

Civil Protection in Hungary

The beginnings

The Hungarian civil defense/protection has an approximately 70 years of history. In the early 1930's, the Act on the Hungarian Air Defense entered into force, in order to prepare for a possible war.

For supporting the society, the Hungarian Air Defense League was established in 1937 in the framework of the authoritative air defense to reduce the risk of air raids on the civil population. Its most important task was to alert the population and to arrange for the supplies in the shelters. This scope of tasks was extended to fire-fighting responsibilities, first aid and issues relating to piety procedures. The organization was very successful during World War II, organizing the protection of the civil population against air attacks.

“Cold war”

After World War II, in 1949, civil air defense in Hungary was reorganized within the Ministry of the Interior. Some of its main tasks were:

- organization and implementation of warning and the continuous information of the entire population in case of air-raids or NBC attacks,
- shelter protection comprising planning,
- construction, maintenance and operation of classified shelters; designing and, in case of classified periods, constructing and operating emergency shelters;
- utilization of natural caves and shafts as shelters;
- supply of the population and NGOs with personal protection kits;
- organization and implementation of the evacuation of the population from the endangered settlements, areas of the country.
- supply of the homeless population;
- protection of subsistence (food, potable water) necessary for the population.

In towns, on the bases of plants and factories, anti-air raid units were organized.

Later, new principles, methods and routines useful for the protection of human life and property came into practice.

Civil defense

From 1962, civil air defense administration went over to the Ministry of Defense.

In 1964, with the threat of a nuclear or thermonuclear war, the Council of Ministers established the Hungarian Civil Defense.

First, civil defense administration belonged to the Hungarian People's Army and was built up like any other military organization. Equipment, training and education, the supply of personnel and internal relations were all military-like.

Civil defense preserved the experience of the civil air (raid) defense organization, and focused to train the population for an armed conflict, first of all, for a nuclear attack. A report in 1973 stated that from ten to thirty hours of obligatory training was undertaken by workers and other employees of industry, and that it was carried out at their workplaces (of course, outside working hours).

Socialization

In 1970, the flood of the Tisza River caused major damages to all areas of life of about 100,000 people. The normalization of life and working conditions, in a manifold and complex way, was only possible with the support of the Hungarian People's Army. The military civil defense organization proved its ability and capability in flood protection activities, provided humanitarian assistance to the population in need.

The Act on National Defense, promulgated in 1976, extended the civil defense duty obligations to damages caused by the forces of nature and other extraordinary incidents.

In the districts and counties, national defense committees were established based on public administration to direct and control the societal civil defense tasks.

At that time, a commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed the Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions on the Protection of the Victims of War. The Additional Protocols were only promulgated in 1989, in a Statutory Rule.

Change of the political system

In 1990, in close connection with the change of the political system, the coalition parties and the opposition agreed on the amendments of the Constitution, regulating the use of armed forces. The classified periods have changed, focusing on fundamental human rights. During a state of national crisis, state of need, or state of emergency, the exercise of fundamental human rights may be suspended or restricted, with some exceptions.

After long preparations, the civil defense administration was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior. At this time, in my opinion, civil defense became civil protection. I have to mention that the civil defense organization was transferred without operational budget, only the salary of the personnel was handed over to Ministry of the Interior.

Most of the methods of civil defense were worthy of preserving: e.g. planning, warning and information of the population, organization of evacuation, supply of food and potable water for the population.

The means necessary for the above-mentioned activities, like sirens, chemical and radiological detection instruments, etc. improved and developed.

Meanwhile, the means unambiguously serving for the preparation of a war or nuclear attack, (bunkers, air-raid shelters, etc.) mostly went to ruin.

Act on Civil Protection

Because of the political, economic and social processes since 1990, new, up-to-date legislative provisions and systems had been developed. In those years, there was an increasing interest shown towards the prevention of and response to disasters and to rehabilitation efforts. Consequently, the safety of people became more and more important during and after accidents, nuclear emergencies or natural disasters.

All this is formulated in the Act No. XXXVII of 1996 on Civil Protection, reflecting the European concept, according to which environment protection, prevention of disasters, nuclear safety and the protection of the population and assets – as a civil protection collective term – are connected.

According to the Act, "civil protection" means a system of organizations, tasks and measures within the system of national defense, the function of which is to protect the life of the population in the event of an armed conflict, disasters or other emergencies, to provide the conditions for survival and to prepare the public for the elimination of their effects and the establishment of conditions for survival.

In Hungary, civil protection is an overall social task, carried out by the citizens, local governments, NGOs, and the Defense Forces and law enforcement authorities in a joint effort. Civil protection is a task assigned to the entire State organization, both at national and regional level. The civilian society also takes an active part in it.

The purpose of the act is to facilitate protection from the effects of armed conflicts, disasters and/or other risks threatening human life and/or the main sources of subsistence, and the preparations for the protection of the population, taking into consideration the tasks emerging from the obligations defined in the Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions.

