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**Global evaluation of the Community Action Programme in
the field of Civil Protection, the Community Mechanism to
facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection
assistance interventions and the Marine Pollution
framework**

**Case Study I – Report
Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC)**

**The European Commission
Directorate-General for Environment
(DG ENV A5)**

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List of Acronyms

CM	Community Mechanism
CIVP	Civil Protection
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
MIC	Monitoring and Information Centre
MP	Marine Pollution Framework
MS	Member States
DG	Directorate General

1. CASE STUDY I – MONITORING AND INFORMATION CENTRE (MIC)

1.1. Background

The inclusion of the Monitoring Information Centre (MIC) as a case study was proposed because of its function as a key element of the Community Mechanism (CM), its variety of functions within the CM, and its links to other institutions / services and emergency systems in the EU Member States, within the broad field of civil protection.

The Monitoring and Information Centre is one of the key elements of the Community Mechanism. It operates on a permanent basis (24 hours a day), and acts as a centre to collect, to compile, and to distribute information on emergencies, to receive and compile requests for assistance, and to forward these to contact points of the affected countries and all other Member States. In addition, the MIC implements database, training and workshop programmes, as well as a Common Emergency Communication and Information System.

1.2. Procedure and methods

The data collection took into account the administrative and implementation level as well as the interfaces of the MIC. Data was collected mainly through qualitative interviews with staff of the EC's CIVP Unit, and with representatives of related services within the European Commission such as "DG SANCO". Additionally, external "links" of the MIC, such as national contact points (MP/CIVP) and national correspondents in the Member States, were also interviewed. Data collection was complemented by secondary data, mainly reports concerning the CM and MIC, as well as MIC "products", e.g. handbooks.

Data collection was carried out through telephone interviews (duration approx. 60 min.) as well as bilateral interviews based on standardised interview guides for the respective interview groups.

1.3. Conclusions

- Over the last 3 years, the MIC has experienced a continuous growth, and has become a useful and important CIVP instrument for most of the "old" Member States.
- The activities of the MIC have a considerable impact on Member States, primarily with regard to the improvement of national CIVP approaches, scarce structures and services and operational procedures of emergency responses in the Member States.

The following weaknesses and potential areas for improvement related to the MIC's activities and structures have been identified:

- The variety of organisational structures in the MS renders it enormously difficult for the MIC to take into account respective individual operational specifications and requirements, especially in terms of harmonising technical and communication procedures and processes.
- In general, the EC (especially the CIVP unit) and most of the MS still have divergent interpretations regarding the role, responsibilities and function of the MIC on the operational level. The interviewees pointed out:
 - o From the point of view of MS, the MIC is not adequately staffed, especially during larger-scale exercises and real interventions.
 - o The contact points of the MS perceive the MIC to be quite passive. They demand a more active role for the MIC in terms of analysing and synergising emergency situations. The collection of data must be more pro-active or in advance.

- The cooperation between the MIC and the MP contact points is very limited. This is due to technical limitations, and to the existence of “comparable” established emergency systems in the Baltic / North Sea.
 - Marine pollution alert structures seem not to be coherent with the CIVP structures and are therefore not really dependent on MIC structures, as they dispose of their own established alert systems and regional agreements that they act upon.
 - The majority of the MP contact points are not well informed about opportunities for training within the EC.
- There are difficulties that stem from the non-integrated nature of alert points.
- CECIS have a strong need for CIVP contact points – but the establishment and implementation process is taking too long.
- The EC should be more active in the field of (bio)terrorism and should initiate more exercises in this emergent field for the MS.

1.4. Recommendations

- Since Civil Protection is a highly sensitive field, the MIC should be permanently staffed. This would reduce the risk of any kind of future brain drain during emergency responses, among others.
- The EC should initiate a communication or negotiation process with MS on more explicit and enhanced roles and responsibilities of the MIC, beyond the requirements and regulations that have been defined to date.
 - For one, this process should focus explicitly on the MIC itself and its external perception by the MS.
 - In addition, the process should focus on the need to move towards a unified system of alert points within the EC structures, which may integrate MIC, BICHAT, and ECURIE etc.. Alternatively, an overall alarm cell could be established in the EC for all these related alert services.
 - Finally, a clarification of the MIC’s role and function in the field of MP is needed in order to avoid overlaps between services such as EMSA, the MP framework, as well as other relevant EC institutions and regional agreements under HELCOM, BONN etc.
- The EC should mediate a mechanism / process to transfer the latest updates on responses to terrorism from more experienced to less experienced MS.
- Exercises within MP should be taken into account more.

2. EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT OF THE MONITORING AND INFORMATION CENTRE “MIC”

2.1. The organisation of national contact points in relation to the MIC

As reported by several interviewees, there are no common organisational structures in the field of Civil Protection and Marine Pollution in the EU countries. Usually, the national contact points are related to various ministries such as Interior, Defence, Infrastructure, Transport or Environment, depending on the respective country. Some countries have only one contact point for their external and internal communications for all related alert points and services, such as “MIC, NATO, ECURIE, RAS-BICHAT” externally and “fire brigades, police, ambulances” internally. Some countries have two or three contact points for CIVP and MP, often depending on different foci. Germany, for example, disposes of two national MP contact points, where one MP contact point acts as a Maritime Emergency Reception Centre,

and a second one is responsible for Maritime Pollution Control. France has three national contact points for MP that serve different regions. Contact points are staffed with either military or civil personnel.

The variety of organisational structures in the MS causes enormous difficulties for the MIC when trying to react individually on operational specifications and requirements in terms of harmonising technical and communication procedures and processes, and to achieve an ever more unified European response system.

Compared to the national contact points within MP and CIVP, the MIC is under-staffed, especially during major events and exercises. This was criticised on numerous occasions by the contact points and by the EC staff itself.

2.2. The national contact points' perception of and experience with the CM and MIC

Only one interviewee expressed his full satisfaction with the performance of the MIC. Nonetheless, all interviewees at the national contact points were conscious of the fact that the MIC was only created recently, and pointed out that the MIC is still in the process of finding its position within an EU emergency response system.

Three contact points stated they were still confused and had some difficulties understanding the role of the MIC in relation to the Community Mechanism and their unclear interfaces.

The majority of the CIVP national contact points pointed out there is some room for organisational and operational improvements within the MIC. Several interviewees mentioned specific areas which they feel the EC / CIVP unit needs to pay more attention to:

- Six national contact points mentioned a strong need for the improvement of procedures (incl. CIVP - handbook).
- The majority of the interviewees held that the MIC needs to be staffed permanently (24 hours a day, including night shifts).
- National contact points expect more operational expertise, e.g. more synthesised analysis of information and requests during operations. The collection of data must be more pro-active or in advance and not limited to the later stages. The information sent must be more precise in its descriptions (e.g. mouthpiece of breath masks / over- or under pressure)
- In the past, the MIC was not always prepared to receive all information provided by the Member States. This might be due to a lack of personnel or appropriate internal procedures.
- The MIC should also send members of its coordination teams to operational spots.

Furthermore, two MS expressed their strong view that the MIC should not take over a steering or leadership role during emergencies, but must be more active and supportive in providing important information. On the contrary, two other MS expressed their desire for a more dominant role of the MIC in coordination during emergencies.

All CIVP contact points participate regularly in training courses and exercises organised by CM / MIC. Generally, one or two participants per country and event have taken part in these activities in the past.

In comparison, the MP contact points have so far had only rather limited contact with the MIC. Contact was mainly related to the "Prestige" incident in Spain, and to the communication tests for the national contact points carried out regularly by the MIC. This situation seems also to be due to technical reasons, as well as to the existence of established emergency systems in the Baltic / North Sea areas.

Finally, the work of the MIC was judged in general as very cooperative and pragmatic, and – except for the MP contact points – the growing need for a more unified EU emergency system including the CM and MIC is well accepted.

2.3. Specific results that have been achieved through activities of the Community Mechanism and specifically the MIC

Overall, the results achieved are satisfactory. Specific results range from learning from the experience of others, information sharing, and sensitising the MS on EC instruments (especially the MIC), to the establishment of new formal and informal networks among the MS.

Beyond these general results, some MS have made use not only of the general lessons learnt from the exercises and activities of the MIC, but have integrated specific aspects into their own national CIVP systems. These include:

- Two MS mentioned a substantial improvement of their national emergency plans as a result of the MIC exercises.
- One MS adopted the MIC handbook and adapted national specifications.
- One MS adopted and set up relevant structures for interventions in third countries.
- Almost all national CIVP contact points stated that they had improved their national, and in some cases also their regional, emergency network systems as a result of the exercises organised by the MIC.
- The majority of the CIVP contact points also stated that the assessment of equipments through the MIC inventories for the EC database system helps to identify lacks and deficiencies at the national level. In addition, it provided MS with an opportunity to identify unexpected resources, such as the additional availability of helicopters in the sectors of trade and industry. This led to a better understanding of the response situation in each MS (limited to EU 15).

