

THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE SYSTEM OF PROTECTION AND RESCUE IN FIGHTING NATURAL DISASTERS - A CASE STUDY OF THE FLOOD OF 2014 IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: *Natural disasters caused by floods, regardless of today's level of scientific development, cannot be completely prevented. They represent the consequences of natural laws on which man has no decisive and direct influence. What can be undertaken, in certain cases, refers to activities aimed at preventing natural disasters or reducing the damage caused. Given the frequency and devastating effect of floods on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, especially in 2005 and 2014, such a question is certainly gaining importance. For the above reasons, the Republic of Serbia was forced to build an effective protection and rescue system in response to the increasingly frequent occurrence of floods and other natural disasters, and one of the most important parts of the above integral system is precisely the units of the Serbian Armed Forces.*

Key words: *flood, protection, rescue and Serbian Armed Forces*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the region of the Republic of Serbia, floods are a periodic phenomenon, different areas are often affected by this natural disaster. The role of the Serbian Armed Forces in the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management in confronting natural disasters caused by floods is multifaceted, where its basic characteristics such as organization, equipment and training come to the fore. However, units of the Serbian Armed Forces are not the only forces that engage during emergency situations. The Serbian Armed Forces represents only one of the many parts of society whose integration into a unified framework is regulated by normative legal regulations, primarily by the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (hereinafter referred to as the Law) (LDRR and EM, 2018).

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2. THE SYSTEM OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN FIGHTING NATURAL DISASTERS

Threats that can lead to catastrophic consequences for the population, material goods and the environment are all kinds of natural disasters to which no country is immune. It is precisely for this reason that the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management is established in the Republic of Serbia, as part of the National security system of the Republic of Serbia.

Until the adoption of the Law, the role of the individual and the community for responding to the consequences of the disaster, protection and rescue, rights and obligations of both citizens and various organizations in the Republic of Serbia was not clearly defined. Also, with the formation of the sector for emergency situations within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, an effective risk management system is established, the level of ability to prevent the emergence or mitigation of the consequences of emergency situations is increased, that is, the conditions are created for the integration of all available human and material resources into a unique system intended for an organized and comprehensive response to possible challenges, risks and security threats.

The Law defines such a system, which is based on an integrated form of management and organization of system subjects for the implementation of preventive and operational measures in carrying out the tasks of protecting and rescuing people and goods from the consequences of disasters, including recovery measures from those consequences. The basic elements of the system are subjects and forces defined by the Law as necessary resources needed for the successful implementation of protection and rescue tasks.

Subjects, by their actions, and in accordance with laws and other documents that regulate the organization, development, preparation and use of forces and means of protection and rescue, influence the construction of a unique the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The Law on risk reduction recognizes the following subjects: state administration bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, public services, companies and other legal entities and entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, educational institutions and scientific research organizations, public agencies and others who, in accordance with the law, other general acts, plans, programs and other documents, participate in determining measures and activities of importance for risk reduction and emergency management. (LDRR and EM, 2018: article 13.)

The protection and rescue forces, through their engagement, provide an integrated form of management and organization of the subjects of the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management for the implementation of preventive and operational measures in the execution of the tasks of protection and rescue of people and property from the consequences of natural disasters and other accidents, including recovery measures from those consequences.

The Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management defines that the protection and rescue forces are responsible for responding in emergency situations and are composed of: emergency headquarters, civil protection units, fire-rescue units, 112 services, the police, the Serbian Armed Forces , the Red Cross of Serbia, the Mountain Rescue Service, the Fire Brigade Association of Serbia, the Association of Radio Amateurs of Serbia, commissioners, that is to say, deputy commissioners of civil protection, citizens, associations of citizens and organizations whose activities are of special interest to the development and functioning of the system. (LDRR and EM, 2018: article 13.)

3. THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE PROTECTION AND RESCUE SYSTEM

The increasingly frequent occurrence of natural disasters requires, in addition to the usual forces, the active use of units of the Serbian Armed Forces in providing assistance to civil authorities in the joint fight against the devastating consequences caused by strong earthquakes, large floods, droughts and snowfalls. The manner and conditions under which the Serbian Armed Forces are prepared and used in support of civil authorities in the event of natural disasters, technical-technological and other accidents are defined by the Law and doctrinal documents of different hierarchical levels. (Bajrami & Slavkovic, 2016).

