EU rapid response capability

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European Parliament recommendation to the Council of 14 December 2010 on setting up an EU rapid response capability (2010/2096(INI))

(2012/C 169 E/21)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Article 196 of the Lisbon Treaty which states that 'the Union shall encourage cooperation between Member States in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural or man-made disasters' and that 'Union action shall aim to promote consistency in international civil-protection work',

— having regard to Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which states that the Union's operations in the field of humanitarian aid are intended to provide 'assistance and relief and protection for people in third countries who are victims of natural or man-made disasters' and that its operations shall be 'conducted in compliance with the principles of international law and with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination',

— having regard to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid jointly signed in December 2007 by the Presidents of the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission, and the Action Plan presented by the Commission in May 2008 for the implementation of the consensus,

— having regard to the Council conclusions of December 2007 inviting the Commission to make the best use of the Community Civil Protection mechanism and to further strengthen cooperation between Member States,

— 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 Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament of 23 February 2009 on an 'EU strategy for supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries',
— having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council of March 2008 on ‘Reinforcing the Union’s Disaster Response Capacity’ (COM(2008) 0130) and the European Parliament resolution of 19 June 2008 on stepping up the Union’s disaster response capacity (1),

— having regard to the report of 9 May 2006 by Michel Barnier entitled ‘For a European civil protection force: europe aid’,

— having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 10 February 2010 on the recent earthquake in Haiti (2),

— having regard to its resolution of 21 September 2010 on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters,

— having regard to the proposal for a recommendation to the Council of 23 March 2010 on setting up an EU rapid response capability, presented by Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Charles Goerens, Louis Michel, Marielle De Sarnez and Frédérique Ries on behalf of the ALDE Group pursuant to Rule 121(1) of the Rules of Procedure (B7-0228/2010),

— having regard to Rule 121(3) of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Development and the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A7-0332/2010),

A. whereas disasters causing significant human, economic and environmental damage are on the increase worldwide; whereas such crises are happening with greater impact, frequency and scope in more parts of the world, mainly due to the effects of climate change; and whereas the European Union is making considerable efforts to respond to these crises,

B. whereas the multiplication and greater frequency of interventions inside and outside the European Union are compounded by the global financial situation and budgetary constraints which underline the need for more cost effective operations,

C. whereas sharing of resources among the 31 states that are members of the Community civil protection mechanism (EU-27, Norway, Lichtenstein, Croatia, Iceland), or in the context of enhanced cooperation between Member States, can represent an operational and financial asset,

D. whereas the Commission’s budget for humanitarian disasters, and specifically that of DG ECHO, has not merely been frozen but has fallen slightly in real terms over the last five years,

E. whereas progress has been made in recent years towards a more coherent EU disaster response, notably through progressive strengthening of the civil protection mechanism, better interaction/coordination between civil protection and humanitarian aid, and the recognition that an integrated approach to disaster management involves not only response but also prevention and preparedness,

F. whereas the European Union’s response to the earthquake in Haiti triggered not only a rapid, significant and large scale humanitarian aid intervention but also the activation of the civil protection mechanism which was able to deploy immediately and for the first time two modules (a water purification unit and an advanced medical post) financed through a 2008 Preparatory Action for an EU rapid response capability,

(1) OJ C 286 E, 27.11.2009, p. 15.
G. whereas lessons learned from recent crises continue to demonstrate the need to improve the EU's disaster response in terms of efficiency, coordination and visibility, and whereas these disasters have once again highlighted the need for an EU rapid response capability (European civil protection force),

H. whereas the EU's capacity to protect citizens' lives and property is a decisive factor for its credibility,

1. Addresses the following recommendations to the Council:

(a) acknowledges that the inclusion of civil protection and humanitarian aid within the portfolio of a single Commissioner responsible for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response creates better synergies within the Commission and helps enhance the coherence of the overall EU disaster response;

(b) calls for greater integration between civil protection and humanitarian working methodologies within DG ECHO, while preserving their specific features by maintaining a clear distinction and demarcation of roles between them, in order to maximize synergies and complementarities and to enhance efficiency; calls also for military and civilian personnel and humanitarian workers involved in disaster response or humanitarian operations to act in accordance with the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality;

(c) reiterates that the use of civil protection resources, where deployed in any humanitarian crisis, should be needs driven and complementary to, and coherent with, humanitarian aid, in accordance with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the United Nations guidelines (Oslo guidelines), with a view to ensuring compliance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence;

(d) insists that EU assistance in the event of natural or man-made disasters should aim, wherever possible, at helping the local economy, for example by purchasing locally or regionally produced foodstuffs as well as providing the necessary materials for farmers in order to relaunch the rural economy;

(e) asks the Council and the Commission to clarify the arrangements for cooperation and coordination between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission for the management of a large-scale disaster response outside the territory of the European Union;

(f) suggests localised coordination efforts, in cooperation with the national government of the affected state, using EU and Member States' representatives on the ground to ensure a targeted and competent response to affected localities;

(g) urges the Council to strengthen the EU's disaster response capacity as a high priority, especially in view of the discussions on setting up an EU Civil Protection Force, and to follow up the European Parliament's repeated requests that the proposals put forward in the Barnier report in 2006 should be implemented;

