

RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND DISASTERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA: COMMITMENT OF INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY

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Достављен: 24.7.2025.

Language: Serbian

Кориговано: 23.9.2025.

Type of paper: Review scientific paper

Прихваћен: 16.10.2025.

DOI number: 10.5937/vojdelo2503087R

Abstrakt: This paper analyses the role of Austrian institutions and society in the organisation and responding to crisis and disasters. The starting point is an assumption that all-encompassing defence and security make a foundation for a successful response to crisis and disasters. In that respect, Austria has made concrete steps to increase its resilience and defence capabilities aimed at ensuring the capability of the society to act in an ever more challenging security environment through continued development and strengthening of all-encompassing national defence and all-encompassing assurance of security. These two concepts take into account military, civilian, spiritual/intellectual and economic measures of national defence, as well as other important social dimensions. The application of the analysis of the involvement of Austrian society in case of crisis and disasters underscores the significance of volunteers, efficient work of institutions, and dedication of the society as a whole. It also presents the role of the armed forces of Austria in the response to crisis and disasters. The conclusion of the paper is that the system of response to crisis and disasters is organised in the way that increases efficiency and effectiveness, and the paper also draws the conclusions that can be applied in other states as well.

Keywords: *The Republic of Austria, all-encompassing national defence, Austrian society, volunteering, system of response to crisis and disasters.*

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Introduction

The Republic of Austria, covering the surface of 83,858 km², is a federal republic consisting of nine autonomous federal provinces ("Länder"). It has 2,100 municipalities and 9.2 million citizens. The Republic of Austria was established in 1918 by the political will of the constituting *Länders*, and reestablished in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, and it belongs to the "old" European federal systems. However, this small neutral state can be classified among the most centralised federal systems in the world (Gamper 2020).

Apart from the fact that the "neutrality has imposed on Austria certain obligations, restrictions and self-discipline, it has introduced Austria into international relations as an active subject and provided it with certain manoeuvring space for autonomous action" (Petković 1982: 216). During the Cold War, this neutral country had to "develop all-encompassing strategies to preserve peace for its citizens to avoid being "thrown into the abyss of international neglect" (Pleiner, Stupka 2010: 69).

The security policy of Austria is based on the comprehensive national defence as an identified goal of the state, and in the context of the overall provision of security, which has been developed since the nineties of the last century. The comprehensiveness of the Austrian security policy is reflected in the dimension of objects, perception of risks and threats, instruments and application phase. Namely, the comprehensive security policy of Austria is a reaction to the changed paradigm of security and the very nature of security threats in Europe ever since the end of the Cold War (Saito 2006).

Also, crisis and wars, 21st century risks and threats of the world have had impact on the further strengthening of this concept. In fact, the guiding principle of Austria is "the comprehensive defence (military, spiritual/intellectual, civil and economic defence) which is integrated into the political concept of active and dynamical neutrality" (Hauser 2007).

The Austrian security policy is aimed at contributing to preventing crisis, and overall stabilisation of the environment and all-encompassing fight against underlying causes of the crisis at international level.

The legal framework for responding to crisis and disasters in the Republic of Austria is characterised by a highly decentralised system, which is primarily based on legislative and executive authorities of the nine federal provinces, amended by federal laws on the coordination and national security. Namely, the protection against disasters (*Katastrophenschutz*) in Austria, according to its Constitution, is chiefly the responsibility of the federal provinces, not the federal authorities. Because of that, legal definitions and regulations on crisis (*Krise*) and disasters (*Katastrophe*) may differ in laws on assistance in disasters and crisis management from province to province.

Still, there are some general principles and some definitions that appear in legal acts of the Republic of Austria. In general, disaster refers to an event (natural or caused by human factor) of extreme scale, such as great floods, earthquakes, avalanches, great fires, etc. It is characterised by extraordinarily grave danger or damage to lives, health, environment, or property (of the people and things) and/or such event exceeds the capacities of regular services (for example local fire service, medical

emergency services) to provide response, and it requires introducing special organisational structures (like crisis headquarters). Crisis is defined as a threat of extreme scope (to life, health, order, security, economic wellbeing) that threatens or emerges, and requires emergent state intervention, but does not have to reach the full disaster scale. It can include complex situations that demand the coordination at a higher level, even if they do not cause immediate damage to the same extent as a classical disaster (for example pandemics, threats to the supply of strategic supplies, massive cyber attacks).

