

## PERCEPTION OF CIVIL DEFENSE’S STATE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Review paper

**Abstract:** *In years of wars, political tensions, pandemics, energy crises and nuclear threats, the key aspects of civil defense are being re-examined. From the practice of most global community countries, it can be seen that we are entering an era of re-establishment of civil defense, which until now, except in Sweden and Switzerland, whose civil defense systems are at an enviable level, almost did not exist. This paper research the key aspects of the civil defense perception in the Republic of Serbia in the context of contemporary security threats. The perception of civil defense by the relevant subjects represents a complex process of analyzing, interpreting and reviewing the possibilities of prevention and response to all types of crisis situations and enables the research of factors that influence the change in that perception, as well as the ways in which civil defense subjects can communicate with the public in order to improve understanding, trust and cooperation in this areas.*

**Key words:** civil defense, Republic of Serbia, perception, state

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Security endangerment factors at the global, regional and local level condition the creation of threats to the security of the Republic. All of them lead to destructive activities aimed at the protected values of society, which requires that an effective system of their protection - the civil defense system - be established at the level of the Republic of Serbia. The security threats faced by the Republic of Serbia in recent years require the obligation of all levels of the state organization to create a civil defense system that will be able to respond to them with its institutional and functional organization, and its effectiveness primarily depends on the perception of the importance of the establishment and development of this system. The establishment of a strategically important system, such as the civil defense system, implies the definition of clear postulates on which it will develop and function.

By looking at the existing normative-legal regulations and based on previous research, it is not possible to get a clear picture of the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia. The problems of the civil defense system have not attracted the interest of many authors, and there is also no progress in the normative regulation of this area. Civil defense is not organized on a

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systemic approach, it does not have its own organizational and training structure, and the dual responsibilities over the system, which almost does not exist in practice, create additional confusion. The only thing that can be unequivocally concluded is that civil defense represents, in addition to the military, one of the defense pillars of the Republic of Serbia, that, considering the characteristics of modern challenges, risks and threats, its importance is significantly increasing and that it needs to be normatively and legally regulated in as soon as possible in order to obtain an efficient system, capable of reducing the threat of protected values.

The Republic of Serbia civil defense system is a strategic component intended for defense, protection and rescue in peace, war and state of emergency. In recent years, the need for its comprehensive reform within the unified national security system has been recognized, which would ensure the efficient implementation of the function of meeting the needs of the army, state authorities and citizens, and the function of protecting and rescuing the civilian population and material resources. With the growing role and importance of the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia within the national security system, the need for its faster reform, development and improvement is also growing.

## **2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

The phrase "civil defense" was first mentioned in 1940 in England as the name for the complex protection of the population and elimination of the consequences of bombing (Kastratovic, 2015). In modern theory, there are different definitions and understandings of this term, but they all have in common that it is about the protection of the civilian population and material resources, and that civil structures of society primarily participate in this. As in the world, in our country the phrase "civil defense" is defined in different ways. Jakovljevic, under the system of civil defense means: „an extensive set of non-military measures that ensure the defense, protection and rescue of the population, material and cultural assets and the operation of institutions in situations of drastically impaired functioning of the state system, that is, in war and in conditions of natural disasters and technical-technological an accident in peace” (Jakovljevic, 2006), while Misovic and Kovac define civil defense as „a set of well-organized and functionally coordinated elements, whose actions fulfill the prerequisites for successfully overcoming crisis situations in peacetime and wartime conditions and ensure the best possible conditions for the functioning of all state institutions, especially those that provide services to the entire population” (Misovic & Kovac, 2006). The defense strategy of the Republic of Serbia determines that "civil defense is a part of the defense of the Republic of Serbia focused on preparations for the defense and defense of the Republic of Serbia with non-military means." It is implemented in peace, state of emergency and war through a set of measures and activities aimed at ensuring the successful functioning of state bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, business companies and other legal entities; creation of conditions for life and work of citizens; meeting the needs of the defense forces; planning and implementation of citizen training plans for the defense of the country; coordination of protection and rescue operations; execution of military, labor and material obligations, as well as mobilization (Strategy of defense of RS, 2019), while in the Law on Defense it is defined as „part of the defense of the Republic of Serbia, which includes a set of measures and activities aimed at: preparations for the defense and defense of the Republic of Serbia with non-military means, ensuring the successful functioning of state bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, business companies and other legal entities, protection and rescue and provision of conditions for the life and work of citizens and meeting the needs of the defense forces in a state of emergency and war (Law on Defense of the RS, 2018).

