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## The crisis and the crisis situation – relations

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## **THE CRISIS AND THE CRISIS SITUATION – RELATIONS**

### **Abstract:**

*In order to discuss the relationship between crisis and crisis situation, we should first define the two concepts and analyze them.*

*The term “crisis” is an ambiguous notion used in many areas, such as: political science, military science, organization and management science, economics or medical science. This term derives from the ancient Greek word “krisis” and indicates a turning point, a decisive moment, a qualitative change of the system or within the system. In colloquial speech, the term “crisis” is used in situations that are associated with threat. The term is used to speak of the political, economic, energy, social, natural environment crisis, or of the crisis of values. In the field of security a “crisis” is variously defined in connection with this field, scientific approach and practical activity.*

**Keywords:** *Crisis, environment, politics, economy, energy.*

In the field of a broadly understood security very often the concept of **crisis and crisis situation** is used. The phenomenon of crisis and crisis situation is perceived in the political relations in the international arena, but also by the public in a given country. Thus, defining crises situations and their apogee in the form of a crisis, we refer to any situations threatening the so far perceived stabilization in a given environment. The term crisis is recognized as all the circumstances that lead the operation entity to the necessity of taking decisions as to the situation emerged. However, the crisis constitutes the apogee of unresolved crisis situation. To solve it, one should apply measures and procedures of a specific action<sup>1</sup>. Popularly and sometimes even in the

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<sup>1</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, *Czynniki zjawiska kryzysowego na obszarze kraju*, „Problemy Ochrony Granic”, Biuletyn CSSG no. 31, Kętrzyn 2005, p. 124.

literature on the problem, a crisis is associated with the crisis situation which is obviously incorrect.

Therefore, what dependencies and relations function between these phenomena? In order to discuss the relationship between crisis and crisis situation, we should first define the two concepts and analyze them.

The term “crisis” is an ambiguous notion used in many areas, such as: political science, military science, organization and management science, economics or medical science. This term derives from the ancient Greek word “krisis” and indicates a turning point, a decisive moment, a qualitative change of the system or within the system. In colloquial speech, the term “crisis” is used in situations that are associated with threat. The term is used to speak of the political, economic, energy, social, natural environment crisis, or of the crisis of values. In the field of security a “crisis” is variously defined in connection with this field, scientific approach and practical activity.

*The dictionary of basic terms relating to national security* defines crisis as a form (a phase) of “the conflict as a result of which there comes to a sudden rise of tension between the parties as a result of what an armed conflict may take place”<sup>2</sup>.

However, in the *Dictionary of the Polish language* we will find the following definition: “a situation unfavorable to someone or something, a more serious breakdown of the economic growth process, which is caused by the contradictions inherent in the relations of production, a sudden rapid turning point of the disease with a rapid receding of a fever or other symptoms, crisis”<sup>3</sup>.

W. Kopaliński defines “crisis” as a “moment, a breakthrough, crisis, the decisive turning point, a period of economic collapse”<sup>4</sup>.

In turn, in the *Dictionary of national security terms* “crisis” is defined as

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<sup>2</sup> *Słownik podstawowych terminów dotyczących bezpieczeństwa państwa*, Warszawa 1994, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, PWN, Warszawa 1982, p.1006.

<sup>4</sup> W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, PW Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1990, p. 285.

a situation which is “the result of threat, that leads in consequence to the breaking off or significant weakening of social ties, during the serious disruption of functioning of public institutions, but to such a degree that the used measures necessary to assure or restore the security do not justify the introduction of any of the states of emergency provided in the Constitution of RP”<sup>5</sup>.

In the same dictionary we find that “crisis” is a situation arising in the “course of conducting combat operations, threatening with the loss of initiative and the possibility of losing the campaign, battle or operation, requiring to undertake decisive, versatile preventive steps”<sup>6</sup>.

Another definition describes the term “crisis” as the situation emerging as a result of the “collapse of the so far stable process of development, threatening with the loss of initiative and the necessity to accept unfavorable terms, requiring to undertake decisive, versatile preventive steps”<sup>7</sup>.

