

JOANNA GRZELA<sup>1</sup>

ORCID: 0000-0003-4341-947X

## THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN ICELAND'S SYSTEM OF CIVIL PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

### Introduction

Iceland lies in a unique geological area, *i.e.* on two separate tectonic plates, the North American Plate and the Eurasian Plate. Being divergent, they are moving away from each other, and this causes natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. In its history, Iceland has repeatedly struggled with natural catastrophes of varying range and scale. Therefore, building an efficient system of civil protection and implementing measures to prevent and limit physical injury and damage to the health of the public, the environment and property, whether as a result of natural catastrophes or human actions, have become a priority for the state authorities.

The following article aims to illustrate the role and tasks of the Icelandic Police in the field of civil protection and crisis management. The analysis conducted leads to the conclusion that empowering the National Commissioner of Icelandic Police (the NCIP) with wide competences and, thus, the centralisation of means and powers accounts for the efficient and effective system of civil protection during natural disasters or other hazards. It is a definite and optimal model as it guarantees the tasks are not duplicated or scattered.

The article is based on literature in the English and Icelandic languages (documents, analyses and legal acts).

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<sup>1</sup> Joanna Grzela, habilitated doctor, professor at Jan Kochanowski University, Vice-Dean for Student Affairs at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences at Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce. Obtained the degree of habilitated doctor in the field of social sciences in the discipline of security studies by the decision of the Senate of Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. Her research interests focus around military and non-military dimensions of security in Northern Europe, collaboration of the Nordic Countries, cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and security in the Arctic. E-mail addresses for correspondence: joanna.grzela@ujk.edu.pl; a\_grzela@poczta.onet.pl

## Geographical Features

The Republic of Iceland was established on June 17, 1944. The country is a volcanic island with an area of 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of 364,134 people (as of January 1, 2020)<sup>2</sup>. Iceland is situated in the north-west of Europe, immediately below the Arctic Circle. The majority of the built-up environment is located along the 4970 km coastline. Iceland lies on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and thus is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity<sup>3</sup>. It is an exceptionally turbulent area in terms of the weather and tectonic forces. That means that Icelanders have to be prepared for many natural hazards such as storms, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, and avalanches. Monitoring, along with the efficient system of public warning and responding, is a necessity for public security. The following are classified as high risk natural disasters: volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods (caused by melting glaciers and high ocean tides), snow avalanches and landslides, snow storms, and extreme weather conditions. The events of high risk also include flu pandemics, accidents (on land, at sea, and in the air) and critical infrastructure failures. Therefore, emergency management and civil protection in Iceland are predominantly focused on natural risks<sup>4</sup>.

## Formation of Civil Protection in Iceland

The first regulations concerning civil protection entered into force on December 29, 1962. They were prompted by the growing tension between the Soviet Union and the US, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The latter could have led to a nuclear conflict. That situation evoked a general discussion on the state of Iceland's security. The Parliament adopted the Act

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<sup>2</sup> The population of Iceland has grown by an estimated 7,143 people in comparison to the previous year, which is an increase of 2%. The number of men (186,941) has increased by 2%, whereas the number of women (177,193) has grown by 1.7%. See: *Electronic source*: <http://www.statice.is>, accessed: 30.03.2020.

<sup>3</sup> There are 30 active volcanic systems in Iceland. In the last 50 years, over 20 eruptions have occurred. In many cases, the consequences were problematic for both the local and international community, which was visible in 2010 with the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull. See: G Jóhannesdóttir, National Risk Assessment for Iceland Executive. *Summary*, Department Of Civil Protection and Emergency Management, The National Commissioner of The Icelandic Police, 2011; cf.: D.K Bird, G Jóhannesdóttir, V Reynisson, S Karlsdóttir, M.T Gudmundsson, G Gísladóttir, Crisis Coordination and Communication During the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull Eruption, [in:] Nemeth K (Ed.), *Advances in Volcanology*, Springer. Berlin, Heidelberg, 2017, pp. 1–18.

