

Report from stakeholder consultation meeting: Impact Assessment for the Commission Communication on Reinforcing the European Union's Disaster Response Capacity

Brussels, 22 July 2010

The meeting brought together 130 representatives from a wide range of actors involved in the response to major disasters. Participants included humanitarian aid, civil protection and military staff from the EU Member States, international organisations, EU institutions, NGOs, research and industry.

In line with the stakeholder consultation document sent out prior to the meeting, discussion focused on whether EU disaster response can be made more effective, coherent and visible.

Summary: It was generally acknowledged that although there is room for further improving the systems for EU civil protection and EU humanitarian assistance, these systems are delivering expected results and functioning in line with their current mandates. The future reinforcement of the EU's disaster response capacity should build on existing tools and instruments available at European and international level, and avoid creating duplications. The UN's overall role in coordinating international relief outside the EU should continue to be fully supported. The principles of a needs-based approach, coupled with the effectiveness and coherence of the EU's response, are central to future developments. Different actors and instruments involved in disaster response should be brought together when strengthening the EU's disaster response capacity, simultaneously ensuring that their roles and mandates are clearly defined. In the area of humanitarian assistance, the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* is considered the framework for any future initiatives. EU civil protection cooperation should continue to be based primarily on Member States' resources, while there is a clear scope for improvement in terms of predictability and better planning of assistance. Cost-effectiveness should remain a central concern in the further development of EU Disaster Response.

Many stakeholders supported the objective of continued reinforcement of the EU's disaster response capacity through a comprehensive and all-hazard approach. **Contingency planning, scenarios, training, exercises** and work on **lessons learnt** were generally considered to increase the effectiveness of the response, while the need to remain flexible was noted. Future reference scenarios should remain relatively general and distinguish between disasters inside the EU and in third countries. Within the EU, preparedness for disasters should be based on risk assessments and mapping, once they become available.

The importance of building on the **civil protection module system** was repeatedly stressed, as was the importance of the interaction between civil protection and humanitarian assistance. Stakeholders strongly supported the further reinforcement of analytical planning and coordination capacity of the MIC.

Future **training initiatives in the area of EU disaster response** could build on the EU civil protection training programme and other training programmes (incl. at international level), and should avoid the creation of new structures. Possibilities for broadening the scope of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism training programme and opening it to humanitarian aid professionals (for participation or for lecturing), the EU and Member States' diplomats, international partners, as well as military and other personnel involved in the response to

disasters was welcomed. More efforts should be made to attain gender balance in the training programmes.

While the Communication will focus on disaster response, it was clarified that **prevention/preparedness and DRR** are equally important and that work in these fields will be pursued in parallel.

The **overall coordinating role of the UN outside the EU** was repeatedly underlined. It was considered important to ensure that EU assistance be needs driven and fitting into the cluster system, that the role of the host country as well as the Humanitarian Coordinator (where applicable) be respected. Some stressed that humanitarian actors should lead work on **common needs assessments**. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid should be appropriately referred to as it clarifies the complementary role of civil protection in humanitarian aid response, and the EU's support for the humanitarian principles.

A few stakeholders also called for the Communication to recognise the importance of **consular cooperation**, including medical evacuation of citizens from disaster areas.

The importance of International disaster response laws, rules and principles (**IDRL**) was noted. References were also made to the usefulness of closer cooperation with NATO, both in relation to its civilian capabilities and its potential role in identifying military assets in disaster response. The cooperation between MIC and EADRCC was considered to be of key importance by some stakeholders.

Discussion on further developing the EU's disaster response in the field of civil protection was welcomed by stakeholders, who expressed a full spectrum of views on the issue. Several Member States expressed their openness to the idea of a **voluntary pool of key Member States' assets** on standby for immediate deployment in EU operations, while a number of conditions were mentioned. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, such arrangements should be genuinely voluntary and based on the existing Member States' capacities. Some participants noted that circumstances in which the Member States could refuse deploying assets committed to the pool should remain relatively broad. A possible need for EU co-funding for Member States' assets committed to the pool was raised.

The majority of Member States that took the floor did not support the option of developing **complementary EU-level assets**. However, some spoke in favour of arrangements such as those tested through a pilot project on the EU Forest Fire-fighting Tactical Reserve, and especially those focusing on horizontal and specialised support tasks (technical assistance and support, IT etc.). There was a common understanding that cost considerations of any proposed arrangements should be carefully considered. The flexibility of the system and minimal investments should be key considerations in developing future arrangements.

The need for common quality criteria for the resources deployed was raised. The use of international standards, such as the Sphere standards, also in the area of civil protection was noted. Accountability towards beneficiaries should remain pivotal.

