
**POSITION PAPER ON THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION'S "*PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE
INTERIM EVALUATION OF THE UNION CIVIL
PROTECTION MECHANISM*"**

Position paper on the European Commission’s “Open Public Consultation on the Interim Evaluation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism”

INTRODUCTION

The objective of the Open Public Consultation is to give EU citizens and all concerned stakeholders an opportunity to express their views on the performance of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Union Mechanism) during the first three years of implementation.

Please note that my selected answers among the options presented will be highlighted in red.

1. **Out of the following hazards/emergencies which Europe is confronted with, please select the five that you consider top priorities for the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Union Mechanism):**

- **Biological and health hazards**
- **Conflict**
- **Cyber-attack**
- **Drought**
- **Earthquake**
- **Extreme weather events (e.g. heat wave, cold spell)**
- **Flood**
- **Forest fire**
- **Industrial accident**
- **Landslide**
- **Migrant crisis**
- **Nuclear emergency**
- **Storm (e.g. cyclone, hurricane, etc.)**
- **Terrorist attack**
- **Transport accident**
- **Tsunami**
- **Volcano eruption**
- **Water/marine pollution**
- **Other.**

Biological and health hazards

We are living in the so called “Antibiotic Era” or “Golden Age of Antibacterials”. Indeed, the pinnacle discovery of penicillin by Sir Alexander Fleming in 1928 has facilitated the discovery of many compounds that are used nowadays to cure many infections. It has not only enhanced quality but also life expectancy and has improved human and animal life on a global scale.

However, nowadays, almost 100 years after their discovery, the lack of new medicines coupled with over-prescribing and over-consumption has led to bacteria becoming increasingly resistant to modern medicines. The World Health Organisation has classified antimicrobial resistance as a “serious threat” to every region of the world which “has the potential to affect anyone, of any age, in any country”.¹ Also, the rise in antibiotic resistance is a threat to modern healthcare and there is an increasing gap between infections and the medicines we have available to treat them.

Against this background, I believe that the Union Mechanism in cooperation with EFSA, ECDC and the European Agency of Medicine should focus on raising awareness on biological and health hazards, and particularly, with regards to the growing resistance to antimicrobials. Under this increasingly concerning threat, it is important to use appropriate tools to make citizens understand their responsibility towards the community, as immune bacteria can be spread through various routes from one animal or human agent to another. Otherwise, we might come back to a 19th century world where the smallest infection or operation could kill.

Cyber-attack

In 1999, a teenager named Jonathan James managed to hack NASA and the US Defence Department computer systems and steal highly confidential information. 10 years later, in 2009, Gonzales, a hacker from Miami, was responsible for stealing tens of millions of credit and debit card numbers from over 250 financial institutions. Recently, in October 2016, a major cyber-attack to system company Dyn disrupted internet service across Europe and the US preventing some users from accessing PayPal, Twitter and Spotify among others. And only some days ago, the European Commission suffered a large-scale cyber-attack that disrupted internet for hours. These are only a few examples of the current cyber security context. In reality, companies and public bodies can be targeted at any time and any moment and they constantly suffer many attacks.

¹ WHO’s first global report on antibiotic resistance, 30/04/2014, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/amr-report/en/>

In April 2016, the EU agency ENISA started Cyber Europe 2016 (CE2016) the largest and most comprehensive EU cyber-security preparative exercise to date, offering the opportunity for cyber security experts across Europe to analyse complex, innovative and realistic cyber security incidents which could potentially happen and make sure a response is ready in case of need.

Given the aforementioned, and how fast cyber-threats evolve and given the many implications a cyber-attack can have (i.e. the political and diplomatic consequences of Wikileaks), I believe the Union Mechanism should also focus on cyber-attack as a priority perhaps by creating a specific highly responsive tool towards any attack or seek to improve exchange of information and cooperation on the kind of attacks any company or public body throughout all Member States might suffer. In my opinion, it is important to prevent any bad intentioned agent from accessing any financially, politically or other sensitive information.

Also, in our current inter-connected society, I believe that cyber-security is of paramount importance due to the fact that cyber-attacks can potentially be a trigger to other types of attacks or threats such as terrorist attacks or nuclear emergencies.

