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TERRITORIAL DEFENCE FORCES AND CONTINUITY OF ACTION IN COMBATING NATURAL DISASTERS

Abstract

The article presents the role and importance of the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT) in the crisis management system of the Republic of Poland, with particular emphasis on counteracting and responding to natural disasters. Since taking over responsibility for the non-military part of crisis management tasks in the Ministry of National Defence under the Homeland Defence Act, the WOT has become a key component of the Armed Forces in this area. The author presents the evolution of the formation, its structure and tasks, emphasising that the effectiveness of the WOT has been confirmed in a number of operations, such as support for actions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, and especially during Operation Phoenix after the floods in 2024.

The results of a survey conducted among students confirmed the positive image of the WOT and the high assessment of the effectiveness of its activities, which, according to the respondents, justifies its systematic development. A comparative analysis with the European Union's crisis response system points to its mainly coordinating nature and the lack of permanent executive forces, which highlights the value of Poland having an integrated formation such as the WOT. China's actions during the so-called "winter of the millennium" in 2008 were cited as an inspiring example of the effective mobilisation of state resources in the face of a natural disaster.

Keywords

National Security, Territorial Defence Forces, European Union, Crisis Management

Introduction

With the entry into force of the Homeland Defence Act¹, the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT) took over responsibility for the non-military part of crisis management tasks in the Ministry of National Defence². WOT commanders were entrusted with the function of Head of the Ministry of National Defence Crisis Management Centre, while territorial defence brigade commanders replaced the existing heads of provincial military staffs in the field of crisis management and became the “right hand” of provincial governors in coordinating and implementing the support that the military can provide in times of crisis. These regulations have significantly strengthened the role of the WOT in building and maintaining social security.

Crisis management, as W. Kitler points out, is a significant part of state governance, focused on utilising the full potential of the nation and its allied commitments to counter threats to national security³. In this context, the WOT has become a key element of the crisis management system, as confirmed by operational experience: support for the police and health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, support for the Border Guard in the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and assistance to refugees on the Polish-Ukrainian border, as well as participation in the clean-up after the floods that affected south-western Poland in October 2024.

The main task of the WOT remains to maintain a constant state of readiness to defend the Republic of Poland through the proper preparation, training and maintenance of readiness of soldiers serving in a rotational system (called up at least once a month for two days during their time off, and in crisis situations – adequate to the scale of the threat). The most important tasks of WOT soldiers include: protecting the population and property from the effects of natural disasters and their removal, search and rescue operations, participation in crisis management tasks, cooperation with elements of the state defence system (in particular with provincial governors and local government), as well as shaping patriotic and civic attitudes.

In view of the increasing intensity of weather anomalies, protecting the population from the effects of natural disasters is one of the state’s priority tasks, in which the WOT plays a leading role. The prerequisite for the high quality of the tasks performed by the formations is the constant improvement of cooperation and communication between the WOT and local government, the WOT and the police, the WOT and the Border Guard, the WOT and the State Fire Service, etc., as well as the gradual provision of modern equipment and intensive training.

In order to strengthen the scientific nature of the work, a research study was conducted to verify the main hypothesis, which was formulated as follows “*The Territorial Defence Forces are positively assessed by students in the area of*

1 Act of 11 March 2022 on the defence of the Fatherland (Journal of Laws 2022, item 655, as amended).

2 Ibid.

3 W. Kitler, J. Prońko, B. Wiśniewski, *Problems of crisis management in the state, study*, National Defence Academy Publishing House, Warsaw 2000, p. 3.

counteracting and responding to natural disasters, and their actions are perceived as effective, which justifies the systematic increase in the size of the formation”.

The research used a diagnostic survey (quantitative method)⁴, sample size: 310 national security students. The group was selected deliberately due to the knowledge possessed by students of the chosen field of study.

Preventing and responding to natural disasters – from definition to practical actions

A natural disaster is a serious, sudden event of a natural nature, causing significant damage, material losses, danger to life and significant disruption to the functioning of society⁵.

A state of natural disaster, as one of the states of emergency specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, may only be declared on the basis of an act of law (Article 228(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland)⁶. The procedure for declaring and lifting a state of natural disaster, the rules of operation of public authorities and the scope of permissible restrictions on human and civil rights and freedoms are specified in the Act of 18 April 2002 on the state of natural disaster. This state may be declared both in the area affected by the disaster and in areas where its effects have occurred or may occur. It is declared by way of a regulation, on the initiative of the Council of Ministers or at the request of the competent provincial governor⁷.

