

PREPARING POLISH SOCIETY FOR A POTENTIAL SECURITY CRISIS IN NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS: SELECTED ISSUES

The topic of this article is preparing Polish society for a potential security crisis in NATO-Russia relations in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The first part discusses issues related to the preparation of European states for a potential conflict with the Russian Federation, using selected examples, then moves on to explore these issues using Poland as an example.

First, the lecture presents the actions taken in Poland and the level of preparedness of Polish society in the event of armed conflict, drawing on the results of surveys on these issues. The next part discusses the problems related to the preparation of shelters and safe havens for civilians in the event of war, or rather the lack thereof. Given the potential prospect of war between NATO countries, the broader West, and the Russian Federation, this must be addressed urgently to avoid being surprised by a Russian invasion. The lecture concludes with a summary and recommendations for actions to be taken to prepare the state and society for the potential defense of Poland and Europe against the barbarity of the Russian army.

Keywords: society, security crisis, war, NATO, Russia.

Підготовка польського суспільства до потенційної кризи безпеки у відносинах між НАТО та Росією: вибрані аспекти

Темою статті є підготовка польського суспільства до потенційної кризи безпеки у відносинах між НАТО та Росією в контексті російсько-української війни. У першій частині обговорюються питання, пов'язані з підготовкою європейських держав до потенційного конфлікту з Російською Федерацією, на окремих прикладах, а потім переходять до дослідження цих питань на прикладі Польщі.

Спочатку курс окреслює дії, вжиті в Польщі, та рівень готовності польського суспільства до збройного конфлікту, спираючись на результати опитування щодо цих питань. У наступній частині обговорюються проблеми, пов'язані з підготовкою укріплів та безпечних

¹ PhD, Assistant Professor, Institute of Economics and Security Sciences of the Witold Pilecki, Malopolska State University in Oświęcim, Poland. E-mail: grzegorz.baziur@mup.edu.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6652-8981>.

місць для цивільного населення у разі війни, а точніше, її відсутності. Враховуючи потенційну перспективу війни між країнами НАТО, ширшим Заходом та Російською Федерацією, це питання необхідно терміново вирішити, щоб уникнути несподіваного вторгнення Росії. Лекція завершується підсумком та рекомендаціями щодо дій, які необхідно вжити для підготовки держави та суспільства до можливої оборони Польщі та Європи від варварства російської армії.

Ключові слова: суспільство, криза безпеки, війна, НАТО, Росія.

Statement of the scientific problem. The full-scale Russian invasion, launched on February 24, 2022, intended by Russian politicians and military to last several days, escalated into a full-scale armed conflict, leading to open rivalry between NATO countries, primarily the United States, and Russia. Both the United States and Western European countries supported Ukraine as their largest ally in efforts to weaken Russian military potential. American support includes the supply of equipment, ammunition, and intelligence, as well as political and military advice. The Russian government also perceived the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO as another escalation of Western actions against Russia. However, between the broadly understood West and the fighting armies of Ukraine and Russia lies Poland, home to its citizens who want to live, study, work, and raise their children in peace. They therefore have the right to expect the state to secure their peaceful existence in these troubled times, amid the tense situation on the eastern borders, particularly with Ukraine and Belarus. This article, which discusses the aforementioned issues, aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of preparedness of society in the event of a crisis or armed conflict?
2. What is the attitude of Poles towards the reinstatement of military service?
3. What is the problem of access to weapons and what is the level of training of youth and adults in this area?
4. What defensive and protective measures, including logistical and legal measures, have been taken in Poland to prepare the country for a possible military threat?

Analysis of previous studies. In preparing this article, the author referred to both the literature on the subject matter and the legal acts cited in the footnotes and bibliography. The material was compiled using an

event-based descriptive method, while the cited survey studies utilized a diagnostic method.

To date, the topic discussed in this article has not received much scientific publication, due to its novelty. Nevertheless, some attempts have already been made to discuss this topic. Publications by Marta Adamczewska, Robert Dynak, Marian Kuliczkowski and Leszek Sawicki, Piotr Miedziński, Marcin Przybylski, and Urszula Staśkiewicz are worth mentioning (Adamczewska M., 2025; Dynak R., 2019; M. Kuliczkowski M., 2020; Staśkiewicz U., 2026; Przybylski M., 2024). It should be emphasized that research on this topic is ongoing and will likely encompass increasingly broader issues. This article constitutes an important contribution to the initiation of this research.

