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PRO-DEFENSE ORGANIZATIONS AND SHOOTING ASSOCIATIONS IN SHAPING CITIZENS' DEFENSE AWARENESS

ORGANIZACJE PROOBRONNE ORAZ STOWARZYSZENIA STRZELECKIE W KSZTAŁTOWANIU ŚWIADOMOŚCI OBRONNEJ OBYWATELI

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Abstract

The paper discusses the role of individual arms bearing citizens and pro-defence organizations within Universal Defence System, promoted in Poland in response to rising military risks. The paper analyses current legislation, aligns it with the need to increase Polish Army, as expresses in Homeland Security Act, and provides answers on how to use citizens and pro-defence organizations to achieve the goals outlined in Homeland Defense Act.

Keywords: security, defence, arms, pro-defence organisations, universal defence system, small arms

Streszczenie

W artykule omówiona została rola obywateli posiadających dostęp do broni broń oraz organizacji proobronnych w ramach systemu obrony powszechnej, promowanego w Polsce w odpowiedzi na rosnące zagrożenia militarne. W artykule przeanalizowano obowiązujące przepisy, w kontekście dostosowania ich do potrzeby zwiększenia liczebności polskiej armii, wyrażonej w ustawie o Obronie Ojczyzny oraz udzielono odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób wykorzystać obywateli i organizacje proobronne do osiągnięcia celów nakreślonych w tej ustawie.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo, obrona, broń, organizacje proobronne, system obrony powszechnej, broń strzelecka

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Statement of the problem in general outlook and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks

According to Article 85 of the Polish Constitution, every citizen of the Republic of Poland, irrespective of age, gender or religion, is obliged to actively participate in the defence of the homeland in the form and to the extent that his physical conditions, state of health and convictions allow. The applicable piece of legislation that defines the rules of military service is the Homeland Defence Act of March 2022. Corresponding with this provision is chapter two of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland of 12 May 2020 relating to state resilience and common defence. Paragraph 2.1 reads as follows: “build a system of common civic defence, making full use of the potential of the state and local government institutions, education and higher education entities, local communities, economic entities, non-governmental organisations and citizens, which will provide comprehensive resilience of the state to non-military and military threats” [1].

The National Security Strategy is therefore based not only on the potential of state or local government institutions, but also on the involvement of non-governmental organisations and citizens. Which is in line with the civic duties set out in Article 85 of the Polish Constitution. Although the National Security Strategy does not define what the universal defence system is supposed to be, changes to the Firearms and Ammunition Act [2] are a prerequisite for its effective establishment. For, it is difficult, if not impossible, for citizens to acquire even basic means of defence, such as helmets or bulletproof vests, under current legislation. And without access to protective equipment and weapons, it is hard to talk about a system of universal defence.

Aims of paper

Given the current involvement of pro-defence organisations in defence matters and their cooperation with the Ministry of Defence to improve shooting skills and support the Polish armed forces, the failure to exploit the potential inherent in pro-defence organisations should be seen as a serious mistake, especially in light of threats to national and international security. There is no doubt that members of pro-defence organisations are a natural base for the Polish armed forces. This issue cannot be considered in isolation from the Homeland Defence Act. In accordance with the content of Article 1 of the aforementioned law, the act defines the subject and object scope of the obligation to defend the homeland, including the principles of cooperation with pro-defence organisations [3].