In accordance with the provisions of the Law, the Serbian Armed Forces is also recognized as one of the key elements of the aforementioned system. The Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management considers the rational (gradual) use of forces in countering internal security threats by enabling the use of the Serbian Armed Forces in cases where the available forces for protection and rescue are insufficient. (LDRR and EM, 2018: article 6.)

In conditions when other forces and means of the system are not sufficient for the protection and rescue of people, material and other goods from the consequences of disasters, and at the request of the Republic Headquarters for emergency situations, the Ministry of Defense ensures the participation of its organizational units, commands, units and institutions of the Armed Forces to provide assistance in protection and rescue, in accordance with the law, except in a state of war and emergency. (LDRR and EM, 2018: article 26.)

When units of the Serbian Armed Forces participate in protection and rescue, they are commanded by their competent officers, in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the headquarters for emergency situations, which manages and coordinates protection and rescue. (LDRR and EM, 2018: article 26.)



Figure 1. a) firefighting by helicopter b) strengthening of embankments

Source: a) <https://www.rtvbn.com/3872410/rs-treba-opremu-za-gasenje-pozara> and b) <https://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/6615/pripadnici-vojske-srbije-angazovani-u-odbrani-od-poplava-6615>

Doctrinal decrees, in addition to war and state of emergency, provide for the possibility of using the Army in secular conditions - emergency situations, in accordance with the law and the decisions of competent state authorities. Making a decision on the use of the Serbian Armed Forces is conditioned by the state of security in the region and the world, the degree of threat to the country, the available defense resources and spatial and weather conditions. (Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces, 2010) The basic doctrinal solutions, stated in Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces, provide that parts of the Serbian Armed Forces can be put on standby and used (planning, preparation and execution of combat and non-combat operations) in the

event of a declaration of a state of emergency due to natural and other accidents and disasters, based on the decision of the Chief of General Staff or the competent senior officer, and by special authorization of the President of the Republic. (Doctrine of Serbian Armed Forces, 2010) However, for the purposes of providing support to civil authorities, the Serbian Armed Forces does not develop special forces, but uses existing parts of the Army for the purpose of protecting and rescuing people, material and cultural assets from natural disasters, technical-technological accidents, the consequences of terrorism and other major accidents, which, according to the basic purpose, they can successfully perform those tasks. Also, the doctrinal provisions stipulate that the Army, unlike in combat operations where it plays a leading role, in non-combat operations has a supporting role for other forces of the defense system. (Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces, 2010) In such circumstances, the success of non-combat operations primarily depends on the achieved level of established cooperation and coordination with the state authorities that lead all the forces in the threatened area and on the level of training and equipment of the units of the Serbian Armed Forces for implementation of non-combat activities (Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces, 2010).

4. THE USE OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES IN PROVIDING MOVEMENT TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES DURING THE FLOODS OF 2014

During May 2014, record amounts of rainfall were recorded, more than 200 mm fell in the third week alone, which is the equivalent of three months of rainfall under normal circumstances. The heavy rainfall caused a sudden rise in water levels on the rivers (Sava river, Tamnava river, Kolubara river, Jadar river, Zapadna Morava river, Velika Morava river, Mlava river and Pek river), and the consequences were immeasurable. - landslides, collapsed bridges, collapsed houses, roads and many other damages. All of this made the normal functioning of life in the threatened area significantly more difficult. In such circumstances, the rescue of people, animals, material goods as well as the protection of the environment represented a huge challenge and required the engagement of a large number of people, means and equipment. Among other things, numerous units of the Serbian Armed Forces were engaged, with the aim of providing assistance to civil authorities during the May floods. Forces and resources from the River Flotilla, Special Brigade, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Army Brigade, 2nd and 3rd Training Centar (TC), Rasin Brigade, 5.bMP, TC Lo, Central Logistic Bases and 250th Missile Brigade for AAO made a great contribution to the implementation of search and rescue tasks, the evacuation of the population and the distribution of vital foodstuffs in the flooded area (Bajrami, 2022).



