

The place and role of the Chairman of the County Protection Committee in case of disasters in Hungary

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Abstract. The County Protection Committee (CPC) is an administration body, which operates under the administrative control of the Government. It is responsible in specified cases for national defense/protection and disaster management that are provided by law and government decrees and decisions. After the new legislation process in Hungary, the Head of the County Government Office (HCGO) is, at the same time, the Chairman of the County Protection Committee (CCPC). Fortunately, nowadays, military tasks relegated to the second priority in the activities of the CPC. But, we can see that the number and the power of destructions by natural and manmade disasters are increasing. These cases impose more and more tasks for the CPC and for the CCPC.

Key Words: disaster management, protection committee, defense/protection administration, chairman of the county protection committee.

Introduction. After the parliamentary elections in 2010, FIDESZ Hungarian Civic Party, with a “strong state” concept, won 2/3 of the seats in Parliament. After the elections, the new Parliament established an intensive legislation process. As a result of this legislation process, the new Constitution of Hungary came into force on 1 January 2012, and the two very important acts on defense/protection administration, namely the new Home Defense Act (HAD – Act CXIII of 2011) and the new Disaster Management Act (DMA – Act CXXVIII of 2011) came into force also on 1 January 2012.

Hungary is administratively divided into 19 counties and the Capital, Budapest. In the seat of every administrative unit, and in addition in Budapest, there has been a County Government Office (CGO) operating since 1 January 2011. The Government re-introduced the districts as administrative units of a county on 1 January 2013. The previous district system was abolished on 31 December 1983. Since the re-establishment, in each county district (175) and in the pre-existing districts of Budapest (23) (Figure 1), there is a Local Protection Committee (LPC). The LPC is an administration body, which operates under the administrative control of the County Protection Committee (CPC).

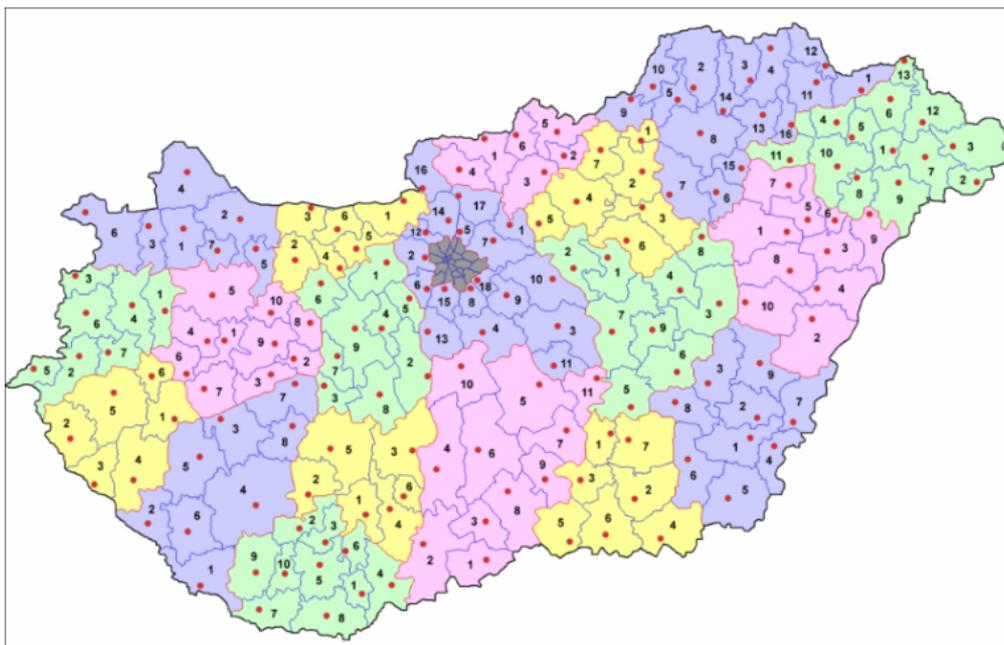


Figure 1. Counties and districts of Hungary (source: Wikipedia).

