

Strasbourg, 10 July 2023

AP/CAT(2023)03  
Or. English

## **European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)**

### **79<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents**

#### **Meeting Report**

11 May 2023  
Room 7, Palais de l'Europe

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

*This document will not be distributed at the meeting. Please bring this copy.  
Ce document ne sera plus distribué en réunion. Prière de vous munir de cet exemplaire*

**Thursday, 11 May 2023**

## **Welcome address**

Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary of European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) welcomed the participants to the 79<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents (CPC). Present at the meeting were the permanent correspondents of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia and the Slovak Republic. The permanent correspondents of Albania, Georgia, Lebanon, Morocco, Moldova, Monaco and Romania were absent. V. Sesov (North Macedonia) and V. Poyarkov (Ukraine) had apologised for their absence due to other unavoidable commitments.

## **1. Adoption of the draft agenda [AP/CAT\(2023\)OJ02](#)**

The draft agenda was adopted as proposed.

## **2. Statement by the Executive Secretary, Mr Krzysztof ZYMAN**

The Executive Secretary updated the participants on the recent administrative and budgetary developments and their impact on the Agreement's activities. Since the last Joint meeting of the CPC and directors of specialised centres, held on 17 to 18 November 2022 in Paris, the number of member states to the Agreement remains unchanged. Due to the ongoing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, that country is currently unable to make its financial contribution to the Agreement's 2023 budget. Solutions are being sought by the Council of Europe to plug the shortfall.

K. Zyman is proactively working to broaden cooperation with observers and non-member states. The Secretariat has made approaches to the Observer delegations of Japan and of Mexico to the Council of Europe with a view to increasing cooperation.

The Executive Secretary informed of his participation in the following meetings:

- Action oriented regional dialogue on "Understanding and communicating existing and future risks: Ensuring evidence-based communication" convened and organised by the UNDRR and the Directorate General for Civil Protection, Department for Emergency Situations, Ministry of Interior of Romania, on 23-24 February in Bucharest;
- 5th International Conference on Civil Protection and Science organised by the Observatory of Civil Protection & Safety and the Higher Institute of Education and Sciences (ISEC), on 28-30 March 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal. K. Zyman congratulated M. Ribeiro and P. Costa from the European Centre on Urban Risks (CERU) for the excellent organisation of the meeting;
- Administrative Council meeting of the European University Centre for the Cultural Heritage (CUEBC) where the Executive Secretary of the Agreement is an *ex-officio* member, and the ceremony to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CUEBC, on 14-15 April, Ravello. The centre has had a longstanding collaboration with the Agreement since it was established. The keynote speech was delivered by Mounir Bouchenaki, Special Advisor to UNESCO Director-General and the retired Director-General of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage (ICCROM).

The Executive Secretary informed also of his planned participation in the following meetings:

- High-Level Meeting of Mid-term Review of the Sendai Framework on 18-19 May in New York;
- Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe - 45<sup>th</sup> Regional meeting on 31 May-1 June in Sarajevo;
- 2023 International Conference on Resilient Systems to be held in Mexico City on 28-30 June, where he will also have bilateral meetings with representatives of the Mexican authorities.

In attending these meetings, K. Zyman seeks to network and promote the activities of the Agreement, particularly the work of the specialised centres and meet leaders of other countries to discuss possibilities of accession to the Agreement.

One minute of silence was held to mark the passing of Prof. Dr. Zoran Milutinović, long-time director of the European Centre on Vulnerability of Industrial and Lifelines Systems in Skopje. K. Zyman had offered his condolences to the family and colleagues on behalf of the Agreement.

M. Mala (PC, Cyprus) thanked the secretariat for their effort and investment in the Agreement and hoped that the conclusions would be helpful for the future steps of the Agreement. A. Micallef (PC, Malta) offered his condolences for the demise of Prof. Dr. Zoran Milutinović reminding of his commitment to the Agreement's activities.

