



Report on Wilton Park Conference WP809

IMPROVING THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN EUROPE

Monday 13 – Wednesday 15 February 2006

Summary

1. Disasters and the impact that results increasingly have global implications. Whether a European citizen is caught up in an emergency at home or abroad they expect their governments to respond to save lives and provide appropriate support. Massive and unprecedented challenges are being faced whether as a result of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, flash floodings or heatwaves, or of terrorist acts including bombings, such as the London bombings on 7 July 2005, sieges, terrorist use of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear device (CBRN), industrial accidents such as the Buncefield oil depot fire, or an avian flu pandemic. The credibility of governments is challenged by how well they are seen to respond to a disaster, whether at home or abroad, in providing a co-ordinated and effective response to their citizens and meeting the growing expectations and needs of those caught up in them. In order for governments to provide this response they need to ensure better strategic and tactical preparedness, have a modern doctrine for crisis response and capabilities which are trained and exercised.

2. In addition to the traditional “first responders” to a disaster there are many new players. Increasingly governments are recognising that they cannot provide all the answers and need to work in close partnerships with the voluntary sector and the private sector. The importance of the media cannot be underestimated given the “real-time” world in which disasters and their response unfold.

3. Whether the disaster is domestic or overseas the same goals and challenges exist in the response. There is a need for more “joined-up” work between those dealing with disasters occurring overseas and those with domestic emergencies. For instance where

disasters occur overseas Foreign Ministries are increasingly expected to provide an appropriate Consular response as their affected citizens expect a familiar “national” response from their government. Support for survivors and the bereaved from disasters overseas needs to be followed through with support provided for them by the more usual “national responders” once they return home. The expertise of a country’s humanitarian response to disasters overseas could be utilised in a domestic disaster, particularly in helping to manage assistance from overseas if it is needed.

4. Policies for supporting foreigners affected by an emergency in a European country also need to be developed in domestic national planning.

5. At the European level the European Union (EU) has a role to play in uniting the civil protection response of its member states. Whilst there are different meanings of civil protection and civilian crisis management across EU countries, and very different operational organisations to tackle this there are opportunities to encourage co-operation and best practice. It is suggested that the Environment Directorate is not the appropriate part of the European Commission to drive this and an EU Co-ordinator responsible to the Commissioner is recommended. More bilateral co-operation, or small groups of countries such as that created between Italy, France and Spain to co-operate over forest fires etc. is recommended. Increasingly there is a need to share experience across the EU at a local level and expand this knowledge beyond traditional planning and response circles to the wider public.

What are the risks of disasters which Europe should prepare for?

6. The risks of disasters facing Europe are many and increasingly varied. They range from severe weather related emergencies to industrial or transport accidents, environmental pollution, human and animal health emergencies, plant disease, terrorism, public disorder, electronic attack, industrial action, technical or business failure, or an international event. The Wilton Park conference looked at some of these risks in more detail.

7. **Severe weather** is creating more hazards and has a greater impact on humans than previously. In Europe between 2000 and 2004 80% of reported natural disasters were triggered by hydro-meteorological hazards. A severe cold wave in January 2006 brought some of the coldest temperatures to Russia and central Europe in decades. Heavier snow falls have led to increases in cold-related deaths and accidents such as roof collapses. In 2003 there were between 22,000 and 35,000 heat related deaths in Europe. Dresden suffered a flood in 2002 which was assessed as a “1 in a 100” year occurrence.

8. Whether or not the incidence of hazards has increased there is a definite trend in the increased impact of weather related hazards. In Europe the impact of floods and windstorms is increasing at a faster rate than drought and geological hazard with the former accounting for 60% of total economic losses from disasters. These trends are likely to continue as a result climate change induced by human activity.

