



**Speech of Krzysztof Zyman,
Executive Secretary, EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, Council of
Europe**

**Europe and Central Asia Regional Platform for Disaster Risk
Reduction**

Budva, Montenegro, 6 - 8 November 2024

Your Excellency Minister Danilo Šaranović,
Your Excellency SRSR for Disaster Risk Reduction of the UNSG, Mr Kamal Kishore,
Commissioner Janez Lenarčič,
Ministers,
Representatives of the European and Central Asian States,
Participants in the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction,

The Council of Europe has worked since 1949 to protect human rights, and since 1967 to conserve natural heritage. The Council of Europe and its 46 member States are committed to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and contribute specifically through the lens of human rights, rule of law and democracy. The EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, established in 1987, the oldest a European and Mediterranean regional platform for co-operation in the field of major natural and technological disasters, has long contributed to and continues to support the global efforts on Disaster Risk Reduction, specified in the Sendai Framework.

Building on the core values of the Council of Europe’s mission, EUR-OPA’s Medium-Term Plan for 2021-2025 promotes a human rights-based and community-led approach ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind when it comes to disasters.

The link between environment and human rights is increasingly recognized today. A healthy environment is essential for the protection of human rights, while environmental degradation can lead to severe violations of these rights. Living in an unhealthy environment, marred by pollution, loss of biodiversity, impacted by ever-more frequent and more extreme weather events, which are amplified by human intervention or climate change, negatively impacts our well-being and fundamental rights. Ultimately, this degradation can undermine democracy itself.

To address these threats, in 2022, **the Committee of Ministers** adopted a landmark [Recommendation on human rights and the protection of the environment](#), calling on its member states to actively consider recognising, at national level, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as a human right. There is also work underway in the Council of Europe on the feasibility of one or more instruments on human rights and the environment. The outcome is expected before end of the year. This forms part of the “Reykjavík process” stemming from the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in Iceland in May 2023 which placed environment high on the agenda of the Organisation.

As we look ahead, it is clear that the choices we make today will significantly impact the future. Climate change is an undeniable reality, and its accelerating effects are being felt across the globe. The growing awareness of states’ obligations to give shape to the right to a healthy environment reflects an understanding that our environmental and human rights are deeply intertwined. The progress being made at international, national, and local levels, even if slow, demonstrates a shift in how societies are beginning to address this critical issue. While the approach may vary by region, with some moving faster than others, the recognition of the need for legal frameworks to protect our environment is steadily gaining traction. How we navigate these developments now will shape the world for generations to come.