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1. Improvement of the Union's response capacity to disasters (6th March 2008)

The European Commission presented on the 5th of March its recommendations to improve the European Union's response, to disasters, natural or man-made, within EU boundaries and abroad. Major disasters, such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in December 2004, the 2006 war in Lebanon, forest fires and floods in Europe in the summer of 2007 and the increasingly frequent disasters caused by climate change have shown the need for the EU to have a rapid and effective response capacity.

The approach adopted by the EU combines prevention and disaster relief and brings together all policies, instruments and services at the EU's and Member States' disposal to work as a team. The Commission has begun the assessment of its own role in the EU response to emergencies, crises and disasters. A task force has been set up to help it provide the most effective response. The communication on "Reinforcing the Union's Disaster Response Capacity", adopted by the College of Commissioners on 5th March, is the fruit of a joint initiative by President José Manuel Barroso and Environment and Civil Protection Commissioner Stavros Dimas.

Amongst other enhancements, the Barnier report released in May 2006 and recommending setting up of a European Civil Protection Force - Europe Aid, has been a key base of the revision of the legislative framework which saw the Council grant the Commission greater responsibility in civil protection.

At a wider scale, to reach a more coordinated EU response, the Commission suggests:

1. Greater coherence, effectiveness and visibility of European action. In the event of a major natural disaster, the Commission recommends greater rationalisation of coordination between itself, the Presidency, Member States and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Defence Policy, both in Brussels and on the ground. To this end, it suggests real-time exchange of factual information and the setting up of joint planning and operational teams.
2. Reinforcing the Community Civil Protection Mechanism. The Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) should be built up into an operational centre for European civil protection intervention which can predict emergency situations or provide follow up in real time. This change includes setting up an early warning system and the use of monitoring capabilities such as those developed under GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security).
3. Reinforcing European humanitarian aid. The Commission proposes identifying existing gaps in the delivery of European and international humanitarian aid through a mapping study on logistical capacity.
4. Capacity building across Community policies and instruments. The Commission proposes the creation of a European disaster response training network.

More information at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/civil/index.htm>

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0130:FIN:EN:PDF>

2. Impact of climate change to be integrated in the EU security strategy (8th March 2008)

The June 2007 European Council instructed Javier Solana and the European Commission to draw up a report on the security side of climate change, analysing repercussions of global warming on international security and making a number of recommendations for the EU.

The report has been submitted to the EU Council of Ministers and discussed in Brussels on Monday 10 March 2008, before submitting it to EU heads of Member States at the European Council held on 13-14 March. The conclusions published by the Slovenian Presidency are expected to instruct the Council and Commission to continue their work to ensure the EU can cope with the impact of climate change, which is already being felt and is expected to mushroom in the near future.

Global warming is very likely to increase both the number of conflicts around the world and the instability in sensitive areas. Fragile countries, including in the European Union's neighbourhood, will be dramatically affected, this includes Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. However, Northern areas might not be spared. The reduction of the ice-coverage generates shifting of borders and loss of land, potentially these elements might generate conflicting situations around the Arctic Circle. Today, five countries (Denmark, Norway, Canada, the United States and Russia) have already planted their flag on new maritime areas in the North.

It may be necessary to assess the capacity of international law to address climate change effects. In areas like the Middle East and the Sahel, lack of water will lead to rising tension and force people to emigrate. The United Nations is predicting that millions of people will be forced off their land post-2020 due to climate change.

GMES and other Earth Observation tools will be key assets to prevent conflicts and enhance crisis- management.

More information at:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/climate_actions/index_en.htm

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Fact/March/0313_EC-ClimateChange.pdf

http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/papers/brown_oli.pdf

3. Reinforcement of crisis management within the European Union (14th March 2008)

On 13th March 2008, during its plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an additional opinion on natural disasters. At the invitation of the EESC President, Dimitris Dimitriadis, the plenary was attended by Mr Michel Barnier, French minister for agriculture and fisheries and former European Commissioner for regional policy, who presented his proposal on the creation of a European force capable of immediate intervention in the event of an emergency, stressing the key role that organised civil society would need to play in developing supra-national solidarity. Indeed the pooling of existing national tools is a key underpinning idea of the report on crisis management by the EU published in 2006 by Michel Barnier.

