

The exercise of the year

A joint international rescue exercise organised by Hungary and Romania involved firefighters, rescue teams and civil defence departments from over 10 nations. Lieutenant Tamas Tímár, Hungarian Disaster Management, Hungarian Civil Defence Force (Békéscsaba), took part in EU-HUROMEX 2008 and writes about this truly international project.

Co-financed by the EU Environment Directorate-General (DG ENV) in conjunction with the State of Hungary (NDGDM) and its partner, the State of Romania (GIES), EU-HUROMEX 2008 consisted of major flooding and critical infrastructure recovery exercises.

The main objective of the exercise was the testing and improvement of the Community Civil Protection Mechanism (CCPM), which is triggered when a disaster exceeds the response capabilities of a European country. This comprises a rescue team's capability as predetermined through civil protection modules, which includes the overcoming of language barriers and the integration of the command structures of different teams –

including their equipment. The aim of the CCPM is to achieve full interoperability, and it is activated by a request for assistance via the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC).

The exercise aimed to mitigate and to eliminate cross-border response issues arising from a natural disaster, radiological and chemical incident as well as the potential consequences of terrorist attack with CBRN agents. It was based on a real life scenario where Hungary's and Romania's neighbouring regions were flooded. As large areas were affected, sub-OSOCCs (On Site Operations Coordination Centres) had to be set up to test the complex operation, co-operation and command mechanisms between all responders – national and international.

In the scenario, climate change results in significant flooding in south east Hungary and south west Romania in August. Cross-border floods threaten both countries and the handling of the consequences exceed national resources. The countries request assistance through MIC, and use the CECIS (Common Emergency Communication and Information System) for emergency management. The Hungarian and the Romanian governments set a main OSOCC in Hungary, two sub-OSOCCs and two OSOCC reception centres in both countries.

Hungarian response

During the exercise both countries took the appropriate national measures and requested international assistance through the Monitoring and Information System.

Hungary's response consisted of:

- The establishment of an OSOCC Receiving Centre at the Hungarian-Romanian border (Gyula) and Szolnok; establishment of one person OSOCC in Budapest in the OKF Emergency Centre; and establishment of two sub-OSOCCs in the region's centres (Békéscsaba, Arad).
- Establishment of disaster-commanding post, team and evacuated camp at two sites.
- Introduction of complex flood protection and technical rescue operations in Gyula (Szanazug).
- Population and animal rescue.
- Establishment and maintenance of critical infrastructure in a small town.
- Simulation of road transport and industrial incidents.
- Usage of EU co-ordinators (latter in OSOCC).

Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland all sent emergency assistance teams.

A number of practical exercises took place in many locations



EU- HUROMEX was based on a real life scenario where Hungary's and Romania's neighbouring regions were flooded.

Planning timetable

17-18 December 2007: the first co-ordination meeting between the Romanian Catastrophy-Assistance Directorate-General and the Hungarian OKF.

30 January 2008: the first planning meeting at DG Environment, Brussels.

1-2 April 2008: the main planning meeting is held in Bucharest.

23-26 June 2008: final planning meeting.

25-26 February 2009: The National Directorate General for Disaster Management of the Republic of Hungary hosts a Lessons Learnt Workshop in Budapest.

between 22 and 26 September 2008 including the city of Szolnok, Gyula and Arad, near the Tisza river and Gyula-Szanazug area. In Békés county alone more than 1,000 people took part in the exercise.

Personal experience

I was a member of the planner team that organised the whole programme over a period of nine months. On a practical level we found it hard work building up and taking down the USAR camps, but we found the equipment suitable for the weather conditions, including the heaters and electrical devices.

Timetable of operations

Day -1

- Arrival of the Directing Staff and organisers.

Day 0: Szolnok

- Arrival of international teams.
- EU experts to Szolnok
- EU observers to Szolnok
- Arrival of Romanian rescue team and specialists
- Arrival of international teams in Szolnok
- Set up OSOCC receiving centre
- EU experts begin work
- OSOCC in action
- Static and dynamic presentations in Szolnok
- Presentations of the international units

Day 1-2: Szolnok

- Chemical factory accident
- Railway accident and hazardous material leakage
- Earthquake
- Highway roadblock
- Flood
- Relocation of the Capital's Rescue Team
- Relocation of the international teams
- USAR camp
- Relocation of the OSOCC
- Set up of the OSOCC

Day 2: Szanazug

- Gyula-Szanazug flood defence, aircraft rescue.
- Gyula-Szanazug rescue action.
- Unexpected incidents.

Day 3: Gyula

- Railway accident, Gyula railway station.
- Centre of Gyula, castle garden.
- Gyula-Szanazug flood defence, aircraft rescue (for VIP-day).
- Gyula-Szanazug aircraft research activity (for VIP-day).
- Relocation of Gyulavári segment.
- Relocation of the international teams to Arad

Day 3: Arad

- Set up of USAR camp.
- Water rescue.
- Set up of the sub-OSOCC.

Day 4: Arad

- Water rescue
- Earthquake, industrial unit accident
- Romanian VIP day and press conference

Day 5: Gyula

- Rescue teams and the OSOCC returns to Gyula
- Cultural programmes
- Closing Ceremony Záró rendezvény and evaluation meeting.



The most spectacular exercise of EU-HUROMEX 2008 was the railway incident, which comprised many special teams from Hungary (railway staff, police, ambulance, and five firefighter units) as well as international units from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. During this incident the commander gave orders to the international liaison officer (myself), and these were then passed to the head of OSOCC, who then commanded the international team leaders – I found that this was too long a command chain for a real life situation.

On another occasion, there was a special diving activity planned for one morning, but an order told the teams to carry out the mission in the evening of the day before, so the exercise was executed twice (it was a good practice!).

One of the objectives was learning to use new communication equipment. At the end of the exercise all teams could use the new communication tools, but some of the other countries were at an advantage because they were accustomed to using TETRA (digital radio) systems. At first it was very hard to use those radios, but we got lots of practice.

We found that communications between the LEMA (Local Emergency Management Authority), the OSOCC, the DISTAFF (Directing Staff) and the rescue teams were clear and understandable. And while English was the official language, a few days into the exercise we all spoke many languages.

In conclusion EU-HUROMEX 2008 was highly successful, regardless of the planned and unexpected surprises for the teams. And although everybody worked hard, it was fun!

In the scenario, cross-border floods threaten both countries and the handling of the consequences exceed national resources.

Special teams from Hungary as well as international units from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia participated.