The Purpose of the Article. The purpose of this article is to present the preparedness of Polish society for a potential NATO war against Russia in the context of a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, which will begin in 2022. The thesis assumes that, following the launch of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland as a country has made significant progress in preparing for potential defense and protection of its citizens against external invasion. However, further significant efforts are necessary in this area, and the article aims to prove the validity of this assumption.

The text is divided into several subsections. The first presents Europe's current preparedness for a potential conflict with the Russian Federation. The second discusses actions taken in Poland and the level of public preparedness in the event of an armed conflict with Russia, including its attitudes towards the reinstatement of compulsory military service and universal military training, which were abolished in 2009, as well as access to weapons and military training for youth. The final section discusses the preparation of shelters and emergency shelters, and the text concludes with a summary. Let us move on to the first subchapter, which deals with Europe's preparedness for a potential conflict with Russia.

Presentation of the main material. *The problem of preparing Europe for a potential conflict with the Russian Federation.* In response to this open and unprovoked aggression, NATO has taken a number of actions in support of Ukraine, guided primarily by the imperative of protecting the security of its members and preventing escalation of the conflict. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasized, "We are not a party to this conflict. Our task is to ensure that it does not spread beyond Ukraine's borders, which could lead to even greater destruction and danger. Such

a development could result in a war on a European scale and bring even more human suffering” (Osiński Ł., Ciechanowicz A., 2022). After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO member states focused on protecting European security, and this will continue to be the case after 2022. In direct response to these actions, an extraordinary virtual summit of NATO leaders was held on February 25, 2022. During this meeting, the actions of the Russian Federation were sharply criticized, including its recognition of the independence of the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk Republic, as well as its direct armed aggression against Ukraine.

The Alliance called on the aggressor to resolve the conflict diplomatically. At the same time, the Alliance significantly increased its military presence in the east, announcing that troops, ships, and aircraft, including over 100 jets and 120 warships, were on standby, a move confirmed during a press briefing in 2022. These actions had a dual purpose: on the one hand, they were an expression of deterrence policy, and on the other, they prepared for defense against a potential attack on any of the member states. At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, a meeting of the Bucharest Nine was also held on February 25, 2022, attended by representatives of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. The participants unanimously agreed that strengthening cooperation was a priority, and that support for Ukraine could best be expressed through humanitarian aid, the reception of the wounded, and refugees. They expressed support for strengthening the Alliance’s eastern flank. Unlike the European Union, NATO, as a military-political organization, did not impose sanctions on the aggressor.

The Alliance actively supports Ukraine by providing military equipment, technological support, and training assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces. Such actions were complemented by individual initiatives by individual member states, which provided Ukraine with significant quantities of weapons, ammunition, and other equipment necessary for the country’s defense, reaffirming its defense of democratic values and international law, while also emphasizing that Russia’s aggression will not go unanswered and that Europe’s security, which is also inextricably linked to the fate of Ukraine.

The chairman of the House of Commons Defense Committee, Tobias Ellwood, stated that the British armed forces would last about five days in the event of war. He added that, among other things, the replacement of equipment sent to Ukraine creates a “truly grim picture” and leaves military

stockpiles significantly depleted. According to the British politician, the local land forces lack surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank missiles, which are among the weapons transferred to Ukraine. The condition of the British armed forces has recently become a significant political issue, and government officials recognized the need to increase defense spending at the end of 2022. However, there has been no declaration of increasing defense spending to 3% of GDP by 2030, a goal that has been discussed for several years. The UK has also failed to implement the legal changes necessary to increase its ability to repel a potential adversary (Lewicki B., 2023).

In many European countries, politicians are slowly moving away from the concept of a “peaceful society”, embracing the concept of a “prepared society”. This is evidenced by the actions taken in individual countries to increase the combat capabilities of their societies. A good example is Croatia, where compulsory military service was reinstated on January 1, 2025, to last two months. The Ministry of Defense estimates that approximately 4,500 people will be subject to service in the first year. Croatia did not abolish military service, but froze it in 2008. Legislation and practice already exist to support the smooth introduction of compulsory military service, which will only require adaptation to new requirements and circumstances (Michałowski I., 2024).

