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The Role of Civil Defense in the Republic of Serbia's Crisis Management System

Milica Mladenović[1*], Nenad Komazec[2], Siniša Domazet[3]

[1]S4 GLOSEC Global Security, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia ✉ mladenovicmilica21@yahoo.com
[2]RABEK, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia ✉ nenadkomazec@yahoo.com
[3]Metropolitan University, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia ✉ sdomazetns@gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper examines the role of civil defense in Serbia's crisis management system, focusing on its contribution to prevention, preparation, response, and recovery phases. The study addresses the insufficient integration of civil defense at the national level and identifies its key functions and opportunities for improvement. Using literature analysis, legal frameworks, good practices, and expert surveys, the research highlights the need for a clear normative definition of civil defense's role within the system. It emphasizes the practical establishment and development of the system for effective crisis response. The conclusion underlines the importance of a proactive approach and strengthening community resilience by fully integrating civil defense into Serbia's crisis management framework.*

Keywords: *Crisis Management; Civil Defense; Serbia; Resilience; Social Communities; Cooperation; Human Resources*

INTRODUCTION

Challenges, risks, and threats to security in modern society are becoming increasingly complex and demanding, making a crisis management system necessary to secure protected values. In such conditions, civil defense in the crisis management system becomes crucial as an indispensable segment in preventing, preparing, and responding to crisis situations and recovering from them.

In the example of current crises, we can see how diverse they are because, in addition to conventional armed conflicts, they also include other conflicts, natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, fires), and dangers such as terrorist attacks, pandemics of infectious diseases, or cyber-attacks. Crisis management and civil defense are vital in solving and minimizing the listed crises' damage. Crisis management through planning, organizing, leading, and controlling all available resources enables an effective response to the crisis through its identification, risk assessment, development of management strategies, coordination between relevant actors, and implementation of rescue, recovery, and reconstruction plans after the crisis. On the other hand, civil defense provides a system of organized crisis response at the national level, which includes training of human resources, collection, and distribution of material resources, coordination between all relevant actors, and public education on preparing and responding to non-crisis situations.

Recognizing the importance of the civil defense system within the concept of crisis management is an inevitable step in defining a compelling concept because the civil defense

system enables the identification of potential dangers and taking preventive measures to reduce the risk of crises. Various types of training, simulations, and exercises prepare subjects for a quick and efficient response to crises, which means that the civil defense system enables early response, mobilization of resources, and rescue of the vulnerable population in the event of a crisis, as well as the reconstruction and rehabilitation of affected areas and communities.

The complexity of each crisis requires many activities at the national level to overcome it, which implies good cooperation and coordination of different levels of government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and citizens, and this is best achieved through an efficient and effective civil defense system, which ensures adequate response to all kinds of crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As with most security concepts, there is no consensus in the scientific literature about crisis, crisis management, and civil defense definitions. Contemporary understandings of crisis include complex and dynamic processes related to security, risk management, and response to unforeseen events. In ancient Greece, the word crisis (κριζις) meant "judgment" or "decision", a crucial moment that decides the further positive or negative development of a thing or situation. In Chinese (Mandarin), the symbol for crisis (wei-ji) includes characters meaning "danger" (wei) and "change" (ji), indicating that a crisis is interpreted as "an opportunity for danger to occur" (Kešetović and Milašinović 2008, 3).

According to Quarantelli (2010), a crisis can be defined as "a sudden event or situation that poses a serious threat to lives, property, the environment or the normal functioning of society, and that requires urgent and coordinated actions to mitigate the adverse consequences" (p. 154). Faget (2018) contributes to the contemporary understanding of the crisis by emphasizing its evolutionary character. Crises are no longer seen as sudden incidents but as complex situations resulting from the interaction of various factors, including social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions. This perspective emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to crisis management that includes anticipation, prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. Kaldor (2013) additionally highlights the changes like crises in the modern era, emphasizing the emergence of new forms of violence and conflicts. She points out that blurred boundaries between military and non-military actors and hybrid threats often characterize contemporary crises. Contemporary understandings of the crisis inevitably emphasize its multidisciplinary character, dynamism, and complexity, and effective management strategies that are adaptive and proactive are required. Contemporary crises are characterized by:

- the existence of a pre-crisis and post-crisis state, and the change is irreversible;
- the breakdown is not caused by one specific event; there is a global resonance of various forms;
- basic, as well as procedures that are not normally questioned, are no longer applicable: e.g., fundamental principles, identities, contexts, actors, rules of the game, defense mechanisms, knowledge - all these tools must be reconsidered and problematized;
- breakdown brings repeated frequent crises, which suddenly crystallize, occur, and disappear in an apparently incomprehensible and random way;

- strongly and deeply rooted in system imbalance, breakdowns are even more resistant to conventional treatment;
- since "decomposition" is the most noticeable, the prevailing impression is that it is a general separation and disintegration process that is almost impossible to stop (Boin and Lagadec 2000, 185-191).

All definitions of the concept of crisis have in common that it means a deviation from the standard order of things due to different events, complexity, and duration than usual, and critical decisions are made in extraordinary circumstances (Ivanović 2014, 15).