(h) calls for the immediate establishment of an EU Civil Protection Force which must be adequately equipped with the necessary technological and technical resources;

(i) calls also, in the context of operations following a natural disaster, for better coordination between the humanitarian agencies and the civil protection mechanisms of the Member States and DG ECHO, and any future European civil protection force;

(j) urges the Commission to develop programs with national governments, local authorities and civil society organisations in beneficiary countries with regard to community-based disaster prevention and response management capacity;
(k) encourages the Council to adopt, under the ordinary legislative procedure, measures (to be proposed by the Commission) for improving the predictability and the forward-planning capacity of the current EU civil protection mechanism, which is currently based on ad-hoc and voluntary contributions from Member States; suggests that these measures may include arrangements tested under the EU Preparatory Action including EU-level assets, voluntary pooling of resources, mapping of existing capacities, identification of scenarios and the development of further training activities;

(l) calls also for realistic budgets in which appropriations for natural disasters or humanitarian action are allocated on the basis of previous years’ spending;

(m) considers that the EU civil protection force should build on the EU Civil Protection mechanism, should optimise the tools available, which would gain in efficiency and visibility, should involve the voluntary pooling of existing logistical and human resources with regard both to disaster-response training and disaster management by developing initiatives taken during preparatory actions, and it should be capable of providing initial aid within 24 hours of the occurrence of a disaster;

(n) recommends that the EU civil protection force be based on the principles that it should:

— be based on an assessment of needs, with the participation of all humanitarian actors,

— be civilian,

— operate under the banner of the EU,

— observe international humanitarian law,

— respect the voluntary nature of the Member States’ participation in the intended arrangements,

— be based on the principle of burden-sharing,

— be open to contributions from non-EU countries,

— recognise the UN’s overall role in coordinating international relief outside the territory of the European Union,

— be organised on a preventive basis, according to specific scenarios;

(o) considers that, with particular reference to humanitarian aid operations, and based on the lessons learned from intervention in Haiti and Pakistan, the EU should, as far as possible, operate under the coordinating umbrella of the UN, concentrating on those fields where its intervention can contribute greater added value;

(p) considers that the European civil protection force could be based on a commitment by some Member States to voluntarily make available pre-determined civil protection modules that are ready to intervene immediately in EU operations coordinated by the MIC, that most of these modules, which are already available nationally and thus would not entail significant additional costs, would remain under their control, and that the deployment of these modules placed on standby would form the nucleus of the EU’s civil protection system for responding to disasters inside and outside the EU;
(q) considers that additional civil protection modules could be financed by the EU for certain specific requirements where gaps have been identified and where the European level would add value, and stresses the importance of increasing funding for transport and developing standby transport modules;

(r) underlines the need to develop a comprehensive and proactive approach in response to disasters, coordinating the various means of action available to the Union and its Member States, such as crisis management (civil and military), financial assistance and development or social and environmental policies; believes in this context that the transition between disaster response and post-disaster reconstruction should be managed more efficiently; recalls the proposal to set up a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps in accordance with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (Article 214(5)), and with a view to the European Year of Volunteering 2011 encourages the European Commission and the Council to work, together with the European Parliament, on the rules and procedures for the operation of the Corps as soon as possible, especially in the light of similar initiatives taken by some Member States;

(s) reminds the Council that the use of military assets and capabilities in disaster response, particularly for logistics, transport and infrastructure support for humanitarian aid operations, should be exceptional, used as a ‘last resort’ and always in compliance with existing agreements such as the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the Oslo guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets in international disaster relief;

(t) acknowledges that military and civil defence assets in disaster relief should be used as a last resort, in compliance with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the Oslo guidelines; recalls that military means often constitute an important contribution to disaster response, along with civil protection and humanitarian aid, and notes that military assets can be necessary for filling critical capacity gaps (particularly strategic lift, specialised assets, heavy engineering and transport); therefore stresses the need to develop a comprehensive approach and to improve synergies between civil and military capabilities, and to identify areas in which Member States can pool their efforts and capabilities at EU level to contribute to EU disaster response, which is particularly important in a difficult economic climate;

(u) emphasises the need to build up permanently available civilian capabilities in the EU which operate independently from military structures and to identify areas in which Member States can pool their efforts and capabilities at EU level in this respect;

(v) urges the Council and the Commission to cooperate on the implementation of a visibility action plan that should include concrete measures to enhance the visibility of the EU’s disaster response;

(w) encourages the utilisation of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) system to keep potential crisis areas under surveillance, allowing for better preparedness in sending humanitarian support, and stresses the critical importance of establishing a follow-up mechanism on EU efforts and assessment of deployed assistance;

(x) encourages the development of research budgets and industrial capacity (for example satellite imagery in the GMES programme) to improve disaster management phases;

(y) invites the Council to take the above recommendations into consideration when examining and reaching conclusions on the forthcoming Commission Communication on reinforcing the European Union’s Disaster Response Capacity, announced by the European Commission;

2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council and, for information, to the Commission.