Austria possesses an all-encompassing and well-developed system of responding to crisis and disasters that is based on governmental institutions and strong voluntary organisations (Neubauer et al., 2013). The concept of the comprehensive defence of the Republic of Austria is a platform which permanently encourages raising awareness of the citizens regarding the active participation, importance of undertaking preventive measures and timely responding to the fight against natural disasters. The establishment of a functional mechanism and joint action between declared units and civilian population is carried out in the framework of numerous training activities for the citizens, both through formal education and attendance at workshops and exercises intended to promote the necessity of the participation of the entire society. Awareness and willingness are built over a long time and become a paradigm of the system of values. In Austria, "5% of all citizens volunteer in emergency and humanitarian services, devoting in total 1.4 million working hours per week" (Seebauer and Babcicky, 2017: 306). The volunteers, i.e. "Volunteer organisations are deeply rooted in the social structure of Austrian communities" (Seebauer and Babcicky, 2017: 313).

Being an important factor in the maintenance of the current standard of quality of the Austrian system of the protection and response to crisis and disasters, further engagement of the volunteers must be ensured and enhanced in the light of the current social changes, and technological development and its influence. In Austria, volunteerism can be considered as one of the main pillars of the social system, with volunteers who provide services in different areas of social life, among which assistance in case of disasters takes a prominent place.

For many years now, actors in Austria dedicated to providing assistance in disasters, like fire brigade or Red Cross, rely on formal models of voluntary service. Therefore, a typical Austrian volunteer is employed, middle-aged, married, and is an Austrian citizen. However, certain decline of this system can be observed. Namely, impacted by social changes, younger generations of the Austrian society look for more flexible models of voluntary service i.e. they prefer providing assistance provisionally in case of responding to crisis and disasters without joining the traditional voluntary organisations.

In institutional terms, in Austria, the National crisis and disaster management (Staatliche Krisen- und Katastrophenschutzmanagement – SKKM) is based on the principles of self-protection at local levels and subsidiarity at higher levels of public authorities (Rainer et al. 2016, 63). One of the pillars of the Austrian system of response to crisis and disasters are strong voluntary organisations. This level of volunteerism in Austria must be maintained in the future and even improved to certain extent. Taking

into account multiple societal changes that take place at present, such as focusing on an individualistic way of living, new forms of voluntary engagement must be promoted.

On the other hand, reviewing the functionality of the system of response to crisis and disasters, several relevant pieces of research have been conducted and their results identified several challenges and immediate problems in the wide field of readiness and resilience of Austrian population. The Association of civil protection demonstrated a high rate of confidence in emergency services, but also a lack of self-confidence regarding the readiness and preventive actions among the population especially in urban environments (Rainer et al. 2016, 63).

Comprehensive National Defence and Comprehensive Provision of Security in the Republic of Austria

Specifically, as early as in 2013, the Strategy of National Security of Austria linked comprehensive and cooperative security, and solidarity with neutrality. This, now former, strategy states that the comprehensive security policy means that external and internal aspects of security are inextricably linked as well as the civilian and military aspects. Furthermore, the strategy states that the integrated security policy must be based on a cooperative approach between governmental and non-governmental actors, and that security must be understood as a “whole package”. A proactive security policy implies the work on the prevention of emerging threats in the first place or at least taking steps to mitigate their harmful effect, i.e. shaping security (Austrian Security Strategy 2013).

In that context, the comprehensive national defence, as a constitutional basis of Austrian security policy, has become significantly more important. Being the fundamental state task, the transformed security environment has created a necessary to strengthen and further develop the comprehensive national defence as a primary state task in dimensions of military, civil, spiritual/intellectual and economic national defence. In addition, the focus is placed on the enhanced analysis of other important dimensions, for example ecology and health.

Given the transformed security environment, there is a consensus that Austrian security policy should not deal only with the traditional areas of internal and external security, but to aspire to an all-encompassing understanding of security. It is implied that it is necessary to establish solid and permanent cooperation among all social actors, policy area and political levels. The concept of comprehensive provision of security, established in the Austrian security strategy of 2013, is aimed at ensuring a systemic interaction of policy areas that are pivotal for security on the basis of the overall strategy built upon the areas of security policy. Then, relevant substrategies, if and when needed, are used for the operationalisation of further concrete measures. This basic idea is developed further, especially taking into consideration the constitutional status of the comprehensive national defence as well as the prevention and crisis management in the entire state.

