

The prospects for the protection of civilian population in Poland in the conditions of a potential armed conflict

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Abstract— One of the fundamental tasks of state institutions in conditions of armed conflict is the protection of the population. In the light of international and national law, this task is dealt with in Poland by the Civil Defence of the Country. The aim of the article is to present the condition of this organisation and to assess its ability to fulfil the assigned mission. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of NIK reports and own empirical research.

Keywords— security, civil defence, armed conflict, civil protection

I. INTRODUCTION

The current war between two of our direct neighbours, Ukraine and Russia, demonstrates that the thesis that Poland is a country that is situated outside the zone of potential conflicts, which has been promoted for years, should be considered as fictitious. Moreover, the cruelty of the military combat that takes place right outside our borders directs our attention to the need to improve the standards and efficiency of protecting the population and property of civilians in the face of the risk of assault of a foreign aggressor. This task is vested in an institution that has been neglected for years, i.e. the Civil Defence. It is no secret that currently, the organisation is in very poor condition. These opinions, which are often repeated by security experts, are reflected in the reports issued by the Supreme Chamber of Control in the previous decade. This knowledge should not, however, stop us from asking the following questions: What is the actual potential of civil defence in Poland? Is civil defence able to ensure the protection of population in the conditions of a potential military conflict? For the purposes of this study, the authors attempted to find answers to the above questions based on the analysis of source materials: reports of the Supreme Chamber of Control, reports of the Head of the National Civil Defence, and academic

publications on the protection of population. As knowledge obtained in this way proved to be insufficient, empirical research was also conducted.

The research was conducted in cooperation between the Faculty of Security, Logistics, and Management of the Military University of Technology and Pracownia Badań Opini Społecznej (Centre for Analysis of the Public Opinion) PrzySłowiu. Research was conducted in local territorial self-government units in Poland with use of the CAWI – Computer-Assisted Web Interview method. This method makes it possible to reach a large group of respondents who are scattered over a large area within a short time, while maintaining a high level of detailedness of the obtained information. The survey was based on a questionnaire that contained both open and closed questions. The survey participants were employees of departments and units that are responsible for issues related to security and defence in local territorial self-government units on the level of municipalities and poviats. The group of respondents was selected based on the objectives of the research projects, whose aim was to specify the main problems of the organisation and functioning of the defence system in self-government units. Even though the issue of Civil Defence is only a fragment of the research project, it provides an exhaustive presentation of data about the discussed problem. As a result of the research, 595 responses were obtained. The survey was conducted from July to September 2021.

II. PROTECTION OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION DURING MILITARY CONFLICTS IN THE LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

War is always cruel and it brings threats for the living beings that exist in the area of its influence. In military conflicts that

took place over the last centuries, the number of casualties among civilians was usually the same as among soldiers (Leitenberg 2006). The more lethal, easy-to-use and area-based the weapons became, the more bystanders were killed by military actions. The largest damages among the population which, in fact, did not take part in combat, were caused during the Second World War. While the total number of casualties among soldiers was estimated at 21-25 million, the number of civilians who were killed was between 50 and 55 million (Kesternich, Siflinger, Smith, Winter 2012). Not all of them died because of the wounds, but each one of them was a victim of military actions and the destruction, which additionally caused diseases and starvation. The mortality rate among innocent civilians led to the need to define certain rules that would put a limit to the previously unlimited cruelty of wars. One of many consequences of the attempts to transform the world after the shock of World War II was the adoption of such principles in form of the International Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts (Cohen 2012) that was sanctioned by the Geneva Conventions in 1949. The laws supplemented the previously concluded international agreements that regulated the principles of conduct during military conflicts and whose origins dated back to the year 1864 (Bugnion 2013). While the older arrangements focused mainly on the standards of treating prisoners of war, wounded soldiers, and sanitary personnel, the 4th Geneva Convention in 1949 also defined the rules of protecting civilians during the war (Harahap, Sudiro, Kristin 2020). These legal standards were expanded by the Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005 and by other legislative acts (Rose 2007).

In the light of these regulations that were adopted by most countries (Tomuschat 2010), civilians are protected from any manifestations of aggressive actions. Therefore, it is forbidden to use threats and to attack non-military facilities and people who are not soldiers, both individually and en masse. All acts of violence against civilians are forbidden, even if they are a collateral effect of attacks on military targets. Due to that, commanders who plan an armed attack must ensure that their offensive will not bring danger to civilian bystanders or their property. The same obligations apply to the defending party, who should not place military targets in the civilian space. Similarly, in the conditions of occupation, certain rules should be introduced to ensure that the fundamental rights of the civilian population are respected. They include the guarantee of retaining life, health, and personal dignity. Therefore, it is forbidden to use physical aggression against civilians, to use any forms of coercion, tortures, mutilation, corporal punishment, humiliation, any attacks on morality (including forcing individuals to engage in prostitution), take hostages, and use collective responsibility. It is also unacceptable to seize the property of the civilian population and to relocate civilians (with the exception of evacuation due to security reasons). On the other hand, it is expected that the continuity of operations of the legal system will be guaranteed with respect to, at least, civil law, family law, and labour law. The norms mentioned above are only an outline of the principles that define the conduct of the parties to the military conflict towards civilians.

Nevertheless, they point to the essence of these rules. Parties that engage in combat and occupy a certain area are obliged to respect the laws of its inhabitants (who are not directly involved in military operations) to the extent that does not differ significantly from the previous rules, on which their social existence was based.

Unfortunately, the beautiful notion of human rights is not reflected in reality during the war. No war is humanitarian, just like a person who is in the midst of a killing rage is not reasonable or law-abiding. Contemporary wars, such as those in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Ukraine, also provide proof of the propensity for cruelty in people who remain in constant contact with death and threats to their lives, which is characteristic of soldiers during military conflicts. War crimes and actions that are far from humanitarian occur during every armed conflict, and the civilian population is always exposed to the brutality and lack of inhibitions of the party that occupies their land. For such is unfortunately human flawed nature that, without strong and restrictive legal rules, we are capable of doing our fellow men the worst of wrongs. The closest evidence of such cruelty lies right beyond our Eastern border, where we are witnessing Russian aggression on Ukraine. The scale of crimes committed by the aggressors that show that they are deliberately breaking the international humanitarian law is shocking. In the last year of the conflict, evidence was provided proving intentional attacks on civilian facilities, mass extermination of the civilian population in certain towns and villages and large-scale abductions of minor citizens of Ukraine. These crimes take place contrary to all humanitarian standards and without any hope that the guilty parties will be punished in the near future.

