



The CBRNe¹ Science and Consequence Management (CSCM) Congress

Cavtat, Croatia, 23-27 October 2023

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

Date: Monday, 23 October 2023

Time: 11:00 – 13:30

Location: Cavtat, Croatia

Dear Congress Organisers, dear fellow speakers, dear Congress participants,

¹ CBRNe : Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear Emergency

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you in my capacity of the Executive Secretary of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) at this **Science and Consequence Management (CSCM) Congress**.

I am honoured to be given the floor at the Congress that gathers academics and civilian and military practitioners specialising in a variety of technical fields, working in an interdisciplinary manner, identifying problem areas, examining data, proposing solutions and making cases for policies to be implemented to offset a variety of threats.

Please allow me to briefly introduce the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. Set up in 1987, the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement of the Council of Europe is a platform for co-operation in the field of major natural and technological disasters between Europe and the South of the Mediterranean. Its field of competence covers disaster risk reduction, in particular: knowledge, prevention, preparedness, risk management and post-crisis analysis. It has to date 22 member States.

The Agreement stands on two pillars: **At the political level**, each State is represented by its minister(s) responsible for natural and technological major hazards, assisted by the Committee of Permanent Correspondents, who play the role of permanent relay between the national authorities and the Agreement.

At the scientific and technical level, the specific role of the Specialised Euro-Mediterranean Centres is to develop projects, both at national and regional levels, which aim to improve the awareness of and resilience to major risks within the population.

From its inception, the Agreement was keenly aware of the relationship between natural and technological hazards and the role of disaster medicine and emergency care. Suffices to say that the Resolution (87)2 of the Committee of Ministers establishing the Agreement specifically refers to the **European Centre for Disaster Medicine in San Marino** as one of only two reference scientific centres (the other one being the European University Centre for the Cultural Heritage in Ravello, Italy) which went on to create over the years a network which today numbers 25 scientific centres. In other words, disaster medicine and emergency care are interwoven into the DNA of the Agreement. The President of CEMEC, Professor Roberto Mugavero, is in the Organising Committee of the Congress, and I take this opportunity to thank him for years of fruitful cooperation and for having extended the invitation to the Council of Europe to be represented and to address this forum.

I come to this conference representing EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, a European and Mediterranean platform for **intergovernmental and scientific cooperation**. I would like to touch upon the issue of the need for (and often the inadequate practice of) an interface between scientific communities and policy makers. 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 situation 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 may simply concentrate on science and not on matters which seem less important.

These factors are detrimental to effectively addressing the challenges of confronting hazards, preventing them from turning into disasters, and building societal resistance.

Dear Participants,

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 EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement pays particular attention to the **most vulnerable people** because disasters affect them more than other groups and create or increase inequalities within our societies. For that reason, EUR-OPA adopted at its Ministerial Meeting in Portugal in 2021, held within the larger framework of the **European Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction**, two Recommendations: (i) on *Enabling and protecting persons with disabilities during public health emergencies resulting from pandemics* and (ii) on *Inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in public health emergencies resulting from pandemics*.

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**. The report, which cites the example of the 2021 floods in Germany and the earthquake that hit Türkiye and Syria last February, and advocates “a holistic response to natural risks”, so that the most vulnerable people do not find themselves isolated and abandoned. It stresses the importance of providing financial and technical assistance to Türkiye and Syria, to address immediate, medium and longer-term needs.

Mindful of the challenges that the most vulnerable persons within our societies face, the Agreement has undertaken this year a reflection on the use of traditional and social media and their use to identify risks and to disseminate information amongst the population on the best practices to prevent disasters from occurring and the measures to take when the disasters do occur. At the next stage the Agreement’s members will consider adopting guidelines and a **Recommendation on the use of social media to support national measures for successful disaster risk communication**.

Dear Participants,

In addition to intergovernmental work, in 2023-2024, the Centres, working within the EUR-OPA Network of Scientific Centres, will continue to address issues relating to hazards amplified by climate change (fires, droughts, coastal erosion, landslides, floods). Projects to be implemented by Scientific Centres with grants from the Agreement include:

1. Malta-based Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD) project "Coastal Risk Assessment and Mapping";
2. European Centre on Disaster Awareness, Cyprus: project "BeSafeNet - Protect yourself from hazards";
3. European Centre on Geodynamical Hazards of High Dams (GHHD) in Georgia is conducting a project on "New technologies for assessment of geo-hazards of large engineering objects (hydropower dams/reservoirs)";
4. European Center for Forest Fires (ECFF) in Greece leads the project on "Multi-hazard Risk Approach and Inclusive Community Engagement in Disaster Risk Management";
5. Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) based in Freiburg, Germany, coordinates the project "Adjustment of landscape fire management policies to the reality of climate change."

These are just a few examples of practical hands-on research projects that EUR-OPA is supporting. You are invited to visit our website to acquaint yourselves with our work in greater detail at the web-site: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/euoparisks/>.

The standards elaborated by the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement 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. I invite you all to take them, as appropriate in your work, duly into consideration.

Thank you for your attention!