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European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

Joint Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and Directors of Specialised Centres

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

Meeting report

16 September 2021
09:30-16:30 CET

*Document prepared by the Secretariat
of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement*

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Thursday 16 September 2021

WELCOME ADDRESS

Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary of the Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) welcomed the participants to the 76th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents (CPCs). He informed the participants that 23 out of the 24 member States were present, with Lebanon being the only absentee.

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The Executive Secretary stated the aims of the meeting, informing the participants that the draft agenda had been revised in August following additional proposals submitted by the Permanent Correspondents in respect of Croatia and the Russian Federation. The draft agenda was adopted without revision.

2. STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

A one-minute silence was observed for the passing of General Evgeny N. Zinichev, Minister for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disaster (EMERCOM), Russia, who died recently in the line of duty. A one-minute silence was also held for the passing of Professor Giovanni Galassi, former Permanent Correspondent for San Marino and former Secretary General of the European Centre for Disaster Medicine (CEMEC).

K. Zyman gave an update on recent developments:

A Working Group (WG) which was formed during the last CPC meeting, held online discussions on the new Rules of Procedure. Questions related to voting rules, network of specialised centres' membership and observer status require further reflection. Discussions on these issues will continue during the next WG online meeting, to be held at the end of September.

Regarding the documents prepared for the Ministerial Meeting, Croatia and the Russian Federation had proposed amendments, which the Permanent Correspondents were invited to discuss with a view to reaching a consensus on their wording. K. Zyman encouraged the directors of the specialised centres to participate in the discussions on the Agreement's future and to share their visions on the expected outcome of the Ministerial Meeting. A separate meeting would be organised at the end of 2021 or in early in 2022 to address the evaluation of the 2021 projects and the proposals for the 2022 projects.

K. Zyman invited the Chair to address the floor. N. Holcinger welcomed the participants and stated the aim to resolve any outstanding issues with regard to the amendments proposed in the draft documents.

3. EUR-OPA MINISTERIAL MEETING TO BE HELD BACK-TO-BACK WITH THE EUROPEAN FORUM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

3.1 EUR-OPA Ministerial Meeting 2021, 24 November 2021, Matosinhos, Portugal

K. Zyman updated on the preparations for the forthcoming Ministerial Meeting and presented the draft agenda. The meeting will be held in hybrid format; only members of EUR-OPA Secretariat will physically attend in Portugal and the ministers will participate online. The agenda was discussed in June with no major comments. N. Holcinger proposed to amend the title of the meeting to reflect its broader scope: "Building more inclusive societies through better disaster risk management". This proposal was accepted.

S. Badalyan (PC, Armenia) pointed out some disparities between the Russian and English language versions of the documents. In Russian, "risk" is translated as "reducing dangers" whereas risk implies danger multiplied by vulnerability. It was suggested to align the Russian text with the English.

A. Makarov agreed to thoroughly check the Russian language versions of the documents and propose amendments if required. He also thanked the Executive Secretary for the minute of silence held in honour of the late minister, General Zinichev.

K. Zyman invited the Permanent Correspondents to confirm to the Secretariat the participation of their respective ministers and if they would like to take the floor during the Ministerial Meeting. A. Freitas (PC, Portugal) informed participants that the invitations would be sent in the next few

days directly to the Ministries for Foreign Affairs with Permanent Correspondents in copy. The ministers are invited to indicate, when registering for the meeting, whether they will be active or passive speakers. A. Freitas hoped for a fruitful meeting with full participation. She informed the Committee that the Prime Minister of Portugal is likely to attend and give a short speech at the start of the meeting (tbc).

K. Zyman thanked A. Freitas and urged Permanent Correspondents to inform the secretariat as regards any changes to ministerial post holders or their contact details.

3.2. Draft Ministerial Declaration

K. Zyman invited the Permanent Correspondents to discuss the draft Ministerial Declaration prepared by the Secretariat, which includes the amendments proposed by the Permanent Correspondents. After a discussion, a consensus was reached to amend the document as follows:

On page 1: Paragraph 2 was added to read: "Recalling the Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Hamburg on 21 May 2021 recalling that its member States are committed to the values which are the common heritage of their peoples and the true source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which must form the basis of all genuine democracies"

Paragraph 5 was amended to read "Recognising...increased vulnerability and exposure of societies..."

Paragraph 6 was similarly amended to read "reduction of vulnerabilities and exposure...", "...improved" was replaced with "improving" for a better flow. The term "...biological disaster" was replaced with "public health emergency", citing that this is the terminology employed by the World Health Organisation;

In paragraph 7 words "biological disaster" were replaced with "public health emergency";

In paragraph 7, line one, "is a large-scale biological disaster" were replaced with "constitutes, among other, a public health emergency...";

Page 2. The proposal to add a new paragraph (n° 3) "Taking note of the leading role played by the World Health Organisation in coordination of international efforts in application of International Health Regulations;" was accepted;

In paragraph 5, words "maintain the democratic fabric of societies" were deleted. Instead paragraph 3 was added (see above); in addition, in line two, the word "most" was removed from the phrase "...on most sustainable responses" and "biological hazards" was replaced with "public health emergencies";

On page 3, paragraph 4 "Stress the crucial role played by international cooperation to prepare societies to the known and emerging challenges, including biological hazards and to address risks posed by such hazards" was deleted.

Decision: The Ministerial Declaration, with the agreed amendments, was approved by consensus.

