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EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL JUDGMENT OF THE HUNGARIAN DEFENCE FORCES THROUGH ITS CONTRIBUTION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT, MEASURED BY A PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

Abstract

By way of a public opinion survey, I was looking for the answer to the question whether the contribution of the Hungarian Defence Forces to national wide disaster management had an effect on its public judgment, and if so, to what extent. Within the framework of my investigation, I searched for those target groups which had been affected by the contribution of the Hungarian Defence Forces in dealing with catastrophes. My fields of study were 6 settlements in BAZ county, lying in the Hernád Valley, which had been involved in the floods of the Hernád River, and thus had real experience of the disaster relief activities of the Hungarian Defence Forces. I had my questionnaires filled out by 34 local residents and I have come to the conclusions laid out in the article by processing that data.

A közvélemény kutatás módszerével arra kerestem a választ, hogy a Magyar Honvédség katasztrófák elleni védekezésben való közreműködésének van-e hatása, és ha van, akkor milyen mértékű a Magyar Honvédség társadalmi megítélésére. A kutatás keretében a Magyar Honvédség katasztrófák elleni védekezésben való közreműködéssel érintett, arról valós tapasztalatokkal rendelkező célcsoportot kerestem fel. Kutatási területem a BAZ megyei Hernád-völgyében fekvő hat település volt, melyek gyakran voltak érintve a Hernád folyón levonuló árvizekkel kapcsolatban és ezen keresztül a Magyar Honvédség katasztrófavédelmi tevékenységéről is rendelkeztek valós tapasztalatokkal. A kérdőívemet 34 helyi lakossal töltettem ki és az adott válaszok feldolgozásával, elemzésével jutottam a cikkben megfogalmazott következtetésekre illetve eredményekre.

Keywords: *Hungarian Defence Forces, disaster management, flood, public judgment ~ Magyar Honvédség, katasztrófavédelem, árvíz, társadalmi megítélés*

1. INTRODUCTION OF THE INVESTIGATION

Within the framework of the public opinion survey, I searched for the target group that had been affected by the contribution to disaster management by the Hungarian Defence Forces, (HDF) and thus which had the most relevant experience of it. My fields of study were 6 settlements in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, lying in the Hernád Valley (Encs, Halmaj, Gibárt, Hernádszentandrás, Hernádbúd, Méra – *Figure 1.*), which had been involved in the floods of the Hernád River, where the HDF often participated in catastrophe prevention and the elimination of the effects of natural disasters in the past 10 years.



Figure 1. The area of investigation (source: Google Earth)

The HDF participated in the defense against floods and the elimination of the effects of heavy snowing in the given area. Consequently, the local residents have a valid opinion and experience about the contribution of the HDF to disaster management. I took sample of the adult residents of the above settlements. The method of the selection of the sample was closest to simple, random selection. I adapted to the circumstances of the survey, therefore I choose the method of voluntary completion of the questionnaire.

I had my questionnaire filled out by the employees of the municipalities and the citizens I visited in their homes. On the other hand, some local residents were willing to have the questionnaires filled out by their acquaintances. Each person filled out the document voluntarily. I did not apply any selection criteria, apart from the one that the respondents should be from the adult residents of the given settlement.

There were altogether 34 questionnaires that were filled out. In order to make the data to be representative, I compared the demography of the respondents and the residents. Approximately 78% of the adult residents of the given settlements were between the ages 20 and 65 [2]. In the sample, this ratio is 100%, which in theory means their overrepresentation, but I deemed the diversion acceptable.

Regarding the ratio of genders, there is no significant difference between the sample data and the statistics. 44% of respondents were female, which shows an appropriate ratio as compared to the real ratio of genders of the residents, which is 50.4% [3] in the given age group. From the viewpoint of economic activity, the sample does not reflect the actual economically active adult resident ratio, since according to the statistical data, the ratio of the registered unemployed is 16.8%, compared to the number of adult residents, whereas in the sample, the ratio of the unemployed is merely 3%. At the same time, from the viewpoint of the study, the difference is not relevant. There seems to be no diversion in the final results.

Consequently, I would say that the data I collected can be said to be representative, as it is proven by the method of sample selection and the control data. On the other hand, it should be noted that the respondents are overrepresented from the labor market point of view as compared to the data of the Central Statistics Office (KSH) but this does not make the representativeness of the answers change. The only goal at the time of the sample selection was that I should find such an adult target group for the study, who have relevant experience regarding the disaster relief activity of the HDF.

2. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

2.1. Questions regarding the competence of the respondents

The aim of asking the following questions was to decide whether the respondents conformed to the criteria that they relevant experience regarding the disaster relief activity of the HDF.

Question: Do you think that the Hungarian Defence Forces has a role in disaster management? 97% of respondents were clear about the fact that the HDF has a role in disaster management. Apart from one single respondent (3%), all the other participants knew that the HDF participated in disaster management in the past 10 years.

The next question was aimed at whether the respondent has a real experience of the contribution of the HDF. The question was the following: Has the Hungarian Defence Forces contributed in your surrounding area? 100% of respondents answered with “yes”, therefore we may postulate that 100% of the participants gave their answers from their own experiences.

Regarding the frequency of the contribution of the HDF, I raised the question the following way: How many times did the Hungarian Defence Forces in your surrounding area in the past 10 years? The responses included the following:

Answers including “rarely” and “a few times” allude to the times when the HDF contributed to the prevention of natural disasters (floods and extreme winter season conditions), as it was requested by the disaster management authorities. 59% of respondents selected “always, when they were needed”, which clearly shows the trust of the candidates towards the HDF.