In the face of such brutality of military operations, nations have the right to take actions with the aim to protect the civil population, regardless of the actions of their own troops. This obligation results, by the way, from the Geneva Conventions. Here, in the First Additional Protocol concerning the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, drawn up on June 8 1977 in Geneva (Journal of Laws of 1992, No. 41, item 175), defines the notion of the institution established for this purpose, always marked by the same symbol, enjoying the same legal protection, and having the same duties, in every country that respects the International Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts. This refers to civil defence, which should function in every country. This is usually respected in countries with a strong democratic mandate. This organisation that is extremely important for the national security was also established in Poland. Its operational capacity and self-organisation reflect the capacity of the state to guarantee the security of its citizens in the conditions of the most dangerous potential threat, i.e., the war.

III. CIVIL DEFENCE IN THE POLISH NATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

The notion of civil defence was defined in Art. 61 of the First Additional Protocol as „the performance of (...) humanitarian tasks intended to protect the civilian population against the dangers, and to help it to recover from the immediate effects, of

hostilities or disasters and also to provide the conditions necessary for its survival” (Górski 2016). These humanitarian tasks were defined in detail, and they include: warning, evacuation, management of shelters, management of blackout measures, rescue and medical services, including first aid, and religious assistance, fire-fighting, detection and marking of danger areas, decontamination and similar protective measures, provision of emergency accommodation and supplies, emergency assistance in the restoration and maintenance of order in distressed areas, emergency repair of indispensable public utilities, emergency disposal of the dead, and assistance in the preservation of objects essential for survival. These actions belong to the competences of “civil defence organisations”, which (together with their personnel), should be treated by the parties to the potential conflict with special respect, and their rights should be respected and protected.

Poland has become a signatory of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention of September 19 1991. The competences of the national Civil Defence are similar to those listed in the international document. Its tasks are defined by the Act on the universal duty of defence of the Republic of Poland of 1967. Art. 137 of the Act defines the mission of the organisation, i.e., “defending the population, workplaces and public utilities, cultural heritage, rescuing and providing emergency aid to victims of the war and assistance in combating natural disasters and threats to the environment as well as removing their effects”. The Act also defines the manner of organisation of the National Civil Defence (OCK), describing its structure in Art. 138. The structure is based on formations appointed in accordance with the territorial division of the country by self-government and government authorities. The subsequent article of the Act (Art. 139) seems, however, to refer to the general population of citizens, whose duties in the civil defence include not only serving in its formations, but also education for security and undergoing training in general self-defence of the population. Therefore, residents of Poland are obliged to prepare, as part of civil defence, to provide an adequate response in the event of emerging specific threats.

The structure of the civil defence in Poland is described in detail in the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of June 25 2002 on the detailed scope of activity of the Head of the National Civil Defence and the Heads of civil defence of voivodeships, poviats, and municipalities. The activity of the Head of the National Civil Defence includes mainly supervision and control. It is the heads of the regional units (in voivodeships, poviats, and municipalities) who are vested with the obligation to realise the mission of civil defence in practice, which should be proven by actual achievements. It is them who prepare the plans of activity of Civil Defence formations in the relevant territorial units in situations of war, peace, or crisis. They are also responsible for educating and preparing the population to react to threats, organising shelters and the storage of necessary emergency supplies (food, clothing, decontamination supplies, etc.). They also create solutions to provide emergency protection of citizens (medical, religious assistance, transport and order services, etc.). In Poland, the following rule was also adopted: the Heads of regional Civil

Defence formations are the Voivodes at the voivodeship level, and the Starostes and Heads of Municipalities (or Presidents and Mayors of towns) in the respective territorial self-government units (Sikora 2015). The Chief of the National Civil Defence is, by virtue of office, the Chief Commander of the National Fire Brigades (Olejarczyk 2014).

IV. THE POTENTIAL OF THE NATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE IN THE LIGHT OF DATA OBTAINED BY CONTROL AUTHORITIES

Interestingly, the Act on common defence duty that was fundamental for the functioning of civil defence was replaced by the new Act on the defence of Homeland of March 11 2022, which, however, does not contain any provisions concerning civil defence. It is intended that they should be included in the proposed Act on the protection of population and the state of natural disaster. However, this law has not been adopted yet, although the draft of February 20 2023 is available online. Therefore, civil defence is not legitimised by valid legal acts of the higher rank. However, its functioning is still defined by the implementation regulations to the previous Act, which have not been repealed and do not have a specified expiration date. As a result, we are dealing with an organisational chaos, which, in a way reflects, like a lens, other numerous problems of Polish civil defence. Their existence is confirmed by the conclusions from the reports of the Supreme Chamber of Control, and they may even be found in the reports by the Head of the National Civil Defence, which used to be disclosed to the public in the previous decade.

The situation of the Civil Defence in Poland is reflected in the report of the Supreme Chamber of Control of 2012. The report contains a highly critical assessment of the preparation of the Civil Defence to perform its statutory tasks. It also mentions multiple irregularities in the functioning of the organisation. The report points out the lack of competence of the central authority, i.e., the Head of the National Civil Defence, who had failed to define the objectives for the civil defence plans of voivodeships, poviats, and municipalities. Another deficiency was the “failure to define the standards with respect to supplying equipment, technical resources, and uniforms necessary to perform the tasks of civil defence to the organs and formations of civil defence” (Przygotowanie struktur obrony cywilnej do realizacji zadań w okresie wojny i pokoju, KPB-4101-02/2011, Nr ewid. 5/2012/P/11/083/KPB). It was also noted that the equipment resources of civil defence formations did not ensure the ability to perform the entrusted tasks due to the scale of wear. The work of heads of local civil defence structures (on all organisational levels) was also assessed negatively, as the plans and solutions possessed by them were outdated or incomplete in the context of changing economic, administrative, and infrastructural conditions (Przygotowanie struktur obrony cywilnej do realizacji zadań w okresie wojny i pokoju, KPB-4101-02/2011, Nr ewid. 5/2012/P/11/083/KPB). Educating the population in common self-defence was presented as one of particularly neglected areas of responsibility of Civil defence. Some self-governments

did not fulfil this task at all, while others limited their activities to organising “lectures” at schools and preschools and to distributing brochures and posters (Przygotowanie struktur obrony cywilnej do realizacji zadań w okresie wojny i pokoju, KPB-4101-02/2011, Nr ewid. 5/2012/P/11/083/KPB). This was confirmed by the annual report of the Head of National Civil Defence of 2015, according to which in 2014, over 752 thousand people were educated on the topic and participated in approx. 22 thousand various educational activities related to civil defence. This included over 6 thousand trainings in common self-defence, which were attended by 447 663 participants (Ocena przygotowań w zakresie ochrony ludności i obrony cywilnej w Polsce za 2014 r.). In 2017, 10 thousand trainings on this subject took place, with nearly 670 thousand participants (Ocena przygotowań w zakresie ochrony ludności i obrony cywilnej w Polsce za 2017 r.).

