

Improving Disaster, Accident, Emergency and Crisis Management Systems in Bulgaria

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Abstract - The modern New World – the World of the 21st century – has turned out to be a world existing in a series of crises and conflicts of the most diverse nature and scope, both at the local, regional and global levels. Crisis situations are sometimes caused by man, but sometimes they are of a natural or mixed nature. In this context, serious issues facing every government and community – be they local, national, regional or supra-national – are issues related to the anticipation, timely identification and rapid adequate response to such crisis situations.

In this sense, the issue of the state of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems, as well as the possibilities for their improvement, is of particular importance not only for Bulgaria as a sovereign state, but also for all countries, in a regional, allied and global aspect. In this line of thought, it is a good idea to ask the question and analyse the relationship and interaction between disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems with a country's national security system.

Keywords— Globalization, management, crises, security.

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern New World – the World of the 21st century, has turned out to be a world existing in a series of crises and conflicts of the most diverse nature and scope, both at the local, regional and global levels. Crisis situations are sometimes caused by man, but they also happen to be of a natural or mixed nature. In this context, serious issues facing every government and community – be they local, state, regional or supra-national – are issues related to the anticipation, timely identification and rapid adequate response to crisis situations, overcoming, prevention [1], monitoring and risk management with regards to them.

In this sense, of particular importance not only for Bulgaria as a sovereign state, but also in a regional, allied, and global aspect for all countries, the question of the state of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems, as well as the possibilities for their improvement, comes to the fore. In this line of thought, it is a good idea to ask the question and analyse the relationship and interplay between disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems with the country's national security system. In the end, this is how the fundamental rights of the Bulgarian citizens, laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria [2], are guaranteed. This is how the purpose of the present development is outlined: analysis of the connection and interaction of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems with the country's national security system.

Actuality of the subject is determined by the fact that security is the basis of the prosperity of any nation. Citizens want to feel safe and free from danger and/or threat. Today, however, the security of the state and its citizens confronts the rulers with challenges in all aspects of our daily lives, and the role of the institutions that are supposed to protect us is also changing. The issue of public-private partnership in this area is becoming more and more relevant.

Without a doubt, this is one of the current issues of our time, difficult, provocative, demanding, and imposing: to discipline, adaptation, foresight, and preparedness, of everyone and everything; most of all, however, in our opinion, of the national state in the context of the social contract - for protection, for care, for responsibility, which is assumed by this contract to its citizens. And here come the questions of honesty, morality, ethics, preparedness, valour, knowledge, cognition, contacts, speed, conscience... A difficult, weighty topic, especially nowadays. In this sense, in this paper, given the volume set by the organizers of this forum, we will limit ourselves, and with that we will also limit the set goal to a brief

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overview of the institutional readiness of the Republic of Bulgaria in terms of the availability in the country of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems and the options for their improvement.

The methods used to achieve the goal of the present development are theoretical analysis and synthesis, comparative analyzes and a systematic approach.

Results, that we would like to achieve with this development, are: establishing the current state of the institutional readiness of the Republic of Bulgaria regarding the availability in the country of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems, and the availability of opportunities for their improvement.

II. CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN BULGARIA

At the beginning of the new century, humanity is shaken by serious problems of global scope, caused by both nature, and man. The realities in which we are immersed - pandemics, regional wars, terrorist acts, ambitions for dominance and influence in the form of nationalism and chauvinism, fundamentalist ideologies and religious fanaticism, economic crises, catastrophes, industrial accidents, street violence, etc., are often accompanied by serious consequences. These lead to emergency situations of varying degrees of intensity, which can have significant negative consequences on society and the overall infrastructure (and not only) of a given country, or region. In our opinion, management should categorically be and is an integral part of the national security of each country and an essential element of its protection activities. The strategic goal of crisis management policy is to prevent their occurrence, to limit the negative consequences, as much as possible, and to quickly restore the functioning of state and public life in the event of a crisis.

When raising the issue of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems in Bulgaria, and even more so, their improvement, it is appropriate to start with the fact that the country today has a well-established regulatory framework regulating the above-mentioned issues and phenomena. It is based largely on the Disaster Protection Act, Promulgated by the Official Gazette No. 102 of December 19, 2006, amended by the Official Gazette No. 41 of May 22, 2007, ..., amended and supplemented by the Official Gazette No. 60 of July 7, 2020 [3], and the Management and Functioning of the National Security Protection System Act, Promulgated by the Official Gazette No. 61 of August 11, 2015, amended by the Official Gazette No. 94 of November 13, 2018, amended by the Official Gazette No. 69 of August 4, 2020, supplemented by the Official Gazette No. 61 of August 11, 2015. SG. No. 15 of February 22, 2022, amended SG. No. 90 of October 28, 2025, amended and supplemented OG. No. 94 of November 4, 2025 [4], to the Defence and Armed Forces Act of the Republic of Bulgaria, published

OG. No. 35 of May 12, 2009, amended OG. No. 74 of September 15, 2009, ..., amended and supplemented OG. No. 100 of November 25, 2025, amended OG. No. 101 of November 27, 2025, amended OG. No. 16 of February 10, 2026 [5], to the Counteracting Terrorism Act, published by OG. No. 103 of December 27, 2016, supplemented by OG No. 51 of June 5, 2020, amended by OG No. 69 of August 4, 2020, amended by OG No. 20 of March 9, 2021, amended by OG No. 15 of February 22, 2022, amended by OG No. 32 of April 26, 2022, amended by OG No. 61 of July 29, 2025 [6].

