

## *Civil Protection and EU-Latin American Relations*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Political cooperation between the EU and different Latin American regional groups has aimed, for some time, to identify areas for a common agenda that might establish a basis for joint initiatives at the international level or for coordinating positions on issues of common interest in international forums, particularly in the United Nations (UN). This is clearly the case of EU-Andean Community (AC)<sup>1</sup> and EU-Mercosur<sup>2</sup> relations, as well as the EU-Central America dialogue.<sup>3</sup> To a large extent, attempts to establish areas of convergence for concerted action with other regional groups reflect the EU vision of how the international system should be organised. The European Security Strategy<sup>4</sup> is based on the concept of “effective multilateralism”, meaning that the development of a stronger international society calls for effective international institutions and a rule-based international order as the best antidotes against current security threats. Given the variety of existing frameworks for cooperation established over the past decades, Latin America is, at least potentially, a privileged partner for putting these principles into practice. More often than not, however, the practical implementation of the declarations of intention made in official documents is at best modest. Explanations for this state of affairs are many, and range from the lack of political will to launch concrete measures to lack of resources or simply an inability to forge common positions on major international topics.

This paper analyses civil protection cooperation as a field for practical cooperation between the two regions and as a privileged area for multilateral action. Despite the obvious potential (and need) for transnational action, multilateral mechanisms to deal with natural and man-made disasters are still clearly insufficient, as recent major catastrophes have shown. The report of the UN Secretary-General on the lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in December 2004<sup>5</sup> acknowledged the need to improve regional and international capacities to respond to emergencies. At the same time, the EU vision of the international system requires strong international organisations, capable of acting whenever necessary.

The main argument made here is that, since both European and Latin American countries regularly face major national disasters that require assistance efforts that cannot be met solely at the national level, they should make good use of existing regional integration schemes to promote the reinforcement of multilateral mechanisms to facilitate the effective assistance to the victims of such disasters. Thus, assistance should rely not on ad hoc arrangements to deal with emergencies as they arise, but rather on previously existing structures. It will be shown that over the years Europe and Latin America have developed instruments to facilitate and coordinate civil protection international assistance for relief and recovery efforts in countries of the region struck by natural disasters. In the case of Europe, disaster relief cooperation is a topic of increasing political salience, as it is in the debates about the European Union role in combating terrorism. Thus, the next step should be to raise the issue in the political dialogue within various existing cooperation frameworks between the two sides of the Atlantic and; on the other hand, proposals should be presented to strengthen leadership to coordinate the international humanitarian system based in the UN.

The paper begins with a presentation of basic facts about civil protection and then traces the evolution of cooperation in this field, both at the EU level and in Latin America, in order to

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<sup>1</sup> As stated in the *EU-Andean Community Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement*, Quito, October 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See *Joint Declaration on political dialogue between the European Union and Mercosur*, Madrid, December 1995.

<sup>3</sup> See *EU-Central America Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement*, Rome, December 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, December 2003.

<sup>5</sup> *Strengthening Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Recovery and Prevention in the Aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster*, Report of the UN Secretary General, June 2005.

assess the potential for cooperation and dialogue between the two sides. It concludes with a number of suggestions for future action in the context of the relevant bi-regional frameworks.

## II. Civil Protection as a Policy Area

### *Types and Functions of Civil Protection*

There is no universal definition of civil protection. In fact, the diversity of national structures set up to deal with civil protection tasks show that different countries have varying notions of what it means and entails. In broad terms, it can be said that civil protection (or 'civil defence' as it is referred to in some countries) entails the guarantee of adequate means to ensure the safety of populations (and property) from disasters and dangers or risks to which they may be subjected. However, it is probably more useful to define civil protection according to its functions and targets rather than with an all encompassing statement.

In general terms, one can divide disasters that require civil protection intervention into four major groups: natural disasters, technological disasters, public health disasters and criminal disasters.<sup>6</sup> These categories should in no way be seen as rigid, since many disasters belong to more than one. Natural disasters represent the most common type and result from *phenomena* such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, wild fires or heat and cold waves. With the advance of science and technology, the capacity to predict and prevent this type of disasters has improved considerably, although there is a tendency for such occurrences to increase given intense urbanisation and mass pollution, among other causes. Global warming is also often presented as a cause for climate instability experienced by various regions of the world in recent years. It is expected that the continuation of this process of global warming will make natural disasters more common in the future.<sup>7</sup> Technological disasters include radioactive accidents, transportation accidents, nuclear accidents or the leakage of hazardous materials, as well as environmental degradation. Technological accidents are sometimes the main cause of natural disasters, such as landslides after the construction of roads and other infrastructures. Public health disasters can be caused by the rapid spread of highly contagious diseases such as SARS or Avian flu. These kinds of pandemics may have serious repercussions on community foundations, and an enormous capacity to disrupt economic activities. Health disasters may also originate from terrorist attacks with biological weapons. Finally, catastrophes with criminal origins can result from terrorist acts, vandalism and large-scale fraud, such as the unauthorised use of computer systems for the spread of computer viruses or the disruption of basic services (such as the Chechen claim to have caused the power failure in Moscow in May 2005). What is important to retain from this typology is that civil protection services must be ready to intervene in a wide variety of situations that cover most aspects of social life. Some of the accidents described above are the consequence of modern technologies and may possess a transnational character, forcing civil protection services to constantly improve their methods and instruments of combat.

The *functions* of civil protection are also varied and include prevention, management during and after the disasters, mitigation and training. The prevention of natural and man-made disasters requires a regular analysis of the dangers and risks to which countries or region are subject, as well as general and specific rescue plans to avoid hazardous interventions. Disaster management involves a command structure and sharing of responsibilities between the various protagonists. In view of the increasing number of actors likely to be involved in a disaster a command unit is necessary to ensure the efficiency of rescue operations. To mitigate the effects of a disaster affected States must provide moral and material support to the victims and to promote the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the disaster area. Basic training or the ongoing

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<sup>6</sup> *Os desafios da protecção civil: uma perspectiva europeia*, Report prepared by IEEI for the Portuguese Ministry of the Interior, December 2003.

<sup>7</sup> A study by the European Environmental Agency published in 2004 suggests that on present trends global average temperatures might rise by 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius by the end of the twentieth-first century. Quoted in Antonio Missiroli, *Disasters, Diseases and Disruptions: a new D-drive for the EU*, Chaillot Paper 83, Institute for Security Studies, Paris, September 2005.

training of rescue teams is the best guarantee of highly effective crisis management. The State's responsibility for training may be complemented by bilateral collaboration with other States.

### ***Organising International Solidarity***

Devastating natural disasters are part of the collective memory of every human society. Devising ways to prevent and contain such disasters, and the organisation of services to combat their effects and to assist those affected were traditionally the concern and the responsibility of the affected populations themselves. With the development of the modern State, such functions have been transferred progressively to the latter and, to some extent, justify the organisation of individuals into political entities. In other words, civil protection embodies one of the core functions of the State enshrined in most modern constitutions – guaranteeing the security of its citizens. It is not surprising therefore that the notion of national responsibility for assisting disaster victims within the boundaries of the state is universally accepted. This obligation is clearly reflected in Resolution 2034 (XX) of 7 December 1965 of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, which calls upon Member States to “envisage the possibility of establishing an appropriate national planning and operational system best adapted to their particular situation, with a view to defining the scope and nature of the assistance required and to centralise the management of rescue operations.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite the recognition of the prime responsibility of the State in dealing with disasters within its territorial boundaries, the development of relations between different states and the transnational dimension of many disasters has fostered a kind of ‘international solidarity’, which has evolved into organised assistance from states to the territory of the state affected by natural or man-made disasters. As the number of transnational risks facing states grows, it becomes clear that there is a limit to the national capacity to provide an adequate response to the consequences of disasters. As Missiroli recalls, the organisation of solidarity efforts can take various forms: bilateral, multilateral and broadly international.<sup>9</sup> Solidarity in relief efforts was at first directed at neighbouring regions, but has gradually widened and it is possible to speak today of ‘global solidarity’ towards the victims of major catastrophes. The global solidarity campaign in reaction to the Indian Ocean tsunami in early 2005 is probably the strongest and most complex example of this trend.

