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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

Meeting Report

17-18 November 2022, Paris

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

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Thursday 17 November 2022

WELCOME ADDRESS

Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), welcomed the participants to the 78th Joint Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents (CPC) and directors of the network of specialised centres. Correspondents representing thirteen member States were present. The CPCs of Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Lebanon, Morocco, Moldova, Monaco, Romania and Ukraine were absent.

M. Mala (Cyprus), Chair of the CPC, had apologised for her absence due to medical reasons and was replaced by M. D. Christou. S. Maharramov (CPC, Azerbaijan) had apologised for his absence due to unforeseen circumstances and was replaced by J. Isgandarli. A. G. Soare (CPC, Romania) had apologised for his absence due to other commitments and was to have been replaced by A. Ginavar. The latter had then apologised for her absence due to certain urgent tasks related to the National Resilience and Recovery Plan. D. Reynolds (CPC, Slovak Republic) had apologised for her absence due to medical reasons and was replaced by J. Hives.

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA AP/CAT(2022)OJ05

K. Zyman asked whether any Permanent Correspondents wanted any changes to be made to the agenda. Since there were no objections to it, the agenda was adopted as it stood.

He invited all of the CPCs to introduce themselves as this was the first meeting in person in three years, beginning with the Chair, Anton Micallef, who was chairing the meeting in M. Mala's absence. After the Chair, the CPCs introduced themselves one by one.

2. STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The Executive Secretary thanked everyone for their work in this difficult year for Europe and the Agreement. He mentioned the most recent meeting in February and pointed out that the Committee had instructed the Executive Secretary to analyse geomorphological threats and geospace technologies that could be used to deal with these threats and the use of all forms of social and traditional media to identify risks, produce guidelines and disseminate information among the population. He mentioned other decisions that had been taken at that meeting: the election of the new Bureau and the establishment of a sub-committee to assess project proposals.

He then mentioned the financial situation of the Agreement in the wake of Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe due to its aggression against Ukraine. He explained that the Russian Federation's contribution for 2022 had been reduced on a pro rata temporis basis and corresponded to 20% of that country's contribution for the year. He also explained that in May, during the meeting of the Committee of Ministers in Italy, a decision had been taken to make up the missing amount so that the Agreement could operate as planned in 2022.

He then pointed out that Belgium had decided in June 2022 to withdraw from the Agreement with effect from 1 January 2023. This withdrawal and the Russian Federation's departure together meant that over 50% of the Agreement's funding had been lost in the space of a year.

As a result of these developments, many discussions had been held during the year to find ways of submitting a viable proposal to the Committee of Ministers so that the 2023 budget for EUR-OPA could be approved. The Executive Secretary explained that savings would be made, and that the Agreement would operate with only two members of the Secretariat. He then announced that the 2023 budget for the Agreement had been adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 November 2022.

He announced that henceforth financial priority would be given to centres located in member States of the Agreement. K. Zyman ended his statement by saying that the Agreement faced huge challenges and that help would be needed from all Permanent Correspondents to sustain it.

In conclusion, the Executive Secretary agreed with the comment from the Chair and San Marino that it was essential for the Agreement to raise its profile and for the various centres to think about activities they

could work on together in order to achieve a bigger impact which would draw more attention to their work and EUR-OPA.

3. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES 2022

3.1 Statutory meetings

The Executive Secretary pointed out that the meeting reports on the 77th meeting of the CPC ([AP/CAT\(2022\)04](#)) and the meetings of the Bureau ([AP/CAT\(2022\)06](#) and [AP/CAT\(2022\)07](#)) were on the Agreement's website with all of the other documents relating to these meetings. He went over the main points from the previous meetings during his statement.

4. BUDGETARY SITUATION

The participants were informed of the Agreement's financial situation for 2022/2023 during the Executive Secretary's statement.

5. ADOPTION OF THE 2023 BUDGET

C. Emezie distributed to the Correspondents a document setting out the 2023 budget for the Agreement.

The Executive Secretary told the participants that the 2023 budget was €570 000 as per the decision adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 November 2022.

6. FUNCTIONING OF THE AGREEMENT

6.1 Adoption of the new Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents [AP/CAT\(2007\)32](#) [AP/CAT\(2022\)08](#)

The participants were invited to discuss and adopt the draft new Rules of Procedure.

The Executive Secretary highlighted the need to update the existing Rules of Procedure due to the changes to the Agreement over the decades following its establishment in 1987 and in the light of the development of the framework of rules within which it operated. The changes that had occurred in the make-up of the Agreement and the changes in the institutional, legal and administrative environment of the Council of Europe within which the Agreement operated required that certain procedures be reviewed and updated.

