

National Crisis Management

by René Du Bois

Responsibility of the federal Government! Germany's federal system makes an effective national crisis management difficult.

Germany has developed an effective response system for coping with major domestic danger or damage situations. In the context of disaster response, services financed by the federal states are to manage situations generated by natural disasters, industrial accidents, epidemics and even the dangers of international terrorism. The German government supports the federal states in the case of particularly large-scale damage situations or those of national importance with a variety of measures (information, support and provision of resources).

In particular, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA and the Elbe floods of August 2002 took damage scenarios to a new dimension, against the background of which existing civil defence and disaster response systems needed to be scrutinised.

The Standing Conference of Federal State Ministers and Senators of the Interior (IMK) adopted a resolution in November 2001 to critically review the efficiency of Germany's emergency response services. Existing systems were updated by the German government and federal states under the New Civil Protection Strategy to cope with damage situations.

In this context a range of new co-operation processes were agreed between the German government and the federal states. The Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance created a Joint Situation Centre of the national government and federal states. To standardise command structures on different crisis management levels, the federal states agreed – in the context of a joint command system (taking account of federal state-specific policies) – to apply the standardising policy recommendations. In this context the concept for a nationwide disaster response of all the federal states was updated and agreed between the federal states.

By agreement!

However, so far the federal states have rejected an amendment of the constitution that would assign both civil defence and civil protection responsibilities to the German government. Hence, crisis management of national situations can only be co-ordinated in all federal states by agreement with the federal states in question.

In view of dangers like the threats of international terrorism, the proliferation of mass destruction weapons, the occurrence of epidemics and pandemics, damage situations caused

by civilisation and the increase of natural disasters (climate change) the question arises whether the existing division of responsibilities between the national government and federal states can still meet the necessary comprehensive prevention and control requirements.

In the case of national danger or damage situations across federal state borders it is necessary to align a number of different command and communication structures of the national government and federal states to form a uniform crisis management.

However, the Interministerial Coordination Group (IntMinKoGr) created in the wake of the 1988 Chernobyl reactor disaster by the German national and federal state governments to respond to large-scale national danger situations, as an agency representing all departments and federal states cannot meet this complex task while responding to a danger or damage situation.

The aim of this agency is to effect an aligned co-ordination of decision-making across the government departments and advise and support the concerned federal states. This does not affect respective federal state and departmental responsibilities. With this focus the agency can make a major contribution to co-ordination efforts as a follow-up to situation management or long-term situations.

Networking indispensable

To master current and future challenges it is indispensable to consciously network the objectives, processes and structures as well as the capabilities and means of all relevant players. This task can only be managed by a cross-departmental and nationwide co-ordination of crisis management on a national level.

In this vein, national crisis management is to enable the concentration of complex capabilities on a strategic goal and synergies to flank the actions. The necessary structures have been prepared over the last few years by the government departments. This August the German government was instructed on the situation of national crisis management by a report of the German ministry of the interior (BMI) and consented to a reorientation of the tasks and role of the Interministerial Coordination Group of the national and federal state governments.

The department whose field of expertise corresponds most to the specific danger or damage situation is in charge of crisis management on a national level. The German ministry of the interior (BMI) plays a special role in domestic crisis management. If domestic security is in great danger, it will convene a crisis management team, which will be in charge of co-ordination within the German government and alignment with the federal states affected by the danger or damage situation.

In addition, further players will be integrated in the crisis management team where necessary. The co-operation of crisis management teams on different levels to control danger or damage situations is ensured by communication between contact persons or by technical media (telephone and video conferences).

Instead of the previous scenario-based planning approaches that merely accounted for a subset of impacts, the complexity of national situations requires a networked capability-orientated strategy approach that can react flexibly to unforeseeable impact chains. The crisis management structures and processes agreed between the national and federal state governments should take account of these requirements.

Department-specific interests are focused and a uniform cross-departmental crisis management approach is chosen by forming cross-departmental crisis management teams, enabling the use of all existing strategic options in a complementary manner. The German ministry of the interior has agreed on the formation of joint crisis management teams according to the BMI crisis management team model with the German ministry of the environment, nature conservation and reactor safety in the event of major danger or damage situations due to criminal offences involving radio-active substances, and with the German health ministry in the event of a pandemic or bioterrorism.

The National Crisis Management Steering Committee under the direction of the BMI is a platform for interministerial alignment on conceptual, organisational and procedural crisis management issues. This panel co-ordinates interministerial co-operation, information and the alignment of on-going expert planning, joint policy documentation (e.g. crisis management briefing documents of the national government departments, overview of crisis management capabilities) and coordination for specific occurrences.

The crisis management exercise

Since 2004 the crisis management system has been practiced by the national and federal state governments in the form of the LÜKEX crisis management exercises for all departments and federal states and planning discussions of the Interministerial Coordination Group. The LÜKEX exercises involve both crisis management teams on various administrative levels (government departments, federal states, government headquarters and districts) and additionally - depending on scenario focus - industrial companies, associations and relief organisations.

Apart from testing structures and crisis management methods, one major objective of these exercises is to harmonise the protagonists' plans for the chosen scenario and encourage further optimisation. LÜKEX 2007 was staged on 7 and 8 November 2007 with the participation of 10 government departments and 7 federal states against the background of an influenza pandemic scenario.

In preparation for the exercise the federal states, authorities, and involved companies expedited their respective planning activities on the basis of the National Influenza Pandemic Plan. As a result of the exercise it can be observed, among other things, that the intensive preparations on all levels made a major contribution to optimising and closely intertwining the structures and aligning public and private-sector planning. The formation of cross-departmental crisis management teams under the direction of the state secretaries of the German ministries of health and the interior and the new role of the Interministerial Coordination Group have been successful.

In addition, experience shows that challenges of this dimension can only be managed by a consistent co-operation with the operators of the critical infrastructure. In future it will be necessary to integrate fields beyond the health sector even more extensively in pandemic planning.

After the third national crisis management exercise all 16 federal states have now tested the aligned management of national situations with the national government and geared their respective structures to a collaboration. The national and federal state governments have agreed to continue with these exercises every two years under the direction of the ministry of the interior in future. The next LÜKEX will be staged in autumn 2009.

The now developed crisis management system of the national and federal state governments is able to meet the requirements for co-ordinating departments of the German government and the federal states during a national crisis within the federal system. The role of the Interministerial Co-ordination Group in the crisis management system has been more clearly defined, so that it will have an important complementary function for the co-operation between national and federal state crisis management teams in select special, long-term cross-border danger or damage situations (e.g. accidents in nuclear power stations inside and outside Germany, pandemics, major natural disasters).

Its task will be to develop decision-making proposals for crisis management teams in the case of heightened consultation and coordination requirements.

Remarks:

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article has also been published in the magazine "griephan global security", no. 1/spring 2008.



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