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SECURITY SECTOR'S ADAPTABILITY TO ATYPICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF SECURITY PHENOMENA: THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Summary: This paper aims to examine the capacity of security sector institutions of the Republic of Serbia to adapt and adequately respond to atypical manifestations of security phenomena. For these purposes, the authors deploy coronavirus epidemic in the Republic of Serbia in the period between March and July 2020 as the case study. The focus of the research is oriented towards four important segments that followed the coronavirus epidemic in Serbia: borders' closure (both Serbian and of the countries in the region), global inertness caused by the pandemic, declaration of a state of emergency, and protests as events whose manifestations were most visible.

The authors apply the postulates of the Complex Adaptive System concept to all four cases in order to provide an assessment of the adaptability of the Serbia's security sector institutions to atypical manifestation of the crisis. The research will result with profound insights into the strategic organization of the security sector and an assessment of the quality of institutional adaptability in a timely and adequate response to crisis situations.

Key words: Complex Adaptive System, strategic crisis management, COVID-19, corona virus, security sector, epidemic, protests

Introduction

One of the general and possibly most important features of any system is its adaptability (Motamedi, 1977). This statement is certainly the most arguable when it comes to the system within which the security sector institutions operate. Whether it responds to the threats for which it is organized and to which it is prepared in ad-

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vance, each system must be ready to adapt to sudden and, in its manifest forms, qualitatively new challenges that may threaten national security. The epidemic of the Corona virus in the Republic of Serbia has drastically affected the public health. What characterizes the difference in relation to other epidemics is its global prevalence, as well as the relatively unknown way of manifesting the disease along with mechanisms for adequate treatment. For all the unknowns about the new disease, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, due to the “alarming level of spread and activity of the new corona virus” (WHO, 2020).

Although at the beginning of 2020, it was believed that the disease caused by the coronavirus – Covid19 would be just another in a series of transient epidemics, this was not the case. Moreover, this epidemic evolved into a unique phenomenon in its manifestation, having in mind that it caused firstly partial, and then complete inertia of the globalized world.¹ The closure of state borders has also conditioned the specifics in the institutional functioning of the security sector of sovereign states. Therefore, the institutions of the security sector, in the first instance – military and police forces, as well as the intelligence and security services, were forced to find answers to this atypical threat to the security of the population, as well as to all accompanying societal changes. This paper aims to analyse the capacity of security sector institutions of the Republic of Serbia to adapt and adequately respond to atypical manifestations of security phenomena. The authors deploy case study – coronavirus epidemic in Serbia in the period between March and July 2020.

The research is focused on four important and accompanying segments of the epidemic: declaration of a state of emergency on the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia, global inertia caused by a pandemic, state borders closure, and protests that occurred in several cities in Serbia. The authors apply the postulates of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) to potential problems in the engagement of members of the Serbian Army, Ministry of Interior, as well as Security Information Agency, in order to provide an assessment of the adaptability of Serbian security sector institutions to atypical manifestations of the crisis. Given the complexity of the crisis, and the absence of reports from the institutions whose work will be presented (the epidemic is still ongoing), the authors will base their analysis on open data sources and legal acts adopted during the crisis. The research will result in additional insight into the strategic organization of the security sector and an assessment of the quality of institutional adaptability in a timely and adequate response to crisis situations.

This paper is structured in a following manner: first, the concept of a complex adaptive system with its features will be presented. Adequate theoretical review will enable the separation of important segments from established concepts of the strategic approach to crisis management. Based on the selected features that ensure adaptability to the security sector institutions, the authors dedicate the paper's central part to the epidemic (pandemic) of the coronavirus in Serbia, and to present its institutional response to the crisis. Consequently, the postulates arising from the

¹ Over 120 countries to some extent carried out partial or complete quarantine, while in the People's Republic of China alone, over 690 thousand people were quarantined in the first three months of the epidemic wave (Liu, 2020).

complex adaptive system will serve as the basis for assessing the adaptability of the security sector institutions of the Republic of Serbia during the crisis.

Can the security sector be entirely adaptive?

The operation of security sector institutions can be contextualized within the theoretical matrix of complex adaptive systems. In general theoretical discussions, a distinction is made between complex and complicated systems.² Paul Cilliers is one of the most prominent authors who has contributed to the academic thematization of complex adaptive systems. This author advocates that a complex system always includes the features of a complicated system, while the latter does not have all the features of complexity (Cilliers, 1998). If the system consists of a large number of subsystems as its minor constituents, which by the way could be clearly analyzed, then we refer to a complex system (1998: 3). Cilliers states that complex systems can only be those that have the characteristics of “liveliness”, and among them includes social forms of organizing systems. This view also contributes to the fruitful inclusion of social institutions as a kind of a system within the analytical framework. Another important feature of complex adaptive systems that arises in relation to “complicated”, concerns the relationship of components with the system itself. Cilliers states that complexity results in the interaction of these components with the system, and that the complexity as such, as a highly qualitative value, manifests itself precisely at the level of the entire system (1998: 2). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the system as an object of observation, because it will largely depend on whether it is complex or just complicated (1998: 2).

