

Brussels, 13 October 2004

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 30 September 2004

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council,
the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
on reinforcing the civil protection capacity of the European Union**

COM(2004) 200 final

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THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council,

the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on
Reinforcing the civil protection capacity of the European Union (COM(2004) 200 final);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 25 March 2004 to consult the Committee of the Regions on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 19 June 2003 to instruct its Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to its Opinion on *the management and consequences of natural disasters: the role of European structural policy* of 3 July 2003 (CdR 104/2003 fin)¹;

Having regard to Council Decision 1999/847/EC of 9 December 1999 *establishing an action programme in the field of civil protection (2000-2004)*²;

Having regard to Council Decision 2001/792/EC, Euratom of 23 October 2001 *establishing a community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance*³;

Having regard to the initiatives of the Commission in late 2003 to adopt the implementing instruments for Council Decision 2001/792;

Having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 4 September 2003 (PE T5-0373/2003) on the *effects of the summer heat wave (2003)* and the European Parliament report (PE-A5-0278/2003) on *improving safety at sea in response to the Prestige accident*;

Having regard to Article III-184 and Article I-42 of the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, wherein the fundamental principles underlying cooperation and solidarity in the field of civil protection are laid down;

Having regard to its draft opinion (**CdR 241/2003 rev. 1**) adopted on 8 July 2004 by its Commission for sustainable development (rapporteur: **Mr Isidoro Gottardo**, Member of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Council (IT/EPP));

Whereas:

- 1) The principle of solidarity and mutual assistance between Member States in case of natural or man-made disasters on the territory of the European Union is a fundamental moral obligation and a founding and defining principle of an international community;
- 2) The highest principles of solidarity must be extended by the European Union to third countries affected by the above-mentioned disasters, within a framework of international cooperation;
- 3) In recent years, there has been a discernible upsurge in exposure to disaster hazards both within the European Union and beyond its borders. As a consequence, it is vital for the European Union to take steps to strengthen the Commission's coordination and rapid response capacities;

4) A modern and effective civil protection system rests on two fundamental pillars, namely a high level of coordination and an intricate, Community-wide network of operational resources and highly specialised rapid response units;

5) A broad Europe-wide network of human and material civil protection resources at the service of Member States and regions is essential to ensure prompt, frontline rescue operations on behalf of disaster victims, and to mobilise and coordinate on-site operational resources with assistance from outside the affected area;

6) Once the European Union's civil protection capacity has been reinforced, the Community should address prevention issues with commitment and determination in order to restrict, in so far as this is possible, the incidence of disasters and mitigate the negative effects of those disasters that defy prevention;

Unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 56th plenary session held on 29 and 30 September 2004 in Brussels (meeting of 30 September):

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

The Committee of the Regions

1. **approves** the action plan outlined in the Commission Communication for strengthening the European Union's operational capacity in the field of civil protection, in the spirit of solidarity and cooperation that the European Parliament upholds as a founding principle of an international community;
2. **considers** that a holistic approach should be followed, covering all aspects of civil disaster protection, such as preventive measures, rescue services and follow-up measures;
3. **considers** that local and regional governments constitute an important structural and organisational model framework for modern and effective civil protection in Europe, due to their legislative and administrative powers and their direct contact with and responsibility for their citizens' security and regional heritage;
4. **considers** that local and regional government can provide an important model framework for the development of an efficient and modern European civil protection system, with the ability to respond to crises within the European Union and beyond its borders;
5. **believes** that an active civil protection culture has taken firm root in the Member States, regions and communes and has evolved into an intricate network that spans the European Union. It finds its source at a local level and is consolidated at the highest institutional level. The authorities, and the regions in particular, must have a high rapid alert and coordination capacity, i.e. immediate access to widespread emergency resources deployed throughout the territory, prompt mobilisation of their own human and material resources to

the disaster area, and the ability to coordinate the arrival of external human and material resources;