Michel Barnier's initiative is one of the main architects behind the creation of a European Civil Protection Force. Following last year's fires in the Peloponnese region of Greece, and recent natural disasters in other regions of Europe (wildfires in Italy, floods in the UK etc.), the EESC almost unanimously adopted a resolution on the response to natural disasters and their prevention at its plenary session in September 2007.

Mr Barnier expressed his appreciation of the EESC's initiative and the invitation and underlined the importance of setting up a rapid reaction force at European level, capable of responding to the risks posed by natural disasters by enabling the EU Member States to join forces. He also stressed the vital role of the EESC, which has been actively campaigning for Europe to take concrete action to protect its citizens. Creating a European capacity for anticipating and preparing adequate responses to the various threats would involve: setting up a European civil protection force - "Europe aid"; coordinating transport assistance; creating a technical framework based on voluntary membership and a bottom-up approach, where countries could choose from a menu of different interventions, and strengthening the operations centre.

On the 5th March 2008, the European Commission unveiled an action plan to improve civil protection. This plan takes up many of the recommendations in the Committee's resolution and opinions on the subject.

More information at:

www.europarl.europa.eu

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/rapport_barnier_20060508_en.pdf

4. Joint action to monitor impact of climate change in the developing countries (28th March 2008)

On 27th of March EUMETSAT (European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites) and JRC (European Commission's Joint Research Centre), both involved in the field of Earth Observation, signed a collaboration agreement for combining their efforts to tackle the potential environmental challenges that developing countries are likely to face as a result of climate change.

The African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries (ACP) suffer a lot of the greenhouse gasses emitted by industrialised countries and Earth Observation will allow both organisations to contribute effectively to monitoring weather, climate and the environment. Data for JRC's Observatory in ACP countries will be generated by using commercial telecommunication geostationary satellites and near-real-time broadcast system for environmental data. The collaboration supports the Implementation Plan of the Global Climate Observing System, created in 1992 by the United Nations to ensure that observations and information needed to address climate-related issues are obtained and made available to all potential users.

The signature of this Collaboration Agreement provides a new impulse that will be beneficial to global initiatives like GMES, its contribution to Africa and the building of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems.

More information at:

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.document&N_RCN=29279

5. Ecosystem-based approach proposed for fisheries (11th April 2008)

The European Commission has published on the 11th of April a Communication on the role of fisheries management in implementing an ecosystem approach to marine management. In this text, the Commission outlines how the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) can help implement a more joined-up approach to protect the ecological balance of our oceans as a sustainable source of wealth and well-being for future generations. The Communication is part of the first wave of actions to be implemented under the new integrated Maritime Policy.

Commenting on the approach set out in the Communication, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Joe Borg emphasises that the ecosystem approach results in a win-win situation benefiting both to our marine environment and also to European maritime sector.

The CFP is committed to the progressive implementation of a precautionary, ecosystem approach to fisheries management. The goal of an ecosystem approach is to ensure the sustainable management of living aquatic resources within meaningful ecological

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boundaries. This means considering the whole ecosystem not simply that isolated element within it which is of economic interest, and minimising both the direct and indirect impact of fishing operations on the future functioning, diversity and integrity of the ecosystems concerned. Nor can fishing itself be considered in isolation; instead it has to be seen in its interaction with other human activities.

The first task of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management must therefore be to reduce fishing pressure, which is currently running above sustainable levels in a majority of commercial EU fisheries. To do so will not simply reduce the mortality rate for target fish stocks, it will also reduce the incidental impact of fishing activities on other species which are taken as by-catch, and on their habitats. This approach is already being enacted through the introduction of multi-annual plans which set target rates for fishing mortality in line with the EU's commitment to manage for maximum sustainable yield, and with the Commission's new policy to reduce by-catches and eliminate discarding in European fisheries.

Another key element in protecting ecosystem integrity is to ensure that fisheries policy is fully coherent with and supportive of the actions taken under the cross-sectoral Marine Strategy and Habitats Directives. The Marine Strategy Directive, adopted last year, forms the environmental pillar of the European Union's integrated Maritime Policy.

