



INTERNATIONAL AMATEUR
RADIO UNION
REGION I

Response to Public consultation on the interim evaluation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Introduction

The International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) is a Non-Governmental Organisation representing the interests of Radio Amateurs. IARU Region 1 comprises Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Northern Asia. The Political Relations Committee (PRC) deals with issues related to the European Institutions and other Region 1 political and government entities of a similar nature.

The Amateur Radio Service is one of the oldest radio services recognised and regulated by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and pre-dates the regulation of radio communications. Having a strong Amateur Radio service has been recognised by Governments in the development of technical knowledge and a corps of radio stations which is geographically diverse which is able to assist in times of disaster.

The ITU actively encourages administrations to allow amateur stations to support disaster relief and to build networks which are independent of other fixed infrastructure. Amateur radio continues to provide basic radiocommunications especially in the early days of a disaster following the loss or overloading of normal telecommunications networks

Disasters within the EU

Within the context of Decision 1313/2013/EU however the application of our skills across the Member States is variable depending on National needs. We see that this may become a problem given the recognition in introductory paragraph (1) of the decision that future disasters will be more complex and may include technological hazards. The development of interconnected energy networks across the continent being one source of problems when there is a history of network failures leading to wide area power failures and the consequence of loss of mobile and fixed telephony.

The Amateur Radio Service is capable of providing the 'bootstrap' network capable of recovering from this kind of scenario and also being a source of trusted information in emergencies. However our capacity to do this for the union appears to be limited by this introductory paragraph of the Decision;

18) When planning response operations, it is useful to also liaise with relevant non-governmental organisations and other relevant entities to identify any additional response capacities that they may be able to make available in case of disasters via the competent authorities of the Member States.

The EU appears from this paragraph to only be able to liaise with Non-Governmental Organisations

via Member States. Since across the EU there is a wide variation in the way the Member States use our service this does not always lead to a positive outcome.

We feel that the EU could have a more positive relationship with smaller NGOs by either engaging directly with them, or providing more guidance on how they may be used in an emergency.

There is no shortage of this kind of guidance since the Amateur Radio Service has been involved in EU exercises and response operations but only at the specific request of local authorities. e.g.;

- Slovenian Ice Storm 2014. Radio Amateurs provided a communications link between Austria and Slovenia for the Austrian Fire Service who were sent to the country to assist. Slovenian Radio Amateurs also provided local communications when Civil Protection and phone networks were harmed by the power outage.
- Exercise SIMIT September 2015. This EU sponsored exercise tested the response to an earthquake affecting Malta and the delivery of support from Italy. As part of the exercise a message was sent requesting tents, blankets etc. This message could only be delivered through a web contact form on the EU ECHO website and was apparently not received by the exercise co-ordinator. It highlights that if assistance is required, the lack of a communications path between the NGO community and the EU ERCC will lead to delays.

In the absence of guidance, IARU and Emergency Communications Groups undertake their own exercises within Europe and are starting to include technological risks. For example in June 2016 Radio Amateurs in Belgium and the Netherlands held a short exercise simulating a power failure in the South of the Netherlands and part of Belgium. In the exercise scenario they did not seek to replace the main emergency service communications, instead focusing on welfare and secondary communications, which would take load off the main Civil Protection networks. More information on this exercise may be found at <http://www.dares.nl/nieuws/245-oef-power-outage> .

The Decision is also focused on measuring success by the number of modules available for deployment through the 'Voluntary Pool' , these modules are those who are actually put into the disaster area. Radio waves like disasters do not follow country boundaries and it is possible that to relay messages, stations outside the affected area/country would be required to respond from their own homes. In a 'no notice' test it was found IARU could mobilise 500+ radio stations within one hour who could have relayed messages on a local, national or international basis. This statistic however is not captured by;

Article 3 (2)

(b) progress in increasing the level of readiness for disasters: measured by the quantity of response capacities included in the voluntary pool in relation to the capacity goals referred to in Article 11 and the number of modules registered in the CECIS;

This and article 11 are only concerned with the capability to project aid into an affected area, not apparently the logistics of getting it there or linking to local services who may be able to assist with information.

This topic also has relevance to the interventions undertaken outside the union discussed in introductory paragraph 14 of the Decision stating;

14) With respect to disaster response assistance interventions outside the Union, the Union Mechanism should facilitate and support actions undertaken by the Member States and the Union as a whole in order to promote consistency in international civil protection work. The United

Nations, in cases where it is present, has an overall coordinating role for relief operations in third countries. Assistance provided under the Union Mechanism should be coordinated with the United Nations and other relevant international actors to maximise the use of available resources and avoid any unnecessary duplication of effort. ...

Disasters outside the EU

The Nepal earthquake of April 2015 provided an example of the global reach of Amateur Radio and also how these facilities were used by other administrations. Radio links were maintained between two functioning Amateur Radio stations in Nepal. One was passing requests for assistance to any available destination, including Europe. The other was involved in a more targeted and practiced procedure which had been requested by the American Military Affiliate Radio Service. That service, made up of amateur operators was tasked with obtaining information from a disaster hit country and feeding it back to the responders so that the right aid was delivered to the right place.

This system had only been exercised in 2013 and announced to the Amateur Radio Community world wide at a conference in 2014 (presentation at http://www.iau.org/uploads/1/3/0/7/13073366/mars_garec_14_aug_2014.pptx) but allowed the United States of America access to trusted information from a disaster area to inform their response.

Amateur Radio can also have a role in Warning and Informing about potential disasters. In Turkey local Radio Amateurs have an agreement with the Kandilli Observatory and Earthquake Research Center (KOERI-BOUN) to allow the Automatic and uninterrupted distribution of observations of earthquakes with $M > 3$ from an automatic radio station in the observatory to a resilient radio based network with the concept of distributing vital information totally independent from infrastructures like internet, GSM and phone lines which are vulnerable in disasters.

Conclusion

It is the position of the IARU that our service is still able to provide information and assistance for disasters both inside and outside the EU. Because of the different local needs however, our service provision is not uniform. This could be assisted by more general guidance from the EU to Member States to recognise and support the voluntary sector in their countries. A meeting to understand the capabilities of the EU ERCC and IARU in Europe would also be an advantage in building relationships and communications routes before our assistance is needed.

Further Information

More information on Amateur Radio and emergency communications worldwide is at;
<http://www.iau.org/emergency-communications.html>

Information more directly relevant to Europe, Middle East and Africa is at;
<http://www.iau-r1.org/index.php/emergency-communications>

A Handbook of ITU regulations and recommendations for the Amateur Radio Service is available for free download at;
<http://www.itu.int/pub/R-HDB-52-2014>

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