Until 2009, the Crisis Management Act (repealed, OG, issue 35 of 2009) [7] was in force in the Republic of Bulgaria. It regulates the powers of government bodies and local self-government bodies, the rights and obligations of individuals and legal entities in crisis management. It stipulates that it shall not be applied when declaring a "state of war", "martial law" or "state of emergency" within the meaning of the Defence and Armed Forces Act of the Republic of Bulgaria. Until the adoption of the Crisis Management Act in 2005, a crisis response system was established and functioning in the country, mainly related to the protection of the population during disasters, accidents and catastrophes. This is regulated by the Regulations on the organization and activities for the prevention and liquidation of the consequences of disasters, accidents and catastrophes [8], adopted by Decree No. 18 of the Council of Ministers of 1998. The organization established by the Regulations, along with its positive aspects, poses certain difficulties for crisis management. However, the Regulations do not define the procedure for the Council of Ministers, as the central body of the executive power, in cases where crises cover a larger part of the country's territory, or significantly threaten the interests of society, or the state. Last but not least, the organization established by the Regulations does not fully correspond to the crisis management systems established in the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, as well as by other international organizations and countries. The analysis of the regulatory framework in the field of crises before the adoption of a special Act in 2005 shows that dozens of laws and numerous other regulatory acts were in force in the country for the management of various types of crises. Last, but not least, the number of international treaties that the Republic of Bulgaria has ratified as a party, should also be taken into account. In this context, after 2001, the country became aware of the need to create a national crisis response system, through which the functions of the state to guarantee the life and wellbeing of the population and protect the spiritual and material values of the country and its citizens in the event of a crisis, were ensured.

In response to the changes that have occurred, globally and regionally, the membership of the Republic of Bulgaria in NATO and its upcoming accession to the European Union, specific legislative actions were taken, as a result of which, on February 17, 2005, the 39th National

Assembly adopted the Crisis Management Act [7]. The adopted act largely regulates public relations with regard to the prevention, control and overcoming of the consequences of crises.

Based on the comprehensive modern regulatory framework currently in force in the Republic of Bulgaria, a number of strategic documents have been adopted by the country that regulate relations between institutions. Among the strategic documents currently in force in the Republic of Bulgaria, we can mention: the National Disaster Risk Reduction Program 2021-2025, published by the Council of Ministers, Sofia 2020 [9]; the National Disaster Risk Profile of Bulgaria [10]; the Disaster Risk Management Plan [11]; Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 740/28.10.2021 on the adoption of a of Voluntary Formations Development Strategy for the Prevention or Management of Disasters, Wildfires and Other Emergency Situations in the Period 2021 – 2030 [12]; for the Development of Voluntary Formations Strategy for the Prevention or Management of Disasters, Wildfires and Other Emergency Situations in the Period 2021 - 2030; Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 758/12.10.2022 on the adoption of the National Program for the Development of Voluntary Formations for the Prevention or Management of Disasters, Wildfires and Other Emergencies in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2022 – 2026 [13]; National Program for the Development of Voluntary Formations for the Prevention or Management of Disasters, Wildfires and Other Emergencies in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2022 - 2026; Plan for 2026 for the Implementation of the National Program for the Development of Voluntary Formations for the Prevention or Management of Disasters, Wildfires and Other Emergencies in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2022 – 2026 [14]; Program for the Modernization and Technical Provision of the Territorial Units for Fire Safety and Protection of the Population in the Republic of Bulgaria [15]; Oil Spills in the Black Sea Combating National Emergency Plan [16]; Kozloduy NPP External Emergency Plan [17], etc.

In our opinion, another interesting and important document is the development of a strategy and system for Emergency Situations, Disasters and Accidents Management. It was developed under the SUDEM (Sustainable Disaster and Emergency Management processes) project with Bulgarian participation. It is important to emphasize, in the present-day context, that this is a strategy at the European level, based on digitalization. The system uses artificial intelligence and drones to increase the effectiveness of disaster and accident management actions. The strategy and the system were created under the "Sustainable Management of Disaster and Accident Activities" - SUDEM" international project, under a European Union (EU) "Erasmus +" program. There are partners in the project from the Netherlands, Germany, Ukraine and Turkey, as well as

scientists from the Institute for Space Research and Technology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (ISRT - BAS). In the words of Prof. Dr. Georgi Georgiev, the coordinator of the SUDEM project: "There is a need for a system for sustainable digitalization of processes in the management of emergency situations due to the increasing frequency of climatic, anthropogenic and other emergency situations leading to disasters and accidents and the unpreparedness of countries in Europe to meet these situations". [18] Here we would like to echo the words of Prof. Dr. Dimo Zafirov from the Institute of Civil Engineering and Technology-BAS, also a party to, and active participant in the project: "We aim for dangerous phenomena not to develop into disasters. To be able to control situations with fewer casualties and material damage. In most cases, the delay in the response to dangerous phenomena and disasters is due to human reaction." [18]

