



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND  
HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO)

### **51<sup>st</sup> Informal meeting of the Directors-General responsible for civil protection of the Member and Participating States of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism**

**Valencia, 17 - 18 October 2023**

#### **Subject: Meeting Summary**

The meeting was opened and chaired by Mr. Maciej Popowski (the Chair), Director-General of DG ECHO (European Commission), and hosted by the Spanish Presidency (ES PCY) of the Council of the European Union, represented by Mr. Francisco Jose Ruiz Boada, Director-General of the Spanish civil protection.

The Chair welcomed Moldova as a new Participating State to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) family, following the signature of the agreement to join the UCPM just three weeks earlier. Moldova's Director-General, Mr. Alexandru Drimitru Oprea, thanked the Member States (MS) and Participating States (PS) of the UCPM as well as the Commission (COM) for accepting Moldova within the UCPM's family. He also thanked those who supported his country in dealing with the cascading effects of Russia's war on Ukraine.

In his opening remarks, the Chair highlighted the increasingly challenging situation that Europe's disaster management system had been confronted with over the past months, including a series of extreme weather events hitting both MS and PS and the European Neighbourhood, as well as the threats posed by Europe's significantly changed security landscape. In this context, the Chair thanked MS and PS for the excellent cooperation demonstrated in responding to this diverse set of emergencies. The UCPM proved once again to be an effective and valuable instrument of solidarity within and around Europe. The doubling of the rescEU wild firefighting fleet – promised by Commission President Von der Leyen one year earlier – was maintained and delivered. However, the Chair also stressed that the accelerating trend of climate change and the above-mentioned security risk landscape call for increased action: response alone will not be enough, the operational evidence clearly calls for more efforts and investments across all areas of civil protection. The Chair equally expressed appreciation for the interest demonstrated by MS and PS in the preceding months in revamping the discussions on the future and on the role of the UCPM within the EU's

crisis and emergency management system. The agenda of this meeting was aimed to accommodate the needs to exchange on the future of the UCPM from different angles.

The Spanish Director-General, Mr. Ruiz Boada, welcomed the UCPM MS and PS Directors-General responsible for civil protection (DGs) to Valencia and recalled the work carried-out until that moment during the Spanish Presidency Semester of the Council. He expressed satisfaction for the outcomes of the Spanish Presidency's Workshop organised in Aranjuez in July 2023, which provided useful recommendations to further improve MS and PS' disaster management systems, and to strengthen the risk governance. He stressed prevention and planning as two fundamental aspects of disaster management systems and recalled the need to improve coordination between the actors involved in civil protection.

#### **ITEM I: MAKING THE CIVIL PROTECTION SECTOR A PRIORITY: NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

COM (Director Hanna Jahns) presented first findings of an ongoing World Bank study, funded by DG ECHO and aiming to provide recommendations to MS and PS on how to prioritise investments for more resilient civil protection systems at national level. The series of extreme weather emergencies over the last summer pointed to the need to further strengthen civil protection services. Whilst civil protection facilities are critical infrastructures/entities that play a crucial role in preventing, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters, investments on the same facilities are lagging behind in several countries, despite the outstanding work that national civil protection authorities have done in delivering on the increasing demands over the last years. The final study results will be published in Spring 2024 and will further highlight potential impacts of increased natural disaster risks to help civil protection authorities for planning and prioritising investments. At the same time, the study should also raise awareness in national administrations for the overall need to upscale investments in civil protection as a priority.

Following the presentation, DGs from IT, PT, DK, HR, RO, FR, DE, NL, EL, FI, NO, SE, AT, SI underlined that not only the national perspective is to be considered when addressing the accelerating trend of disasters and crises, but also international and European dimensions and asked for a continuation of the strategic discussions on the future of the UCPM (with some of them proposing the PROCIV meeting as the right forum in this regard). Besides addressing the role of national civil protection authorities, such strategic discussions should focus on the UCPM's scope of action, and other prominent issues such as the opportunity (or not) of carrying-out UCPM operations in conflict areas and the role of the UCPM and the ERCC within the EU crisis management system. In addition, the following topics should be part of such strategic reflections: what is the best tool to manage long-lasting emergencies? Should that be the UCPM or are there other available instruments better equipped? What is the impact on any of these potential options on the national (civil protection) authorities? This should continue the first strategic exchanges on the same subjects already started during the last DGs meeting in May 2023 (held in Arlanda, Stockholm) as well as during the subsequent PROCIV meetings over the past months under the

Spanish Presidency. These exchanges should feed into an in-depth analysis encompassing potential options for the future of the UCPM, which should then inform a document to be presented to political decision-makers ahead of the European elections (to take place in Spring 2024).

