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GECORPA

To the President of the European Commission
Prof. Romano Prodi
Rue de la Loi
1049 BRUXELAS

Lisbon, May 21st, 2004

Subject: Towards Sustainable Development in the European Union – The Challenge of Seismic Protection

Large parts of the territory of the European Union (UE) are earthquake prone areas, in particular the southern regions. Earthquakes are geological phenomena, almost unpredictable, but the knowledge of their generation mechanisms shows that zones that have already been hit by strong earthquakes in the past will be again in the future. History teaches what the potential consequences of earthquakes can be: for instance (i) the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 destroyed most of the town and it is estimated that it caused the death of more than 5% of the population in the Lisbon region, (ii) more moderate earthquakes can also lead to large human and economical losses, as it was observed in the Turkish earthquake of August 1999 and in the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Therefore the occurrence of large earthquakes may be a threat to the sustainable development of the zones of the European Union more prone to strong seismic activity.

The advances in European integration with the transfer of sovereignty from national to EU institutions created a European dimension in many important issues for European citizens. This was clearly recognised by European leaders during the floods of 2002 in central Europe. One of the examples was the declaration of the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder stating that “he was expecting help from Brussels, since the dimension of the catastrophe that hit Germany was beyond the limits of national intervention”. The fairness of this view was widely recognised and has already led to the creation of the Solidarity Fund.

The European dimension of large natural catastrophes had already been the subject of interventions by the Greek MEP Mihalis Papayanakis that led the European Commission to promote the workshop “Mitigation of Seismic Risk-Support to Recently Affected Countries” that took place in Belgrate, Italy, in November 2000. And the cooperation between European research centres of excellence and the steps being taken to coordinate national Civil Protection Services, are other examples of cooperation and policies at European level to tackle the seismic problem. It is however important to emphasize that, opposed to the perception of a great part of the public opinion and eventually national and Union authorities, the development of Civil Protection Services is not the most efficient way to reduce earthquake consequences. The Civil Protection Services only act after the Emergency has been declared and that is too late in the case of a large earthquake, because at that stage the worse has already happened. The only way to reduce substantially the consequences of strong earthquakes is by means of preventive action on the real cause of the problem, which is the insufficient seismic resistance of part of the building stock, infrastructures and industry.

With this purpose in mind, the Portuguese Society for Earthquake Engineering (SPES) and the Portuguese Association of Companies for Preservation and Restoration of the Architectural Heritage (GECORPA) prepared a set of suggestions in a document entitled "Contribution to the elaboration of a National Programme for the Reduction of the Seismic Vulnerability of the Building Stock". This document will be called Programme for the sake of brevity.

The Programme was submitted to a public discussion in Portugal, to which were invited the main economical and social organisations interested: associations of banks, insurance companies, contractors, consumers, tenants, landlords, industry, professional associations of architects and engineers, etc. The outcome of the discussion was the publication "Reducing the Vulnerability of the Building Stock", that contains the Programme, the papers presented and the conclusions of the discussion. The publication is enclosed with this letter and is also available at <http://www.spes-sismica.org>

Essentially, the Programme consists of an integrated and coherent set of measures aiming at reducing the consequences of future earthquakes in the building stock. Similar programmes should also be developed for the lifelines, industry and monuments

The application of the proposed Programme would avoid the concentration of large losses in a single moment in time. This would be one of the great advantages of the preventive approach as compared to post-disaster mitigation policies. This approach is of interest either to member states as well as to the EU, as more progress in European integration would not be compatible with lacks of solidarity in critical moments (for instances in terms of EU support to the economic recovery and reconstruction of the affected zones).

It can be concluded from the above that (i) the support of the EU to regions that were or may be affected by large natural catastrophes, whose impact largely exceeds the national capacity, is a recognized moral obligation that already gave rise to the creation of the Solidarity Fund; and (ii) in the case of large earthquakes the most efficient way to deal with the problem is by means of preventive action to reduce the potential human and economic losses.

SPES and GECORPA are aware of some Commission initiatives towards the reduction of the risks from natural hazards, including earthquakes, namely:

- a) The ongoing process of approval of Eurocode 8 (the European harmonized code for seismic design of new civil engineering constructions and retrofit of existing ones).
- b) The part of Framework Programme 6 concerned with Global Change and Ecosystems / Natural Disasters.

However, we are convinced that it is time for a more proactive attitude and for launching coordinated actions aiming at earthquake protection in Europe. These actions should comprise seismic risk mitigation measures, namely strengthening the existing building stock, and should include:

- Extension of the Solidarity Fund (or other) to preventive actions, such as proposed in the Programme, and that resources for that purpose are allocated in the European Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013;
- Recommendation to the member-states to create the conditions for, and to carryout, assessment and retrofitting of existing important structures (e.g.: Schools, Hospitals, facilities of Emergency Services, etc.);
- Promotion of research on solutions, techniques and new materials for economic seismic upgrading of existing vulnerable structures (a step forward relatively to FP6). Preparation of FP7 already started. Why not an explicit slot on seismic risk mitigation? This comes along the lines of the Commission Recommendation on Implementation and Use of the Eurocodes issued at 11/12/2003.

