

# THE MANAGEMENT OF COMPLEX (SECURITY) CRISIS

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## Abstract

Crises occur frequently and in very complex ways however routine responses of crisis management often do not follow the changing pattern, nature, intensity and scope of crises. Extensive research has been accomplished in Europe and North America to create bases for creative changes in this field. Common theory and methodology were developed and the huge amount of cases was empirically explored to this effect. The article brings about core findings on legal, system and functional dimensions of crisis management in Slovenia. Its assumption is that inconsistent legal and doctrinal solutions, and consequently system deficiencies hamper the development of effective and rational crisis management. The officials' fear of innovations that change every day routine is not helpful in this process, either. The discourse of the article is analytical and prescriptive by its nature.

**Keywords:** crisis, crisis management (system), legal basis, coordination, innovation.

## Introduction: conceptualization of the problem

Crisis analysts (Yehezkel Dror, Patrick Lagadec, Boris Porfiriev, Enrico L. Henry Quarantelli, Uriel Rosenthal, Arjen Boin, Paul t'Hart, Bengt Sundelius, Eric Stern, Louise K. Comfort and others) agree that this phenomenon is changing in terms of both quantity and quality. They believe that more crises can be expected in the future (a quantum jump), and that crises will be characterized by endemicity (crises will constitute a logical opposition to the increasingly complex systems, which will fail to meet the high security standards and expectations due to technological, financial or political factors), complexity (crises will consist of several combinations of crisis events and of causal relations triggering them, which means that a crisis permanently reproduces itself in various

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forms) (Rosenthal, Boin and Comfort, 2001).<sup>2</sup> In other words, according to Boin, t'Hart, Stern and Sundelius (2005) crises are a result of several causes, interacting in a given time span and producing a risk with destructive potential. Porfiriev (2001) believes that future crises will be characterized by growing heterogeneity, complexity and insecurity. These characteristics refer to the causes, conditions and directions of development. However regardless the changing nature of crises, their consequences will be fairly conventional; we will continue to assess them in terms of victims, damage, risk, urgency, uncertainty, stress and decision-making dilemmas.

The administrative repertoire of crisis management preventive and intervention strategies is not adapted to the character of present and future crises which are, and will continue to be, primarily characterized by a complex and intricate structure. The conventional organizational forms of co-ordination cannot be used to organize the work of the increasing number of different organizations and individuals participating in crisis management (Rosenthal, Boin & Comfort, 2001: 13–14). Scholars agree that the available tools for dealing with crises are themselves also facing a crisis.<sup>3</sup> Routine ways of decision-making and of the political process need to be thoroughly upgraded. This calls for a broader approach to and a reflection on the policies and government competencies which should also integrate crisis management.<sup>4</sup>

Researchers understand crisis as a situation, in which basic social values, norms and structures are at risk, where the time for decision-making is limited, and which entail uncertainty, stress and frequently also the element of surprise (Malešič, 2004: 11–12). Boin and 't Hart (2001) define crisis management as the formulation of procedures, agreements and decisions which affect the course of a crisis, including the organization, preparation, measures and distribution of resources needed to control it.

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2 The last example of such extremely complex event is the Japanese crisis that occurred in March 2011. It was triggered by the earthquake, followed by tsunami and nuclear disaster.

3 In the context of the new critical theory of the world risk society, Beck (2008: 5) holds that the traditional technologies of risk assessment, management and insurance are no longer fully functional.

4 The most successful attempt seems to be the restructuring of crisis management system in Sweden in 2009. A Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency was established to enhance and support societal capacities to cope with crises.

One of the key tasks of crisis management is decision-making that involves key values trade-offs and political risks (Boin, 't Hart, Stern and Sundelius, 2005). Main feature of crisis decision making is interagency, intergovernmental and inter-group coordination that prevents miscommunication, overlapping of activities and value or organizational conflicts between state, private and non-governmental, sometimes concurrently national and international crisis management actors.

### **Empirical evidence**

Researchers around different parts of Europe and North America have carried out about one hundred case studies under the auspices of the Swedish CRISMART (Crisis Management Research and Training) to explore contemporary crises and their management. The research gave an emphasis on individual crises caused by natural disasters, epidemical conditions, technical errors, human mistakes, political conflicts, terrorist attacks and alike, that occurred in different countries. The research was multidisciplinary by its nature, mainly involving disaster sociology and psychology, international relations, security studies, public administration and public policy, and organizational theory. The vast empirical evidence allows for theory building across various scientific disciplines and policy reflections in huge number of crises.