Since 2002, measures have been implemented under the CFP in order to address particular environmental issues. Some measures will include proposals to get simplified technical measures and develop indicators and promotion of an ecosystem approach in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.

More information at:

http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/press_rel110408_en.html

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1463&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

http://www.oceansatlas.org/unatlas_gifs/offsiteframe.jsp?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fao.org%2Ffi%2Fbody%2Fbody.asp&ctn=figis2940&kot=web-sites

6. GMES Sentinel's in orbit by 2012 (21st April 2008)

The Earth Observation satellites Sentinel 2 and 3 will be respectively delivered by Astrium and Thales Alenia. The contracts between the two companies and the European Space Agency have been signed in mid-April for a global amount of €500 million.

Both satellites will be part of the constellation of satellites dedicated to GMES.

Sentinel-2 will deliver crucial data for information services to the EU and its Member States under GMES, it will deliver land monitoring data to GMES services. These services cover areas such as climate change, sustainable development, environmental policies, European

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civil protection, common agricultural policy, development aid, humanitarian aid and the Common Foreign & Security Policy.

Sentinel-2 will support the operational generation of products such as the mapping of land cover, land use, change detection and geophysical variables. The mission objective is systematic coverage of the earth's land surface to produce cloud-free imagery typically every 15 to 30 days over Europe.

As for Sentinel 3, its mission is to produce a consistent, long-term set of remotely-sensed marine and land data for operational ocean state analysis, forecasting and service provision. A comprehensive measurement system facilitating global ocean and land observation is required in order to provide data for advanced numerical forecasting models. Sentinel-3 will determine parameters such as sea surface topography, sea/land surface temperature, ocean colour and land colour with high-end accuracy and reliability.

The launch of both Sentinel 2 and 3 is planned for 2012.

More information at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/custom_rss_adv.cfm?tpa_id=1009

7. EU and Japan towards better cooperation in the field of climate (24th April 2008)

During the EU - Japan annual Summit on 23rd of April, the both parts announced they would seek greater convergence in their approaches to an international framework to address climate change. Japan and the EU stressed that a highly ambitious and binding international approach was required to deal with the scale and urgency of the climate change challenge. The both were in favour of a more flexible approach to address climate change without targeting any strict results. Japan and the EU have differed significantly, however, in terms of their way of reducing industrial CO₂ emissions: Japan has favoured a 'bottom up' approach (setting different emissions reduction targets for individual industry sectors) while the EU was pushing for an economy-wide 'top down' approach (CO₂ emissions ceilings set at national and international level).

The two sides pledged to secure a "breakthrough" before the upcoming G8 Summit to be held in Japan from 7th to 9th of July 2008.

Better progress and cooperation were also pledged in the area of energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon technology financing.

More information at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change/eu-japan-shake-hands-climate/article-171895>

8. European fund to support post - 2012 climate projects (29th April 2008)

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and four other public financing institutions have launched a €125 million fund to boost investment in clean energy projects that are to generate carbon credits after 2012.

The Post-2012 Carbon Credit Fund will exclusively purchase and trade carbon credits generated after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. The aim is to support the market value of environmentally worthwhile projects amid uncertainty over the actual form that the carbon credit trading regime will take after 2012.

Both the scramble of governments to agree on a follow-up of climate pact by the end of 2009 and the uncertainty over long-term prices for carbon are increasingly affecting the development of projects.

By assuming the inherent regulatory risk, the Fund will give a clear signal to the market of the EIB and its partners' confidence in the development of a post-Kyoto regime while directly supporting environmental projects.

The Fund will contract credits from projects, for delivery as far away as 2022, under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI) schemes, which allow industrialised nations to offset carbon emissions at home by funding "clean" projects in the developing world.

The fund will be an asset for the EU to remain at the forefront of international efforts to combat climate change.

More information at:

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change/european-fund-support-post-2012-climate-projects/article-172007>

9. GMES Marine Service to ensure the continuation of GlobColour (6th May 2008)

The Earth's oceans play a vital role in the carbon cycle, given that the well understanding of the marine biological activity helps to predict how our planet will react to the annually decreasing of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The phytoplanktons in the seawater are potentially important carbon sinks. The chlorophyll they collectively contain colours the ocean's waters, which provides a means of detecting these tiny organisms from space with dedicated ocean colour sensors.

