

II

(Preparatory Acts)

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

58th PLENARY SESSION OF 23 AND 24 FEBRUARY 2005

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions — Flood risk management — Flood prevention, protection and mitigation'

(2005/C 164/01)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions — Flood risk management — Flood prevention, protection and mitigation (COM(2004) 472 final);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 12 July 2004 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to its President's decision of 26 May 2004 to instruct the Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to the Council Conclusions on Flood risk management adopted on 14 October 2004;

Having regard to its opinion on the Commission Proposal for a Council Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (COM(1997) 49 final — CdR 171/97 fin ⁽¹⁾);

Having regard to its opinion on the Commission Communication on the sixth environment action programme of the European Community 'Environment 2010: our future, our choice — the Sixth Environment Action Programme', and the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Community Environment Action Programme 2001–2010 (COM(2001) 31 final — CdR 36/2001 fin ⁽²⁾);

Having regard to its resolution on the recent flood disasters in Europe and the establishment of the European Union Solidarity Fund (CdR 294/2002 fin ⁽³⁾);

Having regard to its own-initiative opinion on Management and consequences of natural disasters: the role of European structural policy (CdR 104/2003 fin ⁽⁴⁾);

Having regard to its opinion on the Commission proposal for a regulation establishing a European grouping of cross-border cooperation (COM(2004)496 final — CdR 62/2004 fin);

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 38

⁽²⁾ OJ C 357, 14.12.2001, p. 44

⁽³⁾ OJ C 66, 19.3.2003, p. 26

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 256, 24.10.2003, p. 74

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the European Commission 'Building our common Future — Policy challenges and Budgetary means of the Enlarged Union 2007-2013' (COM(2004) 101 final — CdR 162/2004 fin);

Having regard to its opinion (CdR 299/2004 rev.1) adopted on 9 December 2004 by its Commission for sustainable development (rapporteur: **Mr Alderink**, Member of the Executive Board of the Province of Gelderland (NL/ALDE));

WHEREAS

- 1) Flood risk management is an important issue for European regions and municipalities. Many regional and local authorities have to deal with the risks of flooding from either rivers or the sea to protect and preserve the quality of life for their citizens.
- 2) Different types of floods can be identified due to their different regional characteristics. Diverse measures are required to reduce the likelihood and impact of floods. A regional approach towards flood risk management is therefore necessary.
- 3) Rivers and seas do not respect boundaries. It is therefore necessary to strive for cross-border cooperation between inhabitants and administrators in coastal areas and in entire catchment areas of rivers. It is essential to create solidarity between people who are not directly threatened by floods and those who live on banks or shores which are threatened by flooding.

adopted the following opinion at its 58th plenary session of 23 and 24 February 2005 (meeting of 23 February):

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.1 **welcomes** the essential features in the Commission Communication and in particular the concerted action programme on flood protection and **underlines** that seas and rivers are dynamic systems which can not be controlled by simple or sectorial measures;

1.2 **appreciates** that flood protection measures in one region may affect flooding in other upstream or downstream regions. It is therefore important that the effects of measures are determined for the entire river basin. However, this approach should not lead to prescribed models, standardised plans or further bureaucracy as regional and local authorities know that they are bound in diversity and not in uniformity;

1.3 **realises**, however, that determining the effects of measures on an entire river basin requires a minimum number of standard indicators. These indicators offer the possibility to fine-tune and coordinate actions on an international, national, regional and local level. To assure flexibility it should be possible to alter the number of standard indicators depending on the circumstances;

1.4 **underlines** that the citizens should be made aware of the importance of taking preventive measures when there is no perceived threat. Commitment of the citizens is very important, as citizens are the actual standard bearers of the principle of solidarity. This is particularly important for those citizens who live in river basin areas that face no acute or potential danger of flooding, but which parts may in particular be sensible to create runoff;

1.5 **appreciates** that the Council on 14 October 2004 concluded that in the context of the regular meetings of the EU Water Directors the action programme on flood protection should be prepared in cooperation with other stakeholders and relevant parties and **emphasises** that European regional and local authorities should participate in this preparation;

1.6 **encourages** and would like to take active part in stimulating regional and local authorities to develop plans before 2007 that fit, in advance, within the new EU possibilities for financing, taken into account that using EU financial support, means that national, regional and local financial participation is required.

2. Committee of the Regions' recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

2.1 **considers** that the threat of flooding is a communal problem and that it should be addressed on the level of the entire river basin catchment area. The overall aim should be to create a common responsibility and solidarity within the river basin area so that the entire area would be considered when looking for effective measures to fight the threat of flooding in a small area of the basin;

2.2 **considers** that it is essential to raise awareness among all stakeholders in a river basin and certainly to upstream areas that are not, or to a lesser extent, prone to flooding but who contribute by their land use to create runoff and **recommends** that all regional and local authorities in a river basin should be obligated to active participation in the process of planning for preventative measures;

2.3 **supports** the river basin approach as an integrated way of working, without any sectorial exceptions. This method will have to be practised when applying the principle of solidarity, which is also **supported** by it;

2.4 **believes** that the European Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre for Civil Protection could play an important role in addition to the spreading of information to national, regional and local authorities and **recommends** that the Centre introduce activities aimed at increasing awareness also among stakeholders, both for the general public and for industry; to enhance river basin wide solidarity, **recommends** that the Centre establishes flood partnership initiatives;

2.5 **believes** that only a wide integrated approach, which encompasses several policy sectors, could lead to the desired effect in the longer term, therefore **suggests** that the action programme on flood protection actively addresses the multidisciplinary range of soil bounded policies;

2.6 **underlines** the importance of the implementation of the principle of solidarity in a strategy with three steps, namely, retaining, storing and draining water. A proper land use and water management system may reduce floods in large rivers and especially in smaller rivers. An example of this is to use the water storage capacity of the soil, small water systems and small basins as the storage of rain in these elements may reduce peak discharges in the rivers;

2.7 **advises** the Commission to lay down the activities required to reduce the impact or likelihood of floods in an action programme involving cooperation at all administrative levels concerned. The development of flood risk management

plans should not be hindered by a noncommittal attitude of any Member State;

2.8 **suggests** that when devising and fine tuning the measures for flood protection, the working methods and the principles of the Water Framework Directive should be used, without striving to amend the Directive;

2.9 **believes** that in the long-term the action programme on flood protection should be attuned to all measures that are the result of the Water Framework Directive;

2.10 **takes a positive view** of an action programme on flood protection with short-term and long-term objectives. In the short term it is absolutely imperative that existing initiatives, especially those aimed at the implementation of structural measures, will be continued. Regional and local authorities need to make every effort to realise concrete actions in the range of flood prevention in anticipation of the action programme;

2.11 **takes the view** that the success of the action programme on flood protection is closely linked to satisfactory financing. This view is reflected in the proposed Financial Perspectives for the period 2007-2013 and in the proposals for Regional Development Fund, the EU Social Fund, and the EU Cohesion Fund;

2.12 strongly supports the Commission's proposed method for pinpointing, disseminating and promoting best practice. To this end, regional and local authorities and any stakeholders in the various regions who could make a useful contribution should be involved, alongside the Member States.

Brussels, 23 February 2005.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB
