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Civil Protection in the EU and in South-Eastern Europe 18 - 19 May 2011

IRC-09-S

EXTERNAL REPORT

Background

The rising number of potential threats has led many countries to recognize the importance of civil protection capacity building and, consequently, to include it on the list of their top priorities. Community co-cooperation in the field of Civil Protection aims to better protect people, their environment, property and cultural heritage in the event of major natural or man-made disasters. The improvement of Civil Protection is a specific, continuous, long-term process which heavily relies on strong political and legal commitment, public understanding, scientific knowledge, careful development planning, accountable enforcement of policies and legislation, effective disaster preparedness and response mechanisms.

In South East Europe (SEE), Civil Protection is a security issue that requires very close regional cooperation, including a timely exchange of information, views and ideas. It involves constant improvement of national regulations and their alignment with EU standards. Therefore, the organizers had envisaged this event as a forum for presenting and explaining the EU acquis civil-protection related issues to national representatives coming from SEE countries.

Acknowledgements

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The goal of the Seminar was to increase awareness of the importance of Civil Protection among SEE countries in order to ensure a higher level of preparedness for averting the prospective natural, technological or environmental disasters. This will eventually lead to reduced human and infrastructure losses.

The objectives were:

- to promote increased awareness of the importance of Civil Protection against possible natural, technological and environmental disasters;
- to present EU standards in the field of Civil Protection and to support the SEE countries' practical and operational solutions with EU standards and regulations;
- to lay the groundwork for establishing a common framework for effective and rapid cooperation of national Civil Protection services;
- to provide and exchange information, views, and experiences with regard to the established EU Civil Protection standards and systems;
- to gain and share knowledge of EU's Civil Protection strategies and regulations;
- to propose the way for future cooperation in the field of Civil Protection.

Venue, duration and participation

The Seminar was held at RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation, from 18 to 19 May 2011. It was organized as a three-day event, two of which were working days. The Seminar gathered a total of 33 participants, from SEE's EU candidate and potential candidate countries.



Group foto

Seminar Agenda

As the Seminar Chairman, Mr. Brunsveld welcomed all the participants and subsequently gave the floor to RACVIAC Director Ambassador Nikola Todorčevski for his opening remarks.

Ambassador Todorčevski emphasized, among other things, the importance of exchanging experiences and knowledge especially in crisis management, as it is crucial to know each other in times of crises. Ambassador also stressed the importance of Civil Protection not only in saving human lives and preventing economic damage but also in safeguarding cultural heritage of the region.

The keynote speaker was Mr. Damir Čemerin, Deputy Head of Civil Protection from the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, Republic of Croatia. Mr. Čemerin delivered a presentation on the Croatian national civil protection system and challenges and perspectives in the field of Civil Protection. Addressing the seminar participants, he emphasized the importance of subsidiarity and the need for Civil Protection to be organized at the local level.



From left to right: Mr. Ruben Brunsveld, Amb. Nikola Todorčevski, Mr. Damir Čemerin and Col. Željko Cepanec

The event proceeded with overviews on national civil protection systems in AL, BA, MK, RS and TR. Different national delegations presented the organization of civil protection systems in their respective countries. Common topics were:

- Improving cooperation within and between departments;
- Importance of good communication and ICT systems;

- Establishing good links with the scientific community and engaging civil society;
- Importance of prevention;
- Need of good risk assessment at the local and national level – EU;
- Importance of damage assessment (being able to win the political level over);
- Importance of timely access to relevant, reliable and comparable data.



Working session

Following the opening part, Mr. Branko Dervodel, Deputy Director General, Slovenian Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, was the first to take the floor. He addressed the audience on the topic “Improving the efficiency of prevention of and the response to river floods in Slovenia”. Mr. Dervodel emphasized the importance of good prevention measures in averting damage to cultural heritage, citing the washed-away Partizan Hospital as an example. Since prevention measures, besides being costly, are not always very visible, politicians are often reluctant to spend money on them. However, they represent a more cost-efficient solution than covering the repair costs in the response phase. Mr. Dervodel was also keen to point out the importance of regional cooperation initiatives such as RACVIAC, the DPPI and others in reaching the required standards and promoting increased awareness of the importance of Civil Protection. The next speaker was Ms. Ivana Ljubojevic, Head of Secretariat, DPPI for South East Europe. Ms. Ljubojevic presented the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Initiative for South East Europe. The DPPI is a regional leader in the field of CP training and tries to serve as a bridge towards the EU. Their agenda is set every year by the participating states and organizations and they have an extensive, demand-driven Disaster Management Training Program. The DPPI has focused on enhancing education in the field of sustainable disaster-risk reduction, for which the participation of local communities is crucial.

Following the speakers’ presentations the floor was open for participants’ questions and open discussion.



