



Strasbourg, 7 March 2005

AP/CAT (2005) 3 rev.
Or. E.

**UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER
REDUCTION,
KOBE, JAPAN, 18-22 JANUARY 2005**

STATEMENT BY

**MRS. GABRIELLA BATTAINI-DRAGONI,
DIRECTOR GENERAL, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND
HERITAGE, YOUTH AND SPORT, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**Contribution of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement
to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction**

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe, which involves 46 member States, aims at promoting respect for human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law. Human rights and sustainable development are inextricably linked. Development is unsustainable when the rule of law and equity are absent. Similarly, human rights cannot thrive without social justice and sustainable development. Therefore our Organisation approaches sustainable development not only in terms of the technical aspects of environment preservation, but also in terms of building cohesive societies in which every individual can fully enjoy his or her civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, the ministerial Declaration of Wrocław of 10 December 2004, emphasised that the Council of Europe *“is committed to developing integrated policies for intergenerational equity in access to economic, social, cultural and natural resources under the principle of sustainable development. Policies for the sensitive management of these resources would enhance their contribution to wider economic opportunity, to personal and community development and to the expression of cultural identity and diversity.”*

From that angle our Organisation is expected to develop activity programmes which demonstrate the role of risk prevention and management of natural or technological disasters in sustainable development policies simultaneously with other initiatives concerning the links between conservation and sustainability of the cultural and natural heritage, the need for integrated strategies and the essential role of formal and non-formal education for sustainable development.

I would briefly like to draw your attention firstly to the contribution made by the Council of Europe to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda since 1992. In this context, may I recall, Mr./Madam President, that the Council of Europe presented a political statement by its Committee of Ministers at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Secondly, I would like to refer to the contribution of the Council of Europe’s EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), as summarised in the leaflet available to participants in this Conference.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Concretely, in the **environmental field** we have contributed to the development of the Rio process through the regional application of the **Convention on Biological Diversity**. Our special regional instrument, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) constitutes a regional forum for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Several projects and initiatives, including a Pan-European Ecological Network have been developed in that context including the preparation of a number of reference texts such as “Conserving European biodiversity in the context of climate change” and the follow up and monitoring of “draft General Principles on environment protection for sustainable development”. The European Landscape Convention which came into force in November 2004, together with the

Granada and Valletta Council of Europe Conventions on the architectural and archaeological heritage (and, for the future, the draft Framework Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society) constitute an appropriate regional forum for observing the sustainable use of the cultural and natural resources on the continent.

In the social field the Council of Europe has developed a social cohesion strategy which is a prerequisite for socially sustainable development. The starting point is that poverty and exclusion destroy the social fabric of our societies. The Council's understanding goes beyond the mere economic aspects: our strategy aims at promoting active measures to fight poverty and improve social justice through an integrated approach in the fields of employment, health, education, housing and social protection. Sustainable development means empowering individuals to shape their own lives by giving them access to their most fundamental rights including the right to education and vocational training, the right to a healthy life, the right to decent and also fulfilling work.

At **Parliamentary level**, the **Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly** focused attention on economic and environmental questions such as climate change and the need to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. To date, 34 out of our 46 member States have ratified or accepted this protocol. With regard to **the local and regional levels**, the Council of Europe is helping to create sustainable cities and regions through the work of its **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**. At the end of the day it is up to the municipalities to guarantee the sustainability of, for instance, water and energy in an equitable manner.

Genuine sustainable development does not seem attainable without sufficient social initiatives taking into account long-term economic, environmental and social impacts. From this point of view, the **Council of Europe Development Bank**, as the only multilateral financial institution exclusively focused on the social field, is helping to achieve this goal. Its spheres of action include aid to refugees, migrants and victims of natural disasters, job creation in disadvantaged areas, social housing and infrastructure projects for health, education and environment protection purposes. Over the last five years, the Bank has approved and financed projects worth more than 10 Billion Euros. Such an institution could contribute to ISDR through specific projects.

THE EUR-OPA MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT

In 1987, the Council of Europe took the initiative to set up the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement (named "Open Partial Agreement" because any non-member State of our Organisation may apply for accession). To date it has 25 member States¹. The European Commission, UNESCO, The World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) of the United Nations, the Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations (OCHA) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) participate in the Agreement.