Migrant crisis

In 2015, more than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe sparking a crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx, and creating division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people. The vast majority arrived by sea from Syria but some migrants have made their way over land, principally via Turkey, Albania and Greece.

This unprecedented crisis has led the EU to update his agenda on migration² and to set migration as a top priority in EU policy. The Commission will release up to €700 million for the period 2016 to 2019 to fund emergency support operations addressing the needs of these refugees.

To respond to the refugee crisis, the Commission has also delivered assistance via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for example in Greece where large groups of refugees and migrants are currently stranded at the border and need immediate help.

Given this context and given the fact that since the start of 2016 almost 350.000 migrants have arrived to Europe, according to the UNHCR, as the conflict in their country of origin is still on going, I believe that the Union Mechanism should keep on focusing on this crisis as a top priority and must keep on assisting with the deployment of aid against this exceptional migration pressure.

² See European Agenda on Migration, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/index_en.htm

On another note, I would like to express that in my view, a possible legislative solution to the refugee policy crisis could be the creation of a new agency with powers to implement new policies rather than leaving this task to Member States.

Nuclear emergency

In 1986, the EU suffered the most serious nuclear accident of its history. The Chernobyl disaster was a unique event and the only accident in the history of commercial nuclear power where radiation-related fatalities occurred leading to major changes in safety culture and in industry cooperation. Following the disaster, the EU created the following networks among other instruments: the European Community Urgent Radiological Information Exchange (ECURIE) system to make early-notification and reliable radiological information available to Member States in case of nuclear accidents; EURDEP to make radiological monitoring data from most European countries available on a daily basis; and the ENSEMBLE platform to ensure a common coherent strategy across European national emergency management efforts.

In my opinion, taking into account the fact that a nuclear incident has a clear transborder effect and given the long-term consequences it can have for the population exposed to it, it is of sound importance that the EU focuses on emergency preparedness and response arrangements in the EU and neighbouring countries. The Union Mechanism should set nuclear emergencies as a top priority by training high qualified teams of agents to respond effectively and timely to this type of crisis, offering support to evacuation, and deploying sheltering and food supplying aid in case of need.

I also believe that the EU should keep on reinforcing interinstitutional cooperation between its DGs, namely DGs ENER, ECHO, JRC and SANTE and should also strive for coordination and negotiation with Member States with regards to prevention, in particular in case of hazardous nuclear plants which might be at risk of triggering a nuclear accident.³

Terrorist attacks

In 2015 and 2016 the European Union suffered several terrorist attacks affecting 6 Member States - Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom – although by far the most affected Member States were France, which lost 238 of its citizens⁴ and Belgium which lost 32 of its citizens⁵ and saw several hundreds of injured. These murders and injuries resulted from unsophisticated and well-coordinated terrorist attacks performed by small radicalized groups of actors. The carefully planned attacks demonstrated that the EU can be seriously threatened by a fanatic minority combined with a network of people born and raised in the

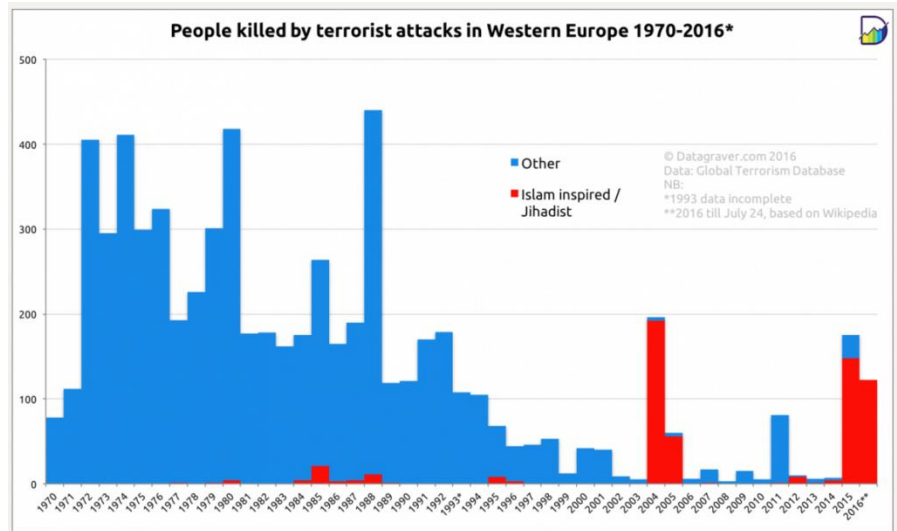
³ See article of Le Monde, http://www.lemonde.fr/energies/article/2016/01/18/les-centrales-nucleaires-belges-inquietent-les-allemands-et-les-hollandais_4849048_1653054.html