A review of the situation in selected European countries provides an insight into how individual countries have recently regulated the issue of universal military service in Europe (W których państwach, 2022). The primary criterion for selecting the examples below was primarily the proximity of the country concerned to Russia as a potential aggressor. In light of this possibility:

– in Poland, universal compulsory military service was suspended in 2009; since then, there has been no or minimal training of reserves. In Finland, every man aged 18-60 must perform military service, lasting from 165 to 347 days; women can volunteer.

– in Estonia, military service is compulsory for men aged 18-27 and lasts from 8 to 11 months.

– in Lithuania, compulsory military service was reintroduced in 2015; men aged 18-23 must serve for 9 months.

– in Norway, compulsory military service has been in force for both men and women since 2016 and lasts from 12 to 19 months (W których państwach, 2022).

However, it's not only countries bordering Russia that have mandatory military service. In Greece, for example, compulsory military service applies to men aged 19-45, lasting 9 months in the Army and 12 months in the Navy and Air Force. In Austria, men serve 6 months of compulsory military service. An alternative is civilian service, which lasts 9 months. In Switzerland, compulsory military service applies to men from the age of 18, lasting 18 to 21 weeks, and reserve service until the age of 30. In Turkey, men must complete compulsory military service, which lasts 6 months. In Sweden, compulsory military service / was suspended in 2010. However, after seven years, it was reinstated at 12 months, applying to both men and women (Höppner S., 2024).

In Europe, there is also a group of countries located at a certain (theoretically safer) distance from Russia that have suspended or abolished compulsory military service. These include Germany, which suspended compulsory military service in 2011 (though discussions are ongoing there regarding its possible reinstatement), and France, where compulsory military service was abolished in 1997, introducing a new type of voluntary civic service instead. In Italy, compulsory military service was abolished in 2005, and in Spain in 2001 (Höppner S., 2024).

Compulsory military service is therefore regulated differently in different countries, often depending on the security threats and military traditions of those countries. In several European countries, including Germany, France, and Poland, discussions are emerging regarding the possible reinstatement of compulsory military service in response to geopolitical threats and the need to strengthen defense.

Actions taken in Poland and the level of preparedness of Polish society in the event of an armed conflict – survey research. Is Polish society prepared for a potential armed conflict? To answer these questions, and in particular the question regarding the state of Polish society's preparedness for a potential armed conflict, surveys were conducted. These surveys were used to formulate responses to questions regarding public attitudes toward the reinstatement of universal conscription, universal access to weapons, and military training for youth.

For over four years, the war beyond Poland's eastern border has necessitated a reassessment of certain views prevailing in Poland regarding the security of the state and its citizens. Until February 24, 2022, the vast majority of politicians in Poland supported maintaining a permanent, moderately equipped, and relatively well-trained army of 100,000, and the

war in Ukraine allowed for a rapid reassessment of this view. In support of Ukrainian military operations, Poland provided assistance to its eastern neighbor by donating significant amounts of military equipment. This freed up space in Polish warehouses and hangars for the purchase of new weapons for the army. While attempts have been made to purchase new equipment, shipbuilding programs have also been launched, and there are plans to acquire several foreign vessels, the effects of these efforts will only be visible over the next 5-10 years.

At the same time, there has been a shift in the approach to the construction and structure of the Armed Forces. New programs have been launched to encourage young people to join the military. The “Train with the Army” program, the construction of the Territorial Defense Force, changes to military-related laws, the creation of voluntary conscription, and the creation of the so-called active reserve are among the most popular. However, we must ask ourselves – is this all we can and should do to effectively defend our country in the event of a potential conflict? Assuming such a conflict could occur, another question must be asked – are we, as a society, prepared for such an eventuality? Will the young people who will be responsible for defense be up to the challenge without basic military training?

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There is no doubt that the Russia-NATO rivalry undermines the foundations of international security, which in turn impacts the security of states. This is discussed, for example, in the context of possible Russian aggression against the Baltic states. State security significantly impacts local security (of the local community), which undoubtedly impacts its security. In some cases, the survey results yielded rather surprising answers. According to research conducted by SW Research, 41,1% responded affirmatively, 38,3% disagreed, and 20,7% had no opinion on the matter.

Support for the reinstatement of compulsory military service varies by age, education, and gender, with men (45,8%) more likely to support it than women (36,6%).