9. Some weather-related risks can be predicted and thus assist planning. For example the UK Met Office predicted a colder winter in 2005/6, and the 2006 hurricane season in the Caribbean/USA region is likely to be as active as the 2005 season. In the longer-term scientists predict a rapid increase in global temperatures resulting in: reduced air quality, increased mortality in older people, damage to crops and heat stress on livestock. By 2040 the summer temperatures experienced in Europe in 2003 are expected to be the norm. By 2060, the summer of 2003 will be considered “cold” by comparison to temperatures reached then. Increased storminess, and heavy downpours are also predicted resulting in more river flooding, landslides and mudslides causing damage to ecological and socio-economic systems (and more insurance claims through damage to property). Where there is a decrease in the average rainfall, for example in southern England, heavier rain fall is expected, increasing the likelihood of flash flooding. Higher sea levels are very likely resulting in more coastal flooding.

10. Such dramatic changes to the climate will not be reversed. The changes and their impact need to be understood and factored into emergency response plans. Met Offices and planners can warn the public but the key factor is how the public change behaviour in the face of warnings to reduce the impact of a weather-related disaster.

11. Acts of **Terrorism** have increased in recent years as a result of Al Quada and its affiliates, for instance the bombings in Madrid (March 2004) and London (July 2005), and the sieges that occurred at the Moscow Dubrovka theatre (2002) and the school at Beslan (2004). Thus the risks are greater and planners need to factor in the way terrorists adapt their methodology; the terrorists involved in the Beslan siege, for example, learnt lessons from the response to the Moscow Theatre siege choosing the building carefully so that it could not be penetrated by special forces from underground, using dogs as indicators of gas, *and* making the children stand at the windows to prevent armed entry.

12. The potential use of CBRN by a terrorist group also has to be factored into the response planning of a terrorist incident. Whilst the threat of such an attack is perceived differently across the EU the reality is that a CBRN incident in one EU country could impact

on another; Chernobyl, albeit an industrial accident, demonstrates this only too well¹. Response plans to a CBRN incident need to consider: prevention; detection (through static detectors, first responders and specialist support); and response including the setting up of hot/warm/cold zones, decontamination units, personal protective equipment, and medical countermeasures such as nerve agent antidote or resuscitation equipment. If a CBRN agent is used covertly the need to carry out epidemiological testing will delay the response. CBRN can cause mass anxiety in the population even if the number of fatalities might be relatively small. It should be recognised that the CBRN threat comes as much from a disgruntled individual or employee in a related industry as it does from terrorism.

13. **Industrial accidents** can create a significant impact both locally, and potentially more widely as was demonstrated by the Buncefield oil depot incident in December 2005. Large-scale damage was caused not only to the fuel depot but also to surrounding commercial areas, with resultant loss of business².

14. Increasingly environmental impacts on air and water quality need to be considered in industrial accidents and other disasters. This was highlighted in the Buncefield incident with the smoke plume and its potential to drift over France. The Fire Service and other responders needed to be aware that there was a danger in contaminating London's water supplies. (This occupied about 80% of the operational response planning). Health aspects also need to be factored into the response to Fire and Police officers on such an occasion.

15. **Disasters overseas:** In addition to disasters occurring "at home" there is an increasing risk of European citizens becoming caught up in disasters when abroad, not least because of the volume of travel overseas. The UK estimates that 13 million British citizens live and work abroad and 65 million overseas trips are made (three times as many as ten years ago). By 2030 this is predicted to rise to 100 million trips. The risk of them being affected by a natural or man-made disaster therefore rises.

Responding effectively to disasters: what improvements are needed?

16. A number of key areas relating to the response to a disaster were examined during the conference through the use of case studies and analysis of particular aspects of the disaster, from planning, exercises and leadership to the need to evacuate citizens, and support *affected* foreigners.

¹ The CBRN threat comes from the potential use of chemical agents (such as mustard, nerve agents of industrial chemicals), biological agents (eg anthrax, botulinum, plague, smallpox, tularaemia), radiological (dirty bomb or emplacement device) or a nuclear improvised device in a terrorist incident.

² Buncefield was a key fuel depot supplying Heathrow Airport and there has been a significant knock-on effect through disruption of fuel supplies.