### **3. Programme of activities 2023**

#### **3.1 Statutory meetings [AP/CAT\(2023\)01](#)**

K. Zyman recalled the salient points of the bureau meeting held on 21 March 2023. The bureau discussed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) debate on "*Political strategies to prevent, prepare for, and face the consequences of natural disasters*." The PACE rapporteur, S. Moutquin, would present the report at the meeting.

Grants had only been disbursed to the specialised centres located in the member states, maintaining approximately the same level of funding as 2022.

The bureau's next meeting will be held in the first week of July.

### **4. Proposed revision of the list of Specialised Centres participating in the EUR-OPA Network (admission of new centres and removal of inactive centres from the list.)**

K. Zyman presented the updated list of specialised centres. The revision had become necessary as several countries had withdrawn from the Agreement, other centres were no longer in existence and one centre had requested to be removed from the list. Before making the proposal, the secretariat had also contacted inactive centres, but did not get a response. Given the lack of response and the lack of cooperation on the part of inactive centres with the Agreement, Annex I to the Rules of Procedures was updated to reflect the reality.

K. Zyman informed the meeting that the Slovak Republic confirmed that the Specialized Centre for Technological Hazards (SCENT) located within the Slovak University of Technology (STU) in Bratislava had expressed their wish to join the Network and will make a presentation to that end.

The Executive Secretary also underlined that the aim of the update was not to reduce the number of specialised centres and some centres located in the non-member states, such as GFMC, (Germany), CUEBC (Italy) and CERG (France), actively participating in the work of the Agreement will continue to form part of the network.

K. Zyman presented the new Annex I to the Rules of Procedure ([link to AP/CAT\(2022\)8rev with Annex I](#)).

J. Isgandarli (PC, Azerbaijan), requested to remove the European Centre on Training and Information of Local and Regional Authorities and Population in the Field of Natural and Technological Disasters (ECMHT), from the list, as it is no longer functioning. Recently, the Institute of Geography under the Ministry of Science and Education in Azerbaijan made a request to establish a new specialised centre. J. Isgandarli will inform the CPC once this decision is confirmed.

Following discussions with the Serbian authorities, K. Zyman confirmed that the University of Belgrade had expressed an interest to join the network of specialised centres. The specific project is still being developed.

**Decision:** the CPC unanimously accepted the proposal to revise the list.

#### 4.1 Presentation of the new Specialized Centre for Technological Hazards (Slovak Republic)

D. Reynolds (PC, Slovak Republic) in her introduction, remarked that the ongoing climate change and climate crises affirmed the need for the specialised centres to continue to find solutions. The new centre in Bratislava also confirmed the will to contribute to seek science-based solutions to the current challenges.

Professor Ján Híveš presented the new Specialized Centre for Technological Hazards (SCENT), Bratislava. The centre has been functioning for four years in the form of a group of working scientists and academics at the Slovak University of Technology (STU). It is recognised by the government, as demonstrated through its collaboration with the Ministry of Interior since December 2022. The accord between SCENT and the Ministry of Interior is underpinned by an Agreement on cooperation in security, research and civil security which will focus on technological hazards such as studying innovative approaches in risk analysis and management methodology, managing new threats as well as educating the population etc. This collaboration is the first practical step towards achieving these objectives nationally. ([Link to presentation](#))

**Decision:** the CPC unanimously accepted the Specialized Centre for Technological Hazards (SCENT) Slovak Republic as a new member of the network of specialised centres.

### 5. Statement by Mr Matjaz GRUDEN, Director of Democratic Participation

K. Zyman thanked the Director for his presence and his steadfast support of the Agreement.

M. Gruden warmly welcomed the participants. He stated that the topical nature of the Agreement's work remained relevant in providing effective solutions as regards the prevention and response to the occurrence of natural hazards which are growing in frequency and magnitude due to environmental degradation and climate change.

