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COMMUNITY COOPERATION ON
CIVIL PROTECTION

SUMMARY

I.	INTRODUCTION	page 1
II.	OBJECTIVE	page 1
III.	IMPLEMENTING THE RESOLUTION OF 13 FEBRUARY 1989	page 3
	. Single emergency telephone number	page 3
	. System of interconnected databanks - pilot phase	page 3
	. Multilingual glossary	page 4
	. Advanced information and telecommunications systems	page 4
	. Public information	page 4
	. Expertise	page 5
IV.	DEVELOPING COMMUNITY COOPERATION	page 5
	. The guide to civil protection in the European Community	page 5
	. Simulation exercise	page 6
	. Combating forest fires	page 6
	. Exchanges, training and education	page 6

XX

XX

XX

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The first moves towards Community action on civil protection were outlined in 1985 at an informal meeting of the ministers responsible.

Since then, there have been two Council meetings which led to the adoption of two resolutions : the first, in 1987, served as the foundation for Community cooperation on civil protection (1) and the second, in 1988, contained guidelines for new developments (2).

2. Encouraged by the successful outcome of these first initiatives and by the favourable reaction to them, the Commission has continued, under its 1989 programme, its efforts to improve the means of preventing and combating natural or man-made disasters and to improve the Member States' capacity to deal with them.

3. Continuing this work, the Commission proposes a number of steps, which will both advance the cause of a People's Europe and contribute to the achievement of environmental objectives.

4. The Commission is encouraged in its efforts by the European Parliament's repeated demands for closer Community cooperation in the very broad area of civil protection.

II. OBJECTIVE

5. Given new momentum by the Single European Act, and on the basis both of guidelines issued by the Ministers responsible and the knowledge acquired in recent years, the Commission believes that it is new time to begin setting up an effective cooperation structure for civil protection.

(1) OJ C 176/1 du 4.7.1987

(2) OJ C 44/3 du 23.2.1989

This is primarily a task for the national, regional or local authorities, which coordinate all forms of action. Cooperation between Member States enables the national and Community authorities to join forces in the face of major disasters.

6. By promoting this Community action, the Commission hopes to achieve a degree of cooperation allowing Member States to benefit when necessary from the best of each national civil protection system rather than having to bear the cost of maintaining, on permanent stand-by, a cumbersome and expensive apparatus which may anyway prove, in the event, unequal to the task.

7. The aim is not to substitute the Community for the Member States nor to make it responsible for masterminding implementation of their emergency plans, but to maximize the benefits of national services by identifying those conditions under which suitable assistance from the Community would be essential by providing the necessary groundwork for efficient cooperation between the twelve Member States.

8. Cooperation at Community level, in addition to allowing more effective intervention, further contributes to national systems through schemes and initiatives reflecting the principle of subsidiarity, by eliminating or limiting duplication and optimizing the conditions synergy. Cooperation of this kind could save time and resources in developing the most suitable methods both for prevention and for intervention, and the exchange of specific technical experience.

By way of example, combating forest fires, which are hurting the Community more and more (an average of 250.000 ha burnt each year in southern Europe alone) requires urgent action to achieve better cooperation at Community level and to pool existing resources, as desired by several Member States.

III. IMPLEMENTING THE RESOLUTION OF 13 FEBRUARY 1989

. Single emergency telephone number

9. On 6 October 1989 the Commission sent to the Council a proposal for a Decision to introduce a single Europe-wide emergency telephone number. This Decision is aimed at reducing the varying situations currently facing the European citizen who attempts to draw attention to an emergency or call the emergency services responsible for public safety.

. System of interconnected databanks - pilot phase

10. In its Resolution of 13 February the Council took note of the Commission's intention to launch a study of the feasibility of a system of interconnected databanks, with a view to setting up a pilot scheme. In its first phase the study concentrated on an in-depth investigation of the individual requirements of the twelve national civil protection services.

The survey showed that users shared many requirements, mostly for information on specialized human and material resources, on laws, procedures and standard terminology, on chemicals and hazardous substances, and on histories of past accidents.

A need was also expressed for simulation tools to help decision-making and a rapid information exchange service. Generally, civil protection operators stressed the need for human support offering technical assistance, coordinating the development of standards, collecting and disseminating information and promoting cooperation.

The survey confirmed that Member States are generally in favour of greater collaboration in exchanging relevant information and experience, and of avoiding duplication of effort.

