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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Civil protection - State of preventive alert against possible emergencies

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1. THE NEW CHALLENGE

In the aftermath of the unprecedented and tragic terrorist attacks in the USA, governments at all levels have been prompted to re-consider how ready and able they are to prevent or mitigate the impact of these threats to our society.

In the European Union, reaction has been decisive and swift. In Council¹, Ministers stressed the need for a concerted effort to bring together and pool our common resources. The Heads of State gave a clear signal that ways must be found to improve the co-operation between Member States.

The European Council in Ghent (October 19, 2001) asked the Council and the Commission “to prepare a programme to improve the co-operation between Member States on the evaluation of risks, alerts and intervention, the storage of such means, and in the field of research. The programme should cover the detection and identification of infectious and toxic agents as well as the prevention and treatment of chemical and biological attacks. The appointment of a European co-ordinator for civil protection measures will be part of the programme”.

For its part, the Commission has swiftly mobilised its resources available under current programmes and actions. It has brought together under one umbrella the various services and networks responsible for civil protection, health protection and the expertise in the research area.

This represents the basis for co-ordinating an optimal response *by the Community* to all types of emergency. All countries will benefit from the combined pool of knowledge and equipment across the Member States, and the Commission with its unique infrastructure, multi-national staff and contacts will use its resources and political will to facilitate this sharing of our mutual assets.

This Communication is a contribution to the joint response from the Commission and the Council to the challenge laid down by the Heads of State. It sets out the main lines of action desirable for improved co-operation across the European Union.

¹ Justice and Home Affairs Council (September 20, 2001), the Research Council (October 30, 2001) and the Health Council (November 15, 2001)

2. THE CIVIL PROTECTION FRAMEWORK

2.1. Growing awareness of the need for a Community response

In recent years, the Commission Civil Protection unit has assisted authorities dealing with major emergencies, by co-ordinating and relaying requests for support. The work done in response to the 1997 earthquake in central Italy, or more recently following the sinking of the Erika off the Brittany Coast in 1999 or following the pollution of the Danube in 2000, has been warmly recognised.

The scale of other disasters, such as the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, prompted action to strengthen the Community's civil protection resources. This reflected a recognition of the value of effective co-ordination in a single spot, the Commission in Brussels, of the various national rescue or intervention teams. In September 2000, therefore, the Commission proposed a Mechanism to facilitate and reinforce co-operation of assistance and intervention in Civil Protection incidents. This Mechanism has now been adopted by the Council and enters into force in 2002. This means that any Member State can draw on the mechanism to have immediate access to the resources available across the Community.

2.2. How the mechanism works

A country affected by a disaster no longer has to spend valuable time in finding and contacting multiple sources of help. It can simply call on the Commission's network to get access to a 'one stop shop' of specialised personnel and other resources.

The Commission is working closely with the Member State authorities to develop this mechanism that consists of five major elements:

- a Monitoring and Information Centre inside the Commission for following events and providing information, that is accessible and can react 24 hours a day;
- a preliminary census of intervention teams available within the civil protection services or other emergency services of the Member States;
- a training programme to reinforce the capacity to react to events and to improve cooperation and spread of expertise between intervention teams;
- the mobilisation of assessment and coordination teams that can be deployed immediately and where needed;
- a common emergency communication system between the civil protection authorities of the Member States and relevant departments of the Commission.

Example: In the aftermath of the 11th of September attack, the Commission activated its Civil Protection unit's 24 hour a day alert system. The unit identified the possible support to be offered to the USA by Member States. Within a few hours, more than 1000 rescuers, with all appropriate equipment from the 15 Member States, as well as from Norway and Iceland were ready to be dispatched to the USA. This action carried out in the spirit of the forthcoming Mechanism allowed the Commission, in close co-operation with the Belgian Consul General, to establish contacts with the New York authorities, to present the potential support available from the European Union.

2.3. First steps

The Commission's meeting with the national heads of civil protection² led to the conclusion that, although the response to the consequences of terrorist attacks remained under the responsibility of the Member States, closest co-operation has to be built around the civil protection co-operation mechanism to face these new challenges. To that end, an action plan was adopted to deal with the consequences of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical attacks.