The reports of the Head of the National Civil Defence also confirm that Polish civilians will not find a safe place to hide from a potential military threat. According to data presented in 2010 “in the territory of 15 voivodeships (data from the Masovian voivodeship were unavailable) there are 35 467 shelter structures with a total capacity of 1 667 970 places. Only 5 574 out of the total number are shelters, which contain places for a total of 875 762 people. The other 29 893 structures are hiding places, which provide rook for a total of 792 208 people (Ocena stanu przygotowania obrony cywilnej w Polsce. Stan na dzień 31 grudnia 2011 r.). This means that in 2010, the shelter infrastructure provided coverage for only 4.37% of the population on the national scale (2.30% in shelters, 2.07% in hiding places) (Ocena stanu przygotowania obrony cywilnej w Polsce. Stan na dzień 31 grudnia 2011 r.). Even worse, the condition of these structures is deteriorating with every passing year. In 2014, in the territory of Poland there were “20 835 shelter structures, with a total capacity of 1 134 411 places” that covered, overall “only 2.94% of the need for shelter places on the national scale, of which 1.41% are places in shelters, and 1.53 in hiding places” (Ocena stanu przygotowania obrony cywilnej w Polsce. Stan na dzień 31 grudnia 2011 r.). In 2017, existing shelters and hiding places provided protection for a total of 2.84% of the population (Ocena przygotowań w zakresie ochrony ludności i obrony cywilnej w Polsce za 2017 r.). The inefficiency of Civil Defence in taking care on shelter infrastructure is likely to result from unclear legislation. According to the statement of the Head of National Civil Defence “currently binding regulations do not impose the responsibility for the maintenance of protective structures on civil defence organs” (Ocena przygotowań w zakresie ochrony ludności i obrony cywilnej w Polsce za 2014 r.). Still, however, this is the institution that was entrusted with the task of maintaining these facilities. On April 23 2023, the Head of the National Civil Defence announced during a press conference that shelters will provide room for over 300 thousand people (fewer than in the previous declarations), while hiding places (of which there are approx. 9 thousand), will shelter over 1.1 million people. The total number of places is still lower than in 2010. At the same time, during the conference it was declared that shelter in so-called temporary hiding places is provided for

approximately 47 million people in Poland. However, neither the method of counting these places nor the conditions that they must meet were presented. It was only stated that these are cellars, underground parking lots, churches or schools, whose structure should ensure protection, e.g., from meteorological conditions. It was also noted that the number of safe places is based on the assumption that 1.5 sqm per person will be ensured. Based on these declarations and their comparison with data from almost a decade, it is justified to conclude that the proper protection of the population from the risk of armed conflict has still not been ensured. Temporary hiding places will not protect anyone from the effects of bombing, air raids, chemical attacks, radiation, or other potential consequences of war operations.

The report of the Supreme Chamber of Control and the data of the Head of the National Civil Defence also revealed that civil defence is incapable of satisfying the needs of the civilian population related to its other tasks, either. In the conditions of military threat, civil defence should ensure evacuation routes for the population that is exposed to the risk of the effects of the combat and to provide the necessary personal protection means, supplies, and clothing for all victims and those who need assistance. This naturally involves the need to collect and store these types of supplies in the time of peace. This is why Civil Defence has a certain number of warehouses located throughout the country. Well-developed warehouse base and logistic potential are the essential elements of the effective realisation of the organisation’s mission. Unfortunately, the deterioration in the functioning of Civil Defence is also noticeable in this aspect. For example, according to the documents of Civil defence, in 2014 the number of warehouses decreased by 81 facilities (mostly on municipality level), although the storage space increased by 19 492.36 square meters (Ocena przygotowań w zakresie ochrony ludności i obrony cywilnej w Polsce za 2014 r.). In that year, Civil Defence possessed 4 997 warehouses of a total storage area of 227 436.22 m². Two years later, in 2016, the Civil Defence had a total of 3 974 warehouses with the area of 164 355 m², while in 2017, there were 3 884 warehouses with a storage area of 163 107 m². This means that the warehouse base of the Civil Defence is becoming smaller, and the stored objects seem to be inadequate to the needs to protect the citizens, either. An example may be the gas masks: in 2017, 561 thousand gas mask sets were stored, along with 63 thousand sets of protective clothing. Knowing that Poland has a population of more than 38 million, the number of masks would be sufficient for 1.5%, and the protective clothing would suffice for 1.5 per mille of citizens. With such disproportionately low amount of equipment to the actual population, it is difficult to talk about any protection.

The report of the Supreme Chamber of Control that was published in 2019 confirmed that the civil defence had been neglected. The authors of the document pointed out that “The Supreme Chamber of Control stated, once again, that the civil defence structures are unprepared to effectively perform their tasks related to the protection of population that are defined in the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention of August 12 1949. The structure and organisation of the civil