In security sciences, crisis management is a comprehensive and strategic approach used to effectively respond to unexpected and disruptive events that may result in significant compromise. The primary goals of crisis management are:

- Proactive planning, establishment of crisis teams, procedures, and communication strategies before any crisis.
- During the crisis, it activates the crisis management plan, coordinating all capacities to deal with it as quickly as possible. This includes allocating resources, managing spillovers, and making critical decisions.
- After the initial response, moving into a recovery phase, focusing on solving any remaining problems and learning from experience to prevent future crises.
- Preserving reputation is a critical component of crisis management. The most important steps are effective communication with stakeholders, transparency and commitment to ethical crisis resolution.
- Crisis management includes taking measures to increase resilience ensuring future progress in dealing with crises (Mizrak 2024, 256).

Crisis management consists of identifying, analyzing, and predicting possible crises and establishing specific ways of preventing or overcoming the crisis while minimizing the consequences and recovering and returning to normal as soon as possible. Therefore, crisis management refers to all activities directed at managing the system in a state of disruption: prevention, preparation, mitigation, and recovery. It involves shaping procedures, agreements, and decisions that influence the course of the crisis and includes organization, preparation, measures, and resource allocation for overcoming it (Kešetović and Milašinović 2008, 51-52).

Modern states and other organizations typically have strategies for overcoming crisis situations regarding preparedness and adequate response - this is their crisis management system. Given that crises are almost inevitable today, it is essential to be prepared for and manage them, representing one of the main tasks of crisis management. For example, some research has shown that in most Local Self-Government units (LSGs), there are severe difficulties in managing emergencies, especially concerning civil protection. It was established that many LSGs do not have a plan for using civil protection units, nor is there an organized command system for those units. This directly affects emergency management and its implementation as a practice in raising the capacity of LSGs to manage emergencies effectively (Karović et al. 2023).

In addition, the issue of protecting human rights and freedom during crisis situations is becoming more and more complex. After the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that special attention must be paid to this problem and that the experiences gained during the pandemic

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can be compared to any crisis situation, which resulted in the draft document of the European Commission, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the effective protection of human rights in crisis situations (Council of Europe, Draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers 2024). During crisis situations, human rights and freedom are often violated, especially in the case of sensitive categories of society such as women, children, the elderly, and people with special needs. The document of the European Commission emphasizes that human rights must not be violated even in the most challenging circumstances and that every country must ensure their respect and protection in all crisis situations. An effective crisis management system and civil defense framework ensure adherence to the principles of the rule of law and facilitate management based on the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, predictability, and timeliness during crisis situations.

Crisis management in the European Union (EU) establishes a comprehensive framework for its activities to build resilience through prevention and promote a culture of prevention. In this perspective, risk assessments, action planning, and capacity assessments carried out by each Member State at the national or sub-national level are essential to ensure an integrated approach to crisis management that effectively links prevention, preparedness, and response activities (EU Civil Protection Mechanism). NATO's crisis management concept encompasses both military and non-military measures, relying on experience, proven procedures, and an integrated military command structure to address a wide range of crises. This approach makes NATO a unique international organization with established mechanisms for effectively conducting crisis prevention and management operations. NATO's robust crisis management capabilities enable it to counter a wide range of threats to the security of the Alliance's territory and population.

Furthermore, NATO recognizes that military forces alone are often insufficient to address crises, emphasizing the invaluable role of civil defense in achieving effective crisis management (NATO Crisis Management 2024). NATO and the EU are developing cooperation among their crisis management mechanisms to coordinate joint activities and enable the most effective response to crises. Concrete cooperation is particularly vital in the fields of defense and combating hybrid threats, involving regular consultations and joint exercises to ensure interoperability between military and civilian forces during crisis situations. These efforts are driven by a shared interest in strengthening crisis management through programs and initiatives that support member states and partners in enhancing their crisis management capacities.

At the national level in the Republic of Serbia, the crisis management system gains particular importance considering the complexity of defending and protecting national values and interests and facing numerous challenges and threats that can cause countless crisis situations. In the Republic of Serbia, the crisis management system is under the jurisdiction of several state bodies. The Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection hold the most significant roles.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, through its organizational unit - the Sector for Emergency Situations - participates in the crisis management system by addressing internal crises that include protection and rescue and fire protection. In cases of dealing with more complex crises, the Ministry of Internal Affairs engages other organizational units, such as special police units.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection participates in the crisis management system through its various sectors for environmental management, nature protection, air and ozone

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layer protection, international cooperation, projects and climate change, waste and wastewater management, and environmental monitoring and preventive action. However, its role is limited to monitoring and prevention, as it lacks the capacity to counteract crisis situations and mitigate their consequences (Ministry of Environmental Protection Sectors).

The Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Defense is one of the most crucial entities in the crisis management system. The Defense Law of the Republic of Serbia regulates the defense system, the competencies of state bodies and the Serbian Armed Forces in defense, as well as the rights and duties of state bodies, autonomous provinces, local self-government units, citizens, companies, other legal entities and entrepreneurs in defense. Defense is achieved by engaging all available human and material resources and is ensured by using the Serbian Armed Forces and other defense forces (Defense Law, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 36/2018). According to the Defense Law, the defense of the Republic of Serbia encompasses both military and civil defense, which defines the place of civil defense within the crisis management system of the Republic of Serbia. Military and civil defense are the two most important pillars of the defense of the Republic of Serbia. However, in practice, it can be observed that the civil defense system has long been neglected in comparison to military defense. Since it is an integral part of the defense system, civil defense should be constituted on the same legal foundations as military defense. This system is under development, concluding that the entire crisis management system may prove ineffective in crisis situations if civil defense is not established on systemic foundations and principles of crisis management.

