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### SENIOR ENLISTED LEADERS FROM 39 NATIONS DISCUSS COMMON ISSUES AT U.S. ARMY EUROPE-LED CONFERENCE

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**HEIDELBERG, Germany** -- More than 50 senior noncommissioned officers from 39 armies in Europe and North America met to discuss common issues at the second U.S. Army Europe Conference of European Armies for NCOs in Weiden, Germany, June 10-12.



BILL ROCHE

Senior enlisted leaders from military forces across Europe and North America take part in a roundtable discussion about officer-noncommissioned officer command team relationships during the second U.S. Army Europe Conference of European Armies for NCOs, in Weiden, Germany, June 11.

This year's conference was co-hosted by the German army -- the Bundeswehr -- and included a tour of their NCO academy in Weiden; a squad peacekeeping situational training exercise demonstration by academy students, complete with simulated explosives and wounds; and dinner at their officer's club.

Additionally, the mayor of Weiden hosted the group at a reception at his city's old town hall.

The conference gave the senior enlisted leaders, many the highest-ranking NCOs in their nations' armed forces, an opportunity to build on theater security cooperation among those forces by networking, sharing ideas and training opportunities, and brainstorming ways to approach concerns shared by the participants'

transforming military establishments. The theme of the event, “Building Tomorrow’s NCO Corps Today,” was explored through working group discussions of recruiting and retaining Soldiers and NCOs, creating viable NCO education programs, and building more effective officer-NCO command teams.

The seminar’s goal was to offer participants information and resources for developing and educating their NCOs to be “good ethical warriors that will lead their armies in the future,” said former USAREUR Command Sgt. Maj. Iuniasolua T. Savusa, the conference host.

While much of the information presented during the event centered on common issues and the U.S. Army’s approaches to those issues, discussion was tempered with awareness that each nation is facing its own unique challenges.

“I think what we’re trying to do,” said U.S. European Command senior enlisted leader Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Farley, “is we’re trying to make the noncommissioned officers in our foreign nations better noncommissioned officers for that country.

“The goal is not necessarily to make them look like the United States,” Farley continued. “I can’t go to a country in Eastern Europe and make their NCOs U.S. noncommissioned officers. That’s not the intent. That’s not the goal. The goal is, what we try to do, is we try to get from them what it is their expectations of their noncommissioned officers are going to be, what it are the duties, the responsibilities, the authorities – what do you want them to do? And then, based on that, then we try to help them establish an education and training system that will grow their leaders into those duties and responsibilities.”

One example that presented itself repeatedly during the conference is the turbulence many of the participating forces are experiencing as a result of having recently transformed from conscript to all-volunteer professional armies. Sgt. Maj. Igor Tomasic of the Slovenian Armed Forces general staff said his nation adopted an all-volunteer force in 2004. Command Sgt. Maj. Janos Zsoter, senior enlisted advisor for the Hungarian Joint Force Command and Command Sgt. Maj. Ludek Kolesa of the Czech Republic, who serves as senior enlisted advisor for NATO’s Allied Command Transformation Headquarters, said their armies made that shift about three years ago. Command Sgt. Maj. Alexandru Cimpoca, Sergeant Major of the Army for the Romanian Land Forces, noted that his country ended conscription just last year.

A great deal of that turbulence comes from the fact that those forces are trying to build volunteer forces without changing the structure of their defense establishments, Farley said. The U.S. faced similar challenges when it put an end to the military draft in the early 1970s, he added, and today’s transforming forces must adopt the same difficult solution: overarching defense reform.

“We changed the structure to fit,” he said, “and then, once we changed the structure, then we changed our recruiting goals to match that new structure, where a lot of these

countries haven't done that. They bring in a change, and they try to change. Well, you've got to change everything. You just can't say, 'I'm not going to draft people.'"

It also takes building new systems that are still somewhat unfamiliar to many nations to develop Soldiers and NCOs, Farley added.