17. While it is recognised that **planning** to respond to a disaster is critical the question remains how far the planning should go. Some key findings emerged:

- There may be more need to prepare for the worst case scenario rather than preparing for the most likely one; for example the Buncefield oil depot fire demonstrates that planning for a single tank fire was not appropriate when 15 both out of a total of 22 tanks caught fire, and both pumping houses were destroyed. (Some of the buildings that were destroyed were major incidents in their own right.) Hurricane Katrina in the USA in August 2005, the single largest natural disaster in the USA, covered 90,000 square miles (the size of Great Britain), displacing 771,000 people;
- More planning may be needed, based on the unpredictable of disasters; to help in thinking through possible unimagined risks and scenarios of possible disasters film-makers could be asked for advice;
- Whatever planning does take place, there needs to be real flexibility to “think outside the box” and allow for the scalability of different aspects of the response in a real crisis;
- For planners at national and local level a crucial question is “what is enough?” Who should decide and how? Using a risk-based approach to plan has been at the centre of UK preparedness over the last few years. Planning assumptions are based around the key risks which are likely to have a significant impact. In the UK, pandemic flu and terrorist attacks are currently at the top of the 100 or so risks identified. Once these risks are identified, the statutory responders (the key ones being police, fire, ambulance and local authorities) create a generic multi-agency emergency planning, organised on the basis of local and regional areas. They should agree which agency has responsibility for “warning and informing” the public on which issues. They also plan for effective business continuity. The national risk assessment is updated annually;
- Plans are only as good as those who are familiar with them; they need to be broadcast more widely beyond planners and responders to those who may *be affected by them*.

18. The need for **exercises** to test the plans and preparedness measures and to develop multi-agency working between the responders is well known. Such exercises have to be as real as possible, and the same scenario should not be exercised twice it is suggested. Lessons from such exercises need to be factored into future plans. Persuading politicians and senior management to be involved in such exercises is not easy; in Italy they simulate earthquakes to help politicians visualise the impact, and ensure publicity around such exercises. International observers should also be encouraged to share expertise to ensure awareness of national methods etc should international support be needed.

19. **Learning lessons** from previous emergencies, and exercises, is critically important, but it needs to be recognised that the solution for one emergency may not necessarily be the solution for the next. Practical lessons, for example for the Fire and Rescue Services in the UK after the Buncefield incident, where the value of high volume pumps and mutual aid arrangements for fire services across the UK were demonstrated, can be taken forward in future planning. Capturing multi-agency lessons, in addition to lessons learnt within an agency, are critical and need to be fed into planning and future exercises. Learning not blaming is also recommended. Sharing lessons learned more widely is invaluable; for example lessons from the London bombings have been shared more widely with EU.

20. Across EU member states there are different approaches to emergency response. Whatever the organisational structure this needs to be robust and comprehensive. The UK's preparedness measures have developed significantly over the last few years following a variety of emergencies in 2000-1 including foot and mouth disease, flooding and fuel protests and 9/11. Central government increasingly needed to take the lead in creating a national strategy enhancing capabilities ready to cope with natural disasters or human-made ones. A new statutory framework, the Civil Contingencies Act, 2004, and accompanying regulations, which came into force in late 2005, aims to guide the local response and recovery across the UK by setting a clear set of responsibilities and expectations.

21. **Crisis leadership** is a core competence needed by strategic and tactical commanders of incidents (known as GOLD and SILVER in England and Wales), by politicians and by Ambassadors responding to the needs of their citizens caught up in disasters overseas. Taking difficult decisions about complex situations and at speed is difficult for risk averse government organisations and entities.

22. Those likely to play leadership roles, including politicians, need training. Involving those who have experience in responding to crises in that training can be valuable. Politicians also need to be trained in managing crises if they are to provide effective leadership during a crisis. The relationship between politicians and the lead responder is critical and there is a real need to avoid inappropriate political interference. Whilst politicians should visit the scene of an incident to understand better the circumstances and demonstrate support for the response too many visits can hamper first responders. Politicians need to understand the professionals better, and the impact of any promises they make to citizens as a crisis unfolds.

23. Politicians and national government departments need to be aware of the burdens their constant requests for information can have on those dealing with the incident. Such information is needed but should be called for in a structured and regular manner, *avoiding duplication*. If not, “feeding the beast” of the government machine can be extremely burdensome on the first-line of responders.

