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8. Crisis Leadership in Governing Floods: Lessons from the Western Balkans

Crisis leadership challenges exacerbate when leaders have to deal with a structural resource shortages, public institutions in transition, ongoing deep-rooted ethno-political conflict, and a history and continued presence of clientelism in politics and administration. Yet media and the public display a strong tendency to arrive at quick and shallow judgments on leadership performance during and after crisis. This chapter aims to look beyond the superficial frame that dominates political debates and media coverage by using an evaluation framework of leadership tasks to draw lessons on leadership performance during the floods of May 2014 in the Western Balkans. This leadership evaluation is based on the best practices and shortcomings in crisis management from the empirical studies on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia presented in the chapters in this book. The lessons emanate from this particular context but their implications are most relevant for communities and leaders of the affected countries, facing similar contingencies in the coming years.

Keywords: evaluation, leadership, learning, politics of crisis management, strategic tasks

Evaluation Framework

Leadership in times of crisis is an arduous task (Boin and 't Hart, 2003; Leonard and Howitt, 2009; Boin *et al.*, 2017). One can only imagine the challenges when crisis leadership is further complicated by a structural lack of resources, unstable or relatively new government institutions, a recent history of war and the continuous presence of ethno-political conflict and legacies of deeply ingrained clientelism in politics. Yet the tendency to arrive at quick and shallow judgments on leadership performance during and after crisis remains.

In response to this tendency, my coauthors and I asked what could be reasonably expected from leaders during crises, in order to look beyond

the superficial frame that dominates political debates and media coverage (Boin *et al.*, 2013). We constructed an evaluation framework of ten leadership tasks to inform a more nuanced judgment of performance. Our evaluation framework was theoretical, based on decades of crisis-management research on different cases and patterns across. The framework pertained to mostly West European and North American crisis-management cases. Its basic structure, the dissection of leadership into a set of tasks and the questions raised by the literature provide a practical toolkit to pry insights from a diverse set of empirical studies. In this chapter, the evaluation framework will serve as a point of departure to derive *ex post* lessons from the three cases discussed throughout this book: the crisis management in response to the devastating floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

The massive challenges that confronted authorities and the population of the countries in the Western Balkans simultaneously during the floods of May 2014 and the crisis response analysed in the different chapters of this book provide valuable lessons on crisis leadership. The lessons emanate from this particular context but their implications carry into the future for the countries affected in 2014, as well as for communities and their leaders facing similar contingencies in the coming years. A reflection on leadership tasks, based on the empirical studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, aims to highlight both the best practices and the lessons presented in the chapters of this book.

Early Recognition

Apart from enhancing the probability of preventing crises in some cases, early recognition is all about paying adequate attention to emerging threats so responsible authorities can raise the appropriate alarms and mobilize the necessary response capacity. It requires “a shared recognition that a threat has emerged which requires immediate attention” (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 82). With hindsight, the missed signals and fragmented information that did not come together in a common threat assessment seem to defy any excuse for the “failure of foresight” that occurred (Turner, 1976). But what can we realistically expect from a network of authorities with different responsibilities in the way they independently deal with signals of danger and vulnerability? The literature on high reliability suggests that

continuous vigilance is imperative – combined with a willingness to detect anomalies, share faint signals and act upon uncertain indicators (Roe and Schulman, 2008; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2002).

Chapter 2 highlights, in its comparative analysis, how the rivers in the Western Balkans often marked the administrative boundaries of different jurisdictions and therefore the floods imposed major challenges for trans-boundary cooperation, not only between upstream and downstream authorities, but also between those on different sides of the rivers. Such a setup requires cooperation by definition. In the meantime, the reality of natural hazards such as torrents and flash floods in the Balkan region, implies more than a “fantasy document” that plans such cooperation only on paper (Clarke, 1999). However, the different case studies suggest that a shared awareness of flood risks among responsible authorities was missing.

