



PSC Europe

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**“Towards a stronger European disaster response:
the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance”**

PSCE position

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“Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance”

PSCE position

Public Safety Communication Europe Forum (PSCE) is a permanent autonomous organisation aiming at improving provision of public safety communications and information management systems and the safety of the citizens during crisis and emergency situations. **PSCE** provides a unique common platform for researchers, industry and users enabling regular exchange of ideas, information, experiences and best practices.

Following its endorsement by the Board on 25 March 2011, **PSCE** welcomes the *Communication entitled “Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance”* adopted by the European Commission (EC) on 26 November 2010.

Some of the elements presented by the Communication lay in the heart of the **PSCE** activities. Being the cornerstone of the **PSCE** mission, *“the improvement of public safety services and the safety of the citizens of Europe and the rest of the world”* is equally one of the main objectives of the EC’s proposal.

Prior to the first discussion of the draft report, which is scheduled for 18 April 2011 within the European Parliament’s Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), **PSCE** would like to comment and propose concrete amendments on specific strategic issues having a direct link to the scope of its activities and expertise.

1. Regular EU trainings on interoperability

Point 4.1. of the Communication states that *“Regular EU training and exercises should be organised to enhance the interoperability of these assets. Interoperability requirements will be further developed.”*

By writing down this statement, the EC recognizes the fact that in the event of accidents, emergencies or disasters, the various communities of interest have difficulty to access and share information between themselves. Interoperability is needed to solve this key issue within and between the countries, regions, and nations. To this end, the EC should encourage the development of shared, more effective and more cost-effective logistics at EU level in order to avoid the deployment by each actor of its own on-site support.

PSCE truly believes that organisational and behavioural interoperability issues should be addressed through EU trainings and exercises. However, one of the remaining problems is the technical interoperability. **PSCE** is of the view that there are already many EU funded initiatives tackling user requirements which results are very disperse. To effectively tackle the complex issue of interoperability and all its different layers, the whole interoperability chain must be considered and the end-users, industrial partners and researchers should work together. There is a real need of a streamlining effort at EU level as there is no market case for the industrial partners to develop such interoperability..

The end users, whose role is crucial in developing interoperability, are typically actively participating in local/ national projects and developments. It has, however, proved to be difficult for them to participate at an international level, despite threats not respecting national borders (e.g. international crime, climatic disasters etc). The isolated presentations of users' demands are not transferrable into developments unless relevant providers take them onboard. Therefore, **PSCE** believes that EU funds should support initiatives which directly involve end-users, industry and research.

Given the fragmented market of the member States, achieving sufficient level of interoperability proves to be a challenging task requiring assessment of user needs and considerable financial resources in order to get equipments that could operate across various systems. **PSCE is of the view that the EC should support the development of interoperability requirements and solutions.**

2. Filling the gaps in civil protection response capacities through the smart funding

Under the same point, the EC proposes to *"to determine whether there are gaps in the civil protection response capacities available in the Member States that could be filled by complementary EU-funded assets.*

PSCE believes that sufficient funding should be allocated at EU level in order to effectively tackle existing shortcomings. Article 196 of the Treaty of Lisbon has introduced a Community cooperation in the field of civil protection policy which provides the sufficient basis for supporting and supplementing national efforts.

3. Effective use of Member States military assets

According to Point 4.6 of the Communication, *"Civilian and military capacities developed in the context of the EU's common security and defence policy can be useful in supporting civil protection and humanitarian assistance notably in large-scale natural disasters."*

While in principal agreeing with the above statement, **PSCE** would like to place this concept into a broader context involving cooperation with NATO. In particular, attention should be drawn to Resolution 360 on NATO's role in civil protection, which among others *"urges governments and parliaments of member and partner countries of the North Atlantic Alliance to clarify the use of NATO's military assets in support of civil protection tasks, and consider the opportunity of adopting a doctrine on this matter."* In this respect, the European Parliament should **exploit the ways to link the EC proposal with this very closely related NATO Resolution.**

4. Developing an Emergency Response Centre

Point 5.1 of the Communication stipulates that the EC will “merge the Civil Protection and the DG ECHO crisis rooms to create a genuine 24/7 European Emergency Response Centre, which will work closely with other relevant services, including that responsible for the Internal Security Strategy.”

PSCE is convinced that merging of the ECHO and the MIC crisis rooms is a right step towards more coherent and efficient response to disasters. From operational point of view, reference scenarios that are to be developed should not distinguish between disasters occurring inside and outside the EU.