Decision: Following a discussion, the new Rules of Procedure (see doc AP/CAT(2022)08rev) were adopted by consensus by the Committee. The Committee also asked the Executive Secretary to inform the Committee of Ministers about the new Rules of Procedure, particularly with regard to the observer status of member States.

6.2 Priorities for the Agreement for 2023 [AP/CAT\(2021\)11](#)

The Executive Secretary stated that the priorities for the Agreement for 2023 which had been adopted during the previous meeting were still valid and were as follows: (i) use of geospace information technologies, (ii) greater use of social media and mobile communication techniques to support the measures taken by states to communicate effectively about disaster risks, (iii) strengthening risk governance in order to manage disaster risks and make vulnerable groups more resilient, and (iv) risk assessment tools and protection of cultural heritage.

He then proceeded to introduce the two speakers and informed the Committee that the presentations to be given by Professor C. Rizza and Dr F. P. Duarte would help to inform the Committee's work, especially in relation to social media.

7. INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATIONS

“The use of social media, traditional media, big data and mobile phone networks to support national measures for successful disaster risk communication” by Professor Caroline Rizza, President of ISCRAM – *Information System for Crisis Response and Management*, Brussels, Belgium. [Link to the presentation](#)

This presentation focused on the benefits of using social media, traditional media, big data and mobile phone networks in terms of prevention with regard to disaster risks and also before and during natural or man-made disasters.

The opposing concepts of institutional or vertical co-operation and civic or horizontal co-operation were described and the importance of combining the two to ensure that communication is effective during such events was pointed out. Professor Rizza mentioned the importance of creating trust between institutions and the public on social media so that the best use of the latter could be made during disasters. She also pointed out the important role played by citizens in crisis situations and the positive impact they could have, and underlined initiatives undertaken by them in previous disasters such as the flooding in Genoa in 2011, Hurricane Irma in Cuba in 2017, the flooding in southern France in 2019 and the rioting in Vancouver in 2011.

Lastly, she stressed the importance of rethinking the citizen’s contribution and the local level of the crisis management operational chain.

“Hybrid Threats – Weaponisation of Social Media” by Dr Felipe Pathé Duarte, Assistant Professor and Researcher at the NOVA School of Law and Instituto Superior de Ciências Policiais e Segurança Interna (ISCPSI), Lisbon, Portugal. [Link to the presentation](#)

Dr Duarte’s presentation focused on the dangers of social media when they were misused. He talked about hybrid threats combining multidimensional attacks that were both coercive and subversive. He said that the aim was not only kinetic but also to influence different forms of decision-making, ranging from cyberattacks on critical information systems to “narrative-led operations”, including through social media.

He said that both states and non-state actors used hybrid approaches to pursue their political and military aims. He showed that social media appeared to have become the weapon of choice for movements of non-state actors and that for these groups, the online realm was becoming increasingly important as it offered an opportunity to form virtual communities of individuals who shared similar views but were geographically scattered.

He concluded by saying that social media had become the weapon of choice for some states and non-state actors in waging asymmetrical warfare or battles.

Decision: The Committee instructed the Executive Secretary to work with experts in order to draw up a report on the use of social media and mobile phone networks for successful disaster risk communication (with draft guidelines) with a view to the adoption of a recommendation.

Friday, 18 November 2022

3. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES 2022 (continued)

3.2 Specialised Centres: Outcomes of 2022 projects and proposals for 2023 projects

The Executive Secretary updated the directors of centres about the Agreement’s 2023 budget situation, noting that it would be significantly reduced following the Russian Federation’s departure from the Council of Europe and the withdrawal of Belgium from the Agreement in January 2023. Two meetings are planned for 2023; the first will be held online and the second in person as a joint meeting. In 2023, the same level

of project funding will be maintained as in 2022 for the centres located in the member States of the Agreement. Funding could not be guaranteed for centres in non-member States. In future, the centres were urged to prioritise collaboration on projects and to seek new ways of pooling projects around common themes as a network, and also as a means of increasing the Agreement's impact and visibility.

A. Micallef welcomed the directors and reiterated the importance of increased collaboration between the specialised centres. He suggested increasing expertise through external consultants as a viable way to proceed, citing BeSafeNet as a positive example of collaboration between multiple centres. He urged the directors to aim for press coverage of their projects in addition to producing scientific papers in order to publicise the network's capabilities.