Types of natural disasters:

- Hydrometeorological: floods, droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, lightning strikes;
- Geophysical: earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides;
- Biological: disease epidemics, pest infestations;
- Climatic: extreme heat waves and cold spells⁸.

Key organisational measures for prevention and response:

1. Forecasting – including meteorological, volcanological and biological forecasts.
2. Disaster response – alerting and warning the population, organising evacuation from endangered areas.
3. Rescue operations, including:
 - specialist reconnaissance;
 - assessment of losses and damage;
 - determining the extent of areas affected by destruction, fires and flooding;
 - identification of buildings and places of residence directly at risk;
 - assessment of the forces and resources necessary to locate threats and secure the population;

4 K. Żegnałek, *Research Methodology for Authors of Master's and Bachelor's Theses in Pedagogy*, WSP TWP Publishing House, Warsaw 2010, p. 88.

5 R. Grodzki, *Crisis Management Good Practices*, Difin SA Publishing House, Warsaw 2012, p. 171.

6 Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997.

7 Act of 18 April 2002 on the state of natural disaster (Journal of Laws 2002 No. 62 item 558, as amended).

8 Act of 18 April 2002 on natural disasters (Journal of Laws 2002 No. 62, item 558, as amended).

- assessment of the forces and resources needed to eliminate the effects;
 - rescuing people;
 - providing first aid;
 - maintaining order and security;
 - securing the property of victims;
 - carrying out protective work;
 - searching for missing persons.
4. Providing necessary assistance to victims in areas affected by disasters.
 5. Reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure in cities, towns and regions.
 6. Implementation of engineering and technical projects to strengthen resilience and reducing risk in the future⁹.

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland are one of the most important pillars of national security and are directly involved in every stage of the projects described¹⁰. The Territorial Defence Forces are of particular importance in the implementation of tasks related to combating natural disasters.

The developed model of calling up territorial service soldiers enables flexible and immediate deployment of military forces. Soldiers from brigades stationed in given provinces are sent to threatened or destroyed areas first. The delegation of soldiers to local tasks means that soldiers familiar with the topography, environmental conditions and specific characteristics of the community operate in the most sensitive areas, which translates into faster reconnaissance, more effective coordination and greater public acceptance of the activities.

Tasks of the territorial defence forces in the crisis management structure of the Ministry of National Defence

One definition presents crisis management as a system of activities regulating the functioning of an organisation in accordance with its objectives¹¹. According to this approach, it is a complex process of designing and improving organisational structures, aimed at achieving high effectiveness and efficiency of operation.

Crisis response includes the actions of emergency services in response to events that threaten human life and health or the environment, aimed at limiting or eliminating the effects and providing assistance to those affected.

There are four phases of crisis management:

- prevention;
- preparation;
- response;
- recovery.

⁹ *Natural disasters*, [https://www.jablonowopomorskie.pl/asp/pliki/obrona cywilna2019/ kleskizywiolowe.pdf](https://www.jablonowopomorskie.pl/asp/pliki/obrona%20cywilna2019/kleskizywiolowe.pdf), [accessed on 29 November 2025].

¹⁰ G. Piątkiewicz, *Challenges for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland based on the Act on the Defence of the Homeland and membership in the North Atlantic Alliance*, *Res Politicae*, vol. 16, (2024), p. 150.

¹¹ W. Kitler, J. Prońko, B. Wiśniewski, *Problems...*, op. cit., p. 53.

These phases form the so-called security chain. Effective security building requires that it be part of a planned, well-thought-out and efficient process known as security management¹². Even the best-organised activities will not bring the expected results without properly set priorities and hierarchies.

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, with their considerable human and equipment potential, play a key role in the security management system. The Territorial Defence Forces occupy a special place in this area.

The Territorial Defence Forces are the fifth branch of the armed forces, alongside the Land Forces, Air Force, Navy and Special Forces. Their functioning is defined by internal acts of the Minister of National Defence and procedures established by the relevant commands.