<sup>4</sup> Kaldal S, *Assessing Emergency Capacity – Emergencies in Iceland's Search and Rescue Region*, Department of Fire Safety Engineering and Systems Safety Lund University, Sweden Brandteknik och Riskhantering Lunds tekniska högskola Lunds universitet Report 5322. Lund, 2010.

on Structured Civil Defence to implement measures preventing injuries to people or damage to property resulting from military actions<sup>5</sup>. Initially, the tasks of civil defence were to be connected with a probable military conflict. However, a few years later, in 1967, the Act was altered so that the forces and means of the civil defence could be used during natural catastrophes and other threats. Pursuant to the amendment, the task of civil defence was to organise and implement preventive measures, responding to damage to health or property resulting from military actions, natural disasters or other threats, and assistance for all loss which occurred<sup>6</sup>. Thus, work began on building a defence system for crisis situations, expanding the original understanding of the term 'civil defence'.

The first integrated plan against an emergency situation was developed in 1971. It entrusted the civil defence with new tasks of assisting and carrying out operations in crisis situations during natural catastrophes (volcanic eruptions, avalanches, earthquakes, and floods). The rescue operation on the island of Heimaey in 1973<sup>7</sup> proved that proper planning and resources can limit the extent of a catastrophe and prevent its consequences. Since then, particular emphasis has been placed on strengthening the civil defence when natural disasters or other emergencies occur.

Another step towards building the civil protection system was the agreement on cooperation during natural disasters between the National Agency of Civil Defence<sup>8</sup> and voluntary organisations, which play a significant role in rescue operations in Iceland. The agreement was signed in 1974 and involved the Red Cross and the rescue organisation currently known as the Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue: ICE-SAR<sup>9</sup>.

After the deadly 1995 avalanches in Súðavíku and Flateyri in the West Fjords, the system of warnings and protection against avalanches was reorganised and strengthened. In 1997, considering an assessment of risk

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<sup>5</sup> Icelandic Parliament, Parliamentary Directive 94/1962, A Parliamentary Directive on Civil Defense.

<sup>6</sup> Icelandic Parliament, Parliamentary Amendment 94/1962 (No 30/1967) A Parliamentary Amendment to the Civil Defence Law.

<sup>7</sup> On January 23, 1973, on the small Icelandic island of Heimaey, a previously unknown fissure in the ground opened up near the town of Vestmannaeyjar, which at that time had about 5000 inhabitants. The island was safely evacuated within one day, and geologists started to monitor the eruption. The newly formed volcano, Eldfell, erupted for six months, covering a large part of Vestmannaeyjar with ash, and destroying hundreds of houses. The lava was flowing towards the harbour, raising the water temperature to 44°C. Enormous effort was undertaken to slow down and control the lava flow, *e.g.* by pumping sea water onto it. A year after the eruption ended, most of the residents returned to their houses.

<sup>8</sup> It was established under the Act of December 29, 1962. In 2003, the Agency was dissolved and its tasks were entrusted to the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police.

<sup>9</sup> Voluntary organisations are an important part in the mechanism of the protection of the population in Iceland. ICE-SAR is an association of search and rescue units. It has more than 20,000 volunteer members, whose aim is to prevent accidents, rescue life and property and respond in emergency situations.

caused by avalanches, a new law and a contingency plan were introduced. This led to the creation of a model of risk assessment of natural hazards, including floods and volcanic eruptions<sup>10</sup>.

On June 12, 2018, the Icelandic Parliament adopted a new Law on Civil Protection<sup>11</sup>. It included entries concerning coordinated measures of civil protection which were to prevent the consequences of critical situations, *i.e.* threats to the life and health of the community, natural environment, and public property. According to them, the mechanism of protecting the population is activated when the events require a coordinated response and support from the emergency services: the Police, Fire Brigade and Coast Guard. The Law promotes extensive cooperation between the parties who have one common goal, *i.e.* providing public security by obtaining information, monitoring, analysis and risk assessment. The Law concerns coordinated actions in the field of civil protection in order to mitigate the consequences of an emergency situation which can threaten life and health of the community, environment and property.

