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

**Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and  
humanitarian assistance  
(Text with EEA relevance)**

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

## **Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance (Text with EEA relevance)**

### **1. Introduction**

EU Member States and EU institutions have responded well to the many disasters that have struck this year, both in the EU and further afield. The Haiti earthquake and the floods in Pakistan in particular stand out. The EU's response has been swift, efficient and generous. The quality of this response helped demonstrating to EU citizens and Member States the added value brought by EU actions in the field of crisis response.

At the same time, demands on the EU's disaster response capacity are likely to increase, as disasters continue to grow both in size and frequency. Current budgetary pressures also call for further efforts to promote an efficient use of scarce resources.

Against this background, the Lisbon Treaty offers an opportunity to build a stronger, more comprehensive, better coordinated and more efficient disaster response capacity in the European Union. The changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty concern both individual instruments of disaster response and the means to ensure a consistent EU response while ensuring coordination with the United Nations.

The work of building a stronger, more coherent and better integrated European disaster response capacity is two-fold:

- to strengthen individual EU response instruments; and
- to ensure consistency and synergies between these different instruments, to the benefit of the coherence of the international response.

Building on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid,<sup>1</sup> the Communication on Reinforcing the Union's Disaster Response Capacity,<sup>2</sup> and drawing inspiration from the Barnier report and the debate it generated<sup>3</sup> the present Communication focuses on civil protection and humanitarian assistance, the two main instruments at the EU's disposal to ensure rapid and effective delivery of EU relief assistance to people faced with the immediate consequences of disasters. The Lisbon Treaty introduces new legal bases for both. In this Communication, the Commission sets out its proposals for the implementation of this new legal framework and for how the two can be combined in a more effective way.

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<sup>1</sup> European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, December 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Commission Communication of 5 March 2008 on Reinforcing the Union's Disaster Response Capacity: COM (2008) 130 final.

<sup>3</sup> Report by Michel Barnier 'For a European civil protection force: europe aid'. [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission\\_2004-2009/president/pdf/rapport\\_barnier\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2004-2009/president/pdf/rapport_barnier_en.pdf).

This Communication should be seen as the first building block of a broader and more coherent effort towards a strengthened EU disaster response. Work is underway on additional building blocks covering different aspects of the EU's response to crises both inside and outside the EU.

In this regard, for disasters outside the European Union, the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) offers opportunities to improve consistency between disaster response and possible political and security related elements of the EU's overall crisis response. This will include political and diplomatic efforts in Brussels and in the field, notably through EU Delegations, including possible consular support if requested. The EEAS will be responsible for crisis response actions under the Instrument for Stability (IfS), as well as for civilian and military crisis management means, whose tasks can include humanitarian and rescue support. Finally, it will include the EU's role as a significant development aid donor to many disaster stricken areas of the world, where the links between relief, rehabilitation and development can and should be reinforced.

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission will soon come forward with a paper in this regard, notably building on the follow-up to the Haiti earthquake earlier this year. This paper will also make further proposals as regards the coordination in the context of crisis response between the EEAS and civil protection and humanitarian assistance structures.

As regards disasters inside the European Union, the proposals for improving response capacity would constitute a major contribution to the EU's Internal Security Strategy in Action, for which increasing Europe's resilience towards disasters is one of the strategic objectives. Consular protection will be addressed in the Commission Communication on consular protection.

The Lisbon Treaty also introduced a Solidarity Clause, which established the obligation for Member States to assist each other in the event of a natural or man made disaster on EU territory.<sup>4</sup> In 2011 the European Commission and the High Representative will bring forward a proposal for the implementation arrangements of the Solidarity Clause.

## **2. Adapting existing means to a changing world**

Europe and its immediate neighbours have experienced a series of particularly severe disasters in 2010, ranging from flash floods and severe storms in Western Europe, large-scale floods in Central Europe, the volcanic ash cloud after the Eyjafjallajökull eruption to unprecedented forest fires in Russia.