The need to coordinate foreign assistance emerges as a result of the fact that a natural disaster in a specific country (especially if the country in question has few means to face the consequences of the disaster) triggers assistance from a variety of countries all over the world. Civil protection services have established a network of contacts, and international organisations, namely the UN, attempt to co-ordinate international assistance on the ground. This paper focuses primarily on EU efforts to co-ordinate assistance, but other regional organisations such as NATO<sup>10</sup> also have schemes to increase the efficiency of multilateral efforts to respond to catastrophes inside or outside the boundaries of its member states. Similar arrangements have been developed in other parts of the world, the most advanced of which can be found in Asia and Latin America (assessed below). At a more global level, the International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO) provides an umbrella for national civil protection services that aims to promote disaster prevention, to strengthen the capacity building of national services and foster international cooperation on civil protection matters.<sup>11</sup> In short, there is a clear tendency to organise disaster relief efforts at various levels – national, regional and global – which has resulted in a plethora of organisations and initiatives. This does not mean that the willingness to

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<sup>8</sup> See: International Civil Defence Organisation, *The Role of the State in the Field of Protection and Assistance in Case of Disasters*, at: [www.icdo.org](http://www.icdo.org).

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> In 1998 NATO created the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Co-ordination Centre (EADRCC). EADRCC is a mechanism to facilitate the coordination of disaster relief assistance among the 46 members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. After September 11, 2001, one of the main aims of the Centre has been to train individuals to ensure a coherent response to terrorist attacks. For more details, see: <http://www.nato.int/eadrcc/mcda-e.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> More information, including a detailed mandate of the ICDO, can be found at <http://www.icdo.org/abo.htm>

set up such structures has been matched with a willingness or ability to pool national resources, however, which is a fundamental step for effective multilateral governance in this area.

### ***The Risk of Disaster in Europe and Latin America***

EUROPE regularly faces three main types of natural disasters: earthquakes, forest fires and floods. The regions around the Mediterranean Sea suffer from a higher risk of seismic activity. Current changes in the global climate have led to increased likelihood of forest fires and floods.<sup>12</sup> The very high concentration of populations in urban areas is another factor that makes the region particularly vulnerable to human casualties in the aftermath of natural disasters. Further, the level of economic development and industrialisation increases the scope for technological and environmental disasters considerably. The European continent has suffered various major natural disasters in recent years. Major floods and forest fires are now recurrent *phenomena* in Southern Europe, with record-breaking figures for total burnt land by the fires that ravaged Southern Europe in the summers of 2003 and 2005. Earthquakes have claimed huge losses, both in human life and infrastructure in several European countries in the past decade, such as Italy (1997), Turkey (1999, 2003) and Greece (1999). As for man-made disasters, some of the most tragic examples worldwide have taken place in Europe, such as the explosion of the AZF factory in France (2001), and the chemical spillage in the Mare Bay (Romania and Bulgaria, 2003). Also worth noting are the major maritime pollution caused by oil spillages in France (*Erika*, 1999), and Spain and Portugal (*Prestige*, 2002). The vast majority of these disasters not only call for huge relief and management efforts by affected states but have also involved international co-operation, with most European Union member states sending assistance to the affected state(s), including experts, and financial, medical and material aid.