An extremely broad and general approach to the notion “crisis” formulates Z. Andrzejczak, who the concept of the term understands as the situation of “non-military or political-military nature, the consequences of which threaten the life or health of large number of people, property in large sizes, the environment in large areas, safety of citizens and the public order as well as security, and the state’s constitutional structure, and the prevention and liquidation of their effects is undertaken using common or emergency measures, in cooperation of various public administration authorities and institutions as well as specialized services and formations, including the armed forces operating under a uniform leadership.”<sup>8</sup>

Considering the above definitions results in the opinion that a crisis: is a particular state or process, always represents a breakthrough between the two phases of a given process, may be more or less intense, may have a different scope, duration, but it always ends the current state of affairs, it is a viola-

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<sup>5</sup> *Słownik terminów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa narodowego*, AON, Warszawa 2002, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> *Słownik terminów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Andrzejczak, *Koncepcja doskonalenia Krajowego Systemu Zarządzania Kryzysowego w aspekcie ustaw o stanach nadzwyczajnych*, „Myśl Wojskowa” no. 1, 2005, p. 43.

tion of a state of equilibrium, not completed in time causes the interruption of the development cycle.”<sup>9</sup> In the objective definitions, there are contained features which are attributed to the concept of “crisis” and to which we include:

- a turning point of a change for better or worse;
- an emotional momentary event or a radical change in the life of a man;
- a need to act under the pressure of time, the flow of which causes the escalation of phenomenon and requires new decisions, relevant to the development of situation;
- state of suffering connected with the feeling of threat and fear<sup>10</sup>.

Analyzing the presented definitions, a statement is arising that all of them characterize the actual or perceptible state of loss of control over the ongoing processes or functioning of organization at the simultaneous unpredictability of the situation development and the lack of concept of bringing it under control. The crisis is always a peculiar challenge to take preventive steps in the situation, which is a violation of basic, commonly accepted as worthy of protection and defense of values and interests of the entity. For measuring the scale of crisis, a scale of measures for its control are used, as it may appear that the applied measures do not always have to be directly proportionate to the danger of a given situation. From a different angle, the level of disorganization of social, economic or political processes (relations) in a given organization is considered as the indicator of rank (scale) of crisis. The crisis may therefore have a subjective meaning, expressing the assessment of a given phenomenon made by a specified abstractive entity. It has also an objective character, because regardless of its subjective assessments it exists and affects a given organization. Finally, the crisis is processual in nature, it develops, and has a unique and increasingly complex form<sup>11</sup>.

During the crisis time plays a dominant role. The variable of time usu-

<sup>9</sup> Comp. W. Kitler, *Wybrane aspekty kierowania państwem w sytuacjach kryzysowych w obronie narodowej RP wobec wyzwań i zagrożeń współczesności*, Warszawa 1999, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, *Czynniki zjawiska kryzysogenego*, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> E. Nowak, *Zarządzanie kryzysowe w sytuacjach zagrożeń niemilitarnych*, AON, Warszawa 2007, p. 34.

ally results in an extreme situation development. In some cases, time is a factor that reduces the scale of threat after its climax. What results from it is that the time may positively and negatively affect the phenomenon of crisis. A characteristic feature of crisis is a state of surprise, resulting from the delayed identification of the situation. However, if the crisis symptoms are recognized early enough, then the status of surprises loses its importance. Yet, in case of identifying the situation in the state of crisis, we may say that the state of surprise lasts as long as there is no reasonable preventive action taken. The state of surprise intensifies in situations of threats' development after the escalation of the phenomenon, in case of incorrect interference or its lack on the part of humans or forces of nature. The crisis does not appear suddenly, and even though it may be violent, it also develops from the bud to the full form. Thus, in the crisis situations we can speak of a certain evolution of the causes into the crisis. If we can define the cause, then a plan to prevent the escalation of events in the crisis should be developed. In the evolution of causes into crisis we distinguish a phase of a smooth development of the crisis situation into a violent one. The development of a crisis situation results from its nature and preventive action taken. The crisis, through the preventive actions, always imposes the need for further changes<sup>12</sup>.

