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OPERATION OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT OPERATIONAL STAFF DURING THE ELIMINATION OF EXTRAORDINARY WEATHER EVENTS

Abstract

Since the nearly 10-year fundamental renewal of the disaster management legislation and the special legal regulation, events have occurred in many cases - mainly due to extreme weather - the elimination of which required the deployment of significant forces, but the special legal order has not been promulgated. The professional disaster management organization operates operational working groups, or in other words, operational staff, in order to eliminate these events - especially in terms of extent, number of incidents and effects on the population - and, first of all, to manage its own forces, and secondly, in order to cooperate effectively with its partner groups. Operational staff of disaster management can be formed at all levels of the organization, on a temporary basis, independently of each other, or even in subordinate relationship.

Keywords: operational staff, extreme weather, managing, special legal order

KATASZTRÓFAVÉDELMI OPERATÍV TÖRZSEK MŰKÖDÉSE A RENDKÍVÜLI IDŐJÁRÁSI ESEMÉNYEK FELSZÁMOLÁSA SORÁN

Absztrakt

A katasztrófavédelemre vonatkozó jogszabályok, illetve a különleges jogrendi szabályozás közel 10 éves alapvető megújítása óta számos esetben következtek be olyan – legfőképpen rendkívüli időjáráshoz köthető – események, amelyek felszámolása jelentős erők bevetését igényelte, ám mégsem került sor a különleges jogrend kihirdetésére. A hivatásos



katasztrófavédelmi szervezet ezen események felszámolására – legfőképpen a kiterjedésre, a káresetek számára és a lakossági veszélyeztető hatásokra figyelemmel –, valamint elsődlegesen a saját erők irányítására, másodsorban a társszervekkel történő eredményes együttműködés érdekében operatív munkaszerveket, vagy más megfogalmazás szerint, operatív törzseket működtet. A katasztrófavédelem operatív törzsei a szervezet valamennyi szintjén, ideiglenes jelleggel, egymástól függetlenül, vagy akár alá-fölérendeltségben is megalakíthatók.

Kulcsszavak: operatív törzsek, rendkívüli időjárás, vezetés, különleges jogrend

1. INTRODUCTION

In the wording of László Keszely, the special legal order “means a stage in the dynamic process of crisis management determined by public law decisions, when the crisis can no longer be dealt with effectively under normal law”. [1] The Hungarian special legal orders and the relevant common rules are set out in Articles 48-54 of the Fundamental Law of Hungary. For the purposes of this writing, an emergency situation as defined in Article 53 is one that is of paramount importance from the point of view of disaster management, as it may be declared in the event of an elemental disaster or industrial accident endangering the safety of life and property as well as to address their consequences. [2] Since the period under investigation, which is 2012, in order to eliminate natural disasters, a special legal order - emergency situation - was promulgated in 2013 in order to effectively carry out the protection tasks related to the flooding of the Danube. [3] During the emergency period, special management rules apply, including but not limited to the followings: the Minister responsible for disaster management may appoint a Ministerial Commissioner - at the latest until the existence of the emergency situation - who coordinates the defence tasks, and instructs the chairman of the county, capital defence committee; and in the case of settlements, the management of the local disaster management activity is taken over from the mayor by a person appointed by the head of the territorial professional disaster management group. [4] It should be emphasized that this paper does not address the declared emergency situation for coronavirus pandemic, which is primarily a man-made disaster.



It can be seen that although the emergency situation and its promulgation are properly regulated, the experience of recent years - especially the period after the organizational and legislative changes already mentioned - suggests that the decision-maker consistently tries to avoid the application of the special legal order and only announces it in duly justified cases.

At the same time, the situations and events that did not reach the promulgation of the extraordinary legal order - however, still extremely damaging and posing a significant threat to the population - have noticeably intensified, of which we can find many examples from recent years. [5] Some memorable cases, including but not limited to the followings: the emergency snow situation in the north-west part of the country in mid-March 2013, and, in parallel, power outages affecting tens of thousands of households in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, or freezing rain in December 2014 affecting a part of Budapest and the settlements of the Buda hills, during which roads became impassable and a prolonged power outage occurred. In addition to events that receive significant media attention and public interest, there are several extraordinary weather events each year - typically of local significance - that cause major damage to the infrastructure supplying the population, such as the two storms in the summer of 2017 in Orosháza which involved more than 500 firefighting interventions. [6] A common feature of these situations is that no special legal order - primarily emergency - was promulgated, but the territorial extent of the events, the duration of the remediation, the number of interventions and the effects on the population would justify the creation of a complex, temporary management component, which directs its own forces and maintains contact with the intervening partner organizations, thus even coordinating the intervention as a whole. The peculiarity of the disaster management regulation is that such temporary or semi-permanent operational working groups can be established at all levels - central, regional, and local - of the organization of the National Directorate General for Disaster Management (NDGDM) of the Ministry of the Interior (MI). The operational staff of disaster management are formed primarily from their own staff, leaving the possibility that the liaison officers of other participants in defence and remediation may also be delegated.