<b>SOME MAJOR DISASTERS IN EUROPE</b>			
<b>Earthquakes</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of victims</b>	
1999	Greece and Turkey	Over 17 000 dead	
1980	Italy	2 739 dead	
1976	Italy	977 dead	
<b>Floods</b>		<b>Number of victims</b>	
2002	Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, United Kingdom		
2001	Hungary, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom		
2000	France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom		
<b>Landslides</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of victims</b>	
1998	Italy	159 dead	
1976	United Kingdom	144 dead	
1963	Italy	1 759 dead	
<b>Forest fires</b>	<b>Country</b>		
Each year	France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain		
<b>Technical disasters</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of victims</b>	<b>Type</b>
2001	France	29 dead	AZF factory explosion
2000	Hungary, Romania		Baia Mare chemical spill
2000	Netherlands	20 dead	Enschede firework factory explosion
<b>Accidental marine pollution</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of victims</b>	<b>Type</b>
1999	France		Erika shipwreck and oil spill
1996	Coast of Wales		Sea Empress
1993	Shetland		Braer
1992	Coroña		Aegean Sea

Source : *European Commission*

<sup>12</sup> A report from the European Environment Agency (EEA) indicates that the number of weather and climate related disasters in Europe doubled in the 1990s. For more information, see EEA, *EEA Signals 2004*, EEA, May 2004.

The LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN region has suffered considerably more than Europe from natural disasters. Historians now believe that an unusually long and severe drought was a primary cause of the disappearance of the Maya civilization. Because of its geographical conditions, the region is prone to natural events of severe intensity, although experts believe that the large economic and human cost associated with these natural events is mainly the result of extreme vulnerability.

Over the past thirty years alone, there has been an average of 32.4 disasters per year in the region, causing a total of 226,000 fatalities (or around 7,500 deaths a year).<sup>13</sup> Studies have also shown that during the twentieth century there was a tendency for greater frequency, although this may result not from an increase in natural disasters per se but from the poor quality of data covering the first half of the century. Needless to say, natural disasters have entailed an enormous cost for the affected countries, not just because of the magnitude of the catastrophes but also because of weak response mechanisms, at least compared to European standards. Economic effects have also been more substantial than for Europe: indeed, the latter have caused the disruption of economic activity and the loss of capital assets, with obvious short-term effects on GDP growth. In many instances, disasters have also resulted in longer-term economic consequences, such as slower growth, higher indebtedness and increased regional and income inequalities. The most common natural disasters in the region are earthquakes, floods and hurricanes with earthquakes causing by far the largest number of fatalities.<sup>14</sup> However, those affected by other kinds of disasters have sometimes reached enormous proportions (the severe drought in Brazil in 1983 affected over 20 million people, for instance.)<sup>15</sup> Landslides resulting from rainstorms have also been particularly lethal, as illustrated by the example of Venezuela in 1999, where more than 30,000 people died.

<b>Earthquakes</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2004</b>	Costa Rica, Colombia
<b>2001</b>	Peru, El Salvador
<b>Floods</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2005</b>	Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Costa Rica
<b>2004</b>	Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua
<b>2002</b>	Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras
<b>1999</b>	Venezuela
<b>Drought</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2004</b>	Bolivia
<b>Hurricanes</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2004</b>	Caribbean (Tropical storm Jeanne and Charley), hurricane Ivan, hurricane Frances
<b>2001</b>	Caribbean (hurricane Michelle)
<b>1999</b>	Bahamas (hurricane Floyd)
<b>1998</b>	Honduras, Nicaragua (hurricane Mitch)
<b>Technical disasters</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2004</b>	Paraguay

Source: *Inter-American Development Bank*

<sup>13</sup> Figures presented in Céline Charvériat, *Natural Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Overview of Risk*, Working Paper 434, Inter-American Development Bank, October 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Two examples are the case of Peru in 1973 (66,794 deaths) or Guatemala in 1976 (23,000 deaths).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid idem*.