#### **Research design**

The analyses of crises and crisis management in the framework of abovementioned research program have been taking place in Slovenia from 2000 on. We selected ten different cases to be explored ranging from political crises to natural and man-made disasters (Malesic and Brändström 2004, 13-14). Our main assumption was that inconsistent legal and doctrinal solutions, and consequently system deficiencies hamper the effective and rational crisis management. The officials' fear of innovations that change every day routine is not helpful in this process, either.

In the first stage researchers applied a cognitive-institutional approach towards crisis decision-making, having in mind, that we should explore cognitive capacity of people involved in crisis decision-making and institutional framework the decisions are made in (Stern 1999). We used four-level model of exploring various cases: (1) installation of individual crisis in adequate historical, political, cultural and institutional context; (2) general description of the case and time-frame; (3) dissection of crisis on specific situations that require decision-making; and (4) use of holistic approach, where crisis is seen again as a complex and comprehensive entity and not only as a sum of its specific sequences.

The following analytical themes were explored (Malesic and Brändström 2004, 14-18): Crisis preparedness, prevention and mitigation (preparedness of crisis managers and their organizations to respond to extraordinary events, experiences, psychological readiness, structures and plans, ability to identify and to perceive crisis). Leadership (the leadership styles and variations: operative or symbolic, concrete and personal or more abstract and distant, hierarchical or collegial). Decision units (how and where decisions are made in the complex institutional systems that are typically engaged in managing a crisis: an individual, a small group or whole organizational network, strategic or operative decision-makers, (de)centralization of decision-making process). Problem perception and framing (the subjective and socially constructed aspects of crisis management, a perceived picture of what is happening, problem-framing: the role of political considerations and cognitive processes). Value conflict (tension and conflict among the various values at stake in a crisis situation, parochial vs. social values, dilemmas and choices, do crisis actors cope with the real and tangible dilemmas of value conflicts that emerge in crisis situations?). Political and bureaucratic cooperation and conflict (patterns of convergence and divergence, parochialism and solidarity among actors and stakeholders in a crisis, cooperation vs. competition or even avoidance). Crisis communication and credibility (the relationship between the information available, its timely and appropriate procession, and the perception of crisis and actions that are taken to solve it; the balance between sorting of information and limiting gate keeping, the role of mass media, 'credibility trap', legitimacy). Transnationalization and internationalization (the tendency of crises to spill over national boundaries, transnational cooperation, international support for new policies and tools for regulations). Temporal effects (the time factor in crisis and its impact on stress, cognitive rigidity, reliance on past experience, importance of cognitive set, stereotyping and importance of short-run values, tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity to others' perspective and resistance to pull of closure, ability to follow feedback). Learning (the ability of crisis management structures and individuals to learn: each and every crisis offers a vast reservoir of experiences and lessons for future crisis planning and training. A fair expectation is that those involved in crisis management will draw lessons from the event and will transfer them into organizational practices, policies and laws).

By selecting cases and themes, we actually created a matrix that allowed us not only to have a thorough insight into individual cases (through analytical themes), but also to explore analytical themes through various cases.

The methods we used were official documents content analysis, mass media content analysis, analysis of secondary sources and data, and individual and group interviews. Triangulation of methods gave us a comprehensive insight into crisis management characteristics at legal, doctrinal, system and functional levels. The research was accomplished in three stages and we will summarize the findings bellow.

### **Functional analysis**

Functional analysis revealed (see more in Malešič 2004 and Malesic and Brändström 2004) that the authorities in Slovenia have not taken all of the necessary precautions to prevent disastrous consequences of crises. As a matter of fact some measures are very costly (e.g. earthquake safe construction, measures against floods, installation of cleaning devices) whereas others were omitted due to subjective reasons. Response plans were at least formally there but our analysis revealed that the plan as an actual document has limited value in a crisis. However, planning as a learning process has proved to be important. This is evident by the fact that crisis managers know the crucial elements of the plan. The decision-making processes and leadership practices were in many cases in contradiction with the rules and planned procedures. There was a lot of shifting or simply assuming responsibility, improvisations and ad hoc solutions. The perception and definition of the crises were largely dependent on previous experiences. People who had already experienced a similar crisis, or more of them, were prone to develop a so called 'crisis subculture'<sup>5</sup> and they acted according to it. The capacity for timely responses was limited. The notification of affected population and general public by the authorities was late in several cases. The response of crisis management actors was often prompt however they were not notified to intervene in the earliest stages of crises. The organizational cooperation was rather good in many analyzed cases however, the relationship between different actors on the disaster site was not always clear enough. The mix of local, regional, state actors, the military and non-governmental actors sometimes produced a certain degree of tension and confusion regarding the responsibility and competencies. Civil-military cooperation in the process of protection, rescuing and help during disasters was not at the highest level. There are at least four key factors that have impact on the decision whether the military should be engaged in disaster relief or not: legal and doctrinal solutions, expectations of the public and