Working session

The second working day started with an address by Mr. Ruben Brunsveld, former member of the Civil Protection Working Party, on the topic “Civil Protection, from Albufeira to Lisbon”. Mr. Brunsveld wanted to make the participants aware of the history of the civil protection dossier and the sensitivities between different EU Member States in the period 2006 - 2011. He gave an overview of the political discussion in the Council after the release of the Barnier report (May 2006) and the position of Member States. He used this practical example to illustrate the difference between that situation and the situation under the Lisbon Treaty. Subsequently, he went on to highlight some specific changes that came into force with the Lisbon Treaty such as the legal base (shared competence, Articles 6 and 196), the Solidarity Clause (Article 222) and the role of the European Parliament and QMV. He concluded that Lisbon had brought a shift in power from individual Member States to the Commission, thus making for European solidarity and common responsibility, as long as Member States maintained operational subsidiarity and acted locally when dealing with crisis management.

The Seminar proceeded with presentations by Ms. Susanne Wacht, Senior Advisor at the Operations Department, German Federal Agency for Technical Relief, dedicated to the Community Civil Protection Mechanism I: Basics and the Community Civil Protection Mechanism II: Operations. Ms Wacht gave a presentation on the functioning of the Mechanism and the way it had been implemented in Germany, drawing attention to the increase in the number of interventions over the last years. She emphasized that the Mechanism dealt not only with response, but with prevention and preparedness as well. Furthermore, she clearly illustrated the importance of the MIC as the communication hub and the information distribution centre, as well as its role in coordination & technical support. Highlighting experts’ exchange programmes of the EU, also mirrored in the IPA programme, Ms. Wacht touched upon the question of cooperation between the EU Mechanism and non-EU instruments such as UNOCHA.

Since the Mechanism is also important for Member States’ pooling of transportation, the Moderator Mr. Brunsveld added that it was important for the countries to work through the Mechanism not just in order to enhance the EU coordination, but in order to be eligible for a 50% reimbursement of transport costs as there was no retroactive reimbursement by the Commission. Ms. Wacht demonstrated the workings of the modules and their self-sufficiency and autonomy using the German High Capacity Pumping Module as an example. Finally, she emphasized the importance of knowing each other during crises and urged the participants to make use of the possibilities of the IPA Programme.



Working session

Following Ms. Wacht’s presentation, the floor was taken by Mr. Paulo Vaccari, Desk Officer at the Civil Protection Department, Italian Council of Ministers. He presented the lessons learned from the Abruzzo earthquake, stressing that Civil Protection implied learning from each other’s experiences, trials and errors. Furthermore, he underscored that assisting a population after a major crisis meant staying there for a short, mid or long term and making the necessary plans for the future. Mr. Vaccari’s presentation led to the discussion of the following issues:

- Human and social factor;
- Local command and control in case of a major emergency;
- Importance of self-sufficiency;
- Simple issues leading to huge problems;
- Transport;
- Psychological effect and the media pressure;
- Cultural and social sensitivities;
- Avoiding “Too many cooks spoil the broth” effect;
- Equal treatment for all the persons involved (modules and standardization);
- Involving the whole population in the management of the camp.

The last speaker was Ms. Patrícia Gaspar, National Operations Assistant at the Portuguese National Authority for Civil Protection. Ms. Gaspar explained how the Portuguese authorities succeeded in diminishing the amount of forest fires by 20% - 25% in the last few years. The main points were:

- A cross-sectoral approach involving all players at the national and local level;
- Engaging and educating the whole population;
- Strong punishment and fines for people making open fire in summer and making sure people are aware of that;
- Good system of command and control on site (mobile command centers);
- Improvements in the institutional coordination and information management;
- Annual revision of the main policy document;
- Strong preparation for incoming assistance, including a welcoming, pocket-size guide for fire-fighting planes pilots;
- Strong media information policy, including weekly press conferences and Rules of Engagement agreed on with the media on what they can and can not do during an emergency.

After Ms. Gaspar's presentation, the participants were given an opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions.

Seminar closing remarks

The seminar entitled " Civil Protection in the EU and in SEE" was an event organized by the European Commission in RACVIAC. The first working day was focused on the analysis of different Civil Protection systems in the participating countries, the importance of regional organizations and the significance of disaster prevention. The second working day offered an insight into the role of the EU, Civil Protection under the Lisbon Treaty and the functioning of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Throughout the Seminar, all the participants actively took part in discussing the following issues:

- Importance of sharing national experiences;
- Importance of improving national administrative structures;
- Importance of involving all actors: public, private, NGO's & Media;
- Knowing the EU political landscape (the Lisbon Treaty) and the internal functioning of the Commission;
- Importance of acting local in dealing with crises;

- Knowing the operational landscape, how the modules work and how the EU operational cooperation functions;
- Importance of regional development and cooperation with the EU through different programs such as the IPA pre-accession instrument;

The aim of this Seminar was fully achieved as it contributed to fostering joint cooperation in the field of Civil Protection among SEE authorities, as part of the overall security cooperation in SEE.

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