## II. Civil Protection and Regional Integration: Cooperation and Assistance

The scale and recurrence of natural and man-made disasters have triggered the gradual emergence of international solidarity towards the countries and the people affected by those disasters. This kind of solidarity is often spontaneous, consisting of *ad hoc* reactions, as illustrated by the international response to the tsunami in South-East Asia. On a parallel to such initiatives, regional groupings of countries have set-up cooperation mechanisms to reinforce the prevention of disasters and facilitate mutual assistance in case of emergencies. This section briefly examines key developments in this area in Europe and in Latin America, and describes relevant common points between civil protection mechanisms in the two regions. Because the EU has developed more advanced cooperation instruments, it is analysed in more detail and with reference to implications for external relations.

### *The European Experience with Civil Protection Cooperation*

Civil protection as an area for cooperation within the EU is relatively new despite the fact that the Treaty of Rome (1957) mentions the possible adoption by the Community of “measures in the field of energy, civil protection and tourism” (Art. 3 (1), *u*). The text of the European Constitution added to this, introducing an article on civil protection for the first time (Article III-184), stating that the Union “shall encourage co-operation between Member States in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural or man-made disasters within the Union.” Subsequent revisions of the Treaty have added little substance to the focus and modalities for EU civil protection: the Treaties re-state the primary responsibility of Member States in the field and the largely coordinating role of the Union.

In practical terms, and despite the lack of a clear legal basis, there have been attempts to move beyond mere coordination of national initiatives and to develop common instruments for more active cooperation since the 1980s. In December 1997, a Council Decision led to the adoption of the first Community Action Programme for civil protection.<sup>16</sup> The Programme focused on pooling expertise and mutual assistance as the basis of Community action and laid down the objectives of the EU in the field, including: support for disaster prevention and intervention efforts; raising public awareness of the risk of disasters; and establishing a rapid cooperation system between civil protection services of member states

The Action Programme presented the idea of establishing a Community Mechanism to facilitate the coordination of assistance by EU member states to affected countries but it was some years before the plan became a reality. It is worth noting that the Commission proposal was tabled for discussion in September 2000, in the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey in August 1999. The lesson learned from the Turkish case was that disasters of such magnitude required effective centralised coordination of the various national rescue and intervention teams.

It was the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States (interestingly, another event outside the EU) that accelerated the EU Council of Ministers decision of 23 October 2001 to establish a Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions.<sup>17</sup> Although responding to natural disasters was the main focus of the decision, its timing shows the growing concern with terrorism and awareness of the inability of individual EU member States to deal with the various consequences of terrorist attacks. The Mechanism aims to ensure the rapid mobilisation of the necessary operational resources from EU Member States when country resources are insufficient to deal with disasters that take place both inside and outside the EU. Furthermore, it aims to improve interventions by better coordinating the deployment of means, and strengthening communication and training capacities.

In addition to this Mechanism, in 2002 the EU established a Solidarity Fund for the relief of natural and man-made disasters, which provides financial assistance to help people, regions and countries hit by major disasters return to normal living conditions. It can also cover

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<sup>16</sup> See: COM (1999) 400 Final.

<sup>17</sup> Council Decision 2001/792/EC, 23 October 2001.

expenses incurred by member states with emergency operations, such as combating a disaster or restoring of essential infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

The September 11, 2001 attacks also triggered a serious reflection on the suitability of existing civil protection instruments and cooperation mechanisms to deal with the consequences of terrorist attacks. This implied a clear shift both at EU and Member States level from 'classical' civil protection tasks (the prevention, management and mitigation of natural disasters) to the management of consequences of terrorist attacks involving chemical, biological and radio-nuclear weapons.

The new priorities are clearly reflected in the European Constitution "Solidarity Clause" (art. 42), which states that: "Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the victim of a terrorist attack or of a natural or man-made disaster." This clause requires member states to mobilise all instruments at their disposal (including military means) to protect "democratic institutions and the civilian populations from any terrorist attack. In short, this raises the 'solidarity bar' among EU Member States (one of the Union's values as stated in Article 2 of the Constitution) but leaves open the question of how solidarity should be organised.

