

CURRENT STATE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: An emergency situation represents a complex combination of events, in which there was an irregular state of functioning of the social system or its parts. Caused by events of a larger scale, emergency situations have the effect of endangering the population, material goods and the environment, thus putting to the test the ability of society and the state to react successfully in unforeseen circumstances.

It is necessary to undertake comprehensive measures in order to manage emergency situations. Successful management of emergency situations requires cooperation and coordination of all participants in the system, at the level of the Republic of Serbia, at the level of the Autonomous Provinces and at the level of local self-governments, in order to mitigate the consequences of the emergency situation and ensure the fastest and most efficient recovery.

The paper analyzes the current state of emergency management in the Republic of Serbia. Procedures and institutions dealing with responding to emergency situations in the Republic of Serbia were analyzed. The inductive-deductive method as well as the method of content analysis was used.

Key words: emergency management, legal framework, emergency headquarters, emergency situations

1. INTRODUCTION

Emergency situations represent a complex combination of different events. They put to the test the ability of society and the state to react successfully in such unforeseen circumstances. This term is often used in the current context by different people and media.

At the same time, a state of emergency is a situation when threats to the population, the environment and material goods are of such a scale that their occurrence cannot be prevented by the regular action of the competent authorities and services, which is why it is necessary to

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use special measures, forces and means to mitigate and eliminate them with a strengthened regime work.

Regardless of the increasing frequency of such situations, it is becoming increasingly important to take comprehensive measures in order to manage emergency situations in the Republic of Serbia. This includes an analysis of the current state of emergency management in the Republic of Serbia, an analysis of the procedures and institutions that deal with responding to emergency situations at different levels in the Republic of Serbia.

Emergency management is a complex and challenging process that requires a well-organized and coordinated management system. Successful management of emergency situations implies an efficient and effective response in the most domestic conditions, which is possible only if the entire system is functioning.

Successful management of emergency situations requires cooperation and coordination of all participants in the system, at the level of the Republic of Serbia, at the level of the Autonomous Province and at the level of local self-government, in order to maximize the impact on preventing, minimizing and mitigating the consequences of disasters and emergency situations, and to ensure the fastest and more effective recovery in case such situations occur.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Every emergency situation, regardless of its source and consequences, affects the activities of individuals, organizations, local communities and even society as a whole. In order to avoid social disorganization that can lead to undesirable events, it is important to define such situations through legal acts.

The meaning of the term "legal framework" includes the system of laws, regulations, regulations, court decisions and other forms of legal norms whose purpose is to regulate relations between people and society. In the Republic of Serbia, emergency situations are regulated by law. The basis of the regulation is the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on Reduced Disaster Risk and Emergency Management (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, 2018.).

It is very important that there is an adequate legal framework that will establish an effective response system in case of emergency situations. In the text that follows, the documents of the legal framework of emergency situations will be presented, as well as the emergency management regulations in the Republic of Serbia.

When it comes to the Republic of Serbia, the most important laws are: Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, 2018), Law on Fire Protection (Law on fire protection, 2018), Law on Reconstruction after Natural and Other Disasters (Law on reconstruction after elementary and other disasters, 2015), Regulation on the implementation of evacuation (Regulation on implementation of evacuation, 2011).

All the above-mentioned documents and regulations should ensure fast, efficient and coordinated action in case of emergency situations, as well as protect the lives, health and safety of citizens and property in those situations.

The basic law that regulates the field of emergency situations in the Republic of Serbia is the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management. This law establishes the basic rules and principles of management in emergency situations, including the way of organization, work and relations of competent authorities in these situations.

In 2018, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia passed the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management. The law regulates disaster risk reduction, prevention and strengthening of resilience and readiness of individuals and communities to respond to the consequences of disasters, protection and rescue of people, material, cultural and other assets, rights and obligations of citizens, associations, legal entities, bodies of local self-government units, autonomous provinces and the Republic of Serbia, management of emergency situations, functioning of civil protection, early warning, notification and warning, international cooperation, inspection supervision and other issues of importance for the organization and functioning of the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, 2018).