These are the opinions, concerns and proposals of SPES and GECORPA, but we are sure that many others, including the European Association for Earthquake Engineering, also share them.

We would ask you, Mr. President, to ask the Commission to analyse the proposed actions for the mitigation of the seismic risk in Europe as well as for a subsequent implementation of appropriate instruments.

Thanking in advance for your attention and co-operation, we send our best regards.

Yours sincerely,

The President of the SPES
(Carlos Sousa Oliveira)

The President of GECORPA
(Vitor Córias e Silva)

P.S. This is an open letter. Copies will be sent to other EU officials, MEP's and organisations similar to SPES. Please find also enclosed information about SPES and GECORPA



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate A - Governance, Communication and Civil Protection
ENV.A.5 - Civil Protection

*Enviado
7/Julho 2004
C. Sousa*

Brussels, 16 June 2004
A.5 (04) D/2500100

Mr Carlos Sousa Oliveira
Sociedade Portuguesa Engenharia
Sismica
Av.do Brasil, 101

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Dear Mr Sousa Oliveira,

President Prodi asked me to reply to your letter of 25 May 2004 concerning your concerns in favour of coordinated actions aiming at earthquake protection in Europe.

On the same subject, we recently replied to written question E-4007/2003 of the European Parliament with the following wording:

"In the framework of the Community action programme for civil protection, the Commission is developing a project on damage assessment in order to identify guidelines on how to classify the risk level of buildings after earthquakes. Experience has shown that private and public buildings need to be classified to protect the population concerned by preventing it from any post-earthquake damage. The project will be finalised in September 2004 and its results will be subject to an in-depth examination with the national civil protection contact points in order to have the guidelines widely adopted.

Moreover, the Commission's European Laboratory for Structural Assessment (ELSA) laboratory of the Joint Research Centre has since 1992 been developing research on seismic assessment and retrofit of structures performing pseudo-dynamic reference tests on large/full scale models buildings and other structures. The work is carried out in collaboration with Member States' research institutions and aims at calibration of Eurocode 8, to be approved in the future as the European norm for design of civil structures in seismic regions.

Availability of harmonized and advanced codes for design of civil engineering constructions in Europe is considered a key instrument for the realisation of the single market and for increasing competitiveness of the construction industry, but it is also considered a basic instrument to provide for adequate safety for new structures as well as to retrofit existing vulnerable ones.

Given the efforts of the Commission and the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) on the approval of the set of more than 50 European Norms forming the Eurocodes, foreseen by the end of 2006, the Joint Research Centre, both through its institutional programme and through support to the Directorate-General Enterprise, will continue contributing to further develop the European Norms which are considered as an important component for the mitigation of the seismic risks in the medium / long term.

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Furthermore, the Commission, through Directorate-General Research, has been funding, since 1986, the whole spectra of seismic risk research (earthquake engineering and seismology), through the FP3, FP4, FP5 and FP6 Framework Programmes. In the context of the FP6 Research Framework Programme- Global Change, and Ecosystem, the integrated project Lessloss^{EU} (under negotiation) will bring together 47 partners from European universities, research institutions, industry and the Joint Research Centre

It aims to improve the earthquake resistant design of structures and contribute to the formulation and improvement of Eurocode 8 (related to construction norms).

Moreover, in the case of an earthquake, the Commission through its Monitoring and Information Centre can pool the assistance offered by the Member States as it did in the case of the Algerian earthquake in May 2003 and more recently after the earthquake in Iran in December 2003."

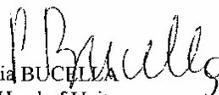
(1) Project relevant to seismic risk assessment and protection against earthquakes

This should reply to most of your questions. Concerning a possible amendment of the Structural Fund, the Commission has adopted on 26 Mai 2004 the *Annual report 2002-2003 and the Report on the experience gained after one year of applying the new instrument* (COM(2004) 397 final), of which you will find a copy attached. In the report, in view of the short period of application of the Fund, the Commission considers it too early to propose any substantial modifications to the Regulation.

However, we would like to point to the existing possibility under Article 3 (2c) of the Regulation to support measures, following a disaster, aiming at an immediate securing of preventive infrastructures and measures of immediate protection of cultural heritage. Moreover, the Regulation foresees in Article 8(2) that the beneficiary State shall detail in the report on the financial execution of the grant the preventive measures introduced or proposed by the beneficiary State in order to limit damage and to avoid, to the extent possible, a recurrence of similar disasters.

Finally, within the new legislative proposals for the Structural Funds for the planning period beginning in 2007, the Commission aims to strengthen the existing possibilities to support measures to prevent natural and technological risks.

Yours sincerely,


Pia BUCILLA
Head of Unit



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GECORPA

To the President of the European Commission
Prof. Romano Prodi
Rue de la Loi
1049 BRUXELAS

Lisbon, September 30th, 2004

Subject: Towards Sustainable Development in the European Union – The Challenge of Seismic Protection

Reference: our letter of 21st May 2004 and your letter of 16th June 2004.

