

15th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering

**Political Aspects of
Earthquake Risk Reduction**

(Special Session)

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Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

summary

1. EU institutions: competencies and performance

1.1. the institutional triangle

1.2. possible initiatives from the European Parliament

2. EU role in the reduction of seismic risk

2.1. current situation and future perspectives

2.2. further possible actions to be pursued

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

1. EU institutions: competencies and performance

- **European Commission (Brussels)**
 - 25 commissioners + 1 President + 1 High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
 - Right of legislative initiative; implementation of the European policies and budget
 - After Lisbon: subsidiarity check by national parliaments and European citizen's initiative
- **European Council (Brussels)**
 - 27 ministers representing the Member States
 - Adoption of legislation and budget; concluding international agreements
 - After Lisbon: more voting by qualified majority and in 2014 there will be double majority
- **European Parliament (Strasbourg)**
 - 754 members representing the European citizens
 - Adoption of legislation and budget; democratic supervision
 - After Lisbon: co-decision: the ordinary legislative procedure and more control over the budget



Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

1.1. the institutional triangle

European Commission (government)

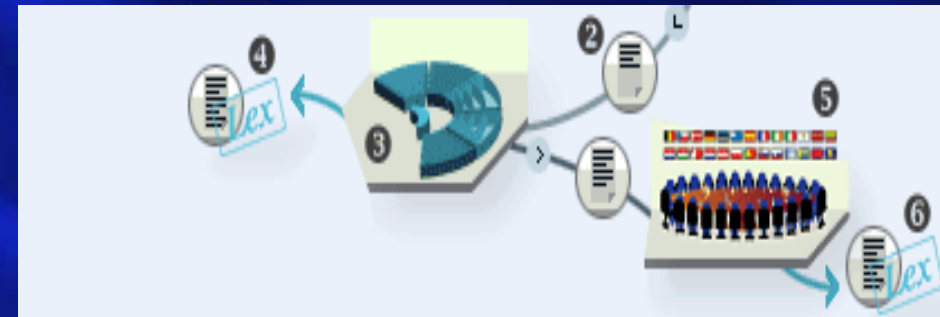
European Council (upper legislative chamber)

European Parliament (lower legislative chamber)

Ordinary legislative procedure:

1st reading

(1) The Commission sends a legislative text to (2) the Parliament and to (3) the Council. The Parliament approves (4) changes which submits to the appreciation of the Council. The Council is in agreement with the result of the 1st reading in the Parliament: (5) legislative text approved.



Ordinary legislative procedure:

2nd reading

(1) The Council does not accept the Parliament vote and adopts a (2) common position. (3) The Parliament approves a common position or does not take a stand: (4) legislative text adopted in the common position. The Parliament confirms the changes not adopted in the common position: either (5) the Council approves them: (6) legislative text approved or the Council rejects them.



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1.2. possible initiatives from the European Parliament

- Initiative Report on the subject
- Oral question
- Joint Motion for a Resolution further to oral question and answer pursuant to rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament
- European Citizens Initiative. The ECI allows 1 million citizens from at least one quarter of the EU Member States (7 states) to invite the European Commission to bring forward proposals for legal acts in areas where the Commission has the power to do so. The organisers of a citizens' initiative, a citizens' committee composed of at least 7 EU citizens who are resident in at least 7 different Member States, will have 1 year to collect the necessary statements of support. The number of statements of support has to be certified by the competent authorities in the Member States. The Commission will then have 3 months to examine the initiative and decide how to act on it
- Parliamentary question to be addressed to the European Commission

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

1.2. possible initiatives from the European Parliament

There is a real seismic risk in several European member states. Earthquakes are unavoidable and science can determine with a high degree of confidence where they will occur. Although their occurrence has a cyclic probability, what it is not predictable is when exactly they will occur.

The risk of human losses, destruction of economic infrastructures and devastation of our historic common heritage is real and certain. Although the prognostics are clear, the reduction of risks associated with earthquakes has not been up to the severity of the situation, neither at the national nor at the European level.

At present, several member states facing a global economic crisis without precedent, tend to limit their investment to the immediate needs, leaving unattended preventive strategies. The reduction of risks associated with earthquakes, shared by various member states, is a complex task, requiring several domains of consideration, for which a EU approach is undoubtedly required.

We believe that the European Commission should take the lead on this issue at two different levels: legislative, creating a framework with the minimum standards of earthquake safety of important facilities and public buildings in the identified seismic areas; and budgetary, providing financial support to ensure safety conditions in the existing structures.

