

# EURO–LATINOAMERICAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY



## RESOLUTION:

### Prevention of natural disasters in Europe and Latin America

based on the report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Human Exchanges, the Environment,  
Education and Culture

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**Friday, 25 January 2013 – Santiago, Chile**

## **EUROLAT – Resolution of 25 January 2013 – Santiago, Chile**

[based on the report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Human Exchanges, the Environment, Education and Culture]

### **Prevention of natural disasters in Europe and Latin America**

*The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly,*

- having regard to the statements issued at the six summits of the heads of state and government of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union, held respectively in Rio de Janeiro (28 and 29 June 1999), Madrid (17 and 18 May 2002), Guadalajara (28 and 29 May 2004), Vienna (11 and 13 May 2006), Lima (15 and 17 May 2008) and Madrid (18 May 2010),
- having regard to the Commission communication: *‘A Community approach on the prevention of natural and manmade disasters’* (2009/2151(INI)),
- having regard to the European Parliament’s resolution of 21 September 2010 on the Commission communication: *‘A Community approach on the prevention of natural and manmade disasters’* (2009/2151(INI)),
- having regard to the communication from the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament: *‘Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance’* (2011/2023(INI)),
- having regard to the resolutions of 27 September 2011 on ‘Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance’; of 11 March 2010 on the major natural disasters in the autonomous region of Madeira and the effects of the storm ‘Xynthia’ in Europe; of 16 September 2009 on forest fires in the summer of 2009; of 4 September 2007 on natural disasters; of 7 September 2006 on forest fires and floods; of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, droughts and floods) – agricultural aspects, regional development aspects and environmental aspects; of 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe; of 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal; of 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain; and of 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe,
- having regard to the legislative resolution of 18 May 2006 on the draft regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Solidarity Fund,
- having regard to the Commission staff working document: *‘Implementation Plan of the EU Strategy for supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries 2011-2014’* (SEC(2011)0215),
- having regard to the ISDR/UN 2011 global assessment report on disaster risk reduction: *‘Revealing risk, redefining development’*,
- having regard to the regional progress report on the implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action in the Americas*, 2009, OAS/UNISDR,
- having regard to the regional progress report on the implementation of the Hyogo

Framework for Action (2009-2011), OAS/UNISDR,

- having regard to the World Bank report ‘Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation in Europe and Central Asia’, 2010, World Bank Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery,
  - having regard to the agreements of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention (COP17), held in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011, which recognised the Central American region as the most vulnerable in the world,
  - having regard to Article 16 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas some 200 million people have been affected by natural disasters over the last few decades, many of them from our regions,
  - B. whereas the risk of death associated with natural disasters is diminishing in some countries in the world, but not in Central America, while the figures for at-risk populations and economic losses continue to increase exponentially, particularly in low- to middle-income countries and regions with poor governance,
  - C. whereas climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of natural disasters, which often affect more than one State and cause serious economic, environmental and social problems, and will affect European regions in different ways, with different degrees of severity at different times,
  - D. whereas combating climate change, with binding greenhouse gas reduction targets, is vital in order to reduce the risks of natural disasters,
  - E. whereas the risks associated with natural disasters increase in proportion to the degree of vulnerability to them, which in turn is intrinsically linked to the working of institutional structures, and, in particular, to the risk-awareness and information system, the priority given to disaster risk management strategies in national policies and budgets, urban planning and management of natural ecosystems,
  - F. whereas the scale of possible future losses, calculated on the basis of disaster-related losses, effects and risks, can be used as a key indicator for reaching decisions on public investment in this sphere, and it would also be more worthwhile for governments to reduce risk through a combination of preventive and corrective measures than to absorb possible annual losses,
  - G. whereas natural disasters have a major long-term impact in terms of the loss of thousands of human lives, food insecurity, education, health, structural poverty and population displacement; whereas children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and there is a clearly established connection between disasters and lower levels of school enrolment, and there has also been shown to be a broad gender gap when it comes to completing school after a disaster has occurred,
  - H. bearing in mind the rise in ‘emerging risks’ linked to the growing interdependence of technological systems such as telecommunications, financial services, transport, energy and water,