GlobColour project started in November of 2005, after having been set up by the European Space Agency "Data User Element" to support global carbon cycle research. GlobColour project has merged 55 terabytes of data from three state-of-the-art instruments aboard different satellites, including MERIS (acquiring data over the Earth whenever illumination conditions are suitable), MODIS (viewing the entire Earth's surface every 1 to 2 days,

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acquiring data in 36 spectral bands) and SeaWiFS (monitoring ocean characteristics). These instruments are combined to produce a 10-year dataset of global ocean colour information with the best possible spatial coverage.

From the middle of 2008 GlobColour will begin to provide near-real time ocean colour observations to support operational oceanography by combining observations from multiple sensors. Thus GlobColour will deliver on a daily basis a global ocean colour data set derived from MERIS and MODIS used as an input to forecast models of the state of the oceans. From 2009 the European Commission (EC) will ensure the continuity of the GlobColour time series via GMES Marine Core service. Building links from one satellite dataset to another is seen by the EC as vital to distinguishing changes in climate change cycles.

In addition to aiding carbon cycle research, ocean colour data can provide oceanographers with the information they need to monitor the state of the oceans for other applications, such as for the fisheries and aquaculture industries.

More information at:

http://www.terradaily.com/reports/ESA_Contributes_To_Ocean_Carbon_Cycle_Research_999.html

<http://www.globcolour.info/>

10. More stringent water quality standards requested by the European Parliament (6th May 2008)

The draft directive on surface water, which is the final major piece of EU legislation needed for the Water Framework Directive (WFD), fixes environmental quality standards for 33 pollutants, likely to be found in the rivers, lakes and coastal waters. The Environment Committee of the European Parliament (EP) required at its meeting of 6 May 2008 tougher standards and adopted several amendments on this draft proposal that will serve as a basis for negotiations with the Council.

Member states would have to meet the water quality standards, which take the form of maximum allowable concentrations and annual average values, by 2015. Twelve of the 33 pollutants are already classified as "priority hazardous substances", to be phased out by 2025. The Environment Committee required that 31 more water pollutants have either to be controlled by 2015 or to be banned by 2025.

Furthermore, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) called on the Commission to include 10 more of these 33 pollutants in the category of hazardous substances that have to be phased out completely. MEPs want also to guarantee that Member States ensure the best available water treatment techniques for zones closed to pollution sources.

Moreover MEPs asked the Commission to table a new separate legislative proposal on standards for living organisms and sediments. This request contrasts with the positions of the Council and the Commission seeking to limit checks to surface waters.

Negotiations on the draft proposal continue between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

More information at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/064-28137-127-05-19-911-20080505IPR28136-06-05-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

11. The European Parliament adopts a precautionary approach on the management of deep-sea fish stocks (8th May 2008)

The European Parliament adopted a report on the management of deep-sea fish stocks. Members of European Parliament (MEP) noted a lack of symmetry between the situation described in the Commission communication and the actual situation and called on the Commission, the Member States and the fishing industry to fill in gaps that exist so that effort control measures can be adapted to each fishery, recognizing that most deep-water fisheries are mixed fisheries.

Given that many of these stocks are managed in international waters, measures must be coordinated within the various RFOs (Regional Fisheries Organisations) so that the measures adopted take account of all fleets operating in these fisheries notes the report.

The European Parliament stresses the need to introduce a ban on discards in the deep-water fishery to enable scientists to study with more precision the complex diversity of species.

The Commission, within the framework of measures to reduce by-catches and eliminate discards, should vary the levels of fishing effort according to species targeted and those caught merely by accident. At the same time, the Commission should also strengthen monitoring and control procedures according to MEPs.

Finally, the European Parliament calls on the Commission to introduce new programmes for the collection of scientific information.

The report adopted by the European Parliament could influence the review of the legislation in the field of the management of deep-sea fish stocks in the EU.

More information at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2008-0103+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>