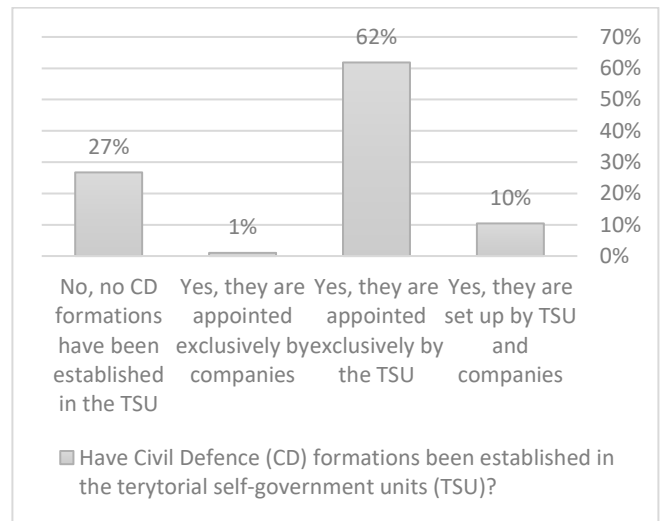
defence are anachronic. The number of civil defence formations is inadequate to the identified threats and is decreasing with every passing year, and the equipment of the existing formations is outdated and incomplete” (Ochrona ludności w ramach zarządzania kryzysowego i obrony cywilnej kpb.430.009.2017 nr ewid. 147/2018/P/1). The new report expanded the issues of civil defence to include problems related to crisis management. They were also strongly criticised and assessed negatively. The main accusations concerning the failure to meet the obligations to ensure safety refer to the levels of poviats and municipalities. According to the report, the source of these “irregularities are many years of neglect (...), which manifests, among others, as the lack of comprehensive legal regulations (in particular related to civil defence), disregarding the importance of preparing plans, procedures, and structures in case of threats, and insufficient financing of tasks” (Ochrona ludności w ramach zarządzania kryzysowego i obrony cywilnej kpb.430.009.2017 nr ewid. 147/2018/P/1). Similar findings were revealed by the authors’ own research conducted in 2021.

V. PROBLEMS OF CIVIL DEFENCE IN THE TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

Civil Defence formations usually exist in territorial self-government units as entities that are established by territorial administration. The conducted research revealed that more than half of the respondents confirmed that civil defence formations in their self-government units were established only at the initiative of offices. One out of ten surveyed experts mentioned that, apart from TSUs, civil defence units were established based on the structures of local enterprises. However, nearly one-third (27%) of the respondents stated that Civil Defence did not exist at all in their administration unit. Based on these responses, it may be assumed that almost one-third of Polish municipalities do not have a formation that would be responsible for assisting the local population in the conditions of an armed conflict. This means that inhabitants of those TSUs will neither find shelter nor receive the necessary material support if the supplies of everyday products are limited. What is even more worrying is the fact that their evacuation will not be coordinated with the operation of the regular Armed Forces. Heads of civil defence on the Poviats level are the Starostes, while on the municipality level these are the heads of municipalities, mayors, etc. Due to the fact that civil defence is linked to the fire brigades by law, territorial self-government units also often combine these two aspects of national security. Therefore, it is often the Voluntary Fire Brigades that are the core of Civil Defence formations. Together with selected employees of territorial self-government administration they are the main part of the personnel of this organisation. Due to that, a large part of Civil defence units in our country does not have the required number of staff. According to research, only 15% of the TSUs have fully staffed Civil Defence formations, while in 20% the number of personnel is almost full. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents stated that most of the civil

defence positions in their self-governments were not fully staffed, and 8% of the respondents declared that there was almost no personnel. Even more worryingly, according to almost one-fourth (24%) of the officials who participated in the survey, the Civil Defence formations existed only in theory, and the staffing is only present in documentation. However, in the conditions of real need, these persons will not perform their duties related to protecting the population. 12% of the respondents were unable to describe the degree of staffing of Civil defence formations.

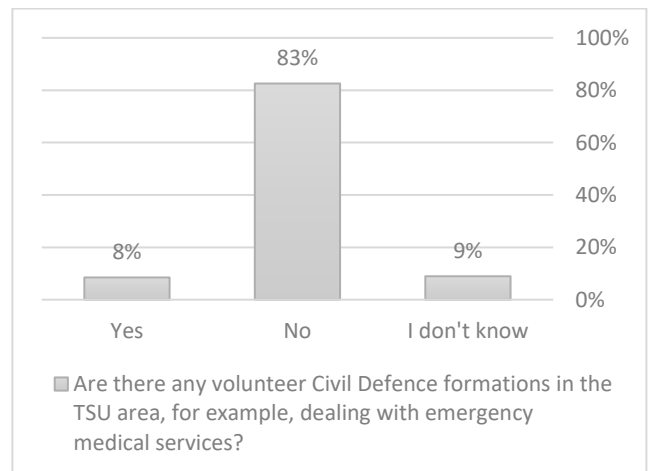
FIG. 1. SCALE OF ACTIVATION OF CIVIL DEFENSE FORMATIONS IN TERYOTIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS



Source: own compilation based on research.

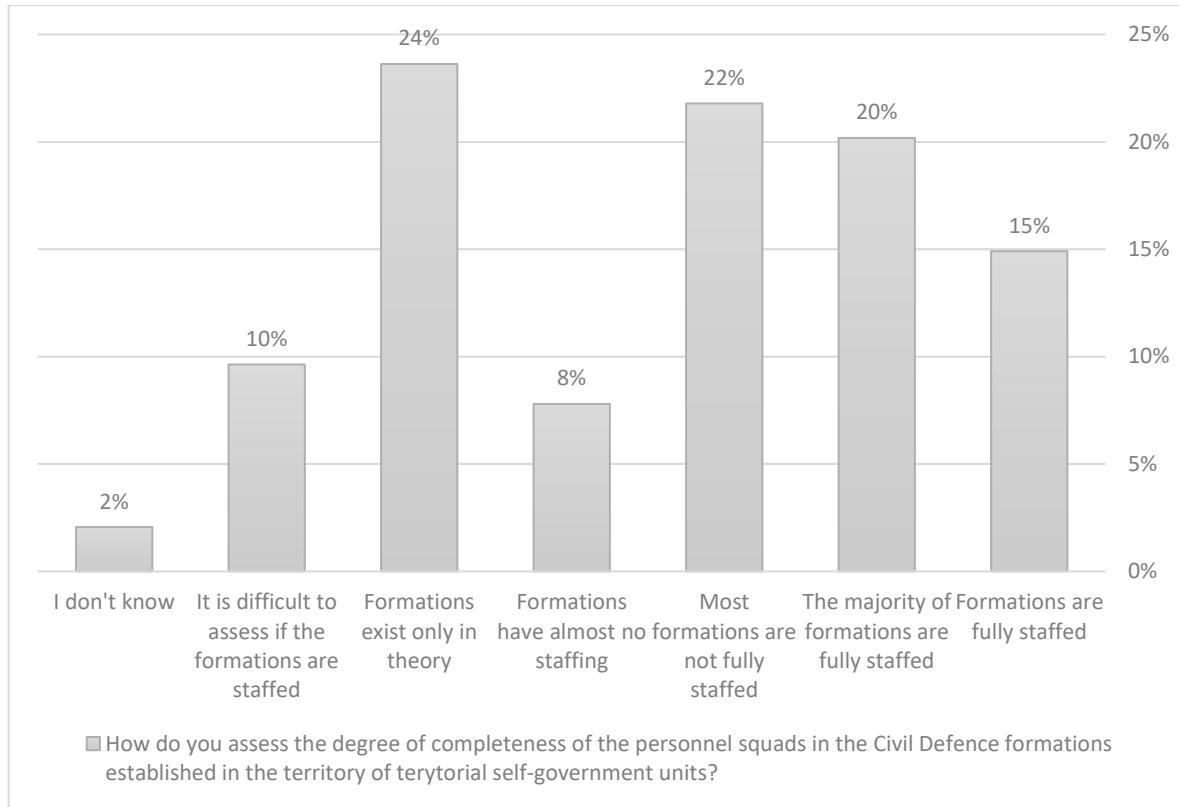
Apart from units established by public administration, civil defence may also be organised as part of civil initiatives. However, in Poland such initiatives occur rarely. Only 6% of the respondents were able to confirm the existence of voluntary Civil Defence formations in their regions. At the same time, a majority of survey participants (83%) were certain that no such social organisation started to operate in their municipality or poviat. Nearly one out of ten (9%) of the respondents were unable to give a clear answer to that question.