DGs from HR, PT, RO, NL, DE, CZ, FI, SE, AT, SK also outlined their national experiences related to the role, development and coordination structure of their civil protection authorities within national disaster and crises management systems. Several DGs agreed on the need to reinforce civil protection systems by building on an all-hazard approach and by involving a broader range of policy areas and actors into civil protection work. DGs from DK, EL, FI, LT specifically highlighted the importance of increasing population awareness and preparedness. EE noted that talking about an ‘all-hazard approach’ means the need to prepare for different kind of scenarios. LT stressed that civil protection could mean both: protection from traditional as well as new challenges.

DGs from PT, HR, LU, DK also reiterated the importance of bilateral and regional cooperation agreements (DK informed about the establishment of a new secretariat to support cooperation between Nordic countries). DGs from RO, IT, DE, LU, BG recalled the need to ensure adequate budgetary and human resources to national civil protection services. EL referred to innovation investments as a way forward to strengthen civil protection, and SE outlined its national ‘whole-of-society-approach’, which allows to find synergies and make best use of available resources between partners working in the same or related fields (such as civ-mil cooperation, humanitarian tools, etc) in a true ‘systemic approach’. The same approach should be used at European level to explore synergies, such as with the European Humanitarian Response capacity.

To conclude this agenda point, COM (the Chair) acknowledged the agreement of DGs on the need to adopt a stronger all-hazard and a more largely encompassing whole-of-society approach, as well as on the need for more prevention and preparedness investments. COM informed that, at EU level, DG ECHO is currently reaching out to other (Commission) services with the objective of mainstreaming disaster prevention across related EU policies and programmes, such as cohesion, environmental and agricultural policies. With reference to the UCPM budget and its constraints, the Chair also reminded that a decision should be made on the mid-term review of the current EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) by the end of the year: in this regard, COM has asked for a reinforcement of the emergency reserve. Furthermore, the Chair noted the importance of increasing the efforts on disaster communication and population awareness/preparedness.

By welcoming the suggestions advanced by several DGs to continue the strategic discussions around the future of the UCPM and some standing related issues, the Chair also announced a dedicated informal meeting to take place in early 2024 at DGs level. He added that a common position could be elaborated in Spring 2024 as a result of these discussions. The Chair equally underlined the importance of keeping civil protection on the agenda of the European Council.

## **ITEM II: MAINSTREAMING DISASTER PREVENTION – FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION**

This agenda point started with a presentation by the Spanish Presidency (Ms. Cristina Marugán Güemez, Head of International Relations of the Spanish Civil Protection Authority) on the main outcomes of the Spanish Presidency workshop held on 5-6 July 2023 around the topic strengthening governance for disaster risk management. Both the four main recommendations for MS and PS as well as the key actions suggested to the European Commission were illustrated as outcomes of the workshop. The recommendations for MS and PS included i) enhanced focus on prevention; ii) the need to improve and update regulatory framework, iii) the need for more effective decision-making processes, and iv) more engagement of civil protection authorities in disaster risk management. The key actions suggested to the Commission comprised: i) assessing together with MS/PS the impact of tools already implemented within the UCPM before implementing new ones; ii) creating a database for disaster risk management funding instruments; iii) elaboration of guidelines for the development of national actions plans and disaster risk management plans iv) promoting voluntary thematic peer reviews/exchange of experts at national and subnational levels; v) creating a community of practice on disaster risk management governance within the knowledge network; vi) establishing a specific training program on disaster risk management with emphasis on prevention vii) development of good practice guidelines for the media and social networks.

COM (Director Hanna Jahns) presented the main instruments available under the UCPM to assist MS and PS in building their institutional capacity to develop more effective prevention and preparedness measure, the ultimate goal being having more resilient and effective civil protection systems. Given the new and rapidly evolving disaster management reality, COM stressed the need to focus efforts on prevention, alongside disaster preparedness and response measures. Among the instruments presented: i) the World Bank Study on economics for prevention and preparedness that provides scientific evidence to better inform policy and investment decisions; ii) the Technical Assistance Financing Facility (TAFF), iii) the peer review programme. COM also reiterated its intention in the following months to better mainstream disaster prevention and preparedness across different EU policies and programmes (such as cohesion policy and funds, common agricultural policy and funding, horizon Europe, etc.), so to maximise and make best use of available resources at EU level.