Figure 2. a) population evacuation b) sanitation of the field

Source: a) <https://www.czkd.org/2014/09/follow-up-obrenovac-je-prisutan> and b) <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/tema-dana/ko-sta-radi-ovo-su-sluzbe-koje-stupaju-u-akciju-posle-poplava/9f81eb4>

The Serbian Army was engaged in the tasks of protection, rescue and removal of the consequences. The capacities of the Armed Forces are engaged in the area of 12 administrative districts (Moravicki, Kolubarski, City of Belgrade, Podunavski, Macvanski, Rasinski, Zlatiborski, Raski, Branicevski, Pomoravski, Toplicki and Nisavski) in 39 municipalities in 50 locations. Over 2,500 members of the Armed Forces and 185 larger assets (engineering machines, helicopters, boats, amphibious vehicles, motor vehicles) were engaged daily. The forces of the Air Force and Air Force carried out 553 aircraft flights with about 200 hours of sorties (Simovic, 2016).

Assistance to the civil authorities during the floods in the first phase was provided by the implementation of the following tasks: evacuation of the population, reception and treatment of vulnerable persons, water supply, delivery of food and quartermaster's funds, engineering works on the construction and strengthening of embankments and roads, installation of bridge crossing points, biological decontamination, veterinary supervision, rehabilitation of landslides, water pumping, military-police affairs, medical care and coordination of rescue teams of foreign armed forces (Simovic, 2016).

The Serbian Armed Forces hired helicopters, motor vehicles, pumps, boats and water tankers. Members of the army delivered vital foodstuffs, blankets and beds to the vulnerable population. In just one day, they filled more than 2,000 sandbags to strengthen the ramparts. Military forces are engaged in the work of evacuating the captured population, providing medical support and sanitizing the terrain. Members of the ABHO units in cooperation with the veterinary service of the Serbian Armed Forces, the republican veterinary inspection, units of the MUP and the Emergency Staff were engaged in the tasks of cleaning up the biologically decontaminated area and agricultural goods in the area of the municipality of Ub. Also, in order to prevent the spread of diseases and infections from the contamination of dead animals, fecal waters and contaminated sources of water supply, for sanitation, biological decontamination, disinfection, disinsection and deratization of flooded areas, experts from the ABH service were sent to the field to assist civil authorities.

Table 1: Overview of the engagement of members of the RF during the May floods (*Source: Bajrami, 2022.*)

Date	Forces to command	Forces to carry out the operation	Forces to logistical support	Total
14.05.	14	92 persons		106
15.05.	26	92 persons		118
16.05.	24	124 persons		148
17.05.	24	169 persons		193
18.05.	26	170 persons	3	199
19.05.	22	114 persons	3	139
20.05.	25	137 persons	3	165
21.05.	25	116 persons	3	144
22.05.	21	121 persons	3	145
23.05.	21	95 persons	3	119
24.05.	5	53		58
TOTAL	233	1283	18	1534

The River Flotilla of the Serbian Armed Forces made a great contribution in providing assistance to civil authorities during the May floods, especially in the territory of Obrenovac

and Sabac. Specifically, for the realization of protection and rescue tasks, the River Flotilla in the period from 14.05. until May 24, 2014, when the intensity of resource strain was at its maximum during the day, on average, it hired about 139 people. The maximum daily stress was on May 18, 2014. year with a total of 199 persons. In total, the River Flotilla had 1,534 daily engagements of its members on tasks from the third mission of the Serbian Armed Forces (table 1) (Bajrami, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

Previous experiences point to the fact that emergency situations caused by natural disasters such as snowfall, earthquakes and floods were the most common causes of endangering the general safety of our society. A very important place in the fight against natural disasters, especially when it comes to large floods, is occupied by the Serbian Armed Forces with its human, material and organizational capacities. Its contribution is especially expected in the implementation of tasks such as: evacuation of the population, material goods and livestock from areas threatened by floods, primarily by water, and partly by land; aid distribution; isolation of the endangered zone; taking care of the injured and sick; providing medical assistance; rehabilitation of the endangered zone; fire extinguishing; transport; construction of embankments; provision of important hydronavigation facilities on inland waterways; restoration of infrastructure and other activities in a specific emergency situation. As a result of the above, we come to the conclusion that the Serbian Armed Forces, in addition to the fact that it is defined by legal regulations as an entity that provides support, is still recognized as a key element of success in the implementation of the tasks of protecting and rescuing the population and material goods during natural disasters.

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