"In the American Army we all know it's pretty simple that we start with a Soldier and we grow that Soldier to be a leader, and that leader is either going to be a sergeant or an officer," he said. "As (other military forces in the European theater) convert from conscript to voluntary ... what they have to understand is that there's got to be the investment in the individual Soldier, who then grows to be a leader and a noncommissioned officer."

Kolesa and Cimpoca said it was good to hear senior NCOs from other nations attending the conference express the same concerns with recruiting and retaining Soldiers in their new volunteer forces and share their solutions to those problems.

"The labor force is going to be a market, and we compete on that market," Cimpoca said. As a result, he added, his army now has to learn new ways to make the military profession attractive to young Romanians.

"Just five years ago (Czech forces) started implementing this, and we didn't have anybody to learn from at home," Kolesa said. "We had to turn to the other nations. So this networking really helps a lot ... you know who to turn to, because you have met somebody who might have dealt with the very same issues or problems just a few months, weeks or years ago."

While many of the recruiting and retention issues participants said they are experiencing are in America's past, others are familiar to today's U.S. Army.

"Nowadays our mission tempo is too fast, and unfortunately we lose many NCOs before they can work a little bit longer time. So after five or six overseas missions, they say, 'Hey, my family's a little bit more important than serving you for the next mission,' and they leave earlier," Zsoter said.

But whether the problems are familiar to military forces in 2008 or relics of their past, the results of the conference's working group sessions revealed that most of the participants believe the solutions are the same.

"Do you have the money to invest in retention, re-enlistment bonuses, quality of life things that retain those that you've trained and educated?" Farley asked.

Kolesa said getting and keeping good people in the ranks takes money and programs that care for troops and their families; support that gives a Soldier "peace in the soul (so) he can focus on his job." Tomasic, for example, said the Slovenian forces need to look at improving military housing, retirement policies and family medical support.

Savusa said it also takes a lot of money to provide Soldiers with the good training, equipment and working environments that will keep people in the military, but more importantly, those things must go hand in hand with caring, sincere leadership.

“Today (the nations at the conference) are starting to find out how expensive the professional armies can be, so monies are being pulled in different directions, from training to equipment to building facilities -- and then preparing Soldiers to deploy,” he said.

“In order to retain a Soldier -- a professional Soldier -- in the army, it goes beyond pay. It’s about the quality of life (a Soldier) receives and the type of leadership that he falls in on, and how much they care about him as an individual (and training) him for his ultimate mission.”

“I can see our Army without Apaches, without M1s, but I can’t picture it without people (such as the dedicated senior NCOs he has worked with during his Army career),” said Lt. Gen. John D. Gardner, deputy commander of NATO’s Land Component Command - Heidelberg, in the keynote address at the conference.

The other major topic discussed during the event was NCO education, an area many participants said is also in its formative stages in their forces. Working groups discussed issues related to setting up programs, how NCO schooling should be constructed, and what its goals should be. Farley also presented a briefing on a variety of programs designed to help fund professional development for enlisted Soldiers and NCOs.



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Soldiers attending the Bundeswehr NCO academy in Weiden, Germany help a colleague role-playing as an injured driver from a simulated burning truck during a situational training scenario the students conducted at the Frauenricht Training Area near Weiden June 11. The Soldiers ran through several such scenarios as part of a presentation on German army NCO training given to the senior enlisted leaders from 39 nations in Europe and North America who attended the U.S. Army Europe Conference of European Armies for NCOs June 10-12.

But perhaps the real business of cooperating on NCO education took place on the sidelines of the conference’s official briefings in the one-on-one networking between senior enlisted leaders who discussed what schools and training are available to their

Soldiers, how to set up their own programs at home, and how to convince their commanders and leaders of the value of investing in enlisted professional development.