24. The staffing of the response becomes critically important. Lessons from recent incidents include:

- the duty of care governments and NGOs etc have for their staff operating in the response. The occupational health of staff needs to be considered as part of the planning and should be monitored during a crisis;
- ensuring a fair division of labour particularly amongst government officials who are unused to working a 24/7 rota system.

25. Ensuring effective **communications** between all the responders, through shared technology, remains a critical issue. The response to the Moscow theatre siege of 2002 suffered through the failure of information exchange between the special forces storming the complex, and the rescuers sent in to evacuate the hostages. The response to the Madrid bombings was hampered by the incorrect use of communications with only 1 out of a possible 10 channels being used and the mobile network jamming.

26. **Evacuations – when and why?** Careful consideration is needed as to whether it would be appropriate to evacuate members of the public in the event of a domestic emergency. In the UK much of the planning for an evacuation, or dispersal of public areas, was based on a terrorist incident and followed the habit of Northern Irish terrorists to issue warnings. In terms of non-terrorism emergencies principal risks arise from flooding. It is assessed that there are relatively few scenarios in Europe whereby large-scale evacuation of the public would be necessary or appropriate; more likely the message would be “go indoors, stay in, tune in”. The most likely evacuation scenario would be as a result of severe flooding. A chemical or nuclear release could also spark evacuation where plumes of contaminants were predicted to head in a certain direction.

27. If large-scale evacuation is to take place it needs time, warning and resources to evacuate effectively. Evacuations are difficult to achieve in an orderly and timely³ fashion; people die during the course of evacuation through road accidents, exacerbation of existing

³ A table-top exercise evacuating a large London hospital notionally took 3 days to evacuate the whole hospital.

medical conditions or even stampedes. Lessons from evacuations ahead of and after hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the USA are useful. A flexible toolkit of options is needed whereby plans can be scaled up if necessary, particularly to support those who will not be able to evacuate themselves. Evacuation of those from hospitals, schools, prisons etc or those with special needs and the most vulnerable need extremely careful planning. Managing public expectations during such an evacuation is critical; for evacuations to work they need to be mandatory rather than recommendations. Questions which need to be addressed include: What sort of government help is needed and how should it be provided? How can local authorities put plans in place to provide long-term shelter and enter into reciprocal agreements with neighbouring local authority areas? What about pets as this could affect how personal decisions are made about evacuation?

28. Increasing numbers of foreigners are caught up in disasters occurring within EU borders. One in four of the victims in the 7 July bombings in London were from overseas. Who supports them, and liaises with their consulates etc needs to be worked through in national and local response plans. Whilst government departments might look to Foreign Ministries for support, such departments traditionally do “overseas” not domestic. Foreign Ministries can assist with liaising with local consulates etc but are not equipped to support the needs of foreign victims and their families. This gap in planning needs to be addressed. Policies need to include access to interpreters, cultural awareness, and the possible need for repatriation.

29. How to promote **personal preparedness and resilience** to disasters is an important aspect disaster planners and responders need to address. How can they encourage a change of behaviour in the public at large? Greater education about the risks of potential disasters and preparedness measure is needed. For example knowledge of “civil defence” by the hostages in the Russian theatre siege in 2002 helped save lives. Discussion about disasters should be included in the school curriculum and local planners and responders are encouraged to be involved in this, for example developing support material for use by schools. Theme parks such as Weatherworld, in Devon, can also be used as an educational tool to raise public consciousness as can national and local media. The media can also help ensure that memories of previous disasters are not forgotten. Insurance companies can also drive changes in behaviour, for example whether to insure certain areas where new buildings might be sited or supporting the introduction of stricter building codes to withstand weather-related disasters.

30. The **longer-term response and recovery** needs to be factored into the initial response and suitable measures should be taken to ensure a co-ordinated, longer term response and a smooth handover to appropriate authorities. For example, after Buncefield the police GOLD commander handed over to the Local Authority once the fires were extinguished, but contaminated water still needed to be dealt with (the site was in the hands of the depot owners); 450 businesses were affected, 80 severely with 25,000 workers displaced, and a number of people still homeless 2 months after the incident.

