

## NEW SYSTEM OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN SERBIA – FIRST EXPERIENCES

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### ABSTRACT

The actual Serbian civil security system was established in June 2010 and still is under construction, as a number of bylaws, directives, guidelines and documents are to be adopted. It is planned that system will be fully completed in 2016. Intention was to design comprehensive decentralised system around Sector of emergency management of Ministry of Interior as the main pillar and integrator of different actors. First experiences are positive but more time and effort is needed in order to harmonize the new system and to evaluate all its good and bad sides.

**Key words:** crisis management system, Serbia, Sector for emergency management, effectiveness, efficiency

### ABSTRACT

Aktuelni sistem kriznog menadžmenta u Srbiji je uspostavljen 2010 godine i još uvek je u izgradnji budući da nije odluka, direktiva i podzakonskih akata još uvek nije donet. Planira se da će sistem biti potpuno kompletiran 2016. godine. Namera je bila da se izgradi sveobuhvatan decentralizovan sistem oko Sektora za vanredne situacije Ministarstva unutrašnjih poslova kao glavnog stuba i integratora različitih aktera. Prva iskustva sa novim sistemom su pozitivna ali je potrebno još vremena i napora da bi se novi sistem harmonizovao i procenile njegove dobre i loše strane.

**Key words:** sistem krznog menadžmenta, Srbija, Sektor za vanredne situacije, efektivnost, efikasnost

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## **1 *buildint the New system of crisis management in serbia*<sup>4</sup>**

Republic of Serbia seems to be rather crisis-prone country. The conflicts in the 1990s related to dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, followed by the conflicts in Serbian southern province Kosovo and Metohija, as well as the NATO bombing campaign in 1999 were among the greatest crises that Serbia's civil security system had ever faced. Located in a region of intense political change and civil unrest, Serbia also experienced a number of demonstration and citizens protests during Milosevic regime, several prison riots and assassination of the Prime minister in 2003 as a result of conspiracy. Besides this, Serbia often has to cope with many natural disasters, most notably floods, forest fires, extreme temperatures, heat waves and windstorms, landslides and, from time to time, earthquakes. As a major link between Asia and the rest of Europe, the threats of transportation accidents, terrorism and infectious disease epidemics are substantial. [8].

The legacy of the authoritarian rule, sanctions and political crisis in 1990's, as well as the lack of democratic and parliamentary traditions and the basic consensus among the parliamentary parties on key social goals and values and how to solve the major problems of society have resulted in slow progress in building a democratic and stable social institutions. Due to huge program differences among members of the ruling coalitions, there was no stable parliamentary majority and only one government since 2000 lasted a full mandate which made it difficult to implement social reforms. The greatest responsibility lies on the leadership of political parties whose narrow party, group and personal interests and the struggle for political power and money, "mirrored" in the lives of all social institutions. So instead of democracy, Serbia has a partocracy, de facto unconstitutional dominance of political parties over constitutional and governmental agencies and institutions. [7] In such political context it took almost two decades for political actors to understand the importance of crisis management and to reach a basic consensus on fundamentals of current civil security system. Adoption of the law was preceded by several expert discussions, while the enactment in the Parliament passed without major controversies, given that the main political actors had previously reached a consensus.

After almost two decades of rather unregulated responsibilities of particular ministries and bodies and outdated legislative, and lack of political will to regulate this area, actual Serbian civil security system is established only in December 2009 when the Law on emergency situations (LES) was adopted in Parliament. This law is the basis for guiding all disaster management activities in the country. Sector for Emergency Management (SEM) is recognized as a single body within the Ministry of Interior (MOI) where all emergency services from MOI, Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Ministry of Environment are integrated. Therefore, the crisis management approach is primarily based on civilian operations and bodies, while military capabilities are only being employed upon request of SEM, when other resources are not sufficient. Serbia

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takes mainly all hazards approach with elements of specific threats approach. SEM is a coordination body that integrates activities of all agencies.

Crisis<sup>5</sup> is defined in Article 7 of the LES as "a situation when risks and threats or consequences of catastrophes, emergencies and other threats to population, environment and material goods, are of such scale and intensity that their occurrence or consequences cannot be prevented nor eliminated through regular activity of competent agencies and services, and for the mitigation or elimination of which special measures, forces and means at higher operational regime are required." [4]

General intention was to design comprehensive decentralised system around Sector of emergency management of Ministry of Interior as the main pillar and integrator of different actors and link professional agencies and political representatives on all levels of government in emergency management headquarters with precise delineation of mandate and responsibilities. Crisis is prepared for and resolved where it happens, that is primarily at the local level and if it exceeds the capacity of the local community up scaling occurs on the higher levels of government up to the national level in cases of large scale disasters, including the engagement of the police and army if necessary. However, due to the uneven development of municipalities and cities there are significant differences in the crisis management capacity between local communities \*as well as in the level of awareness for crisis management among the local political representatives, other actors and citizens. New risk assessment methodology is to be implemented, as the basis for better planning.

