

# ***BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: FLOODS & LANDSLIDES***

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## ***The Disaster***

An unusual period of warm weather during the first week of March provoked excessive spring melting, resulting in flooding in the Volyn, Rovno, Ternopil, and Lvov Regions of north-western Ukraine, the Polesye area in the south of Belarus, and in the Brest and Gomel Regions of the Republic of Belarus. In Russia, the Ministry for Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) has warned that severe flooding (possibly the worst in 30 years) will hit many parts of the country at the end of March and the beginning of April. It is estimated that two million people will be affected by river systems swollen to up to three metres above normal levels. In Moldova, 15 regions have suffered from landslides provoked by melting snow and heavy spring rains.

### **Russia**

In eastern Russia it is estimated that over 520 settlements populated by 215,000 people will be affected. About half of this population live in the catchment area of the Volga river, including parts of Nishni Novgorod (Gorky). In and around Moscow it is assumed that the Moskva, Ruza, Ozerka, Istra and Khima rivers will also flood. A similar situation is predicted in the Nizhnekamski, Kuibyshevski, Cheboksarski and Rybinski reservoirs.

In the Krasnodar region of western Russia 1,354,000 people in 25 regions are threatened by floods as snow continues to fall on already saturated ground. The areas include Krymsk, Temryuk and stanitsa Varenikovskaya. A further 238,000 people are at risk in 106 settlements on the banks of the Kuban River, 127,000 more in Altaisky krai (on the Khazack/Mongolian border), and 209,000 in the Karachaevo-Cherkesskaya Republic in Siberia.

### **Belarus**

In Belarus, spring floods are also expected in the Vitebsk region in the north-east of Belarus (the Western Dvina basin). The ice and snow is 50 centimetres thick in some places, making it likely that the river will crest at 9 meters (only 3 meters less than during the record 1931 flood). The damage already done by the floods in Belarus (as of 17 March, 1999) is estimated at 100 billion roubles. A total of 19 districts, 181 settlements, and 3,455 houses have been directly affected by the floods. 420 houses are now unsuitable for living, and 755 families have been evacuated. In comparison to other Belarussian regions however, the situation in Vitebsk oblast is more or less stable. Despite the damage caused, both the Belarussian Ministry for Emergencies and the Regional Civil Defence Authorities claim that the worst period of flooding is over.

According to sector specialists however, the floods are now shifting to the south-west of the country (to the Gomel Region and neighbouring Ukraine) where more than 22 settlements and 481 houses are reported to have been affected. Technical and human resources from the Ministry of Emergencies and

Regional Civil Defence Units are being concentrated to reinforce dams. Overall, more than 2000 people throughout Belarus are involved in mitigating the effects of the floods.

### **Ukraine**

The flood situation in Ukraine is not improving, particularly in the Polesse Region in the north of the country. In response, the Ministry for Emergency Situations of Ukraine dispatched their special emergency rescue detachment to Rovno Region. In addition, a special commission from the Ministry for Emergency Situations has assessed the situation. 86 settlements and 423 houses are affected by the floods, and 6 bridges were destroyed. 911 persons have been evacuated from the area for protective purposes. In the neighbouring Volyn Region, 65 settlements and 390 houses are in danger of being flooded, and 22 settlements in Zakarpattya are flooded.

The effects of the flooding have been made worse by the danger of radioactive substances from the Chernobyl zone. According to weather predictions, the water level in the Prypiat River is likely to rise, and experts say that 80 percent of the radioactive substances from the Chernobyl zone are spread by this river. Recent tests showed that the level of radioactive substances in the water is twice as high as in other bodies of water in the Ukraine. For the last two months Kiev has been supplied by water from the Desna rather than the Dnieper. Meteorologists said that this year's flooding promises to be the worst in the last five years in this region, and the highest levels are expected to occur within a month.

### **Moldova**

The landslides in Moldova have most seriously affected the regions of Kishinau, Belti, Telenesti, Calaras, Singerei, Ungheni, Nisporeni, Hincesti, Edinet, Falesti, Riscani, Floresti and Soroca. More than 970 hectares have been inundated, destroying 95 dwellings, damaging another 129, and threatening another 152. 1,671 families were evacuated from the landslide zone. Roads and infrastructure were also damaged, and the initial estimate for reconstruction is significant.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

In coordination with the Ukraine Government, the Ukrainian Red Cross is assisting in the operation by collecting and distributing assistance to the affected population using existing stocks of food, clothing, and drugs. Efforts have been facilitated by a Council of Minister's of Ukraine allocation of UAH 500, 000 (or USD 135,000) to Volyn, Rovno, Lvov, Ternopil and Khmelnytsky Region Local Governments for temporary flood prevention and relief. The situation for the next 20 to 25 days will remain critical as the water levels will continue to rise.

The Moldovian Red Cross responded to the situation by sending a needs assessment team to the Telenesti, Calaras and Ungheni area. The exact number of those requiring assistance will be determined more accurately through the ongoing contacts with the Moldovian Ministry for Emergencies and the Civil Defence Department, as well as on the basis of an update from the affected areas to be received shortly.

## *Needs*

While the current needs in Belarus and the Ukraine appear to be limited, the Moldavian Red Cross has indicated that some 253 families are in need of immediate help, specifically consisting of food, hygiene items, clothing, and blankets. Assessments are anticipated from Russia as the situation develops. The Federation is not considering issuing an appeal, but selected PNS's might be contacted for limited contributions.

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