

COM-4/044

Brussels, 25 April 2001

**OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 4 April 2001

on the

**Proposal for a Council Decision on a Civil Protection Mechanism**

**in the event of emergencies**

(COM(2000) 593 final - 2000/0248 (CNS))

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**The Committee of the Regions**

Having regard to

- the Proposal for a Council Decision for Civil Protection Mechanism in event of emergencies (COM(2000) 593 final - 2000/0248 (CNS));
- the decision taken by the Council on 24 October 2000, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;
- the decision of the President of the Committee of the Regions of 27 November 2000 to instruct Commission 4 - Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy, Environment - to draw up the relevant opinion;
- the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on a *Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme in the field of civil protection* (COM(1998) 768 final) (CdR 104/99 fin)<sup>1</sup>;

- the draft opinion (CdR 8/2001 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 4 on 9 February 2001 for which the rapporteur was **Mr Koukoulópoulos** (EL, PES);

**adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 38th plenary session on 4 and 5 April 2001 (meeting of 4 April)**

## **Views and recommendations of the Committee of the Regions**

### **Introduction**

1. The COR takes note of the Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community mechanism for the coordination of Civil Protection intervention in the event of emergencies. The purpose of this proposal is to ensure greater protection of citizens, the environment and property in the event of natural, technological and environmental emergencies, including accidental marine pollution, occurring within or outside the European Union, by creating a new Community mechanism for Civil Protection intervention.

2. The general aim of the proposed mechanism is to provide assistance in emergency situations and to facilitate coordination of aid interventions within the Community when a request is received from a Member State, and outside the Community when an applicant country submits a request for such aid. The mechanism is open to the participation of applicant central and eastern European countries (CEECs) and associated countries (Cyprus, Malta and Turkey) under certain conditions.

### **General context of the Commission proposals**

3. The Resolution of 8 July 1991 on improving mutual aid between Member States in the event of natural or technological disaster<sup>2</sup> constitutes the basis of the existing system for dealing with emergency situations in the European Union.

4. In addition, the Commission has undertaken a series of initiatives in the field of civil protection, based on the principle of subsidiarity, most of which form part of the five-year Community action programme (2000-2004)<sup>3</sup>. The activities include the operational Civil Protection structure on 24-hour call within the Directorate-General for the Environment. This structure is ready to facilitate or coordinate assistance from other Member States to the requesting Member State, to collect validated information and disseminate it to the Member States. However, it lacks the capacity to coordinate assistance.

5. Experience in recent years and the major disasters in which certain regions of the European Union were badly hit have shown that the present Community system lacks the capacity to mobilise significant and sufficient resources from Member States and to support coordination of the necessary interventions.

6. There is therefore a clear need to establish a significantly reinforced Community mechanism for interventions in emergency situations resulting from natural, technological or environmental disasters, including accidental marine pollution.

7. The Commission proposal takes account of the Presidency Conclusions from the Santa María da Feira European Council of 19 and 20 June 2000, which called upon the

Commission to lose no time in submitting proposals in the area of Civil Protection. The proposal to establish the mechanism is intended to supplement the existing Community action programme (2000-2004) of the Commission and to strengthen mutual assistance between the Member States.

### **More specific measures called for**

8. The main measures which the Commission proposal appears to regard as essential here, in addition to the necessary political commitments, are as follows:

9. **Pre-identification of intervention resources and provision of aid:** the identification in advance of the intervention teams available within the Civil Protection services of the Member States at very short notice (generally within 2-24 hours after the emergency occurs) and which can be mobilised immediately (their composition varying according to the type of emergency and the specific needs involved).

10. **Training programme to improve response capability:** the establishment of a training programme to improve the ability of these teams to work jointly and to promote optimum complementarity between them. The programme will include joint training courses and exercises, and opportunities for team members to be seconded for short periods to teams in other Member States.

11. **Assessment and coordination teams** with the aim of improving on-the-scene efficiency and coordination and determining the most appropriate means of dealing with the emergency as well as, where necessary, liaising with the relevant authorities of the country requesting assistance.

12. **Establishment of a common emergency communication system:** developing a common operational emergency communication system between the Civil Protection administrations of the Member States and the relevant services of the Commission.