Supporting victims

31. Of key importance in any response is the support for the survivors and bereaved, whether they are caught up in a disaster at home or abroad. Their needs should be taken into account from the start. These can include:

- safety and provision of immediate assistance;
- access to clear information; particularly if someone is “missing”;
- practical help such as accommodation for family members;
- being offered choices (eg do the bereaved want to see the body of a loved one, or to see photos etc);
- non-judgemental assistance;
- practical emotional first aid after the first few hours or days (not necessarily full-blown counselling)⁴ ;
- financial help such as Disaster Trust Funds, or, as in the US federal assistance for home damage through the Disaster Relief Act;
- respect for the locality, culture and religion.

32. Of critical importance is the first contact between the individual or family affected and the state. Guiding principles for responders and officials working with survivors and the bereaved are: treat people as you would wish to be treated; avoid turning a disaster into a tragedy; and “its not what you say but how you say it”. If things go wrong officials should be prepared to admit it; that can help the longer-term relationship. Working with the bereaved and survivors, and managing their expectations, is a long-term operation. Government departments need to work together so that a package of support can be delivered. This is especially so for those caught up in disasters abroad who need continued but different support when they return home.

⁴ Acute distress and trauma can last up to 3 months after a crisis; early intervention can reduce the likelihood of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) but full therapy or counselling may not be appropriate early on. About one third of those suffering from PTSD will have it for the rest of their lives, becoming a major public health issue for government.

33. On many occasions a self-help group is likely to be created after a disaster whether to work together on a memorial, carry out lobbying or pursue legal action. Using their personal experience, such groups can be extremely valuable in helping responders understand the needs of those caught up in an emergency. The groups can also help provide corporate memory to ensure lessons are learnt; not lost when staff changes take place.

34. In longer-term public health interventions to support the survivors and the bereaved the aim should be to: do no harm; minimise distress and uncertainty; *and* minimise separation and displacement; take account of the understandings of what happens to people who are traumatised by disasters. In establishing a trauma management strategy after a disaster care is needed to ensure survivors do not become patients.

Building partnerships

35. Major emergencies stretch government resources enormously. Increasingly there is a need for partnerships between governments, whether at national or local level, with the voluntary and private sectors.

36. **The Voluntary sector** have traditionally played a crucial role in crisis response and that continues to grow in coverage and professionalism. The voluntary sector can offer:

- search and rescue (at sea or on land);
- medical support ;
- psycho-social support; from setting up one-stop family assistance centres (as after 7 July bombings) to supporting victims through trauma to providing bedding and food, and the care of animals;
- and communications, both through the radio amateur network (RAYNET) and through the provision of interpreters.

37. The voluntary sector's support can be extensive at a local and community level and provide diverse skills and expertise, often at a niche level. Models of partnership and co-operation with governments are different across the EU; in Austria for example there is a long tradition of voluntary organisations being the backbone in disaster relief, in Sweden the voluntary sector is more predominant at a national rather than local level. State organisations are encouraged to work in true partnership with the voluntary sector rather than seeing them as a cheap solution. In the UK the voluntary sector has been formally incorporated into the Civil Contingencies Act and at local level voluntary sector representatives participate in the Local Resilience Forums.

38. The British Red Cross has also convened a national Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum to link representatives of main voluntary organisations. This is a commendable model which acts to develop a voice for the voluntary sector and provide a single point of contact for government, thus enabling capacity and capabilities to be identified whilst enabling the sector to retain its independence. Challenges for the sector include: declining numbers of volunteers; questions of insurance cover; whether organisations should charge authorities for their services.

39. Organisations such as the national Red Cross society in each country can also play a part in helping to manage individual volunteers or groups who emerge at the time of a disaster and whose contribution needs to be managed within the overall framework of the response.

40. The **private sector** also has much to offer during the response phase in what has become predominately a phase driven by the public sector. How the private sector should interface with the public sector planners and responders is important, not least because they are sometimes seen as competitors. The private sector can offer: speed and effective logistics; flexibility and resources; practical humanitarian and other assistance such as call centres and temporary mortuaries; and diversity of experience. The private sector can also provide logistics to ensure the provision of key commodities such as food and water especially in a large-scale incident and provide total asset visibility⁵. The private sector can also help the government manage the message to the public, and their expectations.