This year the world has also witnessed two of the worst natural disasters in recent years: the Haiti earthquake and the Pakistan floods, both of which resulted in massive loss of life and widespread destruction. Other disasters included the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon drilling well in the Gulf of Mexico (which resulted in the most damaging oil spill on record) and severe droughts in the Sahel.

The year 2010 is not just a statistical blip. Worldwide the recorded annual number of disasters has increased fivefold from 78 in 1975 to nearly 400 today. Average annual losses are

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<sup>4</sup> Article 222 TFEU.

approximately one quarter of a percent of global GDP. Over the past 20 years, recorded disasters in Europe<sup>5</sup> alone have killed almost 90,000 people, affected more than 29 million and caused €11 billion in economic losses.

This trend is largely due to climate change, population growth combined with increasing urbanisation as well as other factors including increased industrial activity and environmental degradation. Moreover, terrorism remains a significant security threat for European citizens. Because of these factors, the frequency and intensity of disasters is likely to continue increasing. Faced with this changing reality there is a strong case for the EU to strengthen its disaster response capacity.

Effective implementation of sensible disaster management policies means fewer deaths and less damage. As the risks we face increase and become ever more apparent it is essential that local, national and European policies are reinforced to deal with these threats. Ways of improving the existing system need to be identified and implemented in order to better respond to future major disasters.

Protecting the safety and security of its citizens is the first duty of every state and the responsibility for disaster prevention, preparedness and response lies primarily with national governments. But when a major disaster occurs, and national capacities are overwhelmed, a common European response is more effective than Member States acting alone. Additional assets can be mobilised. Joint efforts can promote cost-effectiveness by maximising the complementarities in national response capacities. EU cooperation provides a visible demonstration of solidarity between Member States and with third countries. Closer co-operation at EU level can also strengthen the overall response and coordination efforts led by the United Nations (UN).

The importance of working together is clearly understood by European citizens. Approximately 90% expect the EU to do more to help their country when faced with disasters.<sup>6</sup> A similar percentage supports EU humanitarian action outside the EU.<sup>7</sup>

The EU has a range of instruments for the response to disasters at its disposal. For disasters inside the EU, the Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates and coordinates Member States' in-kind assistance<sup>8</sup>. The Mechanism also coordinates the delivery of in-kind assistance for disasters outside the EU<sup>9</sup>.

In developing countries, the EU (Commission and Member States combined) is the world's largest humanitarian donor. Funding is provided to partner organisations (mainly UN

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<sup>5</sup> The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED). CRED defines disasters as: 'A situation or event which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to a national or international level for external assistance' [www.cred.be](http://www.cred.be). This Communication deals primarily with disasters, necessitating a request for international assistance.

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_328\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_328_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_343\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_343_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> In 2002, its first year of operation, the Mechanism was mobilized three times. In 2009, it was mobilized 27 times. Approximately half of deployments are to respond to disasters within the EU.

<sup>9</sup> In all cases, a request from the country or countries affected by a disaster must be received before the Mechanism is deployed. In the case of third countries, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs is immediately consulted in the spirit of the Joint Declaration between the Council and the Commission on the use of the Community Civil protection mechanism in crisis management (doc. 10639/03) to clarify whether the activation of the mechanism would fall within CSDP crisis management.

agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and humanitarian NGOs) which deliver the bulk of emergency assistance, on the ground, to those in need.

Arrangements have also been developed to facilitate the deployment of Member States' military assets when these are required as part of the overall EU disaster response.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of the Haiti earthquake, the EU's response was effective and swift. However, initial lessons from this and other recent disasters suggest that there is room for further improvement in terms of the **effectiveness and efficiency** (rapidity of deployment and appropriateness of action), the **coherence** (operational and political coordination) and the **visibility** of the EU's response to disasters. Any improved EU response towards emergencies outside the EU however relies for the civil protection response part on strong and efficient capacities of Member States. The starting point for a reinforced EU disaster response capacity must therefore be to ensure a better response capacity inside the EU.

