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

**Strengthening EU Disaster Management: rescEU
Solidarity with Responsibility**

1. INTRODUCTION

Europe is increasingly facing the dramatic impacts of intense and unpredictable extreme weather events and earthquakes with ensuing loss of life, destruction of property and cultural heritage. This has had a tragic cost on lives and livelihoods. The nations of Europe decided to build the European Union (EU) to promote their common good and to face adversities together, each becoming stronger through unity and solidarity. A Europe that protects is one that has the means to respond in a decisive manner.

Climate change is amplifying the impacts of extreme weather events in Europe and worldwide¹. Key trends show how climate change is contributing to increased intensity of forest fires and a longer forest fire season in Southern Europe, the expansion of fire-prone areas northwards, as well as increased storms and risk of flooding.² Since 1980, as well as the human cost, EU Member States have lost over EUR 360 billion in weather and climate extreme events.³ At the same time, extreme events such as forest fires are also exacerbating climate change through increased Greenhouse gas emissions⁴.

2017 has seen a wide range of disasters. In total, over 200 people were killed by natural disasters in Europe in 2017⁵. Recently, tropical cyclones severely affected the EU outermost regions and the European overseas territories in the Caribbean. Hurricane Ophelia caused flash floods in Ireland and the United Kingdom and affected large parts of North-western Europe. Deadly severe storms following intense heat waves hit Central Europe earlier this summer.

Above all, 2017 saw a disastrous series of forest fires. Over one million hectares of forest have been destroyed, almost three times the five-year EU average, half of which was in Portugal alone. This represents an area four times the size of Luxembourg or over ten times the area of Berlin. Many people tragically lost their lives. Only in Portugal, over 100 people were killed, between June and October alone. Fires resulted in significant destruction of property and major impacts on the economy including to network infrastructure, businesses (commercial and industrial), agricultural and forestry activities. In Portugal alone, the direct economic damage of forest fire events between June and September is estimated at close to EUR 600 million, representing 0.34% of Portugal's Gross National Income. Forest fires are also becoming a reality in new locations, with the 2017 fires affecting parts of Ireland and Greenland.

The last two years have also seen serious damage from earthquakes. The major earthquake hit Central Italy in August 2016 was followed by three major quakes in the following months. 290 people were reported to have been killed; towns and cultural heritage in the regions of Umbria, Lazio and Marche were devastated, and economic activity was severely affected by the shocks. Earlier this summer, the Greek island of Kos, as well as neighbouring Turkey, were hit by an earthquake that resulted in several deaths, hundreds of injuries and huge disruption to an economy heavily dependent on tourism.

¹ IPCC, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014

² EEA Report No 1/2017, 25/01/2017, Climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe 2016.

³ Projections estimate a toll of 152,000 deaths a year in the EU alone between 2071 and 2100 (i.e. a 50-fold increase from current climate-related losses) as a direct result of extreme weather related hazards if no action is taken to protect citizens, with those living in southern Europe likely to be the hardest hit: See Forzieri, Giovanni et al., 'Increasing risk over time of weather-related hazards to the European population', 2017.

⁴ Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change

⁵ EM-DAT, 2017

As well as these environmental disasters, Europe has been hit by terrorist incidents with multiple casualties, including large numbers of complex burn cases needing immediate attention. The Ebola and Zika viruses also served as reminders of the risk from epidemics and health emergencies.

Europe is not alone. Incidents worldwide follow similar worsening trends: the State of California was hit this year by successive forest fires of major intensity burning over 200 thousand hectares, over twice the national five-year average⁶; Brazil may see 2017 be the worst year on record for forest fires⁷; Over half a million hectares were destroyed by forest fires in Chile between July 2016 and February 2017, in the fight against which the European Union provided active assistance⁸. 2017 also witnessed a number of devastating floods in Africa and Asia as well as destructive earthquakes worldwide, with deadly shocks in Mexico in September, which killed over 270 people, toppled dozens of buildings and tarnished hundreds of historical buildings. The earthquake that hit the border region of Iraq and Iran on 12 November of this year claimed at least 420 lives, injured over 7,000 people, and resulted in thousands of damaged houses and cultural heritage, severely disrupting the provision of basic water and energy services. Chile and Turkey were also affected by earthquakes this year.

As new challenges impose new ways of acting, this Communication sets out how the EU can respond to the essential challenge of better protecting citizens from these disasters. It explains how a more ambitious and comprehensive approach can use the EU's scale to react more efficiently and more effectively, whilst at the same time ensuring that Member States use all the instruments at their disposal to prevent, prepare and respond to disasters.