The Directors of Specialised Centres presented the 2022 achievements and proposals for the 2023 projects.

European Center for Disaster Awareness (BeSafeNet), Cyprus. D. Christou presented BeSafeNet, an online tool for promoting risk culture in secondary schools across the member states and beyond. BeSafeNet aims to enrich pupils' knowledge on various natural and technological disasters. In 2022, 808 students from 92 secondary schools participated in the online Olympiad in 11 member states. The top three teams visited the Council of Europe and other European institutions in Strasbourg. The students attended the Olympiad award ceremony held on 27 September in Strasbourg. The next Olympiad will be held on 10 March 2023. D. Christou encouraged the participants to promote the Olympiad in their country in order to increase participation. The CPCs were particularly encouraged to increase their efforts to publicise the Olympiad and widen its advancement. [Link to presentation](#)

Centre Euro-Méditerranéen pour l'Évaluation et la Prévention du Risque Sismique (CEPRIS), Morocco. N. Jabour presented the 2022 activities of the centre focusing on showing recent seismic activity and tectonic behaviour on the strait of Gibraltar. The average hypocentre depths were measured on a weekly basis over a period of 3 months. Samples were taken from the sea bottom in order to compare the temperature and composition. Tide gauges were set up in Saida Marina to record tsunamis following a possible volcanic eruption. The centre collaborated with ICoD, Malta and CERU, Portugal civil protection teams to raise tsunami awareness among the population during the past years. The centre's activities were not financed by the Agreement in 2022.

[Link to presentation](#)

European Centre on Urban Risks (CERU), Portugal. M. Ribeiro presented the project on *Population involvement in risk management and mitigation (POPIRIM)* developed between Portugal, France and Italy. It aims to test public participation in disaster risk reduction and governance in small communities that are susceptible to specific risks in each participating country. In Portugal, it was applied in Encosta da Luz, Odivelas in Lisbon and CERU established good contact with the local people through targeted field work and handing out questionnaires. The project collated information on types of buildings, household equipment and the local community's knowledge about risks. People were mostly concerned about the risk of landslides, wildfires and security issues linked to social problems and the influx of migrants and refugees. CERU also organised the 2nd International Conference on Urban Risks (ICUR 2022) on 23-25 June in Lisbon, in which the EUR-OPA Executive Secretary participated. CERU collaborated in the *Schools against domestic and urban risks (SADUR)* project developed by CUEBC, Italy to analyse domestic accidents, update maintenance of the urban risks web page and participate in a video conference organised by the coordinator centre. In 2023, POPIRIM will define local mechanisms for public participation, synchronise actions of the civil protection authorities and organise training exercises for the local populace. A. Micallef pointed out the possibility of other centres participating in this type of project as part of the plan to increase visibility.

[Link to presentation](#)

Centro Universitario Europeo per i Beni Culturali (CUEBC), Italy. F. Ferrigni shared the results of the *Schools against domestic and urban risks (SADUR)* project. In Italy, domestic accidents are not classified as disasters in spite of three million incidents occurring annually with approximately 1,8 million requiring emergency treatment and 5 500 deaths. The project involved 76 secondary school pupils and a community of 30 000 local inhabitants in Amalfi, through whom CUEBC diffused project-related information. The project yielded excellent results and other schools requested for a repeat of the exercise due to its effectiveness. The activity was particularly pertinent as there is no national institution responsible for managing the

reduction of domestic risks in Italy. Data only dates back to 2014 as the national data collection system is not up-to-date. Women, children below age 12 and the elderly are more susceptible to domestic accidents according to the data, due to their greater presence in the households. A video conference was held with partner centres to define the classification criteria, management and products of the project. Four articles were published in the local press to increase communication and visibility as the local population often rely on local media sources. Schools were contacted in order to establish a protocol for further collaboration.

[Link to presentation](#)

K. Zyman recalled that at the last Joint Meeting, the directors were encouraged to produce guidelines that would serve as a measurable product to share with the authorities and ensure wider publicity. It was important to create awareness about the role of the Agreement and to show the results of projects and activities on the ground. Guidelines resulting from project activities could be included as an additional section in the reporting template for this purpose. A. Micallef commented that projects that focus activities on secondary schools such as BeSafeNet, tend to yield positive results and prove effective in attaining the Agreement's objectives.

