



**European Committee
of the Regions**



Strengthening of EU Disaster Management

Adam Banaszak

- ❖ Spokesperson of the CoR on Civil Protection
- ❖ Member of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Regional Assembly (Poland)
 - ❖ Vice President of ECR Political Group



What is the European Committee of the Regions?

- The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a political institution comprised of 350 members of all EU member states.
- The members are politicians elected at a local or regional level – as mayors, councillors, governors (...).
- We meet in Brussels to discuss and debate EU legislation, and what impact it may have toward local communities.
- We are an official institution recognised within the European Treaties.



The CoR contributions to disaster management

I was appointed as a spokesperson of the CoR for three position papers:

- The Review of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (2018)
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 Action Plan (2017)
- The Union Civil Protection Mechanism (2012)

We have been very active with the European Commission and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to ensure that policymakers hear the concerns of cities and regions.



The significance of natural disasters

- Disasters ignore borders
- Loss of human life
- Severe economic costs



The Position of the CoR

- Local authorities need to be closely involved in these matters
- Disaster resilience should be one factor that allows construction projects funded by the EU to take place
- In case help is not arriving or taking too long, local civil servants and citizens need to be trained and prepared in containment and management of the disaster



The Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)

- Every country that takes part in this mechanism commit their national resources to a voluntary pool known as the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC)
- When a disaster hits, a request for help needs to be sent to the Emergency Response Coordination Centre, the request can come from anywhere
- After the Centre is alerted, all participants are alerted
- Following the alert, the assets are mobilized
- Finally, assets are deployed to the disaster area



UCPM in action

- Example: forest fires in Sweden last year.
- Over 360 fire-fighters, 7 planes, 6 helicopters, and 67 vehicles were mobilised through the ECPM within three weeks to assist Sweden.
- Support was provided by Italy, France, Germany, Lithuania, Denmark, Portugal and Poland, Austria, Czech Republic.
- Poland had made significant contributions in containing the fires – 139 firefighters and 44 vehicles were deployed to central Sweden.



UCPM reform

- UCPM has proved its value but it is too slow hence the need for its reform.
- The reform is ongoing: European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached an informal compromise.
- Main changes that are expected soon:
 - creation of a new of reserve of resources at EU level (rescEU)
 - Commission proposal: “The composition of rescEU should include emergency response capacities to respond to wildfires (...)”
 - rescEU will include forest fighting planes (until now planes have had to be dispatched by the Member States)
 - increased focus on prevention



EU Solidarity Fund

The second EU structure meant for disaster relief is the EU Solidarity Fund created in response to the Central European floods in summer of 2002. The fund functions as follows:

- An application must be received by the European Commission 12 weeks from the date the damage was inflicted
- The Commission then reviews it and passes it to the European Parliament and Council for approval
- After the application is approved, the aid is paid out and the affected state becomes responsible for implementation

Useful Fund, but again subject to lengthy procedures.



Cross-border Cooperation

While these two EU instruments have proved to be helpful, they do not address the administrative challenges of cross-border cooperation. Some of the most common are:

- Entry of rescue teams
- Disputed legal status of medical and other products in different member states
- Administrative obstacles in transferring corpses of deceased family members and servicemen
- Insurance-related issues
- Problems with diploma recognition



Addressing cross-border challenges

- 2017: EU study identifying cross-border obstacles and launching 10 initial pilot projects.
- 2019: New call for proposals for pilot actions (deadline for applications: 15 March).
- Coordinating entity: Association of European Border Regions



Conclusion

Why is it important to solve cross-border obstacles and ensure more solidarity in the EU?

- One, we can save more lives from natural disasters if we react sooner.
- Second, we can save a lot more money. The European Commission estimates that about 2% of GDP would increase if approximately one-fifth of cross-border problems were addressed.



Thank You

adam.banaszak@poczta.onet.pl