Civil defense is an integral part of the country's defense and protection system, which represents a form of civil organization of the state and society with the main goal of protection and defense of protected values. It is an indispensable part of the unified defense system of the Republic of Serbia. Based on the above, it can be concluded that civil defense should represent a set of well-organized and functionally coordinated elements, whose actions fulfill the prerequisites for successfully overcoming various crisis situations in peacetime and wartime conditions. In modern security conditions, the direction of civil defense, its goals and tasks have changed significantly, which must lead to the inclusion of civil defense in the broadest aspects of the protection of all the values of society in all crisis situations.

Civil defense, as a part of the concept of total defense, implies organization on systemic bases and principles that are defined by normative regulations so that the system can fulfill all its functions. The perception of every citizen of the Republic of Serbia, as the most important and most numerous elements of the system, about the place and role in the execution of civil defense tasks at any level of the state organization is a mirror of the possibilities and level of development of the civil defense system and is the starting point for justifying the need and aspiration for its development. As a system that is implemented at all levels of the organization of society, civil defense is faced with numerous problems - from the lack of consensus on the definition of civil defense to inadequate normative-legal regulation and its implementation in practice. It is necessary to redefine civil defense in strategic documents, to organize it as a system with all the necessary elements by normative regulation, to establish a comprehensive system of planning and organization in order to primarily change the perception of all subjects about the importance of civil defense, and then to make the system, which is of strategic importance for the Republic of Serbia, has unequivocally taken its place in the national security system.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS DESCRIPTION AND APPLICATION**

The research results on the paper topic were obtained by applying all the basic methods of scientific thinking and research. Of the general scientific methods, the hypothetical-deductive method, historical, comparative and statistical method was applied. Data collection for research purposes was carried out using the method of content analysis and the method of examination. The research instrument - a survey - was used for the research. Data on the perception of the elements that are necessary for the existence of the civil defense system and the impact of those elements on the development of the system were collected using the survey method (Mladenovic, 2023).

Due to the specificity of the research subject, for the research participants ie. experts in the subject area were chosen from the organizational units of the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Armed Forces, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, state bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, public companies, business companies and other legal entities, entrepreneurs and civilians, i.e. all subjects of the civil system defense. The opinion was also requested from persons who had professional experience in the field of civil defense. As experts in the subject area were chosen persons whose competences were determined by a combination of the functional and behavioral competence model, which implies that experts in the subject area are not only highly qualified in the field of the subject of research, but also possess the ability to learn quickly, adapt to changes, communicate effectively and improve interpersonal relations (Rodriguez & et al., 2002). The functional model of competencies is associated with the quality of work performance in a specific field of work and the possession of knowledge and skills that enable above-average performance in its performance (Wickramasinghe & Zoyza, 2011). The behavioral competency model refers to the behaviors and abilities of subject area experts such as attitudes, motivations and personal

traits. The survey of experts in the subject area was carried out by filling out a questionnaire with a prior agreement and explanation of the method, goals and significance of the research. The questionnaire contains elements for assessing the competencies of experts in the field (A Global Competency Framework Human Resources Implementation Guide, 2014) based on a combination of functional and behavioral (Boyatzis, (2008)) models for determining competencies (Korn Ferry Leadership Architect Global Competency Framework Legacy Mapping, 2014). Competences of experts are determined in two parts. In the first part, the level of education of the respondent, years of work experience in the field of the research subject, title, position and organization in which the respondent is employed, the sector to which belongs, received awards of the respondent, as well as scientific and professional publications in the field of the research subject. In the second part of the determination of competences, a self-assessment of the competences is carried out for which descriptions (descriptors) are given. The expert in the subject area within the framework of this research possesses competencies according to both models. By combining the functional and behavioral model for determining competencies, were selected subject matter experts who:

- have comprehensive knowledge of the research subject and the ability to use it effectively,
- can perform a wide range of tasks within the subject of research,
- can improve and progress in the field of the research subject,
- possess appropriate personal and professional values and abilities that enable obtaining reliable information.

A statistical method was used to present the research results. In this research, the sample size was determined using the statistical method, the numerical data were analyzed and the obtained results were processed. This method made it possible to systematize the data in order to observe certain regularities and cause-and-effect relationships between the perception of the civil defense system and the level of its development in the Republic of Serbia. The research was carried out on a selected partial statistical sample, composed of part of the subjects of the strategic, operational and tactical level of management in the Republic of Serbia. The statistical unit in the sample consists of individuals - experts in the subject area from the organizational units of the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, state bodies, public administration bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, companies and other legal entities, as well as citizens.

