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**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)**

**Contribution of
the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards
Agreement (EUR-OPA)
to the Hyogo Framework of Action**



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The Agreement has pursued its twofold task: to formulate recommendations addressed primarily to member States' authorities and to develop the knowledge to facilitate the implementation of such recommendations.

Recommendations: the Committee of Permanent Correspondents representing the 25 member States of the EUR-OPA Agreement, has adopted three recommendations on: coastal risks (2007), psychological support to victims (2007) and radiological information to populations (2008).

Knowledge: the network of 26 Specialized Centres has developed extensive work in such diverse fields as risk education, landslides or urban risks. Furthermore, three major workshops have been organised on disaster risk reduction (DRR) education (2007) and on new governance of radiological risk and of natural risks (2008).

The Agreement's activities since 2007 have been defined according to the Medium Term Plan 2007-2011 adopted at its last Ministerial Session held in October 2006. This Medium Term Plan reflects the priorities for action in the field of disaster reduction in the European and Mediterranean space within the context of the HFA 2005-2015, taking into account the previous activities developed by the Agreement in several areas now included in the five priority areas of the HFA:

Priority for Action 1: Ensuring that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

The Agreement has always emphasized the necessary institutional basis to support DRR by bringing together the holders of knowledge (scientists) and the users of such knowledge (authorities). In an increasing context of decentralisation of responsibilities in many European countries, the role of the different decision levels (national, regional and local) in the case of disaster management but also where prevention is concerned, has become crucial to reinforce such an institutional basis.

The Ministerial Session of 2006 consequently adopted a specific recommendation on the role of local and regional authorities where the possible contributions of each decision level were highlighted. Using its previous work on national regulations and interministerial management, the Belgian Specialised Centre launched in 2007 a study of the respective roles of authorities in our member countries within a new thematic group on legislation. In parallel, the Agreement organised in 2008 two workshops in collaboration with our colleagues from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: one devoted to public authorities facing radiological risks and the other to the governance of natural risks.

The necessary involvement of all stakeholders, and especially of the population, has been highlighted both in the 2006 recommendation and in the conclusions of the two workshops held in 2008. A major outcome was the emphasis on the necessity to accurately define the rights but also the obligations of each level, taking into account their technical and financial capabilities, and the need to involve more directly the population in decisions related to major hazards.

In order to cope with this wider spread of competencies amongst multiple stakeholders without losing efficiency, the Agreement has strongly supported the creation of National Platforms (NPs) as a way to better coordinate their actions. Two European meetings of National Platforms and Focal Points have been co-organised with UN-ISDR in 2007 and 2008 and support for setting up such NPs in the interested member states has been proposed.

Priority for Action 2: Improving risk information/identifying, assessing and monitoring of disaster risks and enhancing early warning

With its international structure, the Agreement is mainly interested in the comparability of risk assessments between countries and consequently privileges the methodological contributions in this field. In line with this, the Georgian Centre, in collaboration with other South Caucasus partners, carried out a study in 2007 on how to cope with such national approaches in order to obtain a regional mapping of hazards.

The Agreement has been supporting for many years two major initiatives concerning data dissemination. The first initiative is the European Warning System (operated by the Bruyères-le-Châtel Centre) which provides real time alerts on earthquakes higher than 6 on the Richter scale within the Euro-Mediterranean area. Based on this information, the Agreement collects possible needs expressed by the affected country to disseminate them amongst the other member States. The second initiative is the Extremum project (operated by the Moscow Centre) which completes this information with an early estimation of the possible consequences of the reported earthquake.

As a cooperative tool between countries, the transboundary effects of major hazards are also an important aspect for the Agreement, which tries to encourage work in this field. As examples of such commitment, the ongoing initiative on fire management in the Balkans lead by the Freiburg Centre should be pointed out, as well as the previously mentioned mapping project in the Caucasus.

Priority for Action 3: Building a culture of safety and resilience / use of knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

Following the Ministerial Session of 2006 which adopted a specific recommendation on disaster risk reduction through education at school, the Agreement has participated in the biannual ISDR Campaign "Disaster risk reduction begins at school" and is an active member of the Thematic Platform on Knowledge and Education. This involvement led to the organisation in 2007 of the workshop on the topic where many interesting initiatives in Europe were discussed and the need was highlighted to advocate for formal education on DRR alongside more non-formal education initiatives to give students a common access to such information.

Constantly aware of the current difficulties to incorporate such DRR education in curricula, the Agreement has continued its BeSafeNet initiative which includes the setting up of a multilingual website with DRR related material (produced by our specialised centres) and mainly addressed to teachers wishing to incorporate such material in already existing courses.

Public awareness campaigns are also essential to increase global population resilience to disasters. A pilot project to identify the needs (but also the shortcomings) of national and municipal campaigns on population information has been launched in Armenia: apart from a methodological document, several information documents addressed to the general population have been prepared.

Priority for Action 4: Reducing the risks in key sectors / the underlying risk factors

The Agreement has always considered DRR in its wider view and a good example of such an approach is its long-standing work on Cultural Heritage and Risks. Within the Ravello Centre, specialised courses on the topic have been organised for master level students in 2007 and 2008, stressing in particular the new challenges raised by climate change. In parallel, the Athens Centre has continued the study on vulnerability of monuments and possible interventions to reduce it.

Another important issue is the social dimension of DRR. In the field of aridity risk, the Algerian Centre has developed its technical work emphasizing the implication of the population in setting up adequate prevention measures. However, such a dimension is highly variable from country to country and consequently trying to define internationally agreed recommendations or actions turns out to be quite difficult. The Agreement included all relevant domains of action in its three adopted recommendations and tried to facilitate the exchange of experiences to illustrate the effectiveness of policies taking all relevant domains into account.

Priority for Action 5: Strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

In the past two years, the Agreement's activities have concentrated on addressing the sources of possible disasters rather than on responding to those disasters. This tendency was supported by the fact that in Europe response mechanisms are in place at most levels and an important degree of international co-operation is already effective (even with field exercises). Nevertheless, the Agreement has promoted actions in a too often under estimated field: the psychological support to victims. A recommendation on the topic was adopted in 2007 and in collaboration with the European Federation of Psychologists Associations, a project for a training course on psychological support to victims was prepared to be locally operational in the case of a disaster.