

Civil protection: Council agrees negotiating mandate on strengthening civil protection cooperation

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On 25 July 2018, EU ambassadors endorsed, on behalf of the Council, a mandate for negotiations on a proposal to amend the EU civil protection mechanism. On the basis of this mandate, the Council Presidency will start negotiations with the European Parliament.

Strengthening response capacities

The existing rules on civil protection foresee a voluntary pool to provide mutual support in Europe. In addition to strengthening current capacities, the new rules would establish rescEU, a system to be used as a last resort when existing national capacities and the pool prove to be insufficient.

Through this system the EU will be able to support member states by co-financing leasing or rental arrangements as well as the acquisition of capacities which are otherwise lacking. rescEU capacities will be hosted by the member state acquiring, leasing or renting them, and shall be available for response operations under the EU mechanism. Decisions on their deployment, demobilisation and on arbitration in cases of conflicting requests will be taken by the Commission, in close cooperation with the member states involved.

Improving risk prevention

Prevention is vital in both reducing the risk of disasters and in lessening their impact. Under the new rules, member states will be required to develop further their risk assessments, risk management planning and risk management capability.

If a member state requests the same type of assistance for the same type of disaster three times within three years, it will have to provide to the Commission additional information on its prevention and preparedness measures related to that risk. The Commission will then assess whether adequate prevention and preparedness measures have been taken.

The Commission, in cooperation with member states, will be able to establish

consultation mechanisms to improve the prevention, preparedness and coordination between member states which are prone to similar types of disasters.

Sharing knowledge

The proposed new rules also improve training and knowledge-sharing. The Commission will be tasked with establishing a EU civil protection knowledge network of those involved in civil protection and disaster management. This network will be responsible for carrying out various tasks in the area of training, exercises and knowledge dissemination.

Background

The EU civil protection mechanism was established in 2001. It has helped improve cooperation between the EU and its member states, and facilitates wider coordination in the area of civil protection. Any country in the world, as well as the United Nations and relevant international organisations may request assistance through this mechanism in the event of a disaster.

However, recent experience has shown that reliance on voluntary offers of mutual assistance coordinated and facilitated by the mechanism does not always ensure that the capacities made available in the event of a disaster are adequate. This is particularly the case where member states are simultaneously affected by recurrent disasters and collective capacity is insufficient.

To address the existing shortcomings, the European Commission presented a proposal in November 2017 to strengthen the existing rules.

Currently, support under the EU civil protection mechanism is being mobilised to help tackle the tragic fires which are raging in parts of Greece, Sweden and Latvia.

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