⁴ See article of Le Monde, 26/07/2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/07/26/le-terrorisme-islamiste-a-fait-238-morts-en-france-en-18-mois_4975000_4355770.html

⁵ See article of Le Soir, 30/03/2016, <http://www.lesoir.be/1165754/article/actualite/belgique/2016-03-29/attentats-bruxelles-toutes-victimes-sont-connues>

EU, often radicalised within a short space of time. The attacks have led to political reactions at all levels across the EU. Several statements and regulations were released and they have led the EU to update its agenda on security and to adopt new internal security strategy to try and fight terrorism, radicalisation, recruitment and terrorist financing which are considered the main threats to the internal security of the EU.

Against this background, I believe that given the importance of ensuring the security of its own population and given the need to keep up with the reforms on internal security performed by the EU institutions, the Union Mechanism should focus on terrorist attacks as a top priority of the current context of security, in particular on Islamic terrorism which as shown in the graph to the right,⁶ is currently the most dreadful:



In my view, the Union Mechanism should, in cooperation with EUROPOL, address specific resources to:

- a) Prevent Islamic terrorism. Since the recent attacks have proven that the participation of local EU groups is necessary to articulate the operations, preventing and stopping radicalisation on EU territory is key to tackle the issue.
- b) Improve cross-border cooperation among Member States and also between Member States and 3rd countries on the exchange of information, resources, risk management in order to avoid any planned or suspected attack.

⁶ Datagraver, Global Terrorism Database <http://www.datagraver.com/case/people-killed-by-terrorism-per-year-in-western-europe-1970-2015>

2. Do you feel you have sufficient information on the Union Mechanism?

- Not at all
- **To some extent**
- To a large extent
- Fully
- Don't Know

In my opinion, the EU is facing its most critical moment with its multiple crisis (financial, refugees, internal security) and the terrorist attacks it suffered. This crisis is pressuring EU values and has given rise to extremism and populism as well as euroscepticism towards a Union perceived as mainly economic. For instance, initiatives such as #Let_Light_In have arisen on Twitter where citizens and some politicians demand “a front seat in the meetings where their future is decided” and push towards “democratising Europe”. Both are a clear example of the current feelings towards the EU.

I believe there is a clear problem of opacity with regards to the Union. Its actions whether positive or negative struggle to reach citizens and these are usually totally unaware of EU policies and instruments.

With regards to this particular instrument of aid which is clearly positive, I believe there is not enough awareness on how the EU helping in many different crises. When consulting field experts on electoral observation, for example, they usually agree that although the EU is a leading global actor in providing and financing electoral assistance, many targeted citizens do not even realise it is the EU that is helping them. Even though some very specific campaigning elements are used to raise awareness about its actions, such as fact sheets or EU stickers.

Therefore, although there is a DG Communication, in my personal opinion, the EU should focus on its presence on mass-media, increase it and normalise it. Social media platforms, such as twitter, facebook, instagram are key to get through the opacity surrounding all EU actions. Also, a bigger presence on television, not only on political, documentary or news programs but also on cultural, cinema and even humoristic programs – such as any Member States' actions would have – could help citizens gain awareness on what the EU does on a daily-basis.

3. If you wanted to have additional information on the Union Mechanism, what would be your preferred source?

- **National Civil Protection authorities**
- **Regional and local Civil Protection authorities**
- **EU (e.g. DG ECHO, etc.) website**
- **TV and/or radio**
- **Written press**
- **Other**

Nowadays, thanks to social media, events and news are known worldwide in split seconds after they are shared and they can even be shared live. Also, social media is a very democratising platform where anybody can express an opinion or share content and where everybody is interconnected at the same level.