41. Private resources in the delivery of some parts of a response can be more cost effective. Governments do not have to pay for the long-term infrastructure in between disasters and can “buy in” as necessary. It is recommended that the public sector responders have more formal arrangements with private sector providers, which could include security and protection companies, to manage expectations and ensure appropriate delivery before, during and after a disaster.

42. **The military** are another key partner in response. Whilst EU countries have different experiences and practices, a key lesson arising from the response to Hurricane Katrina was that the military should have been involved earlier in the response. However their capabilities, and limitations, need to be understood by civilian planners and responders.

⁵ For the US government response, dependent on contract truckers, this was critical after Hurricane Katrina.

Assistance from overseas

43. Help in the response to a domestic disaster may be needed from **overseas**. Lessons from the international support after Hurricane Katrina are instructive: developed countries have very little experience of accepting donations⁶ of food, temporary shelter, telecommunications etc. A process to integrate international support is needed; that should start with requests being made by the country hit rather than donations offered - a “pull not push” approach. Practical issues need to be thought through as part of the planning phase of a disaster to ensure:

- common standards and operability;
- effective tracking system of items including ensuring manifests are provided of what is arriving;
- the “pre-clearance” of donations through customs etc
- and ability to deal with cash donations.

44. In response to Hurricane Katrina, the USA domestic responders involved the US Office for Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which is more used to sending US humanitarian assistance overseas rather than managing assistance coming from overseas. Other countries could benefit from involving their humanitarian response experts in national planning.

The role of the media

45. **The media** has become a critical player during a disaster and its response phase. A disaster makes a good media story because it is ‘bad’ news. Media providers, operating 24/7, have a constant appetite for news in a race to fill airtime – described as a “race for space”. During a real time crisis the media are relied upon to provide up to date information by responders and politicians as well as the public. The complexities of how the media report a disaster and the subsequent response are increasing with citizen journalists becoming “bearers of witness”, filming events as they unfold using their mobile phones and videocams to feed the media with pictures. For the traditional media outlets this produces huge challenges in terms of filtering and verifying the information and dilemmas in terms of what to show to meet the growing appetite for information⁷. This complexity will only increase with cutting edge developments in new media such as WIMAX where amateur broadcasters can set up a webcam on a laptop and broadcast on the internet live via wireless for example. This new breed of citizen journalism will not be bound by voluntary agreements to limit reporting or real-time broadcasting in times of national emergency. In a

⁶ 151 nations offered assistance to the US

⁷ In the first hour after the 7 July bombings the BBC received 1000 film images, 3000 texts, 20 video clips and 20,000 e-mails.

terrorist hostage situation terrorists can take their own films added complexities to governments and media alike.

46. Whilst news space needs to be filled it has been inadvisable for those responsible for the response to a disaster to let the media drive the story alone. Commanders of incidents need to have centralised communication that delivers one common message from all the agencies to the media. This can help manage public perceptions and expectations. Getting information wrong can be devastating, as was demonstrated during the tragedy at the West Virginia Mine in January 2006. Responders also increasingly need to recognise that their actions will be more transparent through media filming, and that those at the centre of the decision-making will feel very vulnerable, depending heavily on the pictures they see ahead of receiving official briefings.

Disasters abroad – improving the response

47. Responding to a disaster abroad affecting EU citizens is little different to the response to an emergency at home; however Foreign Ministries and their Consular teams are effectively new players in emergency response. The Asian Tsunami of December 2004 was a wake up call for many EU governments about how to provide a response to their citizens far away.

48. Each country has learnt from the Tsunami response; more than 20 EU countries mounted substantial operations to support their nationals who had survived and identify and repatriate the bodies of those who had not. With over 1700 foreigners in Thailand from 36 countries this was an incredibly complex forensic and identification challenge. The Finnish government, for example, worked in partnerships with travel agents, Finnair, the Church and Red Cross to evacuate over 3000 citizens in 5 days. 178 Finns lost their lives. The UK, with 150 deaths representing the biggest loss of life abroad in peacetime, involved the UK Police in dealing with identification and repatriation of bodies. Family liaison officers assigned by the police became very important points of contact. This was the largest peace-time deployment of UK police overseas, over 500, and cost £30 million.

