

The Territorial Defence Forces in the security policy of the Republic of Poland, with particular emphasis on combating the COVID-19 pandemic in the Greater Poland region (Wielkopolska).

The doctoral dissertation addresses the issue of the security policy of the Republic of Poland in the context of counteracting epidemic threats, with particular emphasis on the role of the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT). The subject of the research is the assessment of the functioning of the state under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the analysis of the potential of WOT as a formation that—thanks to its structure, local embeddedness and unique model of service—can play a significant role in responding to health threats. The dissertation is situated within the discipline of security studies, whose interdisciplinary nature allows the integration of military, social, health-related and administrative perspectives.

The main objective of the dissertation is to develop a concept for counteracting epidemic threats in Poland through the use of the potential of the Territorial Defence Forces. This objective is pursued through three analytical areas: diagnosing the contemporary understanding of security policy and health security, assessing the state's capacity to respond to epidemic threats, and analysing the role and effectiveness of WOT in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research problems focus on seeking answers to how well the state was prepared to counteract the pandemic, what the strengths and weaknesses of the security system were, what actions the Territorial Defence Forces undertook, and how their effectiveness was assessed. The main hypothesis assumes that WOT—due to their organisational structure, flexibility, community embeddedness and experience in crisis response—constitute an effective tool for counteracting epidemic threats, and that their engagement enhances the state's capabilities in this area. The detailed hypotheses concern, among other aspects, the effectiveness of WOT activities in healthcare institutions, their cooperation with public administration, and the social reception of their involvement.

The dissertation conceptualises security policy as a complex system in which health, social and administrative issues are as important as the military component. The COVID-19 pandemic became a test for this system—many institutions functioned correctly, yet numerous deficiencies also emerged, including ambiguous procedures, lack of coordination, frequent changes in regulations and limited resilience of public administration. In this complex landscape, the Territorial Defence Forces played an exceptional role. Empirical

research demonstrates that the formation carried out a wide spectrum of tasks—from supporting healthcare facilities and social welfare homes, through logistical and control activities, to providing emergency assistance and informational support. A unique feature of WOT proved to be its local character—soldiers operating within their own communities were faster, more flexible and more effective in identifying needs and cooperating with local authorities. Survey research confirmed that WOT activities carried out during the operations “Odporna Wiosna” (“Resilient Spring”) and “Trwała Odporność” (“Enduring Resilience”) were positively evaluated by respondents. Decision-makers, scholars and military generals likewise emphasised the legitimacy of including WOT in the crisis-management system, while also noting challenges associated with integrating military structures with civilian institutions.

The author concludes that health security should become an integral part of the state's security policy, and that the experiences of the pandemic require a revision of existing assumptions. The research findings indicate that effective protection against epidemic threats cannot rely solely on civilian structures—it requires cross-sectoral cooperation, flexibility and the ability to act immediately. In the author's assessment, the Territorial Defence Forces possess the necessary attributes to function as a systemic component of epidemic security. The final outcome of the dissertation is a concept for improving Poland's security policy in the area of epidemic threats, based on strengthening interinstitutional coordination, developing civil-military cooperation procedures, building WOT competencies and integrating their potential with the healthcare system and public administration.

Keywords:

Territorial Defence Forces, Resilient Spring, Enduring Resilience, pandemic, COVID-19, security policy, health security, epidemic security