13. The above-mentioned intervention teams will form the core component of the mechanism. However, managing emergencies always calls for great flexibility, which means that the Member States and third countries must be given the chance to request other resources such as specialised personnel and special equipment that they may need to deal with the emergency in question.

14. Civil protection authorities in the Member States, as well as non-governmental organisations and other relevant bodies (e.g. at local and regional level) could provide such resources, which would be coordinated by the relevant Community bodies and deployed under the aegis of the civil protection authorities of the national, regional and provincial authorities, according to competences assigned by laws and regulations in each Member State. The Commission proposal states that it is essential to provide for a reliable scientific and technical network that can contribute to the assessment of hazards. Furthermore, it would seem appropriate to establish a national register of voluntary organisations with suitable equipment.

### **Views of the COR on the proposals**

15. Given that even major emergencies take place at local or regional level and that their effects are felt over a long period, the COR would draw attention to the need to establish an institutional framework for dealing effectively with the natural, technological and environmental disasters that recurrently strike the European Union and third countries, observing the principle of subsidiarity while also taking account of the need to promote mutual aid. This political framework will aim:

16. to promote the sharing of experience and technology by the Member States and local and regional authorities;
17. to increase the development of long-term planning strategies (techniques for predicting extreme weather conditions, anti-flood systems, facilities for managing earthquakes, etc.);
18. to develop networks that link and provide immediate communication between the Member States and local and regional authorities facing such problems;
19. to undertake joint, coordinated efforts to address the grave social problems that follow serious disasters, especially in remote and isolated parts of the EU, where particular geographical, topographic, social and economic features exacerbate the impact of a disaster and give rise to specific assistance needs when a serious emergency arises;
20. to support the work of interdisciplinary groups with the aim of producing studies to predict extreme weather conditions and to assess environmental risks;
21. to place greater emphasis on using and further developing applications of modern technology that can help to mitigate the effects of disasters, and in particular lower casualty numbers;
22. to improve the organisation of mutual aid between EU citizens in cases of natural, technological and environmental disasters;
23. to distinguish between civil protection operations within the framework of crisis management and other types of disaster relief operations, since the latter have specific characteristics, as noted in the Presidency conclusions of the European Council in Santa María da Feira (19-20 June 2000)<sup>4</sup>.
24. to address - at local and regional level - the medium and long-term effects of disasters (reconstruction, re-establishment of activities and services, dealing with the social and psychological effects on the population and vulnerable groups, development setbacks in the region affected);
25. finally, to provide particular support by making special arrangements for regions in Europe that have been hit by serious disasters and to take specific measures to protect and provide relief for the wider social groups whose conditions and quality of life have been directly affected by these events.

### **COR recommendations**

26. There should be further consideration and study of the specific problems faced by European regions that have been repeatedly struck by major disasters and which are shown by scientific and statistical evidence to face an increased risk of the same type or other types of disaster re-occurring, by drawing up a European Charter of new risk areas to consolidate the regional civil protection plans.
27. The Decision should include a number of formal measures and provide for funding - which may have a regional dimension - to strengthen joint awareness, methods and practices with a view to facilitating concerted action by the new teams to intervene, mount-rescue operations, provide assistance, evaluate the impact and deal with emergency needs.
28. Key officials and experts who are familiar with local conditions, and with the practical difficulties of actually implementing the new measures, should be encouraged to participate in the intervention teams by the use of appropriate means.

29. A distinction should be drawn between civil protection operations within the framework of crisis management operations and other types of disaster relief operations, since the latter have specific characteristics.

30. In every Member State, and in respect of the subsidiarity principle, the regional and local authorities should set up centres for collecting the material resources needed for crisis management and assistance, and provide for coordination of operational teams in order to mobilise significant and sufficient resources to deal with serious emergencies.

31. The European Commission is clear in its desire to integrate the existing programme of measures with the proposed mechanism. The COR supports this as a means of ensuring greater cohesion and complementarity between the existing programme of measures and measures that will be taken under the proposed new mechanism.

Brussels, 4 April 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Jos Chabert**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 293 of 13.10.1999, p. 53

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 198, 8.7.1991, p.1

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 327, 21.12.1999, p.53

<sup>4</sup> SN 200/00 ADD 1, 19-20/6/2000, p. 19

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