Among the youngest respondents in the under-24 and 25-34 age groups, it reached 34,5% and 34,9%, respectively, while in the 35-49 and over-50 age groups, it reached 34,9%. 43,2% and 42,9%, respectively. The greatest number of supporters of reinstating the service are among people with basic vocational education, among whom positive responses amount to 56,2%. The greatest skepticism is visible among people with

higher education, where 36% of respondents answered “yes” (Czy Polska powinna, 2026).

An alternative to conscription is the Voluntary Military Service (Dbrowolna Zasadnicza Służba Wojskowa, DZSW), which was introduced under the Homeland Defense Act as an option for adult Polish citizens with no criminal record and who are physically and mentally fit for service and have never previously served in the military. The process consists of two stages: a 27-day basic training course, during which volunteers learn the basics of drill, weapon handling, tactics, and first aid, culminating in the military oath, and an 11-month specialized training course, combined with performing duties in a specific position within a military unit, for which the DZSW soldier receives remuneration. After completing training, they can join the reserves or apply for professional service. Interest in this form of service is very high – according to the Ministry of National Defense, a limit of 40,200 places within the DZSW is planned for 2026.

Meanwhile, for those wishing to combine civilian life with military service, the Territorial Defense Forces and the Active Reserve have been established. The AR is a new form of service performed quarterly for at least two days off work and a single 14-day training at least every three years. AR soldiers are assigned mobilization assignments and remain on standby, and after three years of service, they can apply for conscription into the professional army. During a conference on February 9, 2026, held at the headquarters of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, Deputy Prime Minister Kosiniak-Kamysz, Deputy Minister of National Defense Cezary Tomczyk, Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army General Wiesław Kukuła, and Commander of the Cyberspace Defense Forces General Karol Molenda presented details of the new defense concept. The main goal is to reach a strength of 500,000 soldiers, of which 300,000 will be operational troops and Territorial Defense Forces (TDF), and the remaining 200,000 will be various types of reserves.

Poland is also introducing universal training for civilians in the form of the “W Gotowości” program. This initiative is aimed at all adult citizens, regardless of previous military experience. The training includes modules such as safety in crisis situations, first aid and basic rescue skills, survival and terrain knowledge, and cybersecurity. The pilot edition of this program has already generated enormous interest, attracting over 16,000 people, including a large number of women and seniors. The government plans to

train approximately 40,000 Poles in this way in 2026 (Miedziński P., 2026). This is still a relatively small number, but it bodes well for the start.

In the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the results of public opinion polls regarding access to firearms are also interesting – 47,6% of Poles believe that the current regulations regarding access to firearms are sufficient, according to an IBRiS survey conducted in October 2025 for the Polish Press Agency. 26,8% of Poles supported the liberalization of these regulations. percent of respondents, while 17,8 percent would like them to be made more stringent, while 7,7 percent of respondents have no clear opinion on this matter.

The majority of respondents stated that regulations that would promote access to firearms should not be implemented in Poland. A key factor here is the lack of a tradition of firearm ownership in Poland, as well as a lack of awareness among citizens that firearm ownership is not reprehensible. Furthermore, a significant portion of citizens fear widespread access to firearms due to potential criminal incidents involving their use. There is also no discussion in Poland about the need to implement the right to possess firearms during peacetime. Poles, like most Europeans, do not have the right to universal firearm ownership. However, there are countries such as the Czech Republic, the USA, and Switzerland where access to firearms is more widespread (Spór o dostęp, 2025).

The survey results regarding the introduction of shooting clubs in schools in Poland are in opposition to the presented position on universal access to firearms, with 70,2% of respondents in favor of such a solution, and increasing the number of hours of defense education, supported by 77,5% of respondents. This demonstrates the significant need to ensure the safety of young people. The Ministry of National Defense has responded to these needs by announcing another call for proposals for the “Shooting Range in the County” competition. Local government units can apply for funding. There is no clear evidence to support the claim that an increased number of legally possessed firearms leads to an increase in firearm-related crimes.