- I. whereas in order to reduce risks and mitigate the impact of natural disasters it is essential to strengthen regional and international cooperation in areas such as technology transfer, exchange of best practices, compiling information on risks, assistance in improving governance and capacity-building, as well as financial aid and creation of a 'multi-risk' protection system in order to better withstand different types of disaster,
- J. whereas in 2008 the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognised the link in the Bali Action Plan between disaster risk reduction and climate change,
- K. whereas the key to development lies in increasing our capacity to prevent disasters and adapt to the effects of climate change in order to counter the increased threat of such disasters to communities and economic goods; and whereas a degree of consensus has been reached on the need to systematically include risk reduction when planning, drafting and implementing development policies,
- L. whereas real-time prevention needs to be developed at all operational stages: monitoring, including through use of satellite data; issuing early warnings; sounding the alarm and subsequently responding and assisting the population potentially at risk,
- M. whereas in efforts to prevent natural disasters parliamentary bodies play a key role by enacting laws that are relevant to the issue,
- N. whereas the need for a more active approach, aimed at informing, motivating and involving communities in risk-reduction strategies at local level has been widely recognised and the participation of civil society has been shown to have positive results for the implementation of new planning and urban development strategies,
- O. whereas the quality of governance and the degree of responsibility assumed at national and local level, together with social demand and accountability, have a direct impact on the scale of mortality and economic loss,
- P. whereas decisions relating to land use and town planning can have a major impact on risk levels, especially in large cities which include informal settlements,
- Q. whereas the sustainability of ecosystems acts as a natural barrier to many extreme climate conditions, thereby offering an excellent solution in cost-benefit terms,
- R. whereas exploration for, and the use of, natural resources must necessarily be the result of a decision taken by a sovereign entity, and exploration for, and the use of, such resources must therefore be unlawful when carried out in disputed areas, given that such activity poses a very real environmental threat to unspoilt areas of the planet,
- S. bearing in mind the global underestimation of drought-risk patterns and trends; whereas their most visible impact is on agriculture and the supply of drinking water, with the result that their consequences and future impact are most strongly felt at local level by the rural poor who depend on farming for their survival,

- T. bearing in mind the importance of woodland in preventing drought, fire and desertification,
- U. whereas although instruments of social protection such as economic aid and seasonal work programmes are unable to reduce actual risks, they can help strengthen the capacity to withstand natural disaster, reduce poverty and encourage the development of human capital at little additional cost,
- V. whereas both Latin America and, to a lesser extent, Europe have become increasingly prone to extreme natural weather and geological phenomena such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, drought, storms and volcanic eruptions, which has led, in Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, to the forced displacement of peoples, whose human rights need to be properly safeguarded,
- W. bearing in mind the need to take a closer look at the relationship between liberalisation of trade relations, changing forms of production and their effects on climate change, which creates natural disasters,
- X. whereas according to data from the Organisation of American States (OAS), Latin America has made considerable headway in terms of preparation, response and assistance, and whereas although this can be further strengthened and expanded through specific nationwide cooperation, its success in limiting the vulnerability and risks associated with development processes has been limited,
- Y. whereas the subregions of Latin America are able to influence national policies through the various bodies set up by the subregional organisations, such as the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Assistance, the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Centre for Information on Natural Disasters, the Regional Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency,
- Z. bearing in mind the importance of the new solidarity clause included under Article 222 of the TFEU to ensure the mobilisation of all forms of assistance and effective coordination amongst Member States in the event of a natural or manmade disaster,
1. Stresses that, given that natural disasters can severely affect the integrity of communities and the social and economic development of countries in the short, medium and long term, the overall aim of risk prevention, reduction and correction, like that of enforced adaptation to the effects of climate change, is to minimise the loss of life, economic goods, infrastructure, housing and communications and to safeguard the human and basic rights of those affected;
  2. Takes the view that coastal and island areas should be eligible for priority adaptation measures, given that they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and are densely populated, and that the stakes for their economies are very high;
  3. Calls for the fight against climate change and global warming to be a priority on the political agenda of the EU and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean; stresses the need to reach agreement on joint positions in the various forums for dialogue on the environment and climate change;

