

Τηλεδιάσκεψη

14th Ministerial Meeting of the Council of Europe's European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), 24 November 2021, Matosinhos, Portugal

Developing EUR-OPA's actions to meet the new challenges posed by natural, technological and biological hazards

Cyprus' recent experience with fires

Dear colleagues,

- It is with great pleasure that I address the **14th Ministerial Meeting of the Council of Europe's European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement, and been given the opportunity to share with you our recent experiences** of dealing with Covid -19 and the large forest fires endured by the Cyprus Republic this past summer.
- The last two years, like all other countries, we had to take tough decisions and implement painful measures in order to minimize the effects of the pandemic. We experienced new things like lockdowns, self-isolation and even having to request permission to leave our own homes.
- At the same time, we were called to respond to many forest fires. The biggest one, started near Arakapas village, in the mountainous area between the districts of Larnaca and Limassol. This was a fast moving fire, which spread within a few hours, threatening many communities. The fire came so close to houses and farms that we had to take the decision to evacuate the 10 villages. Personnel from different authorities and volunteers worked very hard to save lives, properties and the environment.
- We faced many difficulties and challenges during this particular fire. On one hand, people refused to leave their properties and on the other hand, the fire was surrounding the villages making it difficult to perform the evacuations in a timely manner to minimize the loss of life. Those that were evacuated and needed shelter, were provided with accommodation until it was safe for them to go back home.

- During this emergency, the contingency plans were activated, and all involved stakeholders were mobilized. At the same time, international assistance was requested through the European Civil Protection Mechanism, and from third countries, utilizing the bilateral agreements. Greece and Israel responded to our request by offering assistance via aerial firefighting means. This shows how important it is to have cooperation between neighboring countries, which can be put into effect during emergencies. At this point, I would like to thank all the countries, especially Greece and Israel, that stood by Cyprus during those difficult days.
- The Republic of Cyprus will stand by the fire affected communities and their people. This support will encompass multiple levels, such as financial support, which will be provided to rebuild and replant these areas that rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Reinstating the natural environment will help prevent further destruction of the area and avoid other disasters like floods and landslides.
- We have a profound interest and willingness, to share, under the Sendai framework, scientific and technological knowledge with you, with the support of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Such knowledge includes, but is not limited to, assessment data of disaster risks, vulnerability, exposure and possible sequential effects and lessons learnt. Under the umbrella of EUR-OPA Agreement and the Medium-Term Plan of 2021-2025, our mutual aim is to build more resilient societies.
- We strongly believe that sharing information swiftly amongst citizens at an early stage of a potential disaster is important because ultimately it saves lives. Adopting early warning systems, already used in some countries, is one of our next goals which we aim to achieve.
- Finally, we fully support the initiative taken by EUR-OPA to meet these challenges.

Concluding, I wish you all a very fruitful meeting.