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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 5.3.2008
COM(2008) 130 final

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

on Reinforcing the Union's Disaster Response Capacity

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Communication is to make proposals to reinforce the EU's disaster response capacity, building on what has already been achieved. These proposals are a first step on the road to a comprehensive and integrated EU response and are aimed at reinforcing and creating synergies between existing instruments, and at strengthening coordination between them.

This Communication uses the notion 'disaster' in a broad sense to cover not only natural or man-made disasters but also conflict-related complex emergencies, taking place within and/or outside the EU. In response to a request from Council and Parliament, a specific annex on forest fires is attached to illustrate how further prevention, preparedness, response and recovery measures could be combined to deal with a disaster at the magnitude of the one that struck Europe last summer.

The Commission will work together with the Council, the Member States and other stakeholders on the first steps proposed in this Communication, and examine progress regularly with a view to taking further steps towards a more integrated disaster response for the EU.

2. THE NEED FOR A STRONGER EU CAPABILITY

Major challenges ahead – within and outside the EU. Major disasters —natural, man-made, or a mix of both— such as the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 2006 war in Lebanon, marine pollution episodes in third countries or more recently the forest fires and floods in Europe in the summer of 2007 have led to increased calls to improve the effectiveness of the existing EU disaster response capacity. In addition, the number of disasters related to climate change is increasing in frequency. This will also affect the Union's neighbourhood.

Strong demand. European citizens expect the Union to protect their lives and assets inside the EU, and at the same time deliver effective disaster assistance in other parts of the world as an important expression of European solidarity. Organisations ranging from the UN to NGOs and the EU's third-country partners have high expectations of the role the EU can play in disaster relief. The European Parliament as well as the European Council of December 2007 invited the Council and the Commission to make the best use of the Community Civil Protection Mechanism, along with the civil protection Financial Instrument, to help cope with major emergencies in the future and to further strengthen co-operation with and between Member States. Likewise, the European Parliament and the European Council have signed in December 2007 the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, a comprehensive framework for improved delivery of humanitarian aid at EU level. In

its resolution on the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the European Parliament has called for a strong EU commitment to adequate provision of humanitarian aid coupled with adequate predictability and flexibility in funding, through adequate annual up-front budgetary provisions.

Challenges inside and outside the EU are often similar. Today's disasters are often of a cross-border nature and require multilateral and coordinated responses. At the same time boundaries between internal and external disasters are increasingly blurred: the Indian Ocean tsunami affected European tourists as well as the local populations, floods and fires affect both EU Member States and neighbouring countries, and epidemics can spread from one continent to another, European citizens need to be evacuated from crisis areas, etc. Often the same instruments – in particular civil protection assets – are deployed by the Community and Member States to respond to the same needs within the Union and beyond EU borders, either as a stand alone disaster response contribution or as a complement to humanitarian aid. Any EU response to a given disaster has to make use of the most appropriate components available on the basis of needs. In addition, aspects such as speed, effectiveness and cost-efficiency need to be taken into account.

Addressing the overall challenge of disaster prevention, mitigation and response. The complexity and scope of these multidimensional challenges require a comprehensive approach by the EU to the continuum of disaster risk assessment, forecast, prevention, preparedness and mitigation (pre- and post-disaster), bringing together the different policies, instruments and services available to the Community and Member States working as a team. This helps to balance national responsibility and European solidarity. The existing links between civil protection and environmental policies should be reinforced in order to take full advantage of the preventive measures included in environmental legislation and ensure an integrated EU approach to disaster prevention and mitigation. In addition, cost effectiveness concerns and resource constraints call for a managed, coordinated and integrated response. When providing assistance to people affected by disasters outside its borders, the EU response should be an integrated part of the overall international response.

3. TOWARDS A STRONGER EU RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

3.1. Gradual build-up of a more integrated coordination

A diversity of European players and policies. In the field of disaster response, decision-making processes vary from one policy or instrument to another and determine whether these capacities can be mobilised inside or outside the EU.

The European Commission is responsible for a wide range of response instruments, along with alert and coordination mechanisms:

- It manages many Rapid Alert Systems ('RAS') to provide swift and efficient responses to specific sectoral disasters, ranging from bio-chemical attacks to

communicable epidemics and animal diseases, oil spills or marine pollution to critical infrastructure protection¹.

