

INTERVIEW

REAR ADMIRAL HANS-JOCHEN WITTHAUER
COMMANDER, EU FORCE, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

While it may seem strange to find a naval officer serving as the Commander of the EU Force (COMEUFOR) in landlocked Bosnia-Herzegovina, German Navy Rear Admiral Hans-Jochen Witthauer is well acquainted with the region and the direction of joint operations.

Interspersed with destroyer commands at sea, his professional development included a stint as the Branch Chief for Naval Strategy and International Co-operation on the naval staff in Bonn, while during the Kosovo crisis in 1999 he served as Chief of the Situation Centre at NATO HQ. From 2001 to 2003 he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations on the German Armed Forces Staff, where he oversaw a variety of out-of-area deployments from the Balkans to Africa and Afghanistan.

As COMEUFOR, Rear Adm Witthauer believes the key military tasks facing his command are "to provide a military presence in order to deny the conditions for a resumption of violence; to contribute to the safe and secure environment allowing EU and other international actors to fulfil their responsibilities; to conduct

information activities in support of EU political objectives; and to ensure continued compliance with and manage residual aspects of the Dayton military annexes".

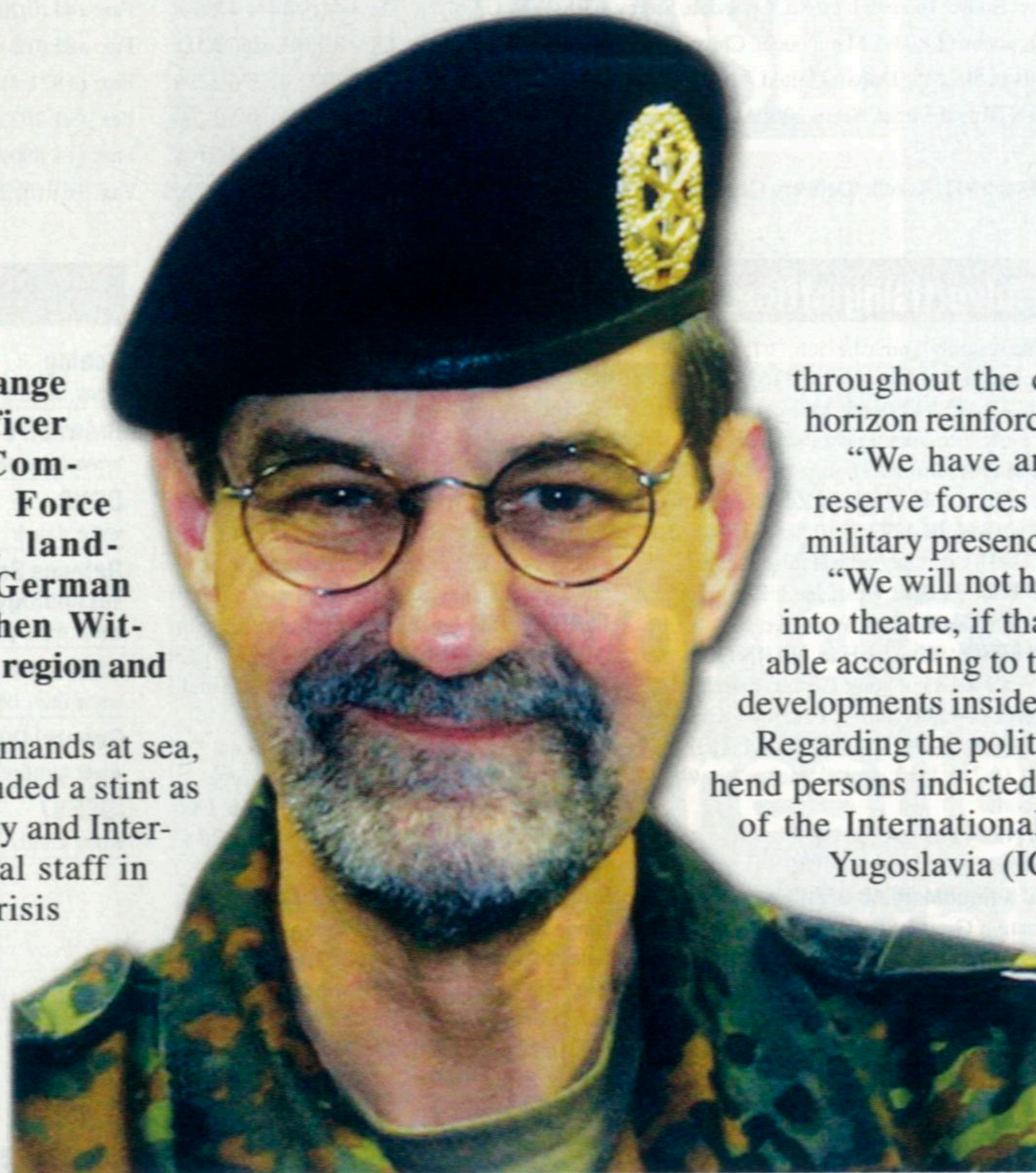
However, most of his tenure will focus on a major reduction in forces from more than 6,000 troops to around 2,500, as directed by the EU Political and Security Committee, a decision which he credits to "the benign security situation" in Bosnia.