This Communication therefore sets out a strategy with the objective of bringing the wealth of expertise and resources - available at local, national and the EU levels - together into a strengthened EU disaster response system. It focuses on the delivery of **relief assistance in the first emergency phase**. Political and security elements of disaster response, as well as crisis response under the IfS and medium and longer term assistance, and how they can be better coordinated with emergency relief efforts will be the subject of separate proposals.

The creation of a European Emergency Response Capacity, based on Member States' assets, and the development of a European Emergency Response Centre, are proposed as the cornerstones of such a strategy. Proposals are also made in the areas of civil protection and humanitarian aid.

### 3. Guiding Principles

The following principles should guide work on the EU disaster response capacity:

- The EU should be able to respond effectively and in a spirit of solidarity to disasters **both inside and outside the EU**.
- The EU disaster response capacity should address **all types of disasters** (i.e. natural and man-made, other than armed conflicts) that overwhelm national response capacities and result in a need for EU assistance.
- A fully coherent approach for disasters outside the EU will need to **bring together the different constituencies** that could possibly be deployed (depending on the nature of the crisis): civil protection, humanitarian, crisis response under the IfS, mainstream geographical instruments for external assistance (using flexible procedures in situations of crises and emergencies), Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) civilian and military crisis management. The objective should be to identify and deploy the most appropriate resources to respond to any given disaster. It should build on the existing roles and mandates and capacities and ensure that critical "gaps" and bottlenecks are addressed.

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<sup>10</sup> The documents developed under the Council in 2003-2006 include the General Framework for the use of Member States military and military chartered transportation assets and ESDP coordination tools in support of EU disaster response and Military support to EU disaster response – identification and coordination of available assets and capabilities (see documents 10639/03, 6644/4/04, 8976/06, 9462/3 REV3 and 14540/06 + COR1).

- When responding specifically to humanitarian needs caused by disasters outside the EU, **EU assistance is bound to act in accordance with internationally agreed humanitarian principles** (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence)<sup>11</sup> and guidelines. Improved EU coordination will help strengthening the central coordinating role of the UN for emergencies in third countries.
- An **approach that balances response with disaster prevention and preparedness** is the best way to respond to the increasing threats posed by disasters. While this Communication focuses on response, disaster prevention and preparedness are the cornerstones of the EU's strategy on disaster management.<sup>12</sup> Actions to strengthen disaster response will be complemented by strong prevention and preparedness measures. This includes maximising the synergies between Disaster Risk Reduction and adaptation to climate change, so that, for example, financial support for prevention, recovery and reconstruction activities increase resilience to future crises.
- **Improved cost effectiveness** means looking for more efficient ways of delivering assistance. This can be achieved through a better pooling of assets in order to reduce costs and avoid a duplication of efforts. Where appropriate, Member States should look to make use of common assets. New initiatives (for example the common provision of transport) should look to ensure that the overall benefits in terms of efficiency gains outweigh any eventual costs and should not undermine national responsibilities for disaster prevention, preparedness and response. The EU should also avoid creating new structures and additional levels of bureaucracy.

#### 4. A More Effective and Efficient European Disaster Response

##### 4.1. The creation of a European Emergency Response Capacity based on pre-committed Member States' assets and pre-agreed contingency plans

The EU civil protection response is currently based on *ad hoc* offers of assistance from Member States. Such a system makes prior planning of emergency operations very difficult and cannot ensure the availability of appropriate and sufficient assistance in all cases. The EU needs to shift from *ad hoc* coordination to a system where advance planning allows core assets to be available for immediate deployment.

In order to improve *planning* of EU civil protection operations, the Commission proposes to:

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<sup>11</sup> European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/consensus/consensus\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/consensus/consensus_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> In 2009, the Commission adopted a Communication on 'A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters' (COM(2009) 82 final) and EU Strategy on supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries (COM(2009) 84 final). The Implementation Plan of the EU DRR Strategy is also about to be adopted. Work is on-going to develop an EU-wide overview of risks and the Commission is exploring mechanisms for regular reviews of Member States' prevention and preparedness policies. Significant EU funding is available for disaster prevention although the uptake of these funds remains limited. Funding is also available under Space and Security Themes of the 7<sup>th</sup> R&D Framework Programme. Efforts are ongoing to extend EU support to disaster prevention projects in third countries, to identify and exchange best practices, to investigate opportunities for innovative financing arrangements. This work should be linked with the EU efforts related to the adaptation to climate change. The implementation and further development of the EU Solidarity Fund could also provide opportunities to reinforce the EU's disaster management.

