

Strasbourg, 19 October 2020

AP/CAT(2020)05
Orig. English

**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT CORRESPONDENTS**

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

MEETING REPORT

2 October 2020 (9:00-17:00 CET)

*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 Déjeant-Pons (MDP): Head of Landscape, Environment and Major Hazards Division
Krzysztof Zyman (KZ): 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), (for point 5, 5.1 and 5.2)

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The agenda [AP/CAT\(2020\)OJ02](#) was adopted without amendment.

2. STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The new Executive Secretary, Mr Krzysztof Zyman, was presented to the Bureau. He gave an update on the recent administrative and budgetary developments and its impact on EUR-OPA' activities. Although the Agreement had undergone many changes in staff, KZ informed the Bureau about the stability of secretariat forthwith.

He addressed the impact of the ongoing pandemic and measures to contain the virus in France, as in other countries that continue to hinder international travel. This affects the possibility of undertaking missions to present EUR-OPA to (interested) countries with a view to inform them of the possibility to join the Agreement. For example, Kazakhstan which collaborates extensively with the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) in Freiburg is a country that could potentially, as other countries, be interested in joining the Agreement.

3. ORAL REPORT ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Bureau members were informed of recent developments due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on EUR-OPA activities. In particular, KZ recalled Algeria's decision to withdraw from the Agreement as from January 2021. Also, he informed about lack of follow-up from the Greek partners as regards the high-level consultation forum on landscape fire management, which was envisaged in the list of events under the Greek Chairmanship of the Council of Europe for October and with respect to the webinar proposed to Croatia on "What if a natural disaster strikes amid a pandemic".

On the positive side, KZ informed about the organisation of the Award ceremony for the BeSafeNet Olympiad, held online on 10 September 2020.

NH extended a warm welcome to the new Executive Secretary. NH informed the Bureau about the tentative date for the webinar on "Lessons learned from the earthquake in Croatia amid the corona crisis" on 15 or 16 October or in the second half of October having in mind the availability and responsiveness of the two experts Croatia is to provide.

4. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES 2020

4.1. Statutory meetings

- a. *Report of the last Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents (8 April 2020)* [AP/CAT\(2020\)02](#).

The main decisions taken at the last Bureau meeting were recalled and their follow-up was discussed. With respect to the decision to include biological hazards in the Agreement's scope of interest, the Secretariat prepared a draft resolution on "Recognising the inclusion of biological hazards to the EUR-OPA partial agreement". The Bureau asked that the text of the proposal be circulated to CPC before the joint meeting in November.

- b. *Preparation of the Joint meeting of Permanent Correspondents and Directors of Specialised Centres (3-4 November 2020, Strasbourg)* [AP/CAT\(2020\)0J03](#)

The Bureau was informed about the organisational aspects of the joint meeting and discussed the draft agenda. The joint meeting will be held via video conference due to the ongoing travel restrictions, using a system – KUDOs – which has been widely tested at the CoE. The overall experience has been positive and it also allows for simultaneous interpretation. The duration of each session is 3.5 hours per morning and per afternoon with a compulsory lunch break of 1.5 hours.

Regarding elections, KZ explained that, if there was more than one candidate, voting would be done by secret ballot. A new secret ballot system is being tested by the CoE through a dedicated website requiring a username and password. An SMS would also be sent to each individual's mobile phone as an extra security measure – therefore all mobile phone numbers would need to be collected in advance. The integrity of the election process would be guaranteed by an external IT company, duly vetted and contracted by the Council of Europe. Candidates should be presented/nominated on day one of the meeting to allow the secretariat to prepare the vote for the morning of day two, and resolve any technical issues. The voting system is robust enough to cope with the number of joint meeting participants. The procedure would be shared ahead of the joint meeting to prepare participants in advance. It would also be important to strictly limit the time allocated to presentations by the directors of centres.

MDP proposed that the agenda of the joint meeting be arranged in such a way that topics of interest to PCs only be addressed in one day allowing the specialised centres to join the meeting with PCs only when issues of common interest are to be discussed.

Decisions:

- Day one of the joint meeting will be dedicated to the CPCs and preparation of MTP and the 2021 ministerial conference. The directors of specialised centres will only join the meeting on day two.
- In future, the Bureau should be scheduled at least 6 weeks prior to the joint meeting.

- c. *Draft Budget 2021* [AP/CAT\(2020\)03](#)

CE presented the 2021 draft budget. The withdrawal of Algeria will represent a 43K reduction in the overall budget. The Agreement's expected results for 2020-21 included the preparation of guidelines and recommendations that EUR-OPA member states can rely on for developing DRR strategies.

- d. *Programme of Work 2020-2021* [AP/CAT\(2019\)04rev](#)

Bureau members took note of the draft revised Programme of Work 2020-2021 which now includes biological hazards, and will be presented at the joint meeting. In the light of this new topic and in order to be relevant, EUR-OPA also sponsored the preparation of two working papers by external consultants (refer to point 4.3 b).

