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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 23.2.2009
SEC(2009) 203

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
Accompanying document to the

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

{COM(2009) 82}
{SEC(2009) 202}

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact assessment has been prepared by the Commission services to support the Communication on “A community approach on the prevention of natural and manmade disasters”.

The objective of such a Communication is to identify measures which could be included in a Community strategy for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters, building upon and linking existing measures. It is also intended to trigger a debate with stakeholders and initiate policy discussions between the EU institutions.

At this early stage of policy development, the objectives of the impact assessment are:

- to provide the necessary information to support the policy decision as to whether or not to develop an EU strategy on disaster prevention;
- to assess and explore options for potential inclusion in the Communication

2. CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

The impact assessment is built on the results of two external independent studies which identified prevention gaps in existing instruments and analysed the approach taken by some Member States to prevention.

The main stakeholders were invited to participate in a general consultation meeting and to comment on an issues paper. Furthermore, three specific stakeholder meetings gathering experts from Member State administrations and private organisations were held to specifically address economic and environmental aspects, in particular forest fires, and land use/risk mapping issues.

There was a wide consensus amongst stakeholders on the need to strengthen disaster prevention efforts both at Member State and EU level and on the fact that EU action can provide added-value in this process. According to stakeholders, while bearing in mind that disaster prevention is primarily a national responsibility, similar vulnerabilities across Member States call for their increased coordination and cooperation at EU level.

3. PROBLEM DEFINITION AND POLICY OBJECTIVE

The tragic events of the past years have led to the strengthening of European civil protection legislation on preparedness and response, with a reinforced Community Civil Protection Mechanism¹ and the adoption of the Civil Protection Financial Instrument². There is now a political will from all concerned stakeholders to strengthen the links between prevention, preparedness, response and recovery: investment in preparedness and response has to be coupled with a similar strengthening of the prevention sphere.

Member States already have, to varying degrees, policies aimed at the prevention of disasters. While prevention remains a national responsibility, action at Community level is based upon the following drivers:

¹ Council Decision 2007/779/EC, Euratom establishing a Community civil protection Mechanism (recast)
² Council Decision establishing a civil protection financial instrument (2007/162/EC, Euratom)

- An increased vulnerability of European citizens to disasters;
- Disasters cause cross-border impacts and have a transnational dimension;
- Disasters inflict considerable damages and costs and have an impact on the economic growth and competitiveness of the EU

The goal of the initiative is therefore to improve the protection of people, the environment and property, including cultural heritage, by bridging existing gaps, better linking the various sectors and stakeholders and establishing a policy framework for initiating thematic initiatives, horizontal and cross cutting tools, and guidelines for disaster prevention.

This goal is expected to be attained via the pursuit of three specific objectives:

- Creating the conditions for the development of knowledge based disaster prevention policies at all levels of government;
- Linking the actors and policies throughout the disaster management cycle;
- Making existing instruments perform better for disaster prevention

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE POLICY OPTIONS

The Commission has identified and assessed policy options as follows:

- a **baseline option**, where no further action is taken regarding the prevention of disasters. This option would not allow the sufficient reduction of the impact of disasters and would not ensure a fair level of protection to all EU citizens.
- **specific options**, on ways forward for each of the areas identified. They include the following, which are not mutually exclusive and may be combined:
 - “**Soft**” **options** such as the provision of guidance aiming at building a knowledge base on disasters, linking actors and policies and/or improving the use of EU funds. They could be grouped under the activities of a multisectoral steering group applying an open method of coordination.
 - **Accompanying measures**: the integration of disaster prevention in the review process of relevant legislation is likely to bring benefits by logically complementing the prevention-preparedness-response-recovery disaster cycle. The creation of a “disasters observatory”, bringing together existing data and information on disasters in the EU, is likely to deliver quick and comprehensive results with limited costs.
 - **Funding measures**, that may require amending existing funds, could improve the consistency and effectiveness of EU funding regarding the prevention of disasters. The creation of a specific financial instrument for disaster prevention is expected to have the least advantages.
 - **Legislative measures** may include integrated instruments addressing risk mapping and disaster prevention in general, or vertical instruments addressing specific disasters, such as forest fires. They would be the most effective in reducing the negative impacts of disasters but may imply significant efforts at EU and national levels.

5. CONCLUSION

A Community strategy on disaster prevention would reduce the disparities within the EU regarding the protection of people, the economy and environment from the effects of disasters, increase the general level of awareness amongst decision-makers and the public, promote best practice, and thereby increase the resilience of the EU and its economy to the increasing threat of natural and manmade disasters.

In the short term, specific actions contributing to the development of knowledge, a better linking of actors and policies and an improvement in the effectiveness of existing policy instruments with regard to disaster prevention could provide a flexible option for Community action that could adjust to the different needs and resources of Member States, simultaneously ensuring EU-wide coordination and consistency. It would have the potential for delivering results at relatively low costs, would enhance the understanding of disaster prevention issues at all levels and provide the basis for future reflections on how to further develop this policy area.

In the long term, the approach might be developed further, leading to a consolidated Community strategy for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters.