidence while the United Nations Mission in Kosovo Police were notified. UNMIK-P dispatched their Regional Investigative Unit to take possession of the contraband and complete the investigation. Three individuals were temporarily detained by brigade personnel and turned over to UNMIK-P officers for arrest.

The operation was launched partially in response to the 17 March riots where two Serbs from the neighboring village of Drajkovce were murdered. "We focused on Firaja for this operation because of the information we obtained concerning the recent murders" said MNB (E) Commander, Brig. Gen. Rick Erlandson. He further added, "However operations like these will be ongoing throughout our area of responsibility. We remain fully committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all peoples of Kosovo".

The operation concluded around 6:00 p.m. Col. Steve Saunders, the on-scene commander said, "We are very pleased with the results. Not only did the soldiers and MSU synchronize their efforts well, and quickly and efficiently cordon and search their respective targets, but we came away with a good number of illegal weapons and ammunition. These weapons will now be off the streets and their owners will have to answer to the legal authorities for their crimes".

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