5. Developing a web-based tool enabling real-time communication between interested parties

Point 5.2 of the Communication states that with the view to strengthen the coordination efforts, the EC will “develop a web-based information tool (based on the current 14 points system for humanitarian aid and the CECIS¹ system for civil protection assistance). This tool will allow real-time communication related to EU (27 Member States and Commission) humanitarian assistance and in-kind assistance.”

PSCE would like to underline that if a network fails to perform in an emergency situation, safety agencies risk much more than network downtime or a loss of productivity as there are lives at stake. **Dedicated reliable, secured and real-time communications is essential in an emergency, especially when multiple departments and government agencies are involved.** Therefore, a secured proposed web-based tool enabling communication in real time is also welcomed by **PSCE**. However, such tool should be available to all countries participating in the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection.

PSCE believes that EC Communication sets out very good basis for parliamentary discussions. **PSCE** hopes that five points briefly outlined in this position paper will contribute to overall quality of envisaged Report. **PSCE** hereby encourages the Members of European Parliament to consider recommendations of all relevant stakeholders and experts in order to achieve a truly stronger European disaster response.

¹ Common Emergency Communication and Information System – a secure system linking civil protection authorities participating in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the Commission.

Annex I

Amendment 1

COM(2010) 600 final
Point 4.1

Regular EU trainings on interoperability

Text proposed by the Commission

“Regular EU training and exercises should be organised to enhance the interoperability of these assets. Interoperability requirements will be further developed.”

Amendment

“Regular EU training and exercises should be organised to enhance the interoperability of these assets. Interoperability requirements and **solutions** shall be further developed **and funded by the European Commission.**”

Justification

Achieving sufficient level of interoperability proves to be a challenging task requiring assessment of user needs and considerable financial resources. The statement, as it stands now, is formulated very vaguely, lacking the identification of key responsible entity. Therefore, PSCE is of the view that the primary role in this context should be assigned to the European Commission that should lead this task.

Amendment 2

COM(2010) 600 final
Point 4.6

Effective use of Members States assets

Text proposed by the Commission

“As a further step, the Commission proposes to:
– Use the contingency planning exercise to determine whether there are gaps in the civil protection response capacities available in the Member States that could be filled by complementary EU-funded assets.”

Amendment

“As a further step, the Commission proposes to:
– Use the contingency planning exercise to determine whether there are gaps in the civil protection response capacities available in the Member States that could be filled by complementary EU-funded assets **with necessary coordination avoiding the scattering of these funds.**”

Justification

Rationalizing the way of EU expenditures on these activities is therefore natural consideration that should be integrated into the text.

Amendment 3

COM(2010) 600 final
Point 4.6

Filling the gaps in civil protection response capabilities through the smart funding

Text proposed by the Commission

“Civilian and military capacities developed in the context of the EU’s common security and defence policy can be useful in supporting civil protection and humanitarian assistance notably in large-scale natural disasters.”

Amendment

“Civilian and military capacities developed in the context of the EU’s common security and defence policy can be useful in supporting civil protection and humanitarian assistance notably in large-scale natural disasters. ***In this respect, the ongoing work in NATO should be taken into consideration.***”

Justification

Resolution 360 on NATO’s role in civil protection, among others “*urges governments and parliaments of member and partner countries of the North Atlantic Alliance to clarify the use of NATO’s military assets in support of civil protection tasks, and consider the opportunity of adopting a doctrine on this matter.*” In this respect, the European Parliament should exploit the ways how to link the EC proposal with this very closely related NATO Resolution.

Amendment 4

COM(2010) 600 final
Point 5.2

Developing a web-based tool enabling real-time communication between interested parties

Text proposed by the Commission

The Commission will develop a web-based information tool (based on the current 14 points system for humanitarian aid and the CECIS² system for civil protection assistance). This tool will allow real-time communication related to EU (27 Member States and Commission) humanitarian assistance and in-kind assistance.”

Amendment

The Commission will develop a **dedicated reliable and secured** web-based information tool (based on the current 14 points system for humanitarian aid and the CECIS system for civil protection assistance). This tool will allow real-time communication **for all countries participating in Community Mechanism for Civil Protection.**

Justification

Dedicated reliable, secured and real-time communications is essential in an emergency, especially when multiple departments and government agencies are involved. This tool should be made available to all states participating in the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection, including non-EU countries.

² Common Emergency Communication and Information System – a secure system linking civil protection authorities participating in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the Commission.