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1.2. possible initiatives from the European Parliament

We ask to the European Commission:

- *What kind of legislative initiative, if any, is the European Commission undertaking on this issue?*
- *Will these proposed measures be included in the new legislative framework for the post-2014 structural funds?*
- *Will the civil society be involved in this huge task of prioritizing the needs of strengthening the seismic resistance of existing buildings? If so, how?*

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

2. EU role in the reduction of seismic risk

The European Commission acknowledge that natural disasters have increased their frequency and severity in the last decades (increasing concentration of population and assets in vulnerable areas, growing urbanisation, poor environmental management).

With more frequent and intense natural disasters affecting increasingly densely populated areas, their costs rise strongly over time. Last year (2011) material damage reached a new record with estimated US\$ 380 billion.

There is strong political awareness among the international community around the need to implement Disaster Risk Management (DRM) at the highest level, that is, at the European Commission level.

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2.1. current situation and future perspectives (DRM priorities)

Risk assessment

Cooperation with Member States to produce their own national risk assessments based on the Commission's 2010 guidelines.

Preparing an overview of the risks the EU will face based on the national risk assessments due by spring 2013.

The main purpose of the overview would be to inform further policy decisions and actions at EU and Member State level (i.e. identify risks and areas for more effective EU cooperation and further action; inform response planning at EU level; orient EU financial instruments and longer term EU strategies).

The overview can also help orient EU research policy and Structural Fund priorities.

Due to the delays in Member States in submitting national assessments the first overview will be limited to addressing the risks identified by a small number of Member States (probably less than 10) complemented by some more EU information available in the Commission (e.g. flood, drought and fire risk information).

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

2.1. current situation and future perspectives (DPM priorities)

Investment in risk prevention:

Under the current programming period for Structural Funds 2007-13 some €6bn have been allocated to disaster management investments mainly flood prevention. The 2011 Structural Fund proposals strengthen the link to disaster management and included conditionality (scientific risk assessment) of EU funding as a key requirement. Commission has proposed to link funding to availability of knowledge of disaster risks that the country faces.

A requirement to disaster (and climate) proofed infrastructure investments to be supported by EU funding has also been introduced in the 2011 Structural Fund proposals. Partnership agreements (Europe 2020: Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth) with Member States are currently prepared by the Commission.

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

2.1. current situation and future perspectives (DPM priorities)

Cooperation with DG MARKT on the Insurance and Disasters Green Paper (end of 2012):

The Commission is preparing a series of options for wide consultation on how to enhance the role of insurance for disaster management.

Traditionally, countries rely on ex-ante accumulation of reserves, or on ex-post increase in taxes and/or debt levels and/or ad hoc external donor support. With the latter being uncertain and not necessarily timely, any alternative response scheme should preferably include some kind of mechanism to transfer part of the risk outside the country. Such a risk transfer outside the country helps the economy to finance potential current account shocks following natural disasters, and thus avoids disruptive effects on trade.

Providing for disasters by means of insurance secures at least some of the needed resources in advance. The experience in advanced economies has shown that many natural perils are insurable, and markets for disaster risk insurance are well established there. The public sector in other countries has also made positive experiences: A group of Caribbean countries have insured themselves against hurricanes and others against earthquakes.

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

2.1. current situation and future perspectives (DPM priorities)

Improving the Knowledge base

especially data availability and accessibility; in addition to the cooperation with CLIMA a specific project has been launched with FEMA (USA) which could lead to new policy.

Exploiting Good Practice to raise the culture of prevention

Based on good practice the Commission has been asked to prepare guidelines on minimum standards for disaster prevention covering certain cross cutting themes such as governance, planning, disaster data, risk communication and information, research and technology transfer.

Development of a 'Peer Review' programme to help transfer good practice on Prevention Governance - a 'pilot Peer review' of the UK DRR policy has been prepared with the field visit planned for 15-26 Sept).

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2.2. further possible actions to be pursued

The main actions to be taken are prioritized in the study "Earthquake Risk Reduction in the European Union", from the European Association for Earthquake Engineering:

Action 1. Territorial and urban planning.

Action 2. Informing and preparation of the population.

Action 3. Evaluation of the seismic resistance of existing buildings and strengthening the ones with insufficient seismic resistance.

3a – Strategic buildings

3b – Current buildings

Action 4. Ensuring the quality of construction.

Action 5. Evaluation of the seismic resistance of lifelines and transportation networks and strengthen where necessary.

Action 6. Evaluation of the seismic resistance of industrial facilities and strengthen where necessary.

Action 7. Strengthening monuments and buildings of high cultural value.

Action 8. Civil Protection actions.

Political Aspects of Earthquake Risk Reduction

2.2. further possible actions to be pursued (lobbying)

- Present the conclusions of the World Conference on Earthquake Engineering to the President of the European Commission, President of the Council of the European Union; President of the European Parliament.
- Political lobbying in the European Commission.

We are in a crucial moment to establish contacts with the European Commission. DG Clima, DG ECHO and DG REGIO that are, at the moment establishing the new juridical framework for the funds after 2014.

Thank you

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