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Exposition of main material of research with complete substantiation of obtained scientific results

The intention of the legislator is not only to increase the size of the professional army and the Territorial Defence Forces, but also to build a system of universal defence. Again, a universal defence system will not exist and function properly unless the citizens of the given country represent patriotic and pro-defence attitudes. And the promotion of civic and pro-defence attitudes among the public is best carried out by the pro-defence organisations which have been doing it in Poland with great effectiveness for years. The question must therefore be asked: how does the Homeland Defence Act treat pro-defence organisations? Article 2 of the act defines a pro-defence organisation as “a non-governmental organisation with which the Minister of Defence has concluded a pro-defence partnership agreement” [3]. In turn, Article 114 stipulates that “the Minister of Defence may conclude a pro-defence partnership agreement with a non-governmental organisation carrying out socially useful activities to strengthen state security and national defence capabilities, at the request of that organisation. (...) Members and volunteers of pro-defence organisations who have not performed active military service and service in the Internal Security Agency, the Intelligence Agency, the Military Counterintelligence Service, the Military Intelligence Service, the Police, the Border Guard, the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, the State Protection Service, Prison Service, Marshal Guard, Customs and Excise Service or the State Fire Service and have not taken the military oath within 12 months counted from the date of the conclusion of the agreement or the date of becoming a member of a pro-defence organisation may be called up for the 28-day training referred to in Art. 143(2)(1) and become active reserve soldiers”. This provision shall not apply to members and volunteers of pro-defence organisations declared unfit for military service and exempted from military service [3].

The Minister of Defence, within the framework of the pro-defence partnership agreement referred to in Article 114, may:

- organise training for members or volunteers of pro-defence organisations in order to confer powers to instruct third parties in the field covered by the training;
- agree to use the resources and infrastructure of the Armed Forces free of charge and provide material and financial support to the pro-defence organisation.

Commanders of military units (Article 117) may cooperate in the performance of their tasks with pro-defence organisations with regard to didactic and instructional activities, the shaping of patriotic attitudes and social capital and the strengthening of the potential of the Armed Forces for the defence and security of the state.

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The Minister of Defence shall determine by regulation (Article 118):

- training areas in which members or volunteers of pro-defence organizations can be authorized as instructors,
- the extent of in-kind and financial support to pro-defence organisations,
- the modalities and entities responsible for conducting the training courses referred to in Article 116, bearing in mind the need to ensure effective cooperation with pro-defence organisations and the needs of the Armed Forces [4].

Thus, as can be seen from the above statutory provisions, the legislator not only envisaged a role for pro-defence organisations in shaping patriotic and pro-defence attitudes, but also active participation in didactic and instructional activities aimed at shaping the desired defence competences. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that the Homeland Defence Act does not present a closed catalogue of pro-defence organisations that can cooperate with the Ministry of Defence. Instead, it creates an open catalogue in which any non-governmental socially useful organisation that decides to cooperate with the Ministry of Defence within the agreed scope can be recognised as a pro-defence organisation.

The role of the citizen in the state security system

This raises the question of the role of the citizen in the state security system. Is the citizen supposed to be just *a resource* to be protected or maybe an active component of the universal defence system? The question might seem rhetorical, but the answer is by no means simple. For, on the one hand, we have Article 85 of the Constitution, imposing on every citizen the duty to defend the homeland, and, on the other hand, in the same Article 85, we have a provision stating that the exact scope of the duty to defend the state will be defined in the relevant laws. And here we come back to the Homeland Defence Act, which, while it creates many opportunities for a citizen to serve in the military and defines them in quite some detail, does not specify how a citizen who is not interested in active or passive military service can contribute to building a system of universal defence.

According to the ambitious plans, Polish Army is to be expanded in four years to 300,000 soldiers, of which 250,000 are to be professional service soldiers and 50,000 members of the Territorial Defense Force. This represents an increase by 140,000 professional soldiers. Within four years, because that is how long the planned expansion is expected to take. That is, we are *de facto* talking about increasing the size of the professional service by 35,000 soldiers per year.

Leaving aside the discussion on the capacity of the Polish Army's training system, it should be noted that it is in the interest of both the military to obtain candidates for

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military service with the highest possible level of training obtained prior to reporting for duty, to shorten the training period as much as possible and to be able to concentrate on specialized training. Although it is not explicitly articulated at the level of the Homeland Defence Act, the above-quoted articles of the act regarding cooperation with pro-defence organisations form the basis for using these organisations to build a training network to provide initial skills to potential candidates for military service.

