



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

2009/2151(INI)

26.2.2010

DRAFT REPORT

A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made
disasters
(2009/2151(INI))

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters (2009/2151(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission Communication of 23 February 2009 entitled ‘A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters’¹ and the corresponding impact assessment²; and the Commission working document of 14 December 2007 on strengthening early warning systems in Europe³;
- having regard to its resolutions of 16 September 2009 on forest fires in the summer of 2009⁴, 4 September 2007 on natural disasters⁵, 7 September 2006 on forest fires and floods⁶, 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe⁷, 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal⁸, 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain⁹, 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe¹⁰, its resolutions of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, droughts and floods) – agricultural aspects¹¹, regional development aspects¹² and environmental aspects¹³, and its legislative resolution of 18 May 2006 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund¹⁴;
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 June 2008 on reinforcing the Union’s disaster response capacity¹⁵, and points 12 to 15 of the Presidency conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15-16 June 2006 on the European Union’s responsiveness to emergencies, crises and disasters¹⁶;
- having regard to Decision 2007/162/EC, Euratom of 5 March 2007 establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument¹⁷;
- having regard to Council Directive 96/82/EC on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances (Seveso II Directive)¹⁸;

¹ COM(2009)0082.

² SEC(2009)0202.

³ SEC(2007)1721.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA-PROV(2009)0013.

⁵ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2007)0362.

⁶ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0349.

⁷ OJ C 272 E, 13.11.2003, p. 471.

⁸ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0139.

⁹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0187.

¹⁰ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0334.

¹¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0222.

¹² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0223.

¹³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0224.

¹⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0218.

¹⁵ 10128/08.

¹⁶ 10633/1/06.

¹⁷ OJ L 71, 10.3.2007, p. 9.

¹⁸ OJ L 10, 14.1.1997, p. 13.

- having regard to Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and Council on the assessment and management of flood risks (Floods Directive)¹;
 - having regard to Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (EIA Directive)²;
 - having regard to the Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, adopted on 22 January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo³;
 - having regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted on 5 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro;
 - having regard to Article 196 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure;
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinions of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee on Regional Development and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (A7-0000/2010);
- A. whereas prevention should constitute an increasingly important stage in disaster management and be given greater social importance;
 - B. whereas factors such as, inter alia, intensive land use, haphazard industrial and urban growth, abandonment of the countryside, desertification and the increased frequency of extreme weather events make Member States, and convergence regions in particular, more vulnerable to disasters, both natural and man-made;
 - C. whereas disasters generally have many causes, they are not always solely attributable to extreme natural phenomena, but are frequently made more likely by mankind's flawed relationship with the surrounding physical environment;
 - D. whereas a holistic and effective approach to disaster prevention should incorporate various levels of cooperation between local, regional and national authorities;
 - E. whereas the balanced occupation of land, and economic and social development that are in harmony with nature, and reinforced cohesion across the EU are fundamental elements of disaster prevention;
1. Points out that the main objective of disaster prevention is to safeguard human life, the safety and physical integrity of individuals, the environment, economic and social infrastructures, including housing, and the cultural heritage;
 2. Considers that, given the scale and/or the cross-border nature that disasters may

¹ OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27.

² OJ L 175, 5.7.1985, p. 40.

³ A/CONF.206/6.

assume, it is appropriate and necessary to enhance cooperation, both at regional and EU level, based on complementarity of action and the principle of solidarity between Member States;

3. Points out the importance of reducing inequalities between regions and Member States in terms of their capacity to protect their populations, environment and economy, in particular helping to improve prevention in the regions and Member States that are highly vulnerable to the risk of disasters and that have fewer economic resources;
4. Takes note of the proposal to set up a network made up of representatives of the various competent national services of all the Member States; stresses that this network should operate within the scope of the cooperation between national, regional and local authorities with responsibilities in disaster management, spatial planning and risk mapping and management; emphasises the role of this network in exchanging experience and prevention measures; calls for consideration also to be given to hearing social organisations working in this area;
5. Stresses the need to create a suitable financial instrument for disaster prevention that will strengthen and link instruments such as cohesion policy, rural development policy, regional policy, the Solidarity Fund and the Seventh Framework Programme; asks that in this context, prevention should be taken into account in the post-2013 Financial Perspective;
6. Considers that, inter alia, the following prevention measures should be the subject of priority support from the EU to the Member States:
 - a) drafting and revising building safety and land use legislation;
 - b) action to remedy situations conducive to future risks: renaturalising river beds; restoring and protecting river basins, wetlands and related eco-systems; increasing the through-flow capacity of bridges and water pipelines, clearing up and reordering forests; and protecting and defending the coastline;
 - c) protecting and refurbishing inhabited areas, especially urban areas, that are particularly vulnerable to certain types of disasters, with the involvement of residents;
 - d) maintaining and inspecting the safety of existing major infrastructures, with particular emphasis on dams, fuel pipelines, road and rail bridges;
7. Emphasises the importance of public research and development (R&D) in preventing and managing disasters and calls for increased coordination and cooperation between the R&D institutions of Member States, especially those facing similar risks; calls for enhanced early warning systems in Member States and the creation and strengthening of links between the various early warning systems; recommends to the Commission that it should take due note of these needs and ensure appropriate funding;
8. Points out the importance of studying rural and urban adaptation measures, given the increased frequency of extreme weather events;
9. Reiterates the importance of setting up a European Drought Observatory which would

be responsible for the study and the mitigation and monitoring of the effects of drought;