4. Recommends, given the cross-border nature of natural disasters and climate change, full cooperation to prevent and mitigate their impact, and enforced adaptation to the effects of climate change, particularly through the exchange of best practices and risk information, the creation and distribution of fully catalogued lists of potential risks, development of prevention, enforced adaptation and capacity-building programmes, transfer of more appropriate technologies, financial aid, the strengthening of governance, particularly in organisational, legal and political terms, and the improvement of early-warning systems;
5. Believes that urgent evaluations should be made of the likelihood of natural disasters occurring in the EU and Latin America, thereby enabling countries to better assess the risks they would face in such an event; believes that such evaluations would also provide useful guidelines for political or government action with the aim of reducing loss of life and damage to infrastructure, as well as financial and economic loss caused by earthquakes, floods and other natural phenomena;
6. Stresses the need to create a new paradigm incorporating disaster risk prevention in development policies, in order to reduce the cost of natural disasters, taking into account the value of investments already made and of new investments;
7. Stresses that the aim of the EU-LAC Foundation is to strengthen the partnership process between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean in various spheres, including scientific cooperation, the environment, disaster risk reduction and energy;
8. Calls for greater leverage for disaster risk reduction as a part of development plans, goals, and targets in the successor to the Millennium Development Goals post-2015 as well as outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development;
9. Calls on governments to take natural disaster risk management policies and combating climate change into account when deciding how to invest in development, in order to ensure that public policies aimed at the various development sectors are coherent and that risk management is included in national development strategies;
10. Urges governments to strive to progressively remove subsidies from fossil fuels, so as to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage investment in renewable energy for greater energy efficiency;
11. Urges governments to include risk reduction when planning public investment, urban developments, improved location of road infrastructure, and environmental planning and management and to allocate sufficient funding for this purpose in their budgets;
12. Recommends that the risks resulting from natural disasters should be analysed and calculated in order to be able to share databases on such events and develop publicity and education campaigns to reduce their effects;
13. Is firmly convinced of the need for the European Union and Latin America to maintain and develop their leadership roles in the international fight against global warming; believes that any delay in taking such action will heighten the risk of adverse environmental, economic and social effects and be likely to generate higher costs;
14. Stresses that the biregional strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America is

the proper forum for strengthening close joint coordination and cooperation of the sort that will make it possible to encourage effective multilateralism, preserve the environment and natural resources, and fight against climate change;

15. Stresses the particular importance of including the risk of disasters in the construction sector, in particular in residential housing, which requires the use of appropriate materials and structures;
16. Recommends the creation of a Biregional Centre for Disaster Prevention, in charge of designing common strategies and an emergency information and early-warning system in order to reduce our regions' shared vulnerability to disasters resulting from climate or technological change, earthquakes and other events;
17. Emphasises the importance of satellite-based services, notably for rescue activities in the event of natural disasters; calls on all those involved to make Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) fully operational as soon as possible;
18. Considers that investment in the prevention of specific risks is needed in order to reduce the repercussions of natural disasters; at the same time recommends, in order to increase the adaptability of countries, that governments use loss calculation assessment and probability models as the basis for deciding on their budgets for public spending on risk management; recommends that they urgently address those risks which can be most effectively reduced and in doing so produce positive economic, social and environmental results; believes, at the same time, that more rigorous monitoring of infrastructure investment using state resources should be considered, to ensure that the infrastructure is of high quality; stresses also the economic, social and financial advantages which early warning systems produce;
19. Is in favour of risk management based on the principle of subsidiarity with a gradual decentralisation of powers; considers that central governments should continue to be mainly responsible for technical, financial and legal assistance and should provide support to local governments in the event of larger-scale disasters which cannot be handled at local level;
20. Stresses the importance of strengthening horizontal cooperation (between different bodies at the same hierarchical level) and vertical cooperation (between bodies at different hierarchical levels) amongst the various government and non-government bodies and of providing local governments with adequate budgets with which to implement risk management strategies at local level;
21. Recognises that the use of military assets – transport, logistics, security – to support humanitarian operations may provide key assistance, particularly in the case of large-scale natural disasters; reiterates that military assets should be used in very limited circumstances and as a last resort, in accordance with United Nations recommendations;
22. Considers that, for implementing risk management strategies, preventive measures in the area of minimising and avoiding risk are just as important as the exchange of experiences and the assessment and adoption of proven strategies within the meaning of 'best practice', especially at a local level;