According to the above-mentioned law, the risk assessment must be made by the Republic, the province, units of local self-governments, companies, health institutions, as well as educational institutions. On the other hand, the disaster risk reduction plan must be adopted by the Republic, the province, as well as the local self-government units.

3. MANAGEMENT OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Natural disasters pose a threat to human communities, whether it is a local, regional or global level of threat, therefore society was forced to develop appropriate protection mechanisms. In the past, people did not have solutions to deal with these threats, which resulted in the devastating consequences of natural disasters, great loss of life and severe property damage. However, the state recognizes the importance of protection and has developed appropriate emergency management mechanisms to minimize possible catastrophic consequences (Prelic, 2023).

The management of emergency situations requires the identification of possible emergency events, the formation of scenarios for the development of these events, the analysis of the mutual conditioning of events and their consequences, the analysis of the impact of various environmental risk factors (e.g. the analysis of dangerous objects in the environment), as well as the taking of appropriate preventive measures to minimize or eliminate the possibility their occurrence, i.e. operative and remedial measures in the event of the realization of these events. Environmental hazard factors are extremely important for successful emergency management because they can increase the negative consequences of emergency situations (Stoimenov et al., 2013).

Management in emergency situations is the guidance of protection and rescue entities in the performance of obligations and tasks to improve the security system in an extraordinary and destabilized state of society caused by large-scale events that paralyze the functioning of the social system (Ljustina & Knezevic, 2013).

For the coordination and management of protection and rescue in emergency situations in accordance with the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management and other regulations, emergency headquarters are formed as operational and expert bodies and that: For the territory of the Republic of Serbia - Republic Headquarters for Emergency Situations, formed by the Government; For the territory of the autonomous province – the provincial headquarters for emergency situations, which forms the executive body of the autonomous province; For the territory of the administrative district - the district headquarters for emergency situations, which forms the Republic Headquarters for emergency situations; For the territory of the city - the city headquarters for emergency situations, which educates City Assembly; For the territory of the municipality - the municipal headquarters for emergency situations, which educates municipal assembly (https://www.divac.com/upload/document/podsetnik_preview.pdf).

The involvement of headquarters at different levels aims at effective coordination and management in emergency situations, as well as a quick reaction and response to various challenges that may arise. These headquarters work in cooperation with various sectors and institutions, including the police, military, ambulance, fire service, health facilities, in order to effectively respond to emergency situations and protect citizens.

3.1. State of emergency management at the level of the Republic of Serbia

In the Republic of Serbia, the Government is responsible for all aspects of emergency management. In its name, the responsibility for planning and implementing preventive measures, preparedness, response to emergency situations and elimination of their consequences, was transferred to the joint activity of competent state administration bodies, autonomous provinces and local self-government units. The responsibilities of each of the listed entities are defined by the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, 2018).

In the Republic of Serbia, citizens in emergency situations cannot call a single number for all emergency services, but each emergency service is called on a separate number that differs from service to service. Unfortunately, coordination between dispatch centers is not always effective, which can lead to delays in responding to emergency situations. Also, the current system of identifying and locating callers is not sufficiently developed, which makes it even more difficult for emergency services to respond quickly and accurately in situations where every second counts. In order to improve the situation, it is necessary to develop a better database for monitoring all kinds of hazards, events, emergencies and disasters, as well as to improve the existing system of coordination of emergency services.

The national emergency protection and rescue strategy, which was published in 2011 and expired in 2021, stated that a universal emergency call system called "Number 112" would be introduced. However, this system was not implemented (National strategy for protection and rescue in emergency situations, 2011).

The introduction of that universal system "Number 112 for emergency calls" was supposed to achieve synchronization, quick and efficient response in emergency situations, disasters and other emergency events. This system includes advanced operational procedures, technologically advanced equipment, increased readiness and trained personnel in accordance with European standards.

As pointed out by the authors Karovic, Domazet and Jesic „[...] a particular problem in the Republic of Serbia is that there is no strong public sector, nor is there a well-developed welfare state and open and transparent work at all levels of executive power, including the government.[...] The mentioned authors also state that citizens' trust in local self-government is different, and that the relationship of mutual trust between state bodies is possibly less than in other countries (Karovic et al., 2021).