FIG. 3. PARTICIPATION OF VOLUNTEER CIVIL DEFENSE FORMATIONS ON THE AREA OF TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS.



Source: own compilation based on research.

FIG. 2. DEGREE OF FILLING UP OF PERSONNEL SQUADS IN CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS ESTABLISHED ON THE AREA OF TERYTORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS



Source: own compilation based on research

In spite of the presented results, the staffing of Civil Defence formations seems to be the least important problem. The state of their equipment seems to be much more worrying. Only 6% of the respondents described it as satisfying and stated that it enables to perform the tasks of Civil defence properly, while nearly one-third of them (27%) declared that the state of equipment of Civil Defence units is insufficient, but it does not prevent them from performing their tasks. More than half (54%) of the participants stated that Civil Defence will be unable to perform its tasks related to protecting people due to the lack of the appropriate materials and equipment. 11% of the respondents found it difficult to assess the completeness of the equipment of Civil Defence formations.

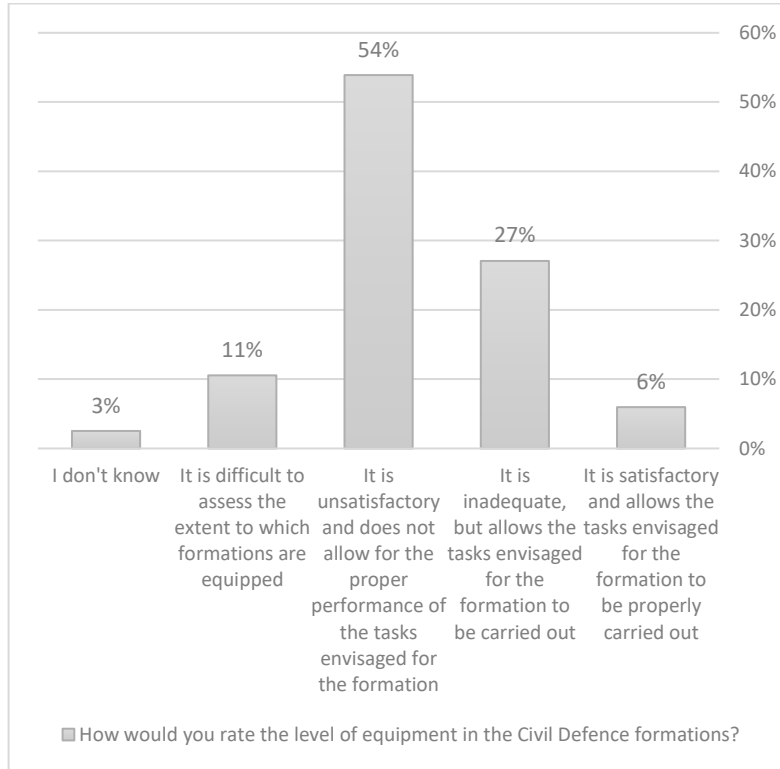
The problems with incomplete staffing of Civil Defence formations and providing them with an adequate state of supplies affect the efficiency of the organisation. 36% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question whether the Civil defence in their territorial self-government units was capable of performing its prescribed tasks. However, only 3% stated that it is able to perform the full scope of the tasks, and 14% pointed to the possibility of certain limitations. 44% of the respondents had an opposite opinion: 24% stated that Civil Defence formations will rather be unable to perform their tasks, 13% chose the answer "no, with the exception of limited tasks", and 7% decided that Civil Defence unites will be unable to function at all. 21% of the respondents were not sure which answer was correct. In general, one may conclude that almost half of the territorial Civil Defence units do not have the

potential to perform at least a part of their tasks. The authors attempted to define these areas precisely in further questions.

The analysis of this aspect of security in TSUs referred to the possibility to perform specific tasks of the Civil Defence in specific areas. The respondents were asked to choose the values from the lowest one (1) which meant that the units were unable to perform the given task, to the highest (5) that meant complete effectiveness. The ability of TSUs to plan civil defence tasks received the most positive assessment (78% positive and neutral scores, from 3 to 5), along with the functioning of the detection, warning, and alarm system (77%) and the ability to protect water intakes and installations (60%).