The place of pro-defence organisations in the national security system

To estimate the potential and capabilities of pro-defence organisations, it is also necessary to take into account veterans' and ex-military organisations, organisations related to medical rescue, educational and educational-cultural organisations or purely sports organisations. It should be noted that so far, only some of the pro-defence organisations have been integrated into the state security system, namely the rescue organisations. However, they too face limitations. The only organisation fully integrated into the state system is the Voluntary Fire Brigades (OSP). However, despite its structures, financing system and regulation, which is impressive compared to other entities, OSP activities are quite limited [5].

Rescue organisations

The only voluntary non-governmental organisation included in the rescue and/or general defence system is the de facto the Volunteer Fire Brigades. In contrast, the main problem of its use in rescue operations is territorial coverage, as OSP are present in rural and small-town areas. By contrast, as an organisation it is virtually absent from large urban centers. At the same time, it should be noted that all kinds of courses related to paramedics have been gaining in popularity in recent years, whether in the civilian version, known as KPP, or the military version TC3. In either case, if those who have completed them do not become part of the state emergency response system (for KPP) or serve in the army (TC3) their skills are not used in any way by the Polish state. Which is done to the detriment of civil defence tasks.

Paramilitary organisations

Paramilitary organisations pay attention to military training because of the scope of their activities. They have a hierarchical internal structure, modelled on military systems. These are overwhelmingly organisations that promote patriotic attitudes, a self-improvement approach to life and advocate legal access to firearms. As a rule, members of these organisations apply for a permit to own firearms to facilitate the training involved in acquiring shooting skills. Many of the paramilitary organisations refer by

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their actions to the history of the riflemen's associations, which contributed to the re-gaining of independence by the Republic of Poland in 1918, and subsequently constituted a forge of patriotic attitudes in the reborn Poland.

Civil defence

The civil defence system has a long-standing tradition. The scope of the Civil Defence was regulated by the Act of 21 November 1967 on the Universal Duty to Defend the Republic. This defined Civil Defence had its own commander in the person of the Chief Fire Officer, and structures at voivodeship, district and municipal levels. Unfortunately, after the 1989 political transformation in Poland, the Civil Defence system was largely neglected, without adequate sources of funding. This has led to its actual atrophy. The Homeland Defence Act of 11 March 2022, replaced the Act on the Universal Duty to Defend the Republic of 21 November 1967. At the same time, the new Homeland Defence Act completely removed the provisions on civil defence. Interestingly, many organisations related to civil defence, such as the Country Defence League (LOK), are still in operation. In contrast, the tasks carried out by the LOK, especially in the context of civil defence, are unremarkable from the state's point of view.

Educational and sports organisations

These organisations place the main emphasis of their work on educating young people in the spirit of patriotic attitudes. But they also include veterans' organisations. Sports organisations of all kinds, which put emphasis on the physical fitness of their pupils. From the point of view of numbers, educational and sports organisations are certainly the most numerous groups of organisations discussed in this study. In addition to the above-mentioned types of organisations, there are a multitude of organisations in Poland that cannot be clearly assigned to the above-mentioned and defined groups. These organisations generally operate at the interface between the types of organisations mentioned above. An excellent example of such an organisation might be the Polish Scouting Association or the Scouting Association of the Republic of Poland, as well as shooting organisations. In all cases, the organisations place great importance on the physical education of their members while promoting patriotic attitudes. But there are also scout troops that specialize in rescue operations, or become very involved in fire-arms pro-gun activities, and shooting organisations take part in rescue operations or provide assistance in natural disasters and catastrophes. It should be mentioned that a large part of relief activities following natural disasters and catastrophes have been taken over by the Territorial Defence Forces, thus limiting the field of action for NGOs. On the other hand, this does not close the way for these organisations to take part in the Universal Defence System or the Civil Defence system.