The effective functioning of the protection and rescue system depends on the quality of human resources and the equipment of the services for preventive and operational response. Unfortunately, the analysis of the current situation shows that both human resources and equipment are not at a satisfactory level. These resources are equally essential and elementary for the successful functioning of the protection and rescue system. Therefore, it is necessary to make an additional effort to improve the quality of human resources and the equipment of the services, so that the protection and rescue system is more efficient and better prepared for any possible situation.

3.2. State of emergency management at the level of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

Based on the research conducted as a result of project no. 142-451-2675/2018-1 dated 07/04/2018. regarding the vulnerability of local self-governments to floods in the territory of AP Vojvodina, where the following local self-governments are included in the survey: Secanj Odzaci, Pancevo, Beocin, Sremska Mitrovica, Becej, Apatin and Backa Palanka, Karovic and Domazet state that, „[...] it is characteristic that the conditions in local self-governments are quite similar and that there are no significant differences. In particular, it can be observed that the local governments, which were taken as a sample, are threatened by floods and that floods are caused by heavy rains and groundwater and that groundwater causes the greatest damage. Floods occur cyclically at intervals of more than 10 years, most often during the months of May and October, but that is not the rule. They can also appear in other months of the year (Karovic & Domazet, 2019).

In particular, it should be emphasized that the damage caused by floods in the local self-governments of AP Vojvodina most often affects agricultural arable land, but urban areas are not spared either. It should be emphasized that, when it comes to preventive measures within local self-governments, especially in connection with flood prevention, the sewage network has not been built at a sufficient level. Also, the built embankments are not of sufficient length or height and are not always functional to prevent flooding.

As stated by the authors Karovic and Domazet „[...] floods that occur in local governments in the area of AP Vojvodina threaten the life and health of the population, property, road and rail traffic, infrastructure for water and electricity supply, sewerage and the telecommunications system are at risk. Although, according to the recorded situation, there is a flood monitoring system in local self-governments, it is not at such a level that it can at any moment provide essential information regarding the flood situation and possible timely measures. This is the weakness of such organized monitoring in relation to the upcoming dangers of possible floods (Karovic & Domazet, 2019).

Based on the recorded situation in local self-governments in the area of AP Vojvodina, it can be concluded that floods are one of the main problems that these self-governments face. Heavy rains and underground water threaten almost the entire area, and the built sewage network is not fully ready to receive such amounts of water. Irregular maintenance and lack of financial resources contribute to endangering the sewage network, and the low level of awareness of the population about the need for preventive action further complicates the situation.

This attitude towards floods is harmful, because floods do not occur often, and their impact can be extremely destructive. Therefore, it is important to invest in taking measures that would prevent floods, and this includes maintaining the sewage network on a regular basis and increasing the population's awareness of the importance of preventive measures.

3.3. The state of emergency management at the local self-government level

The local self-government unit is responsible for, through its organs, and in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, to take care of environmental protection, to adopt programs for the use and protection of natural values and environmental protection programs, and to organize protection from natural disasters and other major disasters, as well as fire protection, and to create conditions for their elimination, i.e. mitigation of their consequence (https://www.divac.com/upload/document/podsetnik_preview.pdf).

As stated in the Methodology for preparation and contents of disaster risk assessment and protection and rescue plan, the plan of the local self-government unit is prepared for the territory of the local self-government unit and contains: early warning and preparedness (readiness); mobilization and activation; protection and rescue by types of danger; external plan for protection against a major accident (if there is a higher-order SEVESO complex on the territory of the local self-government); civil protection measures (warning, evacuation, sheltering, treatment, first and medical aid and field sanitation) and the use of protection and rescue forces and subjects (Methodology for preparation and content of disaster risk assessment and protection and rescue plan, 2019).

Local self-government through the protection and rescue plan should have clearly defined procedures and responsibilities for the work of all bodies and their precise implementation. Based on the treatment of data found in the database of the implemented project entitled: "Model of functioning of local self-government in emergency situations (flood)" no. 142-451-2675/2018-01/01 from July 4, 2018. collected data show: that the organization of local self-government bodies is directly related to the functioning in case of emergency situations caused by floods.