The 2008, regulations introduced a new structure in the crisis management. The state was made responsible for the protection of the population in the territory of Iceland (on land, at sea, and in the air). The national policy referring to natural hazards was formed and executed at the level of government (ministry departments and dependent state institutions). Moreover, the means and forces needed for the people's protection were centralised and coordinated. The duties connected with the protection of the population were delegated to the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police (NCIP/*Ríkislögreglustjórnin*), who acts according to the Government's policy of civil protection and security.

## Organisation and Functions of the Icelandic Police

When the Police in Iceland was formed<sup>12</sup>, it was subordinated to the local authorities. The first legal act providing for the participation of the state in financing the police forces and determining the scope of law enforcement was the Police Act of 1933<sup>13</sup>. Then, the amendment of 1972<sup>14</sup> held that it

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<sup>10</sup> Bernhardsdóttir Á. E, Learning from Past Experiences: The 1995 Avalanches in Iceland. Försvarshögskolan Elanders, Stockholm, 2001, *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Civil Protection Act, No. 82, 12 June 2008.

<sup>12</sup> In 1752 in Reykjavik, an industrial project was introduced, initiated by the Innréttingar company. It was a large venture by the standards of the time and was the starting point for the economic development of urban areas in Iceland. In 1778, watchmen, who could be considered as forerunners of the modern police, were appointed. Their tasks were to patrol the premises of Innréttingar, raise the alarm in the case of a fire, and respond in emergency situations. See: The Icelandic Police and the Justice System. A short introduction, The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police. September, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Lög um lögreglumenn No. 92/1933.

<sup>14</sup> Act No. 56 of 1972 on policemen.

was the State that was entirely responsible for law enforcement in Iceland. Thus, policemen became civil servants; they were no longer local government employees. The State took over the law enforcement agencies in Iceland, forming one national Police. A few years later, in 1977, the Criminal Investigation Police began to operate. Another Police Act came into force in July 1997<sup>15</sup>, replacing the existing regulations. It abolished the Criminal Investigation Police and transferred most of their tasks to local (regional) police commissioners and the National Commissioner of Icelandic Police (the NCIP). Moreover, under its provisions, the Office of the National Commissioner of Icelandic Police was formed. The NCIP was empowered with performing administrative tasks connected with law enforcement such as providing general instructions to local police commissioners and suggesting ways of rationalisation, coordination and development of the Police. Furthermore, he handles all of the operations which require centralisation or coordination between different authorities and is responsible for international police cooperation. Additionally, the tasks of the NCIP are to:

- pass on and draw the attention of the regional police commissioners to the orders and decisions issued by the state authorities which refer to police operations;
- promote and monitor the compliance with the decisions;
- provide the Minister of Justice with information about the police work to assist him in making decisions;
- make proposals to the Minister of Justice concerning general instructions on the police operations;
- support international contacts in the field of law enforcement;
- provide assistance and support to the local police commissioners;
- maintain a register of crimes reported to the police, which includes the essential data about individual cases, a police diary, which contains information about cases transferred to the police and their investigation, a register of arrested persons, and other registers essential for law enforcement and combating crime;
- supervise the civil defence means on behalf of the Minister of Justice in consultation with the Civil Protection and Security Council<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Lögreglulög No. 90/1996.

<sup>16</sup> The government policy on civil protection and security is drawn by the Civil Protection and Security Council, which every three years issues strategies concerning critical situations, how to prevent and mitigate physical injuries and their influence on public health as well as reducing the damage to the natural environment and public property. Moreover, the Council is responsible for formulating the policy on civil protection and security (taking into account future prospects); defining the priorities of civil protection and security (including preventive measures); coordinating response strategies by the public authorities; defining stock levels and equipment to provide for the survival of the nation and recovery in times of peril, and taking other necessary measures to maintain the highest level of security. The following sit on the Council: government ministers, representatives of local authorities, heads of critical infrastructure sectors (Telecommunication Companies, Civil Aviation Administration, the National Energy

The NCIP is also obliged to perform a number of tasks connected with police departments' operations in the field of tax and economic crime, treason and violation of the country's constitution<sup>17</sup>.