2. EU RESPONSE TO DATE

The European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism⁹ (UCPM) is at the disposal of Member States and third countries who can activate it when a disaster strikes and their national capacities are insufficient. It works on a voluntary basis whereby a Member State or third country issues a request for assistance via the European Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) and other Member States decide to make an offer of assistance or not. In order to have some predictability, a "Voluntary Pool of Assets" was created. Member States provide assets that the Commission can request, but the Member States are not obliged to offer assistance. And often Member States have not been able to, especially when multiple Member States are facing the same disasters simultaneously.

In recent years, climate and other phenomena have exacerbated the ability of Member States to help each other as each Member State's own capacities have often reached their limits.

In parallel, the incentives for Member States to offer assistance via the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism are very low since the EU budget only finances a share of transport costs. However, in most operations getting from A to B is not the expensive part: operational costs are much higher than transport costs. For instance, the costs of transporting a large field hospital are just a fraction of its running costs that are some €6 million/month. Flying a plane from France to Portugal is also cheap when compared to the cost of operating it there for several days. The EU budget does not finance the cost of operating these assets.

⁶ Statistics cover the period of 1 January 2017 to 22 October 2017. See State of California, CAL FIRE service,

⁷ Brazil National Institute for Space Research,

⁸ See ERCC Portal, Chile – Forest fires EU support, 02 February 2017

⁹ Decision No. 1313/2013/EU. This Communication is pursuant to Article 34 of the Decision.

As a consequence, the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism often does not deliver the expected results. For example, in only 10 cases out of the 17 requests for forest fires this year, was assistance actually delivered. At times, the response was too slow. It was also dramatically impacted by the limited availability of firefighting planes and the fleet, either in numbers or in their operational period, in a number of affected Member States. The limited availability of fire-fighting planes is also exacerbated by the fact that the specific nature of such planes and their high production cost means that they are not easily available on the market. These circumstances severely impacted the effectiveness of the relevant pre-committed capacity for a European coordinated response, and showed the shortfall in means at an EU level. It also shows that the incentives today are not enough to build a strong EU civil protection capacity, and to be ready to use it to help in the disaster response in other Member States. In short, this year's extensive disasters have shown that we have now clearly reached the limits of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, as it is structured and functions today.

At the same time, it is clear that the potential impact of disasters can be reduced through effective prevention: the substantial reduction of the economic impacts of severe floods in Central Europe in 2013 as compared to similar 2002 events can be partly explained by effective flood protection and risk prevention measures introduced since 2002¹⁰.

The experience, so far, holds important lessons:

1. In the event of multiple or frequently occurring extreme events like those of 2017, additional capacity is needed. Its use must also be as efficient as possible.
2. A functioning solidarity mechanism must have a sufficiently robust incentive structure that encourages sharing of response assets across borders.
3. Proper risk analysis and targeted short and longer-term prevention efforts, with effective monitoring are the bases for effective disaster preparedness and response.
4. All available EU instruments, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), need to be used to their full extent, as far as disaster prevention and management are concerned, and the synergies amongst them used to the fullest.

Strengthening EU disaster management also means taking a critical look at the prevention of disasters in Member States, and at EU measures supporting prevention. A fully integrated approach to prevention, preparedness and response to disasters in the Union and its Member States is urgently needed. We know that investment in prevention saves lives and livelihoods; it needs therefore efficient targeting to disaster risks.

3. A EUROPE THAT PROTECTS: RESCEU

The Union as a whole needs to anticipate the changing and emerging risks, whether natural or man-made. A more robust and comprehensive EU disaster management capacity is therefore a pre-condition for offering better protection to people, communities, economic interests and the

¹⁰ See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-907_en.htm

environment. The EU must improve the contributions of all its policies and instruments to reinforce the capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. This would be building European solidarity and responsibility at all levels.

The proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and Council introduces changes to the current civil protection legislation which would allow Europe to take a leap forward in its aim to better prevent, prepare for and respond to natural and man-made disasters both within and outside the Union.

The changes have the following objectives:

- a) Reinforce the EU's and Member States' collective ability to respond to disasters, and address recurrent and emerging capacity gaps, by putting in place a dual system of response capacity: a dedicated reserve of response capacities with command at control at Union level, to be known as rescEU; and a more effective and dynamic contribution from Member States through a European Civil Protection Pool.
- b) Strengthen the focus on prevention action as part of the disaster risk management cycle, as well as reinforce coherence with other key EU policies acting, inter alia, in the field of climate change adaptation, disaster prevention and disaster response;
- c) Ensure the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism is agile and effective in its administrative procedures in support of emergency operations.