Local government units can apply for funding. The maximum funding is PLN 8 million. The amount of funding depends, among other things, on the chosen shooting range variant. For the construction of a basic shooting range, funding is up to PLN 3 million. For an expanded two-axis shooting range (200 m and 100 m), the maximum funding level is PLN 8 million. Regardless of the variant chosen, the applicant must guarantee at least a

20% down payment. According to the terms of the competition, the local government unit that receives a targeted grant to finance the project is obligated to provide free access to the constructed shooting range for the Polish Armed Forces for up to 40 hours per month, to non-governmental organizations conducting activities related to national defense for up to 20 hours per month, and to students of schools conducting educational activities related to national defense for up to 20 hours per month (Strzelnica w powiecie).

Another issue examined was the need to subject young people to military training. It's important to remember that in defense education, in the 8th grade of primary school and in secondary schools, this subject is taught for one hour per week. This is clearly insufficient (Staśkiewicz U., 2020). A novelty, and indeed a very good solution, is the introduction of mandatory first aid classes for primary school students, effective September 1, 2024. These classes are intended to increase students' awareness and skills in lifesaving.

The results of the responses to the question: "Should 16-year-olds have the opportunity to attend a free 2-3-week military camp?" are particularly surprising. Over 85% of respondents (85,2%) supported this idea. It's worth asking whether this result was a consequence of the camp's "free" nature or its specific nature. However, as the last few questions indicate, respondents generally support better preparation of children and young people for the challenges and hardships of a potential armed conflict. Parents want their children to be able to cope with such an extremely difficult situation and recognize that the current level of preparation for young people is insufficient.

Preparing shelters and safe hiding places for civilians. Perhaps the worst situation is the preparation of shelters and other safe hiding places for civilians in the event of aerial bombardment, missiles, or massive drone attacks.

Meanwhile, no new shelters have been built in Poland since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, as regulations do not allow it. The Polish state has done almost nothing in this regard, and most local governments are in the process of inventorying their existing resources. The current situation in this regard:

– Only 4% of Poles have access to a place of shelter in the event of an emergency, and at least since 2010, no new shelters have been built in Poland.

– Local governments face a lack of clear regulations and funding, which prevents the construction of new shelters; most work is limited to inventorying existing hiding places.

– Despite legislative changes and a Supreme Audit Office (NIK) audit, the situation remains dire, and any real improvement in residents' safety has been postponed.

When Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, Poles began to wonder where they could hide if Russian fighter jets appeared in the air. The state of knowledge was abysmal, as they had lived without wartime nightmares until then. Initially, a guide was published on how to behave in the event of war (Bądz Gotowy, 2022). It should also be noted that three years earlier, during the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war, such preparations had been undertaken within the state and local governments (Dynak R., 2019; Kuliczkowski M., 2020; Kuliczkowski M., Sawicki L., 2020). After the launch of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, various guides were also published for the public, informing them on how to behave in the event of war, what to secure for themselves and their families, and how to protect themselves from the effects of air, missile, and drone attacks. The publishing activities were supported by, among others, the Ministry of National Defense (Rutkowski M., 2024; Poradnik bezpieczeństwa, s.38, 2025).

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Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Supreme Audit Office decided to audit local governments responsible for providing shelters for citizens. In a report by the State Fire Service, published in March 2024, its authors stated, among other things, that only 4% of Poland's population could count on a place in a shelter or hiding place. At that time, the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) audited 32 municipalities, and in six of them there was no shelter at all for citizens (Zapewnienie obywatelom, 2024).

The Supreme Audit Office (NIK) audit, covering the years 2020-2023, concluded on September 29, 2023. It revealed that most local governments were in the process of assessing their ability to protect residents, as in Suwałki, for example, where the local development plan specified, among other things: protective spaces in basic resistance hiding places should be located in public-purpose buildings for the number of people that results from the design assumptions for a given building or complex of buildings; the construction of newly constructed underground garages and other rooms located on the lowest floors of public buildings and multi-family housing should ensure, if necessary, their use as basic resistance hiding

places after being adapted for the number of people that results from the design assumptions for the building or complex of buildings; and the construction of temporary or permanent air-raid shelters in areas free from development (Zapewnienie obywatelom, 2024, s. 39).

This situation exists in almost all local governments, although changes are visible in some, such as in Dęblin, where a Supreme Audit Office (NIK) report showed that there is not a single place to hide, yet in 2024, the city will have 8,628 emergency shelter spaces. This is preliminary, although data also came from Kołobrzeg, which indicates progress there. The protective structures can accommodate 698 people (compared to 210 two years ago), and the city also has 116,677 emergency shelter spaces, whereas two years ago, no such places were reported (Zapewnienie obywatelom, 2024, s. 44-45).

