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**NOTE**

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From : The Presidency

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To : The European Council

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Subject : Reinforcing the European Union's emergency and crisis response capacities

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Delegations will find attached the Presidency report on reinforcing the European Union's emergency and crisis response capacities.

## *Introduction*

1. At its June 2006 meeting, the European Council stressed that improving the Union's responsiveness to emergencies remained a political imperative. It accordingly agreed that particular attention should be given to:
  - further developing the Union's rapid response capability based on means that Member States make available, including civil protection modules;
  - rapid implementation of steps already agreed, including EU Emergency and Crisis Coordination Arrangements and the identification and coordination of military transport assets in support of disaster response;
  - exercising these procedures and capabilities and learning lessons from these exercises and actual operational experience to improve disaster response;
  - work for adoption by the end of the year of the necessary legal provisions to reinforce the Community's civil protection capabilities;
  - and closer consular cooperation among EU Member States, including mutual consular assistance points in pre-identified regions.
  
2. The Finnish Presidency has taken work forward on all aspects of the EU's emergency response. COREPER has regularly exercised oversight. This report review progress achieved across the board during the past six months and sets out the tasks ahead. Future Presidencies are invited to take work forward as a matter of priority on all aspects and report regularly to the Council on the progress made.
  
3. Improvements are needed in the current arrangements for coordinating all elements of the EU response to serious emergency and crisis, including coordination within and between the Commission and the Council Secretariat, liaison between EU institutions and Member States as well as cooperation between the EU and UN and the country affected.

4. While Member States are responsible for managing emergencies on their territory or assisting their citizens in third countries, other Member States and the EU may, in a spirit of solidarity, play an important supporting role, when requested to do so. Following the report from the Court of Auditors on the Commission's humanitarian aid response to the Tsunami, the Commission is taking measures to help affected governments manage donor coordination and to clarify roles and responsibilities between DG/ECHO and the Civil Protection Mechanism to improve synergies, while supporting the leading role of UN OCHA in coordinating the humanitarian response.
5. The Finnish Presidency has taken forward discussion on the roles and mandates of the relevant actors. The scope for developing common needs assessments has also been examined. Further work is required to identify ways and means to enhance the EU's response to serious crisis situations in a concerted manner with efforts of relevant UN bodies.

#### ***Developing crisis coordination arrangements***

6. Following the endorsement by the Council last June of the manual on crisis coordination, and the development of internal standard operating procedures (SOPs) for crisis coordination arrangements within the Council, an exercise testing these arrangements took place on 30 October. Coreper was immediately given a first evaluation of the exercise and a more elaborate report was submitted subsequently. From the perspective of the Presidency, the exercise successfully tested the mechanics of the CCA SOPs and gave ideas as to the areas where further improvements could be made. Further exercises wider in scope will be conducted in 2007, possibly one per Presidency. The SOPs will continue to be updated in the light of these exercises.

7. Work has continued on further developing the manual on EU emergency and crisis coordination, including extending it to all emergency situations. Consideration has been given to whether greater effectiveness would be ensured by identifying a single default contact point in all Member States, which can be used in all emergency and crisis situations that require operational engagement from neighbours, other Member States, EU structures or other organisations. The Presidency organised an expert meeting in Helsinki on 9/10 November 2006 which discussed the concept and the basic requirements for such a contact point.
  
8. With respect to experience gained by Member States in bilateral cooperation in emergency and crisis situations, experts have reviewed lessons learnt from bilateral cooperation in combating forest fires as well as from Community financed exercises. To continue this process, the incoming Presidency will host an expert meeting to exchange information and experience in the field of decontamination with a view to improving interoperability of rescue teams from different Member States.

### ***Enhancing EU civil protection capabilities***

9. As requested by the European Council, the Presidency has taken forward work on the Commission's proposals on reinforcing the Union's civil protection capabilities. The Council on 11 December 2006 reached political agreement on the Civil protection financial instrument.
  
10. As regards the recast of the Community's civil protection mechanism, discussions have focused on the definition and organisation of civil protection modules as well as on the respective roles of the Presidency and the Commission in interventions outside the Community. These discussions will continue, also in the light of the European Parliament's opinion.

## *Using military assets in support of disaster relief*

11. On 13 November the Council noted the document "Military support to EU disaster relief - Identification and coordination of available assets and capabilities" as a living document, and agreed on the way ahead. That paper identified a range of potential military assets and capabilities which could support the overall EU disaster response efforts, and presented proposals for coordinating the use of Member States' voluntary contributions of military assets and capabilities with a view to enabling an immediate response. These arrangements will be subject to review as necessary in the light of experience gained. Any use of Member States' military resources in support of a coordinated EU disaster response will follow international guidelines, notably the Oslo and MCDA guidelines.
12. Identification and prioritisation of a list of relevant military assets and capabilities was based on an overview of recent disasters (2004 tsunami in South-East Asia, 2005 Katrina hurricane, 2005 Pakistan earthquake, 2006 Algeria (Tindouf) flood and 2006 Indonesia (Java) earthquake). Based on this examination, military assets and capabilities that were used and that would be likely to remain the main focus of potential military involvement in the future include: strategic transport (air/sea); tactical transport (e.g. in-theatre use of helicopters); medical units and/or field hospitals; and logistics. These arrangements will be subject to review as necessary in the light of experience gained.
13. Standing Operating Procedures have been finalised for matching transport needs and available military owned or chartered transportation capabilities from Member States which could be used to complement civilian means of transport. These detail the service and information exchanges between the General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission, the Multinational Movement Coordination Centres (Athens and Eindhoven), and the points of contact designated by Member States to deal with military transport aspects for immediate response.

### *Promoting consular assistance*

14. Improving consular protection of EU citizens remains a political imperative and EU citizens rightly expect their governments to be able to provide concrete and tangible assistance for them rapidly in times of crisis.
15. The crisis in Lebanon served to underline the strong sense of solidarity which exists in the EU. Member States are ready to cooperate closely together and to use all means available in order to respond rapidly and efficiently and ensure that no EU citizen is left behind. Mutual assistance during the evacuation operations proved exemplary, following to a large extent the common consular guidelines which were adopted last June. Also in this field, the Lebanese crisis demonstrated the importance of enhanced coordination efforts amongst capitals via teleconferences as well as the need to cooperate closely with third countries.
16. During the Finnish Presidency work has been taken forward to develop the concept of "lead nations" to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of consular crises mechanisms in third countries. Lead State(s) would provide a coordinating framework for all Member States with nationals in the third countries.
17. Member States have also taken practical steps in order to improve the exchange of information, EU consular visibility, and local coordination and cooperation among Member States' consular staff.
18. The concrete implementation of ideas such as mutual consular service points will continue, and co-location possibilities are being examined, alongside possible solutions to the legal issues that may arise.
19. As requested by the June European Council, the SG/HR and the Commission have submitted a joint report on closer consular cooperation among EU Member States, including mutual consular assistance points in pre-identified regions. The Council is invited to examine the further general measures suggested in that report.