- It decides on Community humanitarian assistance (through its Humanitarian Aid Department DG ECHO). The Commission has provided humanitarian assistance, relief and protection to the victims of conflicts or disasters in third countries and is also heavily engaged in disaster preparedness.
- It also facilitates and coordinates the use of Member States civil protection assets through the Community Civil Protection Mechanism created in 2001 to respond to disasters that occur within the EU and outside the EU.
- The Instrument for Stability provides for ‘exceptional assistance measures’ to enable timely responses to disasters in addition to political crises.
- Various geographic instruments for external assistance also have emergency reserves which can be mobilised, under certain circumstances and following specific decision making procedures, for short to medium term disaster response measures.
- Other instruments available to the EU and the Member States include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF), the funds available for Rural Development, the Civil Protection Financial Instrument (CPFI), and LIFE+. The EUSF can help to alleviate the financial burden on Member States or countries involved in accession negotiations with the EU affected by major natural disasters through refinancing emergency operation cost incurred by the public authorities. The ERDF can co-finance the preparation and implementation of measures to prevent and cope with natural risks, as well as reconstruction measures after natural disasters. Rural Development funds, the CPFI and LIFE+ can be used by the Member States to finance disaster prevention measures.
- Since June 2006, the Commission has developed an internal coordination mechanism (known as ARGUS) to help it respond effectively to multidimensional disasters and crises within its remit and also to make an active contribution as part of EU Crisis Coordination Arrangements (CCA).
- The RELEX Crisis Platform, established after the 2004 Tsunami, contributes to the political coordination between the Commission and Member States during external crisis situations.

¹ For example, ECURIE (Community arrangements for the early exchange of information in the event of radiological emergency), ADNS (Animal Disease Notification System), RAS BICHAT (Rapid Alert System in relation to Biological and Chemical Attacks and Threats), EWRS (Early Warning and Response System to alert public health authorities and the Commission to outbreaks of communicable diseases), HEOF (Health Emergency Operational Facilities), RAPEX (Rapid Exchange of Information System, system for the rapid exchange of information on measures relating to serious and immediate risks posed by non-food consumer products), RASFF (Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, rapid alert system for the notification of risks to human health from food and feed productions), RAS-CHEM (Rapid Alert System CHEMicals – in development), CIWIN (Critical Infrastructure Warning Information Network).

Close co-operation and co-ordination with the Presidency of the Council, Member States and the General Secretariat of the Council, particularly regarding consular co-operation, the use of EU Member States' military assets and capabilities to disaster response have to be ensured continuously. The Presidency has the responsibility for (1) assessing whether an EU civil protection operation outside the EU falls within the crisis management provisions of the treaties or not prior to the activation of the Mechanism by the Commission, and (2) ensuring the political coordination of European civil protection operations in third countries.

Efforts have been made recently to improve the coordination of disaster response instruments:

- Following a Commission proposal tabled in 2005 and the May 2006 Barnier report on setting up a European Civil Protection Force, the Council adopted a revised legislative framework entrusting new tasks to the Commission in the area of Civil Protection. In addition, the Commission reviewed its internal coordination mechanisms.
- The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid adopted by the Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission in December 2007 is the first to provide an explicit EU declaration of the shared objectives and principles that underpin EU Humanitarian Aid. It underlines the need for strengthened coordination between Community and Member States' responses to major disasters, and in the domain of humanitarian aid policies.
- EC Delegations in third countries have reorganised themselves so that they can play their full role in the event of disasters. For example, as a pilot phase, six Delegations will specialise in disaster response, and each of the 130 Delegations around the world has a 'crisis correspondent' to act as the local contact point for disasters and political crises vis-à-vis Commission Headquarters, neighbouring EC Delegations and partners on the ground.
- The Commission has adopted in 2007² an Action Plan on consular protection aimed at translating into practice the principle of art. 20 TEC according to which every citizen of the Union shall—in the territory of a third country in which his/her Member State is not represented— be entitled to protection by the diplomatic or consular authorities of any Member State under the same conditions as nationals. It proposes a series of actions to increase awareness, to strengthen the scope of consular protection and to enhance consular cooperation between Member States.
- The Commission is working to improve its delivery in cooperation with Member States, the UN and other international actors (e.g. through the development of Post Crisis Damage and Needs Assessments methodologies for post disaster scenarios - PDNA) and by providing support to the response capacity of key humanitarian actors such as UN and the Red Cross movement for their pre-positioning of humanitarian relief items that can be rapidly and cost-efficiently drawn upon in disasters.

² COM(2007) 767.