As can be seen, since the NIK report, the state has been unable not only to build shelters but also to prepare regulations and organize financing for civil protection investments. Instead, citizens have been provided with the *schrony.pl* app, even though there are still no shelters. Moreover, those that exist are most often in a deplorable condition - as shown by preliminary inspections carried out by firefighters and local government officials.

A sad observation also emerged from the response of Deputy Minister of Interior and Administration Wiesław Leśniakiewicz to an interpellation from MPs Jarosław Sachajka and Marek Jakubiak, who asked about the state of civil defense in the event of a threat. Their interpellation is very detailed and extensive, asking, among other things, how many new shelters have been built in Poland, either on the government's initiative or under its supervision, since 2010. Deputy Minister Leśniakiewicz's response of July 13, 2025, is revealing: "Due to the lack of generally applicable legal provisions regarding technical requirements for protective structures, no new protective structures have been built since 2010 [...] It should be noted that the possibility of constructing new protective structures (shelters and shelters) will arise upon the entry into force of the regulation of the Minister of Interior and Administration on the technical conditions for protective structures and the technical conditions for their use and location. Work is currently underway on the draft of the aforementioned implementing act" (Przybylski M., 2024).

Since then, the situation has become more complicated, as in September 2025, Russian drones entered Polish airspace, and citizens once again began asking: where are these shelters? After the Russian drone

attack, civil protection authorities ordered nearly 4,000 inspections of existing facilities. The State Fire Service (PSP) found that over a thousand structures could serve a protective function. The Ministry of Interior and Administration announced that the State Fire Service and district building inspectorates were inspecting the buildings. Collective protection facilities can be divided into emergency shelters and protective structures, which are further divided into shelters and hiding places. Due to the potential threat of war, Poland intends to establish a network of shelters, allocating PLN 5 mld for this purpose.

74 — The audit findings indicated that the situation in this regard had not changed, but local governments cited problems related to legal provisions that were lacking both under the United Right government and under the coalition formed around the Civic Platform. Jacek Cieřlik, Head of the Crisis Management, Civil Protection, and Defense Affairs Department in Olkusz, stated that after the Homeland Defense Act came into force in 2022, its provisions omitted civil defense. Therefore, in June 2022, following a change in the organizational regulations of the Olkusz City and Commune Office, all matters related to civil protection and the Mayor's role as head of the commune's civil defense were removed from the scope of the Crisis Management, Civil Protection, and Defense Affairs Department (Zapewnienie obywatelom, 2024). Local governments also noted that the implementation of protective structures is a lengthy, often multi-year process, requiring appropriate financial resources, sources of financing, and precise legal frameworks.

On January 1, 2025, the Civil Defense Act entered into force, allowing for the classification of structures as shelters or protective structures, buildings or parts thereof of closed and airtight construction, equipped with filtering and ventilation devices or regenerative absorbers. Concealment refers to structures or parts of structures of non-airtight construction, and so-called temporary shelters, i.e., collective protection facilities adapted to temporarily shelter people (Ustawa z dnia 5 grudnia 2024; Adamczewska M., 2025).

The entry into force of the Act is a significant step towards streamlining the "civilian dimension of security" – an area that has often been neglected, but which becomes crucial in crisis situations, because the Act:

– defines the tasks of civil protection and civil defense – what should be done to protect people, property, infrastructure, culture, and the environment in emergency situations;

- designates the authorities and entities that will carry out these tasks – at the central, provincial, district, and local levels;
- introduces principles for planning, detecting threats, notifying, warning, and alerting the public;
- defines standards for the use, recording, and technical requirements of collective protection facilities (e.g., shelters, hiding places);
- regulates the organization of civil defense, including the appointment of civil service personnel (individuals who, if necessary, will support protective measures);
- establishes mechanisms for financing civil protection and civil defense activities (Ustawa z dnia 5 grudnia 2024).

Furthermore, the Act contains transitional and adjustment provisions, such as the deadlines for developing programs and establishing new structures. What are the changes and their practical implications? For scouts, hikers, and local communities, the Act carries a number of implications, including:

- Improved warning and communication in emergency situations – thanks to regulations regarding detection and notification systems, citizens will be better informed about threats – this will be particularly useful during camping, hiking, or longer expeditions.