## **2     *new system at the test***

The most serious challenge for new Serbian civil security system were extreme weather conditions in February 2012. Following the proposal of the National Emergency Management Headquarters on 5 February 2012, the Government of the Republic of Serbia declared the Emergency Situation on the whole state territory due to heavy snowfalls and extreme cold. All protection and rescue activities, as well as preventive measures were coordinated and managed by the NEMHQ.

In this crisis 22 people died due to extreme cold, whilst 307 were rescued. Approximately 11.122 households and 34,497 people were affected. Approximately 920 households with approximately 2,400 people were completely cut-off in the distant mountain villages. Rescue and evacuation operations were conducted and assistance was being provided to people in the urgent need of medical assistance, food supplies etc. The most affected population was in the municipalities of Sjenica, Nova Varos, Kraljevo, Novi Pazar, Valjevo, Osecina, Ivanjica, Prokuplje, Kursumlija, Zagubica. Only local and uncategorized roads in distant mountain regions were not passable (approximately 4,200 km). Rescuers from the emergency services – fire and rescue teams, medical teams, police, mountain rescue service reached all those in need

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<sup>5</sup>Generic legal term is *emergency situation*. Besides this more specific terms are natural hazard, technical and technological hazard - accident, disaster and emergency also used and explained in LES.

for medical assistance and supplies, and evacuated the affected population from remote regions. Local EMHQs coordinated the delivery of medicines, food supplies, warm clothes, blankets etc, and rescue activities of the emergency services, Red Cross centres and centres for social care. Heavy mechanizations from public companies and Serbian Army were deployed on cleaning the roads. The Government has allocated the financial assistance from the budget for the affected municipalities, as well as fuel for the machines and specialized vehicles. Serbian private companies also donated fuel for the affected municipalities, and citizens put themselves and their equipment at disposal for the rescue operations. The last session of the NEMHQ was held on 22 February. The members of the National HQ discussed the efficiency of the actions taken since the emergency situation on the state level was declared, as well as the report on the current situation regarding the risk of floods due to ice cover formation on the rivers and landslides. Following the decision of the National HQ, Operational Expert Team for flood protection was established. It is proposed to Government of the Republic of Serbia that state of Emergency Situation on the territory of the state due to heavy snowfalls and extreme cold to be revoked. State of Emergency Situation in 23 municipalities remained for a while. The capacities of the Republic of Serbia have been sufficient to deal with the situation and there was no need for international assistance. [6] Therefore, the new system passed its first exam.

However, no significant improvements in coping with extreme weather conditions have been made after this crisis. In similar situation in December 2012 the actions undertaken by responsible factors were not adequate and in timely manner.<sup>6</sup> Due to the collapse that was created in December 2012 at the Serbian roads caused by snowfall the Prime minister criticized the minister in charge, while the representatives of Public Enterprise "Roads of Serbia" claimed they did their job responsibly and that the blame for the current situation is on unscrupulous drivers of heavy vehicles that are speeding and driving without adequate winter equipment and create traffic jams. They criticized the competent authorities for not having prohibited cargo traffic on the most critical sections until crews do not clear them up and the weather allows that cargo traffic can proceed. It was not specified who the "competent authorities" were, neither explained how the cooperation between the Republic Hydro meteorological Service, Enterprise "Roads of Serbia" Traffic police and MOI was functioning in practice. [2]

## CONCLUSION

After two decades of legal vacuum, organizational and institutional confusion resulting from the collapse of the civil security system adapted to the socialist society and the lack of elementary responsibility and vision of political leadership, Serbia in 2010 set up a normative/legal basis for the construction of a new civil security system.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the reasons is that the Republic transferred the road maintenance on the roads of second order on municipalities, but failed to carry out the transfer of the funds for this purpose. In addition, some municipalities have signed contracts for road maintenance with companies that have gone bankrupt.

Although this period was marked by a series of devastating crises, frequent political changes and narrow party interests hindered the achievement of political consensus on the basic principles on which to build an effective system. As a result of wrong policies the country experienced an economic collapse, the collapse of values, political isolation from the international community, lost a fundamental consensus on the basic national interests, while the transport infrastructure and other vital systems remained devastated. Therefore, the starting point for building a new system is pretty bad.