- **Develop reference scenarios for the main types of disasters<sup>13</sup> inside and outside the EU.**
- **Identify and map key existing assets that could be made available by Member States for the EU emergency response to these scenarios.**
- **Develop contingency plans for the deployment of these assets, including transport, and review them on the basis of lessons learned from new emergencies and exercises.**
- **Identify and ensure synergies between in-kind assistance and the assistance provided from the EU's humanitarian funding.**

A mapping of capacities available for EU civil protection operations on the basis of pre-defined disaster scenarios would significantly enhance the EU's response capacity. It will allow the Commission and the Member States to take maximum advantage of complementarities and pooling arrangements. This will result in enhanced cost-effectiveness.

To enhance the *availability* of key assets, various arrangements have been tested through the *Preparatory Action on an EU Rapid Response Capability*. This included standby arrangements for field hospitals, emergency shelter, high capacity pumping, water purification and other assets based in the majority of Member States. Based on this initial experience, the Commission proposes to:

- **Establish a European Emergency Response Capacity in the form of a pool of pre-identified civil protection assets from the states participating in the Civil Protection Mechanism that are voluntarily made available for EU disaster relief operations both inside and outside the Union.**

Member States that have agreed to provide assets to the pool should make them available for EU operations when called for except when these assets are needed for domestic emergencies. These assets would remain under national command and control. The pool should be large enough to ensure availability of critical response capacities at all times. Registration of assets in the pool will remain voluntary and assets will remain at full disposal for national purposes when not used for EU operations. Member States can also join forces and provide multinational modules for inclusion in the pool.<sup>14</sup> These arrangements should be open to the participation of third countries, notably from the European Economic Area and the EU candidate countries.

In the event of a major disaster, and in response to a request for assistance, the Commission will immediately propose an emergency response plan based on the needs on the ground and on the pre-developed scenarios. It will call for the deployment of relevant modules.

Deployed assets will be managed on site by the respective Member States. The coordination between the different EU modules on the ground, and where relevant their integration into the UN cluster system, will be ensured by the EU experts (Commission and Member States) deployed by the Emergency Response Centre.

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<sup>13</sup> Including CBRN and cross-border terrorist attacks.

<sup>14</sup> With the support of the Commission, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania developed a common high capacity pumping module (called 'Balt Flood Combat'), which has been used successfully during the floods in Poland and the Republic of Moldova.



Since most of the Member States' civil protection modules are already available for national purposes, this system is not expected to generate significant extra costs related to their development and standby. On the contrary, developing a common emergency response can be expected to generate efficiency gains and improve the overall cost-effectiveness of EU disaster response operations.

Regular EU training and exercises should be organised to enhance the interoperability of these assets. Interoperability requirements will be further developed.

The deployment of these on-call assets would form the nucleus of any EU civil protection operation. They would be complemented by additional offers from the Member States provided in the same way that civil protection assistance is currently organised. In the case of disasters outside the EU these on-call assets and EU humanitarian assistance would complement each other and, where appropriate be supported by recourse to EU civilian and military crisis management means under agreed frameworks.

As a further step, the Commission proposes to:

- **Use the contingency planning exercise to determine whether there are gaps in the civil protection response capacities available in the Member States that could be filled by complementary EU-funded assets.**

Burden-sharing and common use of resources can result in significant efficiency gains. This is most obviously the case with assets required for horizontal coordination, assessment and logistics (e.g. surveillance aircraft for assessment).

