

Thursday 19 June 2008

European Union's disaster response capacity

P6_TA(2008)0304

European Parliament resolution of 19 June 2008 on stepping up the Union's disaster response capacity

(2009/C 286 E/04)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 174 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on reinforcing the Union's disaster response capacity (COM(2008)0130),
- having regard to the report by Michel Barnier, of 9 May 2006, entitled 'For a European civil protection force: Europe aid',
- having regard to point 12 of the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006 concerning the Union's responsiveness to emergencies, crises and disasters,
- having regard to the Council Conclusions of December 2007 on the development and the establishment of early-warning systems in general and an early-warning system in particular for tsunamis in the North-East Atlantic and the Mediterranean region,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on natural and man-made disasters both within and outside the European Union, which called on the Commission and the Member States to work towards closer cooperation on civil protection measures in the event of natural disasters with a view to preventing and minimising their devastating impact, in particular by making available additional civil protection resources,
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2005)0108), and to Parliament's position at first reading of 18 May 2006 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the European Consensus on humanitarian aid jointly adopted by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on 18 December 2007 ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets in the event of disaster (Oslo Guidelines), as revised on 27 November 2006,
- having regard to the March 2003 Guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets to support United Nations humanitarian activities in complex emergencies (MCDA Guidelines),
- having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 297 E, 7.12.2006, p. 331.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, p. 1.

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- A. whereas natural and man-made disasters, such as floods, causing significant human, economic, environmental and cultural harm are on the increase, making it necessary to step up not only the EU-level response, but also prevention and recovery measures,
- B. whereas problems with forest fires and droughts will become increasingly acute, with extremely dry summers growing more and more common, and whereas previous years' and recent experience highlights the need to step up Community civil protection prevention, preparedness and response capability in connection with forest fires and other wildfires,
- C. whereas no guidelines for prevention of forest fires exist today at EU level,
- D. whereas Member States remain responsible for maintaining land use policies that do not give perverse incentives for human induced forest fires in order to change land status,
- E. whereas the Commission Green Paper on adapting to climate change in Europe (COM(2007)0354) stresses that climate change will bring about an increase in extreme weather events in Europe, which will lead to increased risks of harm to people, infrastructure and the environment,
- F. whereas stepping up the Union's capacity to deal with disasters requires an approach encompassing disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery at national, European and international levels,
- G. whereas the high number of fires in southern Europe in 2007, as well as their extent, is the result of a number of factors, including climate change, an inadequate definition and inadequate care of forests and a combination of natural causes and human negligence, but also of criminal activities, and whereas a number of forest fires in the spring of 2008 should raise the alarm that similar incidents could be repeated in the coming summer,
- H. whereas there is a need for improved coordination between the Council, the Commission and the Member States regarding not only preventative action, but the full disaster cycle up to the final stages of recovery, in close association with Parliament,
- I. whereas today's disasters are often of a cross-border nature and require multilateral and coordinated responses; taking into consideration at the same time the damaging economic and social consequences of natural disasters for regional economies, productive activity and tourism,
- J. whereas, in a world of more frequent and severe natural disasters, with the severest impacts on the poorest people, EU actors must work together to ensure effective delivery of humanitarian aid to victims and to reduce vulnerability,
- K. whereas the lack of common alert signals and protocols is also a major concern in view of the growing mobility of citizens across the EU and third countries,
- L. whereas the EU needs to acknowledge the specific nature of natural disasters occurring in the form of Mediterranean droughts and fires and to adapt its prevention, research, risk management, civil defence and solidarity tools accordingly,
 - 1. Welcomes the abovementioned Commission Communication on reinforcing the Union's disaster response capacity as well as the overall objective of greater coherence, effectiveness and visibility of the EU disaster response;
 - 2. Considers that stepping up its disaster prevention and response capacity is a high-priority policy objective for the Union and that all means should be mobilised to achieve this objective, especially with regard to the heavy floods experienced in recent years;

