

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Session document

FINAL
A6-0388/2007

12.10.2007

REPORT

on the regional impact of earthquakes
(2007/2151(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Nikolaos Vakalis

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the regional impact of earthquakes (2007/2151(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission on improving the Community Civil Protection Mechanism (COM(2005)0137),
- having regard to Council Decision 2007/162/EC, Euratom, of 5 March 2007 establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument¹,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission on Flood Risk Management: flood prevention, protection and mitigation (COM(2004)0472),
- having regard to its resolution of 4 September 2007 on the summer's natural disasters²,
- having regard to its resolution of 18 May 2006 on Natural Disasters (fires, droughts and floods) – regional development aspects³,
- having regard to the regulatory provisions governing the Structural Funds for the period 2007 to 2013,
- having regard to its position adopted at first reading on 18 May 2006 with a view to the adoption of a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 September 2003 on the effects of the summer heat wave⁵,
- having regard to the report of Michel Barnier of May 2006 entitled For a European civil protection force: Europe aid,
- having regard to the programme of activities for 2007 of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), adopted by the Council of Europe on 13 March 2007,
- having regard to the public hearing organised by its Committee on Budgets on the budgetary aspects of natural disasters on 5 June 2007,
- having regard to the findings of the Workshop on Mitigation of Seismic Risk organised by the Commission in 2000 and the Workshop on reducing earthquake risk in Europe

¹ OJ L 71, 10.3.2007, p. 9.

² Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2007)0362.

³ OJ C 297 E, 7.12.2006, p. 369.

⁴ OJ C 297 E, 7.12.2006, p. 331.

⁵ OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 382.

- organised by the European Association for Earthquake Engineering in Lisbon in 2005,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of its Committee on Regional Development (A6-0388/2007),
- A. whereas, in the course of the twentieth century, earthquakes caused the deaths of 1.5 million people worldwide, having an economic cost, in the last quarter of the twentieth century alone, estimated at EUR 75 000 000 000,
- B. whereas a large part of the European Union is at risk from earthquakes, the most seismically active areas being in Italy, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Slovenia, although other Member States, such as Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Spain, Portugal and Malta are also at significant risk from earthquakes,
- C. bearing in mind that the majority of applicant countries, of European neighbourhood policy countries and of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership countries present a high degree of seismic activity,
- D. bearing in mind that, between 2002 and 2007, earthquakes were the fourth most common natural disaster in Member States and applicant countries, but are treated at EU level as absolutely secondary compared to other natural phenomena which are accorded a more integrated approach, as a result of which European regions are left without EU assistance and the European Union Solidarity Fund has been used only once to address the effects of an earthquake,
- E. whereas national, regional and local actors that are directly confronted with the phenomenon of earthquakes, the research community, engineers and large sectors of society are of the view that the EU should play a greater role in protection against earthquakes and impact mitigation,
- F. whereas in addition to earthquakes, volcanic activity is another manifestation of plate tectonics and whereas the effects of these natural hazards can be aggravated, in particular by land movements and tsunamis in response to which regions which suffer them regularly (such as the very remote regions of the EU) have developed key experience in observing, preventing and responding to such phenomena,
- G. whereas earthquakes have very serious short and long-term effects on regional economies and have adverse consequences for infrastructure, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism, thus having a negative impact overall on economic and social cohesion,
- H. having regard to the crucial role of national and local actors in preventing damage caused by earthquakes, in earthquake management and in impact mitigation, and whereas measures are therefore required to mobilise these actors and to inform and educate the general public,
- I. whereas various Community instruments, such as the Structural Funds or the Community civil protection instruments, may be used to strengthen preventive measures to address

earthquakes and rehabilitation measures,

- J. whereas the EU must recognise the special nature of the earthquakes that occur in the Mediterranean and the surrounding area and take appropriate action in earthquake prevention, management and research, protection policy and solidarity measures,
- K. whereas Europe is both very vulnerable to and at high risk from earthquakes and has a high level of technical expertise in this field and yet, compared to Japan, the United States of America and even China, the EU makes far fewer investments in R&D for new technologies and there is no European research agenda regarding earthquake risks,
- L. whereas there is no unitary mechanism at European level for intervention in the event of a national disaster,
- M. whereas it is very important to maintain and increase the EU's seismic expertise, which could become a successful and exportable commodity, with seismic regions even serving as open-air laboratories, thereby making capital out of this handicap,
- N. whereas large areas of the EU are subject to the destructive effects of rock-mass tremors provoked by mining activity, which cause damage similar to that caused by earthquakes,
- O. whereas most of the Member States lack comprehensive earthquake risk maps,
- P. whereas under existing insurance systems policies traditionally exclude earthquake risks;