In Bosnia, fragmented information in the days prior to the floods was available among the two meteorological services but their intelligence did not give rise to sound decisions on public warning and evacuation, nor did the responsible institutions share the information with the other district. Only on the day of the flood (7 hours prior) did the civil protection department of Maglaj municipality receive an informal warning of an upcoming flood wave – which would ultimately completely flood the town and paralyse its crisis response capacity. The same is true for the Bosnian city Doboje, in spite of the fact that the upstream Maglaj disaster could have provided for some early warning and preparation through official channels, which did not happen. In Serbia, the Hydrometeorological Institute gave ample warning information to the municipalities and institutions responsible for water management on the abnormal rainfall, the forecast stormy winds and implications for the high water levels in the rivers. The crisis management authorities came together at the national headquarters, yet more dire threats such as the devastation of the city of Obrenovac were overlooked. The Croatian case shows more action upon signals, although the threat seemed underestimated and when it materialized the authorities lacked the surge capacity for an appropriate crisis response (Chapter 2, this volume).

The difference between the apparent lack of early recognition among authorities in Bosnia, some increased awareness in Serbia and more vigilant Croatia gives some food for thought. First the absence or lack of proper functioning of informal and formal channels of communication between responsible BiH municipalities and regional institutions is striking, given their obvious interdependencies in flood protection and response. Early

recognition begins with a willingness to not only detect but also share alarming information.

Secondly, once institutions, such as the Serbian Hydrometereological Institute, share their signals this information remains only noise until other institutions act upon its potential implications. It seems that no authority took up the responsibility to properly assess the implications (of the combination of abnormal rainfall, high water levels, weather forecasts and vulnerable areas) and act upon it at the National Headquarters or the municipal entities.

Insufficient incentives to take up responsibility may have led to shirking behind others instead of acting upon signals. Assuming that no one envisaged or desired the disastrous outcome at the local level, the organizations involved probably saw action as someone else's responsibility. The case resembles the "bystander effect" during emergencies: the more bystanders when someone is in danger of drowning, the less likely it is that any one of them will act (see also Manning *et al.*, 2007).

Another puzzle that rises from these cases is the apparent underestimation of the consequences of the pending risks prior to the floods, for instance regarding the unexpected flooding of the Serbian town Obrenovac and the fact that the rapidly rising water levels even surprised water management authorities on alert in Croatia. This challenge will be discussed in the next section.

Sense Making

At the onset of a crisis, crisis leaders and their teams have to "arrive at a collective understanding of the nature, characteristics, consequences and potential scope and effects of an evolving threat" (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 82). This is an adaptive, continuous process, as new information keeps coming in and the dynamics of the escalating situation can take sudden turns. Sense making is the kind of puzzle that requires the most of human cognitive capacity at a time when conditions for excellent performance are the worst. In order to be most effective, crisis teams must process information in a rapid, systematic and preferably rehearsed manner. The sense-making process must include the relevant actors, incorporate their feedback, regularly check on common understanding and agreement of the arising operational picture, map (un)certainities and information needs and take

into account both short-term and long-term scenarios. Leaders may not always be able to accurately foresee how an event will play out but we can evaluate whether they systematically made sense of an evolving situation.

Chapter 2 points out that the floods of May 2014 in the Western Balkans qualify as *black swans*, the type of extreme event that cannot be predicted or expected within the existing parameters and cognitive frames based on prior experience and exposure, even when signals and indicators of the impending danger were available beforehand. In case of black swans, failure of foresight is not caused by incapacity or malicious intent: the type of event simply could not have been foreseen. The case of the Serbian town Obrenovac illustrates how vulnerable citizens were evacuated to downtown areas that flooded within the next 24 hours after their arrival. Yet the absence of individual culpability for failures of foresight and the impossibility to forecast a crisis, breaks ground for learning at the organizational and institutional level.

The Obrenovac case describes how all relevant actors gathered at the Serbian national headquarters, in possession of the data signalling the impending danger, well in advance, which allowed the authorities to act more swiftly and adequately to the total flooding and devastation of the city than they really did. Instead, the meeting at the headquarters focused on two other towns that had already flooded. The authors highlight how the floods that had already occurred, such as the one in Koceljeva, captured all national political attention, providing electorally advantageous opportunities to gain media attention while visiting the area and distributing relief aid. While responsible authorities focused on settlements where the flood risks had already been reduced, "huge amounts of water were flowing towards Obrenovac" (Chapter 2; cf. Chapter 3). A blind spot for more, impending danger seems to relate to the attention drawn to the risks that had already materialized.

Information on mitigation efforts in Koceljeva (deliberately breaking a local dam that in fact allowed more water to flow towards Obrenovac) was also not included in a threat assessment for Obrenovac (Chapter 2). Missing this type of crucial information can only be prevented by constantly continuing and adapting the threat assessment and by ensuring that all relevant actors contribute to the common operational picture.