In addition to Cilliers’ views on the complex system, there are many examples in the academic literature that treat the national security system and government institutions as a complex adaptive system (Cilliers, 1999; Fidler, 2007; Hill, 2011). Drawing a parallel with global governance institutions, David Fidler defines (global) institutions as “the effort that societies invest in organizing and exercising political power in response to the challenges and opportunities they face” (Fidler, 2007). In addition, this author acknowledges that local and global governance (institutional organization) at all levels involve the identification of essential goals and mechanisms predefined to be able to achieve them (2007: 3).

Having in mind that the functioning of any sovereign state’s security sector represents a qualitatively new value in relation to the set of functions performed by its individual institutions, the authors of this paper believe that the security sector (system) can be treated as a complex adaptive system. In addition to the previously identified features, the literature lists as the most important specifics of a complex adaptive system a large number of elements of which the systems are composed, as well as their mutual interaction (Cilliers, 1999). Interactions in such a system are

² This distinction is based on the identification of complexity as a qualitatively new category in relation to a complicated system whose complexity stems from the number of subsystems and a large number of factors that affect its functioning and persistence.

nonlinear, which allows the system to perform significantly more complex data exchanges (1999: 4). In addition, complex systems are described as systems that are open "towards outside", and exist in the environment assigned to them, which is highly dependable on the description of the purpose of its existence (1999: 4).

In case of security sector institutions, its purposefulness is determined by the discretionary strategic commitment of each state. Finally, Cilliers points out that complex systems "have a history" (1999: 4). Not only does he emphasize the evolutionary component in the development of systems, but rather, he classifies their past as the most responsible factor in the current behavior of the elements of the system (1999: 4). However, Cilliers believes the most important feature of a complex adaptive system is the fact that parts of such a system function only according to the input information available to the subsystem at its level. Consequently, the operation of the subsystem is not, by any way caused by the behavior of the whole.

In the previous part of the text, the authors offered an argument according to which the institutions of the security sector as part of the national security system could take on the properties of a complex adaptive system. However, the additional formulation of the argument also depends on the answer to the question whether the security sector can be completely adaptive?

The adaptability of the system to real circumstances and the factors that cause it, is its important feature. If the system existed in a *vacuum*, it would be inefficient and would not respond to the needs for which it was set up. The situation is the same with the security sector institutions. Under normal circumstances, the system, due to the absence of real danger or the manifestation of a security threat, does not react or adapt to the circumstances as they do not change. However, when circumstances or factors occur that significantly "disrupt" the usual environment in which the system exists, then the system adapts to respond effectively to new threats.

A set of factors caused by a certain phenomenon or process is, therefore, necessary in order to change the dynamics of the system response. Authors will now present the events caused by the coronavirus epidemic in Serbia. We believe that, due to the previously presented argumentation, these events represent a trigger for the adaptability of the (national security) system.

A trigger for the system's adaptability: Coronavirus virus epidemic in Serbia

The spread of the coronavirus began in the Chinese province of Hubei at the end of 2019. Although at first it seemed that epidemic would not erode into a larger scale pandemic, during the end of February and the beginning of March 2020, Europe was significantly affected. The World Health Organization declared a "public health emergency of international concern" on January 30th and the pandemic on March 11th (Bjelajac, Filipović, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on March 13 that Europe has become "the epicenter of a pandemic", with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world, except China (WHO,

2020). In the Republic of Serbia, the so-called “zero patient” was registered on March 6, since when decision-making process has been intensified towards limiting the daily life and functioning of citizens and Serbian economy (Ministry of Health, 2020). The relatively unfavorable development of the epidemic culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency on March 15. This was the first time that Article 200 (which stipulates the declaration of a state of emergency) of Serbian Constitution was activated. The state of emergency lasted for 54 days and was lifted by the Decision on the abolition of the state of emergency of May 6, which entered into force the next day (Official Gazette of RS, 6p. 65, 2020).