European Centre for Buildings Rehabilitation (ECBR), Romania. E-S. Georgescu presented ECBR's 2022 activities which focused on including institutions that care for vulnerable groups and people with disabilities, NGOs and schools for students with disabilities in seismic risk reduction. Secondary schools presented a non-bureaucratic way of involving local groups in the organisation of the national seismic risk reduction strategy. The significant achievements included organisation of an online seminar on themes including seismic hazards, vulnerability and risk in Romania and earthquake preparedness. Reference was made to the Council of Europe's Disability Strategy 2017-2023 which seeks to enhance equal opportunities and improve the quality of life and independence of people with disabilities. The schools participated in an online questionnaire to gauge their perception on seismic risk as part of the National Seismic Reduction Strategy. The project noted with satisfaction the high percentage of female participants in the activities. ECFF and ECPFE centres also participated in the webinar. In 2023, the project will focus on refugees and the penitentiary system as part of the Agreement's goals for inclusive societies. A. Micallef mentioned the possibility of sharing the webinars with more countries as a means to improve visibility and strengthen the network of specialised centres. Websites could be linked in order to provide more visibility all round.

[Link to presentation](#)

European Centre for Forest Fires, Greece. S. Karma presented the 2022 activities on "*Inclusion of vulnerable groups in disaster preparedness and response for coping with emerging risks*". The project centred on exchanging knowledge on evacuation exercise of people with disabilities. The project resulted in networking among academics, scientists, operational professionals, experts as well as people with disabilities. It aims to empower communities to engage in the disaster management cycle as a means to increase disaster resilience. A publication will be issued in English in the next month summarising the outcomes of the "We leave no one behind" workshop organised by the Ministry for Climate Crisis and Civil Protection, Athens on 8 November. The outcomes included increasing the awareness of the participants on procedures required in an emergency, revealing limitations and gaps in resources or preparation and answering questions relating to rescue methods for people with disabilities.

ECFF participated in the EFDRR roadmap 2021-2030 action-oriented dialogue on "*Inclusive and collaborative systems for heat and wildfire risks governance*" held on 21 October in Athens. In 2023, ECFF will carry out an evacuation exercise to test the early warning systems and will include people with disabilities. D. Christou shared his interest in including people with disabilities as a topic for BeSafeNet.

[Link to presentation](#)

European Centre on Prevention and Forecasting of Earthquakes (ECPFE), Greece. L. Pelli presented the activities of ECPFE which included publishing an atlas on Greek monuments classified according to their seismic behaviour. ECPFE made a presentation entitled "*Earthquakes and people with disabilities: protection measures*" during the workshop organised by ECFF on 8 November. ECPFE's activity aimed to develop a methodology for evaluating the accessibility of people with disabilities in historic buildings and to improve interventions in infrastructure and archaeological sites. ECPFE collaborated with ECILS in assessing selected buildings in Skopje Old Bazaar to compare the results derived from ECILS with the results obtained by ECPFE as both centres focus on the assessment of cultural and historical buildings. In

conclusion, both Centres reached similar conclusions in spite of employing different approaches and assumptions. In 2023, ECPFE will continue its collaboration with ECFF. H. Cako (CPC, Albania) expressed his interest in collaborating with ECPFE. This suggestion was well received by L. Pelli. [Link to presentation](#)

Geodynamical Hazards of High Dams (GHHD), Georgia. T. Chelidze summarised the achievements of the activity focusing on the application of new measures of high dams stability using nonlinear dynamics tools and compilation of guidelines. He participated in the international DAMAST project on “*Monitoring for hydropower lifetime*” in Karlsruhe, Germany in April and presented the GHHD report on “*Nonlinear dynamics tools in the real time monitoring of large dams: the case of High Enguri Arc Dam*”. The report was accepted for publication in “*Special topics in dam engineering*” in 2022. New tools for monitoring dam performance were developed such as the cost-effective telemetric acceleration/tilt monitoring unit. In 2023, the tool will be tested and following the results, it could be considered a prototype which could potentially be shared among other countries. T. Chelidze explained that there were many hurdles to overcome as procedures required for commercialisation and implementation are complex. GHHD carried out the project activities in collaboration with CERG, Strasbourg. [Link to presentation](#)

K. Nikolla (on behalf of H. Cako, CPC, Albania) informed the participants about the structure and activities of the National Civil Protection Agency, created in 2019, which is responsible for disaster risk assessment and civil protection in Albania. Since its creation, Albania has established collaboration with partners in the region and border countries such as Italy, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Croatia, Portugal and Serbia to learn from the experiences of the older agencies in these countries. Albania shares the Agreement’s vision. The agency also cooperates with different local partners. Previously, there was no existing legislation, strategy or concept for disaster risk reduction and climate change. However, this situation is changing, and Albania aims to finalise its new national-level emergency planning in the coming months. Significantly, Albania is now a member State of the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism \(UCPM\)](#) which was established to strengthen cooperation on preventing and responding to disasters. Albania enjoys extensive cooperation on DRR with other international bodies such as DG ECHO and the Pacific Disaster Center.

