

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

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by João FERREIRA (GUE/NGL, PT) on the Commission communication: A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man made disasters.

The report welcomes the commitment made by the Commission to ensuring that disaster-prevention-related issues are taken into account more coherently in EU policies and programmes, and stresses the need for a holistic approach to disaster prevention.

Given the scale and/or the cross-border nature that disasters may assume, Members consider it necessary **to enhance cooperation, both at regional and EU level**, based on complementarity of action, dissemination of **best practices** and the principle of solidarity between Member States. They take the view that **coordinated actions and strategies** between Member States, the different sectors and the different actors involved in the disaster management cycle can lead to real advances in the field of disaster prevention.

The committee supports the proposal to set up a **network** made up of representatives of the various competent national services of all the Member States. It emphasises the role of this network in exchanging experience and prevention measures and in establishing a common methodology and minimum requirements for hazard and risk mapping at EU level.

The report points out the importance of **reducing inequalities between regions and Member States in terms of their capacity to protect their populations**, and their property, including the cultural heritage, by supporting their efforts to improve prevention, particularly in the regions and Member States that are highly vulnerable to the risk of disasters. It urges that particular attention be paid to the most isolated, most sparsely populated, mountainous and border regions of Europe, and the most economically disadvantaged European regions. In this regard, Members highlight the need for the Solidarity **Fund Regulation to be revised** by adapting the eligibility criteria to the characteristics of each region and each disaster, including slowly evolving disasters such as drought, paying particular attention to production sectors, the most vulnerable areas and the populations affected, and enabling mobilisation to be more flexible and timely;

Members point out that **cohesion policy** is an essential tool in natural disaster risk prevention. They consider that it must be possible for the various funds and instruments to operate flexibly and in a coordinated manner in order to improve the functioning and effectiveness of that policy.

The report stresses the need to **create a suitable financial framework for disaster prevention**, with adequate financial resources for preventing and combating disasters, that will strengthen and link existing instruments. It asks that, in this context, prevention should be taken into account in the 2014-2020 Financial Perspective. Members call on the European Commission to assess the **possibility of proposing a more systematic pooling of available resources** in order to strengthen the effectiveness of prevention mechanisms across the EU.

Emphasising that responsibility for disaster prevention lies primarily with the **Member States** and that the principle of subsidiarity in this area should continue to be considered, the report calls on the Member States who are responsible for land management to introduce criteria and legislation in order to prevent catastrophes in areas at risk of flood and landslides and other geological risks, taking into account the problems created by indiscriminate deforestation, and furthermore to prevent construction in these areas.

The report highlights the importance of **viewing prevention from a cross-cutting perspective**, incorporating it in the relevant sectoral policies to promote balanced land occupation and cohesive economic and social development that is in tune with nature. It recognises that some sectoral policies have led to certain regions being more exposed to risk by encouraging abandonment of the countryside and excessive concentration of the population in urban areas. It considers that agricultural and forestry production are vulnerable to climatic phenomena and calls on the Commission and the Member States to encourage the implementation of good agricultural practices.

The committee advocates, as an essential element in the effective prevention of natural disasters, an environmentally and socially balanced agricultural policy that takes into account the need to support and stimulate sustainable agricultural production and rural development in the various countries and regions. The Commission is urged to come forward with a proposal for an **European public insurance system** to better address the risk and income instability of farmers related to natural and man-made disasters.

Members emphasise the importance of **public research and development (R&D)** in preventing and managing disasters and call for increased coordination and cooperation between the R&D institutions of Member States, especially those facing similar risks. They call for **enhanced early warning systems** in Member States and the creation and strengthening of links between the various early warning systems.

The Commission is also invited to:

- present a proposal for a directive, similar to the directive on floods, to promote the adoption of an EU policy on water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change;
- promote the entry into operation of the European Drought and Desertification Observatory which would be responsible for studying, mitigating and monitoring the effects of droughts and desertification aiming to enhance sound, strategic decision-making and better coordination between Member States;
- present and to carry out, together with the Member States, legislative proposals and initiatives in the area of forest protection and fire prevention;
- study and propose to the Council and the European Parliament ways of implementing coercive measures which will discourage negligence and deliberate action in the starting of fires.

Lastly, the report calls on the Commission to support Member States in **promoting awareness-raising campaigns** for prevention and in adopting best practices, providing relevant updated information and training to the general public through channels that are easily accessible to all citizens on identified risks and procedures to be adopted when faced with natural or man-made disaster situations.