On 25 April 2016, the Minister of National Defence approved the “Concept for the creation of the Territorial Defence Forces”, which accelerated the development of the new formation¹³. The current commander of the Military Commando Unit, Colonel Wiesław Kukuła, was appointed commander of the WOT. On 21 December 2016, a new version of the Act on the Universal Duty of Defence of the Republic of Poland was announced, formally establishing the WOT as the fifth branch of the Armed Forces.

From 1 January 2017 to 13 August 2024, the WOT was directly subordinate to the Minister of National Defence. On 14 August 2024, it was subordinated to the General Staff of the Polish Army. This change strengthened the integration of the WOT with the entire command system and supported its role in the area of security management.

Organisational structure of the Territorial Defence Forces. The formation comprises: 18 brigades, two training centres, the Gryf Unconventional Warfare Unit, the SONDA Non-Commissioned Officers School and the Command Battalion. Among the eighteen brigades, there are two Border Defence Component brigades: the 19th Nadbużańska and the 20th Przemyska.

In 2024, one light infantry battalion in the 1st Podlasie and 4th Warmia-Masuria Territorial Defence Brigades was transformed into border defence battalions. Ultimately, from 2026, the 1st Podlasie and 2nd Lublin Territorial Defence Brigades will obtain the status of border defence brigades. In total, there will be four such brigades operating within the WOT structures¹⁴.

12 E. W. Roguski, *Regional and Local Crisis Management in EU Standards*, Main School of Fire Service Publishing House, Education and Rescue Technology Foundation, Józefów 2006, p. 4.

13 M. Klisz, *Creation of Territorial Defence Forces as a response to new threats to national security*, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski University Publishing House, Krakow 2017, p. 68.

14 G. Piątkiewicz, *The role of the Territorial Defence Forces in ensuring continuity of operations in the area of combating natural disasters*, [in:] N. Prusiński, *The Polish Armed Forces in the protection and defence of facilities of particular importance to national security*, Kalisz 2025, p. 48

The Border Defence Component created in this way will be responsible for the defence of border areas. Ultimately, 50,000 soldiers (approx. 45,000 rotational soldiers and 5,000 professional soldiers) will serve in the WOT¹⁵.

The Territorial Defence Forces play a key role in:

- maintaining universal readiness to defend the Republic of Poland;
- protecting the population from the effects of natural disasters and in eliminating those effects;
- protecting property;
- conducting search and rescue operations and saving or protecting human life and health;
- participating in crisis management tasks;
- cooperating with elements of the state defence system, in particular with provincial governors and local government bodies;
- shaping patriotic and civic attitudes and values in society.

Pursuant to the Decision of the Minister of National Defence of 25 June 2018, the Territorial Defence Forces were incorporated into the Crisis Management System of the Ministry of National Defence (SZK RON)¹⁶. The aim of this integration is to ensure rapid and effective assistance to the population and support for local authorities. As part of the SZK WOT, a system for monitoring, analysing and assessing the likelihood of threats has been created.

The main element of the SZK WOT are the forces and resources at the disposal of the WOT Commander for the implementation of crisis management tasks. The Support Assessment Teams (SAT) and Reconstruction Support Teams (RST) also play an important role.

- SATs are responsible for reaching the scene of an incident as quickly as possible, reconnaissance of the area and preliminary assessment of the situation (scale of damage, needs, recommendations for the use of forces and resources).
- RST operate in the reconstruction phase, filling the gap left by the forces used in the immediate crisis response; they support reconstruction and clean-up work, coordinate support with local governments and services (e.g. logistics, engineering), contributing to a faster return of the community to normal functioning¹⁷.

The Act of 23 April 2022 on the Defence of the Homeland entrusted the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT) with new tasks in the area of crisis management, including:

- transferring the non-military part of crisis management tasks in the Ministry of National Defence to the WOT;
- establishing the WOT Commander as the Head of the Ministry of National Defence Crisis Management Centre, responsible for coordinating activities;

15 *Structure and tasks*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/struktura-i-zadania>, [accessed on 29 November 2025].

16 *WOT crisis management system*, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/dwot/wola-wot-w-zk>, [accessed on 29 November 2025].

17 *Crisis management information*, <https://media.terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/informacje/kategoria/4999>, [accessed on 29 November 2025].