The Council of Europe recognises as a priority the need to fight against environmental degradation and climate change as well as contribute to the overall efforts undertaken by the member states. This is set out in the strategic framework of the Council of Europe. It is important for the Agreement to be prominent in the organisation's contribution to provide responses to these challenges based on the values of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Although many international actors and partners are involved in the efforts to respond to and prevent natural hazards, it is the Council of Europe, through the Agreement, that is uniquely positioned to reinforce these values and increase national compliance. Nonetheless, it is imperative to collaborate with other partners; the Agreement enjoys a strongly developed cooperation with UNDRR as evidenced through co-organising the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) in Matosinhos on 24-26 November 2021 and the Agreement's contribution to the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in Bali on 23-27 May 2022. Presence at these events gave the Council of Europe an opportunity to contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

M. Gruden enumerated some key developments within the Council of Europe and their impact on the Agreement:

- On 26 April, PACE debated the report on "*Political strategies to prevent, prepare for, and face the consequences of natural disasters*" drafted by the Rapporteur Mr Simon Moutquin (Belgium, SOC), who would inform the CPC about the outcome of the debate.
- On 3 May, the Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers held a high-level conference to discuss what the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment entails in practice, and what framework for fleshing out this right could take. Senior judges, experts and representatives of the international community attended the conference. Robert Spano, ex-President of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) delivered the keynote speech. Katrin Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland cited environmental degradation and the triple combination of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss as being one of the most urgent challenges of our times. During this conference it was noted that the ECHR had already ruled on approximately 300 environment-related cases.
- On 16-17 May, the Reykjavik Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe Heads of State will be held. Among the most pressing issues confronting the Council of Europe the climate crisis and rapid technological changes were identified as challenges, which are having major effects on human rights.

The opportunity exists for the Agreement to work in these areas and demonstrate its capacity to deliver. The longstanding financial difficulties faced by the Agreement constitute a challenge also faced by the member states and the organisation as a whole. There is a growing cost for defending values across the board, which has impacted the Agreement, compounded by the withdrawal of Belgium and the cessation of Russia's membership.

The reasons for the Agreement's existence are growing and the capacity to respond natural and technological disasters needs to be increased in a way to not only protect human rights and dignity but also to advance them. After many years whereby the concern for the environment was on the margins, European citizens now expect to see effective responses and measures to counter these challenges.

K. Zyman thanked M. Gruden for his message and recalled that following the Ministerial Meeting held in Matosinhos in 2021 and the Medium-Term Plan for 2021-2025 (MTP), it was decided to look into how technology could be effectively used in this field of work. The challenges facing the Agreement were also outlined during the meeting. A. Micallef believed that despite the Agreement's financial difficulties, there was still a pressing need for its work.

In response to a question about maintaining the reference to "safe" environment in the "*right to a secure, to a safe, healthy, sustainable environment*", K. Zyman explained that no definitive decision had been made about what form any follow up action would take: a protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, or a protocol to the European Social Charter or a free standing new convention. There are diverging voices on which direction this development should take and how the Council of Europe should respond. The member states will

decide and the Agreement is hoping for the most comprehensive and broad binding instrument which would allow for the promotion of standards in a safe, clean and healthy environment. and come up with a broad binding instrument to this effect. The secretariat will inform the CPC of any developments.

M. Gruden reiterated that the neither the final decision, nor the exact wording is known for the moment. The reference to a safe environment is important but the use of adjectives ultimately should not matter in dealing with questions and threats to the environment and climate change. The most evident manifestation, driving force and consequences cannot be achieved without the awareness of or engagement in finding responses to ensure that the environment is also safe. An unsafe environment cannot be clean or healthy.

**6. Exchange of views with Mr Simon MOUTQUIN on the PACE Report on “*Political strategies to prevent, prepare for, and face the consequences of natural disasters*” and PACE Resolution 2493 (2023) and Recommendation 2251 (2023) <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/31769>**

K. Zyman welcomed S. Moutquin (PACE member, Belgium), highlighting the ongoing cooperation between the Agreement and PACE, as well as the collaboration between the PACE representatives and the governmental structures in the organisation’s member states. His participation in the CPC was warmly appreciated as it allowed for the transmission of information and first hand feedback from PACE to the CPC.