3.1. Reinforcing EU disaster response

A common EU approach means more capacity can be ready for deployment at a given time. With this in mind, the proposal has two strands in respect to filling capacity gaps in order to allow the Union to collectively reinforce its disaster response.

First, to provide a meaningful and coherent EU disaster response and overcome the shortcomings of the current voluntary system under the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, the European Commission will urgently establish a dedicated reserve of EU assets: **rescEU**. rescEU will be composed of capacities which would allow the EU to address the disasters that have, over the past few years, most commonly affected the social fabric of Europe. These are aerial forest firefighting planes, high capacity pumping, urban search and rescue and capacity building for public health risks, such as field hospitals and emergency medical teams. If there a new proven capacity gap emerges, the Commission, via a delegated act, would identify additional capacities that could become part of rescEU.

This European civil protection capacity will complement existing national response capacities already contributing to European coordinated response.

rescEU would be made up of capacities rented or leased via EU arrangements or acquired with full EU financing. All costs of these capacities would be fully covered by EU financing, with the Commission retaining the operational control of these assets and deciding on their deployment. During operations, the requesting State would ensure that activities of rescEU capacities and teams are executed in accordance with the operational deployment agreed with the Commission.

Second, it is proposed to strengthen and simplify the current incentive structure of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism. The EU should provide increased adaptation, repair, operational, including transport co-financing (75%) for the cost of pre-committed Member State response capacities in a European Civil Protection Pool of assets – assets that the EU crisis response can count on at any given point in time. Given the increased EU financial support to these assets, after an activation of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism is received, these assets would be available for deployment at the request of the Commission, unless a Member State is faced with an exceptional situation substantially affecting the discharge of national tasks. This would constitute a significant shift compared to the situation today.

At the same time, the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism should stop co-financing the use of assets that are provided on an ad-hoc basis without any possibility of predicting their actual availability in times of disaster.

A Europe that protects must also be able to react promptly to disasters without a long chain of bureaucratic procedures. rescEU will solve this problem by providing a robust and credible immediate response capacity that can be used on request of states that cannot cope with a disaster and receive insufficient external assistance. rescEU will be available when national capacities are insufficient or overwhelmed. However, at the same time it will not be a substitute for efforts at national, regional and local level: all levels need to strengthen preparedness in times of a changing risk landscape.

The proposal also includes provisions to ensure that the disbursement of EU funds through the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism is accompanied by adequate visibility to the Union.

As a result, the European Union would have a Civil Protection Mechanism resting on two complementary pillars: a credible sharing of Member State assets in a European Civil Protection Pool and rescEU as a last resort capacity that can be mobilised immediately. The result would be a system that is characterised by simplification, significant reduction of red tape and, most importantly, a more rapid and appropriate response. A Civil Protection Mechanism that would provide an extra safety valve for the protection of our citizens when disaster hits.

3.2. Robust Prevention and Preparedness through Civil Protection

Strengthening the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism places disaster prevention and the reduction of risks at the core of our disaster risk management efforts. Prevention actions are required to reduce the impacts of hazards and to make societies stronger for when the next disaster strikes, while also reducing the response needs. Increasing the resilience of EU infrastructure, ecosystems and societies is an essential element of effective disaster prevention.

Thorough investment by Member States in prevention and preparedness monitoring is of crucial importance for the establishment of rescEU. Disaster prevention, as the basis for effective disaster management, needs to be strongly linked to preparedness and response activities, and more strategically integrated in the actions of the strengthened Union Civil Protection Mechanism. For this purpose, the current proposal includes a provision for the Commission to be able to request, monitor and report on the implementation of prevention and preparedness plans.

The proposal for new legislation also strengthens support to disaster prevention actions through emphasising the importance of climate change adaptation, early warning systems, disaster

preparedness (e.g. trainings and exercises), and knowledge management initiatives, such as the ones undertaken by the Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (DRMKC)¹¹ exchange of best practice, transfer of technology, and making sure that the use of different standards and protocols does not hamper effective deployment. It also allows for specific consultation mechanisms so that the Commission can bring together Member States with specific common interests to work in detail on how to address specific issues like forest fires.

It also opens the door to the development of a dedicated European Civil Protection Knowledge Network, collaborating with initiatives such as the Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre, which should reinforce the training component of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, based around close cooperation with the relevant national structures on the matter. The Knowledge Network's objective would be to strengthen the efficiency of common EU disaster management. It should be constituted as a pan-European network of specialised training and exercise centers, in which European and international best practice would be disseminated, inter-operability and host nation support measures reinforced and joint EU exercises undertaken. Ultimately, this European Civil Protection Knowledge Network will help foster co-operation and mutual understanding, and help to build a common Union disaster preparedness culture. Through increased co-operation, joint training and scenario-based exercises the efficiency of common EU disaster preparedness and response will be increased.