Greater coherence, effectiveness and visibility are still needed to achieve the objective of a more integrated EU disaster response capacity:

- The Commission is committed to improving the effectiveness of its action in cooperation with Member States, international, national and local stakeholders, in particular through synergies and better coordination of training, needs assessment, planning and operations.
- In particular for larger scale natural disasters, 'horizontal' coordination between the Commission, the Presidency, the Member States and the High Representative/Secretary-General could be further streamlined both in Brussels and on the ground for crises involving both Community instruments and CFSP instruments. Improvements could be made in the real time exchange of factual information and analytical reporting at all stages (planning, coordination of interventions and exchange of best practices, backed by the corresponding technical infrastructure) and include the establishment of joint planning and operational teams where feasible. Different and more multifaceted scenarios should be identified in advance so that standing operational procedures can be developed for each main category of disaster and geographical area so as to foster true contingency planning at EU level. Improved contingency planning will facilitate rapid engagement while allowing for adjustments to be made during the acute phase of the disaster.
- Existing resources need to be pooled more efficiently between EU level and Member States instruments, and between EU/Community instruments. There is a need for improvement in the 'vertical' coordination between the EU level and Member States. This coordination should be optimised as the differences in the respective mandates of the various Member States and humanitarian services/agencies have an impact on the Commission's response.

As part of its contribution to improved EU disaster response capacity, the Commission intends to introduce the following improvements, drawing notably on suggestions from the Barnier report. To fully achieve the objective of a more integrated disaster response capacity will require a long-haul effort from the Commission, the EU and its Member States; the improvements suggested in this Communication represent a further step in the rationalisation of disaster response instruments. Some concern the functioning of existing instruments (3.2 and 3.3), while the development of cross-cutting tools is a new step which will ensure more effective coordination (3.4).

3.2. Reinforcing the Community Civil Protection Mechanism

In the area of civil protection the Commission proposes to improve the EU's and the Commission's capacity through the following measures.

- **Building up the Monitoring and Information Centre so it can play the role of operational centre for European civil protection intervention.** This requires a qualitative shift from information sharing/reacting to emergencies towards proactive anticipation/real time monitoring of emergencies and operational engagement/coordination. This includes early warning systems, performing needs assessments, identifying matching resources, and providing technical advice on

response resources to the Member States; developing scenarios, standard operating procedures and lessons learned assessments; implementing the Commission competencies to pool available transport and provide co-financing for transport; increasing training and exercise activities for Member States and other experts; and helping the Member States to set up common resources. This implies also the use of monitoring capabilities such as those developed under the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) initiative or enabling tools like GALILEO (the European radionavigation programme).

- **Improving the European civil protection response capacity.** Following the disasters that struck Member States during the summer of 2007, the European Parliament has called for a European civil protection force and the Council has asked the Commission to present proposals on the response to disasters. Apart from the area of marine pollution, where the European Maritime Safety Agency keeps available EU pollution response vessels at the request of the affected country to complement its national resources, the response to other types of disasters, such as floods and forest fires, which are the most frequent disasters that hit Member States, can only come from national sources at present. Gaps in response resources should be identified and options for filling them assessed, including developing reserve resources available for European civil protection operations. These could be built on two main components – standby modules and complementary European resources, while avoiding duplication with existing response capacities. Funds made available as a pilot project and a preparatory action by the European Parliament in the 2008 budget will be used to test such arrangements.

3.3. Reinforcing European Humanitarian Aid

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid is a comprehensive framework for improving humanitarian aid delivery. In the area of humanitarian aid, the Commission proposes to improve the EU's and the Commission's capacity through the following measures.

- The Consensus foresees *inter alia* the identification of existing delivery gaps on the EU and international level, through a **mapping study** on logistical capacity, including stockpiling, procurement and transport to the area of final use of humanitarian goods, with the aim of identifying potential response gaps. In a second stage, initiatives should be taken to fill potential gaps. The study will serve to provide clear guidance on which of the various tools available is best placed, most appropriate and cost-efficient to be used in a given context.
- The further strengthening of rapid assessment and response capacity at the field level through the ECHO field offices and field experts: 6 regional ECHO offices are progressively staffed with multi-sector teams of experts that can be deployed immediately in case of sudden-onset disasters. This 'surge capacity' can conduct rapid on-the-spot need assessment in order to guide donors' humanitarian assistance and contribute to early field coordination between the various relief organisations present.
- **Liaison with various actors.** In view of the growing diversity of actors involved in the global crisis response, and with the view to be able to use all available

instruments in responding to disasters in third countries, the Commission will engage in dialogue with these actors on the principles of humanitarian aid.