Apart from that, the new Strategy of National Security of 2024 states that “it must be ensured that the tasks of the comprehensive national defence and comprehensive provision of security are accepted and supported by the population on the basis of a wide political consensus. The necessary awareness should be created and maintained through communication, information, and transfer of knowledge, especially among the young” (Austrian Security Strategy 2024).

As regards the comprehensive national defence, Austria will endeavour to strengthen the resilience of state institutions, society and economy. The strategy states that the armed forces of Austria (*Bundesheer*) will receive all necessary resources for the execution of their tasks. The capacities and readiness for national defence are deeply rooted in the population, i.e. Austrian society, and they are based on responsible security awareness. The Strategy also states that they should be strengthened through appropriate measures in the framework of spiritual/intellectual national defence (Austrian Security Strategy 2024).

The comprehensive defence and security in the Republic of Austria represents a complex system that encompasses diverse aspects, from military defence to civil protection, cyber security and economic resilience. The aim is to create a resilient system that can respond to diverse threats. The comprehensive national programme of defence in Austria is being developed in the form of the system of comprehensive provision of security with the focus on new risks and threats. Modern notion of security is oriented towards the future and it will endeavour to prevent new risks and challenges through preventive action. Actually, the states are influenced by a wide spectrum of threats that jeopardise their security and the security of their citizens, and therefore “demand a systemic and strategic response of all subjects of society” (Milenković and Subotić, 2022: 52).

The Role of Austrian Society and Institutions in Crisis and Disasters

Great disasters in a country and abroad, like the disaster with the reactor in Chernobyl in 1986, or the disaster caused by floods in central Europe in 2002 showed that the events of such scale demand general coordination beyond administrative and jurisdiction borders of local and regional (provincial) authorities. That is why, as early as in 1986, the Federal Government of Austria initiated crisis management at federal level. From 2003, the coordination of state crisis management and protection against disasters and international aid in case of disasters has been entrusted to the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In 2004, the system was reorganised into the National body for crisis and disaster management (SKKM) as a one-of-a-kind National coordinating body (Krisen-und Katastrophenmanagement, 2024). Its task is to ensure fast coordination and consultation among all federal ministries, federal provinces and main rescue organisations, particularly in the event of complex, transregional or international crisis and disasters. The key actors in the response to crisis and disasters in the Republic of Austria are: Rapid reaction organisations, public authorities, population, science and economy (Chart 1).

Chart 1. *The key actors in the response to crisis and disasters in the Republic of Austria*



Source: Produced by an author (Jachs, 2011).

In Austria, pursuant to existing legal provisions, the government ensures the cooperation between federal and provincial civil protection bodies, as well as local operational units. The intention is to intensify training and exchange information at national and international level, especially regarding the prevention and fight against terrorism, international organized crime, and illegal migration on one hand, and with the view to ensuring the comprehensive protection against disasters on the other. In addition, the work is done on the improvement of public information on the measures of self-protection and the optimisation of warning system.

Natural disasters connected to climate change are becoming more frequent leaving ever graver consequences. Hence, it is important to prepare state bodies for responding to crisis and disaster management caused by the new challenges, which ensures increased resilience of Austria (Landesverteidigung und Krisen- und Katastrophenschutz, 2020).

In case of crisis and disasters the Federal Government/Ministry of the Interior coordinates international cooperation; coordinates the federal response and support to the provinces. The provinces takeover the management of great scale disasters, provide special equipment and forces. Then, the counties takeover the leadership in

terms of the regional response to disasters; they can delegate operational tasks to municipalities, while municipalities are in charge of the establishment of fire-fighting units, emergency medical assistance, and response to local crisis and disasters.

The Federal Security Crisis Act of 2024 is a legal framework for the declaration of crisis. According to Section 2 of this act, "if an event, a development or other circumstances in areas in which the federal state is competent to legislate and execute pose an imminent or emerging danger of exceptional magnitude to the life and health of the population, to public order and internal security, to national security, to the environment or to economic well-being, the prevention or management of which urgently requires the immediate ordering, implementation and coordination of measures in the area of federal competence, the conditions are met for the declaration of crisis" (Bundes-Krisensicherheitsgesetz, 2024).