4. REVISED DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

An exchange of views was held on the following draft documents:

i - Revised draft Recommendation "enabling and protecting persons with disabilities during a viral or other pathogenic pandemic as well as another biological disaster"

The Permanent Correspondents were invited to comment on the amendments proposed by A. Makarov, Permanent Correspondent in respect of the Russian Federation. Following a discussion, the Committee agreed to amend the title to read "Enabling and protecting persons with disabilities before, during and after public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics." The phrase "before, during and after public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics" was also inserted to replace references to "biological hazards", "biological risks" and "biological emergencies" in paragraphs E, F as well as point 2. In points 4 and 5 "natural and technological" were added before the words "disasters caused by biological hazards".

Paragraph 4 was amended to read "Ensure that measures adopted to counteract *natural and technological* disasters caused by biological hazards ...".

Paragraph 5 was amended to read "Support the initiatives of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement to promote with respect to *natural and technological* disasters ..."

ii - Revised draft Recommendation "Inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in preparing for and responding to biological disasters"

The Committee agreed to amend the title to read "Inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics."

A consensus was reached to amend specific points on page 2 as follows:

Point D was revised to read: "Noting the opportunities offered by the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and other measures contained in the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) in the countries that *ratified it and in line with their national legislations*, to include migrants, asylum seekers and refugees having necessary qualifications in the steps taken to respond to natural and technological disasters."

Point G was amended to correspond with the new title of the Revised Resolution 2020-1.

Point H was revised to read "...during public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics" instead of "...emergencies caused by biological hazards".

Under the recommendations laid out on page 3:

Recommendation 1 was amended to read "Include all migrants...linked to *public health emergencies arising from viral or other pathogenic pandemics*." The Committee agreed to delete the last 2 lines of this paragraph "taking into consideration both the specific vulnerabilities, but also of the intrinsic value of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees."

Recommendation 2 was amended by replacing words "biological hazard emergencies" with "public health emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics";

Recommendation 3 was revised to read "Involve migrants, asylum seekers and refugees having the necessary qualifications in emergency response to natural and technological disasters, taking advantage in particular of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and other measures contained in particular in the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) *in the countries having ratified it, and in line with their national legislations*."

Recommendation 4 was revised to read "Support the initiatives of EUR-OPA to promote, with respect to public emergencies resulting from viral or other pathogenic pandemics, inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in its member States, in particular through promoting adequate regulations, sharing of expertise, awareness raising, undertaking training programmes and promoting good practice."

Decisions: The draft Recommendations, with the agreed amendments, were approved by consensus.

5. EUROPEAN FORUM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

This item was not discussed on account of the lack of time.

6. ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION OF DIRECTORS OF SPECIALISED CENTRES WITH PERMANENT CORRESPONDENTS ON THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

K. Zyman invited the directors of specialised centres to share their expectations on the outcome of the Ministerial Meeting.

J. Goldammer (GFMC, Germany) remarked on how excessive smoke pollution presented an additional risk to that already posed by the pandemic. This called for a more coordinated and cross-sectoral approach to DRR. He hoped to promote interdisciplinary approaches to DRR during the Ministerial Meeting.

S. Karma (ECFF, Greece) agreed with Professor Goldammer regarding the need for a multi-hazard or multi-perspective approach, which includes people with disabilities. She stressed the importance of promoting community engagement in disasters e.g., in the event of forest fires.

S. Badalyan (ECRM, Armenia) pointed out that the pandemic has highlighted that harnessing the media helps to garner civil society's involvement during disasters. The media could help increase people's interest in prevention and disaster preparedness through local organisations. K. Zyman buttressed this point and invited participants to ask their minister to raise any issues which are not already covered in DRR.

7. REVISION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT CORRESPONDENTS (IF TIME ALLOWS) :

The discussion on item 7 was postponed until the next meeting.

7A. PROPOSAL FOR A REVISION OF THE RESOLUTION 2020 - 1 RECOGNISING THE INCLUSION OF BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS IN THE EUR-OPA PARTIAL AGREEMENT

At the initiative of the Permanent Correspondent in respect of the Russian Federation, Permanent Correspondents were invited to hold an exchange of views on the proposal to revise Resolution 2020-1, in the point regarding the definition of "biological hazards". A. Makarov proposed to amend the title of the resolution and paragraphs C, 1, 2, and 4.

After considerable deliberation, a consensus was reached to reformulate the title to read: "Biological threats, hazards and risks causing natural and technological disasters." It was agreed to reflect this formulation in paragraphs C, 1, 2 and 4.

The Committee further agreed to revise paragraph B to read "Considering that the covid 19 pandemic, which constitutes, among other, a public health emergency, has had a devastating effect..."

Decision: The Revised Resolution 2020-1, with the agreed amendments, was approved by consensus.

7B. PROPOSAL FOR A REVISION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN 2021 - 2025

At the initiative of the Permanent Correspondent in respect of the Russian Federation, Permanent Correspondents were invited to hold an exchange of views on the proposal to revise Medium Term Plan 2021-2025.

The Committee decided to reflect on page 2 in paragraph 5, and in footnote 3 on page 4 the new title of Resolution 2020-1, and to add "as amended on 16 September 2021".

The Committee further decided to delete reference to migrants in paragraph 5 on page 8.

Decision: The Revised Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025, with the agreed amendments, was approved by consensus.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No point was raised under this point on the agenda.

9. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The CPC will meet at the Ministerial Meeting to be held online on 24 November. The Joint Meeting of the Directors and CPCs will be organised after the Ministerial Meeting at the end of 2021 or in early in 2022. The Executive Secretary will consult the Bureau and confirm the dates in due course.

END OF MEETING