It is also a very important tool for spreading information. In fact, people tend to read content on social media and then be redirected to the main publishing website instead of accessing directly to it. This can be of particular interest for any public body website be it at EU, national, regional or local level or for any written press which, as said, is often read on social media feeds instead of the specific newspaper's or magazine's website.

However, it is important to highlight that there is a main downfall stemming from these democratised platforms which is the double-edged sword effect of the freedom to share anything whether be it true or not. For instance, Facebook is undergoing huge criticism over its publication of fake news which has led to open a debate about whether the internet, far from spreading enlightenment as its creators once hoped, was leaving citizens less and worse informed. In response to this issue, Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, reacted on a post on November 18 2016⁷ which updated the world on Facebook's progress and goals in tackling the spreading of fake news. But it is yet unclear what the outcome of the control on fake news will be.

Therefore, given the above and although there is the risk to be subject of fake news, in my view, the Union Mechanism should focus on its presence on social media and seek to disclose and publicise its actions through pieces of news or multimedia content linking to any specific source website. This way, citizens could gain awareness regarding this particular positive mechanism and how it functions.

⁷ See article published on BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-38106131>

4. To what extent do you feel informed about risks of "natural disasters" (i.e. caused by natural hazards such as: earthquakes, floods, landslides, etc.) in your country?

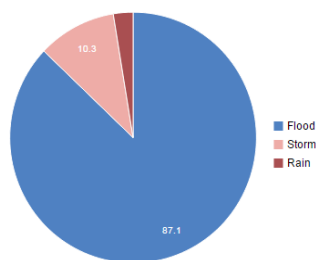
- Not at all
- To some extent
- **To a large extent**
- Fully
- Don't Know

According to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 (GAR)⁸ published by the UNISDR⁹ the main natural disasters threatening Spain are flood, drought and earthquakes. The International Disaster Database (EM-DAT) has estimated that Spain has suffered 64 natural disasters since 1980 and considers the drought of 1990 as being the top disaster in Spanish history with 6 million of affected citizens and resulting in an economic damage of \$4.5 million¹⁰. Although the 1990's drought was very severe, Spain is more frequently affected by flood and more so with the increasing impact of climate change, as indicated in the graph to the left retrieved from the GAR for Spain.

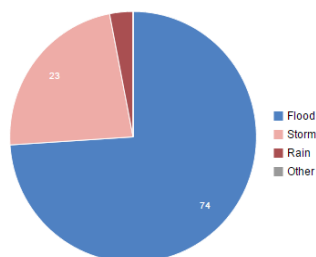
Nationally Reported Losses 1990 - 2014

All scale disasters without criteria.

Mortality



Combined economic losses



The Directorate General for Civil Protection and Emergencies¹¹ created in 1990¹² after the big drought, is an inter-ministerial institution dependent on the Spanish Ministry of Interior whose aim among many others is to inform about criteria, directives and initiatives of the public administrations related to disaster risk prevention and mitigation.

In collaboration with AEMET the Spanish Meteorology Agency and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment, the Directorate General for Civil Protection and Emergencies performs raising-awareness and prevention campaigns through many initiatives and activities such as several campaigns on national television, drill exercises, seminars, etc.

Also, in 2008, Spain put into force the

⁸ Published every two years, see report, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/2015/en/home/index.html>

⁹ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/gar>

¹⁰ See database, http://www.emdat.be/country_profile/index.html

¹¹ See <http://www.proteccioncivil.es/home>

¹² Royal Decree 1301/1990 of 26th October 1990, https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1990-26310

legislation on land which established in its article 15¹³ the requirement to provide a map indicating the risks of natural disasters of any area in order to obtain a construction permit for it (amended in 2015 by RD 7/2015)¹⁴.

Given the above developments in Spain and given the current global climate context, I believe there is an increasing interest towards the impact of extreme natural phenomena and the information on not only natural disasters occurring on Spanish territory but also in different parts of the world (i.e. 2004 Indonesia's Tsunami, 2010 Haiti earthquakes, etc.).