Disaster management is a task of all levels of government. At national level, disaster prevention is controlled by responsible federal ministries in collaboration with federal provinces and municipalities. Federal provinces have the primary responsibility to respond to disasters. The legal basis for providing response are federal state acts on assistance in case of disaster, which define the declaration of an emergency and operational directions of response at municipal, provincial and federal levels. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the coordination of disaster management at the national level. The coordination is provided by the National Coordination Body, which is chaired and managed by the Ministry of the Interior. Also, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for cross-border cooperation and international assistance in case of disasters.

In that context, it should be underlined that in 2024, Austrian Parliament adopted an agreement with the Republic of Serbia on mutual assistance in case of natural disasters and technogenic disasters to ensure fast assistance without bureaucratic obstacles (Zakon o potvrđivanju sporazuma između Vlade Republike Srbije i Vlade Republike Austrije o saradnji u oblasti zaštite od katastrofa 2021). The agreement contains provisions on facilitated border crossing and the provision of mutual assistance.

In Austria, operational capacities are mostly provided by voluntary organisations, voluntarily (fire-fighting brigades, Red Cross, mountain search and rescue and other), which, in case of disasters, operate as governmental services (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations 2022). Fire-fighting associations in the Republic of Austria are based on the voluntary participation of the local population, starting from the earliest age. The fact is that the Republic of Austria appreciates the principle of voluntary participation in fire-fighting units and it replenishes its resources on regular basis. In this way, it raises the awareness of the population on the significance of timely response to crisis and disasters.

Austrian Civil Protection Association has been carrying out preventive measures, actions and procedures in Austria for more than 60 years. It represents an emergency service organisation that helps people to organise in the best possible way in crisis situations by providing information and education before crisis occur. It achieves its goals through information campaigns, presentations and organisation of events in communities and regions. Their programmes are intended for all age groups and they

are organised everywhere, from elementary schools to homes for pensioners, and they represent a point of contact between the population and public institutions in terms of personal preparedness for crisis, and this activity is performed free of charge. Also, the Austrian Civil Protection Association is an umbrella organisation of civil protection associations in federal states of Austria. Their activities are financed through the cooperation with other organisations and public financing.

The fire-fighting service is especially developed in Austria with highly developed volunteering spirit. Namely, the total number of fire-fighters in Austria is 353,798, out of which: 255,069 are active voluntary fire-fighters, 2,653 are active career fire-fighters, and 36,302 are young fire-fighters, while 59,774 are fire-fighters in reserve. There are 4,453 fire-fighting associations in total and six professional fire-fighting brigades (Vienna, Linz, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Klagenfurt), 313 operating fire-fighting units and two university voluntary fire-fighting associations (Austrian Fire Brigade Association 2024).

The work of all services for response to crisis and disasters in the Republic of Austria is organised in the same way as in the armed forces (through the organisation of S services/work, from S1 to S6). This method of work is implemented in the entire civil protection structure of the Republic of Austria, in armed headquarters, military, police, responsible authorities of local self-government etc. This increases the efficiency and effectiveness of response to crisis and disasters.

It is important to point out that apart from practical knowledge and skills, the volunteers learn standard operational procedures as well. As the volunteers are recruited from different social groups, their rich experiences and knowledge acquired in the areas of their profession are also identified. Hence, apart from the general standard operational procedures, the quantum of knowledge of every individual is appreciated as well so that each participant could make his full contribution.

The Role of the Armed Forces in the Response to Crisis and Disasters in the Republic of Austria

The Austrian Armed Forces play a significant role in the system of response to crisis and disasters, and its place and role are defined by the Constitution, laws and international obligations of Austria. Basic legal acts that regulate the defence system of Austria are the Federal Constitution and Defence Law (*Wehrgesetz*). The Federal Constitution defines the foundation principles of defence, including the military neutrality, comprehensive defence, and the obligation of all citizens to participate in the defence of the country if required. Defence Law elaborates the organisation, tasks, authorisations, and actions of the Austrian Armed Forces.

The Austrian Armed Forces are an armed force of the Republic of Austria, and as such, it guarantees the military security of Austria and contributes to the protection and defence of the European Union. It defends Austria, its population and means of life, and they represent a republic strategic action reserve, contribute to common security of the European Union, and provide a visible and significant contribution to international peace and security (Military Strategic Concept 2017). They also provide

their contribution in the context of international crisis and international disaster management under the auspices of organisations like the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization Partnership for Peace (NATO) (Military Strategic Concept 2017). That is why “the Austrian Armed Forces specifically prepares for the tasks in the field of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, disaster relief, and reconstruction of postwar and non-functional societies. The Austrian Armed Forces is focused on the duties contained in the EU Petersburg tasks and NATO crisis management (Gärtner 2018: 143).