Decision: following a decision of the Bureau held on 8 April, the proposal for a revised Programme of Work has been drafted by the secretariat and will be discussed at the joint meeting in November.

- e. *Draft Resolution recognising the inclusion of biological hazards in the EUR-OPA Partial Agreement* [Link to the draft Resolution](#).

The Bureau discussed the draft Resolution and it was agreed to present the document at the Joint Meeting for adoption. The secretariat would invite comments from the CPCs and the directors of specialised centres beforehand. KZ explained that he had adopted the term "biological hazards" as defined in the Sendai Framework. No comments were added by the Bureau. MDP stressed that it was important for EUR-OPA to stay relevant and be vocal in the face of new problems/situations which constituted or provoked catastrophes for countries.

- f. *Preparation of the Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025* [AP/CAT\(2020\)04](#)

The Bureau was informed about the preparation of the preliminary draft Medium-Term Plan (MTP) 2021-2025 by KZ. Its final version shall be presented at the Ministerial Conference in November 2021 for adoption. Following the questionnaire which was circulated to the CPCs and directors of specialised centres replies were received from 6 countries (Azerbaijan, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, Slovak Republic and Ukraine) [Link to the replies received](#). The draft version of the MTP will be sent to CPCs for consultation, before the joint meeting. It will also be translated into French and Russian languages.

The MTP aims to assess the current state of EUR-OPA also in comparison to other international organisations and stakeholders and looks at specific ideas and activities to implement in the coming years.

KZ proposed that a preliminary discussion of the draft be held at the joint meeting in November 2020. He further proposed the following procedure be adopted with the view to ensure the MTPs timely adoption:

1. to ensure that only proposals are concretely contributed, CPCs will be invited to submit any amendments/comments in track changes according to this schedule:
 - first round of amendments/comments by Christmas 2020,
 - second round by 28 February 2021,
 - final draft text to be ready by 26 March 2021, in time for the Bureau meeting.
2. Video conference of CPCs in June, if travel restrictions remain, to finalise the MTP before it is presented and adopted at the ministerial conference in November 2021.
3. It was important for the CPCs to thoroughly discuss and agree on/endorse all the issues raised in the MTP, prior to presenting it at the ministerial conference.
4. The MTP shall be appended to the Declaration (to be drafted in advance of the ministerial conference) that will be adopted by Ministers.

NH agreed with the document format and the timeline proposed for the amendments and finalisation of the MTP.

Decision: The Bureau decided to transmit the preliminary draft Medium-Term Plan (MTP) to the CPC to be discussed at the joint meeting.

4.2. Specialised Centres

Projects financed through grants in 2020 [AP/CAT\(2020\)01](#). CE briefly updated the Bureau on projects funded in 2020. Where required, the specialised centres were able to adjust their activities to cope with the impact of the pandemic, mostly regarding travel. In the case of BeSafeNet, the IT company hosting the website had laid off a significant number of staff therefore, the project was obliged to migrate the BeSafeNet website in order not to disrupt the 2021 Olympiad. In another instance, the GFMC undertook a project to set up an "Online portal on COVID-19 and landscape fire management".

4.3 Operational Activities

a. *BesafeNet project/Olympiad* [Link to leaflet](#)

The Bureau was informed about the progress of BeSafeNet, the leaflet production and the 2020 online Olympiad Award Ceremony. The next Olympiad is scheduled for 19 February 2021.

b. *Publications*

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inclusion of biological hazards in the Agreements scope of activities, two working papers were prepared by external consultants on:

5. [The inclusion of disabled persons in viral pandemic scenarios](#), using the COVID-19 pandemic as a case example and as a follow up to the publication [Major Hazards and People with Disabilities](#) by D. Alexander.
6. [The inclusion of migrants and refugees in viral pandemic scenarios](#), using the COVID-19 pandemic as a case example and as a follow up to the publication [Major Hazards, Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees; Their Inclusion in Disaster Preparedness and Management](#) by J. Twigg.

KZ proposed to draft recommendations for the member states based on the two studies respectively, particularly as the papers already contain adequate recommendations or measures that could prove useful for governments, care givers, the medical profession and other stakeholders. The proposed draft recommendations will be shared with the Bureau and subsequently transmitted to the CPCs with the view to their adoption in November 2020. Furthermore, a publication will be produced early in 2021 to showcase the Agreement's work on pandemics, and whilst the subject is still topical and relevant. The CoE has a [Special Representative on Migration and Refugees](#) as this remains an important and politically sensitive issue, even in many EUR-OPA member states. This also underlines the fact that many opportunities exist for in-house collaboration which in turn would potentially increase the visibility of the Agreement and could serve to attract the interest of other countries. KZ encouraged the Bureau to read both working papers.

