

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Towards a stronger European disaster response'**

(2011/C 192/04)

## THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- underlines the importance of local and regional authorities in civil protection matters. These authorities are often at the forefront of efforts to deal with natural and man-made disasters and must therefore, as a matter of urgency, be involved in developments in this area, especially given that in a large number of Member States' legislative powers are organised on a local or regional basis;
- underscores the importance of the EU's commitment to supporting the measures taken by Member States. The damage caused by previous natural and man-made disasters shows there is still some need for improvement in Member States; there is also room for further improvement in transnational and interregional cooperation. It is here that the EU can make a valuable contribution to even more effective and efficient cooperation, above all by improving coordination;
- points out, however, that civil protection is essentially a task for Member States and their regional and local bodies, whose authority should not be infringed upon;
- emphasises that the TFEU states a supporting, coordinating and supplementary role in the area of disaster response. Therefore, the civil protection mechanism monitoring centres (MIC) have a coordinating role, whereas the EU neither has the competences concerning the establishment of own units, nor taking over the leadership of units and other resources provided by Member States. All planning and measures must be adjusted and carried out in accordance with the requirements, enabling Member States to implement the subsidiarity principle;
- adheres to the principles of solidarity, cooperation, coordination and support among the EU's Member States, regions and local authorities in the area of civil protection and agrees with the Commission's view that there is a need for even more consistency and efficiency and a higher profile if the goal of a more integrated EU disaster-response capacity is to be achieved

<b>Rapporteur</b>	Mr Norbert KARTMANN (DE/EPP), Member of the Hesse <i>Landtag</i>
<b>Reference document</b>	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council entitled 'Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance'  COM(2010) 600 final.

## I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### General considerations

1. welcomes the Commission's plan to make the disaster response policy more consistent and develop a balanced Community concept of civil protection for the EU, as already called for by the CoR <sup>(1)</sup>;

2. underlines the importance of local and regional authorities in civil protection matters. These authorities are often at the forefront of efforts to deal with natural and man-made disasters and must therefore, as a matter of urgency, be involved in developments in this area, especially given that in a large number of Member States' legislative powers are organised on a local or regional basis;

3. reaffirms, especially in the light of the disaster in Japan, the importance of an effective support system with short response times for the protection of the population, which can only be guaranteed at regional and local level; stresses the call set out in the resolution of the Committee of the Regions on: 'The consequences of the natural disaster in Japan: lessons for the European Union' (CdR 123/2011) for a debate on key security issues in the light of the findings from Japan and the need to take into account the latest research in the field; calls on the Member States and regions to examine their existing plans for disaster prevention on the basis of these findings and revise them where necessary;

4. welcomes the clarification from the Commission that Europe's disaster response capacity should be strengthened on the basis of the units and forces made available by Member States. The CoR supports the Commission's strategy to build on existing structures to pool resources even more effectively and to coordinate their use, without creating any additional administrative burden in the process. Better coordination may achieve even more effective outcomes for people afflicted by disasters;

5. adheres to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and prevention in civil protection activities;

6. underscores the importance of the EU's commitment to supporting the measures taken by Member States. The damage caused by previous natural and man-made disasters shows there is still some need for improvement in Member States; there is also room for further improvement in transnational and inter-regional cooperation. It is here that the EU can make a valuable contribution to even more effective and efficient cooperation, above all by improving coordination;

7. stresses the significance of this issue in the light of climate change: the frequency and severity of natural disasters are alarming; floods, droughts and forest fires, as well as damage caused by cold and snow, in particular pose a growing danger;

8. similarly, stresses the importance of this issue in the context of other natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes which, as shown by the statistics, affect and will continue to affect southern Europe and Turkey and even central Europe at varying intervals;

9. points out that the Treaty of Lisbon has introduced a solidarity clause (Article 222 TFEU), which stipulates that the EU and its Member States help each other in the event of natural or man-made disasters on the territory of the EU. Furthermore, the Committee of the Regions welcomes the strengthening of the coordinating role of the EU according to the subsidiarity principle and the promotion of the cooperation and mutual assistance among Member States under Article 6(2)(f) cf. Article 2(5) TFEU and 196 TFEU;

#### Evaluating shortcomings

10. explains that the starting point for further measures to improve disaster response and crisis reaction capacity is a structured analysis of both the status quo and any shortcomings, so that possible tailor-made solutions can be developed;

11. emphasises that identifying and compiling an inventory of available resources in Member States is important in this connection. In addition to measures to enhance coordination and availability, steps should be taken to check where there are gaps in resources and where Member States have a concrete need for EU support to improve their provisions. Implementing measures should be based on substantiated evaluation results;

<sup>(1)</sup> CdR 139/2009 fin.