Through history, the Austrian Armed Forces played an important role in the achievement and execution of security tasks. These tasks, that extend beyond the defence of the country, make an integral part of a spectrum of possible military missions defined by the Constitution and they have existed since the times of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In fact, these tasks are categorised as support to law enforcement and disaster relief operations.

Austria is a neutral country where the comprehensive security provision and comprehensive security measures are integrated into national defence of the country, which is why it needs a modern, advanced, diverse federal military. Hence, it must be ensured that the federal military is appropriately financially supported, manned and materially equipped to continue facing the challenges of the present, and the threats of the future. This means that the operational capability of the federal armed forces in the country and abroad should be strategically improved and that the primary military and civilian service should be made more attractive to the citizens of the Republic of Austria. Apart from that, the aim is to focus on the field of crisis and disaster management, and on the new threats like cyber attacks. The Austrian Armed Forces is undoubtedly a guarantor of security of Austrian state and society.

According to Austrian legal regulations, military activities in the national territory generally require that legal bodies of civilian authorities request military assistance and cooperation (Frank 2005). When rendering assistance to civilian population in case of natural disasters, large accidents, and other emergencies, the Austrian Armed Forces carry out activities that include rescue, search, medical assistance, logistic support, and other kinds of assistance.

A special declared unit (Katastrophenschutz-Kapazitäten und die Spezialeinheit, AFDRU – Austrian Forces Disaster Relief Unit), certainly represents the capacities of the Austrian Armed Forces providing response in case of crisis and disasters, which is specifically tasked for the activities of search and rescue, as well as decontamination (Soldat 2023).

Though rapid deployment and specialised units, they ensure a swift intervention in crisis and disasters, increasing the overall efficiency of the response. In addition, the close cooperation with civilian structures, which is highly developed in Austria, encourages the all-encompassing approach to responding to crisis and disasters, maximising the resources and expertise to achieve optimal results. The use of the state-of-the-art technologies additionally strengthens the capabilities of the Austrian military to respond to crisis and disasters, enabling it to solve different and challenging situations with precision and agility.

Given that the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Austrian Armed Forces have started organising courses/seminars, the mutual understanding between the military forces and civilian organisations in the areas of operation has been significantly increased which is particularly important because of the consequence that crisis and disasters leave on local population. The Ministry of Defence organises a Course of raising awareness regarding responding to crisis and disasters, which includes issues like international disaster relief operations for civilian and military personnel intended for relevant operations. Apart from that, the Ministry of Defence organises a Seminar on response to crisis situations and Course of civil-to-military cooperation (Austria report 2005). These courses and seminars encourage the cooperation at national, regional, and international level, and enhance civil-to-military cooperation and establish confidence among the actors providing response in crisis and disasters. Also, they are very important for the exchange of experience and lessons learned.

In addition, on the initiative of the Minister of Defence Klaudia Tanner, the idea on the establishment of a training programme for civil-to-military cooperation in crisis management was created in 2021 at a conference held with the states of the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. A course has been created with the view to contributing to better interoperability in terms of joint participation in crisis management operations led by the EU. The focus of the course is to create conditions for the enhancement of civil-to-military cooperation among the states of the Western Balkans, and the increase of interoperability, as well as the capacities in the area of protection and rescue in emergencies caused by natural or technogenic accidents.

The Austrian Armed Forces play an important role in the comprehensive defence and security of the Republic of Austria. Their tasks are diverse, and their action is crucial for the protection of the country and its citizens. With continuous modernisation and cooperation with international partners, the Austrian Armed Forces strive to maintain a high level of readiness and competence to face the challenges of 21st century.

Conclusion

The current approach to crisis and disaster management in the Republic of Austria is oriented towards the improvement of resilience of all actors involved, like the authorities, emergency services, and affected population in different phases of crisis and disasters. A resilient society is characterised by the ability to predict, manage and analyse its own risks, and to develop new procedures to prevent crisis or reduce the damage caused by crisis and/or disasters. Relying on governmental institutions and strong voluntary organisations, Austria provides and develops an all-encompassing system of response to crisis and disasters. Further engagement of volunteers and voluntary organisations is promoted and encouraged as an important factor of maintenance of the current quality standards of Austrian civil protection and the system of responding to crisis and disasters.

