

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS OF THE SERBIAN POLICE DIRECTORATE IN THE SYSTEM OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: Emergency situations caused by natural and other disasters in the Republic of Serbia are becoming more frequent. The primary strength of the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system in the response phase are the professional fire and rescue units of the Sector for emergency management. Respecting the principle of gradual use of operational staff, in a situation when professional fire and rescue units do not have sufficient capacity to react, members of organizational units of the Police Directorate join them. The floods are characteristic because of the engagement of members of the Gendarmerie, Helicopter unit, special police units, as well as members of the police of general jurisdiction and traffic police. The engagement of members of the Gendarmerie and the Helicopter unit when forest fires occur is of great benefit and represents a significant operational assistance to professional fire and rescue units. In cases of international rescue assistance sent to the Republic of Serbia, the role of members of the border police is also recognizable. In addition to the operational part, the role of the organizational units of the Police Directorate is reflected in the preventive phase through engagement in various field exercises with the aim of increasing systemic operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Keywords: police directorate, organizational unit, emergency management, system, operational cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

Before talking about the role of the organizational units of the Serbian police Directorate in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management, some of the unknown terms must be precisely defined as well as to provide key current solutions with the already published works in the field of disaster studies and the literature review.

The system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management is part of the national security system and is an integrated form of management and organization of the subjects of this system to implement preventive and operational measures and perform tasks of protection and rescue of people and goods from disasters, including recovery measures (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management).

Forces of the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management are: emergency management headquarters, civil protection units, fire and rescue units, Service 112, Police, Serbian Army, Serbian Red Cross, Serbian Mountain Rescue Service, Voluntary fire association of Serbia, Association of radio amateurs of Serbia, commissioners and deputy commissioners of civil protection, citizens, associations of citizens and organizations whose activities are of special interest for the development and functioning of the system (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management).

The Police Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia is organized into what many consider a seventh sector of the Ministry. It is responsible for the performance of police duties, which are, together with the competences and powers, governed by the Law on Police. The organization of the headquarters of the General Police Directorate is composed of functionally (diagonally) connected organizational units, with a well-established hierarchical structure of police stations and substations, so that they perform tasks within their scope, covering the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia (Kekic et al, 2021).

Police forces should have different roles before, during and after natural and man-made disasters. In this regard, emergency management must be defined as a separate segment of the system where the role of Serbian Police Directorate is primarily reflected. Emergency planning management refers to the coordination and management of resources and responsibilities pertaining to the mitigation of, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from an emergency. The four phases of disaster management are mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (OmniSci, 2021).

Moreover, the literature recognizes the role of police forces in the emergency management. During a disaster, police officers not only have to continue to keep the community safe from possible looting, destruction of property, and theft that may occur, they also have to be prepared to evacuate citizens, render advanced life saving techniques, and keep points of dispensing sites secure. Additional duties also include the delivery of food, water, and blankets to those who have been displaced by the disaster (Herron, 2015). During emergencies, disasters, and catastrophes, law enforcement organizations have primary responsibilities to provide the necessary functions that ensure public safety. Traumatic events such as natural disasters impart short- and long-term effects on the personal lives of those responsible for carrying out these operational asks. The behaviour exhibited by law enforcement personnel during these extreme events has implications on organizational resilience (Adams, Anderson, 2019). The police, as a state body and law enforcement agency, are primarily responsible for the protection of public order and peace, as well as for combating crime. In that sense, the role of the police in emergency situations could be observed. However, the role of the police in emergencies is much broader than that. It includes not only the realization of the basic function of the police, but also a whole range of other activities, such as protection and rescue in emergency situations, elimination of the consequences



of emergency situations, identification of victims, enabling the work of other services, etc. (Šikman, Amidžić, 2014). In the process of response to natural disasters, the police certainly represent one of the most important intervention and rescue services, which has an indisputable role in dealing with the consequences of natural disasters, the number and severity of which increases every year (Cvetković, 2016).

When it comes to theoretical research, the focus is on the not so rich literature that describes the role of the police in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management. Then, the theoretically defined phases of the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management are taken into account in order to make connection with different police forces. All phases are taken into account, so that the emphasis of the role of the police would not be exclusively on the reactive part. In the next part of the paper are pointed out those organizational parts of Serbian police Directorate that have a role in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management. Finally, practical examples of engagement of organizational parts of Serbian police Directorate in emergency situations are pointed out with suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

GENERAL ROLE OF THE POLICE IN THE SYSTEM OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Police forces are extremely important when there are natural or man-made disasters. In most cases, it is a matter of securing locations where the consequences for the population or material and cultural goods are visible. However, police forces should also be engaged in search and rescue operations when it comes to rubble, evacuation during floods, extinguishing forest fires from land or from the air. Modern conditions mostly than before bring new forms of emergency situations. Current global situation with the COVID - 19 pandemic reflects the need to engage police forces. In addition to engaging the police forces in the part of responding to emergency situations, members of the police should be engaged in the preventive part. Events such as earthquakes, floods, storms, tsunamis, landslides often pose a major challenge to police officers. Although most police organizations in the countries around the world has certain plans and procedures for dealing with natural disasters, they are often not adequately tested (Skogan, Frydlyly, 2004).