2.2. Questions Regarding the Contribution of the Hungarian Defence Forces

The following 10 questions of the questionnaire were aimed to find out about the actual contribution of the HDF in the past 10 years, based on respondents’ own experience based on activities regarding the natural disasters in their own settlements.

1. Question: Were you a bit relieved, when you saw the soldiers arriving at the scene of the disaster (e.g. at the time of a flood)?

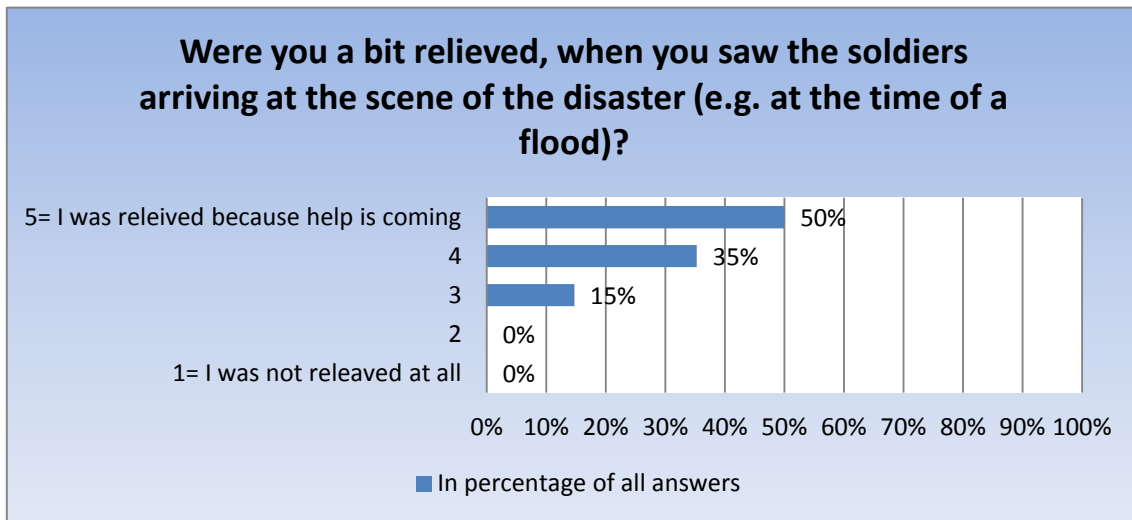


Figure 2. Diagram for the 1st question's answers

As it can be seen in the diagram, 100% of the responses lie in the positive side of the scale and what is more, 50% lies in the topmost area. (Figure 2.) From the above, we can draw the conclusion that the affected residents consider the HDF a serious, reliable contributor.

2. Question: How fast did the soldiers arrive at the scene?

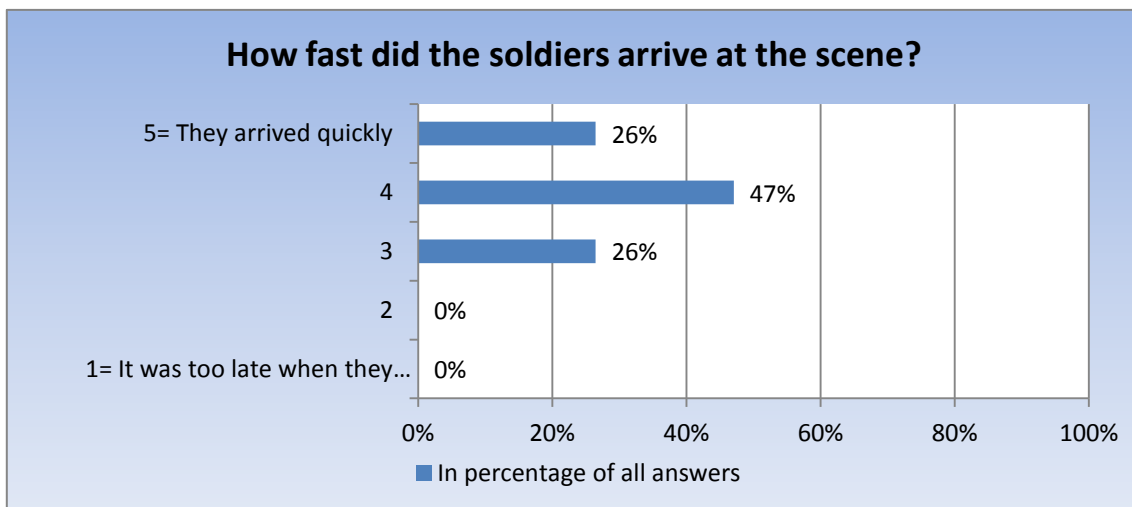


Figure 3. Diagram for the 2nd question's answers

100% of the responses are in the positive side of the scale. (Figure 3.) This consideration is fortified by the fact that the HDF does not belong to the primary interfering authorities, since it does not appear on the scene immediately, only if it is requested by the official disaster management authorities when the situation is extreme. At the same time, the floods are foreseeable, so the Disaster Relief System of the HDF signals an alert before the intervention becomes necessary.

3. Question: What is your opinion about the number of participating soldiers?

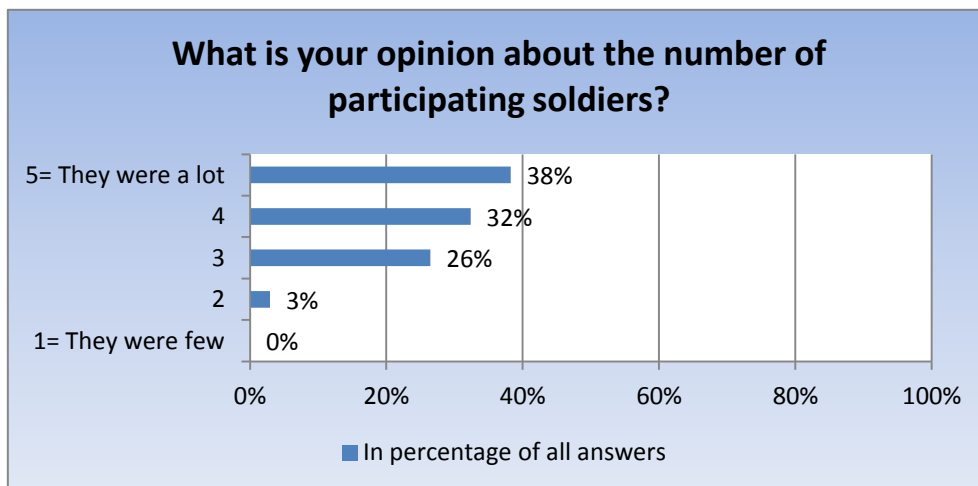


Figure 4. Diagram for the 3rd question's answers

The consideration of the number of participating soldiers is in the middle-upper dimension (Figure 4.) also. The transition from compulsory military service to a professional army clearly has a negative effect on the number of contributing soldiers, which resulted in a decrease of their number, at the same time the HDF strives for professionalism to counter-balance this effect. Presently, within the framework of the Disaster Relief System of the HDF, around 2250 soldiers may be applied to contribute in the first wave, which number may be increased by further members of the HDF, who do not belong to the Disaster Relief System. There will be more soldiers who will be able to contribute to disaster relief operations, to be incorporated into the Disaster Relief System (reserves).

4. Question: What is your opinion about the work of the participating soldiers?

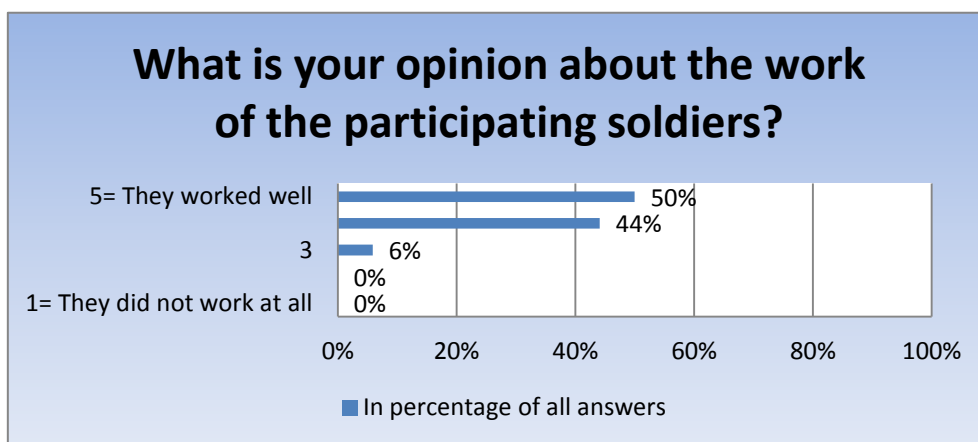


Figure 5. Diagram for the 4th question's answers

The ratio of the responses and their position in the upper-third portion of the graph clearly show the positive opinion of local resident about the quality of work of the contributing soldiers, which underlines my previous supposition, namely that the professional attitude of the reformed HDF and counterbalances the smaller number of soldiers. (Figure 5.)

5. Question: Did the soldiers help the locals?

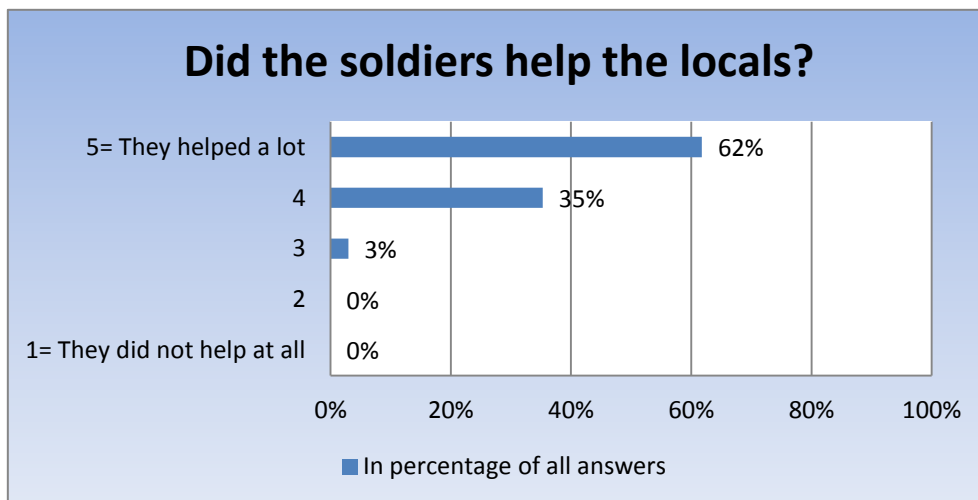


Figure 6. Diagram for the 5th question's answers

The above graph (Figure 6.) clearly signals the commitment of the HDF towards helping the residents of the areas affected by disasters. The fundamental role of the HDF is the armed defense of the homeland, whereas with the change of our security environment, the contribution of the HDF widened in sphere of civilian and natural catastrophes, thus underlining the usefulness and the role of the HDF at the time of peace. This responsibility of the HDF rose to a constitutional level, when it was incorporated into the Basic Law on January 1, 2012.