- transferring the competences of the current heads of Provincial Military Staffs in the field of crisis management to the commanders of Territorial Defence Forces brigades, which means coordinating and implementing support provided to provincial governors¹⁸.

As a result, Territorial Defence Force brigade commanders were obliged to cooperate on an ongoing basis with provincial governors and local government authorities. They are part of provincial crisis management centres, where, together with other entities, they conduct ongoing monitoring and analysis of the situation and participate in the development of action plans. In addition, the WOT Commander is required to participate in crisis staff meetings, is responsible for appointing civil-military teams and delegating soldiers to assess and diagnose needs in areas affected by threats.

Use of WOT soldiers in Operation Phoenix. From 23 September 2024 to 30 April 2025, Territorial Defence Force soldiers carried out tasks in flood-affected areas, participating in the largest military operation since 1989 – Operation Phoenix¹⁹. Over 13,000 soldiers were involved in the operation, including over 2,000 from the Territorial Defence Force²⁰.

The main tasks of the WOT soldiers included:

- mitigating the effects of flooding;
- accelerating the reconstruction of infrastructure;
- reducing the risk of localised flooding;
- improving the safety of the population;
- strengthening and repairing flood embankments.

WOT soldiers carried out operations in Gryfino, Zatonie, Raduszczyce, Czarna, Wilków and Żelazno, among other places. The work focused on cleaning up flooded areas (including public facilities) and, in cooperation with engineering troops, also on rebuilding flood defences, clearing roads and towns of debris and waste, and unblocking culverts under roads²¹. Below are the areas where WOT soldiers carried out their tasks as part of Operation Phoenix:

Lower Silesian Province

- **Counties:** Bolesławiec, Dzierżonów, Jawor, Kamienna Góra, Karkonosze, Kłodzko, Legnica, Lwówek Śląski, Lubań, Świdnica, Wałbrzych, Ząbkowice Śląskie, Zgorzelec, Złotoryja.
- **Municipalities:** Oława urban municipality; Oława rural municipality (Oława County); Kąty Wrocławskie, Mietków, Sobótka (Wrocław County).
- **Cities with county rights:** Jelenia Góra, Legnica, Wałbrzych.

¹⁸ Act of 11 March 2022 on the defence of the Fatherland (Journal of Laws 2022, item 655, as amended).

¹⁹ *End of Operation FENIKS. The army remains in place*, <https://media.terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/informacje/850969/koniec-operacji-feniks-wojsko-zostaje-na-miejscu>, [accessed on 2 October 2025].

²⁰ The army is still fighting the effects of the disaster, <https://media.terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/informacje/841605/wojsko-wciaz-walczy-ze-skutkami-katakliizmu>, [accessed on: 02.10.2025].

²¹ *Territorial Defence Forces*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/wojska-obrony-terytorialnej>, [accessed on: 02.10.2025].

Opole Province

- **Counties:** Brzeg, Głubczyce, Kędzierzyn-Koźle, Krapkowice, Nysa, Opole, Prudnik.
- **Municipality:** Strzeleczy (Krapkowice County).

Silesian Province

- **Counties:** Bielsko, Cieszyn, Pszczyna, Racibórz.
- **City with county rights:** Bielsko-Biała.

Lubusz Province

- **Municipalities:** Szprotawa (urban-rural municipality), Żagań (rural municipality, Żagań County).
- **Cities:** Żagań, Małomice²².

In Operation Phoenix, constant and close cooperation with government and local authorities, based on trust and efficient coordination of activities, was of key importance. The priority was to strengthen internal security and support the civilian population, especially in rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure. In carrying out these tasks, the Territorial Defence Forces clearly contributed to increasing the sense of social security²³.

Disaster response system in the European Union

The European Union (EU) programme for 2021 on disaster prevention and response is part of a broad initiative to strengthen the resilience of Member States and improve the effectiveness of crisis response²⁴. a key tool is **the EU Civil Protection Mechanism**, whose functions include²⁵:

- supporting cooperation between national civil protection authorities;
- raising public **awareness of risks** and preparedness for disasters;
- ensuring rapid, effective and coordinated assistance to countries affected by disasters.

The operational centre of the Mechanism is the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), which operates 24 hours a day and coordinates the EU's response to emergencies.

Key elements of the programme²⁶:

- the EU Civil Protection Mechanism;
- European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF);
- priority for sustainable risk management;
- integration of climate change issues into risk management strategies;
- international cooperation.