Stakeholders were opposed to the development of an EU system for **prepositioning of relief items**. EU support to prepositioning of humanitarian partner organisations such as WFP and IFRC was supported. It was recalled that the WFP Humanitarian Response Depots are open to Member States and to humanitarian organisations. Stakeholders stressed that the EU should

retain its role as a donor in the area of humanitarian aid and not take over functions carried out by humanitarian organisations.

Given that an important share of funding for humanitarian assistance is spent **on transport and logistics**, the need for an efficient management of arrangements in such fields was highlighted. The Haiti earthquake was said to have initially involved too many players and supply-chains.

The Commission's **co-funding for the transport of Member States' assistance** was broadly supported but it was suggested that administrative procedures should be simplified and co-financing rates could be increased. Most of the Member States argued that co-financing rates should not be linked to the level of pre-commitment of assets to the voluntary pool. The possibility of distinguishing between situations inside and outside the EU was noted.

The **Technical Assistance and Support Teams (TAST)** were considered very useful for facilitating logistics arrangements during disasters. Their mandates could be deepened and broadened, and they could also be used to provide services to the UN.

Stakeholders called for more concerted efforts in the field of transport during major emergencies in order not to drive up the prices, possibly making better use of the Commission's framework contract with a transport broker.

Stakeholders agreed that **military capacity** can play an important role in supplementing civil protection and humanitarian assistance in disaster relief, and that it is important to explore how the use of military assets in disaster response can be made more effective and predictable. Military assets and capabilities are used as a last resort and under civilian command in international disaster response, as foreseen by the Oslo Guidelines and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. However, it was recalled that military assets and capabilities sometimes play a more important role in national disaster response schemes.

It was suggested that efforts should be made to define the niche-specific capabilities and gaps where military capacity could provide added value. The use of military capacities should be avoided in direct assistance and in sectors such as water and sanitation, field hospitals etc. where humanitarian organisations already have specific expertise and capabilities which are largely sufficient to cover the needs.

The use of military assets and capabilities as part of EU disaster response should build on existing frameworks, such as the 2006 EU arrangements on military support to EU disaster response¹. The division of labour between the Commission and the future EEAS Council secretariat in coordinating EU military assets and capabilities in disasters should be clarified for the benefit of external stakeholders. A scenario for using EU Battlegroups in disaster relief is currently being considered.

Most speakers did not see the need for the establishment of an independent EU **pool of civil-military liaison officers** separate from that developed by OCHA, nor for standby military resources for disaster relief. References were also made to the usefulness of closer cooperation with NATO, both in relations to its civilian capabilities and its potential role in

¹ General Framework for the use of Member States military and military chartered transportation assets and ESDP coordination tools in support of EU disaster response, doc. 8976/06 and Military support to EU disaster response — Identification and coordination of available assets and capabilities, doc. 9462/3/06 REV 3 and doc. 14540/06 + COR 1

identifying military assets in disaster response. The cooperation between MIC and EADRCC within the agreed framework was considered to be of key importance by some stakeholders.

Stakeholders agreed on the scope for improving **EU coordination in the aftermath of disasters**, both on an operational and a strategic/political level. In the area of humanitarian assistance it was agreed that information sharing regarding funding intentions, analyses, needs assessments etc. can be improved. As civil protection and humanitarian assistance are brought together in the Commission, stakeholders agreed that there are new opportunities for stronger EU coordination in the aftermath of disasters. Appropriate coordination arrangements with the CCA arrangements, relevant Commissioners, the future EEAS, the High Representative/Vice President etc. were noted as crucial. Coordination, consultation and cooperation with international organisations should be referred to in the Communication.

Regarding the option of a **web-based tool for interactive and secure information exchange on EU humanitarian assistance**, stakeholders stressed the need to build on the existing 14 points system and the tools in place in the area of civil protection (CECIS and the MIC Portal). Real-time coordination prior to decisions on humanitarian funding was thought to favour equitable distribution of EU funds. Existing Commission information tools should be rationalised.

Coordination was also considered important in the area of **EU advocacy** where greater use of coherent and joint action could be made. In the area of disaster preparedness in developing countries, ISDR and the Hyogo framework for action provide the basic framework for action.

Stakeholders strongly supported increased work on **lessons learnt** and **evaluations**. It was suggested that future evaluations and EU lessons learnt exercises, such as the one taking place in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, should involve NGOs and other stakeholders.

Several stakeholders requested further consultation opportunities. It was clarified that following the adoption of the Communication, currently foreseen for November 2010, there will be extensive consultations and political debates in the relevant fora. Legislative proposals will follow in 2011.