6. Question: Did the locals have to take care of the soldiers?

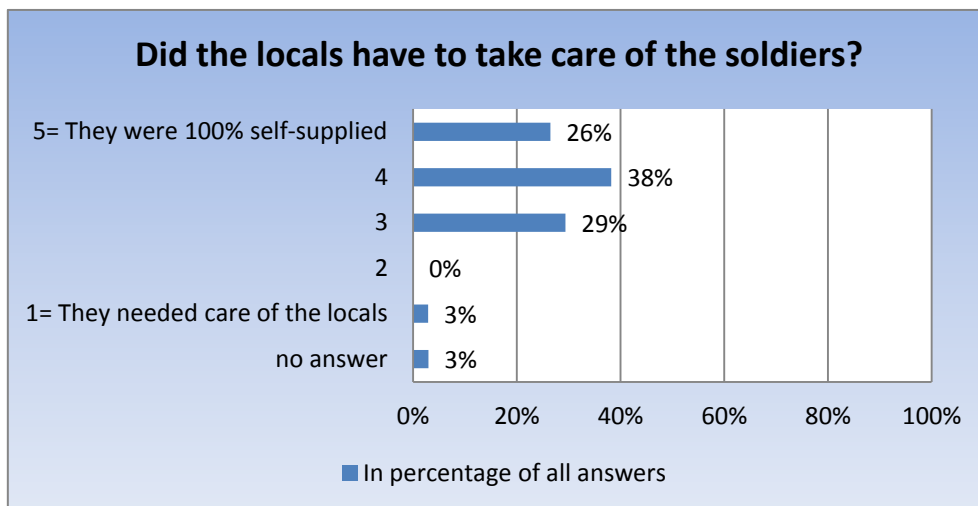


Figure 7. Diagram for the 6th question's answers

One of the most important characteristic of the HDF, which makes it effective for the contribution to disaster management, is its logistical self-supporting capability, which is unique within the intervening authorities. The HDF is capable of providing logistical and health-care support to its staff participating in disaster relief activities. In addition, it is able to support the residents or cooperating authorities depending on demand and supply. The logistic background to be applied depends on the given circumstances, so it can be full-range support, or one that is narrowed down to catering, if the accommodation is provided. This makes the HDF able to do effective work even in the case of a total lack of local infrastructure. The application of this capability is shown by the answers given. (Figure 7.) To underline the

importance of this capability, I would mention the 2010 fight against the flood in BAZ County which lasted for several days and when the delegated police forces had to rely on the help of the locals due to the lack of proper logistical support.

7. Question: What was it like to cooperate with the soldiers?

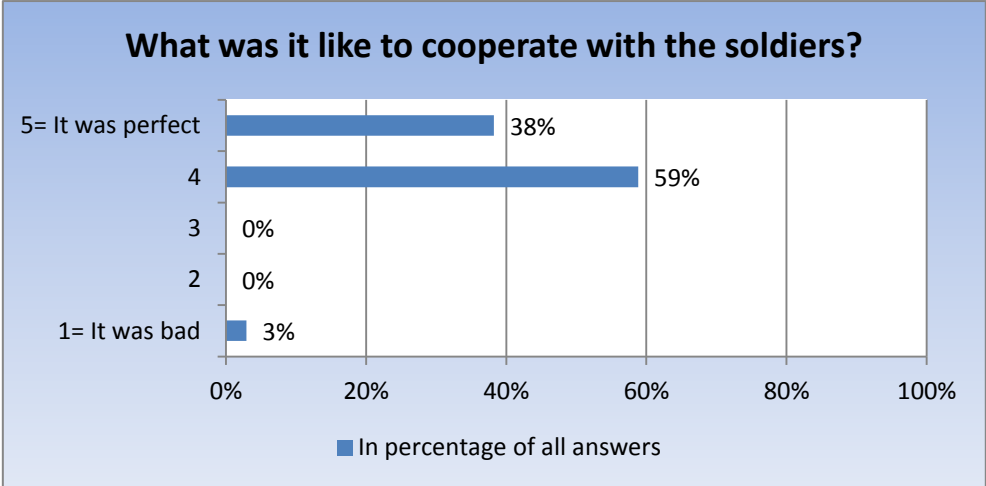


Figure 8. Diagram for the 7th question's answers

The answers given to this question show the excellence of the HDF in cooperating with the locals and vica versa. (Figure 8.) The participating soldiers cannot be placed under civilian command, according to the regulations, but at the same time the tasks of the forces may be defined through the military leaders by the person responsible for the coordination and leading of the local prevention tasks.