It should be emphasized, that the assessment of the crisis largely depends on the viewpoint. Each event is different when we look at it from the perspective of time, differently – when we observe it from the outside during its ongoing process, and yet in another way, when we are its participants and actors<sup>13</sup>. Crisis, as a specific process or state, having its sources and causes, can be predicted, recognized, identified, analyzed and assessed, and therefore (on the basis of the assessments and forecasts obtained) certain preventive steps (activities) may be undertaken. In that case, the crisis, although in a limited scope, is a controllable phenomenon<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, *Czynniki zjawiska kryzysowego*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, B. Wiśniewski, J. Prońko, *Uwarunkowania kryzysów polityczno-militarnych*, *Biuletyn SG*, no. 33, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> See also, A. Bujak, *Zarys teorii kryzysu i reagowania kryzysowego*, *Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL* no. 3 (133) 2004, p. 7.

The concept of a **crisis situation** found in scientific papers, publications, and legal documents is like the notion of a crisis, defined differently by researchers and experts, and includes both many common as well as different contents.

Thus, J. Gołębiwski defines a crisis as *a tangle of violent events, causing the growing influence of destabilizing forces in society, destabilizing the balance, causing shortages in supply and difficulties in normal functioning of the population, causing tension, uncertainty and leading to an uncontrolled development of events including the use of violence*<sup>15</sup>. However, a crisis situation understood in this way corresponds only to the situation brought about by social problems. Yet, it omits the situations caused by terrorist threats, natural disasters, threats caused by criminal activities and those related with the political and military threats.

Whereas, R. Wróblewski defines crisis as “a set of internal and external circumstances affecting the system in such a way that it starts within it and the variable process is continued, as a result of what there comes to imbalance, and then its redress, thanks to regulation measures undertaken (emergency actions).”<sup>16</sup> It should be emphasized, that this definition includes a wide spectrum of circumstances causing a crisis, includes all types of threats starting from both internal and external through natural and technological to a war threat.

A universal definition of crisis situation suggest W. Kitler and J. Gryz, which follows as: *the crisis situation – is a set of internal and external circumstances in which a given entity is found (arrangement, organization, system), affecting its functioning in such a way that it starts within it and the variable process is continued, as a result of what imbalance comes, and then its redress, thanks to undertaken regulation measures, if such are applied*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> J. Gołębiwski, *Zarządzanie kryzysowe metodą rozwiązywania problemów bezpieczeństwa*, II Konferencja Naukowa „Zarządzania Kryzysowego”, Szczecin 2003, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wróblewski, *Zarys teorii kryzysu, zagadnienia prewencji i zarządzania kryzysami*, AON, Warszawa 1996, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> *System reagowania kryzysowego*, (ed.) J. Gryz, W. Kitler, Wyd. A. Marszałek, Toruń 2007, p. 22.

P. Sienkiewicz emphasizes, that a crisis situation occurs when *there appear such threats (internal or external), which may cause interference of the basic features of a given organization, reducing its operating conditions, and thus conducting the loss of development ability, and even the survival of a given organization*<sup>18</sup>. In this sense, each crisis situation is a consequence of existing and emerging threats. But as long as the level of those threats does not cause disruption of normal functioning (does not cause limitations) of a given entity, no one can speak of a crisis situation. What results from it is that the crisis situations are subjective in nature, dependent on the level of threat accepted by a given entity.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of NATO, there are definitions accepted, which connect a crisis situation with the conflictogenic state of social, economic or political relations. According to NATO, a crisis situation is:

- *a set of suddenly occurring events that causes influence of destabilizing forces on the overall international state or on any of its subsystems generally above normal (average) level and results in the increased probability of accumulation of negative phenomena already existing in the system*<sup>20</sup>;
- *a sequence of mutual interactions between the governments of two or more sovereign states, involved in a serious conflict, right on the border of war outbreak, which are aware of danger*<sup>21</sup>;  
*a change of situation between two or more opposing parties, characterized by the increase in the intensity of the negative impacts with a high probability of armed conflicts*<sup>22</sup>.