The defense/protection administration in Hungary is also divided into national, county and local level. Since 1 January 2012, the Head of the County Government Office (HCGO) has been, at the same time, by law (HAD), the Chairman of the County Protection Committee (CCPC). Until 1 January 2012, the CCPC was the Chairman of the County Assembly (CCA). The difference between the two positions is great, because the CCA is elected by the County Assembly after the local elections, and the HCGO is appointed by the Prime Minister (Act. CXXVI of 2010).

The rights and duties of the CCPC are different in the periods of prevention, defense/protection and reconstruction. This publication will show in brief the place and role of the CCPC in case of disasters in the time of prevention and defense/protection, as obliged by the provisions of the DMA.

The Chairman at the time of preparation and prevention. In the period of preparation and prevention, the chairman's activities are determined by the decisions of the CPC. That means that the chairman may only act after the meeting of the Committee, and only according to its decisions in several cases (Act CXXVIII of 2011). According to the Statutes and Standing Order of the CPC, the Committee must hold two meetings every year, the first one until 31 March and the second one until 31 October. The Annual Work Plan of the CPC is adopted at the first meeting of the Committee. The work plan can also define tasks for the Chairman.

For example after the DMA:

- in order to prepare the Chairman it may define tasks for the organizations involved in disaster management;
- he may conduct exercises organized by the CPC;
- he has the right of consent concerning the structure and manpower of the territorial civil protection forces (Decree No. 62/2011. (XII. 29.));
- he submits for approval of the settlement classification for disaster vulnerability to the Minister of the Interior. The mayor must review the risk assessment every year until 30 September;
- he organizes the cooperation between the armed forces, the law enforcement agencies, the National Tax and Customs Office, the NGO's and the civil protection forces;
- he is responsible for organizing and operating the command and control center of the CPC;
- he convenes the meetings of the CPC;
- he is responsible for the preparation and implementation of alarming the public and business organizations.

The Chairman at the time of defense/protection. However, at the time of defense/protection, the CCPC orders tasks, with the cooperation of the CPC. The meaning of this regulation is as follows. At the time of disasters, the quick and right decision is very important. The Committee has 12 members and in a case of disasters, the command and control must be quick and clear. The consequence is that the rights and responsibilities of the Chairman are larger. For example:

- he must organize the implementation of the territorial defense/protection tasks specified by the Government;
- he directs the defense/protection operation and initiates measures to be taken being the Government's competence;
- in urgent cases, he orders the evacuation of citizens from danger zones;
- he can take over the control of defense/protection if the protection against a disaster far exceeds the possibilities of the LPC;
- as ordered by the Minister of the Interior, or in urgent cases, he provides for the deployment of civil protection forces;
- he coordinates the population and property relocation, accommodation, care, and the organization of local defense/protection.

Summary of the study and conclusions. Disaster management is of national importance. The unified management of the defense/protection is a state responsibility (Act CXXVIII of 2011).

County Government Offices (CGO) were established on 1 January 2011. CGO include now 18 previously independent operating, administrative organizations. Consequently, the HCGO is, in "peacetime", the employer of many organizations involved in disaster management. For example, the Plant Protection and Soil Conservation Directorate, the Public Health Service, the Forestry Board, the Construction and Heritage Office, the Food Safety and Animal Health Directorate and the Transport Inspectorate. Since 1 January 2012, the HCGO has been, at the same time, the Chairman of the County Protection Committee.

We can see that the rights and duties of a Chairman in the different periods are diverse. At the time of preparation and prevention, the CCPC has an executive and control mandate, but he must act in accordance with the decisions of the Committee. In the time of defense/protection, the Chairman has the right to make decisions and all the organizations involved in disaster management must implement them.

If the fight against disasters is a state responsibility, we can agree that the change in the person of the CCPC in 2012 can effectuate a more efficient duty, because the HCGO is appointed by the Prime Minister and may also be dismissed by him.

The importance of the CPC and its Chairman shows that more than 16 government regulations (GR) delegate rights and duties to them. For example, the GR on Health Crisis (Government Decree No. 521/2013. (XII. 30.)), on National Nuclear Emergency Preparedness (Government Decree No. 167/2010. (V. 11.)), on Public Information in the Event of a Nuclear or Radiological Emergency (Government Decree No. 165/2003. (X. 18.)), and the related GRs on Water Management (Act LVII. of 1995; Government Decree No. 232/1996. (XII. 26.); Decree No. 10/1997. (VII. 17.)).

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