8. Question: What were the soldiers' equipments like?

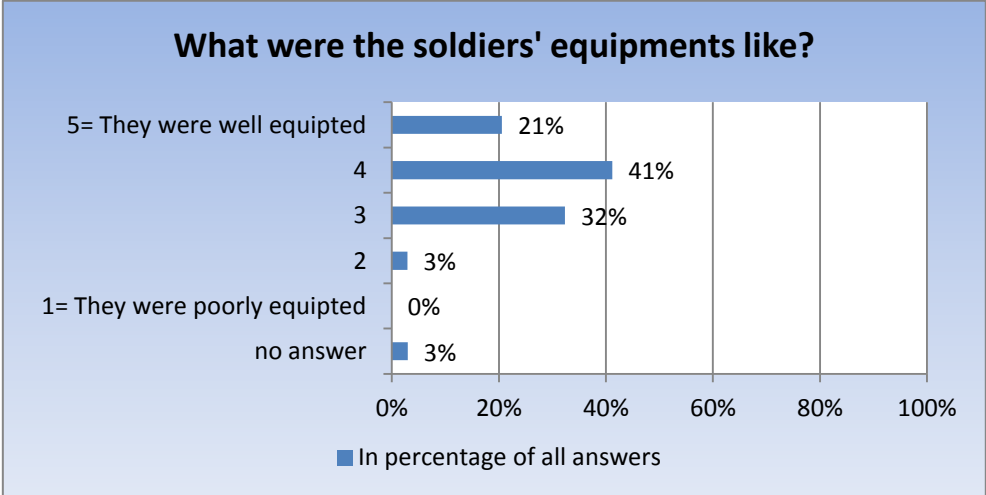


Figure 9. Diagram for the 8th question's answers

According to the responses of the participants, the HDF had a higher-than middle range equipment at the time of participation. (Figure 9.) This perception may have been moved to the positive direction by the unified clothing of the soldiers, their equipment and the presence of their technical devices not common in civilian life. Given the state of the technical devices of the Disaster Relief System of HDF and the soldiers' defense devices, (these mean the personal protection equipments, such as the protecting trousers with boots, life vest and life board) it is not for sure that the responses reflect their actual condition. At the same time, the

HDF strives for developing and keeping the standard from the optimal use of the sources of the HDF Disaster Relief System.

9. Question: To what extent was the operation of the soldiers organized?

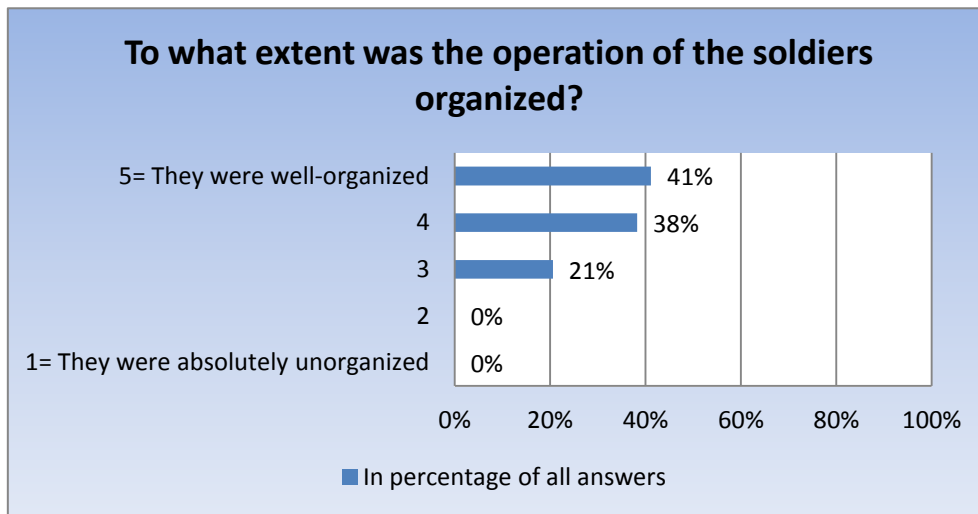


Figure 10. Diagram for the 9th question's answers

Respondents place the organization of the soldiers to the top third scale. (Figure 10.) This clearly reflects the capability of the HDF to make its work more effective through the military leading-directing system, to act as one person in a disciplined manner. The organized act of the soldiers derives from the basic principle of the HDF and the positive opinion of this is not only praise but an understandable expectation.

10. Question: How do you judge the work of the Hungarian Defence Forces?

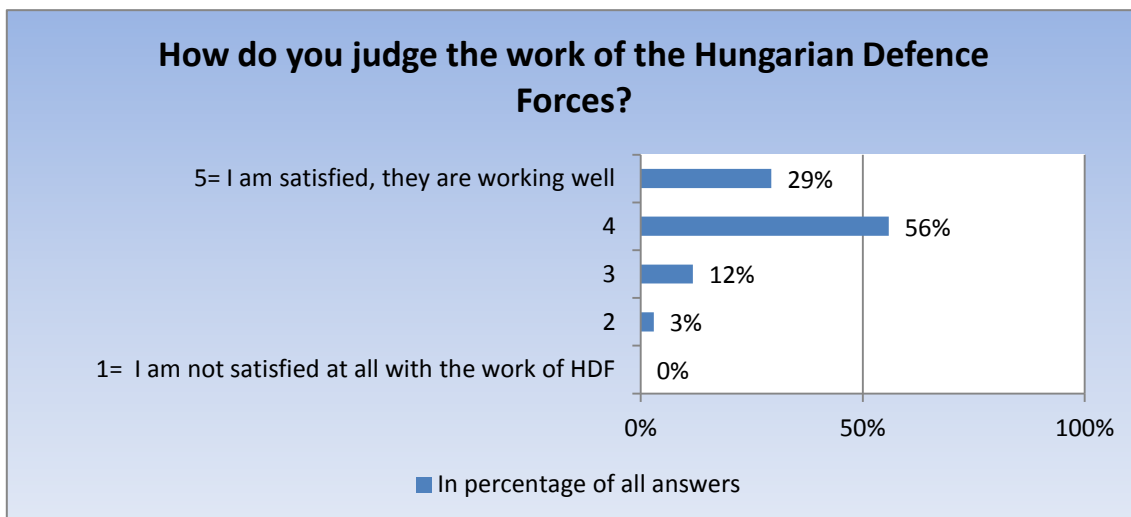


Figure 11. Diagram for the 10th question's answers

I raised this question because I wanted to depart from the HDF's participation in the disaster management to see whether there is a correlation between the judgment on this and that of its participation in the disaster relief activities. Based on the distribution of the responses on the scale, we may postulate that those who have positive experience about the HDF's activities concerning disaster management evaluate its operation deriving from its basic principles positively. (Figure 11.)