On March 17, Serbian Minister of Health issued a decree on organizing and implementing a quarantine measure which, among other things, prescribes controls and health warning for all passengers at airports and other border crossings in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the Expert-Methodological Instruction of the Republic Expert Commission for Infectious Diseases (Official Gazette of RS, 33/2020). In addition, the decree prescribes, as measures, restriction of freedom of movement and mandatory medical examinations of persons who were, or are suspected of being in contact with persons suffering from a contagious disease (Official Gazette of RS, 33/2020). In addition, on March 19, the Minister of Health issued another decree declaring the epidemic of the infectious disease Covid19 as an epidemic of “greater epidemiological significance for the territory of the Republic of Serbia” (Official Gazette of RS, 37/2020).

Another important circumstance that significantly affected the daily life of citizens, the economy and institutions of the security sector was the temporary closure of the state borders of the Republic of Serbia. Following the extremely high influx of Serbian citizens from the diaspora to the homeland at the very beginning of the crisis, the Government of the Republic of Serbia (as well as almost all other European governments) made a decision to completely close the state border. Such a decision was adopted on March 12 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 25/2020), thus completely closing the state borders to passenger traffic.

The next important circumstance is global inertia and confusion in information and work of mass media (see more in: Bjelajac, Filipović, 2018). Given the lack of an adequate vaccine as well as the lack of therapy for Kovid positive patients, all of humanity was forced into isolation measures (in some cases complete quarantine) and thus consequently increased inertia. The fact that supports the claim that global inertia is drastic is the estimated reduction of international passenger traffic in 2020 by as much as 59% globally (ICAO, 2020). In the second quarter, international air traffic was reduced by as much as 92%, while in the third quarter of 2020, the reduction was 70% (ICAO, 2020).

The fourth important specificity, which was the most visible, are the protests that took place after the parliamentary elections held on June 21. Citizens' protests for several days were initially peaceful, which groups of hooligans used to attack members of the police, as a result of which the rallies became violent. The protests began on July 7 and lasted for several consecutive days. The reason for the protest is the dissatisfaction of some citizens with the announcements of repeated restrictions

on movement and other measures that were in force during the state of emergency, in order to alleviate the new incoming wave of epidemic.

Institutional and legal aspects of strategic crisis management in the Republic of Serbia

In the previous chapter, the authors of this paper identified four circumstances that shaped the everyday life of Serbian citizens during the epidemic in the period between March 6, when the zero patient was registered, until the end of July. As many as three of the four specifics of the epidemic are not common to the security sector operation in regular circumstances. It is therefore important to look at the modalities through which security sector institutions and bodies have responded to them. Since it is impossible to analyse each separately, the authors will try to present in a systematic manner the most significant features of each of the four situations, taking into account the connections in the functioning of institutions in all four cases.

The declaration of a state of emergency in legal theory is treated as “a serious violation of the regularity of the legal order and entry into a legal regime that changes the way institutions work” (Dyzenhaus, 2006). Regardless the institution and the mechanism of declaring a state of emergency, it is the executive branch that is entrusted with significantly greater powers, which makes it more susceptible to possible abuses or accumulation of power (2006: 4). The International Commission of Jurists recommends that state constitutional solutions clearly define the conditions under which a state of emergency can be declared and enforced so that institutions that resort to emergency clauses know in advance the scope and limitations of their powers (ICJ, 1983). The Commission further recommends that the constitutions specify that measures must not affect those rights that are recognized as coherent in international law and that they should specify the effects of states of emergency on the rights of citizens and the powers of different branches of government (ICJ, 1983). Finally, the recommendations refer to enumeration of clear situations that justify deviations from the normal legal order and establish a procedure for declaring a state of emergency that gives primary responsibility to the legislator, determines the duration of the state of emergency and periodically reviews the need for its continuation (ICJ, 1983).

Linda Camp Keith and Steven Poe proved in an extensive study that there are statistical regularities when it comes to the relationship between human rights violations and the intensity of the crisis that led to the declaration of a state of emergency. By comparing the intensity of crises countries faced by post-World War II constitutional provisions on the suspension of certain human rights during emergencies, these authors found that governments grossly violated human rights in the event of violent riots and civil wars, which was not the case in nonviolent protests and minor crises (Camp Keith & Poe, 2004: 1091).