Following the presentation, all DGs taking the floor (PT, CZ, SE, FR, EL, EE, SR, RO) agreed on the need to increase prevention investments whilst resources are more and more often limited. Some of them referred to the potential cost-effectiveness for the response budget deriving from further investment in prevention (CZ, SE). PT outlined their emblematic case, explaining how at national level they managed to implement a substantial financing shift in terms of response vs. prevention/preparedness allocations from 80%-20% in 2018 to 40-60% in 2023. This was

possible also thanks to an overall increase of the budget allocated to civil protection, and not at the detriment of the envelope allocated to response. PT proposed the organisation of a ‘European year of prevention’. Both PT and RO also urged COM to support their advocacy efforts vis-à-vis the national Ministries of Finance to obtain increased funding for civil protection.

CZ underlined how a peer review on wildfires from COM could help their national civil protection authority to convince their government to invest more in prevention. SE displayed their national experience, informing about recent increases in financing for prevention measures at local level, and recalled the opportunity of involving the private sector in disaster risk management: private operators may in certain circumstances see a business case and consequently push for adaptation and prevention measures more and stronger than governmental agencies. FR recalled the importance of scientific knowledge, to have well-functioning population alert-systems in place as well as the need to further invest on risk education. EE explained the multifaceted and holistic approach adopted in recent years at national level in disaster risk management, where prevention plays an important part with the objective of building resilience at any stage of the disaster management cycle. EE brought attention to the difficulties sometimes faced by smaller countries to follow the procedures in place for UCPM instruments. However, EE used UCPM ‘track 1 funding’ and is considering asking for a UCPM advisory missions for mass-evacuation potential events in war scenarios together with the other two Baltic countries. EE also suggested to COM whether the UCPM can help national authorities to formulate a proposal to the political decision-makers according to which country should reserve a pre-definite percentage of their GDP for disaster prevention goals (similar to the threshold for military reinforcement established under the NATO scheme).

To conclude this agenda point, the Commission (the Chair and Director Hanna Jahns) recalled the ambition to better identify potential prevention measures also from other EU funding programmes through advocacy efforts to other Commission’s services. The year 2024 should be dedicated to map potential gaps and build strong arguments for more disaster prevention investments. The structures of EU programmes will then be reviewed in 2025. The Chair agreed on the need to join efforts in advocating towards the national ministries of finance as well as the budgetary authorities of the EU, particularly in view of the preparatory work for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The collective effort between COM and MS/PS should serve to keep the civil protection high on the political agenda.

### **ITEM III: ENHANCING DISASTER PREPAREDNESS OF THE UCPM: rescEU CAPACITIES’ DEVELOPMENTS**

COM (Director Hans Das) introduced this agenda item by presenting the state-of-play on the development of rescEU capacities (including on budget allocation). The UCPM can count on around 50 rescEU capacities, spread around 21 Member and Participating States. His presentation

also raised two important points for discussion for the DGs: i) the issue of long-term commitment of rescEU capacities, namely the need for Member States hosting them to keep them available to the UCPM throughout their entire operational lifespan and beyond the current MFF, and ii) the issue of the long-term sustainability of rescEU medical and CBRN stockpiles.

With regard to the first issue, COM explained that in order to ensure the lifelong availability of rescEU capacities to the UCPM, COM would reflect this principle in the upcoming revision of the relevant implementing decision. In order to support the availability and deployability of rescEU assets, MS are foreseen to receive 100% of the EU financial assistance to cover for maintenance costs, including ‘repair’ costs. COM will also work to obtain an adequate budget within the next MFF (i.e., after 2027, expiry date of the current one) to ensure an adequate envelope for rescEU, including for the maintenance of capacities already developed.

On the second issue, COM referred to the fact that rescEU stockpiles have become a crucial element of EU preparedness to address serious cross-border health and CBRN treats. Preventing their waste and ensuring their sustainability is a key criterion for the good management of stockpiles. COM informed MS and PS about an upcoming workshop organised on the subject and mentioned a list of potential options/specific measures to be adopted by hosting countries to strengthen the management of consumables reaching their end-of-life within the rescEU stockpile. Such options would include extension of shelf life, rotating and replenishing these stocks, utilizing them for national purposes, making them available to UCPM training and exercises, their potential use in humanitarian contexts with persistent high medical needs.