Kapidžić *et al* (Chapter 2) and also Vujačić (Chapter 3) convincingly show how authorities despite the abundant information on the threat they already had, never believed that the floods would devastate downtown

Obrenovac. Yet two rivers (Kolubara and Tamnava) joined upstream of the town and their massive force, aggravated by a torrent, would wreck the embankment that was supposed to protect the town area (Appendix 2). The neglected maintenance of the river basin worsened the situation, as did the unfinished second dam nearby. Yet authorities held on to the belief that adequate flood protection measures were in place.

Vujačić also argues that the authorities held a strong belief that the main threats were coming from the Sava River. Instead, the real threat emanated from the Tamnava. “For us, the Tamnava riverbed was a dead channel, but it practically sank us all” (Chapter 3, p. 66). The authorities seem to have inadvertently turned their backs on the real threat, coming from a different direction than expected. Based on previous experiences and events requiring their immediate attention, it seems they were making sense of the wrong crisis.

Critical Decision Making

Although it may seem as if leadership in crisis primarily pertains to decision making, most decisions during the crisis response are taken at the operational level. Boin *et al.* (2017) argue that leaders should focus on the strategic issues and avoid micromanagement. The few decisions at the strategic level usually involve dilemmas affecting core institutional or societal values (Leonard and Howitt, 2009). A characteristic of dilemmas is that there is no right or wrong (often they pertain to a choice between two evils). The act of political judgment requires a sound decision-making process (George, 1980). The process does not only entail careful deliberation on advantages and disadvantages but also takes into account how critical decisions reaffirm core values and whether they were subsidiary and proportional (Boin *et al.*, 2013).

Interestingly, the case analyses highlight how some leaders use micromanagement strategically. Vujačić (Chapter 3) highlights how Serbian Prime Minister Vučić deliberately micromanaged the situation and he gained electoral popularity for it (see also Milivojević and Barlovac in Chapter 4). Meanwhile, he disregarded core institutional values such as the rule of law, freedom of press and equality in relief aid to the different communities, accumulating central government power and strengthening his personal position as Prime Minister (Chapters 3 and 4).

Orchestrating Coordination

When different organizations need to cooperate in response to crises, they are often impeded by unfamiliarity with each other’s way of working and by the absence of a hierarchical relation or clear division of responsibilities among them (Boin and ‘t Hart, 2012). The absence of hierarchy defies possibilities for command and control and yet mere persuasion is sometimes insufficient to arrive at a state of optimal coordination (Boin *et al.*, 2013). In the meantime, some existing organizations turn out to be surprisingly adaptive and disasters often give rise to all kinds of self-organized relief aid initiatives at the local community level. Leadership should be evaluated for its coordinating and enabling role in making cooperation possible (Nooteboom and Termeer, 2013).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, mayor of Dobož, Petrović, obtained more than 80% of the relief aid for his city through international assistance by emphasizing and stimulating interethnic solidarity and cooperation, which surged immediately after the floods (Chapter 5). The initial response and also the cleaning-up efforts after the floods subsided were characterized by the fact that “ordinary people participated in various activities such as evacuating people from affected areas, cleaning flooded houses, providing cloths, food, shelter, money, emotional support, etc.” (Chapter 6, p. 126). This collective, bottom-up response, regardless of ethnicity, was remarkable given the ethnic boundaries and recent history of conflict in the Bosnian society (Chapter 6).

In their analysis of Serbian social media, Milivojević and Barlovac (Chapter 4) point out how citizens used Twitter and other social media to exchange real-time information, provide services and express solidarity and support. Leaders at the national level did little to stimulate such efforts. In fact, citizens found each other in their critique on government using social media to circumvent tightening media control by the authorities (Chapter 4).

The Croatian case reveals how not only civil protection units, the police and the military took care of the initial evacuation of the local population after the breach of the Rajevo embankment, but also the mountain rescue service, local divers and local fishermen’s associations. Improvisation and ad hoc deployment of all possible personnel importantly contributed to saving lives (Chapter 2). The authors outline how it was important that the national headquarters for rescue and protection had moved from Zagreb

to near the flooded area both as a signal to the local population and for the coordination of operations on the ground (Chapter 2).

