

PANEL DISCUSSION:

„Analysis of the current situation and needs for the national Critical Infrastructure Protection system “.

On 16-17th of June, a two-day panel discussion was held at the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade. The panel discussion is one of the activities within the framework of the international project "Resistance of Critical Infrastructure Protection in Europe - RECIPE", co-financed by the European Commission. The project aims at strengthening the resilience of critical infrastructure at the national and European level by identifying threats and vulnerabilities in their protection. Partners in the project implementation, in addition to the Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, are the National Protection and Rescue Directorate of the Republic of Croatia (project coordinator), University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica (Croatia) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Sweden).

Apart from the project team members, the debate was attended by representatives of state bodies and relevant ministries of the Republic of Serbia in the area of critical infrastructure operations and protection.

In his opening speech, the coordinator of the project in Serbia, Prof. Dr Zoran Keković, stressed the importance of the critical infrastructure, such as the production and supply of electricity and fuels, water supply, transport infrastructure, telecommunications system and public health, for the national security and for meeting the vital needs of the population, economic and social activities. Towns and villages without electricity, waterlogged and disrupted roads, contaminated water, insufficient hospital facilities and shelters to ensure accommodation and necessary medical aid to those who need it most, were the most common signs in the media in Serbia which have drawn the attention of the whole public. As an expression of trust of the European Commission and EU member states, a Serbian academic institution, i.e. the Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, was chosen as the first partner in the project, in order to participate in the creation of future policies and practices of critical infrastructure protection in Europe, particularly in the areas with uneven practices in risk management of interdependent critical infrastructures.

On the first day of the panel, the Dean of the Faculty of Security Studies welcomed the participants, wished them successful work, and characterised the dialogue between the representatives of the scientific community and decision-makers in the system of critical infrastructure protection as an event of strategic interest for the Republic of Serbia and the region of Southeast Europe.

The representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Secretary of State - Prof. Dr. Aleksandar Belic and Deputy Minister of Science, Prof. Dr. Branko Bugarski, stressed the importance of the involvement of the academic community in the problem solving process, and the importance of its involvement in the future projects of the Ministry and the EU, which fund the research in the field of critical infrastructure protection, regarded as a prerequisite for sustainable development, energy and national security .

The Deputy Head of the Sector for Emergency Management, Djordje Babic, commented on the role of the Sector in eliminating the consequences of emergency situations and the need for coordinated actions of all community stakeholders in the prevention and alleviation of mass disasters affecting the Republic of Serbia.

Director of the Office for Reconstruction and Flood Relief, Marko Blagojevic, pointed out the disastrous consequences of the last year's May floods and other natural disasters on the population and on critical infrastructure. He stated the fact that the material damage from the 2014 May floods is estimated at over one billion seven hundred million Euros, of which more than one-third pertaining to the critical infrastructure (Nikola Tesla power plant, Kolubara coal mines, Kostolac power plant, etc.). He added that the further efforts of the state in this direction will lead to the soonest adoption of appropriate legislation that will be oriented on prevention, primarily on the establishment of a risk management system.

After the opening remarks, the members of the project team, professors and graduate students of the Faculty of Security Studies, presented the results of research within their themes. It was stated that the competent authorities and ministries have not sufficiently recognized themselves as the most responsible actors in the protection of state-owned critical infrastructure. In this regard, the concrete proposals were given for the need of making the necessary legislation and its implementation, as well as the creation of a risk management system and improvement of the critical infrastructure resilience.

Representatives of the Office of the National Security Council, Ministry of Defence, the City of Belgrade, Director of the Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy, and Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering as well as other relevant institutions took an active part in the debate.

The discussion between representatives of ministries and relevant state authorities continued the second day of the panel. The discussion will serve as the foundation for the formulation of recommendations for the development of the National Critical Infrastructure Protection Standpoints of the Republic of Serbia. In addition, it will serve as the basis for the compliance with the protection strategies and best practices of the countries from the region and the EU member states, some of which are also project partners.

The overview of the state and the needs of critical infrastructure protection of neighbouring countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia – was also presented at the panel discussion, based on the results of the survey of representatives of the competent state authorities.

The results of panel discussions will be used for the preparation of a national standpoint, and more effective protection national, regional and the European critical infrastructures in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the relevant EU directive and other documents in the field of critical infrastructure protection.