It should be emphasized that numerous crises and emergencies action training centres have been established and continue to be set up in the country at the institutional and academic level. Among the good examples we can mention: The Emergency Management Training Centre at the G. S. Rakovski National Defence College, established in 2011 with the main purpose of training leaders and experts from the national and local administration, the Armed Forces and other experts in the field of disaster, accidents and environmental catastrophes management. The centre is used in the training of students, PhD students, and staffs for the implementation of disaster protection plans at national, regional and municipal levels, conducting specialized courses and computer-assisted exercises and staff training [19]. As another such example, operating in a similar vein, we can mention the Department of Disaster Medicine at the Military Medical Academy-Sofia as a key unit for training and organizing medical provision in the event of natural disasters, industrial accidents and terrorist acts. It trains military and civilian medics, develops concepts for actions in extreme situations and includes experts in military toxicology and preventive medicine [20]. There are a number of similar examples that we can give today in the country, which shows both the great interest in the topic and the awareness of its importance at every level.

Looking again at the topic thus set, namely: "Improvement of Disaster, Accident, Emergency and Crisis Management Systems in Bulgaria", it is important to note that, to date, in the Republic of Bulgaria a Disaster Risk Reduction Council has been established and operates under the supervision of Council of Ministers, to assist in the formation and implementation of government policy in the field of disaster protection in Policy Area 02. Internal order and security. The Council was established by the Disaster Protection Act to assist in the formation and implementation of government policy in the field of disaster protection. By Council of Ministers Decree No.

305 of November 17, 2016 (published in the Official Gazette, No. 93 of November 23, 2016) [21], the Procedural Rules for the Organization and Activities of the Disaster Risk Reduction Council under the Council of Ministers for Supporting the Formation and Implementation of State Policy in the Field of Disaster Protection, were adopted. The nominal composition of the Council was determined by order of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Chairman of the Disaster Risk Reduction Council. And perhaps this is the time to emphasize that, speaking of a supra-institutional body that would unite all institutions and other organizations engaged in this field, connect and coordinate them with a common policy and common actions, it is precisely the Disaster Risk Reduction Council under the Council of Ministers to assist in the formation and implementation of state policy in the field of disaster protection or another similar body that would be a good solution, with which the government, and in particular, its executive branch, as well as the citizens, would be able to have a significantly clearer vision and control over this issue, policy and field of such importance to national security.

III. CONCLUSION

Unequivocally, in our opinion, the topic of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems, and their constant improvement both at the national and global levels, has been, is and remains one of the leading topics in terms of security, both at the national and global levels. The results that we can present as a result of the analysis of the present study and the necessary conclusions are that in Bulgaria, over the past 25-30 years, much has been done in this area, both in terms of the regulatory framework, and the institutional readiness of the country, as well as in terms of training at every level. There is, of course, much more to be desired and more to be done in this regard. Our country has taken numerous significant steps towards building a disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management system that meets modern requirements. There also remain a lot of challenges that our country faces in improving this system. In our opinion, the main challenge is the lack of a sufficient budget funding in an area that is extremely important for national security. And last, but not least, we will allow ourselves to make some recommendations: it is good we should look not only at good contemporary practices, but also at good practices from the past in this area, when trying to improve the system [22]. In our opinion, there is much to be learnt from past efforts, when striving to improve disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems in Bulgaria, as well as for the improvement and optimization of their work, which in certain circumstances could be life-saving.

The analysis of the current state of the innovation potential of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems and their constant improvement shows a clear interrelationship and interdependence

between the elements of determining the scope of equipment modernization, allocating financial resources and demonstrating political will. The financial resources set aside in previous years are gradually increasing in order to acquire a better and adequate state of security for modernity and the real modern environment.

The key to successful completion of started projects is clear political will. How many former governments have already had the unpleasant experience of failed projects that lacked either adequate financial resources or political support. On the other hand, sometimes valuable financial resources are wasted on unnecessary upgrades. Balance and unity of effort are needed to achieve the intended results.

In conclusion it can be said, that the management of disaster, accident, emergency and crisis management systems depends not only on the volume of individual resources for their constant improvement, but also on how these resources are used. The increase in the efficiency of their use allows to increase the level of national security of the country, as well as the feeling of security of the citizens, and this automatically leads to an increase in the well-being of the nation.

There is much more to be said on this topic, but given the limitations set, the author will express his position on the topic in his following papers.

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