While functions of local police are well defined for internal emergency, same is not true for natural or other disasters. But wherever earthquake or flood occurs, the police get involved from the beginning (the role of the police in disaster/emergency, 2020). Police forces should be engaged during different phases of emergency management. The role of police during mitigation and preparedness phase consists of:

- Emergency traffic plan,
- Detail communication plan,
- Identification of building,
- Security plan,
- Resource mapping,
- Training (Ibid).

Role of police during response phase consist of:

- Search and Rescue (SAR)
- Deployment of resources,
- Restoration of communication system/liasoning with rescue teams,



- Prevention of commission of cognizable offences including all offences against property, human body and public tranquillity,
- Security during relief distributions/relief management,
- Camp management,
- Emergency transportation and traffic regulation,
- Coordination with various agencies,
- Casualty information/ disposal of dead,
- Family liaison officers,
- Media management,
- VIP security,
- Crowd management (Ibid).

Role of police during recovery phase consist of:

- Restoration of critical infrastructure,
- Safe exit of the personnel involved in disaster management,
- Feedback/assessment,
- Contingency planning (Ibid).

During mitigation and preparedness phase the police must be involved in the emergency response planning process. This means that responsible institutions for planning process have to recognize the importance of police forces and their engagement during natural and other disasters. It is recommended that police officers from different areas should be actively involved in the planning process. In this part we must not forget that various police forces are involved during emergencies. After the planning process part, in the preparedness phase, it is necessary to include the police forces in the part of training and exercises. Exercises and trainings are necessary in order to check the defined plans and determine possible shortcomings in order to further eliminate them. Given the direct/indirect role and importance of police activities, it can be said that the shortcoming research on police preparedness and response in natural disasters, is a serious problem given that more efficient police can evacuate more people, save far more lives and improve public relations. In contrast, an ineffective police response during a natural disaster can prevent evacuation officers, hamper the great search and rescue efforts, but also greatly undermine public confidence in the police (Deflem, Sutphin, 2009).

The next phase refers to the response to natural and man-made disasters. When it comes to search and rescue, certain parts of the police have the equipment and are well trained to react in case of earthquakes, floods and other risks. Police forces also have certain mechanization and means of transport that can be used in the event of a mass evacuation. When it comes to communication, the means of communication used by the police are easily adapted to the communication systems used by other subjects and forces involved in responding to natural and man-made disasters. The safety of locations where protection and rescue operations are carried out is the responsibility of the police. Namely, it is a common occurrence that the crime rate increases with the appearance of certain catastrophes. There are examples in practice that immediately after an earthquake or flood, opportunities are used, in the first hours when chaos usually reigns in the affected territory, for thefts and illegal confiscation of valuables that are in someone else's property. The police have the main role to immediately secure the endangered territory, which in some cases is not an easy task, having in mind that it can be a large area. In addition, it is important not to allow access to unauthorized persons where rescuers are working on. The evacuation of a large number of people often requires that all the necessary conditions for care must be provided, which includes accommodation, food, sanitary and hygienic conditions, medical and psychological assistance. When an earthquake occurs, such conditions cannot be provided in masonry buildings, but camps and tent settlements should be erected. Then the police have a role to provide such spaces. One of the expected consequences is traffic jam caused by damage to roads

or simply by fear and panic that occurs among the population who are trying to get to a safe place as soon as possible. In order to primarily ensure the passage of rescue teams to the places where they will perform their activities, the traffic police is involved in order to regulate key roads and provide escorts to the rescue forces. During emergencies, occurs heightened need for security for country's political leadership. The protection of these persons is raised to higher level during emergencies, and security during transport and the provision of escorts is implied in order to reach the endangered territories as soon as possible or meetings of the headquarters for emergency management where decisions are made on search and protection actions. Generally speaking, there are tasks that the police will undertake regardless of the natural disaster. However, each natural or man-made disaster will be carried with certain specifics to which police officers will have to adapt. Tasks can be ordinary and routinized, but also specific. For example, examples of the specific tasks would be: providing food and water, conducting patrol and stage activities in changed conditions (with or without protective equipment) such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, extreme temperatures, etc., identity checks, deprivation of liberty and bringing people with the help of protective means and auxiliary equipment and appropriate means of transport, etc (Cvetković, 2016).

