



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from:	Presidency
to:	Council
Subject:	Follow-up to the extraordinary meeting of the GAERC on 7 January 2005 on the earthquake and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean – European Union Action Plan

1. In the light of the initial Council and Coreper discussions and with a view to the Council debate on 31 January, the Presidency is proposing an action plan intended to encompass all the initiatives taken, or to be taken, by the Union and the Member States following the earthquake and the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. The principal aim of this action plan is to better coordinate all the available resources at all levels and in all areas (analysis, planning of resources, operational action, prevention, etc.) to deal effectively with the consequences of such events now and in the future.

2. In implementing this action plan, the following general considerations should be taken into account:

- the importance of distinguishing, on the one hand, initiatives to be taken immediately to respond as quickly and efficiently as possible to recent events and, on the other, a discussion to be held in parallel on improving in the longer term the Union's capacity to react to disasters, both natural and man-made, possibly by putting in place new arrangements yet to be defined ("the Union's rapid response capability");
- the great diversity of instruments and resources to be mobilised depending on their origin (Union/Member States) or their nature (civilian or military) and the need to take account of this diversity when rationalising existing instruments or creating new ones with a view to improving the response; in this context, the need to observe the principles and specific nature of humanitarian aid was recalled;
- the central role played by the United Nations and the resulting need to link current and future Union action to the special responsibilities conferred upon the United Nations and its various subordinate bodies and organisations, such as the OCHA, UNICEF and the WHO; in this connection, the importance of fully associating NGOs and civil society partners in the Union and in the countries affected was also emphasised;
- the need to ensure continuity of action and, in particular, a harmonious transition between the current stage, focused on assistance and emergency aid, and the next stage which will be devoted to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected regions;
- the need to take due account of national priorities and the choices of the governments concerned in selecting the programmes and projects to be financed in each country, in accordance with the principle of ownership, while ensuring that resources go to the most vulnerable populations, and taking account of certain particular aspects linked to conflict situations;

- the need to guarantee the efficiency and the quality of the aid provided by the European Union and its Member States;
- the importance of ensuring that resources committed following the recent earthquake are not at the expense of development commitments already entered into, especially in relation to Africa and the Millennium Goals.

Moreover, it was agreed that Coreper and the GAERC will undertake regular follow-up at the political level. The Council will return to this dossier at its meeting on 25 and 26 April 2005 to review the overall progress of the activities undertaken.

It has also been decided to adopt a communication strategy to keep the public fully informed regarding the efforts undertaken by the Union and its Member States to deal with the consequences of the disaster.

A. MOBILISATION OF BUDGETARY AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

1. Mobilisation of the emergency reserve (EUR 100 million)

Further to the agreement reached at the trialogue meeting on 12 January 2005, this was formally approved as an "A" item at the ECOFIN Council on 18 January.

2. Release of financial resources for the medium and long term (EUR 350 million)

In addition to the budgetary measures which it can take directly, the Commission will put forward a first proposal on needs for 2005 in the light of the results of the evaluation by the World Bank, which are expected in February/March.

→ *The Working Party on Development Cooperation and the Budget Committee will examine this proposal as soon as it is available.*

3. Setting up an Indian Ocean Tsunami Facility

The EIB is ready to set up this facility as soon as possible (the approval of the Board of Directors and the Board of Governors is required). The Commission will put forward the appropriate proposals with a view to mobilising the requisite budgetary resources for the guarantee, co-financing and the feasibility studies.

→ *The ECOFIN Council reviewed progress on the dossier on 18 January and will return to it as soon as the Commission proposal is available.*

4. Regular review of the actual implementation of financial commitments

- *The Working Party on Development Cooperation will regularly undertake such a review on the basis of a Commission report updated in the light of all the information available, including in the framework of the United Nations. Particular attention will be paid to improving systems for monitoring financial commitments and to controls to ensure the effective use of the funds committed.*
- *The informal meeting of Development Ministers on 14 and 15 February will provide a further opportunity to review the situation.*

5. Debt

The Paris Club is prepared to offer a temporary debt moratorium to those countries who so wish. The debt issue will also feature in the G7 talks in London in early February.

→ *The ECOFIN Council reviewed all of these issues on 18 January and will consider them again at a forthcoming meeting.*

B. STEPPING UP ONGOING ACTIVITIES ON THE GROUND

6. Humanitarian aid, monitoring the situation

In monitoring ongoing activities on the ground attention will primarily be focused on the following aspects:

- *continuous assessment of the local situation and of the scale and nature of the requirements of each country and of the region as a whole;*
- *cataloguing the humanitarian aid already given by the Member States and by the EU (by stepping up information exchanges) so as to obtain a clearer overview of the situation;*
- *the involvement of civil society and NGOs;*
- *enhancing coordination between the mechanisms and instruments already deployed;*
- *specific logistical problems, including those affecting aid deliveries;*
- *certain urgent requirements, in particular the protection of children, their schooling and their return to school.*

→ *The Working Party on Development Cooperation, in consultation with the Asia-Oceania Working Party (COASI) and the Humanitarian Aid Committee, will review the ongoing activities on the ground and will follow the identification of needs and regularly update them on the basis of a Commission report to be submitted to it.*

7. Military resources

In response to the report from the mission sent to Geneva by the SG/HR on 10 January 2005, liaison officers from the European Union Military Staff have been posted to the OCHA offices in Bangkok and Rome to help coordinate the military resources made available to the UN and pinpoint current and future needs.

