

Civil Security in Central Europe: Comparative Insights from Government Policy Agendas (1990–2016)

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Abstract: Long-term planning and political visions of the future are deemed essential in the present circumstances of complexity and uncertainty. Despite the significant risks posed by natural and human-made disasters, civil security often remains marginalized in political discourse and high-level policymaking. This paper examines the extent to which civil security has been a priority in the policy agendas of V4 countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic) between 1990 and 2016.

For the purposes of this paper, civil security is thought of as a public good ensured by the state, distinct from the military security on the one hand; and from the field of law and order on the other hand (Shalamanov et al. 2005). As a specific policy domain, civil security is typically understood as an expert field characterized by a relatively low degree of political interest (Birkland 2016). Likewise, Tierney (2007) draws attention to the relative marginality of the topic of civil security, while other authors highlight the "short-sightedness" of policies in this area, when more attention is paid to post-disaster relief, instead of disaster preparedness (Healy, Malhotra 2009; Birkland 2016).

By analysing government program statements (PSs), the paper investigates the extent to which civil security has been a priority and how it has been addressed. Drawing on the concept of strategic governance, this study further identifies recurring themes, priorities, and policy directions related to civil security as reflected in the PSs. The aim of the paper is to assess the governmental approach to civil security and to obtain insights into what civil security topics are brought up, if any. In doing so, the analysis also focuses on whether the topic of civil security is indeed marginal in the Central European countries and whether the observation holds that the governmental policy is short-sighted in this area. For this purpose, a qualitative content analysis was carried out upon which a comparative perspective was added to compare the content of PSs both in time and across the countries studied. The analysis was performed based on the following research questions: Do civil security topics appear on the governmental agenda (i.e., in the form being included in the PS) in reaction to (a particular) disaster or does civil security represent a stable topic on the agenda of the government? What aspects are addressed – reaction to disasters, such as disaster relief, or preventive measures? What civil security topics (if any) are brought up by the government? Do these topics change over longer periods of time?

The findings reveal a shift towards a more proactive approach, with governments emphasizing prevention and preparedness measures alongside response and recovery efforts. However, the study highlights the challenges of translating these intentions into effective action, particularly in the context of a polycrisis (Lawrence et al., 2024) characterized by multiple, interconnected crises.