Under this action plan, a first set of measures was introduced:

- **the setting-up of the Monitoring and Information Centre foreseen in the mechanism.** Thanks to the immediate secondment of high level national experts from Belgium, France and Sweden, the Commission was able to launch the monitoring and information centre on 29.10.01. This allows the Commission to maintain a permanent contact with the operational centres of the Member States and to allow the sharing of information between Member States.
- **the gathering of information on Nuclear Bacteriological and Chemical expertise.** Gathering information on this expertise in the member states proved to be a difficult task because this information was not directly accessible. Nevertheless, Member States managed to quickly put this information together.
- **the gathering of information on serum and vaccines.** Putting together information on serum and vaccines was even more difficult mainly due to the highly confidential nature of this information. The necessary channels of information have however now been established.

This work provides common information and pooled expertise that can be activated via the civil protection mechanism whenever necessary.

2.4. Future plans – building a network of networks

Immediately following the European Council at Laeken, the Commission, together with the Belgian Presidency, will invite specialists from different fields, including civil protection and health, to discuss nuclear, biological and chemical threats. The goal will be to stimulate even better collaboration and co-ordination between the actors in the relevant fields. The Commission will subsequently organise and fund the most urgent actions needed as far as possible with existing Community instruments.

This will constitute a unique opportunity to define, on the basis of the measures already decided and of the Laeken conclusions, a programme for the short, medium and long term actions in all the concerned areas, in particular concerning Civil Protection, Health and Research. These various networks and policy areas provide invaluable input and services. The civil protection mechanism is a way of bringing them together as and when the need arises and is a way of stimulating reflection and effort on how best they can contribute to the needs of the challenges posed by the terrorist threat.

² In the extraordinary meeting in Knokke on 11-12/10/01 with Member States, EEA and Candidate Countries

3. HEALTH PROTECTION

One problem with bio-terrorism is that threats are invisible. Health professionals are in the first line of defeating the consequences of such threats. Therefore, specific preparedness plans are needed which go beyond what has so far been established to face threats from diseases. Member States are presently reviewing their preparedness plans for health threats related to terrorist attacks. The European Commission has already taken the initiative to take stock of existing instruments and build on them.

3.1. The network for epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the Community

In 1998, a network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the Community was established³. The Early Warning and Response System, which is a component of this network, aims at detecting any potential outbreak of a communicable disease regardless of its nature and source. Building on these provisions, the Commission has already begun to undertake preparedness activities. However, the capacity of the network to report unusual epidemic phenomena urgently needs to be reinforced.

3.2. Initiatives already taken in the Health field

Following the Ghent European Council, a series of ministerial and high level meetings between the Member States and the Commission have served to clarify the challenges posed by the biological and chemical threats to health .

At the international level the Ottawa G 7+ (US, Canada, Japan, France, Italy, UK, Germany, Mexico) health ministers meeting (with the participation of the Commission) examined a plan for improving international health security. The already close links with the WHO and other international partners will be further developed in this context.

At their meeting on 15 November 2001, Health Ministers requested the Commission to develop an Action Programme addressing the following five priorities:

- (1) Develop a mechanism for consultation in the event of a crisis linked to the bio-terrorist risk and a capacity for the deployment of joint investigation teams;
- (2) Set up a mechanism for information on the capacities of European laboratories with respect to the prevention of and fight against bio-terrorism;
- (3) Set up a mechanism for information on the availability of serums, vaccines and antibiotics, including concerted strategies for developing and using those resources;
- (4) Set up a European network of experts responsible in the Member States for evaluating, managing and communicating risks;
- (5) Promote the development of vaccines, medicines and treatments.