S. Moutquin provided background details to the above-mentioned PACE report. He hoped that through the exchange of views, the Parliamentary Assembly, experts from ministries and other stakeholders could find a consensus and solutions together. The report bares the existing weaknesses in the current approach, underscoring the need to cooperate and coordinate efforts. It serves to gauge the situation, in addition to other work already completed by PACE on the “*Recognition of a right to a safe, sound, sustainable and healthy environment*”. The report was voted on just before the Reykjavik Summit, as the committee tried to coordinate this action with the political agenda of the Council of Europe.

Some of the main features of the report are:

- various interactions which can exist between human rights and fundamental rights in the different stages of a natural disaster e.g., preparation, prevention, the disaster itself, rebuilding, etc. The report sheds light on vulnerable people – women are at greater risk from natural disasters, incidences of domestic violence increase in disasters, there is an increase in orphans and people living in precarious situations suffer the most as they cannot flee from the disaster. For example, migrants from Syria were greatly impacted by the recent earthquake; in Türkiye, social networks were closed down, some demonstrations were prohibited, centralising help and coordination proved challenging, and the local authorities were not always consulted. He also raised his concerns about the coming elections in post-earthquake areas. Finally, he insisted on the reference to a safe environment in the discussions before the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit, which should recognise the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment;
- transparency and democratisation at the various stages were essential for effective management of the disaster.

The PACE report acknowledges that EUR-OPA Agreement is the oldest forum where the community of European natural and industrial disaster professionals meets. Since its inception, the Agreement has been a source of solutions which have enabled disaster risks to be gauged more accurately. EUR-OPA has never been a technical agency, but is rather a body that develops standards in the Council of Europe, enabling sharing of best practice. Its approach based on human rights and democratic participation and its regional dimension are still appropriate. In spite of this, the Agreement is seen as being in competition with the United Nations and the

European Union, although their roles are different. The report further notes that despite the tangible advances to which it has led, the Agreement suffers from a persistent lack of resources. In 2022 alone, the partial agreement lost 52% of its budget.

The Executive Secretary thanked S. Moutquin for preparing and presenting the report, more so, for his efforts towards advocating for the Belgian government to re-join the Agreement. K. Zyman believed that S. Moutquin's support would be beneficial to the Agreement as it continues its work in the future.

K. Zyman reiterated that although working in a different environment today, compared to 1987 at the start of the Agreement, there is much collaboration with UNDRR, DG-ECHO. The forthcoming DDPI SEE meeting will serve as another opportunity in institutional partnerships. What the Council of Europe brings to the various coordination meetings is that the Agreements' member states are all democratic countries, respectful of the rule of law and human rights, ensuring that when different standards are being elaborated these fundamental pillars are not forgotten.

While the Agreement disposes of less resources in comparison to UN partners, this creates a necessity to be more proactive in order to be visible. The Agreement is trying to meet the challenges, therefore, the work undertaken by S. Moutquin to bring the issue of natural disasters to the forefront in PACE and the CM is pivotal. By mutual reinforcement, the Agreement can achieve its goals. K. Zyman lauded S. Moutquin's participation in the meeting which has allowed the CPC to see how these questions are also raised within the secretariat of the Council of Europe.

A. Balducci (PC, San Marino) thanked Mr Moutquin for his remarks, noting that the Agreement had in the past years, overlooked the possibility to have such a well-versed contribution about major hazards from a PACE representative. There are two main issues to resolve; firstly, the lack of membership from the bigger economies in Europe such as Germany, France and Spain, although scientific centres based in Germany and Italy are part of the network.

The second factor causing difficulty for the Agreement is the tight financial situation following the withdrawal of Türkiye and Russia. he expressed the hope that Belgium would re-join the Agreement. A. Balducci suggested that if PACE representatives could be invited to each CPC meeting in future, they could transmit the message and explain the specific difficulties faced by the Agreement. He reminded that distributing a meagre financial contribution to the centres was problematic as this limits the number of projects that can be adequately supported.