In the present study, I aimed to present the disaster management operational staff that can be formed - during events which do not lead to the promulgation of a special legal order - with a special focus on the structure and activities of these working groups, as well as on the common characteristics and experiences of their application.



2. DISASTER MANAGEMENT OPERATIONAL STAFF

Before presenting the operational working groups of professional disaster management, we should highlight the Interdepartmental Coordination Committee for Disaster Management (KKB) operating outside the NDGDM of MI - however, due to its basic purpose, it is closely linked to it - which is a governmental coordinating body set up to carry out tasks related to preparedness against disasters, protection and recovery, chaired by the MI. In order to carry out its activities effectively, KKB operates a scientific and operational working group. From the point of view of the present investigation, the description of the operational working group, the National Emergency Management Center (NVK), is outstanding, as the KKB is established to support the coordinated implementation of its disaster prevention tasks, headed by the Deputy Director General of the NDGDM of MI. The NVK consists of a leader, a general working group and defence working committees performing professional tasks. In case of ordering its operation, the general working group of the NVK performs its tasks on the basis of the NDGDM of MI with partial or full staff on the basis of the Ministry of the Interior, in both cases on a 24-hour continuous basis. The NVK operates as professional advisor of the KKB in the field of disaster management, as well as the body involved in the coordination of the implementation of the tasks, during which it performs e.g., preparing the necessary operational decisions, proposing the implementation of decisions, monitoring the implementation of decisions, as well as analysing and evaluating the situation, information related to the introduction of preventive measures at the central, regional level. [7]

The operational working groups of the professional disaster management organization and the rules of their establishment, application, task and supply are determined by the measure of the Director General of the NDGDM of MI. [8] The central body of disaster management operates the NDGDM of MI Operational Staff (NDGDM of MI OpT) in order to effectively manage events requiring central operations management and to professionally prepare decisions at the management level. The establishment of the NDGDM of MI OpT is ordered by the Director General of the NDGDM of MI in case of emergency and by the Deputy Director General of the NDGDM of MI in case of an event requiring central coordination, while it is ordered by the Director General of the NDGDM of MI on the basis of the internal regulations for the



identification, elimination and publication of the disaster risk, on the proposal of the national inspector general competent for the given type of event. [9] The head of the NDGDM of MI OpT is the National Inspector General of Civil Protection, however, based on the nature of the event or the decision of the Deputy Director General of the NDGDM of MI, other professional leader - the national chief inspector - may also perform the task. The leader carries out the activities at the headquarters of the NDGDM of MI, on a 24-hour basis. In the case of using the OpT, it consists of the Operator Working Group, the Evaluation-Analysis Working Group, the Support Working Group, and the Crisis Communication and Public Information Working Group. Its operation can be partial or complete, and the establishment and number of working groups depends to a large extent on the nature of the disaster.

A special case of using the NDGDM of MI OpT is when for the effective management of events requiring central operations management and the professional preparation of decisions, as a temporary operation control element depending on the situation, the National Field Control Staff (OHIT) is established at a control point in the area where the damage occurred. The activities of OHIT are governed by the provisions of the NDGDM of MI OpT, its head is appointed by the Director General of the NDGDM of MI, and the members - in consultation with the competent professional leaders - are appointed by the head of the OHIT. OHIT carries out its activities in the case of the operation of the NDGDM of MI OpT, in its subordination. A significant difference compared to the organization of NDGDM of MI OpT is that OHIT consists of two elements - departments of operations management and support. In the case of territorial usage, OHIT performs tasks separate from the operational staff operated by the county directorates for disaster management described below.

The regional bodies of disaster management - the county/capital directorates for disaster management (MKI) - establish an operational staff (MKI OpT) if necessary, in order to effectively perform the tasks related to operation management, decision preparation and coordination. The entry into operation of MKI OpT may also be ordered by the director, in justified cases with the subsequent information of the director general or deputy director general of the NDGDM of MI OpT. The establishment and operation of the MKI OpT is determined by a separate internal regulation - measure - for each MKI. [10] The structure of MKI OpTs in general can be said to be organized along similar principles and organizational structure as the NDGDM of MI OpT. Primarily, the staff of the MKI will be assigned by creating a variable



number of working groups. Highlighting the Békés MKI as an example, the relevant internal regulations order the establishment of 4 working groups: operations management, civil protection, logistics, and crisis communication components. MKI OpT carries out its activities in the case of the operation of the NDGDM of MI OpT, under its subordination.