Thank you very much for your reply to our letter on the subject mentioned above, sent by Mrs. Pia Bucella on the 16th June 2004.

We were pleased to receive the confirmation of the Commission efforts to promote cooperation between Civil Protection Services and research in seismology and earthquake engineering. We were also pleased to learn that the Regulation of the Solidarity Fund already considers the possibility of support to preventive measures following a disaster. Moreover we consider extremely relevant the intention of the Commission to “support measures to prevent natural and technological risks”. However, in the case of large earthquakes this intention can only be materialised in an efficient manner if direct action to reduce the risk is taken before earthquakes happen (e.g. controlling civil construction quality, rehabilitating old buildings, etc) and not just by means of preparation to act “following a disaster”.

In order to pursue the Commission’s intention it is therefore necessary that instruments to provide financial support by the EU to Member States that enforce measures with that goal are available. Therefore we urge the Commission to strengthen the existing instruments (and/or create new ones if necessary) to support programmes aiming at reducing the seismic vulnerability of the existing building stock, lifelines, industry and monuments that the Member States may consider to enforce. This work should be carried out in such a way that those instruments are already available for the period beginning in 2007, as stated in your letter. We also suggest that the Commission requires from Member States applying for EU support to such programmes to ensure that mechanisms for quality control of the works to be performed are effectively applied.

We also ask you, Mr President, to give your support to a meeting, which we would like to be organised jointly by the European Association for Earthquake Engineering with the EU (DG Research and Development), in order to bring together the various parts of the European Commission concerned with this matter (especially Research, Environment and Enterprise), with earthquake specialists from the European Association for Earthquake Engineering (EAEE) and the European Seismology Commission; also inviting concerned European parliamentarians and national authorities; to try to

formulate an EU policy on reducing the seismic vulnerability of existing buildings, infrastructures and monuments.

We would appreciate if you could keep us informed of any developments in what regards the strengthening /creation of the above-mentioned instruments to support measures to prevent natural and technological risks and the realisation of the meeting suggested in the previous paragraph.

We thank you in advance for your attention and cooperation.

Yours sincerely

The President of the SPES

(Carlos Sousa Oliveira)

The President of GECORPA

(Vitor Córias e Silva)

P.S. Due to its importance, we would like to make public the correspondence between SPES/GECORPA and the Commission. Please let us know if you have any objection. We also ask for the new President of the European Commission to be made aware of the correspondence with SPES and GECORPA.

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate A - Governance, Communication and Civil Protection
ENV.A.5 - Civil Protection

NO. 395 P. 1/2
Envia por fax ao Prof. Carlos Sousa
de ao Eng. Carlos
Col. Eng. E. Silva
As per...
[Signature]
04.11.04

Brussels, 25 October 2004
CAB (04) A/6094 - A.5 (04) D/250406

Mr Carlos Sousa Oliveira
President of the SPES
Mr Vitor C6ias e Silva,
President of GECORPA
Sociedade Portuguesa de
Engenharia S6mica
Av do Brasil 101

P 170-066 Lisboa

Subject: Towards Sustainable Development in the European Union - The Challenge of Seismic Protection

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your letter to President Prodi of 30 September 2004, to which I have been asked to reply. I do appreciate the importance of your work and am sympathetic to the aims that you outline in your interesting letter.

I think that the idea of a meeting with Commission Services could be a useful initiative and I would encourage you to pursue the matter directly with my colleagues in Directorate-General Research, and perhaps also the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy. As the topic potentially covers a number of research areas, I have copied this correspondence to the offices of each of the Director Generals concerned, who can best direct them to the appropriate point.

EN Important notice:

The references of this letter (date, name and subject) and any correspondence sent to President Prodi, will be entered in a public register. If the content of your letter is not covered by the exceptions laid down in the Commission Decision on public access to Commission documents (concerning privacy, industrial secrecy, etc.) it is possible that third parties may obtain a copy of it on request. You may contest this within ten working days from the date of this letter by writing to the European Commission, Register of the President's correspondence, BREY 10/29, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels, giving the reference of this letter.

For more information see:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodi/reqco/registre.cfm?CL=en>

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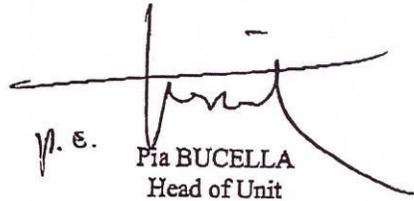
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I wish you success in the initiative and would appreciate being kept informed of any meeting that you do organise as well as its follow-up.

Finally, in reply to the postscript of your letter, there is no objection to you making the correspondence public. A copy of the correspondence is automatically forwarded to the Cabinet of the President of the Commission.

Yours faithfully,


P. B.
Pia BUCELLA
Head of Unit

c.c.: Mr Mitsos, Director General DG RTD,
Mr Schenkel, Acting Director General DG JRC