10. Calls on the Commission to carry out, together with the Member States, a specific initiative in the area of forest protection and fire prevention; considers that forestation and reforestation projects should be supported, with preference given to native species and mixed forests, to encourage biodiversity and greater resistance to fire, storms and disease;
11. Invites the Member States to assess the possibility of improving the inclusion of disaster prevention in national operational programming of EU funding; urges the Commission to support the need to reformulate the operational programmes identified by Member States in this area;
12. Highlights the need for the Solidarity Fund Regulation to be revised, by adapting the eligibility criteria to the characteristics of each region and each disaster, paying particular attention to production sectors, the most vulnerable areas and the populations affected, and enabling mobilisation to be more flexible and timely;
13. Stresses that the natural characteristics and constraints of sparsely populated regions and outermost regions need to be acknowledged and taken into due account;
14. Recommends that issues relating to disaster prevention should be more fully included in the revision of the EIA Directive, particularly with regard to the assessment, communication and publicising of risks;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In recent years EU Member States have been buffeted by a considerable number of disasters. To put this into perspective, records show that during the first six years of the EU Solidarity Fund, the Commission received 62 requests for financial support from 21 different countries¹. Of these, roughly a third fall into the category of ‘major disasters’. Other disasters did not prompt requests for use of the Fund, although their impact on the populations affected, the environment and the economy was considerable and, in many cases, lasting.

The damage is almost always hard to gauge, in particular taking into account the loss of human life. In any event, the economic and social costs of disasters are very significant. It is against this backdrop that prevention should increase in social importance, becoming an increasingly important stage in disaster management.

Although Member States are primarily and chiefly responsible for the protection of their citizens and for disaster prevention, heightened cooperation in the area of prevention is fully justified, as are improved coordination of efforts, enhanced solidarity and mutual assistance.

With a view to achieving this aspiration, cooperation between national, regional and local authorities with responsibilities for disaster management, spatial planning and risk mapping and management is proposed. The creation of a network that would constitute a forum for exchanging experiences and prevention measures, which would also allow social organisations working in this area to participate in some shape or form, seems desirable. The importance of the role of regional and local authorities, owing to their detailed knowledge of local characteristics and conditions, should be highlighted.

Many factors influence how frequently disasters occur and their magnitude. They are often made more likely by policies that cause a flawed relationship between mankind and the surrounding physical environment. Factors such as, inter alia, intensive land use, haphazard industrial and urban growth, abandonment of the countryside, desertification, increasingly frequent extreme weather events make Member States, and convergence regions in particular, more vulnerable to disasters, both natural and man-made. Such vulnerability is widespread but is even more acute for convergence regions. Hence the importance of viewing prevention from a cross-cutting perspective, incorporating it in the relevant sectoral policies to promote balanced land occupation and cohesive economic and social development that is in tune with nature. Furthermore, it must be recognised that some of these sectoral policies (e.g. CAP) have led to increased exposure to risk for certain regions and for their inhabitants, which is why corrective action needs to be taken. It is also important to bear in mind that disasters tend to affect most those who have the fewest resources to protect themselves, their families and their assets.

The creation of a suitable financial framework at EU level for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters is thus considered relevant and necessary. This would back up and link existing instruments, including those in the cohesion policy, regional policy and rural development policy areas, among others. EU funding should favour a series of prevention measures to be implemented by Member States that are generally aimed at correcting situations potentially conducive to risks, protecting inhabited areas, monitoring the safety

¹ COM(2009) 193 final.

of major infrastructures and drafting and reviewing building safety and land use legislation.

Moreover, improving the inclusion of disaster prevention in national operational programming of EU funding is considered necessary, and the Commission should support the need to reformulate the operational programmes identified by Member States in this area. The characteristics and natural constraints of sparsely populated regions and outermost regions should be acknowledged and taken into due account.

It is vitally important for Member States to enhance their research and development (R&D) capacity in the area of disaster prevention and management. This is also an area where it is both possible and desirable to step up coordination and cooperation between Member States, especially those facing similar risks. It is recommended that due account be taken of this need and for it to be adequately funded. Also in the same area, strengthening early warning systems in Member States and forging and consolidating links between the various early warning systems is seen as fundamental, as is studying and developing adaptation measures at urban and rural level, given the increased frequency of extreme weather events.

A Community approach on disaster prevention should make reducing the disparities between regions and Member States in this area a central focus, in particular by helping to improve prevention in regions and Member States that are highly vulnerable to risk and have fewer economic means.

It is clear that some types of natural disasters have a tendency to recur, especially in convergence regions. Following on from previous European Parliament resolutions, it is proposed that a European Drought Observatory should be created, together with a specific initiative in the area of forest protection and fire prevention.