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*Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development*

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**2009/2151(INI)**

8.4.2010

## **OPINION**

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

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

Rapporteur: Maria do Céu Patrão Neves

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission communication on prevention of natural and man-made disasters<sup>1</sup>; supports the view that disaster prevention is inseparable from intervention; reaffirms Parliament's previous work<sup>2</sup> on this subject and regrets that the Commission has not yet put forward legislative proposals in line with Parliament's proposals; stresses the need to establish comprehensive legislation and guidelines with minimum standards, reflecting a holistic approach, towards a more effective EU policy on disaster management; recalls that, in the absence of this, the Treaty of Lisbon permits the use of enhanced cooperation between Member States, and that this subject may therefore also be addressed within that framework;
2. Urges the European Commission to develop an approach to natural and man-made disasters closely linked with all stages: prevention, preparedness, immediate intervention and rescue, all closely linked to a policy of swift and effective management; the increase in response capacity must take account of all types of disasters (within or outside the EU, natural or man-made), of all EU instruments, and of interinstitutional coordination;
3. Advocates a single EU-wide strategy through the introduction of a uniform action plan for each type of disaster, ensuring complete solidarity between countries in tackling disasters; urges that particular attention be paid within the strategy to the most isolated, most sparsely populated, mountainous and border regions of Europe, and the most economically disadvantaged European regions;
4. Supports the key elements of the Community approach, but considers them insufficient for the agricultural sector; is of the opinion that knowledge-based disaster prevention is essential; highlights the need to create a database of economic and social disaster records, in the interests of efficient monitoring, including the mapping of areas at increased risk, as well as to formulate measures appropriate to the specific nature of the major risks in each region;
5. Encourages linking the actors and policies throughout the disaster management cycle, stressing the benefits of a quick reaction force that would enhance coordination and solidarity among Member States, since no countries have the resources required to deal with major natural disasters on their own; supports the initiative to launch a stakeholder group and calls for the inclusion of representatives from agriculture in the proposed mechanism for crisis management with a view, inter alia, to making the principle of multi-functionality a reality;

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2009)0082.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, drought and floods) – agricultural aspects (C 297 E, 7.12.2006, p. 363); resolution of 16 February 2006 on risk and crisis management in the agricultural sector (C 290 E, 29.11.2006, p. 407); resolution of 19 June 2008 on stepping up the Union's disaster response capacity (C 286 E, 14.8.2008, p. 15).

6. Emphasises that the effects of natural disasters spill over the legal and administrative borders of regions and Member States, which means that risk mapping needs to be accompanied by wide-ranging territorial cooperation mechanisms that operate independently of these borders at the macro-region level, in order to combat natural or man-made disasters more effectively in terms of both prevention and intervention;
7. Urges cooperation between Member States, countries neighbouring the EU and developing countries in cross-border projects sharing best practice and disseminating practical knowledge through the EU's neighbourhood policy programmes and development programmes;
8. Considers that recent experience and that of past years emphasises the need further to reinforce the Community's civil protection, prevention preparedness and response capability in relation to natural and anthropogenic disasters, and strongly urges the Commission to take action to this end in order to provide visible expression of European solidarity with countries affected by major emergencies; supports activities aimed at enhancing Member States' civil protection preparedness, notably through the exchange of experts and best practice, exercises and preparedness projects;
9. Deeply regrets the fact that so many and such heavy losses have occurred during recent natural disasters in certain Member States and considers it necessary, in consequence, to examine immediately the adequacy of prevention and preparedness measures in order to ensure that the necessary lessons are drawn with a view to preventing and limiting the devastating effects of similar disasters in Member States in the future; in this regard, urges the Commission to ask Member States to supply details of their operational programmes in place for dealing with natural disasters, with a view to exchanging experience and drawing conclusions on immediate measures, coordination of administrative and operational bodies, and availability of the necessary human and material resources;
10. Asks the Member States and local authorities to facilitate awareness raising with regard to prevention of disasters, particularly in schools and rural communities;
11. Recalls that investments in sustainable ecosystem management or sound environmental management can offer cost-effective solutions to reducing community vulnerability to disasters; healthy ecosystems act as natural buffers to hazard events, are often less expensive to install or maintain, and are often more effective than physical engineering structures; according to the World Bank (2004), investments in preventive measures, including in maintaining healthy ecosystems, are seven times cheaper than the costs incurred by disasters;
12. Stresses the need for the presence of representatives of the agricultural sector within the disaster management mechanism with a view to evaluation and remedial action in line with the reality within this sector, for more efficient coordination of existing resources leading to the consolidation of EU policy on immediate response capacity;
13. Considers that agricultural and forestry production are vulnerable to climatic phenomena such as drought, frost, ice, hail, forest fires, storms, floods, torrential rainfall and storms, to health risks such as pest infestations, animal diseases, epidemics, and epizootics, to

destruction due to wild animals, and to consequences of human activities like climate change, pollution, acid rain and unintentional and deliberate genetic contamination, to landslides because of problems related to urban and regional planning to technological and transport-related hazards, to the desertification of mountain areas and to forest fires primarily due to absence of forest maintenance and criminal behaviour, and to contamination of rivers due to chemical discharges from factories, nutrient leakage and the negligence of forest visitors;