In the particular case of Spain, I believe there is enough awareness on the risks of natural disasters since citizens seem not only to be aware of the risk of flood and drought but are able to identify which areas are at risk. Specifically, I believe that information provided by the Directorate General for Civil Protection and Emergencies via the news and the meteorological forecast on national television together with targeted campaigns are useful to keep citizens informed. However, it is important to note that since the legislation on land is so recent, many constructions are nowadays located on areas at risk.

The rising awareness is such, that it is not only manifested among citizens but also at academic level with the creation in 2010 of the first Spanish Master in Planning and Management of Natural Risks offered by the University of Alicante¹⁵. This demonstrates that there is an increasing demand from citizens to research and participate in prevention and risk management due to their higher awareness of the subject.

¹³ Royal Decree 2/2008 of 20th June 2008, <http://boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2008-10792>

¹⁴ Royal Decree 7/2015 of 30th October 2015, https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2015-11723

¹⁵ See <https://web.ua.es/es/riesgos-naturales/master-en-planificacion-y-gestion-de-riesgos-naturales.html>

5. To what extent do you feel informed about risks of man-made disasters (i.e. caused by human activities, such as: industrial pollution, nuclear radiation, toxic wastes, dam failures, transport accidents, fires, chemical spills, etc.) in your country?

- Not at all
- **To some extent**
- To a large extent
- Fully
- Don't Know

The most recent Environmental Profile of Spain report published by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment¹⁶ in 2014 focuses on forest fires, industrial accidents involving hazardous substances and transport accidents causing environmental damages. In the report, when comparing the number of accidents for the three categories, forest fires appear as the most frequent man-made disasters in Spain as highlighted below¹⁷:

Number of Forest Fires affecting areas of more than 1 ha in the period 2004-2013.

Incendios forestales decenio 2004 - 2013 y año 2014		
	Media Decenio 2004-2013	2014
Nº de conatos (< 1 ha)	10.244	6.745
Nº de incendios (> 1 ha)	5.394	3.014
Total Siniestros	15.638	9.759
Superficie arbolada (ha)	39.932,50	11.279,50
Superficie forestal (ha)	117.034,20	46.554,70
% Superficie Afectada / % Sup. forestal nacional	0,425	0,169
Nº de Grandes Incendios	28	7

Fuente: elaboración a partir de datos del MAGRAMA

¹⁶ See http://www.mapama.gob.es/es/calidad-y-evaluacion-ambiental/publicaciones/perfil_ambiental_2014.aspx

¹⁷ See http://www.mapama.gob.es/es/calidad-y-evaluacion-ambiental/publicaciones/perfil_ambiental_2014.aspx

Number of industrial accidents under the SEVESO Directive¹⁸ in the period 2006-2014

Accidentes industriales en los que intervienen sustancias peligrosas



Number of total road and railway accidents causing environmental damages in the period 1997-2013

Accidentes por carretera y ferrocarril con posibles daños ambientales

Accidentes con posibles daños ambientales producidos en el transporte de mercancías peligrosas por carretera y ferrocarril, 1997-2013												
	1997-2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Carretera	312	64	61	46	48	45	47	25	26	94	28	796
Ferrocarril	30	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	40
TOTAL	342	68	63	47	50	46	47	25	26	94	28	836

Fuente: Dirección General de Protección Civil y Emergencias. Ministerio del Interior.

Every summer, Spain faces many man-made forest fires. The worst occurred in La Gomera island on the 4th August 2012 which affected 11% of its territory and made necessary to evacuate a quarter of its population¹⁹. Because of Spain's risk of drought, flood and its high temperatures, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment has historically set prevention as a top priority and it has been running prevention campaigns on several platforms for almost 50 years – i.e. Youtube where citizens can follow their channel on forest fire prevention²⁰ – in collaboration with the Directorate General for Civil Protection and Emergencies²¹. This information is also provided to other Member States. On the British

¹⁸ Directive 2012/18/EU of 4th July 2012, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012L0018>

¹⁹ See article published in EL PAIS, http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/08/13/actualidad/1344815483_587129.html

²⁰ See <https://www.youtube.com/user/magramagob/playlists>

²¹ See http://www.mapama.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/temas/politica-forestal/incendios-forestales/prevencion/campagnas_sensib_infor.aspx

government website, for instance, British citizens planning to travel to Spain²² can find advice on the risk of forest fires.

