

Balance of Competences Foreign Policy Report: Record of CCS Seminar, 23 January 2013

Civil Protection and Solidarity Clause

35 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BQ

10:30- 13:30

Introduction

1. Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) in the Cabinet Office hosted an evidence gathering seminar for the Balance of Competences Foreign Policy report on 23 January 2013. It was attended by practitioners with experience and expertise in EU Civil Protection. In agreement with participants, the session was conducted under Chatham House Rules i.e. non-attributable. This record is not exhaustive but draws out the key points from the discussion.
2. CCS gave a brief presentation on the Balance of Competences Review and an introduction to EU Civil Protection.

Civil Protection

3. The initial discussion focused on the EU's delivery mechanisms, where the following points were raised:

Project funding

- The extensive bureaucracy and complexity of the application system was a significant obstacle to accessing EU funding because smaller organisations and local government did not have the sufficient resources to bid without the guarantee of securing funding.
- Smaller niche organisations would benefit from further guidance on the application process.
- Other Member States benefitted from EU project funding to a greater extent than the UK as they had developed a greater understanding of the processes and structures of bidding for project funding and were therefore more likely to be successful with a bid.

Training, exchange of experts and exercises

- Common language and training methodology was of benefit to experts deployed on overseas missions, particularly for urban search and rescue teams engaging with their international counterparts.
- Training, exercises and exchanges presented practitioners with the opportunity to network with their European counterparts. This was hugely beneficial as personal relationships facilitated greater coordination and effectiveness when deployed in the field.

- The type of training provided by the EU was not available inside the UK. It was thus of significant benefit as it is transferable at other levels e.g. regional, national, international etc.

Response

- Member States' response to disaster was well coordinated by the EU. This was more so the case outside rather than inside the EU due to the host nation's lack of preparedness and inability to support.
 - Host nations were more likely have a productive relationship with the EU rather than NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) due to NATO's military connotations.
 - In the early years following its creation, the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) duplicated disaster response efforts by other organisations (UN/EADRCC).
 - It would be beneficial for experts to have greater access to the EU's CECIS web system in order to rapidly facilitate situational awareness in the event of a disaster and significantly minimise the time it takes to be deployed overseas.
4. The discussion then considered the comparative advantages and disadvantages to the UK of working through the EU in civil protection. The following points were raised:
- The mechanism could be of significant value in addressing some of the long-term challenges facing the UK.
 - UK resources would be significantly overwhelmed as a result of high impact events such as severe coastal flooding or a disaster similar in scale to Fukushima. In this instance, the UK would most likely need to request international assistance and would therefore benefit from resources made available from participating states.
 - The UK could benefit from factoring in the potential for international assistance into existing crisis management plans. This would be vital to managing in kind assistance from participating states in the event that the UK needed to request assistance.
5. In considering whether more or less EU activity in civil protection would be in the UK's national interest, the following points were raised:
- The current level of EU competence in the area of Civil Protection was adequate for the UK.
 - The existing UK resilience model and training methodology worked well and did not need changing. There were compatibility issues with EU training methodologies that could be overcome.
 - There was a certain level of legal ambiguity surrounding foreign nationals operating in the UK under the Civil Contingencies Act. These issues needed to be addressed before the UK could effectively engage with the Mechanism.

6. The discussion concluded with a consideration of the Solidarity Clause and an EU risk assessment, where the following points were made

- The Solidarity Clause should not need to be invoked given that the Mechanism is sufficient in addressing the impacts of natural or man-made disasters inside the EU.
- The existing Civil Protection Mechanism allowed for a certain level of flexibility. The Solidarity Clause however appeared to put the emphasis on Member States for mandatory action which would not be consistent with the principle of subsidiarity.
- The use of military assets in disaster response was already fully covered in the Oslo Guidelines.
- An EU risk assessment could be of benefit as it would help identify the UK's emerging risks and where it needed to build additional capacity.