Coupling and Decoupling

In order to combat a crisis or de-escalate an evolving threat in a tightly connected and complex system of life-sustaining infrastructures, crisis managers may need to put a (potential) chain of related disruptions to a halt (cf. Perrow, 1984). Leaders therefore need to monitor their system and its interconnected components vigilantly and realize how both incidents and responses can have spillover effects that may threaten or damage other domains. As Boin *et al.* (2013, p. 84) point out, this requires not only expert knowledge on critical infrastructures but also a capacity for trans-boundary cooperation.

The most striking lessons from the Western Balkan floods stem from the natural transboundary nature of the hazard (floods recognize no geographical or administrative boundaries) contrasted with the sometimes completely isolated efforts in different jurisdictions to combat the crisis. In some cases, upstream authorities failed to warn downstream ones and vice versa; downstream authorities seemed unaware that the water was coming from upstream (Chapter 2, Appendix 2).

One of the first-line flood protection works designed to absorb the swelling water of the Kolubara River, the Stubo-Rovni Dam and Pond near Valjevo, was never deployed. In 2014, the Serbian Orthodox Church objected to the use of the valley as a water reservoir because one of its ancient church buildings is located there. Eventually, the Stubo-Rovni Dam was activated during floods in 2016 and the church was flooded. If it had been in operation in 2014, it most likely would have prevented or at least mitigated the floods in Valjevo, Lajkovac, Lazarevac and the wider area surrounding Obrenovac (Chapter 2, Appendix 2).

The different chapters emphasize that the absence of cooperation between different responsible institutions and the use of expertise in and between either of the three flooded states did not allow for optimal use of such (de)coupling strategies in flood defence (Chapters 2, 3 and Appendix 2).

Meaning Making

For the public evaluation of their performance during crisis, perhaps meaning making is the task that matters most to leaders at the strategic level. Leaders have to provide a narrative that restores trust, legitimizes their crisis-response measures and channels emotions of a population in need or in shock (Boin *et al.* 2017). “An effective story relates to the core values of an organization or a society. It explains how crisis management efforts will help to confirm or adapt these core values” (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 85). Crisis and disasters are by definition deeply disruptive events and in evaluating crisis leadership we should look for what interpretations of the crisis leaders offered in their public communication and how they will restore a state of normalcy (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 84).

Several chapters in this book contain insightful case studies into how leaders’ framing efforts influence the course of events and the public perception with regards to the flooding disaster and its response. Majstorović and Vučkovic (Chapter 5) show how Mayor of Doboje, Obren Petrović, framed the disaster as uniting the people of Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH). He embraced relief aid from the people of neighbouring BiH entity Bosnia to his town—which is part of the BiH entity Republika Srpska—thereby emphasizing national unity rather than ethno-political separatism. In doing so he went against the legacy of his own political party SDS (which used to be headed by Radovan Karadžić). More importantly, he directly opposed the official line of the dominant party in Republika Srpska (SNSD) and its leader, President Milorad Dodik. Although BiH-Serbian nationalists saw his “pro-Bosnian” rhetoric as betrayal, Petrović’s pragmatism attracted a great amount of financial aid from national and international donors. In addition, Majstorović and Vučkovic (Chapter 5) argue that the mayor’s discourse on interethnic solidarity significantly contributed to building social trust between the different ethnic groups among the affected population.

Vujačić (Chapter 3) and Milivojević and Barlovac (Chapter 4) show how Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister of Serbia, framed himself as a victim of the crisis, suffering from the incompetence of the institutions and their staff surrounding him. His electorally popular strategy and his increasing control over the media allowed him to avoid blame for any shortcomings in Serbia’s flood preparedness (Chapter 4). The media coverage of Vučić’s rants from the rubble even made his electoral support rise (Chapter 3).

The increasing support for the Prime Minister and the measures he took in the slipstream of the crisis considerably strengthened his position at the expense of democratic institutions and constitutional rights (Chapter 3).

Crisis Communication

Both communication within the response network and communication with citizens is of vital importance during crises. Failing communication infrastructure, combined with great uncertainty, peak demand and a multitude of actors and channels involved impede effective, coherent and coordinated communication efforts. Crisis communication to citizens should inform (the facts), explain (what is being done about the situation) and advise (what can citizens do themselves) (Drabek, 2001; Fearn-Banks, 2007). One of the most important criteria for crisis communication is that it should be consistent and uniform (Coombs and Holladay, 2009). As soon as public authorities start to contradict each other in communication to citizens, they create room for rumour, increased uncertainty and a decline of trust. This is where communication between responsible actors and communication with citizens comes together. Leadership in crisis requires professional cooperation to disseminate timely and correct information publicly, with one voice.