11. Question: Do you think that the Hungarian Defence Forces helped the people more earlier (earlier than 10 years ago) or does it do so more recently?

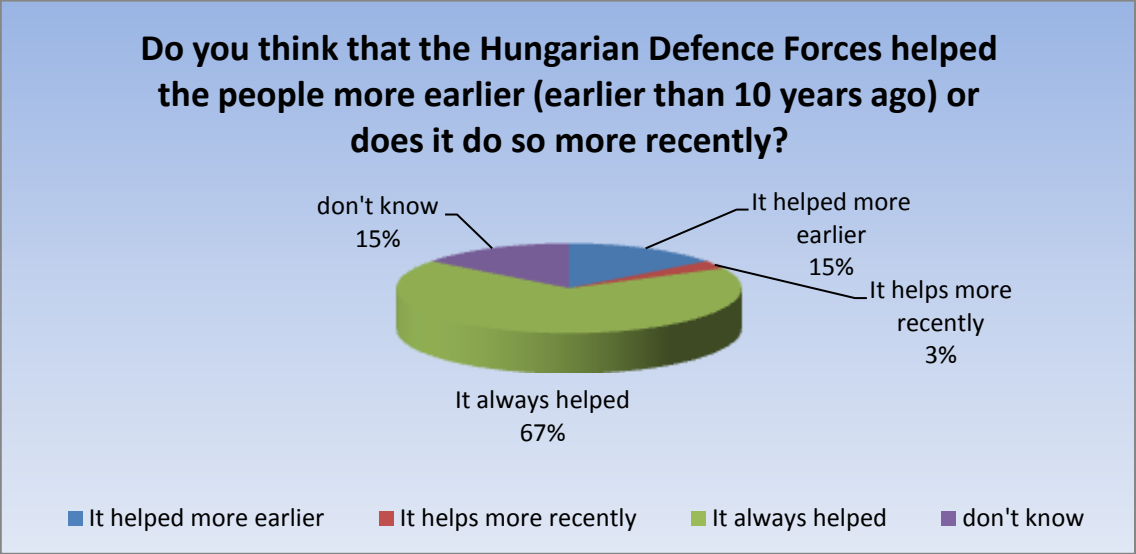


Figure 12. Diagram for the 11th question's answers

From this question, I wished to arrive at a conclusion regarding whether the public judgment of the participation of the HDF in disaster relief activities changed in the past 10 years. Merely 15% of respondents thought that the HDF helped more in the past. The remaining respondents, including answers “I don’t know”, “it helps more recently” and “it always helped”, make up 85%. (Figure 12.) This makes one to conclude that the public judgment of the HDF did not change regarding its participation in disaster management. The picture is a bit blurred by the fact that the HDF is not a first-respond participant in catastrophes, it was only involved in this in severe natural disasters and the distribution of these cases is not even in the period investigated.

I asked the following questions to see how we can compare the general public judgment of the HDF and its judgment regarding its participation in disaster management. (Figures 13. and 14.)