Although such situations are significantly different and very rare, the executive branch institutions must be ready to act even in a state of emergency. Article 13 of the Serbian Law on Police stipulates that the Ministry of Interior (MUP), in accordance with its scope, as well as in accordance with the regulations in the field of defense, “prepares for action during a state of emergency or war” (Official Gazette of RS, Art. 13: 6/2016). It is further stated that during a state of emergency or war, the Ministry performs tasks within its scope by “adjusting its organization, forms and methods of work in accordance with the law and acts which were adopted to eliminate such state of emergency or war” (Official Gazette of RS, Article 13: 6/2016). With this solution, the legislator prescribed the need for adaptability of the Ministry of the Interior in relation to the declaration of a situation that significantly deviates from the regular one according to its regime. Not only does the Law regulate the work of the Ministry as a whole, but also the engagement of individual organizational units. Thus, as one of the special tasks of the Police Directorate, it is envisaged to create “necessary conditions for maintaining and raising the capacity and readiness of the Police to act in a state of increased risk, during a state of emergency and war” (Official Gazette of RS, Art. 24 para. 9: 6 / 2016).

In case of the need to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Article 39) stipulates that “freedom of movement and residence and the right to leave the Republic of Serbia may be restricted by the law” (Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, 2006: Article 39). However, such a decision was made in the form of an order (which is in its nature – a bylaw) signed by the Minister of the Interior with the consent of the Minister of Health. The Minister issued the order only three days after the declaration of the state of emergency, based on the Government Decree on measures during the state of emergency. The order prohibited movement in public places, outside apartments, rooms and facilities for housing in residential buildings and outside the household, and it was specified which categories of the population were exempted from the restrictions (Official Gazette of RS, 34/2020). During the state of emergency, the work of members of the Police was modified in accordance with the newly adopted acts, and aimed at controlling compliance with the measures prescribed by the relevant Minister and the Government of Serbia. Most of the work performed by the police concerned the control of house quarantine, patrolling, ensuring compliance with the ban on movement for a certain period of time in public places and maintaining public order and peace.³

The Serbian Law on the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) does not provide special engagement of the Agency during the state of emergency, nor is there a provision that would more clearly indicate the institutional adaptability to atypical manifestations of security phenomena. The scope of the Agency is defined as “execution of activities related to the protection of the security of the Republic of Serbia and detection and prevention of activities aimed at undermining or destroying the

³ A more detailed analysis of the content of the acts adopted by the Government of Serbia, as well as the actions of members of the police, is the subject of reports by some non-governmental organizations (Đorđević, 2020).

order of the Republic of Serbia established by its Constitution; in addition, the law prescribes research, collection, processing, and assessment of security–intelligence data and knowledge of importance for the security of the Republic of Serbia, as well as informing the competent state authorities about such data” (Law on BIA, 2002: Article 2). Although there are no publicly available reports on the work of the Agency during the state of emergency, during the epidemic, a discussion was initiated in the public about the possible abuse of the BIA's authority on several occasions.

Namely, in one of the interviews in the context of obligatory self–isolation of those coming from abroad, the President of Serbia stated that “security services have modern technical measures to monitor telephone numbers, primarily Italian ones” (Free Europe, 2020). The president further stated that the services “do not eavesdrop, but monitor whether people with Italian numbers are roaming” (Free Europe, 2020). Although the media and the professional public initiated the necessary explanations on several occasions, the BIA did not provide them. Even though it was announced that they would meet, the Board Serbian National Assembly for the Control of Security Services did not do that, as the last session was held on March 4, just before the beginning of the epidemic in Serbia (Assembly of Serbia, 2020). On April 21, in the context of the current epidemic, the President of the Republic thanked the BIA, comparing it with the Israeli Mossad and the British agency MI-6, as well as the US’ intelligence services. According to him, the BIA has been particularly active in procuring materials, respirators and medical equipment for the health system (Beta, 2020).

The Army of the Republic of Serbia was also extremely active during the epidemic. The Law on the Serbian Army stipulates that the military police may be engaged in providing assistance to the internal affairs bodies (police) in peace and state of emergency based on the request of the competent body with the approval of the Minister of Defense (Law on the Serbian Army, 2007: Art. 53). In addition, one of the missions of the Serbian Army is to support civilian authorities in countering security threats. Members of the Army participated in the provision of facilities for health surveillance of returnees from abroad in Belgrade, Kladovo and Zlatibor, performed continuous biological disinfection of people and movables in the halls of the Belgrade Fair, “Čair“ (Nis), Novi Sad Fair, as well as some schools and other halls in which health supervision of persons with mild symptoms was organized (Serbian Army, 2020). In addition, according to the Serbian Army, during the epidemic, 35.000 people and 22.000 tons of various cargo were transported, with the engagement of more than 2.000 vehicles, which covered about 800.000 kilometers in the realization of these tasks (Serbian Army, 2020). In the fight against the epidemic, members of the Serbian Army had the help of CBRN teams of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, which disinfected facilities and health institutions (Serbian Army, 2020).

