Report on the Commission communication: 'A community approach on the prevention of natural and man made disasters'

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PURPOSE: to present a Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters.

BACKGROUND: between 1990 and 2007 the European Union witnessed a marked increase in the number and severity of both natural and man-made disasters, with a particularly significant increase in the former. Analyses carried out by the UN and other international organisations have highlighted a growing vulnerability to disasters, partly as a consequence of increasingly intensive land use, industrial development, urban expansion and infrastructure construction.

The Community has already developed a set of instruments to address various aspects of disaster preparedness, response and recovery. There is, however, no strategic approach, at the Community level, for disaster prevention.

For this reason, the Commission presents this Communication which aims to identify measures which could be included in a Community strategy for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters, building upon and linking existing measures.

CONTENT: the prevention strategy proposed by the Commission is aimed to: (i) prevent disasters from happening, where possible and, (ii) where they are unavoidable, take steps to minimise their impacts.

Community prevention approach: the Community approach to disaster prevention should explicitly seek to build on measures that have already been taken at European level – either sector legislation or the possibility of using Community funds for preventions activities. Several proposals are envisaged:

1) Improve the understanding of disaster prevention policies at all levels of government: the Commission proposes the following:

- **creating an inventory of information on disasters**: the Commission will develop a comprehensive inventory of existing sources of information related to disasters. Information on the economic impacts of disasters is particularly important since it can allow policy makers to properly assess the costs and benefits of different disaster prevention measures;
- **spreading best practices**: the Commission will launch an inventory of best practices and facilitate the exchange of information between stakeholders;
- **developing guidelines on hazard/risk mapping**: hazard mapping aims to identify the areas prone to particular risks. It provides essential information to the public and is an important tool for planning authorities. Member States are in the process of developing a number of initiatives relating to hazard and risk mapping. The diversity of methodological approaches has reduced comparability of information and makes it difficult for information to be consolidated at the European level. The Commission will carry out a study on current practices of hazard and risk mapping in Member States. On this basis, Community guidelines for hazard and risk mapping will be developed, building upon existing Community initiatives. These should focus on disasters with potential cross-border impacts (e.g. floods or accidental release of chemicals and radio-nuclear agents), exceptional

events (major storms), large-scale disasters (earthquakes), and disasters for which the cost of recovery measures appears to be disproportionate when compared to that of preventive measures. The possibility of developing a specific initiative on forest fires will also be explored;

- encouraging research activities: several themes under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2007-2013) address natural and man made hazards. Through the implementation of this Programme the Commission will improve coordination of Community-financed research in this area, and make sure that research results are easily and systematically available to actors in the field of prevention and develop a database for experts with specialist knowledge.

2) Disaster management cycle: the Commission considers that a range of Community and national policies can be managed in a way that supports the disaster management cycle — prevention, preparedness, response, recovery. This requires linking the actors involved in developing and implementing measures that can have significant impacts on disaster prevention. The Commission will work to foster best practice across the EU. In this regard, the Commission proposes:

- to extend the lessons learnt exercises to disaster prevention;
- to establish training and awareness-raising programmes in the area of disaster prevention;
- to improve the linking between actors: the Commission intends to set-up coordinated mechanisms for crisis management, involving different public and private stakeholders. A European network composed of representatives of the various national departments concerned of all the Member States could provide a useful forum for elaborating recommendations on best practices;
- to reinforce early warning tools: the Commission will reinforce the link between early warning systems by: (i) strengthening cooperation with the network of European meteorological services to integrate short-term flood alerts (including coastal floods) in the early warning systems; (ii) reducing alert times of existing early warning systems; (iii) linking existing alert systems for forest fires (EFFIS) and floods (EFAS) in the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS).

3) Making existing instruments perform better for disaster prevention: several Community financial and legislative instruments support Member States action in the field of prevention. The Commission will ensure that prevention concerns are taken into account in a more consistent and efficient way across policies and programmes (such as common agricultural or rural development policies). A **more efficient targeting of Community funding should be sought**.

4) Reinforce international cooperation in the field of prevention: the Commission will emphasise disaster prevention in upcoming cooperation initiatives with third countries, in particular with candidate countries and potential candidate countries within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and through the programme for prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters (PPRD)in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

5) Next steps: the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are invited to provide the Commission with further input with a view to consolidating a Community strategy for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters. The Commission will carry out further consultations and liaise with stakeholders from the public and private sector to promote this approach and if appropriate will propose to develop it further.