

# Emergency Preparedness in the European Union

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## ABSTRACT

European Union is an important global actor - in terms of economy, welfare and soft security - but its institutional development and ambitions has to consider both the issues of grand challenges, resilience, disaster management, in accordance with its citizens' will and skills. The Lisbon Treaty as well as the recent legislation on civil protection produced incremental change and improved the Emergency Management. However, there are not studies to check how the new institutions, the knowledge flows or decisions work.

The final goal of this short paper is to structure an inquiring system and design a research project on assessing the civil protection policy in the EU through a Delphi study with experts and practitioners. While the first part frames the issues the second part will design the methodology and sampling strategy for a Delphi technique.

## Keywords

Emergency Preparedness, Foresight, Strategic Planning, European Union, Disaster Management

## STRATEGIC PLANNING BETWEEN THE EU GLOBAL AMBITION AND CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

The European Union is an important international actor of about half million people from 28 countries that has an ambition to be a global power, resilient to any kind of risks. Inward looking, the European Union faced the challenge of overcoming a “democratic deficit”, as perceived by its population in the last two decades.

Therefore the EU leaders face two grand challenges when dealing with crisis management: an ambition to deal with crises worldwide while making its institutions resilient, as well as considering the citizens' perceptions and involving them in all phases of crisis management.

The overall goal of this paper is to structure an inquiring system, based on a Delphi technique, able to understand the gaps and issues at all policy levels in the EU emergency management and to offer policy recommendation for the European, national and local leaders.

In December 2007, the member states signed the Lisbon Treaty, meant to offer institutional basis for its global ambition and to enhance the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the EU and to improve a coherence of policy actions. Among the issues directly related with capacity of resilience and civil protection the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) claims that “... The Union shall encourage the cooperation between Member States in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural and manmade disasters” (TFEU, article 196, Title XXIII) .

Following the TFEU provision, not operationalized yet by 2013, the European Parliament decided to revise the EU's Civil Protection legislation and build up a new European Union Civil Protection Mechanism in order to integrate all aspects of a comprehensive disaster management policy: disaster prevention, disaster preparedness and improved response arrangements. In the new legislation, the Member States continues to be responsible for disaster management while the European Commission will facilitate and co-ordinate deployment on the ground. For each emergency, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) will put together an immediate response plan, matching the capacities available from the voluntary pool with the needs on the ground. The

ERCC will then call upon the Member States to deploy the needed capacities. The final decision to deploy will remain with Member States (EC Memo, 2013).

By the same token, the European Council in December 2013 gathered the EU heads of state and government to discuss on a wide range of topics, with priority to EU's common security and defense policy (CSDP). The Conclusions of the Council assessed that although the EU deploys more than 7000 staff in 12 civilian missions and four military operations a lots of actions need to be done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this EU Comprehensive Approach "... including as it applies to EU crisis management..."(EUCO 217/13, 2013).

With all these institutional changes the EU concept of crisis management is a fuzzy concept, a "catch-all phrase for both military and civilian European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) operations, whether they are deployed to prevent conflict for bursting into crisis, assist in enforcing the peace or build the peace" (p.11). Moreover, the crisis management term refers both to the external action of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and EU Third Pillar of Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal matters. In addition the European Commission's Directorate for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection formulates the policies for humanitarian aid in non-EU countries while internal disaster management is the responsibility of national governments, supported by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

The need of an integrated approach for a disaster management is embraced by the EU at the coordination level of civil protection in member states in order to improve the effectiveness of prevention, preparedness and response to natural and manmade disasters. The necessity of this approach is given by the increasing complexity of disasters, the more and more extensive and long-term effects and often by combining interaction and negative consequences of natural and technological disasters. A proactive approach of the extreme risk, as part of the crisis management, is primarily aimed at supporting the decision making process, including the political and economic level. With increasing frequency of extreme risk events and limited financial resources continually aims to improve the security of human and material resources. Extreme risk events include natural disasters, terrorism and technological accidents, characterized by rarity (it reduces interest in training, lessons learned, difficulties in understanding and modeling), the seriousness and difficulty of anticipating the consequences of their occurrence (unpredictability, ultra-dynamism, uniqueness of the events). These have a strong psychological impact on the community (Bier, 1999) and interventions are characterized by dynamism, uncertainty, time pressure and a large number of participating organizations and decision makers (Stewart, 2002). Due to the diversity, uniqueness and complexity of the event risk events is extremely difficult to establish algorithms for action or standardized intervention plans, but, in terms of management, significant progress can be made just through the link of implementing a multilevel decision support technology and multi-agent coordination in real time.