In Iceland, the Police are subordinated to the Minister of Justice. The NCIP, acting on his behalf, is responsible for the country's police affairs<sup>18</sup>. The Minister appoints the National Commissioner of Police, his Deputy and also the Police Commissioner and his Deputy in the capital, Reykjavik (two thirds of Iceland's population inhabit the metropolitan area, and the Metropolitan Police constitute the largest force in Iceland). They must fulfil the same qualification requirements as judges in district courts<sup>19</sup>. The officers leave their office when they reach the age of 65. Those appointed to the police service must graduate from the University of Akureyri<sup>20</sup> under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice. To be admitted to the school, applicants need to be Icelandic citizens, aged 20–35, in good physical and mental health, have at least secondary education, sufficient knowledge of a foreign language, driving licence, physical fitness and stamina, and a clean criminal record.

Iceland is divided into 9 districts corresponding to the administrative districts<sup>21</sup>. In the districts, the commissioner represents the Government and supervises the local authorities. Moreover, he is responsible for the border control and daily administration of the Police in his district. District commissioners are also police commissioners, with the exception of Reykjavik, where the functions are separated. They perform tasks which in other countries are never responsibilities of law enforcement officers. Apart from general police duties, district commissioners deal with the

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Department, Energy Transmission Company), civil protection organisations (the Coast Guard, Icelandic Search and Rescue Association ICE-SAR, the Red Cross) and other stakeholders (e.g. General Director of Public Health, National Commissioner of Police, Director of Fire Authority, Director of National Road Administration, representative of Naval Administration, Epidemiological Officer, Director of the National Radiological Protection Authority, representative of the coordinated emergency telephone answering system). The Minister of Justice bears responsibility for the administration of the Civil Protection and Security Council and the chairmanship is entrusted to the Prime Minister. See: Reglugerð um starfshætti almanna- og öryggismálaráðs, No. 459, 30 April 2009; Civil Protection Act, No. 82, 12 June 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Act on Police-Lögreglugög 1996 no. 90 13. júní, at: *Electronic source*: <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/1996090.html>, accessed: 15.04.2020.

<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the Coast Guard (Landhelgisgæslan), whereas Customs falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.

<sup>19</sup> Act on the Judiciary no. 15/1998 at: *Electronic source*: <http://www.humanrights.is/en/mova/page/act-on-the-judiciary-no-15-1998>, accessed: 15.04.2020.

<sup>20</sup> In 2016, the state police school was closed. It was decided to transfer the programme to university level in order to improve its quality.

<sup>21</sup> Iceland's Minister of Justice signed a regulation on this matter on 04.12.2014. See: <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stokfrett/2014/12/04/Reglugert-sett-um-logregluumdaemi-logreglustjora/>, accessed: 30.03.2020.

collection of fees and taxes to the public treasury, handle matters of the registrar's office (marriages, birth and death certificates) and family court matters, *e.g.* divorces. Moreover, they are responsible for the matters of settlement and real estate, execution of judgements (*e.g.* confiscation of property), and sales by court order. They also have the prosecution powers to supervise investigated crimes committed in their district<sup>22</sup>. In Reykjavik, these functions are divided into three institutions: the Reykjavik Commissioner of Police, the Reykjavik Commissioner of Customs, and the Magistrate of Reykjavik. Commissioners also direct searches for missing persons as well as rescue and salvage operations on land.

The Minister of Justice determines the number of police officers in each district in consultation with the National Commissioner of Police. According to the law, police officers operate throughout the country, but their working districts are those in which they have been appointed. Exemptions are made when it is necessary, *e.g.* to complete an investigation that extends to another district. The National Commissioner of Police may decide that police forces in one district will temporarily perform tasks in another, and who will supervise their work. The Minister of Justice may, at the request of the National Commissioner of Police, temporarily designate police officers to perform some tasks outside of their district.

