Interview with

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You have the EU Council presidency. What are the key challenges you will tackle during the presidency?

The Presidency of the Council working group is important in span of the legislative period because the Council working group will discuss new legislation. We already have recent legislation since the end of 2013, so in early 2004, when we discussed the sort of topics which should be on the agenda during a PROCIV, we couldn’t propose new legislation but would have to focus on topics interesting from the point of view of a policy discussion.

The topic we have chosen is “Resilience of Critical Infrastructures” because Critical Infrastructure (CI) is very important for the Netherlands: firstly, the country depends on CI and, secondly, we are very cost-effective. The cost-effective aspect is very high in our priorities and way of thinking. And it fits very well in the priorities of our presidency, with the new commission and globally. This helps Civil Protection address the priorities of the European Commission and that’s why we have decided to concentrate on CI and resilience. Actually, these subjects belong to the prevention side which has not been very high on the agenda of the PROCIV working group up until now.

PROCIV is mostly a response entity, which is fully understandable, but we are champion of prevention and wanted to emphasise its importance.

We will return later to our second topic, prevention of flooding which is addressed not only in the context of CI but more broadly.

The other EU Council Presidency related question was: what do you think is the role of science? The Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre DRMKC is at the science policy interface. What are other specific aspects where you think the scientific community can play a role and/or contribute? How should one engage with them or empower them?

I think it’s similar to the role of the private sector. Science can also give kind of a reality check to the public sector and to the political context because we are the executive arm of politics and implement what our political leaders consider
important. Actually, it’s always important to have this neutral and scientific view on the important topics we are discussing too.

Do you intend to identify research gaps or to give specific directions to the scientific community to create new knowledge for your goals?

This is something which we have to discuss as a follow-up of the workshop and this is one of the topics which have come up during the breakout sessions in one or two situations. We can definitely think about possible follow-ups but currently I cannot fully answer since it would raise and create some expectations.

How do you see the linkages between the EU Council Presidency priorities you have been talking about and the DRMKC, the recent European Commission initiative?

It is a very good idea to involve the DRMKC because, within my limited experience, the DRMKC is particularly important for the prevention side of DRM while the response is actually the assets and capacity we have. Therefore, the DRMKC, research and science can help in further innovative solutions to be applied in the prevention phases.

In terms of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) or science and DRM, what are two key events to which you look forward in 2016?

For us, it is the DG conference which will be held on June 2-3, 2016 in Amsterdam: we will present to the DG the results of this workshop, the results of the discussion in PROCIV and also the results of the discussion on flood prevention which I think is the key moment for the Civil Protection Community.
Mathilda Buijtenddijk (National Expert PROCIV), Ministry of Security and Justice

The first presidency meeting “Building Bridges to Enhance Resilient Infrastructures” was held on January 12/13, 2016, what are the main outcomes? Are the conclusions in line with your expectations to bridge both communities?

What we want really to do is to bridge between two domains - the Civil Protection and Critical Infrastructures Protection CPI - because in the end they are very much interlinked and one of the things we found out is that there are already many bridges. Moreover, the intention to strengthen the bridges between these two communities is growing but how do you bring this into practice?

What we discovered in this workshop is that everybody mentioned five points, therefore there are five cross-cutting themes, or maybe five bridges, that came up in any break-out sessions and those are: 1) information sharing and knowledge, of course a very important one, and also the need of a common framework in order to work together, 2) the cooperation with all relevant partners, therefore both public and private corporations but also national regions, 3) the training exercises, 4) the risk assessment of course, because in both communities risk assessments are being done but are they the same risk assessments? And then 5) the communication which is a multi-levelled topic: it can be the communication to the public, the communication during or before a crisis, but also communication with other member states.

What do you expect from the DRMKC at EU level and how can the DRMKC help, particularly in respect of the workshop? Can you give an example of how science has concretely contributed to improve DRM in your country?

There are many examples. At a small level, we had some research on drones and how you can use them for fire surfaces for example. While at larger scale, it’s a strategy for national safety and security because that was actually built by science, of course with the policy makers, and I think that was good because, as was mentioned in the plenary session, you should illustrate the requirements as policy makers and then talk it through, of course with science asking “what are the requirements?”, “what you are searching for?”, “what does it come to, a model or to a strategy?”, and we did that with our Dutch strategy for national safety and security.

Therefore, it is very important for DRM in the Netherlands because it catches what could happen to the country, what we are supposed to do to prevent or mitigate the impacts of such an event, what we are going to do, and then the last step is of course mainly a policy step but the other two previous steps are mainly a Science step, an analytic exercise you are doing.

Can you give an example of how complex science is communicated in a useable way to practitioners and policy makers, given the good example of science communication you have in the Netherlands?

Complex science...for me as a policy maker, all science is complex to be honest. This is why we need the science world because within the strategy we work a lot with analysts and the scientific world. We tend to think as policy makers and they tend to think as scientists; so it is very necessary to bridge these two worlds and it takes time before we speak each other’s language and I think we mainly succeeded at it by creating an Analyst Network which is very important in allowing us to talk together. The only way to learn to communicate and to translate our languages is just to sit in the same room and to communicate.

Tell us more about this unique distribution for the risk assessment process you have in the Netherlands whereby you use this scientific network that does technical analysis which tends to go up to the political level.

We really needed to have unbiased threat assessment and risk assessment, thus independent from politics and not politically guided because if it is left to us policy makers, we will always say that there is no risk. This is why you need the scientific world. But in the end, it’s a political decision what you have to do. So they need to translate what they are
doing into the political sense and then we’ll take forward. So it comes from the independent Analyst Network and it goes to ministries and onwards to the Cabinet Office. And in all these steps you have a translation.

If you have to pick one piece of expertise of the Netherlands that you would like to contribute to other member states, what would you take as an example?

I would speak about flood prevention because we are very experienced and there is already something we lend to other countries. Moreover, I would also quote the Critical Infrastructure Protection CIP knowledge we have with the public and with private corporations. It is part of the culture here and I think we have built up a lot of experience on how you can face and respond or adapt to that.

How can you make public and private networks?

We are actually working on a triple helix, on a system where science, private and public partners cooperate (at both national and regional level) altogether to protect our CI.

How do you think you will personally interact with the DRMKC in the next 6 months?

Among the several outcomes of the workshop, it clearly appears that there is a strong need of information and knowledge sharing. Therefore, this will be one of the topics that PROCIV will have to face and discuss further steps and then we’ll certainly come to the DRMKC to see how we can go forward on this together. One of the most important things is that there are a lot of platforms and institutes which do something with knowledge (CIP-edia, CIPnet, etc) and we should interlink them together. Indeed, I would like to personally involve you in this.

Last thing, your next event...

The Vitex event which is an internationally important meeting and table-top. It’s not organized within the Dutch Presidency, but it’s the next big event for our Critical Infrastructure team. It will be interlinked with training exercises which are a presidency topic.