11. The feasibility study makes a proposal for the development and implementation of a pilot service able to meet these needs, to increase the effectiveness of the information resources available in the Community and to facilitate cooperation between national civil protection services. It will, however, also preserve the autonomy of national systems and will not infringe any existing bilateral or multilateral agreements.

. Multilingual glossary

12. To meet the exigencies of setting up a computer database and to resolve the language problems encountered by national operators and professional circles in the course of their work, a multilingual glossary is being prepared. The lexical base is currently being established. An expert ad hoc working party will be set up to compile the glossary. This tool will simplify communication and information in emergencies.

. Advanced information and telecommunications systems

13. A study was launched in November 1989 on advanced telecommunications systems to meet the Community's civil protection requirements.

Its purpose is to assess telecommunications requirements and resources, including use of satellites, which could effectively improve forecasting and disaster management.

. Public information

14. The conclusions of a study on the feasibility and cost of a first Community public information campaign on civil protection endorse the concerns expressed by the Commission in its earlier communications to the Council and support its conviction that there is a need for public awareness and education campaigns on this matter.

These conclusions have been sent to the national civil-protection liaison officers.

15. At a practical level, the Commission suggests that national experts should assist the Commission in drawing up an action programme.

. Expertise

16. The Commission will continue to cooperate with the working party of national civil-protection liaison officers and will, when necessary, set up ad hoc expert working parties on particular aspects of civil protection.

IV. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY COOPERATION

17. Further to these schemes the Commission proposes that efforts be focused on three priority areas :

- encouraging coordination between Member States and promoting a policy of active cooperation at Community level;
- improving the exchange of information on civil protection;
- laying the foundations for a Community programme of exchanges, training and education.

. The guide to Civil Protection in the European Community

18. The guide to Civil Protection in the European Community currently edited under a pilot project, has to be periodically updated on the basis of information from Member States. It will require continual improvement in order to become an operational management tool. The possibility of updating this manual by computer, using electronic mail facilities, will need to be examined by an ad hoc expert working party.

. Simulation exercise

19. On the basis of the results of the "EUROPE 1989" civil-protection exercise held in the French département of Pyrénées Orientales from 17 to 19 October 1989 and taking account of the proposals to be made by the national civil-protection liaison officers, the Commission intends to develop a series of projects aimed at :

- improving ways of rescuing air-crash victims;
- standardizing certain pieces of rescue equipment;
- studying the organization of emergency medical services in the context of Community cooperation.

. Combating forest fires

20. To combat the forest fires affecting more of our forests every year, especially in southern regions of the Community, the Commission has, as part of its civil protection policy, drafted a proposal for a Regulation on the implementation of fire-fighting and cooperation measures by the Member States, with particular regard to the use of fire-fighting aircraft. This draft could soon be presented to the Council, after consultation with national experts.

These measures will cover fires which are exceptionally serious or beyond the fire-fighting capacity of the individual countries concerned, with the aim of preserving as much forest as possible once land-based fire-prevention and fire-fighting capacity has been totally overwhelmed.

. Exchanges, training and education

21. The Commission will take the steps needed to study the scope for setting up exchange, training and education programmes for civil-protection staff and management, to support their efforts by joint projects to share expertise, thinking, procedures and equipment. Training modules could then be set up to meet the demands of Community cooperation in specific areas of natural or technological hazards.

22. The Commission is looking into establishing new forms of voluntary service in the civil-protection field, which could take the shape of European civilian service as an alternative or complement to Member States' existing military-service requirements. This alternative would also be in line with public opinion in Europe.

23. There is now a growing awareness on the part of the authorities and citizens of all countries of the need to protect our heritage from natural disasters, demonstrated when this heritage is struck by disaster, such as the earthquakes in Umbria and Kalamata, the floods in Florences and the fires at York Minster and the Chiado in Lisbon. Great efforts are being made, specialist teams developed and programmes set up to examine and rehabilitate this heritage.

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24. Beyond the specific or sectoral applications, the Commission will continue to work with the Member States to strengthen cooperation in managing and combating natural or man-made hazards. Cooperation will also be pursued with international bodies such as the Council of Europe, under its Open Partial Agreement, and the United Nations, in the context of the International Decade against Natural Disasters. This cooperation could also be extended to those EFTA countries which have shown interest in this field.

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