In the Polish legislation, the notion “crisis situation” awaited its interpretation, and in the amended *Act on crisis management*, based on the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal, the term crisis situation is read as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> P. Sienkiewicz, *Analiza systemowa sytuacji kryzysowych*, „Zeszyty Naukowe AON” 2001, no 4, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> G. Sobolewski, *Zagrożenia kryzysowe*, AON, Warszawa 2011, p.15.

<sup>20</sup> E. Jendraszczyk, W. Kozłowski, *Zarządzanie w sytuacjach kryzysowych*, basing on „*Generic Crisis Management Handbook (GCMH)*”, Rada ds. Operacji i Komitet ds. ćwiczeń NATO (17.05.1997), MON-DSO, Warszawa 1997, p. 7, after: J. Gryz, W. Kitler, *System reagowania kryzysowego*, Toruń 2007, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

“a situation negatively affecting the level of people’s safety, of property on a significant scale or the environment, causing considerable restrictions on the operation of the competent authorities of public administration due to the inadequacy of the owned powers and means”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the remaining in force in the Polish legislature definition conditions the arise of a crisis situation only on the threat emergence, which negatively affects the level of people’s safety, property or the environment, while causing significant restrictions on the operation of the competent authorities of public administration due to the inadequacy of the owned powers and means.

From the analysis of various types of definitions presented above, follows the conclusion that a crisis situation may be triggered by natural disasters, terrorist attacks or the adverse social phenomena and criminal activities. It is also worth emphasizing that a crisis situation can also be caused by political and military reasons (may have not only the non-military character, but also political and military). The crises situations of a political-military and social character result from the man’s aspirations, as the perpetrator of these events, to achieve goals inconsistent with the expectations of other people. The perpetrator of their formation and elimination of their causes and effects is a man as a subject and object of operations. However, the crisis situations, of which in many cases the nature is the perpetrator, result from the morphological objectivity of the universe. Nowadays, in many cases, a man is also the perpetrator of crisis situations due to natural forces. In principle, a crisis situation develops gradually, and there are many causes of its development. The lack of response to the threat in an appropriate time causes that they assume a decisive character and their escalation follows in the specific form.<sup>24</sup>

Each crisis situation is different, however, they have common features, which include: surprise and time pressure, insufficient amount and uncertainty of information, loss of control over the situation, the emergence of panic, the system cannot manage to respond to real or tangible events that become

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<sup>23</sup> Ustawa z dnia 17 lipca 2009 r. o zmianie ustawy o zarządzaniu kryzysowym (Dz. U. Nr 131/2009, poz. 1076), art. 1 sec. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, *Czynniki zjawiska kryzysowego...*, op. cit., p. 135-136.

more and more serious, the decision-makers focus on a short-term planning of action.<sup>25</sup>

The analysis of the defined characteristics of the crisis situations' phenomenon shows that the essence of them is uncertainty as to their development, limited duration, and the collapse of the existing legal, economic, social, military or other order. The crisis situations and the crisis may occur in different forms and can be differently perceived by different legal entities. The same situations for different action entities may have contrary meanings. Some people may define and perceive a given situation as the crisis situations or a crisis, while other entities may perceive the same phenomenon in other categories. Regardless of the perception of a given phenomenon, it seems reasonable to consider it through the prism of **the limited time, nature of threat and surprise**. "The mutual interaction of those three elements – i.e. time, threat and surprise constitutes the essence of the crisis definition." This means that we deal with the crisis in the situations of a sudden threat to the public interest, which emerges in an unplanned way, contrary to our expectations. The crisis is also a disturbance of the current state of stability. Hence, a thesis can be put that **the crisis constitutes the destruction of stability, where after the effects of its influence re-stabilization should take place, qualitatively different, but most of all, it should meet the safety standards**. The crisis constitutes the apogee of any situation where, as a result of its effects, a "breaking" of all the existing legal, organizational, social or other relations take place. What results from it is that the phenomenon of crisis is rather brief and constitutes a certain phase of situations leading to their escalation and ending. Therefore, we can talk about two related concepts connected one with another, namely the crisis situation and crisis. **The crisis situation includes all the events leading to the crisis, its escalation phase and actions aiming at elimination or neutralization of its effects**. The crisis situation involves the causes of the crisis emergence, its apogee in form of a crisis and the situations mitigating the effects of crisis, which lead to stability. If the crisis situation is a long-lasting phenomenon, then the crisis phenomenon included in it is characterized by brevity,