The Defense strategy of the Republic of Serbia defines civil defense as:

> [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 (The Defense strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019).

While in the Law on Defense (2018) it is defined as:

> [A] 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 authorities, authorities 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 - from which its role and importance within the system of crisis management.

Definitions from normative acts determine that civil defense is an integral part of the country's defense and protection system, representing a form of civil organization of the state

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and society with the primary goal of protecting and defending the population and material resources in crisis situations. It is characterized by a set of organized and functionally coordinated elements whose actions successfully overcome crisis situations in peacetime and wartime (Mišović and Kovač 2006, 461).

Crisis management and civil defense are closely related because the civil defense system must be seen as a component of the crisis management system. Crisis management and civil defense serve a common purpose that includes the protection of the entire social community in crisis situations, which implies that the existence of a civil defense system in the context of crisis management is necessary for an effective response to crises. Within crisis management, it is imperative to find opportunities to establish an effective civil defense system capable of preventing crises, confronting them, and eliminating their consequences, while the priority should be strengthening resilience. After many years of neglect of this system, and as a function of its development, civil defense in the Republic of Serbia must be organized based on systemic principles and principles of crisis management because this enables quick, efficient, and effective action in crisis situations, which aims to reduce the negative impact on protected values. The civil defense system is a system that represents a set of elements that interact with each other and serve a common purpose. Such a system is established for society to successfully respond to any type of crisis situation, so its organization on the principles of crisis management is necessary.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research collected data using content analysis and survey methods, with the survey as the primary research instrument.[1] The investigation covers the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia. The survey method was used to gather data on the elements necessary for the existence of an effective civil defense system in the Republic of Serbia and the impact of these elements on the development of the system (Mladenović et al. 2023). Due to the specificity of the research subject, experts from all entities within the civil defense system at all levels of government were selected, including the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, state authorities, authorities of autonomous provinces and local government units, public enterprises, business companies, entrepreneurs, and civilians. The research also involved participants with professional experience in civil defense over the past 20 years. The competencies of the research participants were determined using a combination of functional and behavioral competency models. This approach ensures that the experts are highly qualified in the subject area and possess abilities for rapid learning, adaptability to change, effective communication, and improvement of interpersonal relationships (Rodriguez et al. 2002). The functional competency model assesses the quality of job performance in a specific field and the possession of knowledge and skills that enable above-average performance (Wickramasinghe and Zoyza 2011).

[1]This research was part of the doctoral dissertation: Mladenović, M. 2023. "Development of Civil Defense in the Republic of Serbia for Reducing the Vulnerability of the Civil Population and Material Resources". Doctoral dissertation. Military Academy, University of Defense, Belgrade.

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The behavioral competency model evaluates the behaviors and capabilities of experts, such as attitudes, motivation, and personal traits. By combining the functional and behavioral models for determining competencies, the selected experts:

- possess comprehensive knowledge of the subject area and the ability to apply it effectively,
- have the ability to perform a wide range of tasks within the subject area,
- have the capability for further development and advancement in the subject area,
- have appropriate personal and professional values and abilities that enable the acquisition of reliable information.

The research results were presented using statistical methods. The study was conducted on a selected partial statistical sample of individuals from strategic, operational, and tactical levels of management in the Republic of Serbia. The statistical unit in the sample consists of individuals who are experts in the subject area. A representative sample was determined using the formula for calculating sample size in cases where it is unknown or excessively large (Field 2009), given that the civil defense system encompasses all human and material resources of the Republic of Serbia.

Sample size calculation formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

z = normal deviation (z-score) corresponding to the chosen confidence level. For a 95% confidence level, z=1.96

p = proportion of the sample expected to choose a particular answer. With 5 answer options in the survey, the proportion is 20% and p=0.2

q = 1−p, which is q=0.8

e = margin of error. The allowable margin of error in the study is 10%, so e=0.1

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

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

$$n = \mathbf{61{,}4656}$$

In this study, a representative sample size of 61 was calculated using the specified formula. A total of 67 responses were received, exceeding the required sample size. This larger sample enhances reliability and validity, reduces the margin of error, and improves representativeness.

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RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Compared to the period after the Second World War, the focus of civil defense, its goals, and tasks have changed significantly, which has led to the inclusion of civil defense in the broadest aspects of protecting the population and society's values in all crisis situations. As part of the defense system, the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia has strategic importance. It is aimed at the defense and protection of a country's most important protected values so that its development contributes to the development and improvement of the entire crisis management system. Civil defense has as its primary goal the safety of people, material resources, and the environment, which it achieves by limiting the effects and consequences of a crisis, ensuring quick responses, and creating a new culture in the area, primarily emphasizing the importance of prevention, resilience and risk reduction (Mladenović 2023, 87).