³ European Parliament and Council Decision 2119/98/EC, adopted on 24 September 1998

In developing this programme, such initiatives must be closely co-ordinated with those linked to the setting up of a Community co-ordination mechanism for civil protection measures and must take account of confidentiality requirements in the case of sensitive data. The Commission, on request of the Health ministers, has established an ad hoc Committee on health security composed of high level representatives of Member States. In consequence, Member States are contributing experts to a Task Force that is being set up with the Commission to coordinate and support health preparedness and response capacity, and to reinforce planning for biological and chemical agent attacks.

Following the Health Council the Commission and Member States are currently developing a comprehensive programme of co-operation.

3.3. Actions in the pharmaceutical field

Close co-operation with the pharmaceutical industry is clearly a key component in plans to prevent and counter bio-terrorism. Important work has already been done by the Commission and the results will be a valuable resource that the civil protection can draw upon.

First steps include the establishment of a task force with the industry to look at a variety of issues, including treatments, production capacity, control of distribution and vaccines. Authorities from Member States have also examined the availability of medicinal products in the context of biological threats. With the co-operation of the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA), a list with the possible pathogens as well as with the available treatments and the range of products concerned has been drawn-up. On the basis of this list, Member States have been asked to give updated information on the national inventory of actions taken. The results will be analysed by the Commission.

Agreement has been reached on the need to increase co-operation between all the competent authorities and a specific network, via the Pharmaceutical Committee, composed of 15 contact points in the Member States. This network will exchange information and meetings can be convened by the Commission on an ad hoc basis. It will work closely with the Commission's Pharmaceutical industry task-force and act as a liaison on the conclusions of the discussions with the relevant authorities at national level.

4. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

4.1. Mobilising Europe's potential for research and technological development

Improving Europe's capacity to respond to emergencies arising from biological or chemical terrorist attacks requires a mobilisation of its research and technology development potential. Knowledge on new biological hazards and how to deal with them is fragmented across different actors in Europe.

In the short term, a joint evaluation should be undertaken of the current state of knowledge, of existing research capabilities and of additional research needs. The Research Council of 30 October 2001 endorsed the Commission's initiative to convene a group of national experts on research in the field of defence against biological and chemical threats. The group's mandate will be to compile an inventory of ongoing research activities in this field, to determine research gaps, and to define needs and opportunities for co-ordination of national research initiatives in this field. The group's first meeting is planned for 12 December 2001.

In line with the objective of creating a true European Research Area, the new Framework Programme for Research and Development (2002 – 2006) will provide the means for supporting co-ordination of national research efforts and for supporting research that presents a clear European added value. Bio-defence research would gain a lot from bringing together national research activities and resources in fields of common interest.

Under the heading of anticipation of the EU's scientific and technological needs, the new Framework Programme, as proposed by the European Commission, will incorporate the means to respond to urgent research challenges in support of Community policies such as public health or justice and home affairs. New threats linked to bio-terrorism are a good illustration of the benefits of providing flexibility in programming EC research. Relevant research with a longer term perspective could be funded under thematic priorities "Genomics and biotechnology for health" and "Food safety and health risks".

4.2. Making available the competence of the Joint Research Centre

Through the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission has its in-house scientific and technical expertise in the nuclear, chemical and biological fields. The JRC often operates in networks with national laboratories and research centres.

Its long-standing work on behalf of the Euratom Safeguards Office and the International Atomic Energy Agency has made the JRC a centre of reference on nuclear safeguards in the EU. It further operates the European Non Proliferation Information Management and Analysis Centre (IAC), which collects and validates scientific and technical information needed for decision-making in warfare agent non-proliferation.

In the biological field, the JRC has initiated and co-ordinates a bio-response working group with specialist analytical capabilities comprising state-of-the-art laboratories in member states and world experts in detection and fingerprinting of transgenic DNA strains. The group is set to meet on 2 and 3 December to consider scenarios for emergency response. One of the topics for discussion will be the use of transgenic plants to produce vaccines will be considered for the production of smallpox and other vaccines, in light of recent developments in the USA. The JRC will use its own facilities and those of the bioresponse working group of the European Network of GMO Laboratories it co-ordinates, to detect and identify relevant transgenic strains in the context of addressing biological attacks to the food chain (agri-terrorism).