The crucial importance of unambiguous public communication motivated the political executives of the BiH entity Republika Srpska to impose military command over the city of Doboj. According to Majstorović and Vučković (Chapter 5) President Milorad Dodik appointed former general Zec to oversee civil protection and flood management in the city in order to silence the deviating rhetoric from Mayor Petrović who proclaimed ethnic solidarity and unity between his city and the adjacent ethnic Bosnian communities.

In Serbia, public authorities' efforts to communicate clearly and unambiguously to citizens were instrumental to their political ambitions. The Prime Minister of Serbia (Vučić) gave a commercial TV station exclusive rights to report from the city Obrenovac, bypassing public broadcaster RTS and forcing all media to adopt his political rhetoric as the dominant interpretation of the situation (Milivojević and Barlovac, Chapter 4).

In sum, much of the effort to communicate effectively to citizens with one voice was inspired by political exploitation: "the purposeful utilization

of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office-holders and public policies" (Boin *et al.*, 2009, p. 83). Overall the chapters give the impression that the authorities did not prioritize fine tuning crisis communication in terms of information and actionable advice to citizens because they were so overwhelmed by the situation and they lacked the most basic resources such as boats and shovels (Chapters 2, 3 and Appendix 2).

Rendering Accountability

Disruptive events such as crises and disasters immediately invoke questions of responsibility and accountability. The social contract between citizens and the state implies that the state will protect its citizens in exchange for the monopoly on violence. When citizens feel such protection has been lacking, they will most likely hold the state to account. "Rendering accountability does not only satisfy legal and moral requirements, it also allows for the restoration of trust in the functioning of public institutions" (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 86). Crisis research reveals how leaders often take a defensive stance in response to public scrutiny (Boin *et al.*, 2017; Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Resodihardjo *et al.*, 2016).

What societies need after crisis is a public account of how the crisis came about and reassurance that the same "collapse of precautions" cannot happen again (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014; cf. Turner, 1976). In addition, political leadership sometimes employs exceptional mandates to govern during crisis but this should be balanced in the aftermath by a transparent and constructive accountability process (Boin *et al.*, 2013).

Vujačić, in his account of the leadership by Serbian Prime Minister Vučić, argues that the Prime Minister's use of exceptional crisis response mandates during the floods of May 2014 negatively affected the country's democratic transformation in the long run (Chapter 3). In the years after the crisis, Serbia's independent media rating declined, as well as Serbia's scores on the National Democratic Government index in the years, 2015, 2016 and 2017 (cf. Chapter 3).

In the wake of the floods, some areas received much more government support for their recovery than others. Some municipalities did not receive aid at all because they were governed by political opposition parties. Despite evident failures such as the lack of communication

between different water management authorities and local governments on the imminent flood threat and the absence of resources (shovels, boats, sandbags) and disorganization of available local volunteer capacity, the crisis strengthened the power of incumbent authorities in the aftermath (Chapter 3).

Kapidžić *et al.* (Chapter 2) conclude in their comparative analysis, that some public leaders performed better than others but they consider all the crisis responses examples of blameworthy failure on the part of the responsible authorities. The crisis sparked off a trail of blame games in each of the countries, with the different authorities blaming each other for apparent shortcomings in crisis preparedness and during the flood response. Yet none of the high officials had to resign after the crisis (Chapter 2). The flood crisis may even have slowed down the democratization processes of each country studied, with fragile democracies backsliding in terms of transparency, human rights and corruption (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 7).

Learning

Given the intrinsic uncertainties of crises, pragmatic crisis leaders will to some extent learn through trial and error what works during the response (Bartenberger, forthcoming). After the crisis, lessons learned in the disaster response need to be preserved and executives need to learn lessons on how to prevent future crises from occurring (Stern, 1997). Effective learning “takes into account different factors at different levels, such as human error, organizational culture, regulation and system characteristics” (Boin *et al.*, 2013, p. 86). Leadership should enable learning processes by regularly reflecting on the chosen strategies during the response, by actively inviting and incorporating feedback and by logging decision making, including their contemporary information and reasoning to facilitate post hoc inquiries.