49. There are different Foreign Ministry practices in terms of deploying their own key staff in support of their citizens abroad. For example the UK Foreign Office has set up Rapid Deployment Teams (RDTs)⁸. Challenges emerge in how one country's response is perceived by the citizens of another. The Tsunami response led to comparisons between what different EU countries were doing. The UK sent a rapid deployment team to Mexico

⁸ UK RDTs were deployed 5 consecutive weekends in autumn 2005 in response to hurricanes and bombings etc.

ahead of Hurricane Wilma in October 2005; the USA was criticised for sending their team later.

50. Whilst victims expect a national response, for smaller EU countries providing consular support to their citizens around the world is not feasible. More opportunities for co-operation, as for example Finnish support for Estonians affected by the Tsunami, is likely.

51. Increasingly in response to an overseas disaster, partnerships with travel and insurance industries need to be developed, including involvement in assisting with evacuations from overseas.

52. As expectations of the rights of victims grow (including around compensation) governments need to consider what they can realistically offer. If a joined-up approach is to be offered to support the survivors and bereaved from the place of the disaster, through repatriation and replacement of documents for example, to their home with counselling and police support etc (and ongoing) then the link between the response overseas and that at home has to be strengthened.

53. The UK government has outlined the rights and responsibilities of British travellers overseas, including following travel advice and taking out insurance for example. Complex issues still have to be addressed, including providing appropriate support for dual nationals⁹.

54. Hostage taking of EU nationals, particularly those involving a number of nationals, such as in 2003 in Algeria where six different nationals were hostages for six months, also needs careful and clear co-ordination and communication of the response between affected countries and their relevant organisations.

Improving the response at home and abroad

55. Additional factors to be considered in improving the emergency response, whether at home or abroad, include:

- The ability to manage calls from the public in the early hours of an incident; in UK the Casualty Bureau, set up after 9/11, could not cope in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami receiving more than 17,000 calls per hour. A technological web-based solution has now been introduced in the UK. Such systems, used also by others, for example the US Consular service for US citizens caught up in disaster overseas, can be invaluable.

⁹ This guide was published on 21 March 2006 and is available on www.fco.gov.uk

Those referred to as “self-reports” (eg family members reporting) are likely to take more care in filling in forms. Face to face support however was preferred in the USA after Hurricane Katrina;

- the costs of responding to a large scale disaster need to be borne in mind throughout the response even if at the outset “just do it” is usually the necessary cry. There can be a tendency to abandon financial considerations when caught up in a crisis, but they should be kept under scrutiny as financial decisions are likely to be scrutinised and audited at a later date. The UK police expenditure in response to the Tsunami was £33 million (£200,000 per British person who died);
- evaluating the capabilities of responders may need further consideration; what capability is expected or needed? Who can measure this? Are self assessments valid or is there a need for greater external validation of plans of government at national and local level and the plans of individual responder organisations;
- Disaster victim identification, based on DNA, fingerprints, dental records as primary identifiers, can be very difficult when foreign nationals are involved. The ability to interrogate records such as credit cards and mobile phones can be useful;
- for those missing abroad, who may have been caught up in a disaster, passing a message to the user when their credit card is next used, to get in contact with the authorities might be successful;
- Advice on health and air quality etc needs to be made available quickly to Police Commanders (or the overall commander); “off-the-shelf” advice should be prepared in advance. Scientists are used to provide considered advice, which is too slow in real-time situations (lessons from Buncefield);
- Urban search and rescue (S & R) teams are trained for searching collapsed buildings rather than in water; lessons from the flooding after Hurricane Katrina suggest S & R teams might consider the role they can play in rescuing after a flood in support of other agencies.

What more can be done at the EU level?

56. At the EU level more co-operation in crisis management and response should be encouraged, with the aim of strengthening the ability of the EU collectively to provide support when a disaster strikes one EU member state, and to be able to offer a more co-ordinated approach to a disaster overseas affecting EU citizens.