The reinforcement of the Civil Protection Community Mechanism is currently being discussed at the EU level. Although member states are divided over how centralised the EU role in civil protection actions should be there is a consensus that existing mechanisms and instruments need to be improved and that the EU should gradually develop a common strategy to tackle this type of phenomena. In 2004, the European Commission put forward a package of proposals to improve the CPCM through the reinforcement and upgrading of current structures and increasing the number of training initiatives and joint exercises.<sup>19</sup> Some member states have gone further and proposed the establishment of a European Civil Protection Force (ECPF) with different international units specialising in various types of disasters and ready to intervene within a short time frame (this has met with the resistance of several other countries, however).

One of the problems with this kind of proposal is that they gain momentum in the aftermath of major disasters (forest fires in 2003, the March 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid or the South-East Asia tsunami in late 2004) but tend to lose it once the issue disappears from the front page of newspapers. Moreover, further developing EU capacities in this field would be a costly endeavour, at a time when member states are discussing the reduction of the EU budget. It seems likely, therefore, that there will be improved cooperation among the different national services and the intensification of joint training, but not the creation of new structures.

### ***The Latin American Experience with Civil Protection Cooperation***

Civil protection cooperation mechanisms among Latin American countries are not as developed as those created in the EU as the latter benefits from a pre-existing institutional framework and a long-standing practice of pooling of resources that does not exist on the other side of the Atlantic. To date, regional civil protection efforts have focused mainly on gathering and disseminating information about major natural catastrophes, and on procedures to deal with them. Rather surprisingly, given the communality of natural threats, regional organisations have not made civil protection a priority area for concerted action. The Organisation of American States (OAS), which is active in over 20 different fields, has no initiative in this area. Sub-regional integration projects such as the Mercosur have no schemes or proposals on civil protection,<sup>20</sup> although MERCOSUR member states have set up an Environmental Information System and deal regularly with environmental issues of common interest.

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<sup>18</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Reinforcing the Civil Protection Capacity of the European Union, COM (2004) 200 Final, 25 March 2004.

<sup>19</sup> For details see: "Civil Protection: Commission wants to upgrade the EU's capacity to Respond to Major Disasters," Press Release IP/04/385, 25 March 2005.

<sup>20</sup> At the XII meeting of the Common Market Council held in Montevideo in December 1997, Heads of State of the Mercosur recognised the importance of discussion in sectoral meetings on the development of joint actions in the field of civil protection, but there was no follow up to the statement.

The most relevant and widest civil protection cooperation schemes are the Regional Information Centre on Disasters (*Centro Regional de Información sobre Desastres*, CRID) and the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (*Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central*, CEPREDENAC), established in 1988. The former involves six organisations<sup>21</sup> established in 1997 with the aim of combining efforts to gather and disseminate information on civil protection issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its long-term objective is to develop a culture of disaster prevention in the whole region and to develop a regional system of information on natural disasters that promotes the streamlining of national procedures to deal with such phenomena. Since its inception, CRID has developed a database of existing civil protection resources in the region and published a long list of works and information sheets. One interesting aspect of this initiative is the fact that its members include a mix of national and international, governmental and non-governmental organisations with different areas of expertise. The cross-cutting nature of the Centre allows for a holistic approach to address the different stages of natural disasters and complements information efforts by national authorities. CEPREDENAC, on the other hand, has the more ambitious aim of strengthening of national capacities to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters. As with the CRID, the focus is on disaster prevention, which most studies indicate is the major flaw at the national level. It is an official initiative of the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, and involves two kinds of institutions: those dealing with response capacities and technical-scientific institutions. Apart from an information programme which has resulted in the organisation of various conferences and several publications on disaster prevention, the Centre has coordinated a number of regional programmes of risk reduction, mostly financed by international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union (ECHO). However, its ambition to create a regional response mechanism for natural disasters has remained a mere declaration of intention as member states have not committed the necessary levels of financial and technical resources to bring the project to fruition.