### Modules for a European disaster response

12. supports the Commission's efforts to develop advance planning systems in addition to the current concept of 'ad hoc' assistance to Member States;

13. shares the Commission's view that developing reference scenarios, identifying and compiling an inventory of available national resources on the basis of these scenarios and stepping up exercises are useful measures if we are to be able to use existing resources even more effectively and efficiently for the purpose of civil protection and test or supplement them in good time. Emergency plans for such scenarios might also be a useful tool here;

14. acknowledges the Commission's efforts to further improve the disaster response capacity. This should be achieved by further developing the Community procedure, which has essentially proven to be reliable;

### Principles of civil protection: solidarity, subsidiarity and prevention

15. strongly supports the principle of solidarity and mutual assistance in disaster situations, as demonstrated in a large number of transnational and bilateral agreements and actual assistance between regions. The various forms of cooperation among regions across national borders show that regions also make a significant contribution to rapid disaster relief. This successful cooperation also contains the common aim of creating risk maps as well as an assessment of potential threats. Regions have a key role to play here because they are especially affected when it comes to natural disasters and therefore, they have built up civil protection services and gained experiences that can be exported to neighbouring third countries; namely outermost regions have acquired valuable experiences which can be transferred to surrounding regions;

16. stresses Member States' own responsibilities in this area and the regulation of the EU's legal powers under Article 196 TFEU, as recently highlighted by the Council for General Affairs in its conclusions of 14 December 2010 <sup>(2)</sup>;

17. reiterates that support should also be given to those Member States and regions repeatedly afflicted by natural disasters so that they are better equipped to respond to disaster situations swiftly and effectively;

18. is of the opinion that EU support for eliminating any shortcomings in individual areas should be based on enabling Member States themselves to increase and extend disaster prevention capacities in their own countries in accordance with the EU's adopted standards and requirements;

19. emphasises that the TFEU states a supporting, coordinating and supplementary role in the area of disaster response. Therefore, the civil protection mechanism monitoring centres (MIC) have a coordinating role, whereas the EU neither has the competences concerning the establishment of own units, nor taking over the leadership of units and other resources provided by Member States. All planning and measures must be adjusted and carried out in accordance with the requirements, enabling Member States to implement the subsidiarity principle;

20. notes that units and institutions at local and regional level in Member States have a key role to play in the way civil protection is set up. Swift, effective disaster response is most usefully provided by national, regional and local forces. Only by developing a comprehensive network of appropriate precautions can disasters be dealt with quickly and effectively and their impact kept to a minimum. Experience in dealing with current disasters (forest fires and floods) has highlighted the importance of a rapid, firm response for dealing with disasters successfully;

21. continues to believe, moreover, that intensive cooperation between regions and areas exposed to a common threat is essential. As the competent and responsible bodies for effective and efficient civil protection at the scene of any disaster, the regions would in this connection reiterate their special transnational commitment to solidarity. There are currently a number of cross-border agreements and aid arrangements committing regions to mutual assistance and forming the basis for successful cooperation. The regions have already proven in a large number of cases that they are able to put these agreements into practice. The need to create a risk map as well as an assessment of potential threats can be of great value in terms of practical matters;

22. explains that more effective comprehensive civil protection at the scene of a disaster can also be achieved primarily with the help of volunteers. Strengthening voluntary structures therefore constitutes an effective contribution to improving regional disaster response capacities. The CoR calls on the Commission to provide increased support in future to developing and expanding voluntary civil protection structures in those regions where there is a demand. The current European Year of Volunteering should be used to support Member States in their efforts to develop the appropriate structures;

23. acknowledges that, especially in light of the growing threat of natural disasters caused by climate change, the subject of prevention is gaining huge importance. The EU should therefore step up its activities in this area and, in particular, support regions to take the necessary measures to prevent disasters from occurring in the first place or to keep their impact to a minimum. Experience with forest fire disasters in southern European countries has shown how successful preventive measures can be and how important they are;

<sup>(2)</sup> Conclusions of the Council for General Affairs, 3060. Meeting of 14 December 2010.