The Law on Confirmation of Decrees passed by the Government with the co-signature of the President of the Republic during the state of emergency, confirmed the adoption of 11 decrees passed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the RS, 62/2020). The decrees predominantly regulate the function-

ing of the economic system of the Republic of Serbia, then the activities undertaken by the Government in order to mitigate the effects of the epidemic, and measures related to the restriction of movement.

To a certain extent, and in accordance with their material and personnel capabilities, all institutions have adequately responded to the new crisis. Nevertheless, at the systemic level, institutions appear to have favored a fragmentary response rather than a complex integral response. What reduces the efficiency and quality in the functioning of institutions is the huge amount of disputed measures taken in terms of excessive use of force, especially by members of the Ministry of the Interior. Although with a direct inspection on the ground, the Protector of Citizens determined that during the protest in Belgrade on July 8, 2020 “the police did not use excessive force against the participants of that gathering, except in individual cases due to which the Protector of Citizens initiated procedures to control the legality and regularity of Serbian policer” (Protector of Citizens, 2020).

A feature of a complex adaptive system is the significant influence of one on other segments of the system (Holden, 2005). Following this important feature of the system, it can be concluded that the institutions of the security sector did not act as an integral complex adaptive system during the crisis, but as three separate units without interfering with the tasks of other institutions. In no case has a clear interinstitutional cooperation been shown that would enable “learning” from the everyday crisis and systematize the work in the future. Although the institutions in all three cases quickly adapted to the new circumstance and modified the tasks they usually perform, it seems that at the level of a complex adaptive system, such adaptability has not been achieved.

Concluding remarks

It has already been pointed out that the aim of this paper is to gain an additional insight into the strategic organization of the security sector. Accordingly, it was possible to provide an assessment of the quality of institutional adaptability in a timely and adequate response to atypical crisis situations. This paper demonstrated how the institutions of the security sector – the Serbian Army, the Ministry of Interior (primarily the police), as well as the Security Intelligence Agency reacted to the changed circumstance caused by the global pandemic. The authors presented the modalities and specific responses of institutions to several accompanying phenomena of the epidemic. Authors argue that despite the atypical manifestation of threats, security sector institutions responded to the crisis relatively reliably. This is supported by the fact that almost all the measures that have been taken, are precisely the measures that are otherwise part of the work provided by legal regulations.

The main findings of this research relate to the possibility of placing the security system in the analytical framework of a complex adaptive system. Further research, the subject of which would be testing the individual properties of a complex adaptive system in specific situations, would have a significant social contribution.

The findings of such (ideally interdisciplinary) research would greatly systematize and rationalize the process of making strategic decisions regarding the organization of system institutions and thus enable their continuous improvement. The need for a more comprehensive response and cooperation of institutions was also pointed out, bearing in mind that what is shown in public indicates individual actions.⁴

Although the adaptability of the security system to the manifestation of “new” threats is one of the important characteristics of its success, it is natural that segments of the system (individual institutions) cannot treat security breaches with equal speed. Accordingly, the future of the development of a pandemic caused by the Corona virus (at least in the short term) cannot be predicted. The course of the pandemic, especially in the Republic of Serbia and the region, will directly dictate the extent to which the system needs to adapt in order to achieve success.

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⁴ The main cognitive limitation of this work is the absence of official reports of institutions related to the work of organs during the crisis.

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АДАПТАБИЛНОСТ СЕКТОРА БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ НА АТИПИЧНА ИСПОЉАВАЊА БЕЗБЕДНОСНИХ ПОЈАВА: ЕПИДЕМИЈА КОРОНА ВИРУСА У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРБИЈИ

Сажетак: Циљ рада је да испита могућности институција сектора безбедности Републике Србије да се адаптирају и пруже адекватан одговор на атипична испољавања појава безбедности. Аутори за студију случаја узимају епидемију корона вируса у Републици Србији у периоду између марта и јула 2020. године. Фокус истраживања усмерен је на четири значајна сегмента који су пратили епидемију корона вируса у Републици Србији: затварање граница (Републике Србије и држава у региону), глобалну инертност условљену пандемијом, проглашење ванредног стања и протесте као

појаве чије манифестације су биле најизраженије. Аутори аплицирају постулате комплексног адаптивног система (енг. Complex Adaptive System) на сва четири случаја зарад пружања оцене која се тиче адаптабилности институција сектора безбедности Републике Србије на атипично испољавање кризе. Истраживање ће резултирати додатним увидом у стратешко организовање сектора безбедности и оценом квалитета институционалне адаптабилности у правовременом и адекватном одговору на кризне ситуације.

Кључне речи: комплексни адаптивни систем, стратешко управљање кризама, ковид, корона вирус, сектор безбедности, епидемија, протести