<sup>25</sup> Comp. W. Kitler, *Problemy zarządzania kryzysowego w państwie*, AON, Warszawa 2000, p. 40.

the dynamics of threats in relation to its previous state. The crisis situation in contrast to the crisis is not characterized by brevity. In principle, **a crisis situation develops gradually, and there are many causes of its development.** The lack of response to the threat in an appropriate time causes that they assume a decisive character and their escalation follows in a specific form. Thus, **in the modern world it is important to recognize the symptoms of a crisis and to prevent their escalation in the crisis as early as it is possible. It must be assumed, that the lack of proper prevention of a crisis situation would lead to a crisis.** Certainly, avoiding all crises is impossible, however, there are always possibilities to reduce and minimize their effects. Yet, **any actions undertaken after identifying the crisis are the activities undertaken too late.** The determinant of the crisis situation and the crisis is an acceptable or not acceptable level of threats. There is always a level of certain threats, but it cannot be defined as a permanent state of a crisis situation. Hence, in every sphere it is required to determine the level of threats' acceptance. We will talk about crisis situation, if the level of acceptable threats goes beyond its borders and poses risks not accepted in the international and internal law and in the public awareness of a given situation. The level of acceptable, not acceptable and critical threats is different in different crisis situations. It is not possible to determine one level of threats and their acceptance as well as their critical level, because each time this is due to the nature of threats, their causes and anticipated effects<sup>26</sup>.

According to W. Kitler and J. Gryz, about the nature of crisis and crisis situation the following features prejudice:

- each crisis is a crisis situation;
- the concept of a crisis situation is superior to the concept of crisis;
- the culminating element of a crisis situation, if a failure to remedy its factors occurs in the escalation phase, is a crisis;
- the crisis situation begins with the appearance of its symptoms, which are characterized by the excess of subjectively perceived level of risk, which for a given subject constitutes the boundary of acceptable level of safety;
- the crisis situation includes: pre-crisis phase, crisis and post-crisis phase;

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<sup>26</sup> Comp. A. Czupryński, *Czynniki zjawiska kryzysowego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

- a failure to take appropriate remedial actions may lead, depending on the nature of the situation, to a war, total decline (liquidation) of organization or other (worse or better) state of its functioning, and to another crisis situation;
- crisis situations, in which a given entity is found, possess not only a threat, but can also be an opportunity for their development<sup>27</sup>.

**The analysis of the concept and phenomena of the crisis and crisis situation allows to define dependencies between them.** The crisis situation is a broader phenomenon than the crisis. The crisis situation consists of a number of causes, of which influence on one on another is different. It is difficult to determine which variable decides about the development of situation into a crisis. However, with the moment of identification of the crisis situation and determination of its nature, it is possible to prevent its escalation into a crisis through a proper prevention. With the moment of achieving the apogee of a crisis situation, a legible phenomenon of the crisis of a specified nature and consequences in relation to the status or standard situation can be isolated. What results from it is that the crisis is one of the phases of the crisis situations<sup>28</sup>.

The concept of a crisis situation does not always have to have a pejorative meaning. Crisis situations always emerge when the existing state of affairs is changed, not only in terms of threats, but above all in the sphere of unidentified changes. A crisis situation includes all the events leading up to the crisis, its escalation phase, and actions aiming at elimination or neutralization of its effects. A crisis situation involves the causes of the crisis emergence, its apogee in form of a crisis and the situations mitigating the effects of crisis, which lead to stability. If the crisis situation is a long-lasting phenomenon, then the crisis phenomenon included in it is characterized by brevity, the dynamics of threats in relation to its previous state. The crisis situation in contrast to the crisis is not characterized by brevity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Comp. *System reagowania kryzysowego*, (red.) J. Gryz, W. Kitler, Wyd. A. Marszałek, Toruń 2007, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p 133.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.