57. There is relatively good communication and sharing of information about emergencies across the EU, including through the Situation Centre of the European Council, and more informally between practitioners through joint exercises and lessons learned

meetings. However at a strategic level the EU collective response is limited, not least because of the differing models of organisation at national level. The different terms used across Europe, crisis management, civil protection or emergency response, highlight the different approaches. Michel Barnier, former EU Commissioner, has recently been tasked by the European Commissioner to produce a report on the role and means of the EU in civilian crisis management. This should help the EU develop its crisis management and disaster response approach further. Some question the appropriateness of civil protection in its widest form being handled in the European Commission by the Environment Directorate and call for one individual in the EU to be appointed, directly responsible to the Commissioner, to lead and co-ordinate an EU response in support of national responses. Such a co-ordinator would need a team of experts. Care is needed when working outside the EU to work closely with the United Nations (Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs taking the lead in co-ordinating the international response to disasters). Also there is a need to work more closely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which is developing its own disaster response work through its Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Co-ordination Centre, deploying to Pakistan to support humanitarian operations in October 2005 for instance.

58. Bilateral initiatives have become more widespread and the example of the Tri-lateral agreement created between Italy, France, Spain to co-operate over forest fires, floods or earthquakes could be expanded, and built on as an example. A Mediterranean Civil Protection unit for example could be used both inside and outside the EU, it is suggested. Other partnerships could develop in respect of floods and storms affecting Central Europe for example, or large-scale environmental damage in Nordic countries. The recent British and current Austrian Presidencies of the EU both focused on building structures to co-operate across the EU, both for disasters within the EU and those affecting EU citizens abroad, and the development of the EU Ad Hoc Common Understanding Platform is seen as a positive way forward.

59. More could be done at the EU level to improve EU emergency response capacities at home and abroad:

- through the setting of common standards across the EU with guidelines of best practice and benchmarks;
- by addressing deficiencies in EU response; this could be done by a means of evaluation, with some form of enforcement considered;
- by supporting new EU members, and prospective members with the build up of their civil protection/emergency response capacities;
- developing further common training and EU-wide exercises;

- developing common capacity which could be deployed to an EU country or abroad;
- developing more specialisation of response to share across borders, for example in response to the terrorist threat to transport systems, critical infrastructure or big popular events including sporting fixtures. The highly prepared decontamination units set up by the Czechs could be an example of smaller EU countries developing a particular niche role.

60. Initiatives to connect NGOs across Europe are welcomed such as the Civil Protection Forum with organisations from 30 European states making suggestions on a range of actions which could be taken to raise public awareness. A recent report organised by the British Red Cross, focused on NGOs working together across the EU to support individuals in an emergency or disaster. This recommended that a consistent level of care across Europe was needed, together with common terms and practices; and more needed to be done to strengthen the ability of individuals and communities to look after themselves¹⁰.

61. The response to the Tsunami demonstrated the need for greater co-ordination at EU level when supporting citizens abroad. Could more be done to co-ordinate evacuations from overseas to save time and resources? This is likely to be limited when political pressure is placed on officials, especially in the larger EU countries, to provide a national response. Or when local media criticise official actions; for example when UK citizens were brought back in German organised planes. Pooling of specialist expertise and resources on the ground could be one way forward.

Conclusion

62. There is a growing need to link the response to disasters whether occurring domestically or internationally. Nature and terrorists do not respect borders, EU citizens travel overseas in larger numbers, and the environmental impact of a disaster affecting air or water can be felt far away. Managing a crisis and responding effectively needs a coherent government response. End-to-end management is needed throughout the response at home or abroad. Flexibility in adapting the response to the situation, and working in new partnerships at local, national and European level will be important in large-scale disasters.

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Wilton Park Reports are brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of a conference. The reports reflect rapporteurs' personal interpretations of the proceedings – as such they do not constitute any institutional policy of Wilton Park nor do they necessarily represent the views of rapporteurs.

¹⁰ www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/civil/prote/cpactiv/cpact03.htm