→ *In line with the GAERC conclusions of 7 January 2005 the Secretariat, together with the EUMS, is invited to put forward proposals on procedures for coordinating and supplying Member States' military resources. The PSC is monitoring this issue.*

C. RECONSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT MEASURES IN THE MEDIUM TERM

RECONSTRUCTION

8. Monitoring and assessing needs

In choosing reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes and projects to be funded in each country, the Commission and Member States will abide by the priorities defined by the governments of the countries concerned. In so doing, they will ensure that the reconstruction effort is environmentally friendly and designed to prevent or mitigate the effects of such catastrophes in future (e.g. by creating buffer zones). The potential impact on conflict situations will also be taken into account in the reconstruction phase.

An assessment should be made of overall needs in relation to infrastructure in general, with particular emphasis on the housing, education and water and sanitation sectors. In addition, special attention will be paid to certain specific needs, including:

- ***fisheries sector:** the Commission will present its proposals, looking ahead in particular to the forthcoming meeting of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (7 to 11 March 2005) and the ministerial meeting on 12 March 2005. An initial discussion took place in the Agriculture Council on 24 January 2005 to enable the Commission subsequently to submit a proposal;*
- ***tourism sector:** potential forms of cooperation should be considered.*

The Commission and Member States will ensure that, from the evaluation stage onwards, they coordinate their efforts with the development banks (Asian Development Bank and World Bank); they will fully involve NGOs and civil society partners in the EU and the countries affected in their activities.

- *the Asia-Oceania Working Party (COASI), in consultation with the Working Party on Development Cooperation, will regularly monitor developments and needs in the region, focusing in particular on Indonesia (Aceh) and Sri Lanka. To that end the Joint Situation Centre will continue to supply the necessary information.*
- *The Commission will continue to oversee the operational aspects required to steer the action it takes.*

SUPPORT MEASURES

9. Health

The Presidency briefed the Working Party on Public Health on the situation on 13 January 2005. It highlighted the fact that the WHO was responsible for coordinating health-related aid in situ and that, at this stage, no further medicines, vaccines or medical staff should be dispatched until the WHO had determined what the additional needs were.

- *The Working Party on Public Health will review the situation regularly. The EPSCO Council will discuss this matter if required.*

10. Trade-support measures

The Commission presented its preliminary ideas on this subject to the Article 133 Committee and the GSP Working Party in regard to undertakings directly affected by tsunamis, speeded-up entry into force of the new system of generalised preferences; review of current trade protection measures with a view - where justified - to their temporary suspension; easing rules of origin in the appropriate regional context; technical assistance relating to trade issues, more particularly health and plant health aspects.

- *The Article 133 Committee, if need be, and the GSP Working Party will continue examining these issues.*

→ *The GAERC meeting on 16 March 2005 is due formally to adopt the new system of generalised preferences so that it can enter into force on 1 April 2005.*

11. Bilateral partnerships

→ *Coreper will ensure regular follow-up of the initiatives taken by the Member States to encourage the competent authorities to set up twinning arrangements between regions, towns and public and private establishments such as hospitals and schools. The Commission will consider how to support these initiatives.*

12. Political dialogue between the EU and Asia and regional cooperation

→ *Generally speaking, COASI will investigate ways in which the EU could help to reinforce the role of ASEAN in the development and stabilisation of the region. It will also look into how to develop bodies for dialogue between the Union and Asia, in particular on the basis of the assessment of the political and security implications drawn up by the Council Secretariat.*
In this context, COASI will prepare the EU's position for the upcoming ministerial meetings: EU/ASEAN (10 -11 March 2005), ASEM (6-7 May 2005) and ARF (29-30 July 2005).

D. REINFORCING THE UNION'S RESPONSE CAPACITY

On the basis of an analysis of recent events and the initial conclusions to be drawn, the Union must ensure that it is in a position to implement every means appropriate for coping with disasters of this type or a similar nature both inside and outside the Union. Such action must involve better use of existing instruments, the possible establishing of new structures to improve "the Union's rapid response capability" and the role which could be played by certain projects such as the creation of a "European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps".