- Protective facilities: shelters and hiding places – The Act formally defines what constitutes a shelter and a hiding place, and what requirements these protective structures must meet. This is important because, in the field, forest shelters and bunkers can be informally used or adapted by local communities. The new regulations indicate which structures can be approved as “collective protection facilities.”

- Involvement of local governments and communities – The Act imposes responsibilities on commune heads, mayors, and district heads related to population protection and civil defense, meaning that protection planning becomes a local matter, not just a “central” one. This also provides communities with an opportunity to have a greater say in how local warning systems are built and what protective facilities are constructed.

- The role of volunteers and community organizations – Scout organizations are a natural partner in educational, training, and exercises related to civil protection. The Act provides for training and exercises specifically for those who may be involved in protection activities. It is worth considering now how Scout troops can engage in local plans, exercises, and civic education.

– Responsibility for protected facilities: owners, users, and managers of collective protection facilities will be responsible for maintaining them, making them available for use, meeting technical requirements, and responding to modernization orders (Ustawa z dnia 5 grudnia 2024).

Following the adoption of the act and its signing by the president, the authorities issued several implementing regulations. On February 21, the Minister of Interior and Administration issued a regulation on the criteria for recognizing buildings or parts thereof as protective structures, and on February 23, a regulation of the Council of Ministers on the detailed content of the Population Protection and Civil Defense Program (Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw, 21 lutego 2025; Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów, 23 lutego 2025).

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The Population Protection and Civil Defense Program (OLiOC) for 2025-2026 allocates nearly PLN 5 billion to local governments for tasks related to population protection and civil defense. The preparation of collective protection facilities, improved alarm and communication systems, and the development of civil defense are the main areas of activity within the OLiOC Program. The provisions of the Act on Population Protection and Civil Defense assume the inspection of facilities that could potentially serve as collective protection facilities. The opinions and technical documentation from the inspection of such facilities will be one of the criteria for financial support granted, among other things, for the renovation and modernization of protective structures. An important element of the whole is also the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 30 May 2025 on the evacuation of people and securing property, which defines both its principles and the responsibility of local government authorities for its efficient implementation (Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów, 30 maja 2025).

The goal set out in the regulations is to ensure that all collective protection facilities accommodate at least half (including 25% in protective structures) of the projected population expected to be present in an emergency within cities and 25% outside their borders (including 15% in protective structures). The Act on Civil Protection and Civil Defense specifies that the authorities responsible for providing emergency shelter are: the mayor, the district head, the voivode, the voivodship marshal, and the minister responsible for internal affairs. Pursuant to the Act, at the request of the owner or manager of a building, civil protection authorities provide them with targeted subsidies for organizing emergency

shelters. They may also provide funds in the form of targeted subsidies to adapt facilities to the requirements specified for underground floors. The subsidy can reach up to 100% of the investment cost (Budowa i remonty schronów, 2025).

The Population Protection and Civil Defense Program (OLiOC) for 2025-2026 allocates nearly PLN 5 billion to local governments for tasks related to population protection and civil defense (Uchwała Rady Ministrów, 2025). The provisions of the Act on Population Protection and Civil Defense require the inspection of facilities that can serve as collective protection facilities. Technical opinions and documentation from the inspection of such facilities will be one of the criteria for financial support granted, including for the renovation and modernization of protective structures (Uchwała Rady Ministrów, 2025).

According to the decision of the Minister of Interior and Administration, renovations and investments will be prioritized in areas covered by the National Deterrence and Defense Program «East Shield,» as well as in cities and particularly vulnerable locations designated by voivodes. The necessary legal acts for designating collective protection facilities have already been issued. Among other areas, shelters and hiding places under schools, known as «thousand-year-olds,» will be renovated. At the same time, the provisions of the Act on Population Protection and Civil Defense and the Regulations of the Minister of Interior and Administration of July 1 and 9, 2025, oblige local governments to designate facilities where protective structures or emergency shelters can be established. According to the Act, at the request of the owner or manager of a building, civil protection authorities provide them with targeted subsidies for the organization of emergency shelters. They may also provide funds in the form of targeted subsidies for adapting facilities to the requirements specified for underground floors, with the subsidy potentially reaching up to 100% of the investment cost (Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z 1 lipca 2025; Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z 9 lipca 2025).