14. Stresses that natural and man-made disasters endanger the economic viability of farms and lead to rural depopulation, intensify erosion and desertification, damage ecosystems, endanger biodiversity and seriously affect the quality of life of the remaining rural population; believes that the consequences are more critical in areas with natural handicaps and no possibilities of economic diversification, where subsistence farming is practised or agriculture is the major or only sector of the economy, leading to a shortage of food, a shortage of jobs in the region concerned and migration of the population to urban areas;
15. Highlights the role played by farmers as custodians of the countryside in the European Union; therefore considers it necessary to promote the maintenance of agricultural activities in a viable manner in order to curb the abandonment of production and the depopulation of rural areas, a phenomenon which further increases the risk of forest fires;
16. Recalls that agriculture is crucial in this context, as it ensures the existence of rural economies and curbs migration to urban areas, providing good environmental conditions for the land, reducing carbon emissions and contributing to their sequestration, improving soil maintenance, returning river and coastal water systems to their natural state and promoting the recovery of natural spaces;
17. Recalls that plants absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere through photosynthesis and produce biomass that can be converted into biogas, biofuels and industrial goods; that the increase in the use of agricultural products in the production of industrial products such as polymers, lubricants, surface agents, solvents and fibres, can also help reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources;
18. Considers that there is an entire group of agricultural energy crops that, together with wind power and solar energy, can significantly contribute to the EU's energy security;
19. Considers that the foreseeable negative effects of climate change on agricultural production will put additional pressure on maintaining food security as a matter of necessity, which will also be worsened by a demographic increase to 9 billion people by 2050, requiring a corresponding increase of some 70% in production capacity; all of these aspects show how food security, climate change mitigation, natural disasters and poverty reduction are inextricably linked;
20. Warns of the need for the future common agricultural policy to have the financial means to continue to ensure the supply of food to Europeans and to respond to other challenges they may face, in the context of adapting to climate change and reducing its negative effects, in particular through preventing the impact of natural disasters;
21. Calls on the European Commission to examine the viability of creating a climate change

adaptation fund in the context of the next financial perspective, in order to help finance preventive measures relating to natural disasters in specific economic sectors;

22. Recalls that forests are important primarily for the production of wood, but also for maintaining biodiversity, the prevention of fires, floods, avalanches and erosion, management of groundwater resources, landscape management and carbon capture; there is a pressing need for a stringent EU forestry policy, that takes due account of the diversity of European forests and is based on scientific knowledge in order to maintain, protect and adapt forests in the fight against the risks they face; recalls that forests are important primarily for the production of wood but also for maintaining biodiversity, the prevention of fires, floods, avalanches and erosion, management of groundwater resources, landscape management and carbon capture;
23. Highlights the fact that persistent droughts have in recent years encouraged the proliferation of forest fires in Europe, at the same time worsening the desertification of a large number of regions;
24. Calls on the European Commission to present, along the lines of the existing directive on floods, a proposal for a directive for combating drought, with the aim of achieving better coordination between the policies of the Member States on this issue and optimising the Community instruments available;
25. Considers that forest fires are a serious problem in many parts of Europe and that measures should be taken there to avoid dense afforestation and alter the composition of the forest; believes preference should be given to native species and mixed forests in the interest of higher resistance to fires, storms and insect damage, observing the different natural conditions in Nordic Boreal forests as compared with the forests in the south of Europe; calls on the Commission to urge Member States to include legal provisions with sanctions on civil and criminal liability for arsonists, and to coordinate assessment teams to be consulted on the recovery of the affected area, in order to avoid speculative activity;
26. Advocates the creation of a genuine forest policy designed to improve the management and conservation of forests, taking into account the fundamental role that they play in combating climate change, which is having an increasing impact in natural disasters;
27. Calls on the Commission and Member States to include in the calculation of agri-environmental premiums the additional costs borne by farmers in order to take measures designed to prevent fires (such as cleaning of firebreaks, removal of dead arboreal plants, working of the soil along the perimeter of land parcels, etc.) and to dispose of water (cleaning of collecting ditches and canals);
28. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to encourage the implementation of good agricultural practices, which in some Member States has made it possible to halve infiltration of nitrogen-based fertilisers without reducing crop yields;
29. Recalls that water is often involved in natural disasters, not only in floods – often due to inadequate planning – frost, hail and contamination of river basins, but also through its scarcity, which can wreak significant change, such as the desertification of large areas of southern Europe and south-eastern Europe;