In the chemical field, the JRC will make its collection of open-source intelligence on the presence of chemical agents covered by the Chemical Weapons Convention available upon request to all authorised services of the European Commission and Member States.

Building on its foresight expertise, the JRC will immediately launch two studies: one to determine the new scientific issues and questions related to bioterrorism and one to assess the technological, social, economic and psychological vulnerabilities of our modern societies with regard to possible terrorist attacks.

4.3. Global monitoring for environment and security

The Commission has just adopted a communication (COM 2001/609 of 23 October 2001) regarding the setting up of a global surveillance system for environment and security. The Council of the EU and likewise the European Space Agency approved the action plan, which consists of preparing for autonomous and operational capacity of the EU in this area. The field of civil protection will be one of the main figurehead users of GMES services. This spatial application is a priority for the next Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration activities (2002-2003). The development of a pilot project could be envisaged, in particular to demonstrate how GMES answers the needs of civil protection, and especially for anti-terrorist measures.

5. ACTIONS IN OTHER FIELDS

Across the vast range of activities and policies covered by the Commission, there are many valuable inputs that the civil protection mechanism may draw upon.

5.1. Security of energy facilities and transport

Issues relating to the security of energy facilities and transport are part of the follow-up to the Green Paper on the security of energy supply presented by the Commission in November 2000. Work is being carried out by the Commission on these issues as requested by the Nice European Council. A report on the security of energy supply is scheduled for submission to the Barcelona European Council.

The tragic fires in the Mont-Blanc tunnel and the Tauern tunnel in Austria in 1999 and the recent Gothard fire are rekindling the debate about the level of safety in tunnels and relief and evacuation mechanisms in the event of accidents. This is an essential aspect of the establishment of the national plans needed for evacuation/intervention in emergencies. In addition to funding the trans-European networks, in 2002 the Commission will propose European rules for minimum safety standards in tunnels.

Lastly, GALILEO, the European satellite navigation system, which is now in the development phase, will offer a precise and reliable positioning service and thus assist the carrying out of civil protection operations.

5.2. Safety in the nuclear and radiological fields

Nuclear energy

The security and safety standards in the nuclear energy sector are among the most stringent for any industrial activity. Everything is done at Community level to ensure that strict accounting for nuclear materials prevents any diversion for non-peaceful uses.

On radiation protection, the Commission co-ordinates the measures taken by the national safety authorities. However, the events of 11 September now make it necessary to consider factors relating to the vulnerability of nuclear facilities. In this context and in co-operation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, the Commission services are conducting an assessment of nuclear facilities. At the light of the result of this assessment, the Commission will consider the appropriate follow up.

Nuclear emergencies

The Commission and the Member States are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of a system of rapid alert for nuclear and radiological emergencies.

In practice, the European Community Urgent Radiological Information Exchange system (ECURIE) is operational within the Environment Directorate on a 24 hour a day basis and uses coded information to avoid language barriers. Regular exercises are also carried out to ensure its availability.

In case of a nuclear accident, the main role of the EC is to receive an initial notification, to verify the message content, to launch the alert to all member States and the IAEA and receive and forward additional information to all member States.

5.3. Network and information security

The availability of IT networks is not only critical for communication channels (e.g. civil protection) for instance in case of disasters (nuclear, biological, chemical or threats or attacks) but also for other infrastructures (e.g. water , electricity supply, energy; etc.). Work on security of electronic networks had already been identified as a priority issue by the Stockholm European Council. The concrete implementing measures which are being prepared in close collaboration with the Council will be enshrined in a Council Resolution to be adopted at the Telecommunications Council session of December 6 to take the new dimension of the terrorist threat into account.

5.4. Structural Funds

Financing is available from the Structural Funds for action to prevent natural or technological disasters, for example some regional programmes include measures to prevent natural risks (strengthening of river embankments; equipment for centres to combat forest fires; erosion protection, etc.). There is also provision for preventive action as part of trans-frontier and trans-national co-operation (e.g. alerts relating to flooding and technological disasters; establishment of pluri-national centres to combat forest fires; co-operation relating to the safety of popular mountain areas, etc.).