As history proves every time, the occurrence of natural, man-made or technological accidents had taken by surprise the central and local authorities, and the population as a whole. The policies developed in this area are nice on paper; the prevention and preparedness stages play an important role, but the emphasis is on the response stage to the disasters. The Member States, working together, should identify and jointly address some policy issues in various stages of prevention, preparedness and disaster response.

According to the European Parliament and the EU Council, "the European Union should promote solidarity and should support, complement, and facilitate the coordination of Member States' actions in the field of civil protection with a view to improving the effectiveness of systems for preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters" (EP, 2013).

There are reasons and motivations for the member state on disaster prevention and it should be reflected at European level: transnational dimension, the negative socio-economic effects are reflected in common European policies (common agricultural policy, regional development etc.), and funding needs (financial instruments, grants etc.). The Community action should complement national actions and should focus on areas where a common approach is more effective than individual national approaches. The EU will seek to reduce the impact of disasters in the EU by development policies on disaster prevention based on knowledge (create an inventory/databases of information on disasters; dissemination of best practices; developing guidelines on hazard / risk mapping; encourage research); linking actors and policies throughout the disaster management cycle (lessons learned in disaster prevention; training and awareness on disaster prevention; improving links between actors; strengthen early warning tools); improving the effectiveness of existing policy instruments for disaster prevention (performance of the existing tools in terms of disaster prevention; efficient targeting of Community funding; disaster prevention in existing legislation) (EC, 2009).

To sum up, the EU crisis management, defined at large, is a matter of all three pillars of the EU, although the external crises are mainly regulated by the CFSP while disasters and internal crises are regulated by national governments and European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. However there are still gaps in understanding the risk assessment and strategic planning for emergency on crises generated at global, European-wide, regional,

national or local levels.

On the other hand, the European Union faced the challenge of overcoming a “democratic deficit” in the last two decades. Despite the fact that the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties tried to increase the democratic legitimacy and to improve the citizens’ participation to policymaking the issue is still a hot topic. The Eurobarometer in September 2012 found out that more European citizens considered the EU to be undemocratic than democratic. Among the EU actions to engage the citizens and encourage a dialogue between all levels of government, civil society and business was the proclamation of the year 2013 as “The European Year of Citizens”. This general issue of democratic deficit and citizens’ participation to civil protection policy within the EU is very relevant for the debate during the ISCRAM 2014 conference dedicated to “Empowering Citizens and Communities through Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management”.

Thus, the European Commission’s at the request of Directorate-General Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection launched in 2012 a Special Eurobarometer no. 383 in order to understand EU citizens’ awareness of and attitudes towards EU activities in the area of civil protection. Among the most important findings regarding emergency preparedness and strategic planning there are:

- the majority of EU citizens are concerned about the following types of disaster occurring in their country: man-made disasters (75%), natural disasters (67%), terrorist attacks (64%) and armed conflicts (59%);
- a clear majority of EU citizens (84%) agree that EU Member States should be obliged by law to prepare and publish disaster management plans;
- there is strong agreement that civil protection activities should be coordinated across the EU;
- almost one in five EU citizens (19%) says they feel very or fairly well informed about the civil protection activities of the EU. However, 28% say they are not at all well informed (EC, 2012).

Although the public expressed the opinion on a coordinated EU civil protection policy and the numbers speak about a rather uninformed public we still don’t have a view about citizens and communities participation in crisis management.

The immediate goal of this paper is to find out the shortcomings of the newly designed European Union Civil Protection Mechanism and the gaps of the comprehensive disaster management policy and to design a research project on assessing the civil protection policy in the EU through a Delphi study with experts and practitioners.

The authors of this paper wrote case study on the perception of the local leaders of the emergency system regarding the most probable risks, and the uses and utility of long-term strategic planning and foresight methodologies, using the Delphi technique (Zulean, Prelipcean, 2013). They would like to extend the system of inquiry to investigate the EU Emergency Preparedness and the use of foresight methodology in determining the gaps and opportunities to improve the strategic planning at the EU level.