In 2023, collaboration will be further strengthened through cross-border programmes with Montenegro and Greece, and cooperation with Italy and other Mediterranean countries. The gaps in Albania’s civil protection system became apparent during the 2019 earthquake and this presented an opportunity for Albania to update its response and capacity. Albania is collaborating with Germany on a 6-year project supported by the Green Climate Fund to develop an early warning system at national level.

Vulnerability of Industrial and Lifelines Systems (ECILS), North Macedonia. V. Sesov explained that the project aimed at assessing the seismic vulnerability of Skopje Old Bazaar in collaboration with ECPFE, Greece. The collaboration culminated in a meeting in October in Skopje to compare the results of the assessments of historic buildings. The surveys were carried out by rapid visual screening using a first level data form developed in 2021 to screen existing cultural and historical buildings. It was necessary to create a database for the information gathered from the screening of the surveyed buildings. The studies relied on the quantity and quality of data as well as the methodology applied. A desk study and remote data collection were also conducted for the 30 buildings surveyed. An important step for the project was collaboration with government agencies in order to access the premises of the buildings selected for structural analysis. The level of damage to the buildings was graded and the project team will follow up by elaborating recommendations for the owners of the buildings prior to carrying out renovation works. In 2023, the collaboration with ECPFE will continue and will include carrying out bearing and deformation capacity analysis of structures of selected buildings. [Link to presentation](#)

Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Germany. J. Goldammer presented the centre’s activities for 2022, which focused on landscape fire management strategies in Ukraine, Greece and Western Balkans. J. Goldammer conducted a mapping of wildfire monitoring in Ukraine – land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain scattered across the country posing great danger to the inhabitants. GFMC conducted a monitoring of collateral damage caused by the war in Ukraine. A total area of 1.6m hectares of vegetated lands burned in 2022, thereof ca. 300,000 ha forests. 1426 protected areas are contaminated for the long term by UXO (i.e., shelling, mines, bomb and rockets). On 7 December, an online meeting will be held with the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (FOREST EUROPE) to discuss how to

accomplish post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian forests and how to formulate financial, scientific and technical assistance from European countries.

GFMC facilitated the preparation and development of the “*International Landscape Fire Management Framework*”, which was presented by K. Zyman at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, on 27 May in Bali, Indonesia. As a follow up, the “8th *International Wildland Fire Conference*” is scheduled for 16-19 May 2023 in Portugal and will address governance in landscape fire management. S. Karma (ECFF) suggested that centres could participate in the upcoming event in Portugal in 2023. The deadline for submitting abstracts is 12 December.

K. Zyman encouraged the directors to submit their abstracts to the Conference organisers as this was an opportunity to raise visibility given that between 500 to 1000 participants are expected to attend the event and offered the Agreement’s assistance with participation. [Link to presentation](#)

Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD), Malta. A. Micallef, in collaboration with UNIMORE, Italy, worked on the assessment and mapping of climate-change (CC) related vulnerability and risk. The threat of global warming impacts the sea-level rise and is permanent, rendering coastal areas highly vulnerable to marine and CC related processes. This has had negative consequences such as the loss of natural eco-systems and exploitable coastal land and significant social economic impacts. The project aimed to address CC related risk management and challenges which national authorities face and to also address the impact of long-term threats of global warming such as sea-level rise and short-term threats such as inundation and flooding.

Gozo Island was the subject of a case study on the definition of coastal inundation scenarios. Based on the projections of the intergovernmental panel on CC for 2050 and 2100, ICoD produced vulnerability and risk maps depicting coastal areas which are expected to be below the present sea level in 2050 and in 2100. Guidelines will be produced at the end of this process thereby providing valuable tools for coastal planning to the Ministry for Public Works and Planning of Malta. ICoD produced two scientific articles which were published in scientific journals and several presentations were made and publications presented at various conferences thereby increasing the ICoD’s outreach. [Link to presentation](#)

8. OTHER OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN 2022

No further updates were given on other operational activities.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The directors of centres were invited to submit all the proposals for 2023 activities by Monday 5 February. Additionally, details of a new specialised centre in Slovakia will be confirmed in the near future.

10. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next CPC meeting will be held online on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 May 2023.