"Over the next months, EUFOR will reduce its size but keep an appropriate military presence as part of its overall engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. EUFOR will maintain the capacity to react throughout the country to any possible security challenges, and reserve forces will be available over the horizon," Rear Adm Witthauer said.

"Starting from 28 February, we are in the process of reconfiguring progressively, but we will also maintain the capacity to reverse the effects of the force reduction for an initial period of six months and to re-establish a more robust military presence if needed.

"The Office of the High Representative has been extended with its powers until June 2008. One of EUFOR's key roles will be to support him in any decision he takes."

Rear Adm Witthauer plans to maintain a visible EUFOR presence during the transition through extensive employment of small liaison and observation teams (LOTs) operating from 45 LOT houses established



EUFOR: 1165757

'EUFOR will reduce its size but keep an appropriate military presence'

throughout the country, while relying on over-the-horizon reinforcement in case of trouble.

"We have and will continue to have access to reserve forces who can re-establish a more robust military presence, if needed," he said.

"We will not hesitate to get the reinforcements back into theatre, if that appears to be necessary or reasonable according to the security situation and the political developments inside Bosnia-Herzegovina."

Regarding the politically sensitive requirement to apprehend persons indicted for war crimes (PIFWCs) on behalf of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Rear Adm Witthauer relies on

guidance provided by UN Security Council Resolution 1722 and the General Framework Agreement for Peace, which require full cooperation with ICTY, including the detention of PIFWCs. EUFOR has authority to detain PIFWCs and would not hesitate to do so if it had reliable information on which to act. Just recently, EUFOR was engaged in a raid against a PIFWC support network.

"Nevertheless, the main responsibility for PIFWC detention and arrest lies with the Bosnia-Herzegovina authorities," he said.

Another critical EUFOR task is to work with NATO to promote the integration of the newly unified Armed Forces of Bosnia-

Herzegovina (AF of BiH) into Europe within the scope of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme.

Rear Adm Witthauer says he intends "to provide continued support to the BiH authorities on defence reform, within their means and capabilities, as required".

This includes co-operation with the AF of BiH in the field of "joint military affairs" such as joint training exercises.

"Nevertheless, providing assistance in development and training is in the main a shared responsibility of NATO, which has the lead in defence reform issues, and its member states and others on a bilateral basis."

In light of widespread speculation that the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) will probably merge with EUFOR in a single Balkans military mission, depending on the outcome of ongoing status negotiations, Rear Adm Witthauer commented that EUFOR, "at present the only EU-led military mission worldwide, is a success story".

"Co-operation with NATO continues to work well, in Brussels as well as in the country, in the context of the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements," he said. "Therefore, EUFOR is regarded by many as a precedent and a possible role model for similar European Security and Defence Policy missions in other theatres in the future."

Jim Dorschner

JDW Correspondent, Bucharest