When designing the new system and making the law, comparative experiences, historical background, capabilities and capacities of the country and its prospects of EU integration, as well as the current political constellation were taken into account. Professional community has positively assessed the legal text. Normative regulation of the system is almost completed, but the passage of national laws is not a sufficient response. However it puts the government in a better position as having addressed the problem and laid the foundation for national response capability. The implementation or enforcement phase is facing a number of problems such as insufficient resources available and problems related to creation of other organizational, personnel and material and technical conditions for its successful implementation.

There is a growing recognition that disaster prevention and emergency response must be one of the government's priorities. Although general political consensus on importance of civil security system has been achieved, a reflection of existing political divisions and interests on professional performance still remains, as well as an omnipresent political calculus in all phases of crisis management. However, political actors sometimes see the crisis as an opportunity for self-promotion and scoring political points,<sup>7</sup> or denouncing political opponents<sup>8</sup> Political interests and assessments sometimes have an impact on the functioning local Emergency management HQ more than professional reasons. Relations between the state and civil society actors are not precisely defined, and they are dependant on personal relations among people in institutions. Like in the most of SEE countries there is a significant room for national and multilateral initiatives to improve public awareness and involvement in disaster preparedness efforts.[1]

The fact that the system has been existing only for two and a half years and it is still not working at full capacity, since it is not completed in a normative and institutional sense, makes any attempt of serious analysis and its evaluation difficult and problematic. Nevertheless, some general remarks can be made. In the National Strategy for Search and Rescue in Emergencies it is stated that the current level of

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<sup>7</sup> In bitter comments citizens of mountain villages blocked in a storm in February 2012 accused the Minister of interior who visited EMHQ by helicopter that he used the trouble of people in order to gain voters. See <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/305591/Dacic-danas-u-Sjenici-i-Ivanjici/komentari>

<sup>8</sup> After the earthquake in Kraljevo representatives of the city opposition accused the government of irregularities in the allocation of funds for the (re)construction and asked for a detailed report. The mayor said that, "since the special account was opened, daily reports on inflow and expenditure of funds are published on the City's website and urged police and prosecutor to check all the charges, saying that those are irresponsible and baseless accusations in order to collect political points See: <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/240950/Ukinuta-vanredna-situacija-posle-zemljotresa-u-Kraljevu>

organization and capability of system of civil security in Serbia is significantly behind the assessed needs and objective possibilities of the state. There is a need for technical innovation and equipping, as well as for improving and modernisation of infrastructure, of informational-communication systems in accordance with standards of the European Union. [5] The statistical data in Serbia show insufficient capacity of the society to respond to the present challenges, risks and threats in an adequate way, which results in material and non-material damage, both at the level of commercial entities and at the state level. [3] Prevention seems to be the weakest point, together with the fact that in some parts of Serbian population there are no traces of awareness and responsibility for safety. There are also problems related to the harmonization of different organizational cultures of staff co-opted in SEM and overcoming the divisions between "us" and "them".

The most important gaps outlined in the National strategy relate to:

- *institutional organization* (lack of conditions for the consistent application of regulations, inadequate organization and implementation of preventive measures, lack of specialized cadastres, comprehensive risk maps, methodology for hazardous waste management, 112 system, uneven distribution of capacities of the emergency response services in the RS),
  - *material – technical* (unsatisfactory level of road and other infrastructure, outdated, unreliable equipment, facilities and vehicles of the emergency response services, lack of specialized vehicles and equipment for responding to chemical accidents in road, rail and river transport etc.),
  - *cooperation, coordination and availability of information* (insufficient coordination between protection and rescue system entities in emergency situations, between scientific and research institutions and direct beneficiaries of researches, with NGOs and private sector and international cooperation), and
  - *human resources and capacity building* (inadequate professional qualification and technological discipline of the available human resources, lack of specialized personnel, insufficient training, unpreparedness and a low level of the local self-government capacity and underdeveloped culture of prevention).
- [5]

The system has been tested practically in several natural (floods, extreme temperatures and earthquake) and in one technological disaster. The general assessment is that, given the fact that it is not fully completed, it functioned relatively well. The system proved relatively successful in a crisis situation caused by snow storm in February 2012, but in a similar situation in December 2012, reacted poorly. Recurrence of similar technological accidents (fires in night clubs) indicates the inability of the system to properly determine liability, draws lessons and translate them into standard operating policies and procedures. Procedures for determining the professional and legal accountability are complicated and take a long time so the sanctions are not effective, while due to overall constellation of political relations political accountability is minor.

When it comes to Serbia's capacity to respond to the most frequently emergencies, like floods, fires, extreme temperatures and earthquakes, despite some progress there is still significant room for improvement.

Development and completion of the system will depend on material and technical requirements, support of political actors and enthusiasm of the professionals in SEM and in other institutions responsible for crisis management.

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