The studies emphasize the extent to which national and local authorities were overwhelmed by the suddenness, impact and scope of the disaster, the lack of crucial information and physical resources during the crisis response and the political tensions that hampered cooperation and coordination among authorities (Chapters 2 and Appendix 2). These challenges hampered deliberation and feedback during the crisis and thus impeded learning through trial and error. The conclusions regarding accountability (above) in the different studies in this book are pessimistic

with respect to the ability of the institutions involved to learn from the shortcomings demonstrated. If the authorities ignore or deny failure, or deflect responsibility and accountability in the aftermath, they are most likely not learning either.

Kornfein Groš (Chapter 7) concludes from her comparative analysis that – of the three cases – Croatia’s crisis management system functioned best, while Serbia suffered from most problems at the outset but showed most evidence of policy learning in terms of improving its policies and institutions in the aftermath of the crisis. Bosnia and Herzegovina not only struggled in providing an effective crisis response but the state also faced considerable challenges in the efficient allocation of international financial aid (Chapter 7). Financial aid from the European Union had most impact on policy change in the three states, because EU aid is conditional upon the implementation of EU directives and institutional improvements. Kornfein shows how the institutional fabric, fragility of existing democratic governance and national status in terms of EU membership (Croatia: full member, Serbia: negotiating, Bosnia: candidate) affect the adoption of policy changes. Existing institutional capacity (in Croatia) positively influenced policy learning and institutional improvements and so did the combination of EU influence and the exposed shortcomings in the disaster response (in Serbia) (Chapter 7).

The case studies confirm that existing capacity, both in terms of democratic governance and in terms of institutional and social capital, also affected the ability of societies to absorb shocks, respond to disruptive events and recover from them. Kornfein Groš reports how, according to international NGOs, authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina could only account for 54% of its spending of the financial aid. This means that 46% leaked away: unaccounted for and probably not spent on recovery measures to the benefit of the Bosnian population. Kornfein Groš (Chapter 7) relates this problem to the fragility of democratic institutions in Bosnia, in line with claims regarding clientelism and its effect by other authors in this book (Kapidžić *et al.* in Chapter 2; Vujačić in Chapter 3). Stronger public institutions and adherence to democratic values are required to enhance disaster resilience and the capacity to rebuild and recover in the long run.

The floods in May 2014 triggered a remarkable effort by ordinary citizens to help neighbours in need, support adjacent communities and contribute to local efforts to clean up and rebuild, across ethnopolitical boundaries (Chapters 5 and 6). The effect of social engagement at the

community level plays a central role in the analysis of proactive citizen responses in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Adnan Efendić (Chapter 6). Efendić concludes that, besides personal characteristics (gender, income, level of education), the social networks and interethnic contacts of citizens prior to the crisis positively influenced their solidarity and support for fellow citizens in response to the crisis. Best practices supported by statistical analysis provide positive lessons on investing in the social fabric of society (sports clubs, community building, volunteer networks) to improve societal resilience prior to crises.

Conclusion

The cases from the Western Balkans yield important lessons on crisis leadership in governing floods. The cases show the challenges that leaders faced in dealing with structural underinvestment in flood protection and emergency preparedness and the resulting lack of resources. The flood experiences reveal the impediments to early warning and sense making when authorities at different levels do not share information or take responsibility in acting upon signs of emerging threats. The floods show how, in addition to executive leadership, existing resources and institutional capacity are indispensable for effective and sustainable crisis governance. Behind every great crisis leader there must be an institutional machinery that enables a decisive response. Meanwhile, the chapters reveal that individual leaders can have a major impact on citizens' perceptions regarding government performance through political framing – for better and for worse. In the face of structural complications in crisis preparedness and response, leadership can invoke or impede solidarity and resilience among citizens of all ethnic backgrounds in highly divided societies. To prevent the abuse of power requires a transparent and constructive accountability process governed by democratic institutions.

Many authors in this book conclude that governing future floods would benefit from improved governance capacity on other aspects than crisis management: building stronger government institutions, strengthening democracy, combating clientelism and corruption, merit-based staffing in (semi)government organizations and an increased role for

experts in sense making and decision making. Natural disasters will continue to occur and rivers will always threaten to flood residential areas but improved crisis leadership, combined with vigilant public sector organizations and structural investment in public goods such as flood protection and preparedness could spare the Western Balkan citizens situations such as the May 2014 floods.

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