

COM4-021

Brussels, 17 June 1999

**OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 3 June 1999

on the

**Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme in the field of civil protection**

(COM(1998) 768 final)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

HAVING REGARD TO the proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme in the field of civil protection (COM(1998) 768 final)<sup>1</sup>;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by the Council on 9 February 1999, under the first paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by its Bureau on 10 March 1999 to direct Commission 4 - Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment - to draw up the relevant opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion CdR 104/99 rev. 1 adopted by Commission 4 on 16 April 1999 (rapporteur: **Johan Sauwens**),

**adopted the following opinion at its 29th. plenary session of 2 and 3 June 1999 (meeting of 3 June) by majority vote.**

**Introduction**

1. The COR notes the proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme in the field of civil protection. This Decision will extend the current action programme beyond 1

January 2000 in order to facilitate the further consolidation and strengthening of Community cooperation in the field of civil protection.

2. The main objectives of the action programme are:

- to support Member States' efforts for the protection of persons, the environment and property in the event of natural and technological disasters;
- to support Member States in their attempts to increase the degree of preparedness of civil protection bodies;
- to improve response techniques;
- to support public information, education and awareness.

### **General comments**

3. The Committee agrees to a large extent with the proposal, which has been carefully drafted and satisfies key expectations of the general public.

4. The proposed Community measures are clearly not a substitute for Member States' efforts in the field of civil protection. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the purpose is to support and supplement national efforts and above all to provide for an extensive exchange of national experience and mutual assistance in case of need.

5. The basis for cooperation in the field of civil protection dates back to 1985, when the foundations were laid by a ministerial agreement. Since then the relevant Council of Ministers has approved six resolutions, which have led to the establishment of EU cooperation. There have been significant activities in this area since 1992 culminating in the first action programme.

6. The new programme builds on the programme that was launched on 1 January 1998 and will terminate on 31 December 1999. It is based on the experience gathered in the first programme, but also on new needs stemming from the new hazards which modern life has created for mankind and the environment. In this connection the new programme is focused inter alia on providing the general public with information about self-protection and how to behave in the event of disasters.

7. The proposed action programme will also help to integrate civil protection considerations into other Community and national policies. This will apply in particular to the prevention and combating of fires and floods.

8. The proposed project-based approach, with a lead country being selected for each project and the aim and budget being specified in detail, will enhance the effectiveness of the measures.

9. The three-year timeframe introduced for the first action programme has been retained for the new programme, which will run until 31 December 2004.

10. The financial statement accompanying the decision clearly explains the grounds for the action programme.

11. Bearing in mind the comments made in point 4 on the subsidiarity principle, the Committee of the Regions wishes to emphasize the role played by local and regional authorities with regard to assistance provision and civil protection. These authorities have the best local knowledge and are in the best position to judge the assistance required. The EU action programme must support improvements to the work of regional and local authorities and the programme must never result in national or EU authorities taking the place of local or regional authorities. However, the Committee

of the Regions would underline the fact that the implementation of this action programme will have financial consequences for local authorities and that for this reason the latter must also be able to benefit from the funding provided.

12. Given the major role placed by local and regional authorities with regard to assistance provision and civil protection, the Committee of the Regions asks that the major associations of elected politicians, as representatives of the Member States, have seats on the consultative committee referred to in Article 4 of the proposal for a Council decision and responsible for helping the Commission to implement the action programme.

13. The Committee of the Regions would like to refer to the specific situation in border areas. It is often the case that there is an extensive civil protection network in one particular country but that this cannot be deployed in a neighbouring country because of red-tape. The action programme must be extended to include a section which focuses on facilitating and developing cross-border cooperation in the field of civil protection.

### **Conclusion**

14. The Committee of the Regions endorses the proposed new action programme in the field of civil protection provided that its comments in points 11, 12 and 13 are taken into account.

Brussels, 3 June 1999.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Manfred Dammeyer**

**Dietrich Pause**

<sup>1</sup> OJ C 28 du 3.2.1999; p.29

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