

Strasbourg, 23 April 2020

AP/CAT(2020)02

EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT

MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT CORRESPONDENTS

8 April 2020

via video conference

MEETING REPORT

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

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Participants:

Bureau members:

Nataša Holcinger (NH): Chair
Alessandro Balducci (AB): Vice-Chair
Mikaella Mala (MM): Vice-Chair
Ana Freitas (AF): previous Chair

Council of Europe (CoE) Secretariat:

Maguelonne Dejeant-Pons (MDP): Head of Landscape, Environment and Major Hazards Division
Gianluca Silvestrini (GS): Co-ordinator, Department of Culture, Nature and Heritage
Ursula Sticker (US): EUR-OPA Executive Secretary
Catherine Emezie (CE): EUR-OPA Secretariat
Tania Braulio (TB): EUR-OPA Secretariat

Guest:

Milos Gubic (MG): Co-ordination and Communication Specialist, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The agenda [AP/CAT\(2020\)OJ01](#) was adopted without amendment.

2. PRESENTATION OF NEW STAFF TO BUREAU MEMBERS

The new Head of Landscape, Environment and Major Hazards Division, Ms Maguelonne Dejeant-Pons, the new EUR-OPA Executive Secretary, Ms Ursula Sticker, and the new project assistant, Ms Tania Braulio, were presented to the Bureau.

3. ORAL REPORT ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Executive Secretary expressed deep concern over the current COVID-19 crisis and sympathy with all those affected by the virus. She informed the Bureau about recent developments due to the pandemic and its impact on EUR-OPA's activities. As with all activities held at international level, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented knock-on effect on EUR-OPA's action plan, e.g. activities had to be cancelled/postponed until further notice or were held via video conference. Notwithstanding, US highlighted that the crisis situation could present an opportunity for EUR-OPA to come up with new ideas and ways of working. Given the pandemic's evolution, travel restrictions imposed by the various governments and the possible bottle-neck effect in autumn, she pointed out that EUR-OPA had to be ready to adapt to changing needs of the member States and Specialised Centres and engage more in activities that involve less or no travel and face-to-face meetings.

With regard to the on-going implementation of the grant projects of the Specialised Centres, US informed the Bureau that, so far, only one centre had inquired about the possibility to postpone the project deadline due to the pandemic. EUR-OPA secretariat's stance is that project deadlines cannot be extended beyond 1 November 2020 in order to allow for sufficient time to submit the narrative and financial reporting, in keeping with the overall CoE deadline for the submission of payment files. The centres would be asked by the secretariat to confirm whether they can spend their allocated funds within the project implementation period as stipulated in the grant agreement. The possibility of modifying project activities and amending the grant agreement could be envisaged on a case-by-case basis, if needed and where feasible.

4. EUR-OPA AGREEMENT AND BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

In the light of the urgency of the global COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Bureau members discussed the possibility of broadening the scope of the EUR-OPA activities to include biological hazards.

In order to contribute to the global efforts of reducing the risks and losses caused by the pandemic, the Bureau agreed that biological hazards should be included in the scope of EUR-OPA's activities

and action should be taken to address the challenges faced during the pandemic.

As a first step, EUR-OPA should harness the specific expertise on biological hazards available within EUR-OPA's network of Permanent Correspondents and Specialised Centres. It was agreed that external expertise could be sought should there be little expertise on biological hazards within the network due to its original set-up focusing on natural and technological disasters only.

Secondly, EUR-OPA should reach out to its member States and the Specialised Centres in order to identify local needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis and develop steps to take.

It was suggested to create a task force by involving the network of Specialised Centres as well as other external experts that could assess the "lessons learnt" during the COVID-19 pandemic in different member States. Focus could also be directed to post-crisis social aftercare and the psychological impact of the pandemic on society as a whole, and vulnerable groups in particular.

MM explained that BeSafeNet was involved in educating children on the various major hazards, with the website undergoing regular updating of information in order to widen the scope of hazards. Therefore, lessons learnt from the pandemic could also be published on the BeSafeNet website.

Further, the Bureau discussed the situation in Croatia, which had been hit by a strong earthquake amid the coronavirus emergency on 22 March 2020, and ways in which EUR-OPA could tangibly contribute to Croatia's post-earthquake recovery. NH informed the Bureau that there was a need for expertise on how to carry out post-crisis preservation and renovation of cultural heritage. Croatia would be willing for the Specialised Centres with the specific know-how (e.g. ECPFE Greece, CUEBC Italy, ECNTRM Russian Federation) and other relevant emergency management practitioners from the member States to share such expertise. NH agreed to ask her ministries, in particular the Ministry of Culture, to outline Croatia's specific needs as regards expertise following the recent earthquake in Zagreb. Possibly, the EUR-OPA network could set up a task force or organise a workshop where partners and authorities would share their experience in this context.

The Bureau members agreed that the EUR-OPA network has a wealth of expertise to share as opposed to offering financial contributions or material responses which would be too inadequate to make any concrete difference. Determining the order of priority of recipients and the organisation of relief-related logistics could also prove to be a huge challenge.

The Bureau agreed that a Resolution recognising the inclusion of biological hazards to the EUR-OPA Partial Agreement should be put forward at the next Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents (CPCs) in November 2020.

Decision:

Biological hazards are to be included in the scope of the activities under the EUR-OPA Agreement. A wider consultation will be carried out among the EUR-OPA member States and Specialised Centres to identify available specific expertise on biological hazards and local needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis.

5. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

5.1. Statutory meetings [AP/CAT\(2019\)12](#)

The main decisions taken at the last joint meeting of the CPCs and directors of Specialised Centres, held on 5-6 November 2019 in Paris, were recalled. US informed the Bureau that the EUR-OPA secretariat had fully followed up on the decisions taken.

5.2. Specialised Centres [AP/CAT \(2020\)01](#)

CE gave a brief overview of the EUR-OPA projects funded in 2020. The projects were equally distributed along the lines of the four priorities of the programme of activities:

- i. Using scientific and technological knowledge to better assess evolving risks and adapt accordingly the resilience strategies.
- ii. Developing cooperation among all decision-makers to better define authorities' adequate role in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
- iii. Promoting risk culture among population (children, adults and groups with special vulnerability).
- iv. Fostering population's active participation (as individuals and as community) to DRR.

5.3. Operational Activities

a. **BeSafeNet project: Olympiad on "Better knowledge against disasters"**

MM and CE informed the Bureau about the progress of the BeSafeNet project and the outcome of the 2020 Olympiad held on 28 February 2020. The results were launched on 26 March 2020 - over 200 teams and 1000 students took part in the online Olympiad from 10 different countries. This marked an increase in participation in comparison to 2019. The winning teams were from Greece (1st), Romania (2nd) and Bulgaria (3rd). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the award ceremony, which was initially envisaged to be held in Strasbourg in April 2020, had to be postponed. It is planned to organise an award ceremony once the pandemic is over, provided that the schools are still able to attend at a later stage.

b. **International conference to set up a training school on maxi emergencies**

US informed the Bureau about the on-going discussions to organise an international conference to set up an international training school on maxi emergencies based on the project idea of the European Centre for Disaster Medicine (CEMEC) in San Marino.

AB presented CEMEC's international training school project, which is in its very preliminary phase. He informed the Bureau members about the outcome of the 1st meeting organised by CEMEC on 21 January 2020 to set up a training school on maxi emergencies. [Report of 1st meeting held in Paestum/Italy on 21 January 2020](#); [Paestum Agreement](#)'.

AB shared information relating to the school's possible structure, management, objectives, academic course levels/diplomas and partners. AB highlighted that CEMEC is looking for sponsors to finance the school and hopes for more countries to be involved. Further clarification was sought by the Bureau members on the specific role, target group and operatives of the school. AB agreed to provide a clearer definition of the term "maxi emergencies" in order to prepare a concept note.

MDP suggested that online lectures on disasters by experts in this field could possibly be envisaged at this point.

AB pointed out that it would be important to garner political support for the school, more so than funding at this point. Therefore, the Bureau recommended to present the project idea to EUR-OPA member States and international partners such as UNDRR, EU and UNESCO in order to have their feedback. A concept note would need to be drawn up and shared firstly with EUR-OPA member States seeking their approval of the founding of the school and subsequently with the partners. A response should be solicited in order to gauge the interest and willingness of partners to contribute (materially or otherwise) to the school. GS encouraged close collaboration between San Marino and the Russian Federation on the setting up of an international school. Furthermore, AB was encouraged to bilaterally contact and inform the Permanent Representation of San Marino to the CoE of the project idea so as to gather diplomatic/political support.

With regard to the current uncertainty to make travel plans due to the pandemic, CEMEC was invited to put on hold the international conference until 2021 and submit a new project proposal for 2020, possibly focusing on the topic of disaster medicine in biological hazards.

Decision:

CEMEC will prepare a concept note on the setting up of an international training school with a clear definition of "maxi emergencies", the school's role, target group and operatives which will be circulated to the Permanent Correspondents of the EUR-OPA member States and EUR-OPA's international partners UNESCO, UNDRR and EU.

c. **High-level Consultation on Enhancing Governance in Landscape Fire Management, in the framework of the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (tbc)**

US and GS informed the Bureau about the on-going discussions to hold a high-level consultation on enhancing governance in landscape fire management in Athens/Greece, the

possible aims and expected results of the event. This conference has been put on hold until further notice.

d. **Participation of students of EUR-OPA Member States in training activities of the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters (EMERCOM) (tbc)**

US and GS informed the Bureau about the on-going correspondence to possibly initiate and support the participation of students from EUR-OPA Member States in training activities of EMERCOM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this activity has been put on hold until further notice.

6. EUR-OPA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD BACK-TO-BACK WITH THE EUROPEAN FORUM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (November 2021, Portugal)

6.1. EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference 2021

[Agenda Ministerial Conference 2016](#)

[2016 survey on thematic priorities for EUR-OPA](#)

[2018 Results of Survey on Implementation of EUR-OPA Recommendations and Guidelines](#)

In order to prepare for the 2021 Ministerial Conference, the Bureau members were invited to:

- propose priority topics for the Medium-Term Plan 2021-25;
- propose topics for the Ministerial Conference 2021;
- propose ways to measure the impact of EUR-OPA's work on national laws, policies and practices; gather information on activities that have had a positive impact.

US recalled the agenda of the last Ministerial Conference in 2016, the survey on thematic priorities of 2016 and the survey of the implementation of EUR-OPA Recommendations and Guidelines of 2018. She explained that a draft Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025 would need to be presented for discussion at the next meeting of CPCs in November 2020 in order for it to be adopted at the next Ministerial Conference in November 2021. The Bureau agreed that the Medium-Term Plan should be based on the UN Sendai Framework priority topics, but at the same time specific to the needs of EUR-OPA member States. Issues such as natural disasters and climate change, human-rights-based approach to DRR and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, major hazards and Artificial Intelligence, biological hazards, gender aspects of DRR and protection of cultural heritage were proposed as possible areas of interest. It was also suggested to address the role and responsibility of the media in reporting on disasters. GS drew attention to the conference on [Culture against disasters: protecting cultural landscapes as prevention of natural disasters](#) organised in September 2018 in Ravello, Italy which had addressed the topic of the media.

US highlighted that it was crucial for EUR-OPA to carry out an accurate needs assessment for this new phase 2021-2025. EUR-OPA must further reflect on how to carve out a niche and avoid an overlap on topics which other international partner organisations with greater resources are working on. The CPCs, directors of Specialised Centres and international partners should be asked for their views on the added value of co-operation with EUR-OPA. US proposed to launch a survey among the CPCs and directors of the Specialised Centres to identify relevant priority topics and to receive feedback on the benefits of EUR-OPA activities. The progress and impact of the activities implemented under the EUR-OPA Agreement could be measured, for example, through the follow up of conferences, tallying online visits, adopting a goal-oriented approach, feedback session reports of workshops etc. GS highlighted that the new EUR-OPA project proposals now include specific questions on significant achievements in the reporting section. It was recommended to set the summer break as deadline for the submission of the replies to the survey.

The Bureau was invited to further brainstorm with their various ministries to see which topics they consider to be most pertinent for the Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025 and Ministerial Conference 2021 and provide feedback to the EUR-OPA secretariat.

Decision: The member States will be consulted via survey to identify priority topics for 2021-2025 and the impact of the EUR-OPA Agreement on national policies and practices in 2019-2020.

6.2. Exchange of views with Milos Gubic, Co-ordination and Communication Specialist, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

MG joined the video conference at 14:30. He informed the Bureau of the organisation and timeline for the preparation of the next European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) to be held on 4-5 November 2021 in Matosinhos, Portugal. The UNDRR, the EU and the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement make up the Secretariat to the Forum.

The Bureau exchanged views with MG on preparations for the EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference to be held back-to-back with the EFDRR. US informed MG of the timeline for the EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference and preparations leading up to this event. The meeting of the CPCs of EUR-OPA is generally hosted at the same time as the Ministerial Conference.

Discussions then centred on how to host the EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference at the EFDRR and the following points came to light:

- Several suggestions were made as to how the Ministerial Conference could be scheduled given the heavy schedule of the ministers, i.e., a half day meeting? a 2-hour meeting? a dinner event with a keynote speaker and a declaration adopted at the end? A side-event during the EFDRR to present the CoE Medium Term Plan and showcase the increased co-operation with EFDRR? On Wednesday (3 November) or Thursday (4 November) evening?
- The pros and cons were weighed re hosting the meeting before the EFDRR on Wednesday 3 November with half a day devoted to the CPCs meeting and the other half to the Ministerial Conference.
- AF drew attention to constraints linked to accessing Matosinhos which is 5 km from Porto Airport, and a 3 hour drive from Lisbon.
- AF will consult with her ministry and give feedback regarding the possibility of hosting the EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference.
- It was considered necessary to interlink/bridge the topics of the EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference 2021 with the topics of the EFDRR 2021.

The Bureau was invited to consult with their various ministries to see which timing and length of the Ministerial Conference they consider to be most pertinent and provide feedback to the EUR-OPA secretariat as soon as possible.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

US informed the Bureau that the International Conference on Urban Risks (ICUR), originally planned for June 2020, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and postponed to June 2021.

With a view to increasing the visibility of EUR-OPA and its areas of work, US highlighted the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, 13 October, as an opportunity to raise awareness among the general public.

Further, TB shared ideas and possible ways forward on how to increase the visibility of EUR-OPA and its activities through an improved communication strategy, e.g. by creating a campaign for the different topics covered by the Specialised Centres, producing visibility items in line with the topics covered by EUR-OPA, developing sign language videos for vulnerable groups, producing cartoons for younger audiences, updating the EUR-OPA information leaflet and translating it into languages of the member States.

TB presented the newly launched COVID-19 web [page](#) which contains useful resources produced under the EUR-OPA Agreement, its Specialised Centres, international partners and other sectors of the CoE.

The Bureau supported these ideas to increase EUR-OPA's visibility and considered the new COVID-19 page as very useful.

The Bureau was invited to share any ideas which they believed could help to dynamise EUR-OPA's visibility overall.

8. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Decision:

The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting on 2 October 2020 in Paris.