After the response phase follows the phase of recovery and the establishment of the same living conditions as before natural or man-made disaster. During this phase police forces have a minimal role. They must continue to secure the endangered and affected parts in order to avoid criminal actions during the repair of the damage. Police management, both at the local and higher levels, will be involved in the assessment of the forces required and the time required to normalize life in the affected area. In addition to the police, many other intervention and rescue services will be involved in eliminating the consequences of natural and man – made disasters, which will generally have the same goals: saving and protecting human lives; alleviating suffering; controlling a natural disaster by limiting its escalation; warning the public and businesses, advising and providing information, etc (Mlađan et al, 2012).

ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS OF SERBIAN POLICE DIRECTORATE INVOLVED IN THE SYSTEM OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Organizational units of the Serbian police Directorate in the seat are:

1. Anti-Trafficking Coordination Office,
2. Bureau of the Police Director,
3. Criminal Investigations Directorate,
4. Directorate for International Operational Police Cooperation,
5. Uniformed Police Directorate,
6. Security Unit Protecting Specific Persons and Facilities,
7. Protection Unit,
8. Traffic Police Directorate,
9. Border Police Directorate,
10. Administrative Affairs Directorate,
11. Operations Centre



12. Gendarmerie,
13. Special Anti-Terrorist Unit,
14. Helicopter Unit,
15. Coordination Directorate for Kosovo and Metohija (Kekić et al, 2021).

The Serbian police Directorate also comprises of Police directorate for the city of Belgrade as well as 26 regional police directorates. Grouping of positions was done during the classification for the organizational units of the Serbian police Directorate in the seat. Organizational units at the headquarters of the Police Directorate, the Police directorate for the City of Belgrade and regional police administrations are formed so that they are working and functionally connected with appropriate organizational units and jobs in a way that they perform related police tasks at the central, regional and local level (the Ministry of the Interior, 2021).

This kind of organizational structure of the Serbian police Directorate suggests that this is a hybrid organizational structure. Territorial differentiation of a regional police directorate coincides with administrative territorial structure. Namely, the area of one police station is equal to the administrative territory of one municipality (Stevanović, 2019:134-144). When it comes to organizational units of the Serbian police Directorate that are engaged in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management must be pointed out Police directorate for the city of Belgrade and 26 regional police directorates, uniformed police Directorate, Helicopter unit, Traffic police Directorate, Border police Directorate, Operations centre, Gendarmerie, Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, Security Unit Protecting Specific Persons and Facilities. Other organizational units may be engaged sporadically, but those listed above have priority at different phase of emergency management.

Police directorate for the city of Belgrade and 26 regional police directorates consist of partly similar organizational units as those in the headquarters Serbian police Directorate. Bearing in mind the gradualness as one of the basic principles in emergency management, will react first Police directorate for the city of Belgrade and 26 regional police directorates. This part refers to the organizational units that are responsible for police affairs of general jurisdiction and traffic police. The purpose of the work of the traffic police is the organized functioning of road traffic and the protection of citizens and material values in the process of transportation. The traffic police monitor compliance with regulations related to road safety (the Ministry of the interior, 2021). When a natural or man-made disaster occurs and if the assessment is such that there is a need to engage traffic police, the first to react are members of the traffic police within the police Directorate for the city of Belgrade and 26 regional police directorates depending on the endangered territory. Their role is to close sections in order to prevent the movement of certain roads that have been damaged due to earthquakes, floods or some other danger. Also, to them can be assigned the role of escorting forces that are engaged in order to save and protect people, material and cultural goods in order to get to the location as quickly as possible. Moreover, escorting of VIP convoys during emergencies should be one of tasks of traffic police within the Serbian police Directorate. A similar engagement procedure applies to the police of general jurisdiction. In the part of securing the endangered territory and not allowing access to unauthorized persons, members of the police units for general jurisdiction within the police Directorate for the city of Belgrade and 26 regional police directorates will be engaged. Border police, as an organizational unit in the Ministry of interior of the Republic of Serbia performs duties related to control of crossing and securing the state borders; duties related to movement and sojourn of foreigners; it participates in procedures of acknowledging asylums; it performs normative and legal tasks, controlling legality of work and doing logistic duties; as well as other duties as prescribed by law (Integrated border management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia, 2017). When the consequences of natural or man-made disaster



exceed the capacity of the affected state, the assistance of the international community is sought. The role of the Serbian border police is to ensure unhindered crossing of the state border in coordination with the customs administration and other competent institutions. Helicopter Unit is an air support unit of the Serbian Police. Its purpose is to provide aerial surveillance, reconnaissance, border patrol, VIP Transport, medevac, search and rescue and aerial firefighting (Ministry of the Interior, 2019). In cases when evacuation is done from inaccessible terrains or during floods, members of Helicopter unit within the Serbian police Directorate have a significant engagement. On the other hand, in cases of forest fires and fires in the open space, for the purpose of aerial fire-fighting capacities Serbian police Helicopter unit are engaged. The Gendarmerie is a special police unit at the headquarters of the Serbian police Directorate. The internal organization and formation of the Gendarmerie has changed several times since its formation. Currently the Gendarmerie consists of:

