



The Bridge of Hope: The Paratroopers of the 8th Engineer Regiment “Folgore” in Kosovo

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Djakova (Kosovo) – May 2025. Twenty-three years ago, **the paratroopers of the 8th Engineer Regiment of the Folgore from Legnago built a Bailey bridge over the Bistrica River**, in a war-torn area. Today, that same bridge is still there: useful, safe, alive in the memory of the local population and a concrete symbol of the Italian commitment to peace. To ensure its integrity, they return today: the engineers of the 8th, on a mission with KFOR, ready to verify its stability and renew the bond with a community that has never forgotten.

A symbol that unites past and present

The bridge was built in 2002 on the orders of **General Pierluigi Torelli**, then Commander of the Paratrooper Brigade, after the tragic death of a child attempting to cross the river in the absence of infrastructure. Built by the 22nd company "Ares" of the 8th regiment, it is a **67-**

meter-long and 4-meter-wide Bailey bridge, capable of supporting vehicles up to 8 tons. Today, under the guidance of Warrant Officer Giovanni Muratore – the same who participated in the original construction – it is inspected by a new platoon of young paratroopers.



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«We slept in tents, next to the river», recounts Muratore. «In just over a month, with the help of local institutions, we restored an essential connection between the villages of Klina and Baran. UNMIK and local leaders were present at the inauguration ceremony. An unforgettable moment.»

A memory that endures

The bridge marked a turning point for the Kosovar population. This is demonstrated by the moving encounter between Warrant Officer Muratore and a local farmer, who recognizes in the photos from that time the child he was, the people of the village, the entire community. «They were images I never thought I would see again», the man says, moved. He takes new photos with his phone, embraces the warrant officer, and returns to the pasture with a smile that says it all.

Under the bridge, covered by vegetation, lie the remains of the old crossing destroyed by the Serbian retreat. But above, every day, dozens of people cross it thanks to what the Italian paratroopers built with dedication, competence, and a sense of mission.

Women and Engineers: Francesca's Determination

Among the soldiers deployed on the bridge today is **Francesca Braccato, 21 years old, paratrooper engineer**. «Any girl can do what I did», she states confidently. She obtained her paratrooper and engineer certifications: «I wanted to challenge myself, I found companions with the same passion. It's a job I like, I don't feel it as a burden. Being both a paratrooper and an engineer is a fascinating combination».

Francesca, now participating in the KFOR mission with the same unit that built the bridge, testifies to the continuity of a unit that has managed to renew itself over time without losing its spirit. «Handling explosives, building structures, doing something concrete with my hands: it's exciting. But first of all, I am a paratrooper. The silence after the jump is an emotion that cannot be explained».



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A Bridge Between Generations

Today the 8th Paratrooper Engineer Regiment "Folgore" is part of the Regional Command West, based in Peja at the Italian Village. The Italian contingent, consisting of about 1,200 soldiers, is led by Colonel Francesco Errico, also a paratrooper and commander of the [183rd regiment](#). The unit continues to carry out security and cooperation operations with local institutions, in a scenario that requires professionalism and cultural sensitivity.

The bridge of Gorni Petric represents a point of union not only physically, but also humanly and morally. A tangible symbol of Italy's commitment to the stability of the Balkans, it is today entrusted to the vigilance of Italian soldiers and the competence of Kosovar technicians trained also thanks to that project. Twenty-three years later, it continues to speak of hope, dedication, and future.

News link: <https://www.veronasera.it/foto/cronaca/Folgore-legnago-kosovo-fiume-bistrice-maggio-2025/#alza-bandiera-al-villaggio-italiano-dei-para.html>