After the Cold War, the civil defense systems in most countries around the world collapsed, exposing their weaknesses under modern security conditions. This highlighted the need for a new and comprehensive approach to civil defense, particularly in Europe and the Republic of Serbia. As a vital component of an effective defense architecture, civil defense requires a redefined understanding and efficient implementation to ensure that every country can establish its security functions as effectively as possible. Crisis management and civil defense play an essential role in preventive activities, especially during crisis situations when these systems gain a special dimension due to lack of time, accelerated consumption of resources, and constant changes in conditions (Kovačević, Nikolić, and Komazec 2024). The renewal of the concept of civil defense throughout Europe is essential for its security, and it seems that the countries of Europe are finally taking this into account. The concept of civil defense contributes to a comprehensive understanding of security and is a necessary element in supporting military defense, protecting the civilian population, and preserving material resources. Civil defense implies the systematic and comprehensive establishment of a structure to strengthen civil society's resistance to all internal and external crises. By establishing a civil defense system in Europe, coordinated and complementary action of all countries can be achieved in a crisis situation of any scale (Mladenović et al. 2024).

In Ukraine, which is engulfed in armed conflicts, where the civilian component and civil defense play a vital role in protecting and defending protected values during the conflict, there has been a change in the understanding of the roles and importance of this system. European countries increasingly realize they need to establish a civil defense system even without a conflict on their territory because it may be too late when a crisis already occurs (Braw 2022). Countries like Sweden and Denmark are reviving the concept of civil defense, indicating a growing belief that it encompasses more than just preparedness for crises; it completes the total defense concept. Most European countries are embracing the comprehensive development of this system. Europe is rethinking civil defense by incorporating new technologies, engaging as much of society as possible, and encouraging international cooperation within the crisis management framework.

In the context of modern crises, where all aspects of human life and work are affected, and weapons of mass destruction cause both direct and indirect consequences, there is a pressing need for increased organization and engagement of the population during crises.

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A civil defense system's development and successful functioning within crisis management creates realistic conditions for reducing human and material losses and providing timely assistance. The most effective crisis management systems are those in countries that have adopted the concept of total defense, as all potential resources of such a state are directed toward defense. Total defense encompasses all military and civilian activities to prepare the state and society for crisis situations. This concept implies a high level of readiness in the defense system during crises. Applying this concept means that, in times of war or emergency, all parts of society, both military and civilian, are involved in defense efforts (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) 2021).

The military component and civil defense are parts of a unified defense system of the country, both in terms of purpose and function. The army is a factor of deterrence from armed intervention and a force capable of armed combat. At the same time, civil defense is a force that provides the needs of the army (military forces) and the protection and functioning of all state and local institutions. Civil defense encompasses all state and societal activities and the utilization of human and material resources vital to national defense. These activities are indispensable to the armed forces, as the defense of a state relies on the collective efforts of all its resources. The state's ability to respond effectively to various crisis situations depends on the overall capacity of its civil defense system. By ensuring the survival of the state, civil defense creates the conditions for the efficient operation of the entire state apparatus. Simultaneously, it supports the armed forces and other crisis management entities, facilitating the effective management of crises and the protection and rescue system.

The civil component of the total defense concept has long been neglected. The growing number of hybrid threats characteristic of the 21st century drives its revival and increasing importance. The new Swedish Minister for Civil Defense believes, "Everyone needs to know what to do if a crisis or war occurs; civil defense starts with you and me. What should we do if a crisis or war comes?" (Braw 2022). Given the high vulnerability of modern civil societies, this question can also be asked of other countries, and previous experiences have shown that the civil component is crucial in national defense systems. Civil defense begins with the individual and their preparedness, as the more people can manage independently in crisis situations, the better the state can focus on helping those in the most difficult situations (Government Offices of Sweden 2024).

Countries that successfully implement the total defense concept include Sweden, Singapore, Estonia, Lithuania, Israel, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Russia, and Serbia. Sweden and Russia have developed the most comprehensive total defense concepts in Europe. In Russia, in addition to the Ministry of Defense, there is also a Ministry of Civil Defense, while Sweden established the position of Minister for Civil Defense in 2024.

The crisis management and civil defense systems in the countries of the Southwestern Balkans often vary depending on their level of development and membership in international organizations such as NATO and the EU. Crisis management systems generally share similar foundations in countries that are candidates for EU and NATO membership, as well as those that are not members. These systems aim to align with the guidelines of the international organizations and institutions they belong to or aspire to join, reflecting a commitment to adopting best practices and international standards in crisis management and civil defense.

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In the Republic of Albania, the crisis management system is based on the development of the National Crisis Management Platform, in which all capacities of society play a role. In crisis management, the government occupies the most important place, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the head of the Regional Commission for Emergency Situations, and regional and local authorities (European Committee of the Regions - Albania 2024). Albania also joined the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in 2022. The situation is similar in North Macedonia, which, with its National Platform (North Macedonia National Platform 2024), which includes political, administrative, operational, and professional levels, wants to show that it is going to step with all the achievements of crisis management of international organizations in which participation takes the entire social potential. The complex political situation and territorial organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina bring great difficulties to implementing the crisis management system in this country. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) and its legal entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBIH), Republic of Srpska (RS), and Brčko District (DB), have ratified specific laws on crisis management and crisis response. However, their implementation is hampered by a lack of cooperation and coordination between these entities, so the entire crisis management system is unreliable. Parallel systems follow the organization of the civil defense system in all entities, which leads to a lack of functionality due to the intertwining of numerous functions and responsibilities with a constant lack of communication, coordination, and cooperation between the subjects of the civil defense system at different levels (Karajlić and Smailbegović 2021, 11). Bosnia and Herzegovina has, among other things, accepted all EU crisis management mechanisms, such as the emergency number 112, but their implementation in practice is still in its infancy. The crisis management systems of Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece are conditioned by the characteristics required by membership in NATO and the EU, so these systems are modeled after the systems of these organizations with certain specific characteristics required by local and regional challenges.