It can also be the case for certain types of high-value assets. The Commission has run, together with Member States, successful pilot projects looking at the possibility of EU support for the provision of different types of emergency response equipment. These projects have focused on aerial assets for forest fire-fighting and Technical Assistance and Support Teams (TAST), but the approach could be extended to other types of assets, such as marine search and rescue or specialised medical facilities.

Working arrangements will be developed between the European Emergency Response Capacity and the EEAS, with the aim of ensuring complementarity and of using possible synergies between the ways in which disaster relief and civilian and military crisis management actions are managed.

#### **4.2. Prepositioning of relief assets**

Aid effectiveness means that relief-items should be pre-positioned as close to the disaster zone as possible, drawing on local and regional resources whenever possible. This is why major international humanitarian organizations (e.g. World Food Programme and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) have been developing and expanding their pre-positioning capacities with substantive financial support from the EU. Inside the EU, Member States also group national relief and response items in strategic locations. Recent experience has shown that this approach has significantly sped up the operational response to disasters. A global network of regional depots/hubs could greatly facilitate the rapid mobilisation of assistance.

To reinforce the rapid availability of assets for humanitarian actors in external emergencies the Commission will:

- **Review experience gained from EU engagement with key humanitarian partners - notably WFP and IFRC - and develop options to develop this approach further.**
- **Seek to use, where available, Member States' existing prepositioning systems in third countries.**

#### **4.3. Improved needs assessments**

Timely and accurate needs assessments are essential to allow informed decisions on relief. For emergencies outside the EU, ECHO field experts and EU civil protection teams play a crucial role in providing information and advice for the EU's response. They also support the UN's assessment and coordination work. Better linkages should be ensured between humanitarian needs assessments in the early phases of disaster relief and subsequent recovery and development assessment approaches, such as Post-Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNA).

The Commission will:

- **Support UN-led efforts to develop joint, cross-sectoral and comparable needs assessments.**
- **Deploy EU experts to serve as liaison officers with the UN system.**
- **Increase the capacity of EU assessment teams to cover a larger territorial scope and, where necessary, to plug gaps in UN capacity.**
- **Ensure adequate participation in the PDNA by EU experts involved in the relief-related needs assessments and the implementation of humanitarian actions.**

#### **4.4. Shared, more effective and more cost-effective logistics**

Various national and EU arrangements currently co-exist for logistic hubs in disaster zones in third countries. Different structures mean that each actor has to plan for and deploy their own on-site support. Sometimes these national support centres do not effectively communicate with each other. This is not operationally efficient, it is not cost effective and it reduces EU visibility.

The performance of horizontal tasks, such as logistics, can be more efficiently provided at EU level. The Commission working with Member States has developed specialist units (Technical Assistance and Support Teams - TAST) which function as mobile logistic support hubs. The Commission proposes to:

- **Deploy the Technical Assistance and Support Teams more systematically, especially in situations where local infrastructure has collapsed, and develop contractual arrangements to ensure their guaranteed availability.**
- **Develop with the EEAS options on how these teams can better support EU Delegations, consular authorities and other EU and international actors during major emergencies outside the EU.**
- **Look to develop these arrangements into an EU field coordination centre that can plug into the UN system.**

#### **4.5. Coordinated and cost-effective transport**

The EU currently has the possibility to co-finance the transport of in-kind assistance. This capacity should be strengthened to ensure that transportation bottlenecks are removed. Improvements are needed in delivery of assistance to affected countries, including logistics and local delivery to where it is needed most.

The Commission proposes to:

- **Simplify and reinforce existing arrangements for the pooling and co-financing of transport assets.**
- **Engage with the private sector to prepare options on the commercial provision of transport and logistics in disaster situations.**
- **Make full use of the agreed framework for the use of Member States military or military chartered transportation assets and CSDP coordination tools in support of EU Disaster Response.**
- **Continue its support for the development of appropriate airlift /transport capacities (strategic and tactical) by humanitarian organisations and the UN.**

#### **4.6. Use of Member States military assets and CSDP support to EU disaster response**

Civilian and military capacities developed in the context of the EU's common security and defence policy can be useful in supporting civil protection and humanitarian assistance notably in large-scale natural disasters.