In reply to S. Moutquin's question regarding how the Agreement could make a difference, A. Micallef suggested that the Agreement could strengthen its involvement in projects focusing on human rights, including the human rights of future generations, which is an important issue. He cited as an example a project run by the centre in Armenia on "*Investigating the constitution of member states of the Council of Europe regarding any reference to the rights to a safe environment*". These types of projects contribute more, and allow the Agreement to play a more effective role especially given the Council of Europe's concerns with (defending) human rights. The major constraint would be the lack of specialised centres within the Agreement with expertise in human rights in order to give a bigger input into the human rights issues.

S. Moutquin stressed the need to be honest and open about the reasons behind the Agreement's funding situation. He noted that countries are investing less in human rights instruments and prefer to direct more funds to issues such as diplomacy and multilateralism. This is no longer an era in which human rights is a top-priority for countries as there is an ongoing backsliding in human rights, in addition to the climate and energy crises. This situation should urge people to call on their politicians to invest more in agreements and instruments such as EUR-OPA. He has pleaded domestically for Belgium to re-join the Agreement.

The Agreement is also impacted by a broader phenomenon which is beyond the control of PACE. For example, the operational effectiveness has become a priority for the EU, whereas the Council of Europe's added value and strength consist of planning, preparing, prevention measures, concern for vulnerable and precarious groups and rebuilding following a natural disaster etc. This is something that needs to be reaffirmed, although all these actions require adequate human and financial resources.

Moreover, when dealing with specific climate related cases judges and the ECtHR will be required to draw on expert opinions. Therefore, the Agreement has an important contribution to make here as well. It is the responsibility of the member states to make decisions about funding.

Much more work is required to disseminate information about the Agreement within the national parliaments as well as within PACE, as the Agreement is not sufficiently known. The Agreement needs to seize the opportunities of natural disasters (sadly) to demonstrate that it is both a visible and an important tool which can be effectively used. Funding could possibly be improved through this means.

Furthermore, as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe will visit Türkiye in September 2023, this presents an opportunity to develop interaction between the Agreement and the Congress, opening possibilities for greater interaction particularly in the area of local level management of natural disasters. In the different countries different players have an important role to play and can be part of the strategy that the Agreement needs to develop in order to bolster its role.

K. Zyman added that the Congress was in fact following today's meeting and this would serve to reinforce the message and raise awareness about the Agreement's work.

K. Zyman thanked S. Moutquin for the exchange of views with the CPC and stressed the need to continue cooperating and mutually strengthening and supporting each other's message and work. K. Zyman would keep PACE informed about the progress of the work within the CPC, whilst watching out for developments at PACE. Maintaining the visibility of Agreement was important and K. Zyman also appreciated that the report mentions the financial situation of the Agreement and suggested that it could be funded by the ordinary budget, although this power lies with the member states. K. Zyman assured that efforts would be sustained in order for the Agreement to be heard. There remains indeed a need to work within an international context for the prevention and preparing the response to disasters through such instruments as the Agreement.

## **7. Functioning of the agreement [AP/CAT\(2021\)11](#)**

### **7.1 Priorities of the Agreement for 2023**

The CPC will decide on the future work of the Agreement at their next meeting. After the conclusion of the current work on the use of social media, the CPC will determine the priority topic for next year. Some possibilities are mentioned in the MTP, such as limiting the exposure of vulnerable groups to hazards or risk assessment tools for the protection of cultural heritage – the latter topic should be approached in cooperation with UNESCO, to reinforce collaboration on topics of common interest. K. Zyman invited the CPC to reflect on this and come up with proposals for future work. The Executive Secretary also informed that V. Poyarkov (CPC, Ukraine) made a wide-scoping proposal to create a working group to review the functioning of the Agreement. This issue will be discussed in depth when V. Poyarkov is present.