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3. Stresses that the Commission's approach to natural and man-made disasters occurring in the EU or in third countries should be entirely coherent and consistent with its Communication on Europe's climate change opportunity (COM(2008)0030) and its proposal on the effort of Member States to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to meet the Community's greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments up to 2020; emphasises that climate change is a key factor in the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, and that environmental policy and climate change legislation must be pillars of the Union's disaster response capacity in order to prevent further damage to people, infrastructure and the environment;
4. Considers that coherence and coordination between different policy areas and institutions at local, regional, national and EU level will lead to more effective, integrated and visible EU disaster management;
5. Considers that cooperation with the candidate countries and potential candidate countries with a view to improving their capacity for preventing and coping with disasters and support to regional cooperation are in the mutual interest of the EU and the countries concerned, and should therefore be developed and strengthened in a way that ensures complementarity and avoids duplication with existing bilateral, regional and international initiatives;
6. Stresses that work planned by the Commission to develop a knowledge base on disaster scenarios, capacities needed and available, and the impacts of various options to fill any identified gaps should not be used to delay important proposals for the protection of people, property and the environment from disasters;
7. Stresses that the Commission's approach should cover the full disaster cycle from prevention to recovery, and natural disasters, including extreme droughts, and man-made disasters occurring in the Union or in third countries, and that further work is needed in the areas covered in the abovementioned Commission communication;
8. Welcomes the Commission's presentation of an action plan for the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, as an important contribution to efficient, well-coordinated and reinforced European humanitarian aid;
9. Stresses the importance of strengthening the global response capacity, and therefore acknowledges the role of key humanitarian actors such as the UN, the Red Cross movement and NGOs in third-country disaster-prone areas;
10. Recalls that the use in third countries of civil protection resources and military assets in response to humanitarian situations must be in line with existing international guidelines such as the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, in particular to safeguard compliance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence; underlines that, where deployed in a humanitarian crisis, the use of civil protection resources should be needs-driven and complementary to and coherent with humanitarian aid;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to address not only risk-based approaches to prepare for extreme events, but also to address ways of reducing vulnerability at EU policy level through appropriate planning and risk reduction measures in due time, taking due account, where appropriate, of environmental and climate change policies and legislation;
12. Reiterates that the sole aim of Community humanitarian aid and civil protection assistance provided to third countries is to prevent or relieve human suffering and should always be based on the needs of victims alone and in accordance with the fundamental humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-discrimination;

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13. Calls on the Commission to present proposals as a matter of urgency, and no later than the end of 2008, regarding disaster prevention within the Union, together with an EU strategy for disaster risk reduction in developing countries;

14. Draws attention to the fact that the EU will support preparatory activities conducted at local level in the context of humanitarian operations and will incorporate disaster risk reduction into its development policy;

15. Regrets that the proposal made by former Commissioner Michel Barnier to create a European civil protection force remains a dead letter and highlights the need, in this context, to pursue the development of a rapid response capacity on the basis of the civil protection modules of Member States, in accordance with the mandate issued by the European Council meeting of 15 and 16 June 2006, and calls on the Commission to develop a specific proposal to that end;

16. Deplores the fact that the Council appears to have reached a decision not to proceed with the adoption of the new EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) regulation, despite the strong support of Parliament for the revision of the existing instrument; reminds the Council that Parliament adopted its position by an overwhelming majority at first reading in May 2006, and that the relevant dossier has been blocked in the Council for more than two years; reiterates its conviction that the new EUSF regulation, which — among other measures — lowers the thresholds for the mobilisation of the Fund, will put the Union in a better position to address damage caused by disasters in a more effective, flexible and timely manner; strongly urges the European Council to take a decision not to reject this regulation and to request the immediate revision of the current EUSF;

17. Calls on the Commission to mobilise, when appropriate, the current EUSF in the most flexible manner possible and without delay; considers that, in the event of a natural disaster, it is of paramount importance that the necessary EUSF resources be made available immediately for the purpose of relieving the suffering and satisfying the needs of victims and their immediate families;

18. Calls on the Commission to carry out more research geared to improving forest fire prevention and forest fire-fighting methods and materials and to review planning and land use; urges the Member States, therefore, to take strong action to improve and implement their forest protection legislative framework and to abstain from commercialisation, reclassification and privatisation activities, thus limiting intrusion and speculation; considers that all available EU know-how, including satellite systems, should be used to this end;

19. Urges the Commission to submit a package of legally binding instruments (e.g. a framework directive) with a view to filling in gaps in existing EU legislation, policies and programmes as regards disaster prevention and response;

20. Recommends that such a comprehensive framework should comprise three pillars regarding prevention, with a view to stepping up prevention under existing EU mechanisms and Member State approaches, developing a new framework approach on disaster prevention and supporting further development of prevention knowledge and technology through EU research and development programmes;

21. Recommends that the proposals regarding stepping up the overall EU response capacity include the setting-up of key resources that have a guaranteed availability for participating in European civil protection operations at any time; states that this should be based primarily on national capacities and, where necessary, include arrangements with other parties;