Despite their shortcomings, the two initiatives have revealed the willingness of organisations in the region to reflect about how improve the capacity to deal collectively with disasters that regularly affect the region with devastating consequences. The initiatives of the Central American Coordination Centre in particular make the link between disaster prevention/response and socio-economic development, a crucial element if the vicious circle of disaster-devastation-poverty is ever to be broken.

### ***European-Latin American Civil Protection Links***

Not surprisingly, civil protection has not featured high in bi-regional or bilateral relations, and although the Agreements on Political dialogue of the EU with the three main regional groupings (the Mercosur, the Andean Community and Central America) mention disaster prevention as an area for cooperation. This intention has not materialised in any concrete joint project. Nonetheless, it is important to mention, however, that the EU Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) is one of the most important international contributors to relief operations in Latin America, particularly in the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> ECHO also finances various projects on disaster prevention and risk management at the national and regional levels. These are carried out by DIPECHO (Disaster Preparedness of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office), which focuses on disaster prevention and preparedness to reduce the vulnerability of communities rather than on disaster relief operations. DIPECHO activities are organised at the regional level and of the four regional offices it has around the world, three are located in Latin

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<sup>21</sup> The six organisations are the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), the International Strategy for Disasters Reduction (ISDR), the National Commission for the Prevention of Risks and Emergencies of Costa Rica, the International Federation of National Societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Latin America, and the Regional Emergency Office of Medicines Without Frontiers.

<sup>22</sup> ECHO intervention was particularly strong in the cases of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which destroyed vast areas of Central America and of the El Salvador Earthquake in 2001.

America,<sup>23</sup> which shows that the EU is a relevant partner for most of the countries in the region when dealing with natural disasters.

The Ibero-American Association of Governmental Civil Protection Organisms (*Asociación Iberoamericana de Organismos Gubernamentales de Defensa y Protección Civil*), established in 1996 in the context of the Ibero-American Summits is another sub-regional cooperation project in the field of civil protection. The aims of the Association are to foster scientific and technical cooperation, exchange best practices, and improve human resource skills among all associates. Its main project is the Network Mechanism for Emergency Situations that aims to facilitate cooperation in assistance and relief operations and resembles the EU CPCM. The action plan establishing the project was approved in 2000 but the latter has not been put into practice as yet. If it is ever implemented, it would certainly be the most ambitious cooperation initiative between countries from different geographical regions in the field of civil protection.

### **III. Conclusions, Recommendations and the Way Ahead**

This paper has shown that natural and man-made disasters must be conceived as global phenomena with regional dimensions and consequences. Global warming is now widely recognised as a phenomenon that is making natural disasters more frequent and intense. The situation is likely get worse in the near future. Both Europe and Latin America have experienced this trend first and, with disasters reaching proportions that have very serious negative consequences for local communities and make it very difficult for individual countries to face deal with the aftermath of disaster without external assistance. Strategies to prevent and mitigate such disasters should thus be conceived and implemented not only at national but also at the regional and international levels.

European and Latin American countries have already understood the need for some form of coordinated approach to the handling of natural disasters. Over the last decades, regional and sub-regional schemes have emerged to deal with the challenge, and although there are no joint efforts to combat the effects of disasters there are at least channels that have been established to permit an exchange of experiences and to disseminate relevant information. Making use of the institutional framework provided by the European Union, Europeans have set up a mechanism to facilitate mutual assistance that has proven useful in recent disasters. The European Union has also turned civil protection into a field of cooperation with neighbouring regions, namely the Southern Mediterranean partner countries.<sup>24</sup> Despite the attempts to strengthen cooperation in Latin America, joint efforts have focused essentially on information exchange. Both regions are still far from developing anything that resembles regional civil protection forces, and from pooling national resources in international units ready for rapid intervention in case of catastrophes. Nonetheless, global solidarity towards the victims of natural disasters is powerful as the myriad of initiatives to assist those affected by the 2004 tsunami in South East Asia has shown. That disaster also showed that the international community lacks appropriate mechanisms beyond the national level to address such situations, with obvious consequences for the efficiency of relief operations.