3.3 Simplification

The proposal seeks to streamline administrative procedures in order to reduce delays in the deployment of assistance. It simplifies the current system by:

- introducing only one category of response assets whose use requires co-financing by Member States and the EU budget, i.e. the European Civil Protection Pool.
- Introducing a single co-financing rate (75%) in relation to adaptation, repair, transport and operational costs for assets that are in the European Civil Protection Pool.
- A specific reference to the use of unit sums, lump sums and flat rates is introduced in relation to the co-financing of transport costs to improve both consistency and efficiency.
- specific provisions limiting activations of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism to a 90 day period (unless otherwise justified) have been included in order to clarify scope and incentivise use of assets in the immediate response phase.

KEY ACTIONS:

Member States in Council and the European Parliament to adopt the legislation amending the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism.

Member States to take preparatory measures in order to be ready to commit additional capacities to the European Civil Protection Pool as soon as the legislation is adopted.

¹¹ Examples of such DRMKC initiatives include the continuous development and incorporation of the most innovative research results

As a first example of a specific consultation mechanism, Commission to put in place a structure to allow for a systematic, regular and close coordination and cooperation between affected Member States before and during each fire season.

Commission to take all preparatory measures in order to put in place a leasing or rental contract to endow rescEU with the capacities foreseen.

Commission will facilitate discussions with industry so as to accelerate production of capacities, that are not readily available on the market, such as firefighting planes.

Member States to prepare prevention and preparedness plans and send to Commission at the latest by 31 January 2019, so that the Commission is in a position to review and help those Member States that may require additional support.

Commission to coordinate exchange of information with Member States on cross-sectoral preparedness and response to large-scale disasters, including terrorist attacks within the field of civil protection.

4. COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER EU POLICIES ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT

A higher level of solidarity and responsibility in response and preparedness must be accompanied by the necessary prevention measures to reduce the risks in the longer run. This will inevitably mean greater coordination of EU policies but also greater coordination at national level, including with regional and local actors, and between the various tools and instruments that Member States have at their disposal.

Disaster risk management considerations are increasingly integrated in a number of EU policies. The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for instance supports climate-proofing of EU action by promoting adaptation in key vulnerable sectors and in synergy with disaster risk management. Such considerations are also integrated into financial instruments, including the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Solidarity Fund, environmental legislation (e.g. flood management plans and eco-system based solutions), research and innovation¹², climate change adaptation strategy, serious cross-border threats to health and more¹³. Similarly, more disaster risk-proofing of investments in the EU contribute to strengthened resilience and sustainable growth.

Most of EU funds supporting disaster prevention and management activities are currently programmed through the European Structural and Investment Funds:

¹² Horizon 2020 has already financed over EUR 20 million in research projects related to forest fires. Future research foreseen for 2020 will address respectively: "New Ecosystem-based adapted management, including nature-based solutions, for forest fires risk reduction in the EU" (EUR 15 million) and "Resilient Forests" in view of developing new guiding references for forest fires risk prevention and risk-informed decisions on the best adaptation options (EUR 10 million). In 2018 a strategic research and innovation agenda on forest fire risk management in the EU will be developed based on needs identified in a science-policy review of EU-funded forest fire research projects and the recommendations resulting from the multi-stakeholder workshop "How to face mega-fires in Europe", to be held in Lisbon, in January/February 2018.

¹³ Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, SWD(2016)205

- Over the period of 2014-2020, almost EUR 8 billion have been allocated by 20 Member States for climate change adaptation and disaster prevention and management through Cohesion Policy funds, making them the largest source of EU funding in this area¹⁴.
- The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) includes a focus area on *supporting farm risk prevention and management* under its priority for rural development. This fund also supports forestry measures which include specific forest fire prevention and restoration measures. Some EUR 2,3 billion have been specifically earmarked over the period of 2014-2020 for this purpose. A vast majority of the planned measures to support investments¹⁵ in prevention action to reduce the consequences of natural disasters and catastrophic events¹⁶ as well as for the restoration of agricultural land and production potential¹⁷ are yet to be executed in the current programming period.

Moreover, since the creation of the EU Solidarity Fund in 2002 as a (re-)financing instrument for emergency and recovery operations following severe natural disasters, the Commission awarded a total amount of over EUR 5 billion in EU financial assistance for post-disaster interventions.