²² *Areas affected by flooding*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/arimr/tereny-dotkniete-powodzia>, [accessed on: 03.10.2025].

²³ G. Piątkiewicz, *The role...*, op. cit., p. 51.

²⁴ Regulation (EU) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (2021/836).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

In March 2022, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on civil protection, emphasising, among other things:

- investment in research and innovation;
- the development of prevention and preparedness measures;
- strengthening civil protection capabilities;
- better preparation of citizens through wider access to information;
- encouraging citizens and volunteers to participate in civil protection initiatives.

The European disaster response system operates in three modes: monitoring, information exchange and full activation (Table 1), which are triggered depending on the scale and type of threat. It is worth noting that none of the modes is directly related to conducting operations in the affected area, which confirms the coordinating nature of this system.

Table 1. Modes of operation of the European disaster response system

Modes of operation of the European disaster response system				
Element/Service	Monitoring	Information exchange	Full activation	
Exchange of existing emergency reports	✓	✓	✓	
24-hour contact point	✓	✓	✓	
Analytical reports		✓	✓	
Platform for gathering and sharing information		✓	✓	
Crisis meeting (ambassadors/ministers)			✓	
Proposals for EU action			✓	

Source: Own work: *New European system for combating natural disasters*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pl/ip_17_4731, [accessed on 2 October 2025].

The European Union does not have its own permanent forces and resources that could be deployed to the scene of an incident in an emergency. For this reason, it is necessary to develop clear procedures and rules of operation in the event of a crisis, so as to ensure maximum effectiveness of interventions.

In the coming years, the EU is likely to face increasingly frequent multidimensional crises, often occurring simultaneously in different regions. It will be crucial to increase the resilience of the community, as well as to ensure effective crisis communication and combat disinformation.

An important financial instrument is the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), established in 2002, which provides support to regions affected by natural disasters. Member States can apply for funding in the event of floods, forest fires,

earthquakes, storms, droughts and public health threats (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic). To date, the fund has been used in response to 118 natural disasters and 20 public health emergencies²⁷.

Protection of the population against natural disasters in the People's Republic of China

In 2008, China faced the so-called “winter of the millennium” – one of the largest non-military undertakings in the country’s history. It is estimated that approximately 180 million people were stranded at train stations, airports, on roads and railways²⁸. The armed forces were called in to combat the effects of this unprecedented disaster: military district commanders were given responsibility for supporting the civil authorities, and operations were coordinated by a specially established centre, which, among other things, set up 70 military medical points²⁹. The motto guiding the operations was: “when one place is in trouble, help comes from every corner”.

The following forces and resources were sent to areas affected by frost and heavy snowfall to support the civil administration:

- 519,000 soldiers;
- 1.6 million reservists;
- 34,000 vehicles;
- aircraft (transport planes).

Military equipment was also used **in unconventional ways**:

- shooting at icy power lines to remove ice cover;
- air drops of food, medicine, blankets and warm clothing to places cut off from roads.

The scale and pace of the operations yielded measurable results: approximately 17,000 kilometres of roads were cleared and made passable, approximately 4.3 million people were evacuated, and over 2 million tonnes of material aid were transported to residents of the affected areas. In addition, soldiers involved in the operation collected approximately 123 million yuan (approximately 17.5 million USD) for the victims and donated over 15 million items of warm clothing³⁰.

The example of China shows that even in the face of a crisis of enormous scale, it is possible to respond effectively by fully mobilising the key links in the response system. This approach, in the spirit of the motto “when one place is in trouble, help comes from every corner”, can serve as a guide for the European Union in building a system that effectively counteracts crisis threats and strengthens citizens’ sense of security.

27 How does the EU respond to crises and build resilience?, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eu-crisis-response-resilience>, [accessed on 02.12.2024].

