

## Bulgaria Human Security Chronicle 6 – April 2015

### *Handling of natural disasters as a threat to human security*

## **Deadly floods and snowfall raise questions about state policies**

Bulgarians witnessed numerous natural disasters during the past year which unfortunately cost human lives. The series of catastrophes began with Varna in June 2014 when at least 12 people died as a result of massive flash flooding and mudslides.<sup>1</sup> Most of the streets were impassable, filled with smashed and overturned vehicles and uprooted trees. It should be mentioned that the cyclon responsible for this flooding was progressing very slowly across southern Europe, making the argument that it was not expected invalid. Research of the Directorate for National Construction Control showed that illegal constructions and pollution were the cause of the tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

Later that year, in August, the Skat River burst its banks in northwestern Bulgaria as a result of weeks of torrential rain, killing one person and forcing authorities to evacuate hundreds. Hundreds of properties were swamped in Mizia, the worst-hit city<sup>3</sup>. About a month later three people drowned in floods in the Bourgas region on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast. Torrential rain led to states of emergency in various places in Bulgaria and closures of some roads. The dead were a 69-year-old woman, a 21-year-old woman and a man (27), who drowned in the swollen Ropotamo River. Several houses in the Pobeda and Akatsiite residential neighbourhoods were flooded and more than 20 people were evacuated from the Otmanli village in the region of Bourgas. A state of emergency was declared in municipality of Primorsko on the morning of September 6.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/20/world/europe/bulgaria-floods/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mediapool.bg/nezakonni-stroezhi-i-boklutsi-prichinili-tragediyata-vav-varna-news222619.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/1-dead-floods-hit-northwestern-bulgaria-093927318.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://sofiaglobe.com/2014/09/06/two-dead-in-floods-in-bulgarias-bourgas-district/>



This leads to the catastrophe of March 2015, when Bulgarians witnessed a snowfall and flooding, which was disastrous for some regions in Bulgaria - mainly the southern parts - Rudozhem, Madan, Kurdzhali and others. Over 850 settlements had neither electricity supplies, nor access to drinking water.<sup>5</sup> There were disruptions in telecommunications, road infrastructure. Rivers reached critical levels. Numerous trees fell and thus blocked several main roads, making it almost impossible for medical care to reach the people in danger and also causing several crashes in the region.

Of course, people should be far from the illusion that such events take place only in Bulgaria. Even more developed countries which have modern equipment for dealing with crises experience difficulties in handling such situations. However, it is the authority's responsibility to take a look at these events and to try to find the reasons why things happened the way they happened, in order, on the one hand, to reduce the number of lost lives in the future, and on the other – to avoid literal blocking of parts of the country.

Unfortunately, it won't be true to say that events like these are precedents, since such disasters have been happening quite frequently for the recent several years – an example to the point are the floods and landslides of 2005. What these events have in common is that the reaction of public authorities is not always adequate. No matter who is the Minister in office, the form-factor issue is the way of conducting policies in general – by investing money and resources in solving crises, rather than investing in preventing them. It turns out that inappropriate actions of the public authorities or the failure to respond to illegal acts is an actual threat to the security of citizens.

An example for such actions that led to catastrophic consequences is the indiscriminate and illegal felling in the country towards which the state has not taken any action. The majority of experts and public

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.novinite.com/articles/167069/Bulgaria%27s+Snowstorms+Leave+Regions+Isolated+and+Without+Electricity>



opinion are adamant that this is one of the causes, if not the main one, for the resulting floods<sup>6</sup>. Sometimes, under the pretext of preventing disasters, bigger disasters are caused. During the recent years, in the form of anti-flood actions hundreds of kilometres along rivers have been totally deforested while riverbeds remained congested and clogged.<sup>7</sup> As it occurs, flood prevention activities hide high risks of abuse and violation of the law. There are solid reasons to be considered that flood prevention is one of the most lucrative industries in which huge profits are formed by government contacts to clean the gutters and by illegal felling and selling of wood.

However, the most important aspect of the problem is not so much related to the profits that some actors generate from the illegal felling. The key problem is that through its lack of willingness to solve this issue and to apply adequate measures, the state in the face of the competent authorities, directly threaten the security of citizens. Such is the case with the village of Vladaya, which is located 13 km from Sofia,<sup>8</sup> where the forest is being felled illegally, but in contrast, the streets are destroyed because of the flowing water and Vladayska river raises its level every time in case of prolonged rainfalls. The Mayor of the village commented that this felling is made in the state forest and it is legal, since recently the State Forestry - Sofia has appointed a private company timber above the village. However, according to the felling norm, it should be done at a height of 5-10 cm. from the base of the log. The trees in the region are obviously felled quite higher from the log, proving that it was an illegal felling.

The concerns in this case, as in the cases mentioned above, is why the authorities tolerate such illegal acts, thus putting the lives of the citizens in danger, which leads to the question who should be responsible for guaranteeing this citizens' safety.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://bivol.bg/en/gori-izsichane-english.html?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.temanews.com/index.php?p=tema&iid=40&aid=972>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.btv.bg/az-reporterut/id/12/usernews/1711462506-Nezakonna\\_sech\\_vav\\_Vitosha.html](http://www.btv.bg/az-reporterut/id/12/usernews/1711462506-Nezakonna_sech_vav_Vitosha.html)



*Sources:*

Milanova Boriana, Nearly dozen die in Bulgaria flooding, *edition.cnn.com*, 20 June 2014, Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/20/world/europe/bulgaria-floods/>

Granitska Lili, Illegal construction and debris caused the tragedy in Varna, *Mediapool.bg*, 14 July 2014, Available at: <http://www.mediapool.bg/nezakonni-stroezhi-i-boklutsi-prichinili-tragediyata-vav-varna-news222619.html>

1 dead as floods hit northwestern Bulgaria, *News.yahoo.com*, 3 August 2014, Available at: <http://news.yahoo.com/1-dead-floods-hit-northwestern-bulgaria-093927318.html>

Three dead in floods in Bulgaria's Bourgas district, *Sofiaglobe.com*, 6 September 2014, Available at: <http://sofiaglobe.com/2014/09/06/two-dead-in-floods-in-bulgarias-bourgas-district/>

Bulgaria's Snowstorms Leave Regions Isolated and Without Electricity, *Novinite.com*, 9 March 2015, Available at: <http://www.novinite.com/articles/167069/Bulgaria%27s+Snowstorms+Leave+Regions+Isolated+and+Without+Electricity>

Felling of Bulgarian Forests – crime and Punishment, *Bivol.bg*, 9 September 2014, Available at: <https://bivol.bg/en/gorizsichane-english.html?lang=en>

Parvanov Kalin, When the muddy water comes, *Temanews.com*, Available at <http://www.temanews.com/index.php?p=tema&iid=40&aid=972>

*Btv.bg*, 19 February 2013, Available at: [http://www.btv.bg/az-reporterut/id/12/usernews/1711462506-Nezakonna\\_sech\\_vav\\_Vitosha.html](http://www.btv.bg/az-reporterut/id/12/usernews/1711462506-Nezakonna_sech_vav_Vitosha.html)

