

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

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SUBCOMMITTEE IV ON FLANKING AND HORIZONTAL POLICIES

EEA EFTA COMMENT

on the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (COM(2017) 772 final)

1. SUMMARY

- The EEA EFTA States are of the view that the current proposal does not strike a balance between different regional capacity needs within Europe.
- The EEA EFTA States are of the view that the operational aspects, including the interface between rescEU and the European Civil Protection Pool, need to be clarified.
- The EEA EFTA States note that due to the short time period left of the current UCPM, focus should be on the overall review of the current UCPM and not on the remainder of the current UCPM. This would result in a more balanced approach since all aspects of the UCPM would be reviewed.
- The EEA EFTA States are of the view that the proposal could be more ambitious in relation to prevention and preparedness.

2. INTRODUCTION

1. The EEA EFTA States¹ have, for many years, actively participated in the European cooperation in the field of civil protection and currently participate in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) 2014-2020² through the EEA Agreement. The EEA

¹ Liechtenstein does not participate in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and therefore, the position communicated in this comment only reflects the position of two of the three EEA EFTA States, namely Iceland and Norway.

² Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 17 December 2013 on the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

EFTA States are of the view that this cooperation and the support given by the UCPM to projects, workshops and training courses in the field of prevention, preparedness and the response to natural disasters is highly important and has so far proven successful.

2. The Commission proposal, published on 23 November 2017, presents a targeted change to the remainder of the current UCPM (2018/19-2020). As both Iceland and Norway currently participate in the UCPM any amendments to the current legislation and the increase in the financial envelope would have an impact on their participation.

3. DIFFERENT REGIONAL CAPACITY NEEDS

3. The EEA EFTA States support the overall objective of the proposal, which is to ensure better crisis and emergency support within Europe. However, after carefully studying the proposed amendments, the EEA EFTA States are of the view that the current proposal does not strike a balance between different regional capacity needs within Europe. It would appear that southern and central European States could benefit more from the core of the proposal than northern European States.
4. The EEA EFTA States sympathize with the risks and threats shaping the logic of the proposed assets in *rescEU*, and will not argue that this is to the detriment of any of the common goals of the UCPM. Still, bearing in mind the increase to the financial envelope accompanying the proposal, the EEA EFTA States would like to have more and clearer reassurances as to how the Northern and Arctic areas of the European continent should interpret and possibly benefit from regional contingency planning for known risks in the more northern and maritime corners of Europe.

4. THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE RESCEU AND THE EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION POOL

5. For the EEA EFTA States it is not entirely clear how the more operational aspects will apply upon activation in an emergency, including the interface between *rescEU* and the European Civil Protection Pool and, when to prefer deployment of one asset to another. If the threshold of the last resort capacities in *rescEU* would be elevated, then much of the resources therein risk staying unused for the larger bulk of time.
6. The planned reshaping of common resources through both *rescEU* and the European Civil Protection Pool should not interfere with the need to have a certain level of flexibility and scalability in the overall response. The current EU overview of risks and capacity builds on knowledge and evidence, yet complex emergencies with cascading effects might call on other volumes and capacities than the ones described in *rescEU* and the European Civil Protection Pool. There is a risk that the future assembly of common capacities - should incentives favour a uniform construction - could lean towards a too strict definition of needs and gaps and thereby lose important flexibility in its overall response capacity. Rather than risking the duplication in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capacities, to take one example, there should be room to consider developing more targeted assets on a medium term. A number of analysis and

global trends indicate a more complex risk landscape in which health, climate change, migration and digital dependency dominate and dictate our joint preparedness.

7. To this end, the EEA EFTA States take this opportunity to emphasize the importance they attach to institutional cooperation for example between the EU and NATO, just as they, on a regional scale, cooperate between the Nordic countries. A further dialogue on potential civil risks in this context should be reflected in the new legislation with a view to build on our collective ability to prepare and respond to a wider spectrum of threats.

5. HOLISTIC REVIEW OF THE UCPM

8. The EEA EFTA States note that approximately only two years would be left of the current UCPM, when the European Parliament and the Council have concluded on their procedures and adopted the new legislative act amending the UCPM. Due to the short time period left, the EEA EFTA States are of the view that the focus should rather be on the overall review of the current UCPM, hence long term objectives. This would result in a more balanced approach since all aspects regarding inclusive and effective civil protection cooperation would undergo a more thorough and systemic review at the same time.
9. The EEA EFTA States call on the Commission to set out how the proposed legislative changes align with the requirement for a renewal of the UCPM mandate by 2020, as set out in the existing legislation. Introducing a set of sudden onset proposals such as these, and with a questionable economic assessment, could erode or remove necessary energy from the process of renewing the wider mandate for the UCPM – due by the end of 2018.

6. PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

10. The EEA EFTA States welcome all efforts to articulate more importance and to direct more resources to the area of prevention and preparedness to disasters and emergencies, in particular to extreme weather events and natural and manmade disasters resulting from the long-term effects of climate change. However, the EEA EFTA States are of the view that the Commission proposal in relation to prevention and preparedness could be more ambitious. The EEA EFTA States look forward to further discussions on how to reduce disaster risk through better planning and management and not only by allocating funds to response capacities.
 11. The EEA EFTA States will closely follow the developments in the European Parliament and in the Council on the proposal to amend the UCPM and welcome a continued dialogue on the matter.
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