The Structural Funds can also co-finance some reconstruction work after natural or technological disasters, as part of the regional programmes and in the normally eligible zones.

5.5. Safety in the chemical field

Chemical plants and storage facilities could become possible targets of terrorism, in particular the ones located close to towns and cities. The operators of such installations must already consider how they react to the possibility of major accidents. Now, they are expected to reinforce safety measures, in particular measures to control access, as far as practicable.

Moreover, the terrorist attacks, together with the explosion in Toulouse on September 21st 2001, showed the importance of appropriate land use planning so as to limit the impact of possible accidents on the population, independently from their causes. The Commission is currently working with the Member States on this difficult issue.

6. THE EUROPEAN CO-ORDINATOR FOR CIVIL PROTECTION MEASURES

The actions described above need to be put into the context of the request from the Ghent Informal European Council for the appointment of a co-ordinator for civil protection measures.

The Commission is uniquely placed to work with groups across all Member States and beyond. It is playing a valuable part in bringing different Community networks – research, health, civil protection - together to focus on this need. One can distinguish between three categories of support that the Commission can offer in this respect:

- immediate responses to events in terms of mobilising teams of specialists etc ;
- planning to improve preparedness for events, eg promoting training and work on stocks of vaccines and serums ;
- longer term research and information to assist both policy and operational responses.

To play this role will mean effective and increased co-operation with existing networks and resources as well as a sensitivity and ability to co-operate and work with a wide group of organisations and different interests. In practice, this can be best achieved by building on the existing Civil Protection activities and notably through the full implementation of the Community mechanism for Civil Protection.

The Commission therefore intends to nominate in its midst a high profile European co-ordinator who will be namely responsible for the management of the Community mechanism for co-ordination of actions in the field of civil protection. In this capacity, he will have to co-ordinate the activation, implementation and follow-up of the many available community initiatives, and in particular those described in this Communication.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The recent terrorist attacks have caused increased concern amongst the people of the European Union.

Governments have reacted with a series of measures at a national level but, significantly, have come together at the level of the European Union to look at the viability and contribution that a combined effort could make. The European Commission and the Council of Ministers were asked by the Heads of State to react and to organise.

In response, the Commission has shown – and this Communication clearly describes how – that it is already willing, able and equipped to make an important contribution to civil protection. It has anticipated the entry into force of the so-called civil protection mechanism that is already ‘on-line’ and available to all Member States, Candidate Countries and other countries. In practice this means using modern management and technology to co-ordinate and makes available the sum of resources drawn from the networks operated in the environment, health, research, transport, energy and other policy areas.

In particular in the health sector, the Commission, following the invitation by the Health Ministers, is establishing an action programme with the following objectives:

- Setting up a mechanism for information change, consultation and co-ordination for the handling of health –related issues related to attacks in which biological and chemical agents are susceptible to be used or have been used.
- Create a EU-wide capability for the timely detection and identification of biological and chemical agents that are susceptible to be used in attacks and for the rapid and reliable determination and diagnosis of relevant cases;
- Create a stock and health services database and a stand-by facility for making medicines and health care specialists available in cases of suspected or unfolding attacks;
- Draw-up rules and disseminate guidance on facing-up to attacks from the health point of view and co-ordinating the EU response and links with third countries and international organisations.

As a priority, to achieve these objectives means that the Commission should intensify its activities under current actions and programmes. For the future, it will need to use the opportunity of the Annual Policy Statement and budget processes to review the scope of this activity.

The various Commission services are working closely with national authorities, with industry and with each other to reinforce the work already done and to improve even further the contribution that the Commission can make to civil protection. The appointment of a European co-ordinator is confirmation of the priority given to this area of work.

This is a clear example of the value of action at Community level, where national responsibility (for dealing directly with disasters) remains unchallenged but is facilitated and assisted by the sum total of shared Community resources.

The Commission will keep the Council and Parliament informed of the progress achieved in implementing this programme.