Regarding the future priorities of the Agreement, M. Mala informed the CPC about a recent seminar, where the climate crisis and climate change were discussed in parallel with the development and expansion of cities and how they affect cultural heritage. She suggested that a project combining cultural heritage and the climate crisis could add value to the Agreement and any recommendation resulting from this, would be a way to



promote the Agreement and make it more visible. K. Zyman fully agreed with this proposal, emphasising that combining these subjects in one project would be topical and important, as well as offer visibility due to the importance of cultural heritage worldwide. More so, 194 countries are signatories to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. K. Zyman proposed to discuss this in more detail at the next CPC meeting.

M. Mala pointed out the usefulness of the Agreement, lining up different options for projects that feed into the conclusions or decisions of the UNDRR Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework meeting in New York in May, on how risk reduction affects people and the plan for 2015-2030. The Agreement could look into defining activities that connect to UNDRR's outcomes and align our conclusions with theirs. K. Zyman agreed that this would indeed demonstrate that the Agreement collaborates with other actors active in the field e.g., UNESCO and UNDRR, the primary partner to the Agreement. This would also showcase the usefulness and added value of the Agreement.

The Executive Secretary also recalled that the election of the new Bureau will take place at the next CPC meeting in order to renew its composition.

#### **8. Presentation of a working paper on *"The use of social media, traditional media, big data and mobile phone networks, to support national measures for successful disaster risk communication"***

In his introductory remarks, K. Zyman explained that the working paper is a follow up of the decisions taken at the last Joint meeting held in Paris, where two presentations were made on the use of social media and DRR communication by F. Duarte and C. Rizza. The paper concentrates on one major aspect of the discussions held before on the use of social media in DRR before and during the event. It does not address the question of the threats posed by social media as further work is still required on this. The paper, although unfinished, addresses a substantial part of what should constitute the Agreement's reflection on the use of social media. The aim of the present discussion was to take stock of the stage reached in this reflection on the use of social media by the experts and the CPC. Guidelines and recommendations will be drawn up by the end of the year for the CPC to adopt a recommendation on this topic.

C. Rizza, Associate Professor, Information Systems for Crisis Response And Management (ISCRAM) outlined the context of her working paper which takes a communicational approach of crisis management on how social media are transforming the democratic public space i.e., change in mediations, interactions between public institutions, citizens and private companies. The working paper builds on C. Rizza's presentation to the CPC in November 2022 on *"Social media and digital app. as communication tools"*.

The draft paper is framed with two main contributions; a report on Strategic Crisis Management in the EU elaborated by the Scientific Advice and the *Handbook of computational social science for policy (JRC, 2023)* which looks at all the data to be found on social media that raised opportunities i.e., contextualising and understanding an event and understanding the dynamics of a disinformation campaign thanks to social network analysis. It identifies challenges such as the need for professional practices to adapt to these new tools and new opportunities and points to challenges linked to recognising citizens actions as the first link of the crisis management operational chain when dealing with a crisis.

The objectives of the working paper are to:

- i) provide specific examples of both the beneficial uses of social media and their critical analysis;
- ii) provide a state of the art to support discussions about the relevant issues to be addressed in the area of social media and crisis management in the framework of the Agreement;

iii) Serve as a basis for drafting concrete policy recommendations and guidelines.

The key issues are underlined in the working paper and relate to the function and the values public institutions may give to do-it-yourself crisis management as regards building resilient societies. There is a need to deepen the understanding for public institutions to embrace bottom-up initiatives. It also raises the question of the pros and cons of volunteering citizens use of social media. Additional questions are linked to questions on how to cope with citizens expectations in communication, the insufficiency of guidelines on digital culture, new rules etc. Refer to the report and the presentation for more information. ([Link to the presentation](#)).