Given all of the above, the following recommendations for a European-Latin American dialogue in the field of civil protection and for a common European-Latin American agenda at the international level are put forward:

- The EU and its Latin American partners should make good use of existing frameworks of cooperation, namely those for EU relations with Mercosur, the Andean Community and Central America, to establish an ongoing dialogue on issues related with the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters. The aim should be the continued strengthening of regional civil protection cooperation.

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<sup>23</sup> They are in the Caribbean, Andean Community and Central America.

<sup>24</sup> This is the Pilot Project for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean system of mitigation, prevention and management of natural and man-made disasters, launched in 1996 as an Italo-Egyptian initiative and implemented in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). For details on the project, see Pedro Courel, *Civil Protection as a Euro-Mediterranean Project: the Case for Practical Cooperation*, EuroMeSCo paper 34, Lisbon, August 2004.

- Bilateral dialogue should begin by identifying issues of common interest based on the work conducted by DIPECHO over the past 10 years. Issues for dialogue should include different sources of risk and the promotion of development policies to reduce human vulnerability to natural disasters. The exchange of best practices should be an integral part of bilateral dialogue, with a particular focus on preventive measures (risk reduction and preparedness), and on existing mechanisms that facilitate regional response capacities in the region and elsewhere. The implementation of concrete measures to strengthen regional mechanisms for civil protection should be a regular topic for debate.
- A concrete field for practical cooperation is training and expert exchange programmes that take advantage of existing bilateral initiatives.<sup>25</sup> Training courses on specific natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, forest fires) could be organised by individual national civil protection services and be open to the participation of experts from both regions. A system for the exchange of experts could also be established at the level of individual EU member states and Latin American partners and within the framework of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
- Last but not least, dialogue should aim to develop a common EU-Latin America agenda to reinforce international mechanisms for natural disaster relief. Such an agenda should be put forward in relevant international organisations, particularly the United Nations. The agenda could be structured around three main strategic axes:
  - The reinforcement of the capacity of regional groups to deal with natural disasters, not just in terms of relief assistance, but particularly risk reduction and prevention. Regional integration groups should be encouraged to use their cooperation frameworks to facilitate mutual assistance in case of catastrophes;
  - Strengthening the coordinating role of the United Nations in disaster-struck regions, particularly in the mobilisation of resources and dispatching of resources to the field. In other words, the United Nations should be the privileged manager of global solidarity;
  - Putting into practice the widely accepted principle that rapid assistance to disaster victims requires quickly available funds. At present, funding for relief operations is arranged on a case-by-case basis and requires several funding decisions by donors, as well as fundraising efforts by various agencies. As already proposed by a number of European countries,<sup>26</sup> a humanitarian fund managed by the UN Secretary General should be created. Donors would pay into this fund and humanitarian coordinators could draw financial resources at the early stages of a disaster. The EU, which is already the largest contributor to the financing of disaster relief operations through ECHO, should be the first contributor to the UN fund.

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<sup>25</sup> Portugal and Chile recently signed a protocol for the exchange of expertise in the area of forest fires, for example. Within the framework of this protocol, Chilean firemen visited Portugal during the 2005 fire season (in which over 300,000 hectares of forest were destroyed) and Portuguese firemen will receive training in Chile in early 2006.

<sup>26</sup> The UK government has proposed that the UN humanitarian fund should have a budget of 1 billion US\$ a year. See speech by Hillary Ben, UK Secretary of State for International Development at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on 15 December 2004, at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/Speeches/bennaidssystemreform.asp>