In their work, the Police bear responsibility to the citizens and the state authorities. The role of the Police is to ensure public safety and guarantee security under the law, combat crime, assist the authorities with their tasks, and maintain peace and order. A police officer must follow the rules of objectivism, honesty, and moderation. If needed, the Police are permitted to use force, but they need to take particular care not to use greater force than is necessary. Force is used only as a last resort. Officers are specially trained in negotiating techniques and riot control. The Icelandic Police are restricted in the use of force; officers on duty are unarmed<sup>23</sup> except for a short baton and an OC-canister. Nevertheless, all policemen are trained in the use of firearms. If necessary, the Police may call any adult person to assist them. Citizens are obliged to help the Police if they can do so without endangering the life and health of themselves and their families. It is essential that the citizens who work with the Police and under their command are subordinate to the police superiors and are provided with the same protection as policemen<sup>24</sup>.

In Iceland, there is a special unit (the so called "Viking Squad") under the National Commissioner of Police. They operate as an arrest squad and anti-terrorist unit in all cases where firearms are used and the regular police actions are ineffective. Their duties include the protection of the

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<sup>22</sup> See: Lögreglulög No. 90/1996.

<sup>23</sup> The Police in Iceland first used their weapon on December 2, 2013, shooting at a man who opened fire in a building. The policemen responded with fire, injuring the man fatally. See: *First fatal police shooting in Iceland leaves gunman dead*, in: *Electronic source*: <https://www.icenews.is/2013/12/03/first-fatal-police-shooting-in-iceland-leaves-gunman-dead/>, accessed: 30.03.2020.

<sup>24</sup> The Icelandic Police and the Justice System. A short introduction. *Electronic source*: <https://www.logreglan.is/>, accessed: 30.03.2020.

most important people in the country. The unit operates all over Iceland and its territorial waters.

## Tasks and Role of the Police in the System of Civil Protection and Security

The Government entrusted the tasks of civil protection and security to the Minister of Justice, who delegated the responsibilities to the National Commissioner of Police. The NCIP's role is to monitor whether the measures taken during an emergency situation comply with the Government's policy of civil protection and security. The tasks of the NCIP include, among others, extensive cooperation with the local authorities and organisations in terms of developing plans for emergency situations and coordinating works on preparing and reviewing contingency plans throughout the country. He also supervises the preparation of contingency plans by private entities. Moreover, he controls the structure of civil protection means at the national level, and the measures taken by local authorities. His responsibilities include monitoring and supporting research related to risk factors and natural disasters. His role is to procure and organise additional assistance (national or international) for the area stricken by a catastrophe, upon the request of the local police commissioner.

The Minister of Justice, after receiving information from the National Commissioner of Police, and after consulting the Civil Protection and Security Council, issues a regulation concerning civil protection alert levels. The National Commissioner of Police on behalf of the Minister, and in consultation with the relevant regional commissioner, takes a decision regarding the alert level for all natural and man-made hazards<sup>25</sup>. A state

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<sup>25</sup> The levels of alerts:

– Uncertainty Level (*Óvissustig*):

characterised by an event which has already started and may pose a threat to people or the natural environment. At this stage, cooperation and coordination between civil protection authorities and stakeholders begins. Monitoring, research and assessment of the situation increases. The event is defined and risk assessment is carried out regularly.

– Alert Level (*Hættustig*):

when the assessment of the situation implies an increased threat, immediate measures must be taken in order to provide safety to people endangered / staying in the given area. This is carried out by increasing the preparedness of the rescue and security services, and by taking precautionary means such as restrictions, closures, evacuations, and relocation of the residents. This level requires informing the public, giving advice and warnings.