28 R.K. Bhonsle, *China: The Dragon's Winter Tsunami*, Boloji Media Inc., New York 2008.

29 Z. Śliwa, *The Chinese Armed Forces and Disaster Relief*, Przegląd Wojsk Lądowych, no. 6 (2009), p. 61.

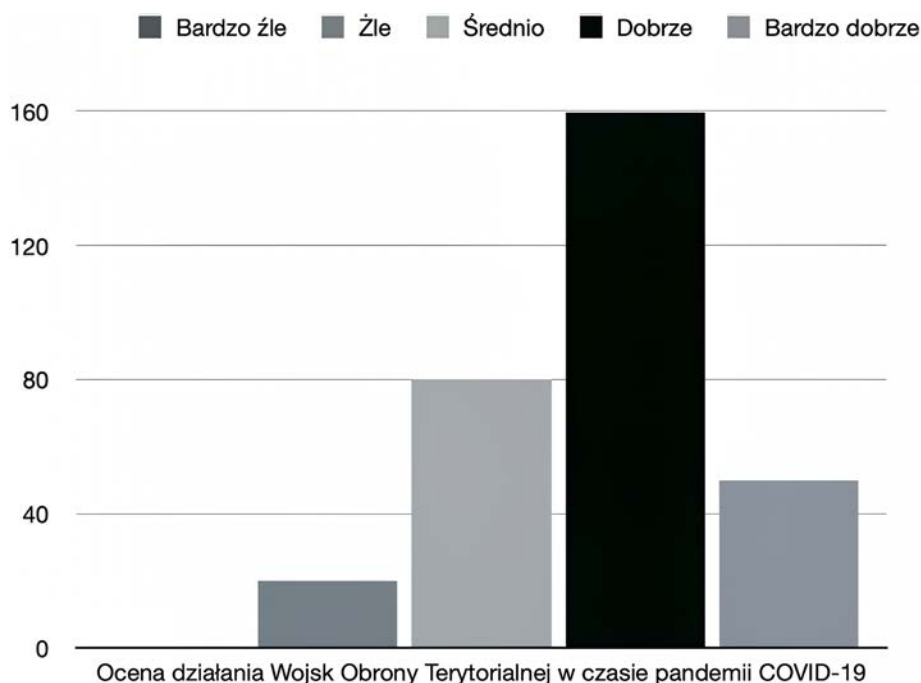
30 G. Piątkiewicz, *The Role...*, op. cit., p. 54.

Assessment of the performance of tasks by WOT soldiers

Building the potential of the Territorial Defence Forces based on soldiers performing territorial military service distinguishes this formation from other types of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. Its specificity lies in the possibility of combining service with professional work or study. In accordance with the Homeland Defence Act (Article 303(1)), an employer is obliged to release an employee for the duration of the tasks performed by a WOT soldier and, moreover, may not terminate their employment contract.

Initially, this model of service was met with mixed opinions among professional soldiers and the public, especially with regard to the level of training and the quality of task performance. Therefore, a survey was conducted among students of national security at one of the Silesian universities to find out their opinions on the activities of the WOT in the area of combating natural disasters.

Figure 1. Assessment of the Territorial Defence Forces' activities during the COVID-19 pandemic



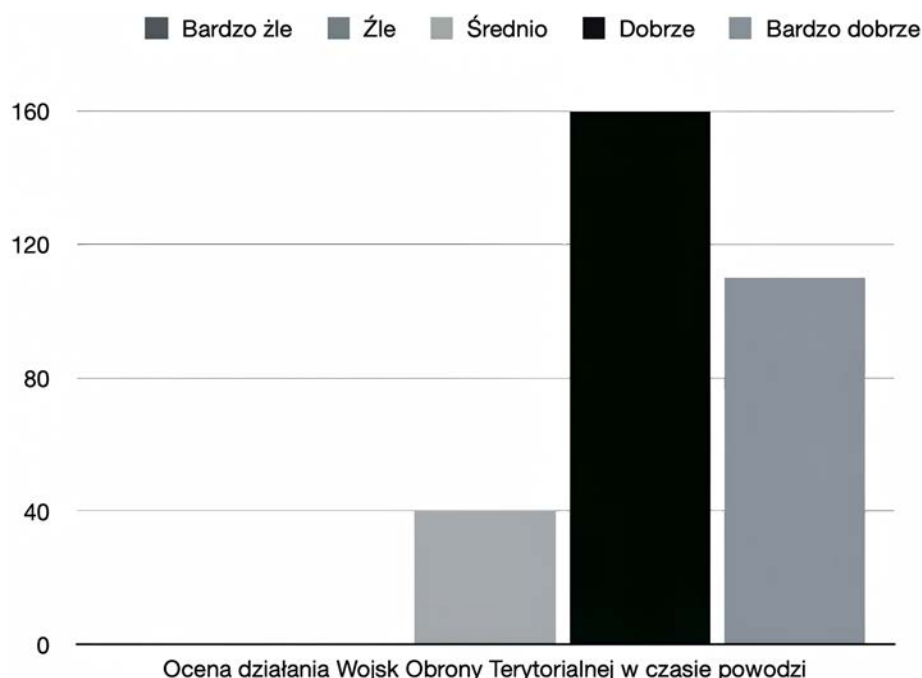
Source: Own work.