The use of military assets to provide assistance in third countries as part of a response to natural disasters is governed by the so-called Oslo Guidelines.<sup>15</sup> These guidelines have been agreed at the UN level and endorsed by the EU in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.<sup>16</sup> The Oslo guidelines stipulate that military assets should be used as a last resort, when there is not any other available civilian alternative to support urgent humanitarian needs in the time required.

Some Member States have national systems in place to use military transport or other military assets in support of their civil protection response to major disasters outside the EU. Such military assets, channelled through the civil protection authorities of Member States can contribute to the overall in-kind assistance that the EU currently channels via the Civil Protection Mechanism's Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC). As proven by the response to the Earthquake and Tsunamis in the Indian Ocean in December 2004 and more recently by the response to the 2010 Pakistan floods, military assets can fill in critical capacity gaps in areas such as transportation, logistics support, engineering, or medical support..

The EU has developed a framework for military support to EU disaster response, which covers the use of Member States' military or military chartered transportation assets and

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<sup>15</sup> Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in International Disaster Relief — 'Oslo Guidelines' (re-launched by UN OCHA in November 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See in particular para. 61.

European Security and Defence Policy coordination tools.<sup>17</sup> Standard operating procedures have been developed and used to good effect in major emergencies such as the 2010 Pakistan response where the Commission facilitated (via the MIC) aid delivery flights offered through the EU Movement Planning Cell of the EU Military Staff. This came in addition to various civilian flights organised and co-funded in the framework of the Mechanism.

Specific proposals for how to improve mechanisms for the use of civilian and military means under CSDP as part of the EU's disaster response, notably how to improve consistency and synergies with EU humanitarian and civil protection operations will be presented separately by the High Representative and the European Commission.

There is a need to develop:

- **The European Emergency Response Centre as the Commission's operational emergency relief interface with the CSDP coordination tools in order to match humanitarian needs on the ground with the provision of Member States crisis management assets.**

## **5. A More Coherent Response**

### **5.1. Developing an Emergency Response Centre**

Civil protection and humanitarian aid are the main operational instruments of the EU's immediate response to disasters. These instruments have been brought together into one Directorate General (DG ECHO) in the Commission which makes it possible to establish a strengthened Emergency Response Centre that can draw on information and expertise from both areas and effectively link, at European level, the civil protection and the humanitarian aid authorities in the Member States.

The ECHO and the MIC crisis rooms will be merged into a genuine response centre, operational on a 24 hours basis and responsible for the coordination of the EU's civilian disaster response. This will require a qualitative shift from information sharing and reacting to emergencies to a more proactive role of planning, monitoring, preparing, operational coordination and logistical support. To this end the centre will develop an integrated monitoring capacity based *inter alia* on GMES services. The centre will ensure a continuous exchange of information with both the civil protection and humanitarian aid authorities on the needs for assistance and the offers made by EU Member States and other actors. This will ensure that Member States can make informed decisions on funding and offering additional assistance. The centre will also develop reference scenarios for the main types of disasters inside and outside the EU.

For emergencies outside the EU, the Emergency Response Centre should be responsible for collecting information on all available European in-kind assistance and ensuring its coherence vis-à-vis the UN coordination system and the affected country.

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<sup>17</sup> For reference to the various documents see footnote 11 *supra*.

A consolidated Emergency Response Centre will also facilitate operational coordination with other EU actors.<sup>18</sup> This would involve sharing information and analysis with the geographic departments of the EEAS (including the Situation Centre where appropriate) and EU delegations. It would also concern co-operation with the EEAS crisis management structures when the use of EU civil and/or military assets is being considered as a part of the EU disaster response. The Centre should also be a point of liaison with relevant parts of the EEAS, including in view of CFSP or ESDP missions deployed in third countries. The Centre will also be linked to the situation awareness arrangements being developed as part of the Internal Security Strategy and will thus contribute to increase Europe's resilience towards disasters.