– Emergency / Distress Level (*Neyðarstig*):

emergency phase, characterised by an event which has already begun and may lead or has already led to damage to people, community, property, or the environment. At this stage, immediate measures are taken to ensure safety, save life, and prevent casualties, damage and loss. See: *Electronic source*: <http://www.almannavarnir.is/english/>, accessed: 11.04.2020.

of emergency may be declared when an emergency is likely to occur or has already occurred. It is announced for preventive or rescue purposes<sup>26</sup>. The National Commissioner of Police organises preventive, educational, awareness-raising measures for private entities, government authorities and the public concerning the structure of civil protection if deemed necessary. Moreover, he participates in training and education in the field of civil protection.

The National Commissioner of Police runs the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management, which administers the matters of civil protection and maintains the National Coordination and Command Center in Reykjavik. The Department coordinates activities connected with the development of civil protection programmes and oversees their implementation.

In the event of an emergency, the Government is authorised to issue special instructions concerning general security principles in official places and areas to which residents have access. In the event of a direct threat, a regional police commissioner may introduce a ban on using public meeting places.

Preventive measures depend on an emergency, risk assessment and scientific research. The National Crisis Coordination Centre coordinates all relief and rescue operations. During the operations, alerts are given using various information channels, depending on the situation, via news broadcasts on the radio or television, text messages sent in the areas affected, the Internet or social media. The centre is responsible for coordinating the country's means and forces when the emergency has an impact on several municipalities or districts. The above involves the work of the Minister of Transport, Director-General of Public Health, representatives of the Local Authorities Union, Police, Fire Brigade, Coast Guard, Telephone Emergency Centre 112, ISAVIA (the company managing aviation in Iceland), representatives of the Icelandic Red Cross, and ICE-SAR. The centre takes measures adequate to the alert level and civil protection plan.

The National Commissioner of Police, in the case of an emergency, may establish Temporary Service Centres. They are to provide information and services to people who have been harmed or suffered as a result of an event<sup>27</sup>. The centres cooperate with civil protection committees (appointed by local authorities, whose role is, among others, to conduct risk as-

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<sup>26</sup> Civil Protection Act No. 82, 12 June 2008.

<sup>27</sup> In crisis situations, the Government sets up the following services: temporary mortuaries, centres for casualties, centres for evacuees, centres for friends and relatives, centres for the provision of food, service and welfare centres. The operation of some of these services is often delegated to partner organisations, *i.e.* the Icelandic Association for Search & Rescue or the Red Cross. They have made an agreement with the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management and support the Government in crisis situations by providing trained manpower and other resources such as vehicles, rescue equipment, relief material and expert knowledge. The Red Cross is responsible for psychological support for victims of disasters.

assessments, mitigate the effects of emergency situations, and contingency planning)<sup>28</sup>.

Government ministries and their subordinate bodies, along with local authorities, approve response plans and submit them to the National Commissioner of Police, and then carry out exercises based on the plans. Public and private entities are obliged to provide the information necessary to prepare national and regional response plans. There are three types of response plans:

- √ national plans, which cover events affecting the entire country (National Pandemic Response Plan)<sup>29</sup>;
- √ general plans, which cover some categories of incidents and are geographically separated. They refer to actions to be taken during floods, storms, or landslides;
- √ special plans which cover a specific incident in a given location (*e.g.* a response plan in the case of an eruption of a specific volcano)<sup>30</sup>.

Each Minister, in cooperation with the NCIP, may determine that public or private entities are to take preventive measures concerning the sale of goods, provision of services and manufacturing in their business operations if it is necessary to protect the community. Moreover, it is a civic duty for a person aged 18–65 to work during an emergency (without recompense) in services connected with civil protection in the administrative districts in which they reside, in accordance with the instructions issued by the regional police commissioner after receiving a proposal from the civil protection committee or the NCIP<sup>31</sup>. In emergency situations, residents are not allowed to leave their place of residence without the permission of a police commissioner, who may decide to take over the control of traffic or forbid people from staying in a certain place or travelling.

