

US Army Europe Commanding General Praises Hungarian Role in Worldwide Operations

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This article has been translated from the original article located [here](#).

May 26, 2011, Budapest (MTI) – The US Army Europe Commanding General offered his condolences in a letter to the families of the Hungarian soldiers who had died in Afghanistan. In his interview to MTI in Budapest on Thursday General Mark Hertling also said that the units of the Hungarian military are undertaking a significant role in NATO missions.

The lieutenant general said that the case of the two soldiers who died in the vehicle accidents demonstrates how great a sacrifice the Hungarian people are making to help another country to achieve their freedom.

The Commanding General of the US Army in Europe commended the Hungarian military units for the significant role they play in NATO missions. “The Hungarian soldiers can be proud of the role they play in various international peacekeeping and stabilization operations”, he said. These are relatively small units in numbers, but their role in the coalition missions is important”, he emphasized.

For the three-star general who was appointed to his current post six weeks ago and is expected to fill it for three years this was his first time in Hungary. As he said, in order to establish “coalition confidence”, he considers it important to build a personal relationship with the leaderships of partner countries’ armies.

General Hertling said that it is very difficult to explain to the public why the soldiers of the nation are fighting in foreign lands for the freedom for others. The fundamental mission of the soldier is that, leaving his family behind, often among dangerous circumstances, even defying death, he should make a sacrifice for the freedom of others, he added, saying that “we do that because we believe in human dignity and in freedom”.

The commander – who earlier, as the commander of an armored division, had fought in Iraq for three years and his units lost 227 soldiers – said that the death of each soldier is a painful sacrifice, but when he talked to their families most of them said that the soldiers would not have wanted to choose a different path because they felt they were making a sacrifice for an important cause.

The U.S. Army Europe chief said that on Thursday he met with Chief of Staff Tibor Benko and they discussed ways how to improve U.S. - Hungarian military relations. The general said that Tibor Benko told him about his commitment to training military leaders, and that the U.S. Army operates a huge training center in Germany where many allied countries send young officers.

In response to the question whether the terrorist threat has increased in Europe after killing the al-Qaida leader in Pakistan, he responded by saying “we have not seen any indication of that”. However he added that the threat of across the borders extremist groups must be taken seriously.

Speaking about the U.S. Army in Europe he said: he considers it his most important task that the troops be suitably prepared for various deployments, as it happened, for example, in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and North Africa.

He explained that currently the United States has a 42,000 military presence in Europe, and most of the troops are stationed in Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. The substantial transformation of the U.S. Army Europe started in 2002; since then, certain units have been relocated and certain bases eliminated. In 1990 there were as many as 90 thousand American soldiers serving in Europe; in 2002 the number was only 68 thousand, and in recent years there has been a further decrease. He said that by 2015, of the current four another combat brigade will return home to the United States, and the number of the U.S. Army in Europe will decrease to 37 thousand.

Responding to the question whether the United States is capable of providing security guarantees to Eastern Europe e.g. against Russia he said: NATO is a collective security system, and we do not need to speak about defense against one particular country. "I don't think that at the moment Russia poses any concrete threat" he said, adding that NATO guarantees the security of all of its members be it any kind of threat.

Answering the question whether he sees any concrete threat that justifies the presence of American troops in Europe, he said: he does not see any concrete threat aside from the continuous across the borders terrorist threat. Currently averting this threat is what they are working on. The presence of military force has an important preventive role, he emphasized.

Speaking about what compromise could possibly be reached on one hand between the United States and NATO, and on the other, between [the United States and] Russia about the European deployment of a possible missile defense system he stated that "Russia has nothing to be concerned about, as it is aimed against dangerous states". He said it is the politicians who have to decide this matter, just like about what U.S. military technology and units could be stationed in Poland. (The Warsaw government is urging the deployment of military planes in Poland. According to some analysts, during his visit in Warsaw on Friday President Barack Obama might make an announcement on that.)

General Mark Hertling came to Hungary for three days. On Thursday he is going to attend and make remarks at the Szekesfehervar conference organized for NCOs of European land forces, where 42 countries will be represented.