13. Improvement of existing instruments

Discussion of improvements to existing instruments should cover the following aspects, in particular:

- (a) improving the capacity for analysing and assessing needs;*
- (b) coordinating the contributions of Member States;*
- (c) coordinating a collective response by the Union within the framework of an operation conducted by another organisation;*
- (d) coordinating and managing an autonomous Union operation;*
- (e) establishing scenarios for different types of situation, making it possible to identify in advance the resources (human, material, medical, transport, logistical) which Member States could make available in the event of a major disaster; in this context, consideration will be given to establishing "modules" capable of responding to specific needs;*
- (f) the interoperability of systems and means, including civil-military interoperability;*
- (g) re-examining existing exercise programmes with a view to strengthening them (e.g. joint exercises of the various Union bodies concerned);*

- (h) link with the UN (and the OCHA);
- (i) *evaluation and study of improvements which could be made to humanitarian-aid instruments as such, bearing in mind the principles and specific nature of such aid.*

- *The Working Party on Civil Protection will look into all possible improvements from the perspective of civil protection, in the light inter alia of the Commission's assessment of the operation of the Community civil protection mechanism, and on the basis of proposals from the Commission and the SG/HR. The JHA Council will also be apprised in good time of the outcome of this study.*
- *The Working Party on Development will look more specifically at the humanitarian-aid aspect.*
- *Other Council preparatory bodies will take part in discussion of this point, in their respective spheres of competence: thus the PSC (together with CIVCOM, PMG and the EUMC) will examine the contribution which could be made by the pol-mil structures and the civilian/military cell.*

14. Developing a European Union rapid response capability

In connection with the setting up of a European Union rapid response capability, discussion should include the following issues:

- (a) *the scope of the European Union rapid response capability (natural/man-made disasters, inside/outside the Union);*
- (b) *the coordination or even pooling of certain own resources (reciprocal use);*
- (c) *relations to be established with the civil protection mechanism Information Centre (MIC) and ECHO, and between Member States (e.g. via an online information system);*

- (d) *interaction with work in progress in connection with implementing the Plan of Action on combating Terrorism, the Hague Programme and the conclusions of the European Council in December 2004;*
 - (e) *interaction with work in progress in connection with the Civilian Headline Goal 2008 (particularly as regards the rapid deployment of civilian crisis reaction teams);*
 - (f) *means of ensuring increased coordination of military resources made available by the Member States to support operations of this type (in the light of the role played by Member States' military capabilities in the recent earthquake);*
 - (g) *procedures necessary for the Union to support the coordination efforts of the United Nations;*
 - (h) *coordinating structures to be put in place in the affected regions;*
 - (i) *finally, whether in general it is sufficient to plan to reinforce and rationalise existing structures or whether new mechanisms or new means should be put in place to complement or replace the existing structures; in this context some recalled the idea put forward that consideration be given to the usefulness of setting up a Civil Protection Agency; others referred to the Council Conclusions of 7 January on "developing a European Union rapid response capability".*
- *The Council asked the Commission and the SG/HR to submit appropriate proposals, each in their respective sphere of competence, insofar as possible for the GAERC in February.*
- *These proposals will be swiftly examined by the Working Party on Civil Protection and the PSC (together with CIVCOM, PMG and the EUMC).*

15. Consideration of the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

Following the invitation from the Council, consideration should be given to the contribution which could be made in this type of situation by a European Volunteers Corps.

16. Examination of the specific aspects of protection and support for European citizens

Recent events have shown the importance of increased cooperation between the Member States in coming to the aid of European citizens in such areas as assistance, evacuation and the delivery of food and medical care and consular cooperation. In this context, the role which could be played by existing instruments, once improved, and by a rapid reaction capability in assistance to citizens of the Union outside EU territory was also mentioned. These questions will be discussed:

- *by the Working Party on Consular Affairs on the basis of a report from Heads of Mission in the countries affected by the earthquake and assessments made by capitals - in this connection the idea of setting up consular assistance teams will be discussed. The Working Party on Consular Affairs will draw up specific proposals as soon as possible and report back to COREPER in good time before the GAERC on 21 February 2005. If appropriate, other working parties such as CIVCOM or the Working Party on Public Health may be consulted, in their respective spheres of competence;*
- *in the context of preparatory work relating to the establishment of the joint External Action Service (amongst other matters, in the field of consular cooperation), including the possibility of setting up a crisis-response centre.*

E. PREVENTION

17. Strategy of reinforcing preventive, early-warning and disaster-prevention measures

The Commission is invited to make proposals to reduce vulnerability to this sort of disaster, particularly in the light of the results of the Kobe Conference and with a view to the third international conference on early warning to be organised under UN auspices at the initiative of Germany.

These proposals should cover the establishment of a detection and early-warning system for the Indian Ocean, as well as for the Mediterranean and the Atlantic; they should also take account of work already under way on a strategy for the protection of critical infrastructures.

→ *These proposals will be examined by the Working Party on Civil Protection, in consultation with the Working Party on Development Cooperation and the Working Party on the Environment.*

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