Considering the current state of security in the world marked by numerous armed conflicts, migrant and energy crises, and local crises such as natural disasters, the crisis management systems of the Southwestern Balkan countries must strive for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Regional cooperation between these countries is of inestimable importance because contemporary crises often cross individual countries' borders and require a collective response.

In the example of the adopted concept of total defense of the Republic of Serbia, one can see expressed views on the integration of military and civil defense, which should enable a synchronized response of the subjects and forces of the defense system to all challenges and threats to national security. After the long-term collapse of the civil defense system, in the new Concept of Total Defense and the White Book of Defense, there are indications of the intention to improve and develop this system and eliminate numerous deficiencies in the existing normative regulation. The new documents define how this system functions, which has not been the case until now. The White Book of Defense defines other defense forces as forces that will be focused on preparations for the defense and defense of the Republic of Serbia by non-military means. Training civil defense commands at all levels of the state organization are planned to manage the defense forces that perform civil defense (White Book of Defense 2023, 21-43). The Civil Defense Command will, in a state of emergency and war, defend the Republic of Serbia with non-military means by:

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- manage subordinate defense forces and civil defense commands in the execution of assigned tasks in the defense of the Republic of Serbia;
- manage and coordinate the provision of conditions for the functioning of state bodies, bodies of autonomous provinces and local self-government units, legal entities, and entrepreneurs;
- manage and coordinate the provision of living and working conditions for citizens;
- manage and coordinate the provision of conditions for meeting the needs of the defense forces;
- manage and coordinate the implementation of civil protection measures;
- plan and implement training plans for citizens for the defense of the country;
- carry out military, labor, and material obligations, as well as mobilization;
- coordinate and direct preparations for unarmed struggle and resistance;
- monitor the capabilities of other civil defense forces and propose measures for their improvement;
- perform other tasks determined by law and defense plans (Concept of Total Defense 2023, 9).

The Civil Defense Command, in a state of emergency and war, will manage and coordinate the headquarters for emergencies and coordinate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the implementation of civil protection tasks and the centers of the Ministry of Defense for the implementation of other civil defense tasks, in the zone/region of its responsibility. The Civil Defense Command will coordinate and cooperate with the Military Defense Forces and, if necessary, send representatives or a team to them (Total Defense Concept 2023, 6-13). The function of the civil defense system within crisis management can also be seen within the third mission of the Serbian Armed Forces of Serbia - support to civil authorities in confronting security threats (Figure 1). Operations to support civil authorities in confronting security threats are carried out in case of internal threats to security - terrorism, separatism, organized crime, natural disasters, and technical-technological accidents. The goal of conducting operations is to support civil authorities and the population in protecting and saving people's lives, material goods, and the environment.

The basic preconditions for the success of the operations are direct cooperation and coordination with the state authorities that lead all the forces in the threatened area and the use of fully trained and equipped military units (Doctrine of Operations 2017, 37).

Table 1: Operations of the Army (Source: Land Forces Doctrine 2012)

OPERATIONS SUPPORTING CIVIL AUTHORITIES
Non-Combat Activities
Evacuation of the Population Distribution of Essential Life Supplies Provision of Health Services Assistance in Mitigating the Effects of Natural and Technical-Technological Disasters
Objectives
Preservation of Population Lives Restoration of Essential Public Services Protection of Infrastructure Support for Local Government Authorities Creating an Environment for the Success of International Humanitarian Organizations' Activities