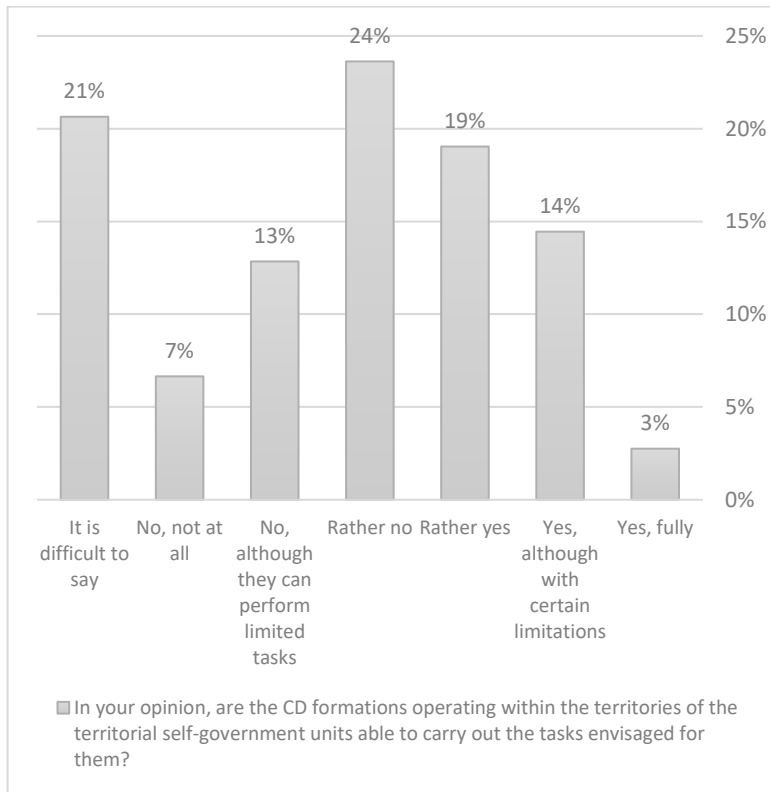
However, the results are much worse when it comes to handling logistic tasks and duties that require an appropriate budget. A major part of the negative assessments of the ability of the office to perform its duties related to Civil Defence formations concerned the supply of material resources, specialist equipment, and, in general, the existence of a storage base (55% negative scores 1 and 2 in all cases).

FIG. 4. LEVEL OF EQUIPMENT OF CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS.



Source: own compilation based on research.

FIG. 5. POTENTIAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS OF CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS ON THE AREA OF TERYTORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS.



Source: own compilation based on research.

FIG. 6. TASK IMPLEMENTATION POTENTIAL OF CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS IN TERMS OF: TASK PLANNING, DETECTION, WARNING AND ALARM SYSTEM AND PROTECTION OF WATER INTAKES AND FACILITIES (ON A SCALE FROM 1- INCAPABLE TO 5 - FULLY EFFECTIVE)

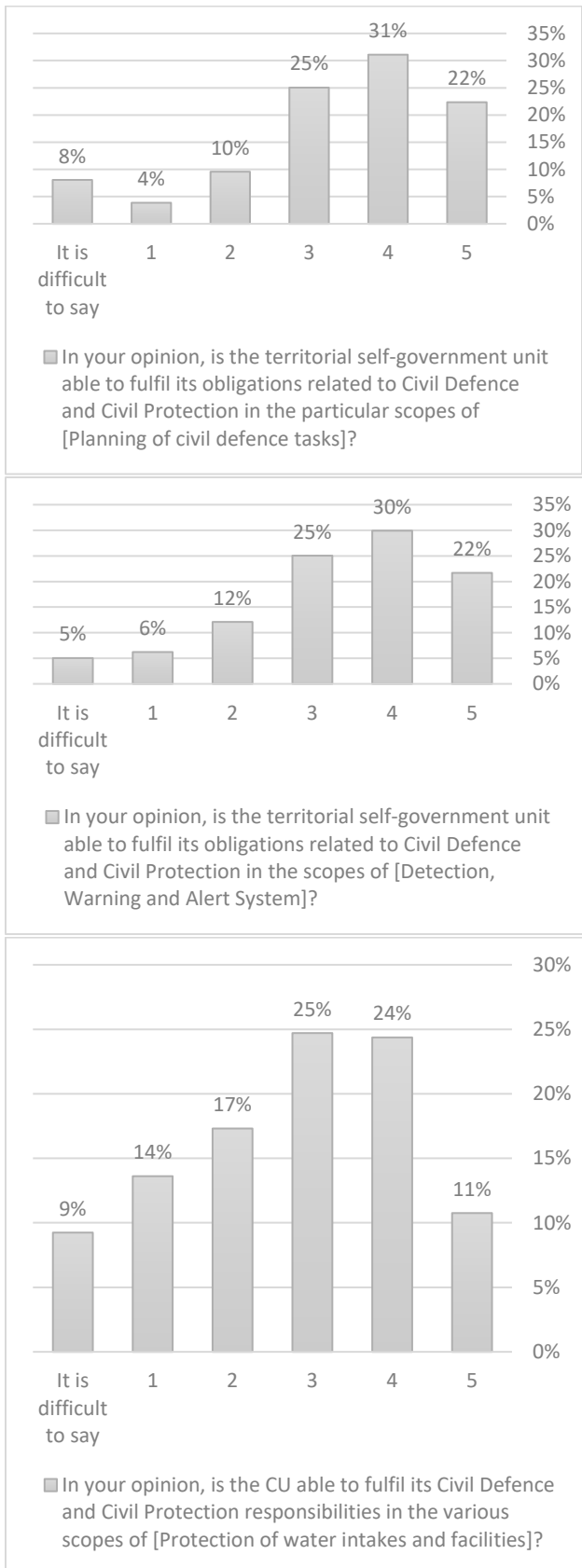
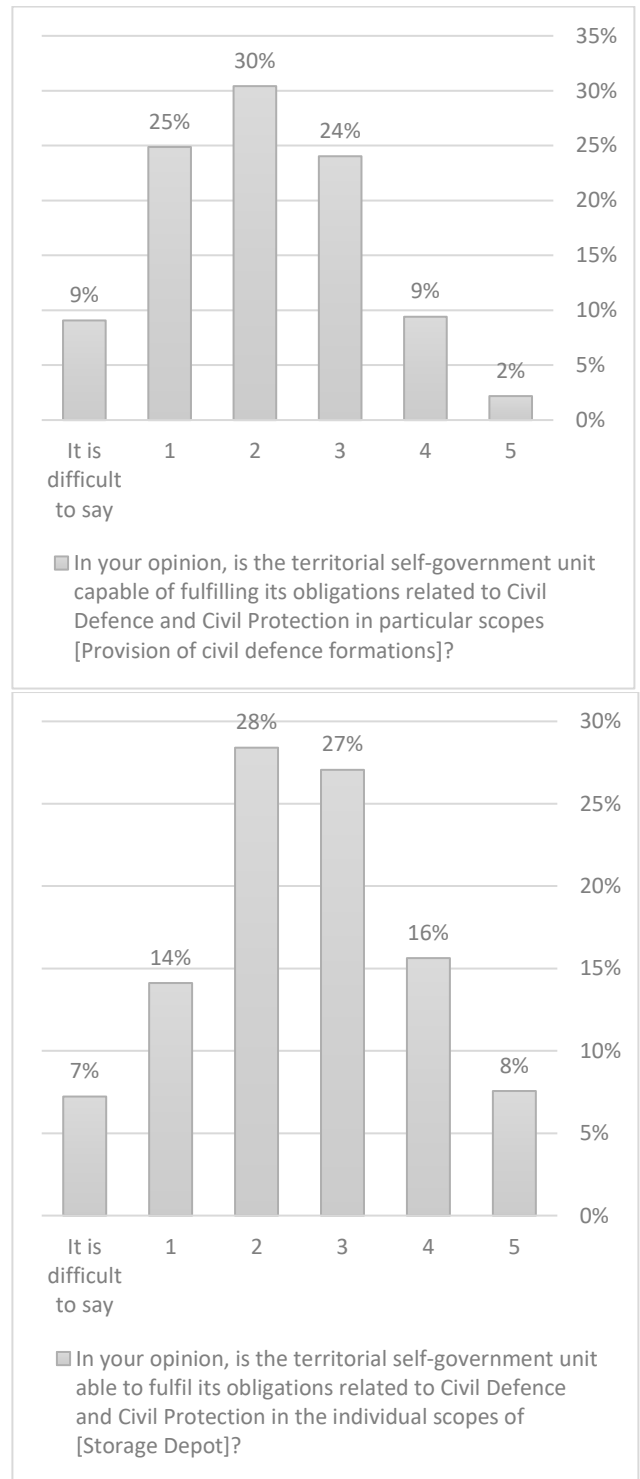
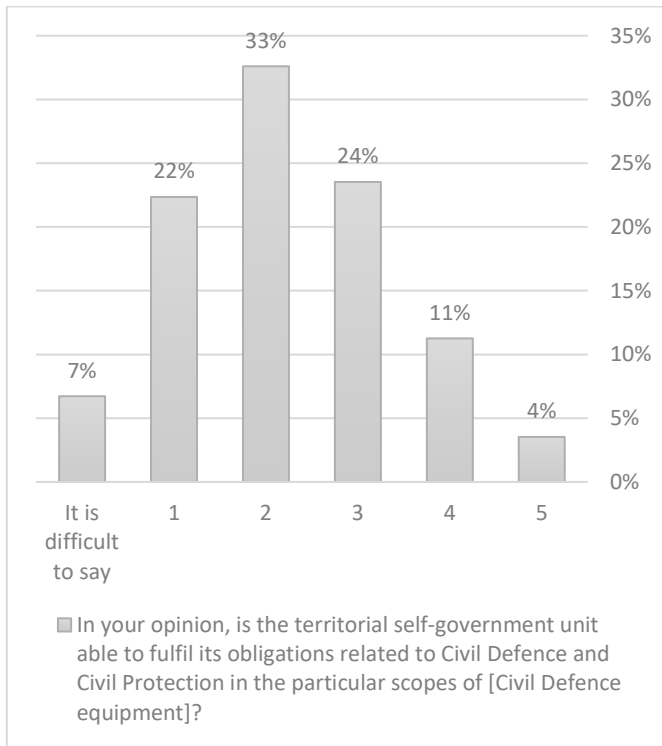