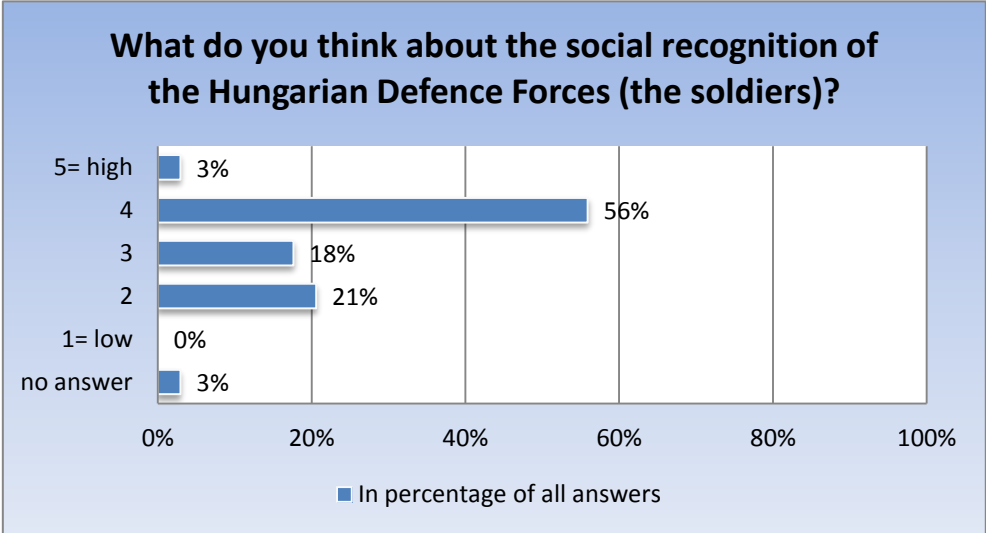


Figure 13. Diagram for the 12th question's answers

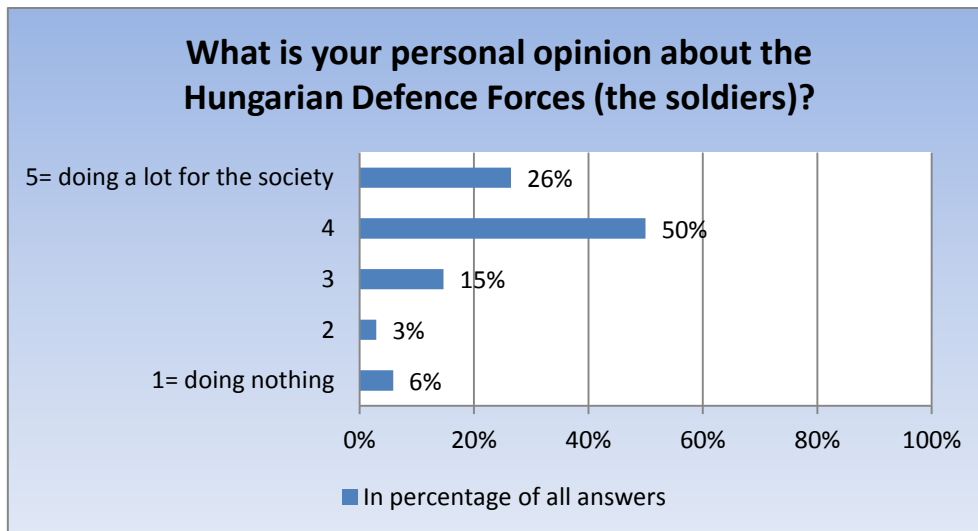


Figure 14. Diagram for the 13th question's answers

From the joint graph we can see that the individual judgment of the HDF is better than its overall judgment by all of the society, as the respondents see it. (Figure 15.)

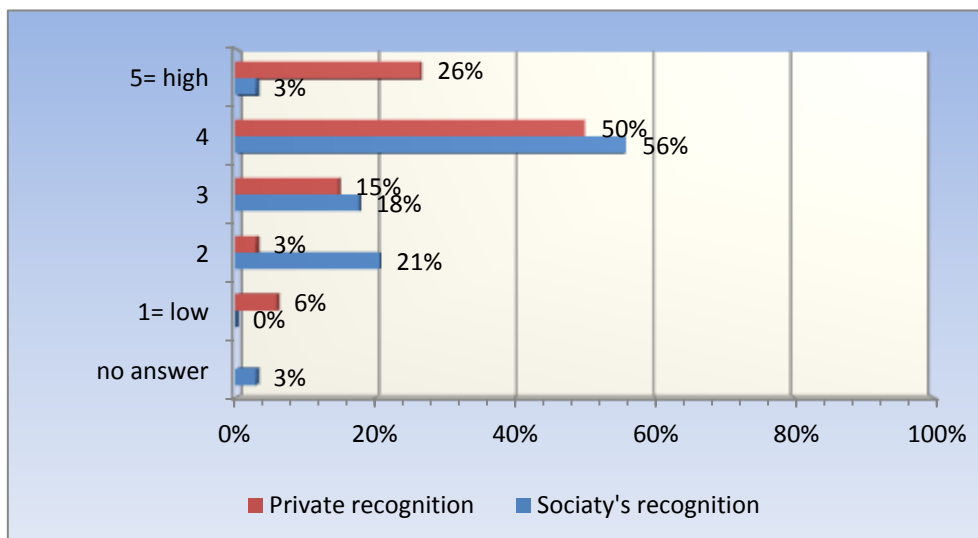


Figure 15. Diagram for the 14th question's answers

The better individual judgment may derive from that the respondents do have personal experience regarding the HDF's participation in disaster management, as a beneficial social activity.

15. Question: Where do you get information regarding the disaster relief activities of the Hungarian Defence Forces?

The public judgment of the activity of the Hungarian Defence Forces is heavily influenced by its media coverage, namely that how and to what extent is the public informed. The answers to this question are shown in the following graph. (Figure 16.) Since there were more options to answer, they show the media-preference and options of the location and that which media covered the participation of the Hungarian Defence Forces and to what extent. According to the data, the primary source of information was the television. Newspapers and the radio represent a similar ratio.

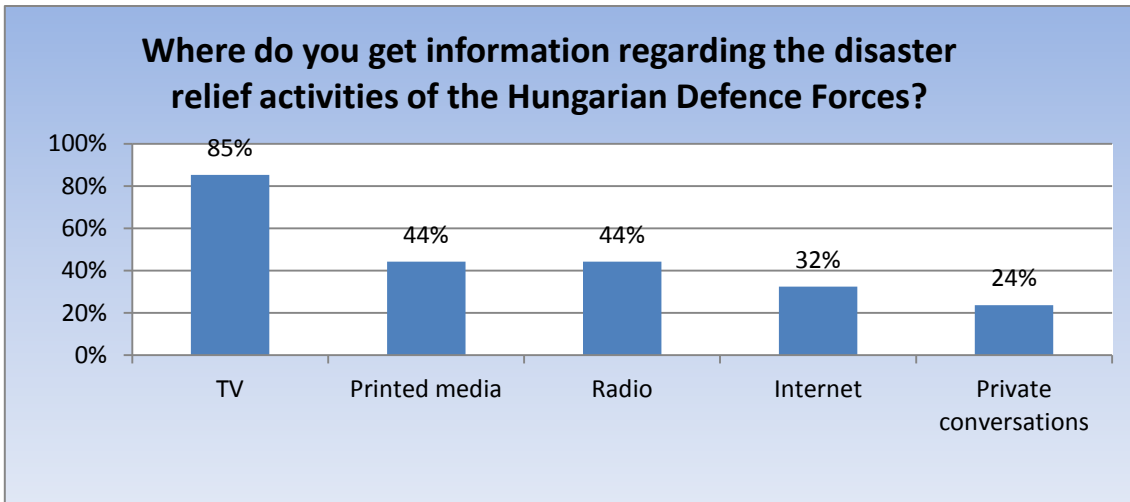


Figure 16. Diagram for the 15th question's answers

16. Question: Do you think that the participation of the Hungarian Defence Forces in the disaster relief activities is represented in the media in proportion?

