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REPORT

From :	The Presidency
To :	The European Council
Subject :	Reinforcing the European Union's emergency and crisis response capacities

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Emergencies, crises and disasters – whether natural or man-made – take many forms. In recent years the world has witnessed the Indian Ocean tsunami, hurricane Katrina, numerous serious earthquakes and major terrorist attacks inside and outside the European Union. Inside the Union, Member States have had to deal with large-scale floods, forest fires, marine disasters and industrial accidents. Many of these events are unpredictable in their scale and impact; however when they do occur, citizens rightly expect a swift and effective response.

2. Member States are responsible for managing emergencies on their territory and for deciding whether they need external help. Governments are also responsible for assisting their own citizens affected by emergencies abroad. However, many major risks inside and outside the Union could affect one or more Member States or engage the whole European Union. In such circumstances, support may be needed from other Member States and EU structures.

3. In many cases, cross-border assistance among Member States is already available under bilateral or regional agreements. EU structures play a role, in a spirit of active solidarity, by facilitating organisation and coordination of available assets, when requested, and by coordinating a political response, when required.

4. Improving the European Union's responsiveness to emergencies has been a priority for the Austrian Presidency. In January 2006 the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council requested Michel Barnier to study the Union's role in responding to crises. On 9 May 2006, Michel Barnier presented a comprehensive report entitled "For a European civil protection force: europe aid". The Presidency has expressed its gratitude to Michel Barnier for his report, which it considers a useful input for our work.

5. Building on the results of previous Presidencies, significant progress has been made in improving the Union's ability to respond to emergencies and disasters through more effective delivery of assistance and streamlining of EU initiatives launched in the wake of recent emergencies, in particular the Tsunami Action Plan.

6. The present Presidency report draws together the follow-up to the various initiatives launched by preceding presidencies. It summarises efforts made by the EU to improve coordination of available assets; to get assistance quickly where it is needed; and to provide more effective consular assistance to EU citizens in third countries. The Presidency accordingly urges the European Council to invite the Council to take work forward on the basis of the suggestions in this report, building on input from the Commission and the Secretary-General/High Representative.

7. A public information note is available on the Council's website explaining the practical benefits for citizens of action taken by the Union in dealing with emergencies, particularly in third countries.

II. BETTER COORDINATION FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

8. When seeking assistance, Member States are able to draw on existing EU mechanisms managed by the Commission, in particular the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) which is linked into many rapid alert systems with Member States.

9. The Council Secretariat (EU Military Staff) is linked with military duty desks in capitals and the multinational movement coordination centres in order to coordinate and make best use of military or military-chartered transportation assets made available by Member States on a voluntary basis. It is also linked (through the Joint Situation Centre) to Member State Foreign, Defence and Interior Ministries, as well as intelligence and security services, and is able to assist in assessing critical events. The Commission and the Council Secretariat work closely together.

10. Rapid and coherent coordination and decision-making is at the core of an effective response. Steps have been taken to improve the effectiveness of the political coordination process in Brussels and the mechanisms for calling on available assets. Following the Hague Programme and the JHA Council Declaration of July 2005, the Council has taken steps to ensure that the European Union will lend assistance more effectively when major emergencies occur.

11. The Council has endorsed an **operational Manual on EU emergency and crisis coordination**. Firstly, this manual sets out interim EU crisis coordination arrangements for political coordination in Brussels for major emergencies inside or outside the European Union directly affecting a number of Member States or engaging the entire European Union. These arrangements do not supplant existing rapid alert systems; they will help fill any gaps and provide input for coordinated action or decisions by the Council. The manual will be updated in the light of tests, experience and practice.

12. Secondly, the manual pre-identifies **operational networks and emergency support** available in Member States which could be called upon in the event of coordinated terrorist attacks or an influenza pandemic. The Presidency, the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission will continue to develop the manual to cover other emergency situations.

13. Member States have already put or are putting in place the necessary **internal structures** to be able to respond rapidly to all requests for assistance in relation to emergencies or crises. In doing so, Member States should consider whether, for the purpose of these arrangements, a single national contact point for the coordination of all emergency and crisis situations would ensure greater effectiveness.

14. Work on the Commission's proposals on reinforcing the **Community's civil protection capabilities** has been brought forward ambitiously during the Austrian Presidency. The Council should work for adoption of the necessary legal provisions by the end of the year.

15. The EU attaches particular importance to effective coordination with the UN given its leading role in coordinating disaster relief activities outside the EU. With a view to further enhancing coordination and communication between the EU and UN-OCHA, the Austrian Presidency organised an expert seminar on which a Presidency report was submitted to the Justice and Home Affairs Council. Further progress on practical ways of improving coordination between EU and UN will render emergency relief outside the Union more efficient.

16. Further **military assets and capabilities** which could be made available by Member States on a voluntary basis for disaster response and coordinated through EU structures are in the process of being identified, on the basis of orientations from the Secretary-General/High Representative. This may extend the database of military assets and capabilities relevant to the protection of civilian populations.

17. Common needs assessments could help the Union take decisions and ensure a coordinated response in Brussels and in theatre in major emergencies. Further work should be undertaken on whether the Commission, the Council and Member States, including, where relevant, international organisations, could develop common needs assessments in both the immediate response and the longer term reconstruction phases.