- Strengthening the **global response capacity**, the Commission will continue its support to the response capacity of key humanitarian actors such as UN and the Red Cross movement for their pre-positioning of humanitarian relief items that can be rapidly and cost-efficiently drawn upon in disasters.
- Other initiatives include the development of local humanitarian response capacities; support to the reform undertaken under UN leadership and the development and dissemination of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as well as humanitarian principles among EU institutions and other actors.

3.4. Capacity building across Community policies and instruments

In addition to reinforcing the Community Civil Protection Mechanism and implementing the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, a further set of measures might be considered:

- **Creating a European Disaster Response Training Network.** High standards of preparedness, self-sufficiency and interoperability call for increased European-level training. This could be best implemented by a structured network building on the experience of the Member States and scientific knowledge acquired at national and European level through the Framework Programme research projects dealing with natural hazards and disasters issues. A Disaster Response Training Network would link existing centres of excellence in the Member States and offer a wide range of activities, including training courses, exercises and exchange of experts. The Training Network would develop agreed curricula to be delivered by a network of selected centres of excellence, set quality standards and explore synergies across the various training programmes. Using complementarity between the areas of civil protection and humanitarian aid in particular, the training network could also develop expertise in sectors such as logistics, crisis communication, water, food, healthcare, public health, protection and shelter by building on capacity available through NOHA, academic humanitarian programmes in the Member States and on other training networking experiences, such as the European Group on Training (EGT).
- **Improved disaster preparedness measures, early warning systems and use of the single European emergency number "112".** The Commission is preparing initiatives on the prevention of disasters both within the EU and in third countries. Early warning systems exist for most of the main natural hazards in Europe, but the lack of systems of this kind for tsunamis in the Mediterranean is a significant gap. Early warning systems can also benefit from the information made available by citizens through emergency calls, notably through the single European emergency number "112". In addition, European exchange of experience on organising and providing emergency response will contribute to improving the handling of 112 calls. The lack of common alert signals and protocols is also a major concern in view of the growing mobility of citizens across Europe and third countries. The enhancement of broadband and mobile communications for public protection and disaster relief services, as well as the opportunity to enable EU-wide interoperability, should also be examined.

- **Disaster preparedness in third countries.** The majority of natural disasters do not trigger an international disaster response. Where an international response is initiated, it will often take 12-72 hours before external assistance reaches the disaster site. For these reasons it is important to have an active expert presence in the field and ensure that vulnerable communities and local authorities in disaster-prone countries have the capacity to provide an immediate response. Disaster preparedness is of key importance as climate change will continue to affect weather patterns and increase the number of natural disasters - particularly sudden on-set disasters affecting vulnerable populations. The Commission will propose an EU Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in Developing Countries, which will, *inter alia*, provide the strategic framework for scaling up support for disaster preparedness capacities in third countries facing high levels of risk. A closer relationship should be pursued with Candidate Countries, potential Candidate Countries and the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy.

4. ACTION PLAN

In line with the steps outlined above that it plans to take, the Commission proposes that the following actions be considered and/or implemented by the end of 2008 (unless otherwise indicated):

4.1. Towards better inter-institutional cooperation

It is proposed that the Commission, the Council and Member States, within their respective competences, should:

- define multifaceted scenarios for disaster relief operations inside and outside the EU for each main category of disaster and main geographical area;
- launch a study on global logistical capacity for disaster response, ensuring close linkage with relevant work in the area of international humanitarian aid, and with the identification of gaps in disaster response resources in the area of European civil protection. Where needed, efforts will be made to address existing gaps, so as to come up with protocols for contingency planning at EU level, using the most appropriate tools, and to establish standard operating procedures for the Commission response to disasters inside and outside the EU; this kind of improved planning would facilitate rapid engagement while allowing for adjustments to be made during acute phases of an emergency;
- ensure close linkage between the mapping of logistical capacity, underway in the area of international humanitarian aid, with the process of identification of gaps in disaster response resources, to be launched in the area of European civil protection. Where needed efforts will be made to address existing gaps;
- deploy, where appropriate, joint planning and operational teams to deal with particular disasters involving both Community instruments and Council action, and building, for the assessment phase, on the joint EU, UN and World Bank post disaster needs assessment methodology;

- develop exchanges of factual information and analytical reporting (to be supported by the corresponding technical infrastructure) and situation awareness tools;
- continue to invest in research and pilot projects on Information and Communication Technologies improving emergency and disaster warning and response systems.