Decision:

- KZ will prepare draft recommendations on the inclusion of disabled persons in viral pandemic scenarios and on the inclusion of migrants and refugees in viral pandemic scenarios with a view to CPC discussing and adopting them in November.
- Leaflets will be prepared summarising the working papers in other major languages e.g., Arabic, which is widely spoken by migrants, whilst translating the publication into the CoE official languages. TB would look into the possibility and cost of preparing the leaflets in Braille.

c. *Other operational activities.*

KZ informed the Bureau about other activities in 2020. The World Forum for Democracy (WFD) has been postponed until November 2021. In the period leading up to the WFD, monthly webinars on specific topics related to the environment and disasters will be held. EUR-OPA hopes to contribute to the one on Climate change-related disasters and displacement. On 5 October, the European Court of Human Rights will host a webinar on "[Human rights and the planet](#)". The conference, that was to be organised in the framework of the Greek Chairmanship of the Council of Europe in collaboration with the GFMC, Freiburg has not been confirmed.

d. *Launch a call for experts for biological and technological hazards* – this is to be decided.

5. EUR-OPA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD BACK-TO-BACK WITH EUROPEAN FORUM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION, 2021

5.1. EUROPEAN FORUM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (EFDRR), THURSDAY 25-26 NOVEMBER 2021, MATOSINHOS, PORTUGAL

MG joined the meeting at 14.00 and shared the timeline and organisation of the EFDRR in 2021. The working groups (i.e., the conference concept group and the roadmap group made up of 26 countries) would be responsible for making decisions pertaining to the modalities of the EFDRR, the topics, concepts and development of the roadmap to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for the next 10 years. The 1st draft of the agenda and concept note will be ready by November 2020 and sessions organising teams will be formed by January 2021. Further information will become available after the next EFDRR secretariat meeting to be held in November, in which KZ will participate.

Should the current pandemic situation continue, the EFDRR would either be hosted online or as a hybrid event. However, if the event is not held physically, this would negate the need to host it back-to-back with the EUR-OPA ministerial conference. It was agreed to raise this point at the next joint meeting.

5.2. EUR-OPA Ministerial Conference, November 2021, Matosinhos, Portugal

The Bureau was updated on preparations for the Ministerial Conference. AF had visited the venue in Matosinhos and was scheduled to visit again to clarify further arrangements with the local authorities. EUR-OPA is aiming for the joint meeting to be hosted back-to-back with its ministerial conference. A decision is pending regarding the specific date and time of the ministerial conference. MG explained that the forum would begin at 09.00 or 10.00 on 25 November with an opening ceremony, which will naturally be attended by all ministers present. After the opening ceremony, the ministers representing states-members of the EUR-OPA Agreement could attend a dedicated EUR-OPA ministerial meeting, held simultaneously with the EFDRR. Another option would be to host the EUR-OPA ministerial conference the evening before the EFDRR forum opening. Whatever the chosen scenario, the ministerial conference will unlikely exceed a half-day. It could also be necessary to maintain social distancing rules throughout the conference.

6. VISIBILITY

TB informed the Bureau about the preparation of an awareness-raising campaign to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (13 October), the International Day for People with Disability (3 December) and other promotional activities. TB played three new 2-minute EUR-OPA promotional videos and informed the Bureau about the launch of a Twitter campaign featuring 3 other short videos to be published on Twitter and Facebook on the international Day for DRR as well as on the DGII web page.

The communication campaign, produced by an external company, includes a media pack containing products such as posters with animations showing the importance of prevention through four different themes; oil spills, earthquakes, landslides and wildfires. It will also be launched on 13 October.

In order to prepare the ministerial conference, a new range of visibility items e.g., whistles, first aid kits, waterproof phone pouches and other items linked to EUR-OPA's activities will be procured.

A quiz focusing on the Agreement's activities which will be posted on the CoE intranet website. TB will also share the link with the Bureau members.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bureau members were invited to raise any other issues to be discussed.

AB updated the Bureau on the Maxi emergencies school project. An agreement had been signed between San Marino, Slovakia, Ukraine, Malta and the Russian Federation to participate in the project. KZ expressed EUR-OPA's support for the project, although the Agreement would not be able to provide funding. AB explained that the San Marino authorities would contribute to providing the venue. AB hopes to present the project's budget by November. KZ added that the EUR-OPA platform provided a wealth of knowledge to be harnessed and used for the school and reiterated his readiness to share EUR-OPA's expertise. AB confirmed his awareness of EUR-OPA's limited resources and that the school would not depend on EUR-OPA as a source of funding.

AB welcomed the new Executive Secretary and expressed his hope for stability within EUR-OPA.

8. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Decision: The next Bureau will be held between 12 and 23 April 2021 in Paris or via video conference. A final decision is to be made at the joint meeting in November 2020.

END OF THE MEETING