30. Invites the Commission to report on the implementation in the Member States of Articles 70 and 71 of the Health Check provisions on risk insurance and mutual fund schemes; urges the Commission to come forward with a proposal for a European joint system to better address the risk and income instability of farmers related to natural and man-made disasters; stresses that it must be more ambitious than the present model in order to avoid a multiplicity of different insurance schemes in the EU, creating huge imbalances between farmers' incomes;
31. Considers it urgent for a minimum compensation scheme for natural or man-made disasters to also be accessible to all European farmers, denouncing the unworkable nature of Article 11(8) of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1857/2006<sup>1</sup>, given the different insurance schemes available in the various Member States, recommending in addition that the component on promoting prevention measures be given preference when calculating agricultural insurance premiums;
32. Recalls that insurance schemes are provided for under the WTO amber box, and that our trading partners, such as the USA (Counter-Cyclical Programme and Disaster Assistance Programmes), systematically use them to secure the incomes of farming and forest-management businesses as compensation for the effects of natural disasters as well as for loss of income due to market instability;
33. Refers to the existing risk-reduction strategies of businesses, such as their internal or market-focused strategies; reaffirms that such strategies for diversification, production adjustment, changes to crop rotation, cultivation methods designed to protect the soil and conserve water, futures markets, insurance policies and contracts are paramount and should be supplemented by monitoring instruments;
34. Invites the Commission to encourage the exchange of good practices between Member States in preventing man-made disasters, and calls on the Member States to ensure that regional authorities undergo disaster management training;
35. Considers that an adequate financial framework on response to disasters should be provided and would be better articulated via the Solidarity Fund, the Rural Development Policy, the Regional Policy, the Seventh Framework Programme, state aids, the Forest Focus programme and the Life+ programmes; calls for special funds, outside the CAP, to be partially used for private prevention measures, such as measures for the adaptation of forests to climate change and corresponding research activities, reforestation, protection of wetlands and associated ecosystems, monitoring erosion and sedimentation in water courses, alternative uses for recovering high risk land; further calls for prevention and intervention and public information to be appropriately included in the next financial perspective;
36. Stresses the need to enhance prevention measures designed to tackle all types of natural disaster by establishing joint strategic guidelines to ensure better coordination among the Member States, as well as greater operability and coordination among the various Community instruments (Structural Funds, Solidarity Fund, and the rapid response mechanism and preparedness instrument for major emergencies);

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 358, 16.12.2006, p. 3.

37. Urges the Commission to mobilise the current EU Solidarity Fund in the most flexible manner possible and without delay in order to assist victims of natural disasters and calls for the adoption of more transparent criteria;
38. Calls on the Commission to simplify and speed up the process, taking into account the initial estimates of direct damage to a disaster-stricken country so that the EU Solidarity Fund offers the maximum efficiency;
39. Calls for the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund to be enlarged to define 'disaster' as a major destructive event that occasions serious harm to the population and the environment, including slowly evolving disasters such as drought; in this situation the adoption of emergency water-rationing measures by central or regional government should trigger action by the EU Social Fund;
40. Recommends an expansion of the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund to cover damage to agriculture and forests;
41. Considers that the eligible operations listed in Article 4 of the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) are too restrictive and do not allow for other situations of the same nature, such as droughts; in this context, and regardless of the fact that it is not practicable for the main victims (private individuals and businesses) to receive direct aid, a new, more flexible clause should be introduced in the EUSF which would enable indirect support to be granted;
42. Calls for the introduction of a new category in the European Union Solidarity Fund relating to 'other operations of public interest aimed at restoring the social and economic life of affected populations and/or areas', so as to include events with consequences for private assets which, being of unquestionable importance for overall wellbeing, operate as if they were public assets;
43. Takes the view that, when setting eligibility thresholds, consideration of the regional dimension is vital, as otherwise regions facing very serious disasters could find themselves excluded because the threshold set for the whole Member State is not reached; consideration should be also given to the specific situation of remote and isolated regions, such as the island and outermost regions;
44. Considers that, in setting the thresholds referred to in paragraph 15, all rural areas with specific natural disadvantages and abandoned areas should also be taken into consideration, so as to incentivise non-abandonment of those areas;
45. Urges the Commission to support the rebuilding of agricultural regions that have sustained significant damage, to relaunch efforts to create jobs and to take adequate measures to offset the social costs inherent in the loss of jobs and other sources of income from agriculture;



## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	17.3.2010
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 34 -: 6 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	John Stuart Agnew, Richard Ashworth, José Bové, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, Michel Dantin, Paolo De Castro, Albert Deß, Diane Dodds, Herbert Dorfmann, Hynek Fajmon, Lorenzo Fontana, Iratxe García Pérez, Béla Glattfelder, Martin Häusling, Esther Herranz García, Peter Jahr, Elisabeth Jeggle, Jarosław Kalinowski, Elisabeth Köstinger, Giovanni La Via, George Lyon, Gabriel Mato Adrover, Mairead McGuinness, Krisztina Morvai, James Nicholson, Rareş-Lucian Niculescu, Wojciech Michał Olejniczak, Georgios Papastamkos, Marit Paulsen, Britta Reimers, Ulrike Rodust, Giancarlo Scotta', Czesław Adam Siekierski, Alyn Smith, Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, Janusz Wojciechowski
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Luís Paulo Alves, Spyros Danellis, Lena Ek, Véronique Mathieu, Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, Daciana Octavia Sârbu