Unfortunately, none of the MP national contact points reported any kind of results achieved. This confirms the lack of exchange between the CM / MIC and the national contact points.

2.4. Adjustment of national obligations at the national level to the MIC (e.g. data base requirements, standards)

Overall, it must be stated that the variety of individual CIVP systems and regulations in the MS continues to exist. This severely limits the possibility of any substantial modifications.

In this regard, most of the national contact points explained that only some partial changes had taken place. Some MS have stated that they are continuously improving and updating their databases thanks to newly collected and elaborated data available thanks to the MIC. One MS has made a major adjustment, developing an overall national emergency plan based on lessons learned during MIC exercises, including the integration of technical requirements such as a purchasing list for new equipment.

The interviewees at the MP contact points were not aware of any adjustments.

2.5. Identified changes through activities of the CM and MIC (incl. training courses and exercises) with regard to:

- the cooperation between Member States in case of emergency:

In general, the opinion of the CIVP contact points was quite positive. Two contact points have established new contacts, as well as improved previously existing bilateral contacts, which will be useful also in case of emergencies.

- the degree of preparedness:

Regarding the degree of preparedness, the majority of the CIVP contact points reported a general improvement of their national preparedness. Specifically, one MS pointed out that due to the experience gained through the EC exercises, his country was much better prepared for national incidents. A second MS stated that the multiple EC exercises had led

to an enormous improvement of national capacities during the preparation and execution of national exercises.

- effectiveness and response in case of emergency:

All CIVP contact points pointed out that, due to the very low number of real emergencies in EC countries over the last years, it was difficult to judge this point exactly. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees reported an improvement of the inter-operability among their national services.

The Marine Pollution contact points were unable to report any changes, due to their lack of experience with the CM / MIC.

2.6. Impacts of the MIC on emergency planning in the MS

According to the interviewees of the national contact points, the main impacts of the MIC are limited to the following points:

- The level of awareness concerning emergency preparation and planning has improved due to new dimensions in emergency planning.
- The effective cooperation between certain MS on a bilateral basis has been significantly improved.
- There seems to have been a change of mentality among the CIVP actors, who express a feeling of improved security within a more unified EU response system.

2.7. External coherence – collaboration of MS with other services of other organisations comparable to the MIC

All CIVP contact points mentioned that the role of MIC is continuing to evolve, although three MS explicitly stated that on 70% of all real interventions, they receive duplicate requests through the NATO alert point system (EADRCC – European Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre). This leads to problems of communication within the MS, and even to a certain degree of confusion that sometimes means precious time for fast response actions is wasted. Most of the contact points have problems prioritising these similar requests received through the MIC and EADRCC. None of the interviewees pointed out any real comparative strength or weakness of either of the two systems. Most of the MS perceive the double requests as additional workload and would prefer a more harmonised communication within the communication system of interventions.

UN-OCHA acts outside of Europe during interventions and has not been perceived as a service that competes with the MIC. Three out of four CIVP national contact points were not aware of any operational conflicts between the UN-OCHA and EC alert point system.

The MP contact points have almost no interest in collaborating with the MIC, due to the existence of well-established services under regional agreements like HELCOM and the Bonn and Copenhagen agreements. Furthermore, bi- and trilateral agreements such as the “Swedinger” agreement also exist and are operational e.g. in the Baltic Sea area. MP contact points cite mainly technical reasons to explain their lack of motivation to use the MIC as an alert point. Two MS stated that they do not have much information about the MIC.

However, overlapping actions and unnecessary friction should be held to an absolute minimum for the national contact points. Therefore, the EC should initiate, maybe on the political level, a process to discuss and solve the above mentioned friction between the different services.

2.8. Most useful aspect / added value of the MIC

- Assistance by foreign MS in case of emergencies is ensured
- Growing together of structures in Europe

- One single coordination point
- MIC as an Info-Point
- Support during especially large-scale disasters / oil spills
- Bringing people into contact.

2.9. Least useful aspect of the MIC

- Too much friction with MS systems
- Too many discussions on meetings, more exercises are necessary
- Permanent internal changes in DG ENV (rooms / infrastructure, people)
- Difficulties with non-integrated alert points.