

BULGARIA IN NATO: CHALLENGES TO CIVIL EMERGENCY PLANNING

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Civil Emergency Planning, as all other NATO areas of activity, was positively affected by the accession of seven new member states to the Alliance in Spring 2004, including Bulgaria. Given their strong involvement in Civil Emergency Planning during previous years in the framework of Partnership for Peace and EAPC and as Invitees in 2003, the new Allies were able to integrate effectively into NATO's Civil Emergency Planning structures.

The year 2004 was also marked by a number of important policy initiatives in the area of Civil Emergency Planning. Allied Heads of State and Government, at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, agreed on a broad set of measures for defense against terrorism, including a commitment to further explore and enhance Allies' and NATO's ability to respond rapidly to national requests for support to help protect against and deal with the consequences of a terrorist incident. The Istanbul Summit was also the venue for a successful exhibition on NATO's role in response to disasters and civil emergencies. Also in 2004, a Civil Emergency Planning Exercise Policy, an exercise program, and a Catalogue of Civil Capabilities for use by the NATO Military Authorities in crisis response operations were developed and agreed by the Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committee (SCEPC). With regard to disaster assistance, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) agreed in January 2004 that the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) should be ready to respond expeditiously, on the basis of SCEPC guidance, to requests for disaster assistance support by the Afghan government. The role of EADRCC for emergency response in real time and consequences management has considerably increased over the last years in EAPC area. The new expected extension of SCEPC and EADRCC activities is directed to strategic approach and practical options for an enhanced cooperation with the Mediterranean dialogue countries in the field of civil emergency planning. Furthermore, efforts continued to achieve closer cooperation among NATO bodies involved in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) - related

matters, and, in particular, between the SCEPC and the Senior Defense Group on Proliferation (DGP). The implementation of the Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan for the Improvement of Civil Preparedness against Possible Attacks against the Civilian Population with Chemical, Biological, or Radiological Agents continued at satisfactory pace in 2004. All these policies were reflected in the new Ministerial Guidance for Civil Emergency Planning 2005-2006, which the SCEPC developed during the second half of 2004 and which was endorsed by NATO Foreign Ministers at their 9 December 2004 meeting in Brussels.

In regard to NATO's Civil Emergency Policy, Bulgaria has made essential contribution to NATO's efforts to improve its own Crisis Response System. Bulgaria has played and continues to play active role in the decision-making process with its permanent participation in the SCEPC and its Planning Boards and Committees' sessions. Bulgarian national representatives have participated in the development of the main strategic NATO's documents in the areas of civil emergency planning and the protection of civilian population and critical infrastructure. Many institutions and organizations in the country have worked hard to improve their own preparedness in the field of civil emergency planning and gave their contribution to the development of the national crisis response system. Numerous activities took place during this one year period: the adoption of the new crisis management law; conduction of emergency response exercises; implementation of research studies, projects and programs in the field of national and regional security and risk prevention; conferences, seminars, working meetings on bilateral and multilateral basis, etc. Most of them were presented in NATO and were highly appreciated by the International Staff and the Allies.

Bulgaria will continue to share and bear the common NATO responsibilities and values not only in piece keeping, but also in developing the increasing NATO role in protection of the civilian population in case of emergencies. The adequate approach to the achievement of this humane task for Bulgaria for the next couple of years is the development of modern national crisis response system in accordance with the NATO's crisis response system. The system has to be flexible, integrated, and quickly deployable and to comply with the NATO standards, allied agreements and procedures. The system has to be supported by clearly-structured institutional organization on a national level with integrated state, regional and local network of emergency management centers, bodies and rescue teams. This organizational structure should be fully equipped and oriented towards protection of the civilian population in case of disasters, accidents, and catastrophes.

One of the best practices and priorities that Bulgaria has to follow is strengthening of the regional cooperation. Good example in this direction is the initiated and organized by Bulgaria Civil Military Emergency Planning Council for South Eastern

Europe. This governing body has already gained rich regional and international experience in dealing with natural disasters and technological accidents. The scope of Council's activities covers also improvement of civilian preparedness and protection against terrorist acts.

The Bulgarian efforts to keep, protect and maintain the civilian security and stability in case of emergencies would be very much facilitated by our active and visible NATO membership. And if we wish to contribute to the Alliance efforts in developing a reliable and efficient common collective security system, including a secure civilian environment and protection, we, on a national level, have to improve the realization of the following NATO priorities:

- Development of a National Capabilities Inventory;
- Participation in the work-out of the non-binding guidelines and minimum standards against CBRN agents and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD);
- Protection of the civilian population through development, introduction and application of new technologies in crisis management;
- Improvement of Civil-Military Cooperation;
- Development of Border Crossing Agreement in case of emergencies;
- Critical Infrastructure Protection;
- Development of Training and Exercise Policy in Civil Emergency Planning;
- Inclusion of the scientific community and the non-governmental organizations in the civil emergency studies and research.

We have to look for opportunities to raise the public awareness and understanding of the necessity for a highly effective and transparent system, able to overcome the challenges to the natural and man-made surrounding environment. The role of the authorities and the civilian associations is very important here, in how to initiate a public debate on this important subject – the protection of the population.