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<sup>5</sup> We understand crisis subculture as an ability of community that is often affected by crises to cope with them in a routine way: Individuals shift from normal to crisis roles, and every day norms and rules are replaced by crisis ones relatively smoothly and rapidly.

political elite, willingness of civilian disaster relief structures to ask for military help and last but not least the operational preparedness of the military to cope with such civilian crises. It seems that in Slovenia civilian authorities are reluctant to ask the military for help in case of disasters. We witnessed situations in which affected people expected prompt assistance of the military however it was provided rather late and in a limited scope. However in the last decade the conscript army was replaced by an All-Volunteer Force and civil-military cooperation in case of disasters improved. The role of mass media in crisis communication process was rather important especially in revealing deficiencies of the system and creating public pressure to improve the situation. It seems that mass media themselves play an ambivalent role in this process – on a one hand it is an opportunity to enlarge the audience or increase the intensity of media attention, while on the other hand mass media are according to the law part of crisis management.<sup>6</sup> The adequate balance between their business (profit) interest and crisis communication role was not always achieved. Although mass media connected affected people with the 'outside', normal surroundings, which helped them in psychological terms, and reduced uncertainty by providing information, mass media also triggered conflicts with authorities and reported in sensational manner.<sup>7</sup> The international cooperation does not refer to all examined cases, but in some of them it seemed that other countries respected international obligations and solidarity did work. Sometimes neighbouring and other countries offered even more help than needed in a certain case. The level of internationalization of crisis depends on the nature and scope of crisis – some crises are not severe and are of local scope, others affect regions, the entire country and some of them even international community as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The lessons learned to a certain extent improved crisis management in Slovenia. Experiences were applied to crisis management practices: more investments in some prevention measures, adoption of national program and act on the protection of environment, improved notification system, psychological assistance to affected people and most exposed crisis management

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6 Mass Media Act; Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Act.

7 Extremely positive exception of mass media role in crisis was their performance during the Slovenian ten-day independence war in June and July 1991. The worst case was a communication process during preparation for a potential Y2K crisis.

8 It is important to emphasize that not only the dimension local-global is an issue but vice versa, as well. In the past analysts were more interested in the process of local crisis transformation into a global problem, whereas in globalized world a question is frequently raised, how global processes influence the emergence of crisis in local environment (e.g. pending financial, economic and social crisis).

actors and alike. However some lessons were not documented, were forgotten and were not embedded in future crisis planning. Let alone cognitive and institutional barriers to the process, one should not neglect the fact that lesson drawing is constrained by the role of these lessons in determining the impact that crises have on a society. Simply put, lessons learned might easily reveal deficiencies in crisis prevention, preparedness and response, a matter not pleasant for incumbent leaders (see also Boin, 't Hart, Stern and Sundelius, 2005).

### **Analysis of legal and doctrinal bases**

The logical question after the first stage of the research was why crisis management in Slovenia faces functional difficulties? In the second stage we wanted to find the answer through the analysis of legal structure regulating crisis management and system analysis in this field (see more in Malešič, 2009). The findings of the content analysis of relevant legal documents indicate that lack of precision and serious legal inconsistencies are hampering the development of effective crisis management. This is even more evident in the strategic and doctrinal documents. A firm and consistent legal basis is a necessary but by no means a sufficient precondition for effective crisis management at the national level.

The system analysis reveals the insufficient development of inter-organizational co-operation, and the inadequate co-ordination of actors and promotion of innovative approaches to crisis preparation and response. In this respect, the lack of a coordinating mechanism can be observed. Such a mechanism would integrate crisis management actors at the state, regional and local levels, and could ensure a flexible, rational and efficient crisis response.