4.2. European Humanitarian aid capacity should be reinforced

To this end the Commission will:

- launch a mapping study on logistical capacity, including stockpiling, procurement and transport to area of final use of humanitarian goods, with the aim of identifying potential response gaps. In a second stage, initiatives should be taken to fill potential gaps;
- provide a comprehensive capacity building programme to continue development of standby capacities of both the UN and Red Cross movement;
- implement immediately the Consensus' call for better operational coordination of EU humanitarian aid, for example through the timely distribution of DG ECHO's situation reports from field experts to focal points in EU Member states, both in capitals and in the field;
- together with development actors, develop further the strategic framework for disaster preparedness initiatives aiming at strengthening local capacities in disaster prone countries.

4.3. European civil protection should be geared up

To this end the Commission will:

- develop the Monitoring and Information Centre into an Operations Centre for European civil protection intervention;
- identify gaps in disaster response resources and, where gaps are identified, present proposals for improving the European civil protection response capacity based on two components:
 - a voluntary pool of key standby civil protection modules to be available for deployment at any time; and
 - additional reserve capacities designed to complement national responses to major disasters such as forest fires and flooding.

4.4. Strengthening capacity across Community policies and instruments

To this end the Commission will:

- submit proposals for a European Disaster Response Training Network by mid-2009, building on the experience acquired by the Community Civil Protection Mechanism and on synergies between existing training initiatives;
- finalise proposals for a European integrated approach to the prevention of natural disasters and for an EU strategy for disaster risk reduction in developing countries;
- help the Member States to develop common early warning signals. In particular, the Commission urges the Member States to step up their efforts to create an early warning system for tsunamis;
- increase the provision of information in support of preparedness, early warning, response and recovery phases of disasters., including through its GMES initiative;
- consider reserving bandwidth for communicating in emergency situations.

The concrete proposals in this Communication constitute a first step towards strengthening the Union's disaster response capacity. This will be achieved while taking due account of the need to explore opportunities for rationalisation as part of the ongoing screening of Commission resources.

ANNEX

FOREST FIRES

The 2007 summer season witnessed dramatic forest and other wild fires across Southern Europe, which affected Greece in particular. Large fires fanned by strong winds devoured hundreds of thousands of hectares of land and claimed many lives of civilians and dedicated fire fighters.

The Community Civil Protection Mechanism was activated 12 times over a period of 11 weeks, a five-fold increase compared to previous years, by Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Whenever possible, the Member States provided assistance in the form of aerial fire fighting, fire-fighting equipment, protective clothing and expertise. However, the level of assistance provided was limited as fires were raging at the same time in several Member States and the risk of fires was high in other Member States. Therefore, only a limited part of the available fleet could be mobilised to assist the Member States most affected, which limited in particular the assistance that could be sent to Bulgaria.

Forest fires and other wild fires are a recurrent phenomenon. The frequency and intensity of hot and dry summers and water scarcity³ in south-east and south-west Europe is expected to worsen due to climate change⁴ despite the EU's mitigation efforts, thus increasing the risk of forest and other wild fires. However, the occurrence of such fires varies from year to year in intensity and in geographical location. The average yearly area burnt is between 450 and 600 000 hectares and Member States are occasionally hit by disastrous fires burning areas of up to four times the yearly average. Experience has shown that such events do not affect all the Member States concerned the same year or at the same time during a summer season. In 2003, the worst fires concerned the south-west of the EU; Portugal was most affected and nearly 5% of its national territory burned. In 2007, it was south-eastern Europe that was affected by one of the worst forest fire seasons on record with over 810 000 hectares burned, of which 68.2% was on forest land, 31% on agricultural land and 0.8% in urban and industrial areas⁵. 21.9% of the 465 000 hectares burned in the EU Mediterranean countries was located in Natura 2000 sites⁶.

The regions affected are often among the most vulnerable areas to climate change in Europe due to the combined effect of high temperature increases and reduced precipitation in areas already facing water scarcity. Under a changing climate, the role of European forests as providers of environmental and ecosystem services will further gain in importance. Forests play a major role in ensuring efficient water retention in dry regions, protecting water courses against excessive nutrient inflow, improving flood management, and maintaining and

³ COM(2007) 414.

⁴ COM(2007) 354.

⁵ 12.3 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent were emitted this summer by forest fires in the whole of the affected area, of which 6.9 million tonnes in the EU Member States concerned, which amounts to around 0.4% of their yearly emissions (source: JRC).