In fact, on a personal note, I have myself contributed to extinguish a forest fire that set close to my house in 2013 following the recommendations provided by one of these campaigns.

Therefore, for all the reasons abovementioned, I understand that Spanish citizens and non-national citizens are well informed of the risk of forest fires.

With regards to industrial accidents involving hazardous substances, it is important to highlight that industrial accidents usually involve private sector companies and therefore, in my view, the State has less influence on the degree of information the citizens are provided than on the information on forest fires.

In my opinion, usually citizens are not fully aware of the operations or characteristics of the facilities of a particular company and therefore, are not fully aware of the risk this company might represent. Frequently, citizens are directly confronted with the consequences of an industrial environmental damage and cannot do much else. Powerful lobbies might increase opacity on information depending on their interests and might have a strong influence on the degree of information citizens receive.

With regards to transport accidents causing environmental damages, the Prestige accident occurred in November 2002 where a single hull oil tanker spilled over 20.000 tons of oil over the Spanish and Portuguese coastline²³ is still considered today to be the largest environmental disaster in the history of Spain²⁴. That accident led the EU to adopt new legislation on maritime safety and single hull tankers²⁵. Again, in my opinion, transport of hazardous goods also involves the private sector and in that case, there is not sufficiently available information for citizens, and thus, they are not fully aware of the risks involved.

In conclusion, my answer “to some extent” reflects a mixed answer as I believe the degree of information about the risks of man-made disasters depends on the type of disaster these risks trigger and also on the type of industry the risk relates to.

²² See <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/spain/natural-disasters>

²³ See article published in EL PAIS, http://elpais.com/diario/2002/11/22/espana/1037919601_850215.html

²⁴ See Greenpeace report on the disaster, <http://www.greenpeace.org/espana/Global/espana/report/other/prestige-cr-nica-de-una-marea.pdf>

²⁵ Regulation (EC) No 417/2002 of 18 February 2002 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32002R0417>

6. Do you believe that a joint EU action for disaster response coordinated via the Union Mechanism is more effective than the separate response of Member States?

- **Not at all**
- **To some extent**
- **To a large extent**
- **Fully**
- **Don't Know**

To the south and east, Europe is facing an arch of instability. In the south, ISIS and other terrorist organizations are proliferating from the Middle East in North Africa. The migration crisis at the southern and eastern borders also poses dramatic challenges to the EU and its Member States, including security concerns, and must be addressed collectively.

In my view, the EU should be capable of rapid and effective response in emergencies caused by natural or man-made disasters, in Europe and in the world: rapid, since it presupposes monitoring, previous resource identification and criteria for the participation of Member States according to their preparedness and specialization; effective, because it relies on resource sharing.

The strength of the EU lies in its potential to mobilize resources across the full range of Member States' civilian instruments. Using them in a comprehensive approach gives the unique potential flexibility to effectively address the most challenging disaster issues. In order to promote its values and protect its interests, the EU must keep on being an aid provider and a post conflict actor.

Additionally, Solidarity is at the core of EU principles and therefore, the Union Mechanism must keep on being an instrument conveying this value among Member States and towards third countries.

I also believe that the Union Mechanism is necessary to ensure a homogenous aid support through the EU since some Member States might not have the same capacities and resources to respond to disasters than others. It is important to note that all the initiatives are based on the principle of subsidiarity on the basis of which any EU action can take place only in coordination and on request of the affected country. Therefore, Member States or third countries have the right to respond to a disaster on their own if they consider they have sufficient resources to do so.

Also, the EU has a clear political will to seek stability and peace not only within but also outside its borders and not only for security reasons but also due to its willingness to increase its profile as a world player. Thus, in my opinion, instruments such as the Union Mechanism must be at the core of the strategy to achieve these goals.