K. Zyman thanked C. Rizza for the detailed and thought-provoking presentation. He noted that the word 'trust' had come up severally and is a key part of any reflection on the use of social media – the trust between the citizens and the institutions. How such trust could be built, maintained and nurtured for it to work throughout the full cycle of the four stages of crisis management (prevention, preparedness, response and recovery). Given that social media is evolving so rapidly, and that some networks or media only appeal to specific age groups or specific fields of interests, could any work that is being now undertaken be made future-proof? How should the authorities choose or maintain a presence on social media (Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram etc.), taking into account questionable status some of these platforms? What happens if the authorities are using a different software to the citizens? These questions immediately constitute key points for the guidelines as these are very strong lines of reflection which could be further developed and adopted at a later stage.

K. Zyman welcomed Dr Felipe Pathé Duarte, Assistant Professor and researcher, NOVA School of Law and Instituto Superior de Ciências Policiais e Segurança Interna (ISCPSP), Lisbon and thanked him for joining the meeting. F. Duarte highlighted the dark side of social media, linking it to the political effects of disinformation campaigns or information disorder campaigns through social media. Social media can be used negatively with a political perspective as security threats or hybrid threats through social media and information disorder campaigns. They can be weaponised in order to change or block the trust that you might have in institutions. Further, it could create forms in order to directly attack the trust, which is the basis of social contact which allows us to live in a democracy.

K. Zyman picked up on the issue of trust or mistrust: how to trust in institutions in order for democracy to function? How to ensure freedom of social media? How should the authorities use social media, on the one hand developing trust and in contrast combating mistrust which can be fuelled by the malevolent use of social media by different state and non-state actors? It is indeed a complicated field and a difficult act for the authorities to follow. How do they operate in this environment trying to build trust in the face of disinformation e.g., the campaign that led to the mistrust of vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic? On the one hand, social media are used to promote security, safety and responsible behaviour and on the other hand, there are state and non-actors using the crises to propagate false narratives and to build mistrust in society. More time is needed to reflect on how to put forward examples and wording which would guide the CPC and the member states.

K. Zyman welcomed M. Olivier Galichet, Expert in planning/crisis management, National Operational Centre for Civil Protection, Ministry of Interior, France. O. Galichet, a former firefighter, has extensive experience on social media in emergency management and shared his knowledge as a practitioner. He explained that crisis managers work with volunteers in order to improve data mining in social media. He looked at the use of social media data quality reliability analysis and whether to trust the data. He elaborated that globally, as well as in France, crisis management is mostly top down and rarely bottom up. This approach should be remedied as crisis management should be more agile with regard to the citizens, but usually becomes an afterthought following a crisis.

The question of the quality of data circulating on social media and their integration into crisis management is the main point for the institutions and the first challenge is trusting social media information. However, the good practices are not sufficient to bridge social media emergency management and institutions. Social media

constitute new channels of communication and there is a need to rethink tools and engage with the new culture. Social media provide a virtual space for the expression and organisation of citizen action. This provides a good opportunity for crisis management to have this space wherein they can communicate and build up the citizens contribution. However, in order to achieve that, the services must define new doctrines, methods and ways to engage within this new digital immediate two-way communication culture.

Regarding data, the huge amount of information flow is a problem for institutions, requiring tools to classify and prepare the data by means of human analysis, which is essential today. Rescuing human beings cannot be based on using artificial intelligence (AI) as this is not the best form of crisis management. As the rescue services require all-inclusive information, humans need to be available to analyse and verify the photos, location, time, sender etc. This is not the reality with AI. Further thought is needed regarding new protocols, interoperability and meta data which provide information on location, date, reliability, information sources, etc.

The mistrust of information makes it complicated to strengthen the doctrine and crises can kill new concepts such as social media in management, emergency warning systems. A small team, facing an emergency situation at night would need to involve people e.g., in the event of a forest fire or a big accident. However, social media may not relay the information immediately and an emergency warning system could fail, thus the responsibility would fall on the authorities to react in these crucial moments following an event. Citizens' initiatives often act first but they are not recognised or affiliated.