A representative sample was determined based on the formula for calculating the sample size in cases when it is unknown or too large (Field, 2009), (the civil defense system includes all human and material resources of the Republic of Serbia):

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

where in:

n – sample size

z - normalized deviation, determined based on the selected confidence level, which in this research is 95%, so the value of z = 1.96.

p – variation for the sample ie. the probability that respondents will choose a particular answer. Given that 5 answers were offered in the survey, the variation amounts to 20%, i.e. p = 0.2

q = 1-p which means q is 0.8

e – represents the permissible error. The permissible error in the research is 10%, so e=0.1

$$n = \frac{1,96^2 \cdot 0,2 \cdot 0,8}{0,1^2}$$

$$n = \frac{0,614656}{0,01}$$

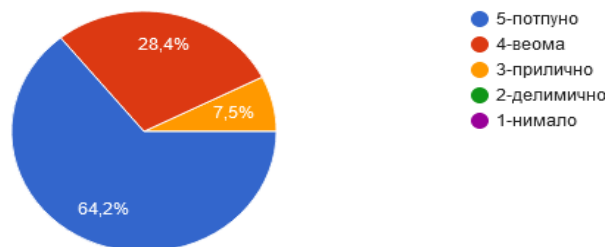
$$n = 61,4656$$

The size of the representative sample according to the given formula is 61. A total of 73 questionnaires were sent, and 67 responses were received.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The conducted research resulted in the perception of the Republic of Serbia's civil defense by relevant subjects at all levels of the state organization, as well as the necessary elements for its development and re-establishment (Mladenovic, 2023).

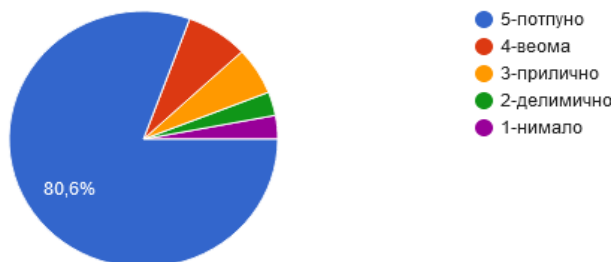
In accordance with the assessed challenges, risks and threats, the Republic of Serbia should establish an efficient and effective system of civil defense, because civil defense is an activity of strategic importance for the Republic of Serbia in the opinion of experts in the subject area (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Civil defense is an activity of strategic importance for the Republic of Serbia

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

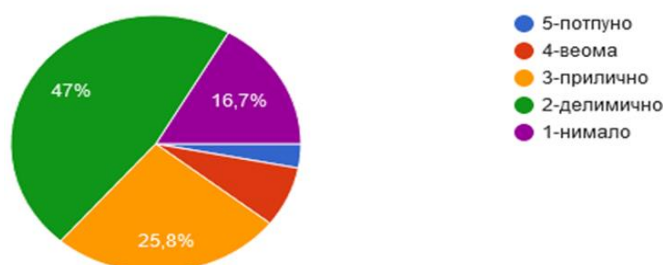
The opinion of most respondents is that the establishment and improvement of the civil defense system begins with determining its place and role within the defense system, which is currently not the case in practice (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** It is necessary for the civil defense system to exist within the defense system of the Republic of Serbia

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

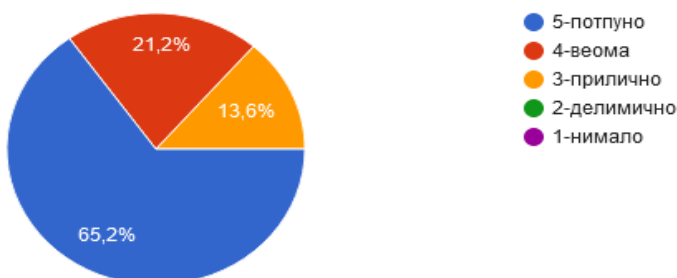
The results of the research showed that the opinion of most respondents is that the Republic of Serbia does not currently have a fully developed civil defense system in practice (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** In practice, the Republic of Serbia has an efficient and effective civil defense system

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

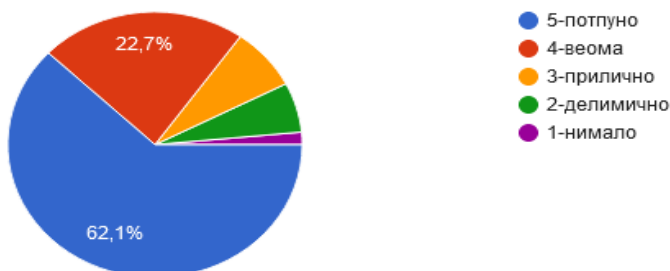
Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that it is necessary, in a systematized way, to establish a comprehensive normative-legal framework of the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia as a primary step in its construction and development (Figure 4). 65.2% of respondents fully agree with this statement.