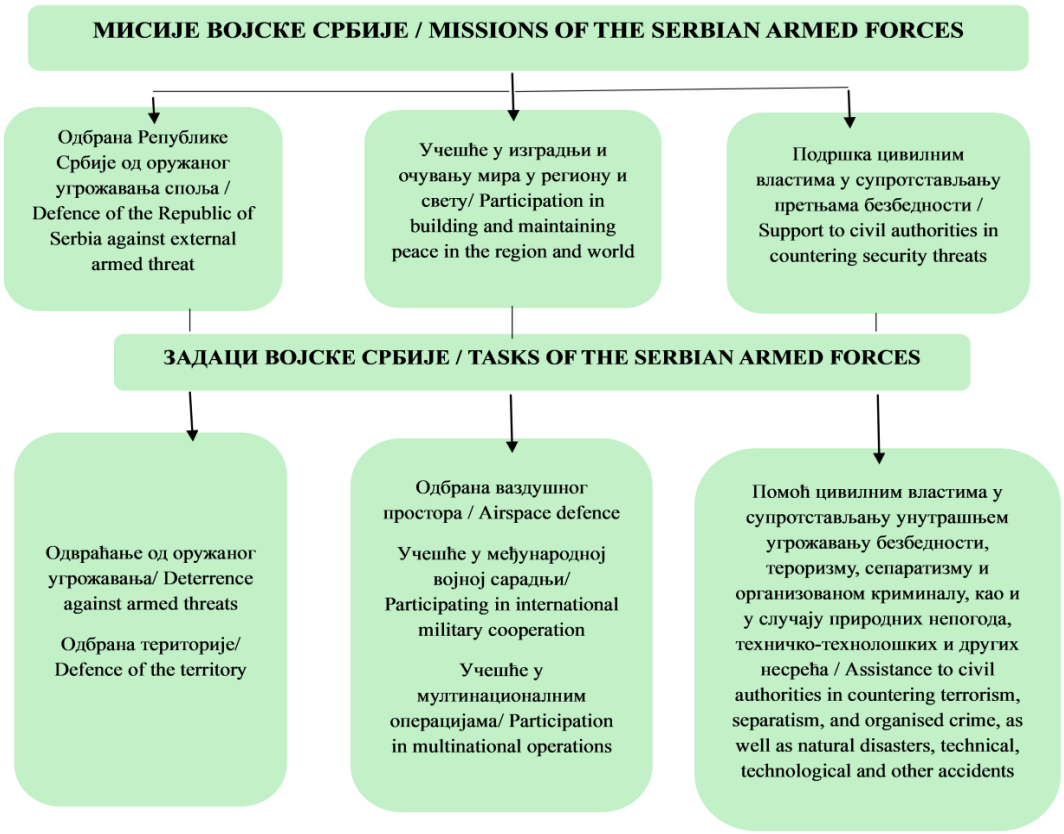


Figure 1: Missions and Tasks of the Serbian Armed Forces
(Source: White Paper on Defense of the Republic of Serbia 2023)

The defense system of the Republic of Serbia, with civil defense as a key component, forms the backbone of the country's entire crisis management framework. Civil defense plays a crucial role in this system by defending and protecting vital values during crises, ensuring efficient and timely responses to minimize damage and risk. Doing so significantly contributes to strengthening community resilience and enhancing cooperation among local, regional, and national institutions. Civil defense encompasses much more than crisis preparedness; it involves assessing all potential threats and mobilizing resources to provide the most effective deterrence against various risks, all while ensuring proper planning and organization at the national level.

The civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia is still evolving, facing numerous challenges in its development, but it also presents many opportunities for improvement. The first crucial step in establishing an effective civil defense system within the country's crisis management framework is creating an adequate normative framework. This framework will provide the legal and regulatory foundation necessary to guide the development of civil defense, ensuring its alignment with international standards and ability to address emerging threats and crisis situations effectively. The new Concept of Total Defense (2024) and the White Paper on Defense (2023) show progress in defining and organizing this system, which additional normative regulations with many shortcomings should complement. Analyzing normative documents of the Republic of Serbia in civil defense reveals that a comprehensive reform of these documents is necessary to create appropriate foundations for the normative, institutional,

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and organizational development of the civil defense system of the Republic of Serbia. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia does not explicitly address civil defense, while it recognizes military defense, suggesting that the constitutional framework should also acknowledge the strategic importance of civil defense and create the necessary conditions for its comprehensive development. Although the Constitution does not directly establish civil defense provisions, it does proclaim the right to defense, which provides a partial basis for the development of a civil defense system. This constitutional recognition allows for the legal foundation to be laid for establishing and strengthening civil defense as a critical element of the country's overall defense strategy (Figure 2).

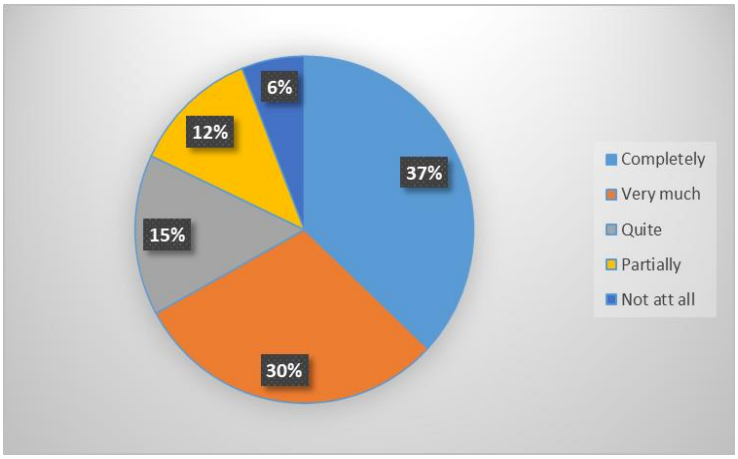


Figure 2: Constitutional Provisions Establishing the Foundations of the Civil Defense System in the Republic of Serbia (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 219)

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia does not recognize civil defense as part of the defense system and, as a result, does not provide the legal foundation for a comprehensive defense system that unequivocally includes both military and civil defense (Figure 3).

