



Forum EUROMED PROTECT-NET

Euro-Mediterranean Forum for Disaster Risk Governance, Health Preparedness, and Networking Advancement



2 - 3 May 2024 San Marino

**Statement: Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary
European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)
Council of Europe**

Dear Directors, dear Forum Participants,

It is an honour to open the "EUROMED PROTECT-NET - Euro-Mediterranean **Forum for Disaster Risk Governance, Health Preparedness, and Networking Advancement**" initiated and organised by the European Centre for Disaster Medicine (CEMEC), in collaboration with the University of San Marino's Center for Security Studies (CUFS), the University of Rome "Tor Vergata" Department of Electronic Engineering (DIE), and the Italian Research Institute Observatory on Security and CBRNe Defense (OSDIFE).

For those of you who are less familiar with the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, I will recall some basic facts:

In 1987, the Council of Europe created an instrument to promote governmental co-operation in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction and dealing with emergencies "the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)". Today, the Agreement unites 22 member States, among whom are two States that are not member States of the Council of Europe. San Marino was a founding member of EUR-OPA, even before it joined the Council of Europe in 1988.

Fighting against environmental degradation and climate change is one of the key priorities of the Strategic Framework for the Council of Europe.

At the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in mid-May 2023 in Reykjavik, member States adopted a Declaration "United Around Our Values" in which they underlined the urgency of taking co-ordinated action to protect the environment by countering the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity. The Declaration, which provides guidance for future priorities of the Council of Europe affirms that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations.

The "Reykjavik process" initiated at the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government aims to strengthen the work of the Council of Europe in the environmental protection field, with the aim of identifying the challenges raised by the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity for human rights and contribute to the development of common responses thereto, while facilitating the participation of youth in these discussions.

The **Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats** (the "Bern Convention"), a unique international instrument aimed at aligning national standards and practices in conserving wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats at pan-European level and beyond, provides the necessary tools to strengthen intergovernmental co-operation and creates an opportunity to civil society to engage with governments and bring to their attention concerns about threats to biodiversity and natural habitats and their detrimental consequences. It is my duty to point out that **San Marino remains the only Council of Europe Member State that has not ratified the Bern Convention**, thus depriving it of the right to be called a European-wide standard for Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. It would be a fantastic development if this question was reconsidered by the authorities.

The **Council of Europe Landscape Convention** - the first international treaty devoted exclusively to all dimensions of the landscape – specifies that the landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields and is a key element of individual and social well-being, and that landscape protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone. San Marino has been a party to that Convention since 2004.

The Council of Europe is committed to strengthen its work on the human rights aspects of the environment based on the political recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right. Furthermore, the Council of Europe strives currently to conclude ongoing work on a convention superseding and replacing the European Convention on the Protection of Environment through Criminal Law.

On 26 April 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe debated a report on Political strategies to prevent, prepare for, and face the consequences of natural disasters.

Last month, on 18 April 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly debated **Mainstreaming the human right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment with the Reykjavik process** and welcomed the setting up in January 2024 of an Inter-secretariat Task Force on the Environment, responsible for carrying out a stocktaking survey of existing and planned activities, and “proposing elements for the development of a first Council of Europe strategy on the environment”. It stated that this future strategy must have a clear goal in terms of setting standards at European level and underlined the importance “to draw up a legal binding instrument recognising an autonomous right to a healthy environment within the Council of Europe”, capitalising on existing Council of Europe standards.

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What I outlined above, pertains primarily to the intergovernmental cooperation within the Council of Europe, and the Major Hazards Agreement plays its part within this process.

In two weeks from now the Committee of Permanent Correspondents will discuss in its turn “**The right to living in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for the current and future generations**” and decide on the further steps to be taken, with the view to elaborate the Agreement’s guidelines and a recommendation.

But the Agreement stands on two pillars: one is intergovernmental, the other is scientific. EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement has been construed from the beginning as a platform for intergovernmental and scientific cooperation.

My presence here, as one of only a handful of representatives of those who work on the governance and policy side, points to a serious issue. This issue is the need **for** and often the inadequate practice **of** an interface between scientific communities and policy makers usually found in governmental or similar advisory bodies.

The situation varies in different parts of the world, but insufficient cooperation between scientists and policy makers is all too often a problem that significantly impacts the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent hazards turning into disasters, for efficient actions being taken to minimize the scale of disasters when they happen and for building back better.

The reasons for such state of affairs are multiple:

- Governments may not have the reflex to consult scientists,
- they may not sufficiently understand the arguments that are being put forward,
- they may not have constituency support for taking necessary actions,
- or they may not dispose of adequate funding to implement scientific recommendations.

On the other hand, scientists:

- may be frustrated by bureaucratic way administrations operate,
- may not have access to the decision-makers,
- or ay simply concentrate on science and not on matters which seem less important.
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All these factors are detrimental to effectively addressing the challenges of confronting hazards, preventing them from turning into disasters, and building societal resistance.

I strongly believe that it is our task ad this forum, to address this question and to propose solutions. Also, within the EUR-OPA Network of the Scientific Centres we should seek ways to maximise synergies and to strengthen partnership among centres.

The standards elaborated by the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, both at the governmental level and at the scientific level, are useful guidance tools at governments' disposal, allowing for the elaboration of more fine-tuned strategies and policies that offer better protection to the most vulnerable persons in our societies. Which is the aim we all share and work towards. I am looking forward to our discussions over the next two days!

Thank you for your attention!