Based on the data from the above-mentioned project, it can be noted that the characteristic elements are primarily manifested in the segments related to the response of local self-government bodies in emergency situations, the existence and functioning of the headquarters for emergency situations caused by floods and the agreed procedure for requesting assistance from the competent authorities at the level of the District and Autonomous provinces.

Considering the state of local self-governments in relation to the organization of local self-government in emergency situations, it is not possible to speak with high reliability about the level of organization, primarily if it is taken into account that many issues have not been resolved in an efficient manner. There are partially plans to check the functioning of local self-government in emergency situations, but this should also be taken with a grain of salt, while the common assessment is that the approved financial resources are not sufficient for local self-government bodies to function successfully in the conditions of an emergency situation caused by floods (Karovic & Domazet, 2019).

Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that the level of organization of local self-government in the event of an emergency situation does not instill much confidence, especially in segments that deal with problems of a financial nature, and mostly of a professional nature. The main challenges are insufficient quality of staff, limited financial resources, unrealistic planning and lack of engagement in solving the flood problem.

Part of the research on the mentioned project refers to the plan of protection and rescue and its functionality, where it can be noted that plans have been made in some local governments, while in most others they are still not available. As the reason for this deficiency, it is stated that the dates ordered by the competent authorities for the preparation of the plans were too burdensome and that the local self-governments had inertia in relation to their preparation. In addition, there is a lack of professional bodies capable of preparing these plans, and the responsibilities of persons and competent bodies for their preparation are not clearly defined.

From the aforementioned research, it can be concluded that in many local governments, protection and rescue plans are often neglected and not sufficiently updated on an annual basis. This can be a risk because the plans do not reflect the actual situation and the actors involved may not be aware of their obligations and responsibilities. In addition, in some cases, plans are drawn up, but they are not sufficiently functional and serve only as a paper formality. These

weaknesses are present in most local governments and attention needs to be paid to this problem in order to strengthen the protection and rescue capacity at the local level.

Based on the situation in local self-governments and an overview of the activities and development of the disaster risk reduction system, a special part that should be focused on is the technical and technological equipment of local self-government, which is necessary for effective action in emergency situations. In the current state, local self-governments do not have sufficient technical and technological equipment, nor adequate means with which they can react in similar situations.

Funding of the protection and rescue system is extremely important, considering that the level of equipment and the speed of response of rescue teams in emergency situations decisively affects the scope and severity of the consequences of certain extraordinary events, that is, the amount of material and any other damage.

4. CONCLUSION

Emergency situations, which are defined in the legal framework of the Republic of Serbia, cause various damages to the social community. The legal framework of emergency situations in the Republic of Serbia defines key elements and responsibilities in such a situation. The declaration of a state of emergency can be caused by various events, such as floods, fires, earthquakes, explosions or other disasters caused by the action of nature or the human factor. All of this requires that society, that is, the state, should be prepared to be able to react in such a situation and organize itself to be able to manage an emergency situation. This means that it is capable of enabling the protection and rescue of the population and material goods in such conditions.

Effective disaster risk reduction and emergency management depends on the quality of human resources and the equipment of the services for preventive and operational response. Unfortunately, the analysis of the current situation shows that both human resources and equipment are not at a satisfactory level. These resources are equally essential and elementary for the successful functioning of the protection and rescue system. Therefore, it is necessary to make an additional effort to improve the quality of human resources and the equipment of the services, so that the protection and rescue system is more efficient and better prepared for any possible situation.

In the paper, it was determined that in the area of AP Vojvodina, floods are one of the main problems that these self-governments face. Although there is a flood monitoring system implemented in local self-governments, it is insufficiently developed to provide comprehensive information on the current flood situation and enable timely taking of adequate measures. This represents the weakness of such organized monitoring in terms of anticipating possible floods and implementing the necessary actions on time.

It can be stated that the level of organization of local self-government in the event of an emergency does not instill much confidence, especially in the segments that deal with problems of a financial nature, and above all of a professional nature. The main challenges are insufficient quality of staff, limited financial resources, unrealistic planning and lack of engagement in solving the flood problem. The lack of engagement may stem from the fact that floods occur sporadically and are not always an actual problem.

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