Actions: prevention, response and repairing damage

1. Calls upon the Commission forthwith to draw up a communication evaluating the hazards posed by earthquakes and considering the questions of prevention and management and measures to address and repair earthquake damage;
2. Takes the view that the Commission should draw up a technical protocol for common action to be taken by the EU in the event of a major disaster caused by an earthquake, focusing particularly on critical transport, energy, telecommunications and health infrastructures and on the role that various national, regional and local authorities can play;
3. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take due account of earthquakes when finalising and implementing the revised legislative framework for civil protection;
4. Calls, furthermore, on Member States to include the issue of earthquakes in national and regional strategies for sustainable development and to establish national platforms for the discussion of earthquake risk management and civil protection based on integrated analyses of vulnerability, involving different institutional actors and the relevant partners in civil society;
5. Recognises the special nature of the Mediterranean area and urges the Commission to focus on measures for prevention, education, research, risk management, protection and solidarity at Community level, aiming at a more satisfactory response to the frequent

disasters in the region;

6. Stresses the need for public information campaigns with an emphasis on prevention measures and preparedness, for educational measures including university courses, master and Ph.D programmes in relevant disciplines such as engineering and for special training in related professions throughout the EU;
7. Calls on the Member States to speed up research so as to prevent damage, manage crises and minimise the scale of impact of disasters in conjunction with actions under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development and calls on the Commission to help formulate a special European research agenda for earthquakes;
8. Hopes that the Commission and the Member States will encourage the setting up of centres of excellence in scientific, technological and architectural innovation, aiming both to ensure public safety and to enable sustainable land development, through interregional cooperation and networking of research establishments, SMEs and the local authorities in the regions concerned, including the very remote regions;
9. Calls on the Commission and Member States to consider in particular the issue of improving and maintaining ancient buildings and monuments which are of significant historical, cultural, tourist and, by extension, economic importance for many regions of the EU as well as public buildings of strategic importance for civil protection and other critical infrastructures; calls, to that effect, on the Member States to register such buildings and infrastructure and consult the Commission on existing or needed projects and policies which will ensure their protection from earthquakes;
10. Urges the Commission to recommend that the Eurocode 8 instructions be incorporated in the planning regulations of all vulnerable Member States, and calls on the competent authorities at EU and Member State level to consider whether it is necessary to extend the scope of the implementation of Eurocode 8 to include old buildings in addition to new ones;

Funding

11. Takes the view that the future funding of infrastructures under the Structural Funds in the next programming periods must be made conditional upon the implementation of seismic protection measures and upon the definition of such measures by the Member States in their respective Operational Programmes; furthermore, encourages the Member States, where possible, to begin financing earthquake protection measures under their current Operational Programmes;
12. Urges the Commission and the Member States to promote special European programmes for training and the exchange of best professional practices in the specialist skills required to prevent and deal with earthquakes damage, and calls on Member States to use the European Social Fund for this purpose;
13. Calls on the Council to complete without delay the codecision procedure for the adoption of the new European Union Solidarity Fund regulation, given that the European Parliament already expressed its views in the position it adopted in May 2006 on time-

limits and eligible actions, so as to enable the new Solidarity Fund to help repair damage in an effective, flexible and timely manner, including simplifying the existing financial procedure in the event of earthquakes;

14. Points out the need to involve other existing resources, such as regional state aid and European Investment Bank loans with a view to preventing and repairing the damage caused by earthquakes and promoting the relevant insurance schemes;

Coordination

15. Appeals for mechanisms to coordinate the actions of Community, national, regional and local players in the spirit of the abovementioned Barnier report; calls, to that effect, for closer cooperation between Member States based on a binding coordination system concerning prevention, management and protection measures, including observation and early warning mechanisms, databases and the exchange of best practices; urges, in order to facilitate this process, each Member State to create a single, coordinated civil-defence management system;
16. Reiterates its support for the establishment of a European Civil Protection Force and calls on the Commission to submit a proposal in this connection;
17. Stresses that a European Civil Protection Force only makes sense on the basis of improved national civil protection schemes, and of better instruments for coordination between Member States;
18. Stresses the importance of cooperation with neighbouring third countries and also by extension with other third countries at great risk from earthquakes, especially those which have developed technical expertise in this domain;
19. Calls on the Commission to evaluate all existing preventive, management and civil protection instruments to deal with natural disasters promoted by various EU policies (environment, cohesion policy, research, etc.) and to propose, in the interests of simplification and improved coordination, a centralised prevention and management instrument;

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20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliament of the Member States and the Committee of the Regions.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Introduction

Earthquakes are one of the most lethal and destructive natural disasters world-wide causing huge loss of life and enormous damage to property. It is estimated that, in the twentieth century earthquakes have killed 1.5 million people worldwide and have cost EUR 75 billion over the last 25 years alone.

