

## **Elusive E-words: Effectiveness and Efficiency in Civil Security**

Natural disasters are the most common and prominent challenges that the countries' crisis management agencies have been facing since the end of the Cold War. This also holds true for Central Europe. Indeed, the most frequent and significant crises in all Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) were caused by floods which also framed the civil security systems' shapes over the last two decades. The systems do currently seem to be able to deal with these challenges quite well, yet (except for some post-crisis reviews), no comprehensive evaluation of the systems' effectiveness or efficiency has been conducted.

For almost all European countries it holds true that stakeholders are rather convinced about the functionality of the national civil security systems. These are perceived as relatively well-performing and able to handle most crises. However, only few countries apply standardized procedures and methods for effectiveness and efficiency assessment. Comfort et al. (2004) point out that in disaster management, the balance between efficiency and effectiveness is difficult to reach in practice. The findings of the FP7 ANVIL (Analysis of Civil Security Systems in Europe) project's results show that governments in most countries do not have an entirely precise picture of spending on civil security as this cuts across different areas under different ministries, as well as across different levels of administration. At the same time, rigorous cost efficiency reviews do not come into the question due to the sensitiveness of the issue where lives of the citizens are potentially threatened.

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In Poland, just as in most of the other European countries, the citizens trust and support the national civil security system. Particularly the response forces - and especially the fire fighters - are trusted almost absolutely and they are viewed in a very positive light by the population. Contrastingly, however, public opinion polls suggest that the Poles are skeptical about the state's ability to cope with natural disasters (European Commission 2011). Similar findings appear in national surveys, conducted after the 1997 and 2010 floods. Here, except for poor protective infrastructure, state capabilities were increasingly blamed (CBOS 1997; CBOS 2010). In both flood cases, respondents indicated deficiency in preparedness for a big flood. Hence, despite the high trust in the response forces, there is also a relatively strongly perceived insufficiency of the security provision in this respect in Poland.

In the ANVIL project, the assessment of effectiveness was based on the calls for international assistance during crises as well as on the outcomes of incident-related inquiries. As for the latter, although the inquiries commonly did not address directly the effectiveness, there was a general tendency to view the security systems as well performing and to focus on more specific issues for further improvement only. These typically concerned coordination, planning and preparation problems, as well as deficiencies in forecasting, warning and expertise at the local level. Also in Poland, the report of the Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli) was investigating the response to the 2010 flood, pointing to substantial deficiencies in the so-called civil defence. Especially the preparation phase was evaluated negatively and it was pointed out that civil defence plans were incomplete and containing provisions which were already outdated. In some countries, however, a strong professional investigation culture is in place. Such example is the Netherlands where there is a structural investigation program run by the Public Order and Safety Inspectorate concerning all aspects of civil protection.

As for the calls for international assistance, Poland was among the countries asking for assistance the most often (eight times over the last twelve years). Generally, also some other post-communist countries were requesting assistance relatively frequently, yet no clear pattern exists distinguishing among the old and new member states of the EU. Except for the officially requested international assistance, most of the countries were also receiving assistance from their neighbors during a crisis. This was also the case of Poland during the floods. While requests of international assistance cannot be directly perceived as a lack of effectiveness of the national security system, the cross-border help and cooperation can be actually perceived as a solid ground for (potential) regional cooperation in crisis management and, thus, as a potential way to increased effectiveness.



While assessing effectiveness is not an easy task, it is even more problematic to address the issue of efficiency. The overall finding of the ANVIL project suggests that there is no consensus on what efficiency in civil security is and on how to evaluate it. In general, little pressure is made on governments to improve national civil security systems based on efficiency. One approach is to look at efficiency through the public administration's spending and the budget devoted to civil security. From such perspective, Poland does spend significantly less on civil security compared with the most of the Western European countries.

An alternative to the budget increase can be to engage in more cooperation and common action within the Central European region represented by the Visegrad Group, following the example from some other regions in Europe. The advantage of this approach is that the basis for cooperation in civil security in general and in disaster management in particular is already in place. Thus, the transaction costs of an increased cooperation would be relatively low compared with a potentially increased efficiency of the civil security systems.

Some interesting inspiration can be sought abroad, in other regions of Europe. In this way, the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South-Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE) could serve as point of reference for the Visegrad Group. As it can be seen in Table 1, two of the three aforementioned regional organizations do engage in some form of asset sharing or joint procurements. While assessing the efficiency of these organizations, this is clearly seen as an added value with respect to the capabilities of their member states. Similarly, joint exercises and exchange of experts (as in the case of CBSS) can be viewed as enhancing national capabilities.

Table 1: Cooperation in Civil Security – Comparison of Regional Organizations

Organization	Members' contributions to the budget	Asset sharing	Joint procurements	Main outcomes of the cooperation
Barents Euro-Arctic Region	uneven	no	no	<b>exercises, training and the exchange of experts</b>
Council of the Baltic Sea States	uneven	<b>yes: pilot project for integrating maritime surveillance</b>	no	exchange information and foster a better understanding



		systems		
Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South-Eastern Europe	even/equal	yes	<b>yes: firefighting equipment purchased</b>	implementation of a limited number of training and education projects
Visegrad Group	even/equal	no	no	Facilitate cooperation through meetings and information exchange

Source: authors, based on the ANVIL data. **In bold:** examples of good practice.

In this respect, when looking at the public opinion, it turns out that most of the people in Poland are in favor of potential international pooling of civil protection resources as a means to a more cost-effective disaster management (European Commission 2012). This suggest that, politically, such step would have large support of the public.

In sum, it can be argued that one possible pathway to increased efficiency of civil protection and disaster management could be through an increased and more intensive cooperation within the Central European region, where the countries do face similar threats. Bilateral agreements among the countries to provide assistance during a crisis are already in place. Moreover, the countries did already make use of these agreements in practice. The Visegrad Group could provide a very suitable platform for deepening cooperation as professional links are already in place here, so as are informal meetings and information exchanges. Furthermore, through common exercises and expert exchanges, the preparation phase (which was diagnosed as problematic) could be improved.

### Summary / Recommendations:

- An alternative to a budget increase in crisis management can be to engage in more cooperation and common action within the Central European region represented by the Visegrad Group as the countries both face similar threats and have a relatively similar organization of their civil security systems.
- The Visegrad Group could provide a very suitable platform for deepening cooperation as professional links are already in place here, so as are informal meetings and information exchanges.
- Cross-border help and cooperation can be perceived as a solid ground for regional cooperation in crisis management and, thus, as a potential way to increased effectiveness.



- Public opinion is clearly in favor of potential international pooling of civil protection resources as a means to a more cost-effective disaster management
- The example from some other regions in Europe can be followed: such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) or the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South-Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE), that engage in some form of asset sharing, joint procurements or expert exchanges which is clearly seen as an added value with respect to the capabilities of their member states enhancing national capabilities.

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