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Pro-defence organisations and the state security system

Before moving on to a discussion of how pro-defence organisations can become involved in the system of general defence and support for the state's pro-defence activities, it is necessary to define what capacity we are talking about in the case of members of these organisations. If we were to make an estimate of the paramilitary organisations themselves, cooperating with the Ministry of Defence, the number of their members is around 60,000. On the other hand, considering the definition of pro-defence organisations adopted above, which significantly expands the types of organisations that should be counted in this capacity, the Volunteer Fire Brigades alone count almost 700,000 people (as at the end of 2016) [6].

According to various estimates, we are therefore talking about a potential of between 800,000 and 1 million.

This is a rather interesting situation. The current size of the Polish Armed Forces is about 110,000 professional soldiers and about 37,000 soldiers of the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT). The government plans to increase the size of the military to 250,000 professional soldiers and 50,000 WOT soldiers in just four years. The training system of the Ministry of Defence is not prepared to train such a number of soldiers (let me just remind you that we are talking about 35,000 soldiers per year, not taking into account losses related to soldiers leaving the service, if only because they have reached retirement age) in order to achieve the goals, set out in the Homeland Defence Act. It is therefore impossible to carry out this project without tapping into the human reservoir of around one million members of pro-defence organisations. This is because they are the only ones who can provide basic training to candidates for soldiers in the Polish Army, but also to supply the Polish Army by joining its ranks.

It seems that the Ministry of Defence is aware of this dependency, as the Homeland Defence Act itself provides for pro-defence organisations to participate in training programmes for the Ministry of Defence. On the other hand, this in no way creates a system of incentives for members of pro-defence organisations to join the ranks of soldiers in the Polish Army.

The role of shooting associations in shaping citizens' competence in structural and personal security. Unexploited potential of pro-defence organisations

The potential of civil defence, which would have provided an excellent basis for a system of universal defence, was squandered in Poland after 1989. This applies equally to the activities of the state defence-related organisations themselves as well as to the formation of citizens' structural and personnel security competences.

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The Homeland Defence Act introduced a certain novelty, as it explicitly addresses the need for pro-defence organisations to cooperate with the Ministry of Defence. Moreover, the Ministry of Defence envisages and defines at the statutory level not only cooperation with pro-defence organisations, but also their use in training programmes designed to provide access to the skills desired by the Ministry of Defence to the broadly understood citizen of the Republic who is a potential soldier of the Polish Army.

However, for this cooperation to take on a broader dimension, a system of incentives should be created for pro-defence organisations to want to actively participate in programmes prepared by the Ministry of Defence. Such systemic solutions do not yet exist.

It is impossible to create a system of universal defence with the current legislation on the citizen's right to own firearms. These provisions must be amended in such a way that, while maintaining the current level of citizen security, they assist the state's efforts to improve the level of defence. The amendment to the Firearms and Ammunition Act is the only document of its kind that addresses all the requirements of the Homeland Defence Act. In other words, the amendment must bring the Firearms and Ammunition Act into a situation of full compliance with the requirements of the Homeland Defence Act and the need to increase the defence potential of the Republic.

The amendment must remove many of the problematic provisions contained in the Firearms and Ammunition Act and primarily related to the unequal treatment of soldiers, dividing them into professional service soldiers and WOT soldiers, giving certain preferences as to the possession of firearms to the former. Of course, this is because the Firearms and Ammunition Act entered the legal order in 2011, long before the WOT came into being, but the removal of these inequalities seems to be a *sine qua non* for further work aimed at prioritizing members of the armed forces and creating a system of incentives for pro-defence organisations and their members.

It is also necessary to move away from the current system of weapons licences for purposes and introduce a conceptual grid related to categories of firearms. There are four basic categories of firearms: A, B, C and D, and for the purpose of this research problem, we will only focus on categories A and B. Generally speaking, category B covers semi-automatic firearms - and such weapons are available to civilians, while category A defines weapons prohibited (with certain exceptions) to citizens. Category A includes self-propelled weapons, commonly referred to as machine guns.