Experience and lessons learned both from the study of emergency preparedness at the national level and from the literature are pre-requisites that will help to extend the system of inquiry to investigate the EU Emergency Preparedness and the use of foresight methodology in determining the gaps and opportunities to improve the strategic planning at the EU level.

## **PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERTS AND PRACTITIONERS ON EU CIVIL PROTECTION: A DELPHI STUDY**

As shown in the first part, the emergency preparedness in the EU is a very important and timely topic of research. A European decision-maker is stacked between the Scylla of responding to global challenges while fostering its institutions and Charybdis of involving the citizens in the emergency management. The most appropriate methodology to study the EU civil protection mechanism is by using a Delphi technique.

The aim of the Delphi study would be to explore the gaps regarding the shortcomings in emergency preparedness at the EU and national levels to explore the long-term and foresight techniques in the process emergency planning and training.

The secondary goal of the Delphi is the estimation of future risks by the experts and practitioners, the probability of disasters and the preparedness of the emergency system to deal with them.

The design of Delphi started from the basic Handbook in literature of Linstone and Turoff (Linstone, Turoff, 1975) and continued with case studies and lessons learned drawn from the Special Issue of the Technological Forecasting and Social Change on “Planning and Foresight Methodologies in Emergency Preparedness and Management” (TFSC, Volume 80, Issue 9, 2013).

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### Issues and problems to be investigated

The emergency preparedness of the EU is a very complex, multi-dimensional and extended problem that goes beyond the scope and resources of this proposal; therefore the research focus would target some of the issues subsequent to the main goal of the short paper such as:

- Enhancement of the institutional arrangements and mechanisms
- Gaps in the emergency management system- in general - and Civil Protection Mechanism- in particular
- Understanding the risks perception
- Strategic planning from ad-hoc coordination to a predictable system (foresight)
- Citizens participation in disaster management

A first set of research questions would address the recent institutional arrangements and mechanisms to cope with disasters, particularly on Emergency Preparedness of European institutions (ERCC) and national governments.

A second set of questions will try to identify the functional and planning gaps in disaster integrated or comprehensive management under the newly Civil Protection Mechanism.

A third set of questions would be addressed to assess the main risks that can lead to disasters at global, European or local levels.

Another set of questions would inquire the existence or not of a scenarios, plans or training modules by ERCC, national agencies or local institutions.

The last set of the questions would address the issue of citizens' participation in all stages of disaster management.

### Consultation Strategy

Sampling strategy is going to be determined by the goals of the study. We are going to build two Delphi panels of about 25 people, one panel consisting of academic experts selected from databases such as Web of Knowledge, Academia.edu and Research Gate and practitioners both from EU institutions such as ERCC as well as representatives from national and local agencies, mainly from Romania, France, Portugal and Sweden.

The reasons we choose the respective countries are: their similar size but very different Emergency systems as well as the different degrees of integration in the EU structures and policies. Moreover, they were a focus of a previous study that can help us understand the dynamics of transformation (EC, 2008).

The questionnaire will be distributed online. For the first round an extended of problems, risks and issues compiled by the authors from the literature would be sent to the respondents as a Glossary to have a common understanding of the terminology and a list of respondents will be given keeping in mind a semi-anonymity (respondents can see the list but not the answers).

Second and third rounds of Delphi would be carried out using Internet-based software, to be determined later on. The research would be carried out by the end of 2014.

### CONCLUSION

This is a work in progress that would like to be debated within the ISCRAM aegis, utilizing the expert knowledge and feedback to design a European research project. The first part of the paper was meant to describe the grand challenges an EU decision-maker faces and to structure de problem for research while the second part was meant to design a Delphi study on perceptions of the experts and practitioners on EU Civil Protection mechanism.

The recent decisions from December 2013, such as the European Council decisions and the new EU's Civil Protection legislation are very new and nobody did an ex-ante impact evaluation or foresaw how the new decisions will enhance the emergency management. Thus it is a very timely endeavour but huge in terms of scope and resources. However we consider that a Delphi study will be the best way to approach the problems and structure a system of inquiry that can be continued by an extensive research project funded by Horizon 2020.

Even it is embryonic the venue of ISCRAM 2014 is a great opportunity to debate the inquiring system, get

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feedback from the worldwide experts in Delphi technique, foresight methodology and emergency planning.

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