Most of the participants are graduates of programs such as the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and Canadian Forces chief warrant officer training. That meant they were not only familiar with well established NCO education systems, but also with each other. Many said they are also becoming familiar with sending their NCOs to developmental schooling in other countries through programs such as the International Military Education and Training system, and via NATO and other allied programs.

The U.S. Army welcomes those Soldiers, Savusa said, because as they train they have an opportunity to learn about the education system itself as well, and can apply that knowledge in setting up enlisted schooling at home.

“We send many drill sergeants and NCOs to the United States to attend your NCO academies and training centers,” Zsoter said. “They learn this, we (take) what we need, and we ... train the Hungarian Soldiers by the Hungarian NCOs.”

Savusa said during the conference his colleagues also asked about a number of courses available in USAREUR that their Soldiers can attend.

“There are other venues that are available here in Europe, like (the) Warrior Leader Course, that are always available to any of these armies to send their Soldiers,” he said. “There are other courses that we conduct here, such as Combat Lifesaver, instructor training courses, small-arms type courses, Battlestaff courses. Those are other courses -- skill-enabling courses -- that can help their armies, help their Soldiers.”

“All I’ve done throughout this conference is make these things available to them. Now it’s up to them. If they want it, they’ll ask.”

“We have taken a lot from (the U.S. Army NCO Education System), and we are trying to make it adjustable and flexible, agile to work for particular nations, because just taking it and copying, translating, implementing, wouldn’t work with some nations, just because of different cultures, different societies,” Kolesa said.

“But we got great support from the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy when we were developing the NATO NCO development program, which includes also NCO leadership courses,” he added. He said what was not long ago a “dream and a vision” for NATO -- creating its own NCO academy focused on leadership in an international environment -- is now considered a serious topic of discussion.

In USAREUR NCO education and cooperation takes place on a more practical level as well, Savusa said, that gives NCOs an opportunity to build coalitions and enhance theater security cooperation through direct interaction with allied forces.

“Today a great example of that is JTF-East, or Joint Task Force-East, which today is in Bulgaria and Romania. Last year was the first ‘proof of principle’ exercise that we conducted, and we had Soldiers from the Romanian army, along with our Soldiers,” he said. “They lived together. They were fed together, in the same building. And they observed our Soldiers, our leaders, how they were conducting business each and every day, all the way up to lights out. ... And who carries that load? The majority, 90 percent of the time, it is noncommissioned officers they see first thing in the morning and they see last thing at night.”

“I believe from this common training, everybody gains,” Cimpoa added. ... “We started last year with the ‘proof of principle’ exercise, we continue this year the common training with American Soldiers -- everybody gains. And the most important thing I believe is confidence, because ... they train together, they live together, so (when) they fight together after that, they ... are confident with each other.”

That kind of one-on-one connection is also key to the networking many of conference participants said is one of the most important things they get by attending.

“It’s very good to develop and build these NCO networks, because a lot of things ... can be done or can be arranged between the NCO corps,” Tomasic said. “I call my sergeant major colleagues from different countries and we arrange everything by the phone or by the mail, and (he claps his hands in an “it’s all taken care of” gesture) in a paper – fixed.”

This year’s conference had a bit more significance attached to it, as NATO has designated 2008 the “Year of the NCO.” Kolesa said that decision was a reflection of the NATO leadership’s realization of the importance of the NCOs and their roles, particularly in light of the organization’s current operations.

“So that gave us such an impulse to come up with new ideas, new initiatives, to help the nations with the changing and transforming NCO corps or role and the positions of the NCOs within their own armed forces,” he said.

With half the year still left to go, he added, the theme has made an impact on the NATO community.

“We have had already some feedback from the nations that ... some of the chiefs of defense and chiefs of the joint staff have decided to use this opportunity in establishing themes or working groups reconsidering the role and position of their NCO corps, their NCOs, (and are) considering establishing senior enlisted advisor and senior enlisted leader positions in their forces. So this is already great feedback for us and a great payoff for us.”