FIG. 7. TASK IMPLEMENTATION POTENTIAL OF CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS IN TERMS OF: SUPPLYING THE CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS, HAVING A STORAGE BASE AND SPECIALISED EQUIPMENT (ON A SCALE FROM 1- INCAPABLE TO 5 - FULLY EFFECTIVE)



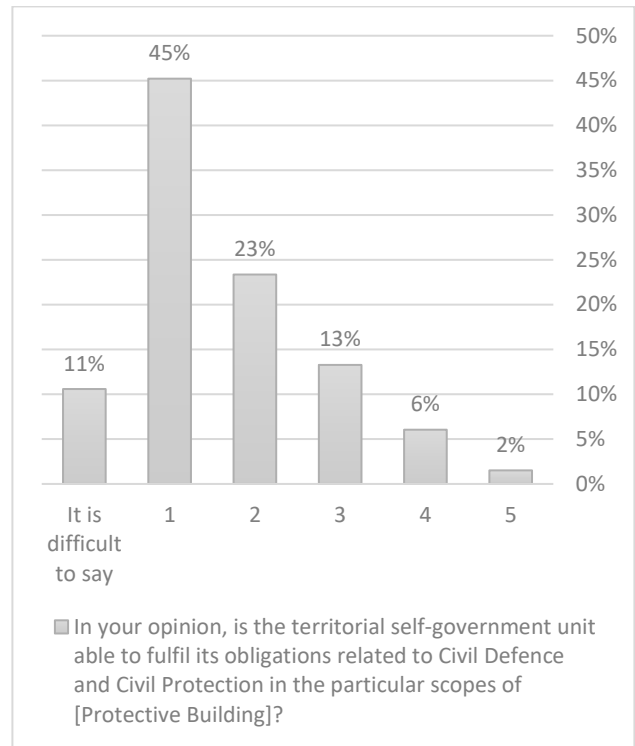
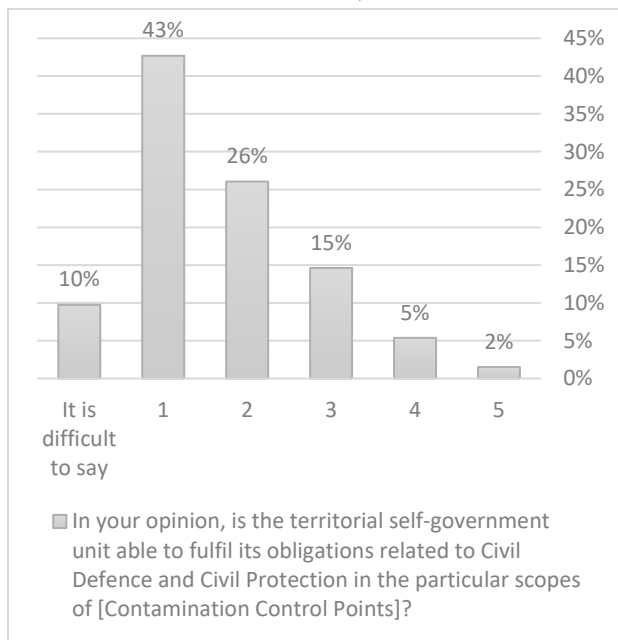
Source: own compilation based on research.