¹ Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, France, Georgia, Greece, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, San Marino, Romania, Russia, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine

The main objectives of the Agreement are to:

- reinforce and promote co-operation between member States in a multidisciplinary context to ensure better risk management: knowledge, prevention, forecasting, warning, crisis management, post-crisis analysis, rehabilitation;
- use the Agreement as a suitable platform for co-operation between Central and Eastern Europe, the South of the Mediterranean and Western Europe in the field of major natural and technological disasters;

During the past ten Ministerial Conferences, the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement acknowledged that :

- *“Societies are increasingly vulnerable to natural and other related technological and environmental hazards, whose impact is made more acute by the consequences of demographic, economic and social changes including urbanisation and development processes, as recently recognised by the World Summit on Sustainable Development”*;
- *“Disaster reduction is one central element of sustainable development and the associated integrated disaster risk management is a primary responsibility of governments. Such risk management should be based on a holistic approach to risk prevention and reduction combining scientific knowledge, vulnerability assessment and the competencies of disaster managers”*.

Significant European programmes have been implemented since 1987 through a network of 26 specialised European Centres, the aims being: research, training, information and expertise. May I mention as examples:

- The programme to assist in decision making in the management of risk and emergency situations. The European Warning System enabling member States concerned by earthquakes to be informed in real time of technical data under the responsibility of the Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) in Bruyères-le-Châtel, France;
- In parallel, the EXTREMUM simulation tool can provide a first assessment of the potential number of victims and damage arising from a seismic event under the responsibility of the European Centre of New Technologies for the Management of Natural and Technological Major Hazards in Moscow;
- The FORM-OSE programme dealing with a range of initiatives in the field of education, training and information. For instance: the setting up of safety plans for school buildings and the training of staff and children accordingly. At university level, the launching of European Masters in various fields such as disaster medicine, risk science and seismic vulnerability of buildings. With regard to vocational training, the organisation of courses for environmental inspectors in Morocco following the El Hoceima earthquake in February 2004;
- In a different emergency context, the setting up in Kosovo of a school of civil protection by the Agreement, in co-operation with the United Nations

Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

HOW CAN THE EUR-OPA MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT CONTRIBUTE TO THE INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION, IN CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS?

The Council of Europe's EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement is a unique structure for regional co-operation between the countries of the north and south of the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe whose specific interest is :

- to bring together institutions working in the fields of regional/spatial planning, the environment and civil protection with a view to intersectorial and multidisciplinary co-operation;
- to form a privileged platform for multinational and transfrontier co-operation contributing to the progress of prevention, protection and awareness-raising policies and fostering the coordination of initiatives between a group of member countries.

Discussing the possible contribution of the Agreement to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in the follow-up to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents approved at its meeting in November 2004, a Draft Declaration of the Ministers of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement which will be completed and approved at the next Ministerial session.

The Agreement, through a synergy to be strengthened with the institutions of the European Union and other international organisations, will pay close attention to the conclusions of the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction with the aim of playing an active part in international risk reduction efforts and helping to promote implementation of disaster prevention guidelines and measures within the Euro-Mediterranean region.

To give practical impetus to the Kobe Conference, it will also:

- consider how the Agreement's network of 26 Euro-Mediterranean Centres can make its expertise, training and research available to the international community and in particular their availability to support initiatives for assistance to Asia;
- place emphasis, in the Agreement's future programmes, on areas of action that the Agreement, in the light of its own functions, is particularly suited to developing, in particular through :
 - continued comparative analysis of national legislation on matters of risk management and prevention and the joint drawing up of recommendations so that other countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region and worldwide derive benefit from the results of its work;

- the setting up, through multilateral co-operation between the countries, of education programmes on awareness of hazards, preventive measures, proper conduct in crisis situations and the process of rehabilitation in:
 - school and university teaching and further training programmes
 - vocational training
 - public information, awareness-raising and hazard prevention.

At regional level, ideas should be pooled to innovate and to improve the methods of training available for the trainers of professionals in the field of risk management.

Concerning the disaster in Asia, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe put forward a number of proposals on 12 January 2005. The Open Partial Agreement could :

- make experts from its network of specialised European centres available to assist in the process of setting up an early warning system in the region;
- organise, in co-operation with other international organisations, a training programme for psychologists who are needed to provide assistance to victims, in particular children. This programme would take advantage of the existing distance education tool and would also involve expert missions;

The conference on risk prevention mechanisms in the Euro-Mediterranean area could also be organised soon upon invitation of a member State of the Agreement which could aim, *inter alia*, at clarifying the Agreement's specific role vis à vis other international organisations in particular as concerns education for the prevention of hazards and the management of their social consequences.