Preconditions on disaster risk prevention and management and climate change adaptation for the attribution of European Structural and Investment Funds are also in place to ensure effective and efficient spending: national or regional risk assessments, need to be in place for investments in risk prevention, including climate change adaptation and management. Conditionality has provided an incentive for Member States to implement structural changes in their disaster risk management systems and to strengthen their administrative capacity, and improve the quality of their investments.

Strengthening prevention in the EU relies also on a strong knowledge base backed by scientific support, and the effective dissemination of extensive evidence, lessons learnt, good practices and project results. Understanding disaster risks is a prerequisite for the awareness of risks and the development of a risk culture in the EU.

A number of other EU policies and funds can support response and recovery efforts, including through restoration actions under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, flexibility of Cohesion Policy funded programmes, and the activation of the EU Solidarity Fund. Moreover, the European Solidarity Corps enables young people to support communities working to prevent disasters or to help them recover, in a powerful expression of EU solidarity.

In general, the importance of contributing to disaster prevention and response should also be taken into account when relevant areas of the EU *acquis* are being updated.

¹⁴ European Regional Development Fund: EUR 4.2 billion; Cohesion Fund: EUR 3.7 billion.

¹⁵ Co-financing rates can go up to 80% for individual investments and up to 100% for collective investments

¹⁶ Under the 2014-2020 period, including: of the planned EUR 3.8 billion for investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems, 13.4% are currently executed; Of the planned EUR 354 million for forest-environmental and climate services, promoting preventive ecosystem-based approaches, 7.2% have been executed; of the planned EUR 2.7 billion for risk management tools, such as insurance, mutual funds, and income stabilisation support, 7.2% have been executed.

¹⁷ Planned EUR 2.1 billion for 2014-2020, of which 10.4% currently executed

KEY ACTIONS

Member States to make use of all funding possibilities under existing EU legislation in order to acquire, adapt and refurbish capacities.

Commission to consider for post-2020 making use of risk assessments and risk management planning provisions¹⁸ as ex-ante conditionality, both under Cohesion Policy and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Commission to consider how rules for post-2020 could facilitate co-financed disaster response capacities developed through Cohesion Policy funds used in the context of the European Civil Protection pool of response assets.

Commission, by the summer of 2018, to screen planned investments in all relevant programmes and discuss possible changes with Member States. Member States should target implementation of remaining funds for specific projects and, where needed, the Commission will modify the programmes swiftly.

Member States to use the possibility of increased co-financing rates or recovery/restoration actions following natural disasters under European Structural and Investment Funds.

Commission to consider, for post-2020 how to accelerate procedures to amend relevant European Structural and Investment Funds' programmes, in particular following a disaster¹⁹.

Commission to capitalise on the revisions of relevant EU legislations and processes to strongly reinforce disaster prevention considerations, at all relevant levels of governance.

Commission to launch a Communication and Advocacy Campaign on disaster prevention with a particular focus on forest fires, heat waves and other climate-induced extreme weather events, to improve awareness of preventive action.

Member States and Commission to promote more systematic collection and dissemination of loss data, to enhance the collection of loss data and make use of loss data for optimised prevention and climate adaptation planning.

5. CONCLUSION

The sequence of destructive disasters in 2017, resulting in severe human, environmental and economic cost, demonstrated the need to reinforce European solidarity and the responsibility of the EU and its Member States in preventing, preparing and responding to disasters. Climate change is playing an important role in exacerbating the challenges and has contributed to the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters. A Europe that protects must be also able to prevent, prepare for and

¹⁸ Provisions such as the existence of disaster risk management plans required under the Civil Protection legislation; flood risk management plans based on the EU Floods Directive; or ecosystem-based measures to increase the resilience of forests against fires could be considered

¹⁹ Following the 2017 forest fires in Portugal, accelerated procedures were used to amend operational programmes.

respond to challenges that affect the fabric of our societies. rescEU is a leap forward in providing the Union and its Member States with the capacity to do so.

Building on the principle that prevention of identified risks, and adapting to these risks where full prevention is impossible, must be a duty, not a choice to be made, and combined with the capacity to react as quickly and efficiently as is humanly possible, rescEU will substantially reinforce disaster risk management capacities in the EU.

rescEU will lead to a situation in which all countries have integrated disaster prevention in all their policies, have made arrangements guaranteeing a satisfactory level of response capacity and can safely rely on EU assistance in case of disasters that are exceptional in scope or nature, and where EU intervention is justified. Looking ahead, the European Union and the states participating in the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism will be in a position to concentrate fully on developing its response capacities based on the risks of the future.