

## **5th International Conference on Civil Protection & Science 28-30 March 2023, Lisbon**

**Speaking points: Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary  
European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)**

Dear Professor Maria Cristina Ventura, President of ISEC Lisboa, Professor Maria Teves Costa, Professor Manuel João Ribeiro, dear participants,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the 5th International Conference on Civil Protection and Science. I am honored to be given the floor at this gathering, and I am equally pleased to see so many partners with whom we cooperate to take part in this important event.

I would like to briefly recall a few facts about the main objectives of the Partial Agreement, that I represent.

In 1987, the Council of Europe created an instrument to promote governmental co-operation in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction and dealing with emergencies “the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)”. Today, the Agreement counts 22 members, among whom are two States (Morocco and Lebanon) that are not member States of the Council of Europe.

## Distinguished Participants,

- **Fighting against environmental degradation and climate change is one of the key priorities of the Strategic Framework** for the Council of Europe. EUR-OPA provides responses to these challenges based on the values of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights, the rule of law and democratic participation.
  
- EUR-OPA 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 (held here in Portugal in 2021) two Recommendations:
  1. on *Enabling and protecting persons with disabilities during public health emergencies resulting from pandemics and*
  2. on *Inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in public health emergencies resulting from pandemics”*.
  
- The Agreement has equally vigorously promoted **gender responsive disaster risk reduction**. Natural disasters affect women, men, girls and boys differently. The number of women who die from natural threats is greater than that of men. This is a consequence of women’s unequal socioeconomic status. Additionally, women face different levels of risk and have different coping vulnerabilities and capacities, originated by a series of gender-based political, cultural, and socioeconomic inequalities and differences.

- We are proud to have **co-organised the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction** (Matosinhos, 2021) and **contributed to the UN Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction** (Indonesia, 2022). This created opportunities for the Council of Europe to ensure **coordination with both EU and UN global initiatives**, as well as to promote the values that the CoE stands for: Human Rights, Democracy, the Rule of Law and Democratic Participation. Presence at these events gave us an opportunity to contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
  
- Among the targets set by the **UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**, member states are called upon to adopt and implement national and local disaster risk reduction strategies and plans, and to prepare or review and periodically update disaster preparedness and contingency policies aimed at preventing the creation of risk, the reduction of existing risk and the strengthening of economic, social, health and environmental resilience. The standards elaborated by EUR-OPA, such as the two recommendations I referred to, are useful guidance tools at governments' disposal, guiding them in the process of elaborating more fine-tuned strategies and policies that offer better protection to the most vulnerable persons in our societies.

I will go now to the point of the main theme of this meeting.

Mindful of the need for sharing scientific knowledge and establishing links across borders, EUR-OPA since its inception in 1987, relied on two pillars. In addition to intergovernmental cooperation, it established a Network of

Specialised Scientific Centres to develop technical scientific projects seeking to identify hazards affecting specific territories and to propose solutions aiming at risk reduction.

As Professor Maria Cristina Ventura justly observed the interface between science and policymaking is the necessary element for successful implementation of disaster risk reduction policies.

Currently, projects implemented by Scientific Centres with grants from the Agreement address issues relating to hazards amplified by climate change (fires, droughts, coastal erosion, landslides, floods).

I will name a few of them:

1. Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD) based in Malta is leading the project "Coastal Risk Assessment and Mapping";
2. European Centre on Disaster Awareness, Cyprus implements the project "BeSafeNet - Protect yourself from hazards" addressed to young people and aiming to increase their risk awareness;
3. European Centre on Geodynamical Hazards of High Dams (GHHD) in Georgia is conducting a project "New technologies for assessment of geo-hazards of large engineering objects (hydropower dams/reservoirs)";

4. European Center for Forest Fires (ECFF) is the lead Center for the project on Multi-hazard Risk Approach and Inclusive Community Engagement in Disaster Risk Management”
5. European University Centre for Cultural Heritage (CUEBC), based in Ravello, Italy, coordinates and leads the project "Local Knowledge and Schools Against Natural Disasters (LoKSAND)";
6. Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) from Fribourg, Germany implements the project "Adjustment of landscape fire management policies to the reality of climate change;
7. Last but not least, here in Portugal, the Agreement is supporting a project implemented by CERU - EUROPEAN CENTRE ON URBAN RISKS in cooperation with the European Centre for Forest Fires based in Athens and the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage based in Ravello, Italy. The project called POPIRiM (Population involvement on risk management and mitigation - Testing in small communities). Its aim is to test the public participation in governance and DRR in different communities exhibiting susceptibilities to one or more risks, in different countries. In Portugal it will be applied to a peripheral area of the city of Lisbon, located in the municipality of Odivelas. It is intended to characterize the social content of the area, in its demographic, socio-economic, urban and cultural components, so that, in association with the dangers present in the region, to identify the main social vulnerabilities and perceptions that are constructed about these types of risk on the part of the resident population. Through this survey and diagnosis, it intends to build a formative and informative

program providing citizens with the conditions and tools needed to act in the field of disaster risk reduction, in order to adequate their behavior and to promote the public policies of local resilience.

Mindful of the challenges that the most vulnerable persons within our societies face, the Agreement is also working currently on the use of traditional and social media and their use to identify risks, produce guidelines, spread information amongst the population on the best practices to prevent disasters from occurring and the measures to take when the disasters do occur.

Social media platforms have become a feature of everyday lives of millions of people and can play a vital role in saving and safeguarding people's lives and livelihoods. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and other social media sites are useful tools to educate populations on natural and technological disaster preparedness (preparedness checklists, information on where key survival items are available), provide live updates of the impact of disasters people witness as it happens (which can help response services to have a better understanding of the situation on the ground and to act more quickly) and simply inform about individuals' whereabouts and conditions.

Such uses of social media demonstrate how social media are changing the world for the better. However, with changes come consequences. There are negative impacts of viral social media outreach that can sometimes harm individuals, and one should be careful about the validity of each claim one sees online. Fake claims online allow malevolent operators to take advantage of naïve social media users and can cause unnecessary panic and fear. They may go as far as to create fundraisers

for supposed victims but actually pilfer the funds for their own personal use are fundraise for criminal activity.

This raises the question of the platforms' responsibility and the appropriate use of the social media platforms by authorities and other institutional operators.

The working paper, which is currently prepared by a Portuguese Scholar, **Prof. Felipe Manuel Pathé Duarte**, an Assistant Professor and researcher at the NOVA School of Law and the Instituto Superior de Ciências Policiais e Segurança Interna in collaboration with Prof. Caroline Rizza, an Associate Professor as well as President of the Information System for Crisis Response and Management Association in Paris, shall offer an analysis of the above issues and give specific examples of both the beneficial and malevolent use of social media and of positive examples of engagement of the public, public authorities and other institutional operators. At the next stage the Agreement's members will consider adopting guidelines and **a Recommendation on the use of social media, traditional media, big data and mobile phone networks, to support national measures for successful disaster risk communication.**

The standards elaborated by EUR-OPA are useful guidance tools at governments' disposal, allowing them to elaborate more fine-tuned strategies and policies that offer better protection to the most vulnerable persons in our societies. I invite the authorities of Portugal, just like of all other member states, to take them duly into consideration.

Thank you for your attention.