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<sup>28</sup> In Iceland, there are 21 Civil Protection Committees. Each protective district (being one of nine police districts) has one or more Civil Protection Committees. They are in charge of organising civil protection at the local level. The committees organise and run relief and rescue operations, prepare risk assessment and contingency plans in the case of emergencies at the regional level, cooperating with the NCIP. Their aim is to guard the security of citizens, prevent damage, and protect the natural environment against pandemics, and natural and man-made hazards. The committees regularly review risk analyses and carry out crisis response exercises in cooperation with the NCIP. Crisis response plans are considered complete once they have been verified and checked. Each committee consists of a district commissioner, representatives of local authorities, and institutions connected with security and civil protection. The Minister decides which commissioner is to sit on the Civil Protection Committee if there is more than one district assigned to the Committee.

<sup>29</sup> Icelandic Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan. Issue 2, 2016. *Electronic source*: <https://www.almannavarnir.is/english/about-the-department-of-civil-protection-and-emergency-management/>, accessed: 10.04.2020.

<sup>30</sup> Útgefið efni, at: *Electronic source*: <http://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/?wpdmc=vidbragdsaaetlanir-seraaetlanir>, accessed: 10.04.2020.

<sup>31</sup> Civil Protection Act, No. 82, 12 June 2008, Articles 16–18.

The Minister of Justice may expropriate property or moveable property owned by private persons for the needs of civil protection. The NCIP may, in an emergency, instruct the owners of housing to receive evacuees from a danger area and give them shelter<sup>32</sup>. The Government may, if public interest requires and considering the risk of natural catastrophes, epidemics, acts of terrorism or other threats, issue instructions on the sale and distribution of essential goods in the country, or confiscate food, fuel, spare parts, medicines and other essential products which may quickly run out.

At the level of local government, civil protection and security in emergency situations fall under regional police commissioners who act in consultation with the NCIP. Their task is to appoint the Operational Committee consisting of, among others, representatives of local authorities, Civil Protection Committee, ICE-SAR, and the Red Cross. The Operational Committee cooperates with the Cooperation and Command Centre, and is responsible for organising rescue operations. Regional commissioners bear responsibility for all civil protection operations in the areas under their jurisdiction. To this end, they appoint site managers to supervise the operations at the site of an emergency.

## Conclusion

Iceland is an exceptional country in terms of responding to emergency situations. This is due to a strong centralisation of competences in the field of civil protection and the limited number of entities responsible for emergency management and public safety. The system of civil protection is based on central government administration bodies and the National Commissioner of Police, whose role, tasks and responsibilities have significantly increased since 2008<sup>33</sup>. The Civil Protection Act of 2008 brought different levels of emergency response to one centre in order to make it quick and effective. The reliability of the system has been achieved as a result of close cooperation of officials on many levels of government and local administration, coordinated and supervised by the NCIP. In effect, the Police definitely dominate in civil protection operations and crisis management during emergencies caused by natural disasters. Additionally, building and maintaining friendly interpersonal relations and the trust which residents place in police officers are of great value in the assessment of the emergency response system in Iceland. Social partners and voluntary

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<sup>32</sup> The local authorities in the evacuated areas bear the costs of accommodation and food.

<sup>33</sup> This happened despite the opposition from the local authorities and fire department who raised an argument of insufficient consultations while developing the draft act of 2008. See: Ómarsdóttir S. B, *Iceland's Security: A Small State's First Attempt at Policy Making*, Faculty of Political Science University of Iceland. *Electronic source*: <https://ams.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/old/Silja%20IcelandicSecurity.pdf>, accessed: 17.04.2020.

organisations constitute crucial support for the system. The strength of those organisations and preparedness to act in emergency situations are of high importance for the security of the state and its citizens.

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**Keywords:** Iceland, Police, civil security, civil protection, crisis management

**Summary:** In Iceland, since 2008, there has been a centralisation and coordination of forces and resources needed to protect the population and civil security. Duties in the field of civil protection at the national level are delegated to the National Police Chief, who acts in accordance with the government's policy of civil protection and security. The system's reliability has been achieved thanks to the close cooperation of officials from many levels of government and self-government administration, which is overseen by the National Police Chief.