Source: own compilation based on research.

The lowest score was given to the possibilities of TSUs to perform tasks related to civil defence that required specialist skills, the possession of rare specialist equipment, or intrastate that is expensive to build and maintain. Most negative answers concerned creating points of decontamination (69% of 1- and 2-point scores) and the possession of hiding places and shelters (protective structures) – 68% negative answers).

FIG. 8. TASK IMPLEMENTATION POTENTIAL OF CIVIL DEFENCE FORMATIONS IN TERMS OF: CREATION OF CONTAMINATION ELIMINATION POINTS AND PROTECTIVE CONSTRUCTION (ON A SCALE FROM 1- INCAPABLE TO 5 - FULLY EFFECTIVE)



Source: own compilation based on research.

In general, the obtained information confirmed that Civil defence is highly incapable of performing its main tasks. The free comments of the respondents even contained suggestions that the institution exists rather in theory than in reality. The review of its potential and resources reveals that it has not only insufficient personnel but also lacks the appropriate material resources. Only matters that are handled by self-governments on an ongoing basis anyway (creating defence plans and other plans, ensuring access to potable water intakes and protecting them) are resolved in a relatively effective way. On the other hand, when it comes to actions that require incurring additional costs, the Civil Defence often ceases to function at all: it lacks the equipment, the resources to deal with potential crisis situations, and even the appropriate storage base. The emerging image is even more worrying when we realise that Civil Defence formations are expected to assist civilians, for example during armed conflicts. Without the appropriate resources and preparation, the objectives and plans alone will prove insufficient. This means that, at the moment of the most serious danger, the number of potential casualties will be significantly higher than necessary.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Both the evaluation of the Supreme Chamber of Control and the empirical research conducted by the authors confirm the existing opinions of Polish security experts that civil defence in Poland does not function properly. The decision makers who are informed by their officials must be aware that, in the event of an armed conflict, citizens will not be protected by anyone, which will in consequence lead to many tragedies. In spite of that, no necessary actions have been taken to solve this problem

for years, and maybe even for decades. This is because the officials assume that their substantial and financial resources should be focused on more “realistic” challenges than the potential war, which, in their opinion, will never come. However, the civil defence problems, although they are obvious for specialists and officials, are a specific indicator of the overall weakness of the local aspects of the security system in Poland. Their multi-dimensional nature reflects the level of complexity of the related challenges, which the central authorities will ultimately have to confront one day. They may be divided into four fundamental areas: formal/organisational, financial, personnel, and social.

The legal and organisational dimension involves a whole spectrum of problems. The authors managed to collect the opinions of officials who deal with civil defence matters in municipalities and poviats. They noted that the legal regulations are not adapted to the economic and political situation of the country. In the opinion of one of the experts who took part in the survey, “the principles of functioning of civil defence are still based on the regulations and structures from the previous era, which was dominated by state-owned property, and enterprises had positions for people who were responsible for security and military issues”. Another problem is the organisational chaos that consists in scattering the responsibility among organisational units that operate independently: poviats, municipalities, and fire brigades, which remain autonomous in the light of legislation. Moreover, there is no logical structure of subordination of specific civil defence units and the institution that is responsible for the allocation of funds. Our respondents also noticed that dividing the actions into common self-defence, civil defence, and crisis management is a problem, although all these actions ultimately mean the same, i.e., protecting the population. To quote one of the comments that was submitted in the survey: “In fact, the same personnel and storage base is used for all these purposes, and dividing these issues only leads to multiplying large amounts of documentation, whose creation requires large resources, at the expense of practical actions”. Later, our respondent suggested that “the most desirable change would be combining the defence, civil defence and crisis management, and to crown it with one security plan that would combine all these plans (that are currently required) and that would be accompanied by a set of operational and crisis management tasks”.

The financial aspect of the problems faced by civil defence determines the other challenges. The data presented above reveal that it is impossible to secure a logistic base for civil defence in terms of providing the necessary resources or chances to maintain shelter structures. In the opinion of one of the officials who participated in the survey, “civil defence warehouses, if they even exist, are full of outdated, old, or non-functional equipment. The resources available on the national scale will not protect even a fraction of the population”.

The problem of insufficient funding of issues related to security has a wider dimension and, on the level of territorial self-government, includes all actions taken in this area of state responsibility. This significantly affects the staffing problems.

Officials who are responsible for security matters in municipalities very often combine this job with tasks from other departments. In this way, security and civil defence issues are being pushed to the background. As a result of the staffing problems, civil defence usually functions only on paper. In reality, when it becomes necessary to act, the persons who are designated as civil defence members, are not on duty or ready to act. This results, to a large extent, from the lack of appropriate funds for the performance of tasks by persons involved in civil defence and to remunerate them for their actions, but first of all from lack of social awareness. The civil defence personnel usually consist of voluntary fire brigade members of office employees who are listed in the plans due to purely formal reasons. Their participation in real evacuation or assistance in the conditions of a real attack is doubtful.

In the social aspect, first of all there is a lack of trainings and courses that would raise the awareness of the importance of security-related administrative tasks in ordinary citizens. This would give more importance to the role of civil defence and to the actions taken to prepare the protection of the population. Unfortunately, these types of programmes are currently supported neither by the local communities nor by representatives of the national and territorial authorities.

Sadly, the lack of social awareness of the state’s needs related to the organisation of civil defence (but also crisis management, material and personal support and other considerations) on the local level is one of the main problems of Poland in terms of security. The limited social acceptance for projects connected to this area of public services translates into the other deficiencies of the security and civil deficiency system mentioned here: insufficient funding that leads to limited staffing and legislator disorder. In the conditions of a democratic state, current public needs always gain advantage over these that might become important only in situations of crises and threats. Unfortunately, neglecting these tasks generates extreme risk for human life and property when the threats actually emerge, and this can never be completely excluded. In this respect, the old Polish saying that the Poles are wise only after the loss sadly seems to remain true. Neither the historical experiences, nor observing the problems of other countries in crisis have convinced us that it is best to prepare for threats in advance. Therefore, if a serious threat occurs, we will likely suffer from personal and material losses that could have been avoided.

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