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22. Calls on the Commission to make the best use of the 2008 pilot project on forest fires and of preparatory action on a rapid reaction capability to experiment with operational arrangements with the Member States and other parties that make response capacities available at all times for European civil protection operations, and considers that this will provide important experience for future legislative proposals;
23. Supports activities aimed at enhancing Member States' civil protection preparedness, notably through exchange of experts and best practices, exercises and preparedness projects;
24. Reiterates the call made to the Commission in its resolution of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (fires, droughts and floods) ⁽¹⁾ to put forward a directive on preventing and managing fires, to include the regular collection of data, preparation of maps and identification of areas at risk, preparation of fire risk management plans, identification by the Member States of the resources allocated and facilities available, coordination of the various administrations, minimum requirements for training crews, establishment of environmental responsibility and penalties;
25. Urges the Council without further delay to adopt a decision on the proposed regulation establishing the EU Solidarity Fund in order to provide a better definition of the criteria and of the eligible events, including droughts, and hence enable damage caused by natural disasters to be countered more effectively, flexibly, and swiftly, bearing in mind also that Parliament adopted its position as long ago as May 2006;
26. Considers that, in order to ensure the necessary integration of prevention and disaster risk reduction into the Structural and Cohesion Funds programmes, existing guidelines should be strengthened and new guidelines should be developed; calls, in particular, for conditionality in the contribution from Community financial instruments and repayment of Community aid in the event of improper use such as non-fulfilment of reforestation plans and/or other compulsory conditions; calls, furthermore, for prevention awareness-raising and education measures to be financed under Community programmes;
27. Believes that the Commission's proposals to step up the EU's disaster response capacity should make full use of expertise relating to the geographical location of outermost regions and overseas countries and territories;
28. Urges the Member States, and particularly those most affected by natural disasters, to make optimal use of the funding opportunities provided under the Structural Funds and other Community funds in the current programming period 2007-2013 and to integrate, when appropriate, prevention activities and projects as priority actions within the relevant Operational Programmes;
29. Believes that the procedures for mobilisation of the Solidarity Fund need to be reviewed in order to speed up payment of aid; considers, in particular, that to that end a system of advance payments based on initial estimates of direct damage could be developed, whereby further payments depend on the definite calculations of total direct damage and evidence of prevention measures taken as a result of the disaster;
30. Emphasises the urgency of strengthening the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) with the human and material resources necessary to enable it actively to support the operations launched by the Member States under the Community Civil Protection Mechanism;
31. Urges the Commission to assess a wide range of options for setting up a sustainable European disaster response training network, covering all phases of disaster management, and to present proposals for such a structure as soon as possible; calls, moreover, for further enhancement both of the preparedness of civil protection services and of the capacity of teams and modules from different Member States to work together;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 297 E, 7.12.2006, p. 375.

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32. Recalls the Council Conclusions of December 2007 on the development and establishment of Early Warning Systems in the EU and on the establishment of an Early Warning System for tsunamis in the North East Atlantic and the Mediterranean region, and reaffirms the need for the Member States and the Commission to take forward initiatives to improve early warning systems and alert signals for disasters;
33. Asks the Commission to include the issue of adequate EU funding for disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in its proposals for the budgetary review 2008/2009;
34. Calls on the Commission to ensure the efficiency of the single European emergency number 112;
35. Calls for the specific nature of natural disasters occurring in the Mediterranean, such as drought and forest fires, to be acknowledged at Community level and for Community prevention, research, risk-management, civil-defence and solidarity tools to be adapted accordingly so as to improve the response to this type of disaster in each Member State;
36. Urges that due recognition be given to the need for more Community funding for prevention measures;
37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the parliaments of the Member States.
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Fortieth anniversary of the Customs Union

P6_TA(2008)0305

European Parliament resolution of 19 June 2008 on the fortieth anniversary of the Customs Union

(2009/C 286 E/05)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the recent adoption of Regulation (EC) No 450/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 laying down the Community Customs Code (Modernised Customs Code) ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 70/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2008 on a paperless environment for customs and trade ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 624/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007 establishing an action programme for customs in the Community (Customs 2013) ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission entitled 'Strategy for the evolution of the Customs Union' (COM(2008)0169),
- having regard to its resolution of 5 June 2008 on implementing trade policy through efficient import and export rules and procedures ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the report of its Committee of Inquiry into the Community Transit System (January 1996 to March 1997),

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 145, 4.6.2008, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 23, 26.1.2008, p. 21.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 154, 14.6.2007, p. 25.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2008)0247.