Contrary to what is widely believed, major earthquakes also occur frequently in the EU. Many countries and regions, particularly in southern Europe and the Mediterranean, are at high risk from earthquakes. Furthermore, most countries on the borders of the EU, i.e. the candidate countries, the European Neighbourhood Policy countries and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership countries, experience a high level of seismic activity. By way of illustration, in the twentieth century 128 000 people were killed in Italy, 99 000 in Turkey, 78 000 in the former Soviet Union, 6 600 in Greece, 2 600 in Romania and 5 300 in Algeria.

Earthquakes clearly have a very serious short and long-term impact on the economic and social life of regions. Their adverse consequences affect infrastructure, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism. In other words, earthquakes have an overall negative impact on economic and social cohesion of the regions.

However, while the economies and societies of various European regions have been hard hit by earthquakes, they have not received any assistance from the EU. The regional and local authorities in areas affected by earthquakes and large sections of society are painfully aware of the very limited nature of the anti-seismic actions carried out by the EU and its lack of sensitivity to this issue. Tellingly, the Solidarity Fund has only been used once to compensate victims of earthquakes, in marked contrast to what occurs in the event of other natural disasters (such as flooding and fires).

Your rapporteur believes therefore that a series of regulatory and financial measures are needed to strengthen actions to prevent, address and repair damage caused by earthquakes and to improve coordination between the authorities involved in tackling earthquakes and providing public information .

A. Successful earthquake management through actions to prevent, respond to and compensate for earthquake damage

Addressing a natural disaster successfully depends first and foremost on a correct evaluation of all the dangers involved and all possible measures to prevent and to address protection from and mitigate their harmful impact. In the absence of a uniform strategy for each natural hazard and its specific characteristics, the measures taken in the aftermath of disasters will be relatively ineffective and will not be sufficiently understood by the bodies involved and the population affected. For this reason your rapporteur's main demand is that the Commission should immediately draw up a communication evaluating the hazards posed by earthquakes and proposing the measures necessary to address them, as it recently did, for example, in the case of floods.

In addition:

Prevention measures:

1. One vital preventive measure (based on countries affected by seismic activity such as Japan) is to launch campaigns to educate and inform the public throughout the EU. Success in dealing effectively with the aftermath of an earthquake and mitigating its harmful effects depends largely on preventing panic and ensuring that the public reacts appropriately. These public information campaigns should not be restricted to citizens in regions at high risk from earthquakes, but should include all European citizens. Given that one of the main *raison d'être* of the EU is to increase citizen mobility, it is very likely that each one of us will experience an earthquake at some time in his or her life.

2. It is necessary to ensure that education and training of the competent technical bodies in Member States, including at regional and local level, and all specialists dealing with earthquakes. It is therefore desirable that a sustained effort be made to disseminate and exchange good practices with the support of the European Social Fund.

3. Earthquakes are a natural phenomenon which we cannot yet do anything to prevent. However, with the help of technology, we are able to prevent and limit the extent of the damage. Substantial investments in the research and development of new technology are necessary for this purpose. The Seventh Framework Programme for Research for 2007-2013 already provides for the funding of joint research actions in respect of earthquakes. Your rapporteur takes the view that Member States for their part should also contribute funds to this research so as to achieve a multiplier effect through the combination of actions. There is, of course, a positive aspect to this natural phenomenon: if it is handled properly and if aid is provided, expertise in this area may become an exportable commodity and possibly even boost economic competitiveness and employment. Your rapporteur calls upon the Commission to help formulate a European strategic research agenda for earthquakes, with the involvement of seismic areas which, as 'open-air laboratories', may also have the opportunity of making capital out of their natural handicap.

4. The seismic evaluation and, where appropriate, the upgrading of buildings and infrastructure of strategic importance must, according to scientific experts, be priority preventive measures in the EU. Member States and the Commission should therefore initiate evaluations in geographical zones, initially zones of medium or high seismic activity, with the aim of classifying buildings according to a uniform list of priorities. By 'buildings and infrastructure of strategic importance' your rapporteur understands essentially buildings and infrastructure of vital importance for civil protection and society, for instance, hospitals, power stations, energy production plants and networks, bridges, telecommunications networks, schools and other public buildings. Furthermore, ancient buildings and monuments which are of significant historical, cultural and tourist - and, by extension, economic - importance for many regions of Europe should also be afforded similar protection. We should examine how the European, national, regional and local levels can contribute to the constant upgrading of anti-seismic protection measures for all the above. Your rapporteur would point out in particular the need to examine the possibility of extending implementation of Euro Code 8 (concerning standards of anti-seismic construction) to include old constructions, in

addition to new ones, for which is included a special commitment.

Response measures

1. The European Union will shortly have an improved Community civil protection mechanism. Your rapporteur calls on the Commission and Member States to focus particularly on earthquakes in implementing this mechanism. He also calls for serious consideration to be given to earthquakes in all the relevant Community instruments. Consideration should be given, for example, to whether the EU Monitoring and Information Centre covers earthquakes in a satisfactory manner and whether further aid is needed to support early-warning instruments.