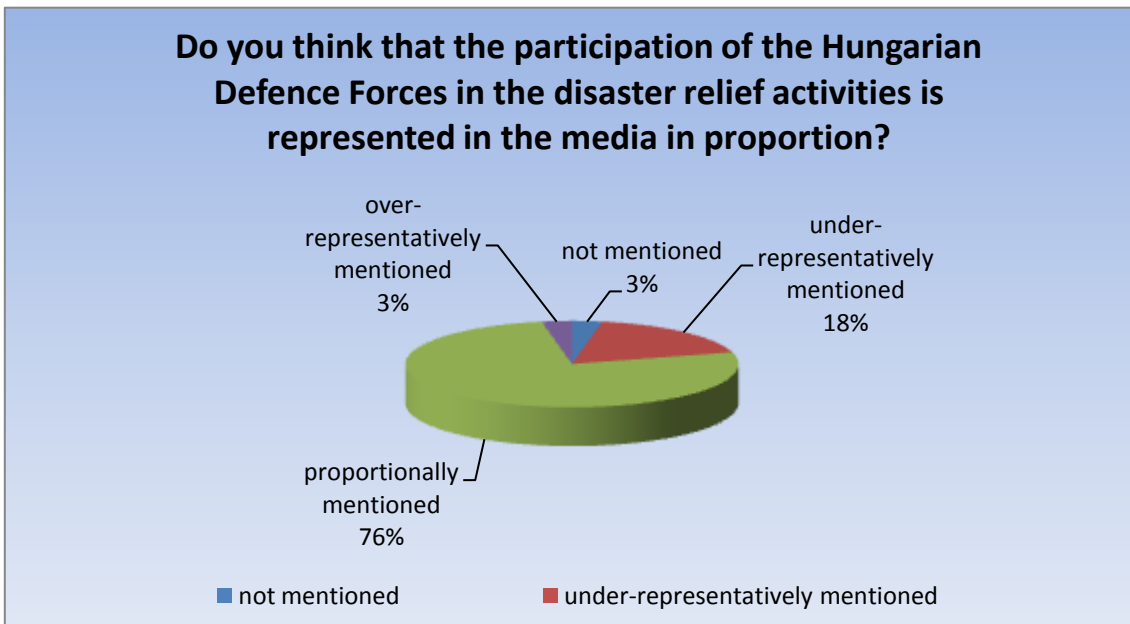


Figure 17. Diagram for the 16th question's answers

I sought the answer with this question for whether the participation of the HDF in the disaster management is represented in the media proportionately according to the opinion of the respondents.

The answers seem to suggest that the media represents the role and participation of the HDF in disaster relief activities proportionately. (*Figure 17.*)

2.3. Further suggestions and notes

At the end of the questionnaire, I gave the opportunity to the respondents to explain their opinion and additional thoughts. Out of the 34 respondents, 3 such suggestions resulted, which are the following.

“As long as the people do not have any problems, they think they (the soldiers) are irrelevant! When the trouble comes, they are waiting for them as for the messiah (Hungarian saying)”

“When there is a catastrophe situation, we can count on the Hungarian Defence Forces in every respect.”

“Inside the body of National Directorate General for Disaster Management, there are no working people, only bosses and a spokesman. The real work is done by policemen, firemen, soldiers and the ambulance.”

3. SUMMARY

The results of my survey may be summarized as follows:

The respondents asked in the area is clearly informed about the role of the HDF in disaster management and they have their own experience about it in the past ten years, since their living area, their life and possessions have been endangered by the flood of the River Hernád. The last occasion when the HDF intervened in this area with considerable forces was the 2010 flood. Most of the respondents have positive experience about the participation of the HDF, we can assume that they see it as a positive, reliable source of help, which participated in disaster relief activities in an organized way, precisely, professionally, relying on its own supply system (not relying on the local population and its supply system). There is no conclusion about any change in the trend of the effectiveness of the HDF's participation. It is clear from the survey that the HDF's participation in disaster management contributes to its public judgment, since the Hungarian society has only this kind of real experience regarding the HDF. We should not miss the huge influence and responsibility of the media, since the part of the population who is not affected by the natural disasters may be informed only through it and it judges the HDF's work through the media. As a result, the branch of the Ministry of Defense and the Hungarian Defence Forces responsible for communication has an immense role in informing the national media about the participation of the HDF in disaster relief activities, thus strengthening the general public judgment of it. With respect to the fact that the HDF continuously carried out such activities in the period investigated, there seems to be no change in the public judgment of the HDF resulting from the communication towards the media or the lack of it.

References

- [1] Yearbook of the Central Statistics Office (KSH) of 2010: settlement databank
- [2] Yearbook of the Central Statistics Office (KSH) of 2011: comparative data of the shires
- [3] Yearbook of the Central Statistics Office (KSH) of 2012: population statistics of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county