The government policy is not entirely based on the recent achievements of individual sectors in the crisis management field and it fails to integrate them into a functional entity or even into several functional modules which would provide for a crisis response adapted to the nature, intensity and scope of a particular crisis.<sup>9</sup> The results of the analysis also point to the absence of an umbrella act, i.e. an act on crisis management, which would regulate this field, overcome the existing situation and enable the establishment of co-ordination structures at the national level, e.g. an agency for crisis management. This institution should be attached to the executive authorities.

### **Analysis of experts' ideas and views**

In the third stage of research we interviewed high-ranking officials to explore crisis management grey spots that were not revealed by other approaches and methods.<sup>10</sup> In the following section we present the main ideas and views of our respondents.

Many common points were found in the respondents' answers. It is evident that there is a high level of consensus on the fact that crisis management actors in Slovenia have a different understanding of the concepts of 'crisis' and 'crisis management'. This can also be seen implicitly in their answers. They believe that a sectoral approach to the phenomena is prevailing, which is strongly conditioned by the unclear and unharmonized legislation. In addition, problems also arise from inconsistent application of the legislation. However, the respondents were less worried about functional integration and co-operation between actors in concrete crisis situations.

The key problem in development of the crisis management system is that a bottom-up approach has been used, whereas a top-down approach would be more appropriate. Many crisis management actors stick to their existing competencies and relations, thereby failing to meet the requirements to build a more modern and functional system. Another problem is the absence of strategic reflection at the level of the system

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9 In case of overwhelming crisis, national structures could be also supported by international organizations' programs such as United Nations' Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, and NATO's Civil Emergency Planning.

10 Representatives of the following institutions were interviewed: the Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, the Office for Civil Defense at the Ministry of Defense, the Slovenian Armed Forces, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Public Health Institute, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These institutions are the key actors involved in crisis management in the country.

as a whole which would allow for different systemic solutions and doctrinal groundings. In addition, the role of crisis management related expertise is underestimated.

All the respondents observe a need for adequate co-ordination mechanisms to integrate the crisis management actors during the stages of preparation, response and after a crisis. It is evident that coordination is relatively good within practically all the sectors or at least within their organizational entities, but the co-ordination among them is insufficient. However, the respondents do not agree when assigning authorities to the existing organs. Some believe that the National Security Council (NSC) could perform the co-ordination function at the national level, but what is lacking is the political will; while others believe that the NSC is a government advisory body, or a more strategic body, and is therefore unsuitable for this function.

Another solution for better coordination could be the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC), which has been operating for several years now. The majority of respondents agree that the existing solution, whereby the NCMC operates within the Ministry of Defense, is not good. Some see the NCMC as primarily a center for logistic, material and technical support in the crisis response process, while others are afraid that some people understand the NCMC in a broader sense as expanding beyond the legal framework, as a kind of super-body, which is unacceptable to many actors within and especially outside the Ministry of Defense. The NCMC also comprises a cross-sectoral analytical group for crisis management. This group could perform the tasks now carried out by other cross-sectoral coordinating groups, addressing crises partially.

The respondents mainly do not mention the issues of different organizational cultures and interpersonal problems. However, they observe the introverted nature of sectors, insufficient integration with other actors, in particular during planning and preparation. The crisis management actors overcome many of these problems during a crisis response, but they cannot catch up on everything that has been missed in the previous stages. It seems that crisis management could be significantly more efficient and rational if adequate systemic and doctrinal solutions are found and followed in practice.

The respondents also differ in their proposals for solutions to the existing situation. Most agree that we need a cross-sectoral organ, attached to the government, and authorized to co-ordinate agents in different government sectors. The respondents believe that this would certainly

be an opportunity to overcome the residues of the former system of total defense, which can still be noticed particularly at the system and organizational levels, but less so in the content and the functional domains. On the other hand, it seems that the main obstacle to introduce crisis management innovations into national security structures, lies in high-ranking officials and politicians who are reluctant to accept ideas that change every day routine, bring about uncertainty and potentially jeopardize their positions. Fear, resistance to changes and even conflicts with researchers were experienced during the research process.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary security crises are ever more characterized by a transformation in terms of their quantity and quality. This is reflected in the increased number of crises, their endemicity, composition, durability and complexity. The effects of big contemporary crises expand beyond national borders, refer to different social fields and relate to existing social problems which, in turn, exacerbate them. These changes directly influence crisis management. The adequacy of conventional organizational and co-ordination forms has obviously come into question. This situation requires innovation in both politics and crisis response capabilities to address the national and international levels of the phenomenon. The changed characteristics of crises and crisis management are also relevant to Slovenia, which has relatively well-developed crisis management within individual government sectors, although adequate co-ordination between them has yet to be established.