2. A technical protocol for joint action by the Union, must be adopted to address major disasters caused by earthquakes, highlighting the potential role of various national, regional and local authorities and with guidelines to ensure the effective protection of critical infrastructures. Perhaps what is most urgently needed after a disaster is for measures to be taken to ensure the accessibility of telecommunications infrastructure, energy networks, hospitals, bridges, ports, airports, etc. It is therefore a matter of urgent necessity to record in advance all likely earthquake scenarios and to assess their expected impact.

Compensation measures

Effective and rapid measures to repair unavoidable damage are of key importance in determining how rapidly or slowly a region will recover from an earthquake. This applies particularly to disadvantaged regions, such as convergence objective regions, regions with low population density or declining populations and mountainous, island, border, remote and ultraperipheral regions. An earthquake in such regions can violently interrupt their development or make them even more disadvantaged than previously, given their special characteristics.

As a result, the speed at which Member States address the damage caused by earthquakes and the solidarity shown by the Community to affected areas are critical (see paragraph B below).

B. Funding

1. Within the framework of the implementation of the new financial instrument for civil protection (see above), it is critical that due account be taken of earthquakes.

2. Your rapporteur takes the view that cohesion policy must in future seriously consider the damage caused by earthquakes. He proposes that the future funding of infrastructure projects through the cohesion policy should be predicated upon compliance with all the necessary and internationally recognised anti-seismic protection rules.

3. The Council appears to have unjustifiably delayed making adjustments to the Solidarity Fund. It must remedy this situation immediately so as to ensure that this instrument will be able in future to address damage caused by natural disasters, including earthquakes, effectively, flexibly and swiftly. The absence of flexibility, particularly as regards deadlines and actions eligible for funding have meant that the needs of earthquake victims are

essentially being ignored (as mentioned above, this Fund has only been used once for earthquakes).

4. The Commission should also promote other forms of funding beyond immediate aid, such as, for example, regional state aid or loans from the European Investment Bank. Only in this way will it be possible to ensure an adequate level of resources comprehensively to address the composite phenomenon of earthquakes.

C. Coordination

1. Common experience shows that the greatest shortcomings in addressing natural disasters lie in the coordination, cooperation and flexibility of the bodies involved at Community, national, regional and local levels (fire services, emergency medical units, the police, mountain rescue teams and sea rescue and mine rescue services). The proposals made by former Commissioner Michel Barnier in May 2006 are radical but are based on the fundamental principles of the EU solidarity added value derived from European coexistence.

Your rapporteur considers it both desirable and feasible that each Member State, - or region in some cases - should develop and perfect equipment and technical know-how in a specific area which would be 'lent' to another Member State or region which needed it. Let us concentrate our efforts to achieve better results with fewer resources.

In this spirit of coordination, your rapporteur urges Member States to establish central civil protection services to assist in coordination and is openly in favour of the creation of a European civil protection force and calls on the Commission to submit a legislative proposal to this effect.

2. In order effectively to manage earthquakes it is not enough that coordination should take place at European level alone. Cooperation with third countries is also needed, especially with neighbouring countries affected by seismic activity. Cooperation could take place at various levels: initially there should be a technology transfer and an exchange of best practices with countries developing the relevant expertise. In the second place, there should also be technical cooperation, with the objective of responding to earthquakes more effectively.

3. Finally, given the existence of multiple preventive, management and civil protection measures in respect of natural disasters promoted by various EU policies (environment, cohesion policy, research etc), your rapporteur takes the view that the Commission should bring together all existing instruments. Providing the evaluation concludes that this is necessary, your rapporteur proposes, in the interests of the simplification of legislation and improved coordination, that it should consider the creation of a centralised instrument for the prevention and management of natural disasters, including earthquakes.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	4.10.2007
Result of final vote	+: 39 -: 0 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Stavros Amnautakis, Elspeth Attwooll, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Jana Bobořiková, Wolfgang Bulfon, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Ambroise Guellec, Marian Harkin, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Rumiana Jeleva, Gisela Kallenbach, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Miloř Koterec, Constanze Angela Krehl, Jamila Madeira, Mario Mantovani, Sérgio Marques, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez, Yiannakis Matsis, Miroslav Mikolášik, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Markus Pieper, Wojciech Roszkowski, Elisabeth Schroedter, Grażyna Staniszevska, Catherine Stihler, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Oldřich Vlasák
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Zita Pleřtinská, Samuli Pohjamo, Miloslav Ransdorf, Toomas Savi, Richard Seeber, Nikolaos Vakalis
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Mariela Velichkova Baeva, Zbigniew Zaleski