Subsidiarity:

The system set up in 1996 is based on the principle of subsidiarity. The majority of the tasks became an organic part of the daily activities of public administration leaders.

In each municipality, the No. 1 person responsible for civil protection is the mayor. In case of emergency, the mayor is the No. 1 decision maker. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the support is available on request of the affected settlement's mayor. This may arise if the affected municipality's preparedness for a disaster is not sufficient to provide an adequate response in terms of available resources.

In case the cooperation between several organs is necessary in a county or at local level, leaders responsible for the direct command of the protection, within their sphere of competence, shall be designated by the chairpersons of the defense/protection committees of the counties, and Budapest, the settlements and the mayors, and by the Government or its commissioner if more than one county is affected.

Civil protection organizations

According to legal regulations, a mayor of a settlement designates a citizen living there to a civil protection organization by issuing an "assignment decision". The type, the number of personnel and equipment of civil protection organizations are determined based on the vulnerability of the settlements. The mayor and the chairperson of a County Defense Committee have the right to raise the deployment readiness level of these organizations, based on the recommendations of the head of the professional civil protection organ competent by area.

This system is supported by a professional civil protection authority. It means the organ which, through its professional, civil servant and public employee personnel, and within its sphere of competence, plans and organizes civil protection tasks and controls the execution thereof in order to protect the population and property.

The Minister of the Interior (at present the Minister of Local Government) and the Government are entitled to raise the deployment readiness level and to deploy these organizations in a classified period, with posterior reporting obligation to the Parliament.

Knowing the origins and the concept of civil protection, a two-third (rather than a simple) majority of the National Assembly (Parliament) is needed for the amendment of the Act, guaranteeing stability, (and making the inevitable modifications impossible).

Disaster management

The main objective of Hungary's security policy is to fully enforce civic and human rights and to assure the safety of life and property, and social security. Under this aegis, from 2000, an integrated disaster management system was created. Civil protection administration became an organic part of the integrated disaster management system.

Under the term "disaster", the State of Hungary understands the occurrence of a damaging incident that, in terms of magnitude and its expected consequences, substantially exceeds the magnitude of the daily damaging incidents and primarily poses danger to human life, property and to the regular supplies of the population, to a large extent.

Regulation

The Act on Disaster Management entered into force on 1 January 2000. The Act determines and provides a uniform framework for the tasks and responsibilities. It prescribes the different levels of state, governmental and municipal systems for the prevention of man-made or natural disasters. The Act also stipulates the responsibilities of the different organizations during response and recovery.

The scope of disaster management includes natural and man-made that is ecological and human disasters and emergencies. It covers the legal regulations, institutional systems, measures taken and tasks fulfilled.

The three main fields of competence of disaster management are: prevention of emergencies and disasters, the response thereto and recovery.

Responsibilities

Disaster management is a national cause. Subjects of the implementation include the bodies established for this purpose, state organizations and local governments, voluntary associations, business entities and even individual citizens.

To avoid the duplication and overlapping, the disaster management system was built on the existing administration and authorities. The Act specifies the exact tasks of each authority, state administration or elected functionary, for normal periods and for periods differing thereof.

Government

The Government is responsible for the organization of the directional system of protection, defines the disaster management tasks of ministers and coordinates their work. The Government concludes international and inter-governmental disaster management agreements. In a large-scale disaster, the Government declares the state of emergency, decides on the declaration of the entire area or of a part of the country disaster stricken. In a state of emergency, it may govern by issuing decrees, for fifteen days at the maximum. After this, it must request the decision of the National Assembly.

Governmental Coordination Committee

The Governmental Coordination Committee has a determinant role in the uniform direction of protection. Its responsibility is, as regulated by the Act, to prepare decisions of the Government relating to disaster management and to define the uniform requirements of protection. The chairperson of the Committee is the Minister of Local Government, and its members are the senior leaders of the ministries and individual central organs. The coordinating role of the chairperson concerning disaster management does not replace the coordinating role of other ministers in other policy areas.

The Committee has nine Protection Working Committees according to different disasters.

Ministers

The Minister of Local Government directs and controls the work of the defense/protection committees of the counties and of Budapest and approves the plans of regional level disaster management.

The competent minister and the head of the organ with national sphere of authority are responsible for the planning, organizing and directing activity of disaster management of specialized ministries.

The defense/protection committees of the counties and of Budapest direct the performance of tasks of preparation and protection in their area of competence. They organize cooperation with military organs, public administration organs, law enforcement bodies and societal organizations. Their important task is preparation and the regular advanced training of public administration leaders and mayors. The chairperson of the defense/protection committee may, in case of urgency, order to evacuate citizens; he/she organizes the supply of the evacuated population. He/she may declare an area of a county disaster-stricken.

Disaster management directorates of the counties ensure the professional background for the decisions of the defense/protection committees.