The findings of the content analysis of relevant legal documents confirm our initial assumption. They indicate that a lack of precision and serious legal inconsistencies, and consequently system solutions are hampering the development of effective crisis management in Slovenia. This is even more evident in the strategic and doctrinal documents. As suggested in the responses of the interviewees, at first sight it seems that the legal impediments can be overcome in an actual crisis and that co-operation can be achieved among all the crisis management actors. Nevertheless, improvisation during a crisis response action cannot completely do away with the shortcomings stemming from differences in understandings of the concepts of crisis, crisis management, and from uncoordinated crisis planning. The sterility of the 'crisis' legislation is therefore only partially compensated for by the activist improvisation of the crisis management actors. However, the problem does not only lie in the legal structure and in the derived systemic, organizational and consequently also co-ordination solutions. In the preparations for

different crises we also encounter an inadequate legal culture, namely disrespect of the existing norms, principles and solutions, or the inability to fully take advantage of the possibilities they offer. This means that a firm and consistent legal basis is only a necessary but by no means a sufficient precondition for effective crisis management at the national level. A fear of change among high officials and politicians is also an obstacle in the process of introducing crisis management innovations.

The analysis therefore reveals a lack of awareness about the changed nature of contemporary crises, the insufficient development of inter-organizational co-operation, and the inadequate co-ordination of actors and promotion of innovative approaches to crisis preparation and response. In this respect, the lack of a coordinating mechanism can be observed. Such a mechanism would integrate crisis management actors at the state level and could ensure a flexible, rational and efficient crisis response. The Strategy of the National Security of the Republic of Slovenia fails to integrate them into a functional entity or even into several functional modules which would provide for a crisis response adapted to the nature, intensity and scope of a particular crisis.

Conceptual inconsistencies can be observed in the analyzed laws, ordinances and regulations. This prevents the framing of a more or less unified representation of crisis and of crisis management by the key actors in the country. The results of the analysis also point to the absence of an umbrella act, i.e. an act on crisis management, which would regulate this field, overcome the existing situation and enable the establishment of co-ordination structures at the national level, e.g. a crisis management agency. This institution should be attached to the executive authorities.

The efforts deployed by the government in the crisis management field are insufficient. The government is failing to take the initiative and implement a top-down approach. Moreover, it is not sufficiently providing for the harmonization of ordinances relative to planning in the fields of security, military, internal security, and disaster relief. Planning is only partially targeted to the concept of crisis planning and it is therefore impossible to provide for integrated training including comprehensive (simulation) exercises or the testing of different scenarios as foreseen by the plans.

The crisis management innovations proposed in the article are only partly suitable to solve pending financial, economic and social crisis in Slovenia, however these phenomena are related. On the one hand, every security crisis occurs in the context of broader social crisis, which

exacerbates it (crisis within the crisis) and makes it difficult to solve, whereas on the other hand coordinated crisis management effort in austerity times could create synergies and reduce entropy within the national security system, making it more rational and efficient despite budget cuts imposed on various crisis management actors.

### **Analyzed legal, strategic and doctrinal documents**

Civil Defense Doctrine, Official Gazette of RS no. 56/01.

Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. Official Gazette of RS nos. 331/91-I, 42/97, 66/00, 24/03, 69/04, 68/06.

Defense Act, Official Gazette of RS nos. 82/94, 44/97, 87/97, 47/02, 40/04.

Disaster Relief Act, Official Gazette of RS nos. 64/94, 28/06.

Disaster Relief Doctrine, Government of RS, May 30, 2002.

Foreign Affairs Act, Official Gazette of RS nos. 45/01, 78/03.

Military Doctrine, Government of RS, June 1, 2006.

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Ordinance on National Security Act, Official Gazette of RS nos. 135/04, 45/05.

Ordinance on the Organization and Operation of National Crisis Management Centre, Official Gazette of RS no. 9/06.

Police Act, Official Gazette of RS nos. 49/98, 93/01, 79/03, 50/04, 53/05, 98/05, 78/06.

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