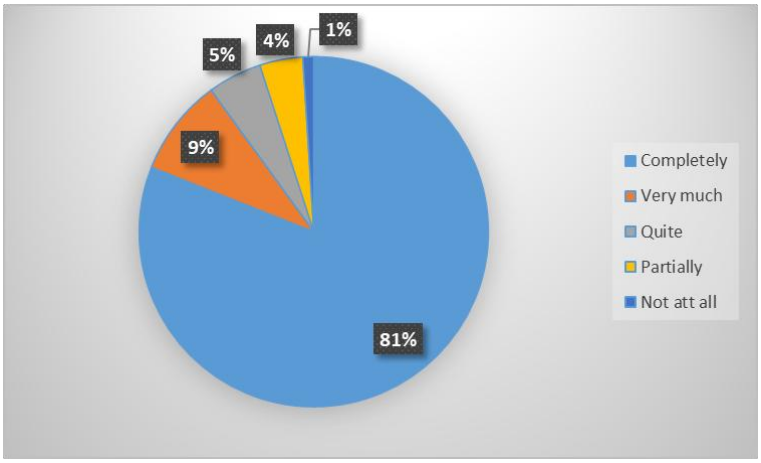


Figure 3: Necessity of the Civil Defense System Within the Defense System of the Republic of Serbia (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 217)

The Defense Strategy of the Republic of Serbia does not provide a clear and precise definition of civil defense, including its structure (entities and forces), objectives, and tasks, despite the anticipated need for its regulation and improvement. The strategy fails to regulate civil defense systematically, thereby not creating the necessary conditions for its development and enhancement. Consequently, normative documents of the Republic of Serbia should establish the organization and define the functioning of the civil defense system (Figure 4).

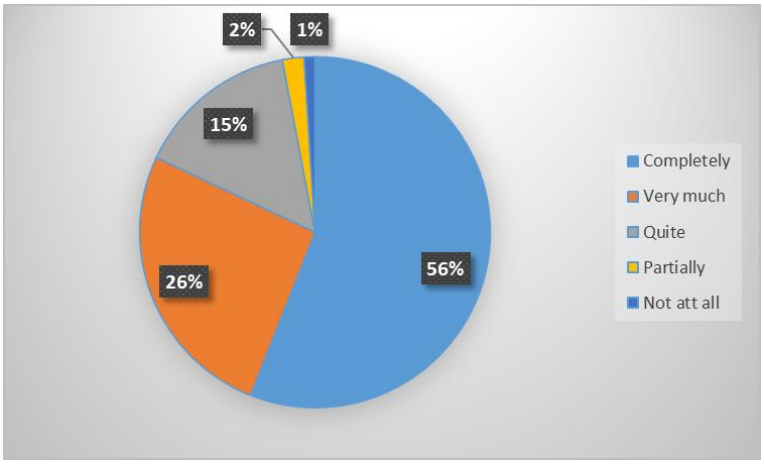


Figure 4: Normative Documents of the Republic of Serbia Establishing the Organization and Functioning of the Civil Defense System (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 220)

In response to the assessed challenges, risks, and threats, the Republic of Serbia must establish an efficient and effective civil defense system, as civil defense constitutes an activity of strategic importance for the country (Figure 5).

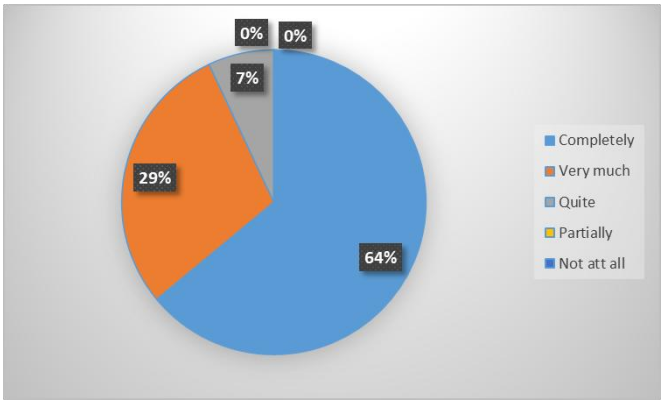


Figure 5: Civil Defense as an Activity of Strategic Importance for the Republic of Serbia (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 216)

Advancements in establishing and developing the civil defense system in the Republic of Serbia are evident in the adoption of the new White Paper on Defense and the Concept of Total Defense, both of which dedicate significantly more attention to civil defense. However, inadequate normative regulation remains one of the key challenges in the development of this

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system. The normative and institutional framework for civil defense requires updates to regulations and alignment with international standards and practices. This also involves clearly defining responsibilities, authorities, and coordination, a process that has begun in the new White Paper on Defense and will facilitate improvements in the planning process within the civil defense system. The regulatory framework should ensure the allocation of appropriate budgetary resources for civil defense, supporting the modernization and procurement of adequate resources to implement its functions within the crisis management system effectively. Together, these efforts contribute to developing an efficient and effective system that is only partially realized (Figure 6).

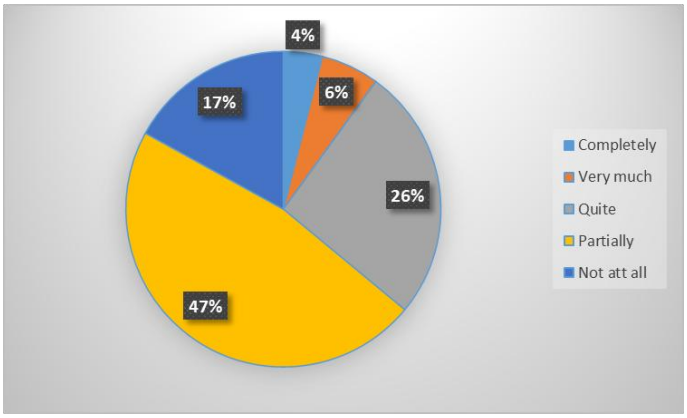


Figure 6: The Republic of Serbia's Efficient and Effective Civil Defense System in Practice (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 217)

Collaboration and coordination at all levels of government organization and on an international level are crucial for effectively countering crises. The organization of the civil defense system should follow the territorial structure of the Republic of Serbia, meaning it should be developed according to the administrative-territorial division of the state and represented at all levels of government organization (Figure 7).

