



3rd Technical Workshop of the Global Fire Management Hub

28 - 30 May 2024, FAO Headquarters, Rome

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

Dear Director Zhimin WU, dear Workshop Participants,

Thank you for the invitation to attend, together with Prof. Johann Goldammer, Director of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (one of the most active in EUR-OPA's Network of Scientific Centres) the **3rd Technical Workshop of the Global Fire Management Hub**.

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, a Strasbourg-based organisation of 46 member States, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Two weeks ago, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents discussed in its turn “**The right to living in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for the current and future generations**” and decided to proceed to elaborate the Agreement’s guidelines and a recommendation in this area.



What I outlined above, pertains primarily to the intergovernmental cooperation within the Council of Europe, and the contribution the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement plays within this process.



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.

In the field of fire management, study of wildfires, effects of smoke pollution and urban heat, the EUR-OPA Network of Scientific Centres coordinates primarily the cooperation of the Freiburg-based Global Fire Monitoring Centre (represented here by its Director, Professor Johann Goldammer), the Athens-based European Centre for Forest Fires and the Portuguese European Centre on Urban Risks.

Since 2010, the EUR-OPA Secretariat has sponsored the decentralization of GFMC by the establishment of the Regional Fire Monitoring Centre for South-East Europe, based in Skopje, North Macedonia. In 2013, the GFMC established the Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Centre in Kiev, Ukraine, with the financial support of the Major Hazards Agreement.

These two Regional Centres have been example for setting-up similar centres of excellence in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The seed money provided by EUR-OPA is paying off. Meanwhile, the regional centres are supported by long-term programmes such as the Switzerland-funded Programme “Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans”.

The EUR-OPA Secretariat and GFMC are closely cooperating with the UNDRR Office and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In the last years, the centre focused on landscape fire management strategies in Ukraine, Greece and Western Balkans. It conducted mapping of wildfire monitoring in Ukraine – land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain scattered across the country posing great danger to the inhabitants. A total area of 1.6m hectares of vegetated lands burned in 2022, thereof ca. 300,000 ha forests.

In 2023, Professor Goldammer attended, on behalf of the EUR-OPA Agreement, the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference in Porto, Portugal.

The EUR-OPA Secretariat is welcoming the initiative of FAO and UNEP to establish the Global Fire Management Hub, notably the integration of the expertise of the GFMC and the Regional Fire Monitoring Centres. This Hub, we believe, could provide the basis for developing a consent-based international instrument, as we have proposed in 2022 at the UNDRR Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and at the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference – the establishment of a “Global Landscape Fire Framework”.

As a regional intergovernmental Agreement, the EUR-OPA Secretariat will further promote international cooperation in disaster risk reduction and will be available to contribute to the definition of the mission of the Hub over the coming months.

Thank you for your attention.