The DGs taking the floor unanimously congratulated COM for the work done over the past years and the rapid development of the rescEU reserve. RO suggested to carry-out a strategic reflection on how rescEU should be developing in the future, given the ‘maturity’ stage reached now by the programme. To avoid further competition among MS/PS on the development of rescEU capacities, RO also suggested to establish consortia between MS for common proposals to develop rescEU capacities and asked for a ‘better geographical distribution’ of some capacities. Given the high costs to procure certain rescEU capacities, their purchase should be split through more than one MFF, for which also a change of the legislation would be needed.

On the issue of long-term commitment, PT expressed its agreement with COM, and other DGs (EL, PL, PT, FI) stated that the stability of rescEU cannot be threatened by the time span of budgetary plans. IT underlined the importance of budget predictability for rescEU and affirmed that they will be able to keep putting capacities at the disposal of the EU/UCPM only as long as they will receive grants for maintenance. Similarly, PL stressed that MS need to receive funding in the future for the maintenance of capacities.

With reference to the long-term sustainability of stockpiles, DGs from FI, PL, PT, SE and CZ largely supported the options put forward by the Commission. DE confirmed the difficulty and limited scope to rotate stockpiles, including via UCPM exercises, and suggested the rotation of stockpiles via the manufacturer to be specified already in the grant agreements. EL suggested adopting a new methodology, encompassing new criteria, for the development of medical and CBRN stockpiles.

Furthermore, CZ enquired about a possible extension of the rescEU transition call timespan, as wildfire seasons start earlier and finish later. On the potential development of demining capacities, FR offered its support to Ukraine (given the high need in the latter country), while SE stated that this could still be an area where the UCPM could play a role, suggesting exploring alternative possibilities other than rescEU (such as advisory missions).

Finally, IT reminded that notwithstanding the success and added value provided by rescEU assets, the European Civil Protection Pool needs to remain the backbone of response. DE also reminded that the protection of civilians being a national competence, Member States are responsible for developing their civil protection assets, with rescEU representing a ‘safety net’ and not a mechanism to ‘replace’ national capacities or cover for national responsibilities.

To conclude this agenda point, the COM reassured that it will do its best to obtain the needed funding for the continuation of rescEU developments and maintenance under the new MFF. Furthermore, COM will propose a provision on the principle of the long-term commitment of rescEU capacities for their whole lifespan in the implementing act that is currently being revised. On demining, COM reminded MS and PS that according to previous related discussions in CPC and PROCIV there was not much appetite to develop such capacities under rescEU. However, COM would stand ready to explore potential alternative ways to support Ukraine in what is a priority issue for them. COM would also look into the possibility of extending the timespan of rescEU transition calls provided enough financial means are available.

#### **ITEM IV: FORWARD-LOOKING – THE PROGRAMME OF THE INCOMING BELGIAN PRESIDENCY**

The incoming Belgian Presidency presented its envisaged working programme and the main events to take during their Presidency Semester (January – June 2024) in the field of civil protection.

BE will work under the overarching theme ‘The UCPM within the EU risk management architecture’, with the objectives to i) reinforce the UCPM within the cross-sectoral risk management of the EU and ii) conduct a stakeholders mapping for the UCPM at EU level.

BE announced that the Presidency workshop will take place in Antwerp on 23-24 January 2024, while the informal meeting of Directors-General will be hosted in Brussels on 25-26 April.

## **ITEM V: JOINT SESSION UCPM – UfM DIRECTORS-GENERAL MEETING**

The joint session between the UCPM Member and Participating States' DGs and the DGs responsible for civil protection of the UfM MS focussed on three main regional hazards in the Mediterranean region: wildfires, floods and earthquakes, with the objective of exploring further cooperation potentials.

The discussion for each of the three hazards was chaired by a UCPM MS' DG (Portugal – wildfires, Italy – floods, Romania – earthquakes), while UCPM and UfM Member States were then invited to present some best practices and lessons identified (Greece, Lebanon and Cyprus on wildfires; Algeria, Czech Republic and Jordan on floods; Tunisia and Palestine on earthquakes).

In the concluding remarks of the session, the Chair reiterated the need for closer cooperation on civil protection both across Europe and with Europe's neighbourhood. He warmly thanked the Spanish Presidency and wished participants a good continuation in the 4<sup>th</sup> UfM Civil Protection Directors-General meeting starting directly following this exchange in the afternoon of the same day (18 October).

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In his concluding remarks, the Chair thanked the Spanish Presidency again for hosting the event, as well as the DGs for their lively and important contribution to the discussions. He expressed his wish to meet everyone again in Brussels in early 2024 to continue the strategic discussions on the future of the UCPM, while taking stock of the outcomes of the discussions of this meeting.