6. **emphasises** that rapid, quality information and communication systems for monitoring and managing emergency situations are vital to the new Community civil protection mechanism since the efficient coordination of rescue efforts on behalf of disaster victims cannot be achieved without them;
7. **considers** it indispensable to link the European monitoring centre with national and regional civil protection operations through one fixed emergency communication network system;
8. **hopes** that the implementation of the Communication's guidelines will be accompanied by European certification regarding standards for the communication capacity, command and management of national and regional civil protection operations in order to ensure the efficiency and reliability of such fundamental emergency forces;
9. **considers** that in order to keep European civil protection databases up to date, and to ensure an efficient and rapid emergency response, regional and national civil protection centres should be the primary source of information on human and material resources and experience in emergency response situations. Existing national authority databases should be synchronised with the European database;
10. **considers** that, given the long experience of Member States and regions in managing the more common or recurrent disasters, the essential pan-European strategic objective should be to bring together and coordinate the human and material resources that already exist in the European Union;
11. **considers** that a Community-level team of experts should be appointed to develop realistic emergency scenarios for rare or poorly understood emergencies, and to identify the human and material resources best suited for rescue and rapid response operations;
12. **considers** that joint civil protection operations are an important indicator of the different Member States' human and material operational capacity in the field. Joint operations establish whether participating States are able to integrate their respective operations effectively and to coordinate closely with the civil authorities on the spot, whose local responsibility in the communication, command and crisis management network is of primary importance;
13. **emphasises** that the process of creating and finalising a European rapid emergency response force should provide as much scope as possible for cross-border cooperation and, in particular, for joint civil protection exercises between neighbouring or border regions.

2. **The Committee of the Regions' recommendations**

Database

The Committee of the Regions

1. **recommends** that the human and material resources database for various emergency situations be compiled - by coordinating available information from national authority databases - and updated by the operators that possess the relevant information for their own institutional purposes, and that manage operational 24-hour civil protection emergency centres in the territories of their jurisdiction;
2. **proposes** that the database information sources include national civil protection operational centres by pooling information on major material and human resources, and highly qualified specialists. The database should also include regional civil protection operational centres by pooling information on the overall resources and specialised rapid response units attached to local authorities;
3. **recommends** that, in addition to information on the financial and operational resources allocated to various emergencies, all actors at all levels of the above-mentioned information network should contribute to the database a list of the specific emergencies dealt with by specific operational units, on or off their own territory;
4. **recommends** that the database include a list of civil protection operations of an international character that have been coordinated by the operational centre on its own territory;
5. **recommends** that the database be updated every six months, within a pre-established time frame.

Joint exercises

The Committee of the Regions

6. **recommends** that joint civil protection exercises should strike the right balance between the greater resources of the specialized national forces and the emergency response resources of the region, which are specifically trained to provide direct assistance to the population in close coordination with the municipality and other national and regional forces;
7. **urges** the Commission to commit itself to the planning and development of cross-border operations that involve the active participation of border regions. This would enable regions to pool their experience in civil protection and provide a solid operational base on which to build a European emergency response force;
8. **recommends** that best emergency response practices be defined for recurrent disasters, and in particular, for disasters that spread rapidly such as forest fires.

This could be achieved by comparing the early warning and emergency response tactics used in different regions;

9. **recommends** that steps be taken to improve the interoperability of civilian and military resources in order to ensure the immediate deployment of special resources that only the armed forces can access, or to call in additional special resources, such as helicopters, to complement civil protection resources in complex or widespread disasters.

Communication and improved coordination

The Committee of the Regions

10. **recommends** that in order to solve problems connected with the timely communication of information so as to ensure the rapid assessment of an emergency situation and the prompt delivery of effective assistance, regional 24-hour emergency centres must be able to communicate directly, in real time, with national and EU emergency centres, thus avoiding circuitous information channels that slow down or distort the flow of information;
11. **recommends** the establishment of a dedicated European civil protection communication network linking all regional and national emergency centres to the European monitoring centre;
12. **proposes** that it be made compulsory to notify the European monitoring centre of an emergency situation whenever a regional civil protection centre calls external resources to a disaster area. The regional centre should also notify the European centre once the crisis is at an end.

Financial resources

The Committee of the Regions

13. **recommends** that financial support for emergency interventions and the creation of a European civil protection system should be reinforced. Not only is such funding essential to solidarity amongst the Member States of an international community like the European Union, but it further provides the means to facilitate integration and coordination of highly specialised forces and units from different EU Member States and regions that are called upon to coordinate their operations in an integrated manner.

Brussels, 30 September 2004.

The President
of the

The Secretary-General
of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Peter Straub

Gerhard Stahl

¹ OJ C 256 of 24.10.2003, p. 74

² OJ L 327 of 21.12.1999, p. 53

³ OJ L 297 of 15.11.2001, p. 7

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