### Principles of humanitarian aid measures

24. on the strength of organisational and legal agreements between regions (parties) advocates the use of synergies arising from the planned measures to strengthen the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) as the institution which coordinates civil protection and humanitarian assistance operations. However, steps must be taken to ensure that the legal and structural differences between these two areas are maintained;

25. supports efforts to coordinate humanitarian aid measures more closely with international governmental and non-governmental aid organisations. In stepping up cooperation and through the possibilities to use the IT databases of individual parties (regions), the development of duplicate structures should be avoided. This applies in particular to setting up arrangements for the EU's own relief goods storage. Furthermore, in matters pertaining to aid in kind, synergies should be sought between aid provided by Member States and humanitarian assistance financed by the EU and coordination should be sought with all the other actors, especially the regions, in order to increase the effectiveness of such assistance;

26. recalls that the geostrategic position of some regions, including the outermost regions, makes them key European actors in terms of emergency humanitarian intervention outside the EU, as demonstrated by recent actions such as the intervention in Haiti;

27. believes that a key task is to raise the profile of disaster response and humanitarian assistance work in future. This not only helps to inform Europeans about the EU's response to disasters and strengthen the Community politically as a responsible, reliable international partner, it is also an appropriate way of giving the many helpers, who make such intervention possible in the first place, additional motivation for their efforts. The development of a common communication strategy, supported by IT tools and e-pages (databases of capacities and resources) is an important element for raising the profile of such intervention. This communication strategy should also illustrate the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and aid structures;

28. points to experience with current international disaster relief operations, which have shown that a key factor in effective assistance is rapid, red-tape-free availability of transport capacity. With a view to optimising international relief operations, the CoR therefore particularly welcomes the proposals to increase co-financing of transport costs. Furthermore, there should be an analysis of how the provision and coordination of relevant transport capacity can be improved. Ways must be found here to enable aid providers to deliver aid to afflicted regions quickly with a minimum of red tape, without incurring additional transport costs. The goal must be to ensure that, as far as possible, those already providing the necessary resources incur fewer transport costs;

29. recommends that successful inter-regional cooperation specifically relating to the respective national prevention

measures should continue to be promoted and supported; points out that the INTERREG initiative has proved to be extremely effective in the exchange of tried and tested practices in the prevention of natural disasters in precisely such cross-border contexts. The establishment of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) can further improve the implementation of disaster-prevention measures in the areas of shared databases, exercises, risk assessment and early warning systems, as well as technology transfer and exchange of experts;

30. welcomes the Commission's request that available resources should be used as effectively as possible and that there should be no additional financial and bureaucratic burdens. This is particularly important for local and regional authorities which, despite their extensive knowledge about disaster preparedness and response, have to make do with a limited budget. This applies above all to humanitarian relief operations, for which there are no special funds available at local and regional authority level, as these do not fall within these authorities' original remit;

### Reinforcing the MIC and the way it operates

31. welcomes the plans to strengthen the MIC as the body that coordinates both disaster relief operations within the Community's territory and humanitarian operations outside the EU, particularly in those countries most vulnerable to disasters and with the lowest so-called 'Human Development Index' of the United Nations. However, it should be borne in mind that there are no plans for the centre also to assume operational responsibilities. Operational responsibility must remain with aid providers, who are best placed to exercise this responsibility;

### Concluding remarks

32. adheres to the principles of solidarity, cooperation, coordination and support among the EU's Member States, regions and local authorities in the area of civil protection<sup>(3)</sup> and agrees with the Commission's view that there is a need for even more consistency and efficiency and a higher profile if the goal of a more integrated EU disaster-response capacity is to be achieved;

33. points out, however, that civil protection is essentially a task for Member States and their regional and local bodies, whose authority should not be infringed upon;

34. welcomes therefore, in light of the EU's powers under Article 6(2)(f) cf. Article 2(5) TFEU and Article 196 TFEU, the fact that the Commission has not taken up the request to establish a European civil protection force;

<sup>(3)</sup> See CdR 116/2006 fin.

35. supports the Commission's efforts to develop an overall Community concept in order to regulate disaster preparedness, response and recovery in accordance with the treaties.

Brussels, 11 May 2011.

*The President  
of the Committee of the Regions*  
Mercedes BRESSO

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