III. GETTING ASSISTANCE QUICKLY WHERE IT IS NEEDED

18. Helping EU citizens and local populations in third countries in an emergency requires effective delivery of assistance where and when it is needed. Member States themselves are primarily responsible for transporting the assistance they provide in response to an emergency. In certain cases, however, Member States are able to offer teams of experts or equipment but have no transport to bring that assistance where it is needed. A recent example involved a request through EU mechanisms – and a subsequent offer – to transport tents to a flooded refugee camp in Tindouf in Algeria.

19. The Council and the Commission, building on a report by the Secretary-General/High Representative, have taken steps to help put in place effective procedures at EU level for identifying potentially available military or military-chartered transport capacities, and for coordinating their use to complement civilian means of transport when circumstances so warrant. Options for this include Member States' nationally-owned and operated aircraft as well as the so-called Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS).

20. The procedures which are being put in place for this purpose will ensure a more rapid match between transport needs and available military transportation capabilities. These will include appropriate direct links between the Council Secretariat (EU Military Staff) and military duty desks in Member States' capitals manned around the clock, as well as with the main European air and sealift coordination centres in Eindhoven and Athens. While this work evolves, an interim capability is ensured, elements of which were used in reaction to the earthquake in Indonesia.

21. Procedures should be put in place by the end of this year between the Council Secretariat and the Commission (in particular the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and EC Humanitarian Office (ECHO)) to exchange rapidly information to arrive at a common needs assessment and identify potentially available transportation means.

22. The Council and the Commission should rapidly examine whether **financing** of transport means could be covered under the Community budget.

IV. PROTECTING EU CITIZENS ABROAD

23. Improving consular protection of EU citizens remains a political imperative. More than 180 million trips are made by EU citizens every year to destinations outside the European Union. Citizens expect Member States to be able **to provide concrete and tangible assistance** for them rapidly in emergencies and crises. As a result, there is now an advanced level of cooperation among Member States on consular assistance. This cooperation was put into practice in the recent terrorist attacks in Sharm-El-Sheikh and Bali and hurricane Katrina. Further measures have recently been agreed. However, more still needs to be done.

24. **Instant coordination via teleconferences among crisis centres** in EU capitals, **joint demarches** to local authorities by EU Member States' missions in the countries concerned, and **continued burden sharing** among national crisis intervention teams on the spot are now routine once news of a major international emergency or crisis has broken. Further steps have recently been agreed, in particular to keep Member States which have not been directly affected by an emergency or crisis informed on measures taken by other EU Member States.

25. The **common consular guidelines for EU-Member States' missions in third countries** have been updated. They set out recommendations on cooperation among missions on the spot for dealing with emergencies and crises. They also provide a framework for **cooperating in case of a major evacuation of EU-Member States' citizens** from a third country such as sharing of transport capacities and of needs' assessments in the aftermath of a natural disaster. A **study exercise on how military and consular services could cooperate** in case of such a major evacuation of EU citizens (EVAC 06) was conducted in April 2006.

26. The guidelines draw on a **catalogue of best practices** in third countries, on issues such as sharing of contingency plans and changes to national travel advice as well as on co-ordination of visits to hospitals and hotels to look for missing EU citizens.

27. For the first time, where appropriate and on the basis of the existing legal framework, a **pragmatic support role of Commission delegations** in providing logistics and staff in a consular crisis is foreseen in these guidelines. This reinforces existing EU Member States' capabilities in serving the citizen in need.

28. Measures recently agreed include making **European Emergency Travel Documents** available to citizens of all 25 Member States, and **developing the internet forum** to **facilitate information, communication and coordination** among Member States' consular services. The forum facilitates access to the world wide network of EU-Member States' representations and Commission delegations.

29. Measures are being undertaken by Member States to ensure best possible protection of EU citizens, including consular services, in the event of WHO-confirmed cases of **pandemic influenza** in third countries. Significant information to be urgently communicated to EU citizens should also be publicly made available at important airports and train stations.

30. Article 20 of the Treaty establishing the European Community states that citizens of Member States are entitled to consular protection in third countries by Missions of other Member States, in accordance with specific rules. This information and round the clock emergency contact numbers are made available through the **EU Consular Brochure**, which can also be accessed on line, in the languages of the 25 Member States. To ensure best possible information for EU citizens Member States are invited to consider the possibility of **reproducing the wording of Article 20 in national passports**.

31. In order to be better prepared, more efficient and more visible, work should continue on ensuring greater **coordination of EU Member States' missions contingency and evacuation plans** in third countries. In addition, the **catalogue of consular crisis management capacities** is constantly being updated to ensure better cooperation of Member States' consular assistance teams dispatched to crisis spots.

32. Service improvements for the citizen and synergies among Member States' missions may be achieved by creating **mutual consular assistance points**, which should be considered as soon as possible. To help further explore this potential, EU Member States may envisage **co-locating consular services** in certain regions. This might in practice take the form of consular officers from one Member State not represented, providing consular services out of the premises of another EU Member State mission.

33. Rapid implementation of agreed measures for developing improved cooperation between EU Member States in their consular activity will bring immediate and tangible benefits for all EU citizens in the unfortunate event of facing an emergency beyond the borders of the Union.