Therefore, in light of the above, and given that in recent years the number and severity of natural and man-made disasters have increased considerably, which has made more pressing the need to pursue a further integrated and updated approach to disaster management, the Union Mechanism is of sound importance. Indeed, it is more effective than the individual

actions of Member States to respond and intervene in a coordinated and integrated way to Members States' and third countries' disasters.

7. Do you believe that a joint EU action for disaster preparedness coordinated via the Union Mechanism can help individual Member States be better prepared for responding to disasters?

- **Not at all**
- **To some extent**
- **To a large extent**
- **Fully**
- **Don't Know**

While disasters are often unpredictable, the harm they cause can be mitigated or partly prevented. The success of preparedness and prevention depends on the success of activities such as disaster planning, organization and training.

Preparedness is defined as “the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from, the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions”²⁶. The EU through its Disaster Preparedness ECHO programme (DIPECHO) launched in 1996, has invested thus far €325 million to help communities at risk of disasters to better prepare themselves by undertaking training, establishing or improving local early warning systems and contingency planning.²⁷

Taking into account the abovementioned, I strongly believe that a coordinated EU strategy is not only necessary to respond to disasters once these have occurred, but also to prepare communities at risk to mitigate the impact of any disaster. This is of paramount importance, as an effective preparedness strategy will be key not only from a humanitarian point of view but also from an economic point of view both at the receiving country and at EU level. In other words, although it might mean spending money in the short term (i.e. investment in earthquake-proof structures or enforcing stricter building codes), if a disaster is less harmful not only lives will be saved but also money on disaster response and recovery in the long term. In this sense, the Union Mechanism thanks to the participation of all Member States might have more funds to do so that an individual Member State.

Again, it is important to coordinate risk reduction and preparedness initiatives at EU level through drills and simulations of how a disaster unfolds not only to train volunteers and staff on how to respond to disasters, but also to assess the overall response capacity of the national society under emergency circumstances. Indeed, the Union Mechanism is key to support those Member States and third countries not having enough resources to conduct specific preparedness activities.

²⁶ Terminology on disaster risk reduction. Nations/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), 2009. http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf

²⁷ See, DG ECHO, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/risk-reduction_en

In light of the above, in my view, although less visible than a coordinated response, a joint action on disaster preparedness is truly necessary and is of major importance in order to provide homogeneous disaster planning, organization and training to communities at risk so it can, thanks to the Member States' funding, help Member States and third countries to mitigate the humanitarian and economic impact of disasters and of the response to them.

8. As far as disaster prevention is concerned, do you believe that the EU, via the Union Mechanism, could provide additional support to the action of Member States?

- Not at all
- **To some extent**
- To a large extent
- Fully
- Don't Know

With regards to disaster prevention, the Commission already focuses on improving the understanding of disaster risks and facilitating the sharing of knowledge, best practices and information related to prevention. Member States, for their part, are required to make available to the Commission their national risk assessments (“NRAs”) as well as an assessment of their risk management capabilities. The Commission also provides grants to finance cooperation projects in the field of disaster prevention and preparedness.

It also supports and complements prevention efforts of the Member States through several ways²⁸:

- Creating an inventory of information on disasters
- Sharing of best practices on disaster risk management planning
- Developing guidelines on risk assessment and hazard mapping
- Encouraging research activities
- Developing training policies and awareness-raising campaigns
- Reinforcing early warning tools.

Given the above, I understand that the Commission already makes its best efforts to coordinate and cooperate with Member States with regards to prevention. In particular, initiatives such as the sharing of best practices and making them available to other Member States and third countries are particularly useful. Also, the submission of national Risk Assessments from Member States as well as updates to already submitted National Risk Assessments and progress reports will help complete a comprehensive EU overview of risks.

However, in my view, the EU could further focus on support and giving specific recommendations to those Member States lacking a “culture of prevention” through specific strategies tailored to the culture of that particular country via the Union Mechanism, since each Member State has its own particularities. In my opinion, it is important to raise awareness and make prevention and preparation to be part of the mentality of citizens and the EU should try to make sure that EU funding is used to boost preventive measures in these countries.

²⁸ See, “European Union Civil Protection at a glance”,
http://knjiznica.sabor.hr/pdf/E_publicacije/Civil_protection_at_a_glance.pdf