Protective measures encompass, among others, education and higher education institutions, where they are implemented based on existing legal provisions. Ministerial regulations concerning higher education include the Act of July 20, 2018 – the Law on Higher Education and Science, and the earlier Order of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of August 18, 2011, regarding the principles of planning, organizing, and performing tasks within the framework of the universal defense

obligation. While the provisions of the Act do not directly address defense issues, they are important because they define the general organizational framework, establish competencies, and regulate organizational matters of universities, particularly Articles 13, 33, 40, 66, 227, and 229. The most important regulation, however, is the autonomy of universities, established in Article 70 of the Constitution and further specified in Articles 3-5 of the Law on Higher Education and Science (Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018; Zarządzenie, 2011).

Conclusions.

1. Despite the enormous resources allocated to defense, society as a whole is not prepared for war and existential threats. However, military training and preparing young people for greater resourcefulness in the event of armed conflict are not excluded, rather than creating a concept of total defense, in which every citizen would possess a weapon they could use if necessary. Therefore, we should ask whether we, as a society, should not initiate a nationwide discussion on which direction we are heading?

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2. While research findings indicate that there is support among respondents for the reinstatement of universal military service and a clear agreement to change the youth training system, the topic of universal access to firearms remains taboo, and it would be worthwhile to engage in a public debate on this matter. There are more opponents of universal access to firearms in Poland, and it should be assumed that their number is unlikely to increase in the next 5-10 years. Therefore, shouldn't we offer them a more acceptable concept: universal yet limited access to firearms? This could involve a citizen trained in the use of firearms being assigned a firearm of their own, purchased by the state. However, these firearms would be under state supervision and always ready for use. Stored in appropriate warehouses within nearby military units or police stations, they could be made available as needed through so-called mobile weapons delivery points. The considerable fragmentation of such points would also make it difficult for the enemy to locate and eliminate them. There is no doubt that an armed population is more difficult to defeat than an unarmed one.

3. Regarding civil protection facilities, including protective structures (shelters) and temporary shelters, the situation is downright dire, as audits by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) and the State Fire Service (PSP) have shown. This situation stemmed from both the negligence of previous governments in this regard and the lack of regulations enabling government administration and local governments to begin revitalizing

existing facilities and constructing new ones. This situation existed at least until the adoption by the Sejm of the Polish Parliament of the Act on Civil Protection and Civil Defense. The implementation of these tasks is the responsibility of local government and local government administrations, which can obtain special financial loans for their implementation.

What actions can be recommended for the implementation of these tasks in the so-called “field”?

1. The activities of local civil liability organizations (OC) and their cooperation with local administration – both central and local – should be «reactivated.»

2. Local heads of civil liability organizations should cooperate closely with local military units (garrison, Territorial Defence Force (WOT) unit), services (Police, Municipal/City Guards, State Fire Service), or, for example, by organizing training and situational games that simulate real threats, such as missile or drone attacks. This also involves the use of trained members of NGOs, such as the Riflemen’s Association, or scouting organizations (ZHP, ZHR, SHK Zawisza, and others).

3. It is necessary to organize accelerated first aid courses in primary and secondary schools, universities, and other settings, such as professional work environments (administrative offices, workplaces), as well as logistics courses, for example, in the field of evacuation operations in hospitals, schools, offices, religious buildings (churches, monasteries), and cultural institutions (libraries, museums, theaters, cinemas, historical monuments).

4. Organize professionally trained personnel in protective structures and emergency shelters, for example, from among Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and shooting organizations.

5. If possible, individuals skilled in the use of weapons and explosives (grenades) should be trained to combat sabotage and diversionary groups operating on behalf of the aggressor’s forces, similar to what was done in Poland in 1938-1939, particularly within the Police, special services (instruction), the State Fire Service, riflemen, and scout organizations (here: one could consider establishing, for example, a Scout Information Service, as a civilian component of intelligence and counterintelligence within the security community). A short course in the art of clandestine operations also seems necessary, especially under conditions of temporary occupation of a given area by the forces of the aggressor state.

Administrative authorities, all services, NGOs, school and student communities, and as many civilians as possible from the broadly defined

civilian population should actively participate in these preparatory activities, so as not to be “surprised” by the enemy.

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