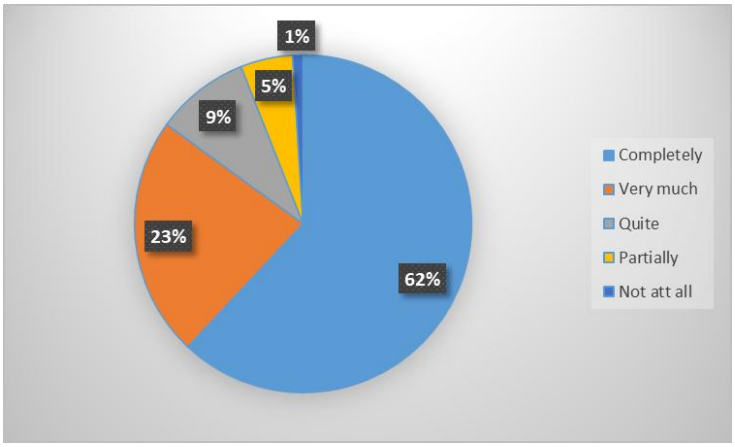


Figure 7: Organization of the Civil Defense System According to the Territorial Structure of the Republic of Serbia (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 238)

A prerequisite for the active participation of all stakeholders in the civil defense system is establishing an appropriate education system (Figure 8). Developing civil defense within the crisis management system also entails raising awareness and educating citizens about its importance and how they can participate. Civil defense entities and forces should consist of highly educated human resources capable of collaborating with educational institutions to establish and improve the civil defense education program. Additionally, integrating modern technologies into the civil defense system, including digital platforms for communication and coordination, is a crucial step in its development, particularly for early warning systems and monitoring potential threats. Innovative solutions facilitate efficient resource and operations management in crisis situations.

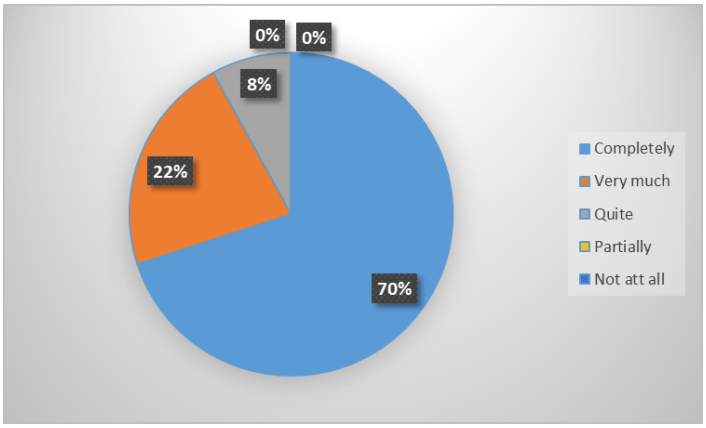


Figure 8: Necessity of Establishing an Education System for the Functioning of the Civil Defense System at All Levels of Education (Source: Mladenovic 2023, 239)

All these challenges simultaneously present opportunities for the development of the civil defense system within the framework of crisis management and allow for the adaptation of the civil defense system to new challenges, leading to the development of strategies and plans for the prevention and response to various types of crises with continuous monitoring and risk assessment for the purpose of as efficient crisis management as possible and the creation of a civil defense system that can respond to all potential crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

The role of civil defense in the crisis management system of the Republic of Serbia is essential for effective response to crisis situations and preserving protected values. Research within this paper shows that civil defense is considered an important part of the national crisis management system in certain normative documents. However, its practical action is limited by an underdeveloped normative framework, limited resources, and a lack of effective inter-institutional cooperation and coordination. In addition, the population's low awareness of the importance of civil defense and the need for continuous education makes its work even more difficult. These factors currently reduce civil defense's effectiveness in all crisis management phases: prevention, preparation, response, and recovery.

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The research's practical implications show that improving civil defense in these segments is necessary for the best possible response to crises. Focusing on training, education, and raising awareness among all subjects would be essential to strengthening this system and ensuring a faster and more effective response in crisis situations.

In the future, the civil defense of the Republic of Serbia must continue with adaptation and modernization to adequately respond to new challenges, risks, and threats. This paper emphasizes the need for a broader and more proactive approach to the role of civil defense in crisis management. Further research could be focused on identifying specific steps that would enable better implementation of theoretical crisis management models in practice, making the civil defense of the Republic of Serbia more flexible, modernized, and ready for contemporary crisis situations.

Civil defense is necessary for any modern state to continue the functioning of the state and society in all crisis situations, especially in war. This implies the protection of the civilian population and a guarantee that the provision of basic goods and services can continue, thus supporting military defense and strengthening the will of every citizen to defend the country, which implies that further research in this area is necessary.

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CRediT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Milica Mladenović: conceptualization, methodology, validation, writing-original draft, writing-review and editing, visualization, formal analysis, resources. **Nenad Komazec:** conceptualization, validation, visualization, resources. **Siniša Domazet:** conceptualization, validation, visualization, resources.

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