Regional impact of earthquakes

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the initiative report drafted by Nikolaos **VAKALIS** (EPP-ED, EL) on the regional impact of earthquakes. The report calls for a series of regulatory and financial measures to strengthen actions to prevent, address and repair damage caused by earthquakes and to improve coordination between the authorities involved in tackling earthquakes and providing public information, in particular through the establishment of a **centralised prevention and management instrument**.

Actions: prevention, response and repairing damage: the report calls on the European Commission to draw up a communication on earthquake hazards, damage prevention, management and repair and a technical protocol for joint action by the EU in the event of earthquake disasters, focusing on critical transport, energy, telecommunications and health infrastructures and on the roles of national, regional and local authorities. The Council and the Commission are called upon to take due account of earthquakes when finalising and implementing the revised legislative framework for civil protection.

The Member States are called upon to:

- include the issue of earthquakes in national and regional strategies for sustainable development and to establish national platforms for the discussion of earthquake risk management and civil protection based on integrated analyses of vulnerability, involving different institutional actors and the relevant partners in civil society;

- speed up research so as to prevent damage, manage crises and minimise the scale of impact of disasters in conjunction with actions under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development;
- consider improving and maintaining ancient buildings and monuments which are of significant historical, cultural, tourist and, by extension, economic importance for many regions of the EU as well as public buildings of strategic importance for civil protection and other critical infrastructures;
- register such buildings and infrastructure and consult the Commission on existing or needed projects and policies which will ensure their protection from earthquakes.

The Commission is urged to:

- formulate a special European research agenda for earthquakes;
- recommend that the Eurocode 8 instructions be incorporated in the planning regulations of all vulnerable Member States. The report calls on the competent authorities at EU and Member State level to consider whether it is necessary to extend the scope of the implementation of Eurocode 8 to include old buildings in addition to new ones;
- focus on measures for prevention, education, research, risk management, protection and solidarity at Community level, aiming at a more satisfactory response to the frequent disasters in the Mediterranean region.

Funding: the committee takes the view that the future funding of infrastructures under the Structural Funds in the next programming periods must be made conditional upon the implementation of seismic protection measures and upon the definition of such measures by the Member States in their respective Operational Programmes. Furthermore, it encourages the Member States, where possible, to begin financing earthquake protection measures under their current Operational Programmes. The Commission and the Member States are urged to promote special European programmes for training and the exchange

of best professional practices in the specialist skills required to prevent and deal with earthquakes damage, and calls on Member States to use the **European Social Fund** for this purpose.

The report states that the Council should decide without delay on the new **Solidarity Fund regulation**, as part of the co-decision procedure, so as to help repair damage fast and flexibly, including simplifying the requisite financial procedure (Parliament made its observations on time limits and eligible actions in May 2006).

Coordination: MEPs appeal for mechanisms to coordinate the actions of Community, national, regional and local players in the spirit of the May 2006 Barnier report and call for closer cooperation between Member States based on a **binding coordination system** concerning prevention, management and protection measures, including observation and early warning mechanisms, databases and the exchange of best practices. They urge, in order to facilitate this process, each Member State to create a single, coordinated civil-defence management system. The support for a European Civil Protection Force has been strengthened and the Commission is called to submit a proposal in this connection.

Lastly, the report calls on the Commission to evaluate all existing preventive, management and civil protection instruments to deal with natural disasters promoted by various EU policies (environment, cohesion policy, research, etc.) and to propose, in the interests of simplification and improved coordination, **a centralised prevention and management instrument**.