- Gendarmerie Command (headquarters in Belgrade),
- Diving unit (headquarters in Belgrade), has a diving and nautical platoon,
- Four detachments of the Gendarmerie: in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Kraljevo (the Ministry of the Interior, 2021)

Members of Serbian Gendarmerie should be engaged when it is necessary to evacuate people endangered by floods, especially members of diving unit, as well as in situations of inaccessible terrain. Also, engagement of Gendarmerie is visible when there is an additional need for forces to extinguish forest fires and open space fires. Operations centre should coordinate engagement of police forces during natural or man-made disaster with National centre 112 which is organizational unit of Sector for emergency management. Furthermore, it is necessary to mention the role of Special anti-terrorist unit as well as Security unit protecting specific persons and facilities. Special anti-terrorist unit should be engaged only when there is special need for rescuing and evacuating people who are endangered due to flood or earthquake. Security unit protecting specific persons and facilities, as a part of Serbian police Directorate, should be engaged for protection VIP persons during emergencies.

In this part, the education of future Serbian police officers should also be pointed out. During their schooling they have the opportunity to gain the basic knowledge of emergency management. At the University of criminal investigation and police studies in Belgrade there is a special scientific field of security in emergency situations within the Department of security sciences. There are several different exams through which students at different levels of study can acquire knowledge about safety in emergency situations. Moreover, as a separate part of master academic studies exist study program with name Managing security risk in natural disasters (the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, 2021).

REAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE SERBIAN POLICE DIRECTORATE IN THE SYSTEM OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

In the previous period there were examples of engagement of organizational units of Serbian police Directorate in different phases and segments. During the third week of May, exceptionally heavy rains fell on Serbia which were caused by a low-pressure system ('Yvette') that formed over the Adriatic. Record-breaking amounts of rainfall were recorded more than 200 mm of rain fell in western Serbia in a week's time, which is the equivalent of 3 months of rain under normal conditions. Because of the flooding, some 32,000 people were evacuated from their homes, out of which 25,000 were from Obrenovac. (World bank group, 2014). Such a natural disaster initiated the engagement of various



parts of Serbian police Directorate. The government established a “Floods Emergency Headquarters” within the Sector for Emergency Situations in the Ministry of the Interior, together with crisis centres in each of the flood-affected municipalities/districts/cities. The headquarters office was staffed by central and municipality operational crisis management teams made up of staff from the sector, the fire and rescue services, the police and gendarmerie, and the military. The police, the Serbian army, gendarmerie and firefighter and rescue units played key roles in evacuating affected populations and providing humanitarian relief assistance to areas most in need, and coordinated closely with the municipal emergency headquarters in the planning and execution of such tasks (World bank group, 2014). The summer of 2021 was marked by forest fires and open fires both in Serbia and in other countries. The helicopter unit of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia firstly was engaged on few different locations at territory of Serbia in order to assist extinguishing wildfires. After that, the same organizational unit of Serbian police Directorate was departed to Greece, where its members provided assistance in extinguishing wildfires that had been burning in that country. Members of this unit, before Greece, were in North Macedonia for almost the whole past week, where they also helped in extinguishing wildfires, and before that they provided their help on mountain Stolac above Višegrad (Telegraf, 2021).

These are just some of the examples of Serbian police engagement in the event of a response on natural or man-made disasters.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the role and activity of the Serbian police during natural or man-made disasters have been raised much in recent years. The growing number of emergencies declared due to earthquakes, floods, forest fires and other risks leads to the need to engage various organizational units of Serbian police Directorate, both at the local level and from the headquarters. In addition, pandemic caused by virus COVID-19 showed also need for police engagement, especially because epidemics and pandemics are considered as natural disasters.

It is very important that the engagement of Serbian police forces is coordinated by the competent emergency management headquarters. In such cases there is a full effect of the significance use of police forces in some of the phases of the emergency management system. On the contrary, bearing in mind that the role of the Serbian police Directorate in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management is not the primary role in the security system, it may happen that the required level of efficiency and effectiveness is not achieved. This is supported by the need to involve the police force as often as possible in various forms of exercises and training to respond to natural or man-made disasters.

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