The activities of the Territorial Defence Force were rated negatively by 6% of respondents, and 26% of respondents rated them as “average” – which may be related to

the fact that this was the first such serious test for the formation, requiring above-average commitment.

However, the vast majority of students gave positive assessments: 52% rated the activities as good and 16% as very good. These results indicate that the tasks carried out mainly in support of the health service and the police were well received, despite the relatively limited experience of the Territorial Defence Forces soldiers.

Figure 2. Assessment of the Territorial Defence Forces' actions during the floods



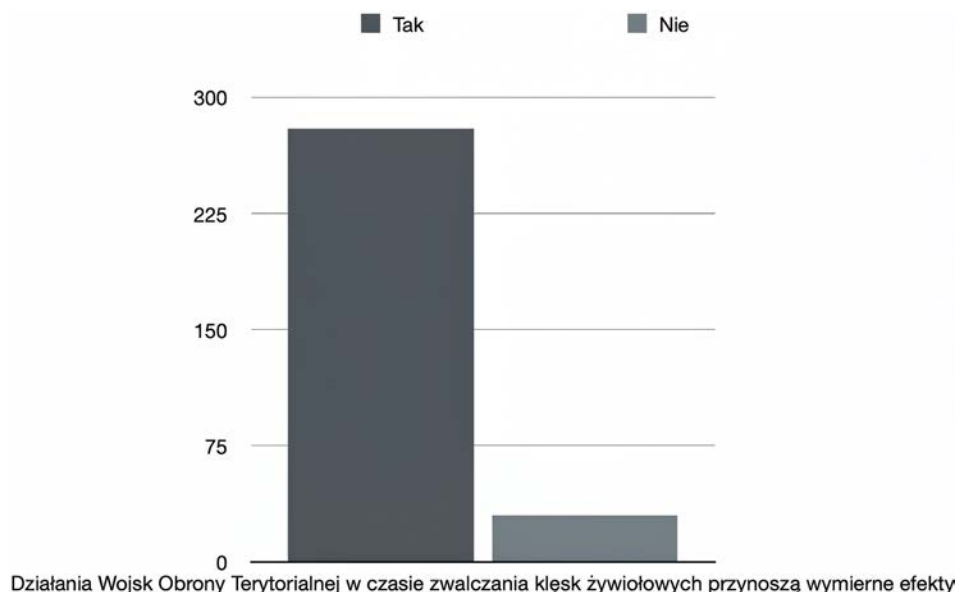
Source: Own study.

None of the respondents rated the actions of the Territorial Defence Force soldiers negatively. 13% of respondents rated them as average, while the vast majority of students gave them good (52%) and very good (35%) ratings.

Such a high level of acceptance may result from the trust built up by the formation during previous operations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when protecting the Polish-Belarusian border and supporting the Border Guard on the Polish-Ukrainian border immediately after the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