No new overarching structures are suggested. The development of specialized hubs/platforms will be coupled with working arrangements that ensure the systematic exchange of information.

The Commission will:

- **Merge the Civil Protection and the DG ECHO crisis rooms to create a genuine 24/7 European Emergency Response Centre, which will work closely with other relevant services, including that responsible for the Internal Security Strategy.**
- **Develop the Emergency Response Centre, over time, into a platform providing support for other services dealing with major disasters.**
- **Set up working arrangements with the EEAS (both headquarters and EU Delegations. This can be done inter alia through measures including regular meetings, temporary exchange of liaison officers, joint exercises and training.**

## **5.2. Strengthening coordination**

For disasters in third countries, the EU strongly supports the central coordinating role of the UN, in particular that of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Stronger EU co-ordination will reinforce the UN's role by ensuring a coherent EU contribution to UN-led relief efforts.

The Commission will:

- **Strengthen EU support to the UN in-country coordination of humanitarian assistance (the cluster system and UN humanitarian coordinator) including through the possible deployment of EU humanitarian liaison staff and the possible secondment of EU staff to the local UN coordination system.**
- **Use the Emergency Response Centre to streamline information flows between the EU and the UN regarding the EU's overall relief efforts.**
- **Improve the reporting by the UN financial tracking system of the overall EU assistance in any given disaster.**

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<sup>18</sup> The Commission will continue to use and further develop ARGUS (see COM(2005)662) and related procedures for cross-hazard multi-sectoral crises plus for coordination across all Commission services.

The bringing together of humanitarian aid and civil protection in the portfolio of a single Commissioner provides opportunities for joint analyses, joint information gathering, simplified feed-in to the cluster coordination system and improved intra-EU coordination on the ground. To further strengthen the coherence of European emergency relief assistance the Commission will:

- **Propose the nomination of humanitarian focal points in Member States available at all times for information exchange. These focal points will be linked with national contact points for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to ensure a fully joined-up approach.**
- **Develop a web-based information tool (based on the current 14 points system for humanitarian aid and the CECIS<sup>19</sup> system for civil protection assistance). This tool will allow real-time communication related to EU (27 Member States and Commission) humanitarian assistance and in-kind assistance.**
- **Encourage Member States to provide timely reporting on humanitarian contributions.**

## **6. A More Visible Response**

EU visibility is not an end in itself. At the same time, the EU public has a right to be given accurate and complete information about the way that the EU is responding to disasters. At present, EU is the largest humanitarian donor and its efforts are considered operationally effective but they are not always visible to EU citizens, to beneficiary developing countries and international partners. This greatly weakens the credibility and negotiating position of EU at international level in an era driven by globalisation. An adequate scenario planning approach is also needed for communications issues. EU institutions, together with Member States, need to develop a communications strategy that will improve the visibility of the EU response.

It is also important that EU funding, through international and local partner organizations, is properly acknowledged and visible in situ (except in cases where the presence of EU symbols would make the delivery of aid more difficult) and on the internet.

The Commission will:

- **Present a single overall figure for EU emergency relief assistance (both financial and in-kind) rather than separate EU and Member States' figures while giving full credit to related bilateral assistance.**
- **Work to ensure that EU symbols are used in conjunction with national badges for all EU and Member State staff/assistance deployed in response to disasters.**
- **Consider ways for partner organisations to give adequate visibility to emergency relief assistance funded by the EU (e.g. through the EU or double logo on relief items).**

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<sup>19</sup> Common Emergency Communication and Information System – a secure system linking civil protection authorities participating in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the Commission.

- **Monitor the respect of existing funding conditions more closely.**
- **Consider appropriate branding of a strengthened EU response capacity.**

## **7. Conclusion**

The strategy outlined in this Communication represents the first step in the development of a reinforced EU disaster response capacity. It will help maximize the impact of the EU's contribution to alleviating the suffering of the victims of disasters inside the EU and across the world. Legislative proposals will be proposed in 2011 to implement the key proposals.