**Figure 4.** It is necessary, in a systematized way, to establish a comprehensive normative-legal framework of the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

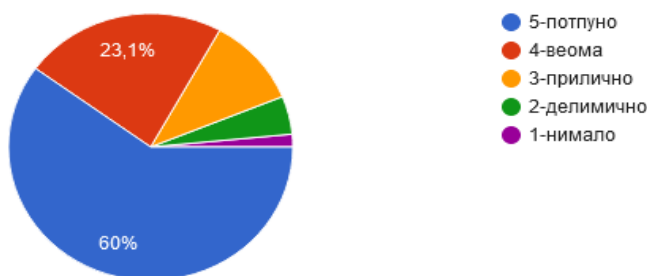
The organization of the civil defense system should follow the territorial structure of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. it should be developed according to the administrative-territorial division of the state and be represented at all levels of the state organization according to the opinion of 62.1% of experts in the subject area. 22.7% of respondents strongly agree with this statement, while four quite agree, four partially agree, while two do not agree at all (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The civil defense system should be organized according to the territorial organization of the Republic of Serbia

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

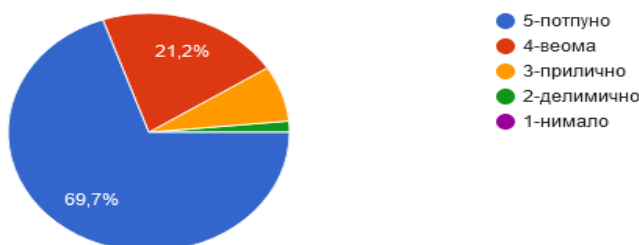
The establishment of the governing body of the civil defense system should also be carried out at all other levels of the state organization, in which 60% of experts in the subject area completely agree (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** It is necessary to establish a body for managing the civil defense system at all levels of the state organization

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

A prerequisite for the active participation of all subjects in the civil defense system is an appropriate education system (Figure 7). That it is necessary to establish an education system for the needs of the functioning of the civil defense system at all levels of education, 69.7% of experts in the subject area completely agree, 21.2% of them agree at a high level, three partially agree, while one respondent partially agrees, but there is no area expert who expressed disagreement with the given statement.



**Figure 7.** It is necessary to establish an education system for the needs of the functioning of the civil defense system at all levels of education

*Source: Mladenovic, 2023*

The civil defense system, in accordance with its goals and tasks, is a very complex system that requires comprehensive preparation and permanent development of all its elements. Since there is no detailed structure and adequate organization of the system in the normative regulations of the Republic of Serbia, this research has created certain conditions for its construction and improvement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The perception of the civil defense's state in the Republic of Serbia indicates the need for the establishment of a system, its further improvement and harmonization with the modern security situation. The current situation shows the need to take the initiative and invest in forming a system, training and equipping human resources, modernizing equipment and establishing effective preparations for responding to all crisis situations, because the (non)existing system indicates the need for better coordination between different levels of management, as well as for greater involvement of citizens in preventive activities. In this context, it is important to continue strengthening all system capacities. All steps towards

achieving a comprehensive and efficient system cannot be taken at once, but priorities must first be determined that will enable further development and progress. To initiate the establishment of the system, the purpose of the existence of civil defense must first be defined, then it is necessary to determine the state of existing and required human and material resources, and after that to precisely define the normative framework and ensure coordination with all relevant entities, in order to carry out implementation of the system in practice. Given that it represents a system of general social importance, its functioning, establishment and development must be primarily scientifically based. This, in addition to everything, requires the creation of a completely new perception of the system, raising of the level of security culture for everyone in this area, and the formation of a completely new profession that will enable the efficient development of the system.

Based on the presented research on the perception of civil defense state in the Republic of Serbia, it can be concluded that the establishment and development of this system reflects a vital role in ensuring an effective response to potential crisis situations, while at the same time strengthening society's ability to protect its citizens and resources in accordance with modern standards and best practice.

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