To conclude, social media certainly offer a space for spreading both accurate and false information. The level of veracity is central to crisis management and must be managed. Social media must be a part of crisis management for it to be effective. To illustrate the need for coexistence of both social media and civil protection authorities, O. Galichet cited the idea of the bazaar and cathedral which coexist side by side.

The floor was opened for discussion:

A. Micallef picked up on the point about the reference to citizen's responsibility in ensuring their own security, i.e., the citizen should be involved in their own safety. This draws attention to the issue of the human right to live in a safe environment. Evidently, rights come with responsibilities, and the assertion suggests that to ensure the human right to living in a safe environment, it is the citizens' responsibility to ensure their own safety. These points could be expanded on as they are complimentary. Another question raised was if it is possible to identify disinformation relating to certain hazards e.g., when there are radioactive emissions and oil spills. A. Micallef queried if there were examples of such disinformation. In his opinion the potential for disinformation is limited because there would be very little to be gained.

Regarding the two points underlined by A. Micallef, C. Rizza pointed out that the question of citizen's responsibility for her or his own security, could be regarded as a cultural issue. As regards disinformation, one must distinguish between political disinformation and disinformation during a natural or technological hazard. Disinformation usually relates to political campaigns against the state. This can be seen as an additional threat to a state, adding a disinformation campaign to the crisis caused by a disaster. For example, in the event of a technological disaster which took place in France, due to insufficient official communication, rumours started to circulate on social media about the air quality and the risk this posed for the population. This was not a disinformation campaign but a case of citizens worried about air quality. This exemplifies the danger that institutions may not be aware of occurrences on social media until it is too late. It is essential therefore for institutions to be present on social media in order to dispel such rumours. During the earthquake in Türkiye, a lot of information was spread on social media.

A. Micallef pointed out that the earlier presentation on the human right to a safe environment aligns with the responsibility that comes when demanding a right. They strengthen each other: calling for a human right to live in a safe environment, lays a certain responsibility on the citizen to learn about the natural hazards that

occur in their region and to improve their knowledge on how to behave in case of particular hazards. It also strengthens the call for increasing efforts to improve people's knowledge on how to behave during a particular crisis. This would also strengthen the argument to enlarge the Agreement's activities in this direction.

In her response C. Rizza, pointed out to a New Zealand approach where earthquakes and hurricanes are common, where culture related to crisis management developed in such a way that people are aware and families plan ahead of what to do during a crisis on an individual level. This is something that could be worked on i.e., promotion of the new culture of the responsibility of the citizens in a crisis. O. Galichet commented that institutions are not sufficiently prepared for citizens' involvement in crisis management.

F. Duarte, in reply to A. Micallef about the political dimension of the misuse of social media which hampers intervention explained that this obstructs one's perception, citizens votes, opportunities such as intervention by fire fighters, or armed forces or any kind of intervention where trust is key. Disinformation is using false information to create harm to a person or social group, misinformation is using false information but it is not intended to cause harm and mal information is based on altering the truth and thereby results in much harm. Mal information could be regarded as a political problem. K. Zyman remarked that these distinctions will be taken into account when preparing guidelines.

K. Zyman remarked that the discussions provide a good starting point for drawing up guidelines on the use of social media. The secretariat will work with the experts on this. He thanked them for their help and looked forward to continuing the work.

M. Mala thanked the experts for their work remarking that there was still much work to be done.

**Decision:** the CPC unanimously agreed to continue the work on social media use in disaster communication with a view to producing draft guidelines and a recommendation for the next CPC meeting.

## **9. Other operational activities**

K. Zyman encouraged the participants to regularly check the Agreement's website for regular updates, more so, in view of the Reykjavik Summit of the Heads of State.

## **10. Any other business**

K. Zyman thanked the participants and also the observers from the International Civil Defense Organisation (ICDO) and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (RescEU).

## **11. Date and place of the next meeting**

It was agreed that the next Joint Meeting of the CPC and directors of centres will take place in person, on 6-7 November, in Strasbourg.