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A provision should be introduced to enable the pro-defence organisations cooperating with MON based on an agreed statute and/or concluded agreement to possess the category A firearms.

At the same time, membership in a pro-defence association cooperating with the Ministry of Defence under the above-mentioned conditions would give members of such organisations the right to apply for a category A firearms licence. Thanks to this, members of the organisation will not only be able to improve their competence in the use of weapons meeting the requirements of the Armed Forces but will also be able to train potential candidates for soldiers in the same way. This will have a motivating effect on pro-defence organisations in terms of cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and the implementation of training tasks in accordance with the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the provisions of the Homeland Defence Act.

Conclusions

Over the last few years, the international security system has been deteriorating in a significant manner. In response to the situation, the Polish government accelerated the modernisation programme of the Armed Forces. At the same time, a new piece of legislation, the Homeland Defence Act, was passed.

The act provides for a quantum leap in the number of soldiers serving in the Polish Army (from the current 110,000 to 250,000 professional soldiers and an increase in WOT soldiers from the current 32,000 to 50,000 – in both cases in just four [sic!] years). This means no less than an increase in active-duty soldiers of around 40,000 per year. At the same time, these figures do not consider the replacement of soldiers leaving the service (whether due to reaching retirement age, health or, finally, life choices). This reform will be extremely difficult to carry out unless the Polish Army is guaranteed a large, patriotically minded human resource pre-trained in shooting and tactical terms, from which it can draw.

And here comes one of the key aspects of this study, namely the role of pro-defence organisations. It is an indisputable fact that the Polish Army has other tasks, especially in light of current threats, than building public awareness and providing shooting training to the wider population. Such tasks can be fulfilled effectively by pro-defence organisations cooperating with the Ministry of Defence. It should not be forgotten that pro-defence organisations are a forge of cadres for the Territorial Defence Forces. Pro-defence organisations bring together some 20,000–30,000 citizens. Let us add to this the approximately 200,000 legal firearms owners in Poland, in whose hands there are over 600,000 firearms, and we have a ready base of potential recruits, trainers and

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soldiers. Such potential should not be missed, especially as the Homeland Defence Act explicitly indicates the need to cooperate with pro-defence organisations.

Further steps certainly need to be taken. The Firearms and Ammunition Act should be amended immediately, honouring all active-duty soldiers (the current act only covers professional soldiers, leaving out WOT soldiers and many other uniformed services). Immediate barriers to the development of civilian shooting ranges must be removed (the newly entered Small Arms Shooting Programme assumes extensive use of commercial ranges due to existing limitations of garrison ranges) and attempts to ban lead ammunition must be resisted.

As far as specific, high-level proposals for specific legislative changes are concerned, the most urgent are:

- Clarification of the principles of cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and pro-defence organisations;
- Simplifying the possibility of obtaining a firearms licence for uniformed services and active-duty soldiers – by amending the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- Removal of the need to obtain administrative approval for the operation of a shooting range (provided that the model shooting range regulations published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration in a Decree are followed) – by introducing an appropriate provision in the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- Revitalising the Shooting Range in Every District programme run by the Ministry of Defence;
- Lowering the financial barriers (costs of exams and medical examinations) required to obtain a firearms licence – through amendments to the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- Seizing the opportunity to rationalise firearms possession regulations arising from EU Directive 555/2021 – through amendments to the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- The generation of synergies between the State and pro-defence organisations and the voluntary linking of legal firearms owners with the defence of the state – through amendments to the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- Strengthening the ability to achieve the goal of increasing the size of the Armed Forces by providing better trained recruits – through amendments to the Firearms and Ammunition Act;
- Elimination of discrepancies between the Law on Licensed Trade and the Firearms and Ammunition Act – through amendments to the Firearms and Ammunition Act.

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