⁶ Minimum provisional estimates based on satellite images provided by EFFIS, the European Forest Fire Information System managed by the Joint Research Centre. This information covers Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, as well as Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

restoring multifunctional landscapes. Protecting forest ecosystems against forest fires and promoting climate-resilient forest management measures in Europe is key to increasing the capacity of these areas to adapt to climate change.

The occurrence of forest and other wild fires is influenced by a series of factors, including:

- management practices of agricultural land and forests;
- climatic conditions: hot, windy and dry weather as well as lightning;
- lack of enforcement of rules for clearing vegetation around settlements and buildings;
- human action, by negligence or fault, including acts of arson;
- economic drivers and inadequate legal framework, which may influence profits resulting from acts of arson and/or reduce the incentive to protect forests effectively.

As requested by the Council and Parliament, the issue of forest and other wild fires therefore requires comprehensive scientific knowledge and policies covering prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

- **Prevention:** It is one of the prime responsibilities of the Member States to implement forest fire prevention policies and the Commission encourages the Member States to screen national legislation to identify any perverse effects on the occurrence of acts of arson. In this context, the Commission would look favourably on the widening of its proposal on environmental crime to cover significant destruction of forests⁷. The Community disposes of a number of financial instruments to support the efforts of the Member States to reinforce national prevention policies. These instruments are subject to national programming. To make it easier to include the prevention of forest fires in national programmes, the Commission will provide the Member States with a breakdown of the relevant instruments. Furthermore, the Commission is assessing the need for a European integrated approach to the prevention of natural disasters. Two ongoing studies are focusing (1) on the Community situation, the identification of potential gaps, and the need for Community action, and (2) on identifying good practice of the Member States. This will provide the basis for proposals to be developed by the end of 2008. In addition, the ongoing study on the factors leading to forest deterioration, including forest fires, will feed into the development of Community guidelines for the prevention of forest fires based on Member State best practice.
- **Preparedness:** The Community supports activities aimed at enhancing Member States' civil protection preparedness, notably through financial support (exchange of experts, exercises and preparedness projects), providing courses intended for national experts, development by the Joint Research Centre of the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), and financing projects. For example, FIRE 4 is a pilot project on the response to forest fires and earthquakes whose aim

⁷ COM(2007) 51.

is to develop cooperation between four Member States (France, Italy, Spain and Portugal). Six other Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) are closely associated in the activities undertaken in this project (workshops, training and field exercises) and Greece has recently announced that it will become a full member of the project. The Commission proposes the creation of a Disaster Response Training Network linking existing centres of excellence of the Member States to further enhance both the preparedness of civil protection services and the capacity of teams and modules from different Member States to work together.

- **Response:** This summer fires raged at the same time in several Member States while the risk of fires was high in other Member States. In this situation only limited aerial fire fighting assistance was provided by the Member States and the assistance provided to the countries affected was uneven. This indicated that there may not be sufficient capacity to aid Member States hit by major catastrophes where other Member States are unable to assist because they are facing fires or a high risk of fires in their own countries. If this apparent gap is confirmed by a full assessment, the Commission may consider proposing the financing of EU-level equipment to supplement national resources. The EU already has capacities available in the area of response to maritime pollution⁸. European reserve capacities should be ready to fight major fires that rarely occur in just one Member State and are not a rarity in the region as a whole. Potentially, future EU reserve capacities could include, although not necessarily exclusively, high-capacity fire-fighting aircraft adapted to a variety of geographical conditions.
- **Recovery:** The Commission will continue, upon request, to use the Solidarity Fund as effectively as possible to assist regions in distress, and urges the Council to resume negotiations on the revision of the Solidarity Fund Regulation in order to make its use more effective. The Member States are encouraged to use the available Community instruments to support their recovery from disastrous fires, including the European Union Solidarity Fund and the Rural Development Regulation. To assist the Member States in the national programming of the use of these instruments, the Commission will provide a breakdown of the various Community instruments that may provide such support. The Commission considers that Community support for the restoration of forests should include preventive measures put in place by the requesting Member State and measures as part of recovery programmes to increase the capacity of new forests to adapt to climate change. In this context, the Commission will look further into how the existing financial instruments might be improved, for example through the inclusion a conditionality clause linked to effective preventive measures, and at whether the Community should assume a greater role in financing the restoration of forests.

⁸ The European Maritime Safety Agency may, on request, support the pollution response mechanisms of the Member States with additional European resources that are on standby.