23. Recommends that the mandates of all peace missions include a specific clause concerning the provision of assistance to the civilian population in the event of a natural disaster or catastrophe, along similar lines to the support provided by MINUSTAH at the time of the earthquake in Haiti;
24. Calls on governments to involve representatives of civil society, specialist partners and academics, particularly from the R&D sector, in the design of risk-management strategies and policies in order to improve their dissemination, planning and implementation, as well as to build consensus;
25. Sees a need to include a gender dimension in disaster risk reduction and in the removal of its effects, and to take steps to enhance public awareness of risks, as a key factor in improving the implementation of risk-management strategies;
26. Urges governments to remove all barriers impeding access to information, particularly information about disaster risks, in order to establish responsibilities, emphasises the need to establish a freely accessible map of regions at risk, which can in turn help to improve the efficiency of governance, and stresses the importance of nationwide early warning systems which contribute significantly to the control of risk and the prevention of disasters;
27. Proposes that suitable steps should be taken to reduce the inequalities between the various regions and subregions in terms of their ability to protect their populations, natural resources and economic assets and their capacity to react and recover from the impact of natural disasters; highlights the need to pay special attention to disadvantaged areas and regions and/or those which are geographically and orographically complicated, such as islands and mountainous, outlying, frontier or scarcely populated regions;
28. Considers that governments should take steps to transfer certain risks, through the use of insurance systems, to create a degree of protection in the event of major losses beyond their capacity to absorb and to anticipate and prepare themselves to reduce the impact of emerging risks; an example of this is agricultural insurance;
29. Considers that the development of insurance systems and a risk-based approach can have a vital impact on reducing the cost of reconstruction and its budgetary impact;
30. Considers it highly important to strengthen the emergency services' specialised technical capacities and their appropriate training, and guarantee the effectiveness of emergency information and communication systems and the availability of rapid response tools;
31. Stresses the need for training of residents of areas naturally vulnerable to disasters so that it is possible to control collective panic in crisis situations, and so that the residents know how to behave – this will allow for the limiting of fatalities;
32. Calls for special care for people affected by disasters, and for them to be provided with alternative housing solutions and psychological and material support;



33. Urges governments to include social protection measures in their risk management strategies, such as social allowances, for example microcredits, as these can help soften the immediate impact of a disaster on the most vulnerable groups and prevent the interruption of children's schooling or the sale of production assets, with positive medium- and long-term effects;
34. Considers it fundamentally important to protect children and their needs in terms of education, food, nutrition and health, particularly in the case of very young children, especially in rural areas and indigenous communities, who are the most immediately affected by any natural disaster;
35. Calls on countries to give special consideration to asylum requests from people displaced by natural disasters and/or environmental problems and to make every effort to ensure their resettlement;
36. Urges governments to develop active planning and land-use systems able to guarantee the protection of ecosystems and natural resources, the prevention of damage, adaptation to climate change and use of construction methods designed to withstand the risk of natural disasters;
37. Emphasises that building laws, regulations, standards and criteria must be adapted carefully and clearly to each country's specific situation, as well as to local needs, and therefore considers it important to involve communities in decision-making; considers that the participation of civil society encourages the adoption of new approaches to help reduce risks and also has wider advantages in terms of promoting more organised citizenship and greater social cohesion;
38. Calls for greater emphasis to be placed on the development of strategies built on ecosystem-based risk management planning, which can provide highly attractive solutions in cost-benefit terms and allow a range of disaster risks, such as floods, drought, fires and others, to be addressed;
39. In order to tackle drought, recommends that governments include drought risk management as a core element of their risk governance and, in particular, that they identify and address the root causes of drought and adopt measures to improve soil and water management systems, including forest protection of water sources, and water recharging areas, and that they provide social and technical support to the poorest rural families who rely on farming and improve early-warning and response systems;
40. Calls for technical and financial support to be given to farming activities in rural areas which have been abandoned due to the development of industrial sectors and which are becoming more and more exposed to the risk of natural disasters; recalls that the upkeep of rural areas helps to prevent their desertification and impoverishment and preserve their ecosystems, particularly their natural resources;
41. Points out that, given the importance of woodland and soil in preventing erosion and flooding, maintaining biodiversity, managing aboveground and underground water resources and capturing carbon, it is important to adopt and use measures to prevent deforestation, the pollution of and reduction in water flows, illegal logging and forest fires; supports a firm policy of reforestation, preferably with native species and mixed

forests, to create better defences against fire, disease and storms, and also support the maintenance and development of fauna;

42. Welcomes the outcome document – the Future We Want – of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development from June 2012, which calls, among other things, for disaster risk reduction and building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; urges States, international financial institutions, international organisations and civil society ‘to accelerate implementation’ of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, and to set a floor for the post-2015 framework;

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43. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, the parliaments of the EU Member States and of all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the Andean Parliament, the Mercosur Parliament, the Office of the Secretary-General of the Andean Community, the Commission of Permanent Representatives of Mercosur, the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Latin American Economic System, and the Secretaries-General of NATO, the OAS, UNASUR and the United Nations.