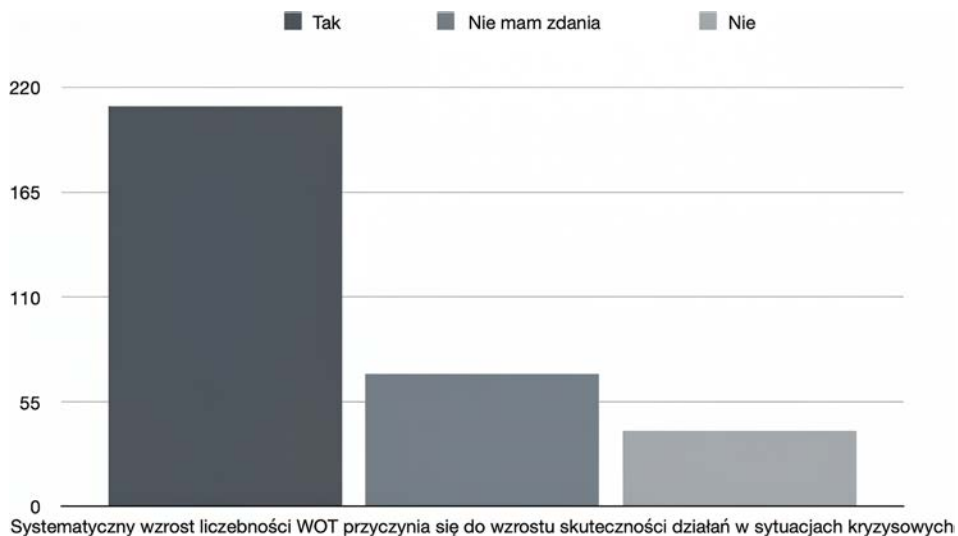
As many as 90% of respondents believe that the activities of the Territorial Defence Forces bring measurable results. This result confirms the high public support for the formation and the fact that soldiers, despite the rotational nature of their service, are regarded as professionals.

Figure 3. The activities of the Territorial Defence Forces in combating natural disasters bring measurable (visible) results



Source: Own study based on conducted research.

Figure 4. The systematic increase in the size of the Territorial Defence Forces contributes to the effectiveness of operations in crisis situations



Source: Own study based on the research conducted.

68% of respondents agree that the increase in the size of the Territorial Defence Forces increases the effectiveness of crisis response operations; 13% disagree with this opinion, and 19% have no opinion. These results suggest that respondents recognise the growing scale of military and non-military threats and are aware that the activities of the Territorial Defence Force contribute to increasing the level of national security.

Completion

Seven years after its formation, the Territorial Defence Forces have established themselves as an important component of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in ensuring continuity of operations during natural disasters. Its effectiveness is due to its adequate organisational structure, intensive training system and operational experience gained, among others, during the COVID-19 pandemic, support for the protection of the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borders, and in operations following the floods in 2024. The legal and organisational solutions applied allow for combining territorial military service with professional and educational activities, and open the path to professional service for the most distinguished soldiers.

Surveys conducted among students indicate that the WOT is generally viewed positively in the area of natural disaster prevention and response. Respondents attributed professionalism and effectiveness to soldiers, which, in their opinion, justifies a systematic increase in the size of the formation. The results confirm the thesis of growing public trust in the WOT and its real contribution to increasing the state's resilience to both military and non-military threats.

In the context of EU solutions, it should be emphasised that the EU's disaster response system, in place since 2021, is primarily of a coordinating and informational nature (modes: monitoring, information exchange, full activation). The lack of joint, permanent executive forces that can be immediately deployed to a crisis area limits the Union's ability to respond quickly to multi-focus events. From a public policy perspective, it therefore seems reasonable to: further strengthen mechanisms for joint planning and standardisation of procedures between Member States; consider building joint executive capabilities (military and civilian) dedicated to disaster response; integrating early warning, communication and logistics systems across the EU.

An analysis of China's experience with the so-called "winter of the millennium" (2008) shows that full mobilisation of state resources, clear assignment of responsibilities and centralised coordination of actions can significantly increase the effectiveness of crisis response. Although differences in political and institutional conditions do not allow for a simple transplantation of solutions, the very logic of action – rapid concentration of forces, interoperability of entities, priority for the

continuity of critical infrastructure and support for the population – can be treated as inspiration when designing European procedures.

Practical conclusions include: further strengthening the capabilities of the Territorial Defence Force in the areas of communications, reconnaissance, logistics and engineering support for reconstruction; developing interoperability with government and local government administration and emergency services; and systematically improving competence in crisis communication and countering disinformation.

In the area of further scientific research, it is recommended to continue measuring public opinion on representative research samples. These should be supplemented with an analysis of performance indicators, such as metrics of the time needed to restore functions in disaster-stricken areas, estimates of avoided costs, and indicators of the resilience of local communities.

In summary, the Territorial Defence Forces are an integral part of Poland's internal security architecture. Through the further development of specialist capabilities and closer cross-sectoral cooperation, this formation has the potential to become a model solution within an integrated disaster response system, both nationally and at European level.

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