An efficient civil protection, i.e. response to crisis and disasters would be incomplete and less effective without the participation of the Austrian Armed Forces. On the

other hand, it should be noted that the military is engaged when other cannot be, and it does not represent *the first line of defence*, which ensures that its resources are not needlessly wasted. Hence, the armed forces are not engaged merely to establish organisation, planning and predicting, but solely as an additional force that is reflected through the use of necessary personnel, capacities and assets..

The proactive role of Austrian society is reflected in a very pragmatic approach to the participation of organisations in the service of an efficient crisis management. Consequently, knowledge is permanently upgraded and advanced. It should be specifically noted that the Austrian society continuously exchanges experiences with other states.

As only new knowledge opens *the door to the future*, in keeping with the need to keep up with new challenges, it is important to highlight the general principles of the Austrian society: understanding of the great importance of civil society actors; implementing scientific knowledge to daily practice; reducing red tape and redundant steps to ensure an efficient response to crisis and disasters; long-term planning and prediction when managing crisis and disasters.

Detailed experiences gained through such manner of organising the services and Austrian society as a whole, and voluntary organisations responsible for crisis and disasters are certainly very important. Such experiences and examples of good practice can be implemented in our country as well. Namely, the Republic of Serbia is developing the total defence concept, which in some segments can make use of the very experiences and solutions of the comprehensive defence and security of the Republic of Austria.

The area of responding to crisis and disasters is particularly suitable for the implementation of Austrian experiences and solutions. That is why it is necessary to harmonise civilian and military standard operational procedures in decision-making process of the Republic of Serbia making them more productive. It is required to analyse the possibilities for the reduction of administrative procedures that would decrease the response time in case of emergencies. Specific attention should be paid to encouraging the young to acquire knowledge through the introduction of specific content in the framework of mandatory school education. Citizens' awareness should be strengthened through numerous promotional activities, educational films and voluntary organisations, whose members would enjoy a special status in the society. Their work engagement and contribution should be additionally promoted in mass communication media as exemplary and heroic. Such and similar measures would strengthen the role of responsible institutions, encourage the awareness of the citizens and direct their appropriate response in emergencies.

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Summary

This paper analyses the role of Austrian institutions and society in responding to crisis and disasters.

The purpose of the paper is to present the dedication of institutions and Austrian society to response to crisis and disasters, showcasing specific solutions and experiences. Furthermore, it is noted that Austria possesses an all-encompassing and well-developed system of responding to crisis and disasters that is based on governmental institutions and strong voluntary organisations. The authors start from comprehensive defence and security which is the starting point for the successful provision of response to crisis and disasters.

It is noted that Austria has made concrete steps to increase resilience and defence capabilities, which is aimed at ensuring the capability of the entire nation to act in ever more challenging security environment. Continued development and reinforcement of military, civilian, spiritual/intellectual and economic national defence in Austria, achieves resilience and readiness to respond to ever more complex challenges and threats.

Through the analysis of documents on the participation of Austrian institutions and society in case of crisis and disasters, the authors point to the importance of volunteers and institutional commitment. Through a study trip and participation in the course on Civil-to-military cooperation in crisis and disaster management organised by the Austrian Armed Forces, the authors have gained a direct insight into the organisation of the system of responding to crisis and disasters in the Republic of Austria.

The paper presents the role played by the Austrian Armed Forces in responding to crisis and disasters, and underlines a significant fact - the existence of a unit declared for such tasks. In addition, the close cooperation between the military and civilian structures is highly developed in Austria, and it encourages the all-encompassing approach to crisis and disasters management, maximising the resources and expertise

to achieve optimal results. The armed forces are engaged in crisis and disasters as an additional force whose role is primarily reflected in the engagement of necessary personnel, capacities and assets.

The authors conclude that the system of response is organised in the way that increases efficiency and effectiveness, and the paper also draws the conclusions that can author other states as well. One of the most important pillars of the Austrian system of response to crisis and disasters are certainly the active and dedicated voluntary organisations. Even though the volunteerism is quite developed and popular in Austria, the continuity and certain improvements must be achieved in the future. That is why manifold social changes are under consideration in Austria, and the promotion of new forms of voluntary engagement is emphasised.

Keywords: *The Republic of Austria, all-encompassing national defence, Austrian society, volunteering, response to crisis and disasters*

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