The local defense/protection committee is the joint protection body of adjacent settlements. Disaster management and the organization of local civil protection tasks belong to its sphere of competence.

Local direction is the responsibility of mayors. Settlements may mutually render assistance to one another. The mayor directs and organizes the tasks of preparation and protection in the territory of his/her settlement. During protection against major accidents involving hazardous materials he/she is responsible for the publication of safety documents, the preparation of the external protection plan and for regular exercising.

The mayor, the local defense/protection committee, and the defense/protection committees of the counties and the Government also have, of course, defense competences, determined by the Act on National Defense.

Professional organization

Based on the Act on Disaster Management, by integrating the State Fire Service and the civil protection administration on national and county level, a uniform disaster management organization was created. This law enforcement organization was directed by the Minister of the Interior, nowadays by the Minister of Local Government.

In 2006, the scope of authority of the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice were redistributed between two new ministries: Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement.

National Directorate General for Disaster Management

The National Directorate General for Disaster Management, whose director general, since 2003, has been LTG Attila Tatár, PhD, does not have civil protection, fire-fighting or disaster management operational units. NDGDM comprises four organizational units. These professional fields are the following:

- prevention and authoritative,
- emergency management,
- financial management, technical issues and information technology,
- administrative (human resources management, legal issues, international relations, control, etc.).

Each department, organizational unit has tasks and competences related to civil protection, fire-fighting and disaster management issues.

The members of the disaster management organization are professional (uniformed) personnel, civil servants and public employees. The professional personnel has partly civil protection, partly fire-fighters' ranks.

NDGDM directs the 19 directorates for disaster management of the counties and the Civil Protection Directorate of the Capital Budapest. (The latter does not have fire protection competences). The organizational structure of the county directorates is very similar to that of the national level.

Local organs are the 96 civil protection branch offices, which have local offices as well.

Tasks

Nowadays, in Hungary, the protection against natural and man-made disasters is one of the timeliest national responsibilities. Public opinion, the political and professional leadership attach a special attention to it, and it is a factor that determines the development of the country and basically influences the lives of citizens.

The professional disaster management organization preserved the scope of competence of its legal predecessors.

The organization is an institution committed to assist in case of fires, accidents, emergencies and other incidents threatening life, to protect citizens and their properties. Its main task is to organize and direct operational disaster management activities. During emergencies, it organizes the protection of the

population, and in the period of recovery, it fulfils tasks of coordination and direction.

The professional disaster management organization has some fire protection authoritative competences and activities. It prepares the necessary statutory provisions and plans and organizes preparation, arranges the civil protection preparation of the population, with special regard to the actors of public administration and education.

New challenges

Disaster Management performs the authoritative supervision and inspection activities of the protection against industrial accidents, relating to the SEVESO II Directive, simultaneously, to the implementation of the UN ECE (Helsinki) Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.

Another major field of authoritative control is the transportation of hazardous materials by road. Emergency Detection Groups carry out the rapid detection and identification of hazardous materials.

One of the new tasks is the preparation of the installation of the Uniform European Emergency Call System “112”.

In recent years, a new element has come to the fore: the analysis and protection of the critical infrastructure. Based on the continuous update of data of civil protection and voluntary organizations there are adequate forces available according to the present legal regulations to mitigate and eliminate the consequences and effects of slow-onset disasters.

These activities can hardly be regarded as civil protection tasks.

Conclusion

Civil protection has a continuous evolution in its history, in close connection with the political requirements.

In Hungary, in recent years, civil protection has been renewed both conceptually and in relation to its tasks; has become suitable for the coordination of civil emergency activities, and intends to render primacy to civil emergencies.

Civil protection has become an integrated management, protection, and rescue and relief system.

The creation of the disaster management system does not mean the termination of civil protection tasks. Integration does not mean the automatic amalgamation of the two organizations, on the contrary, based on the existing organizations, completely new terms of reference have been bestowed on the new system. Accordingly, civil protection in the classical sense has received additional tasks:

- prevention of disasters (emergencies), participation in the mitigation and elimination of their consequences and in recovery and reconstruction;
- population protection measures in connection with the establishment and operation of plants producing, storing, using and transporting hazardous materials;
- tasks in relation to critical infrastructure assessment and protection;
- wide range of international cooperation, humanitarian assistance.

The Hungarian disaster management system, in recent years, proved its operability. The amendment of the Act on Disaster Management requires a qualified majority (two thirds of the votes). Therefore, it provides a possibility for a calculable and continuous professional activity.

The missions and goals of the new system and organization are unchanged: the protection of human life and property. We only have one objective: to guarantee the safety of the everyday life of the society by efficient prevention, successful response and recovery.

Continuous improvement is an unambiguous requirement because of the changing challenges and the complexity of risk factors. The Hungarian disaster management system is capable of implementing the strategic objectives, flexibly responding to the changes in the circumstances.

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