In order to effectively manage events requiring operational management locally or in a limited area and to prepare decisions professionally, depending on the situation, a field operational staff (HOpT) can be established as a temporary operation control element. The formation of the HOpT may be ordered by the director and deputy director of the MKI, and possibly - if applicable - by the head of the MKI OpT. In the case of an established MKI OpT, HOpT belongs to its subordination. We distinguish between two types: HOpT, which has its own and reinforcing staff, the head and staff of which are appointed by its director. Due to its nature and main task, the place of operation of the HOpT is the designated control point in the area of the damage occurred. HOpTs are less differentiated than the elements of similar organizations in national or regional bodies, with regard to which their organization typically consists of two working groups: the departments of operations management and support. The main task of the HOpT, in contrast to the operational staff established at higher levels, is to manage the interventions on the site, coordinate the operation of the deployed forces, report the measures taken on the spot to the leading organization, and keep in touch with partner bodies and organizations involved in local tasks.

3. SHARED EXPERIENCE OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT OPERATIONAL WORKING GROUPS IN PRACTICE

The most important common feature of the operational working bodies to be established at any level of the NDGDM of MI that they operate on a temporary basis, only in justified cases, they are established to manage the effective and efficient execution of complex disaster management tasks related to specific event(s) as well as for the collection, analysis and evaluation of related data, coordination of tasks. [8] Their main task is to manage the activities of the disaster management forces involved and the volunteer rescue forces. The groups formed keep an



operations log of their activities. The structure and number of operational staff depends to a large extent on the characteristics of the event to be treated.

A common feature of the operational working groups of the NDGDM of MI is that their staff consists of those performing services at the organizational units and elements of disaster management, who are typically assigned in advance to perform a professional task. As a result, the staff of the groups already knows the tasks in advance, in the framework of which the staff is trained in accordance with the regulations in peacetime. [8] The staff provide 24-hour continuous service, employing at least two service groups. The supply and equipment of the groups at different levels must be provided primarily from the available stocks of the organization, which is supplemented, if necessary, by the stocks of the Economic Supply Center of NDGDM of MI or by the stocks of the MKI.

The activities of the disaster management operational working groups are regulated by the measures of the NDGDM of MI and/or the MKI. Internal regulators provide the framework for use, with which they ensure sufficient flexibility to create groups with different compositions for different types of events.

The establishment of operational staff is not at all tied to the special legal order, we can find many examples from the period under investigation of the events when the Director General of NDGDM of MI or the director of the MKI - possibly on the proposal of the head of the local disaster management body - ordered the use of an operational staff. It is not necessary to operate the operational staff hierarchically, as in the case of storm damage in Orosháza already mentioned in the introduction - in a limited area, with a large number of damages to a municipality, in view of the intervening forces and the protracted remediation - although it was necessary to establish and operate the HOpT, but the use of other higher-level operational staff was not justified. In this case, the application of HOpT was ordered by the director of the MKI, and its staff was composed primarily of local bodies, supplemented by some specialists of the MKI (e.g., IT). [10]



4. SUMMARY

In summary, it can be stated that the activities of the operational staff in the organization of disaster management are well regulated, due to which their operation effectively helps to eliminate damages where the promulgation of a special legal order and the application of the resulting special management rules is not justified or necessary. Depending on their location and role, they can be established to coordinate/manage the elimination of a wide variety of damage events, but in recent years their application has been mostly related to the elimination of sudden natural disasters. The current system and application concept of the operational staff meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The activities of the disaster management operational staff are regulated by the measures of the NDGDM of MI. The participation and involvement of partner organizations in these working groups is in many cases limited and difficult partly due to this. In order to increase the involvement and cooperation of partner organizations, the possibility of incorporating them into the relevant regulations - not only as an option but also as an obligation - arises as a suggestion, based on which participation in the operational staff should be included in the relevant regulations, and even the operation of joint operational staff in cases that do not reach the special legal order. This could allow for a more efficient use of force-means and speed up the flow of information.

It is also worth mentioning that in the case of the examined temporary organizational elements, the disaster management organizations - especially the specialized human resources of the MKI and local groups - have a relatively small number. In view of this, the operation of several operational staff at the same time is not feasible with its own staff, the involvement of reinforcing forces is absolutely necessary. Even then, however, the presence of at least one person with local knowledge in the group is very important, and in order to keep in touch with the reinforcers and to establish the necessary local knowledge, it is recommended to hold continuous preparations and trainings.

With regard to IT developments, it is absolutely necessary to continue the further development of electronic databases and decision support applications accessible via the World Wide Web, thus facilitating the availability of information necessary for defence. At the same time, in



connection with the provisions of the previous paragraph, it is worth considering the storage and availability of emergency plans at the level of the disaster management office in order to facilitate the local knowledge of the transferred staff.

In line with current development trends in the organization of disaster management, it is necessary to install at least one vehicle per MKI - with aggregator, mobile internet connection - capable of independent operation, even as a multi-purpose mobile driving point, which can significantly increase the efficiency of field interventions and operations management tasks. At the same time, depending on financial resources, even at the level of disaster management offices, it is worthwhile to systematize multi-purpose vehicles that can be used as mobile driving points in order to manage local incidents as effectively as possible.

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