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EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT (EUR-OPA)

**Contribution of the Agreement
to the Hyogo Framework of Action (2009-2011)**

Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents
29-30 September 2011, Yerevan, Armenia

The EUR-OPA Agreement has pursued in 2009 and 2010 its twofold task of formulating recommendations addressed primarily to Member States' authorities and developing the knowledge to facilitate the implementation of such recommendations.

The Agreement's activities since 2009 have been defined according to its Medium Term Plan for 2007-2011 adopted at the Agreement's 11th Ministerial Session back in 2006. The plan reflected the priorities for action in the field of disaster reduction in the European and Mediterranean area within the context of the HFA, taking into account previous activities developed by EUR-OPA in several areas now included in the five HFA priority areas.

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

As an international cooperation group, the Agreement has continuously promoted within its 26 Member States¹ the importance of disaster risk reduction mainly through recommendations adopted by its Committee of Permanent Correspondents. Two additional recommendations were adopted in 2009 : one on cultural heritage and climate change and one on national platforms. The Agreement's 12th Ministerial Session (St Petersburg, 28 September 2010) has also adopted a resolution on ethical values and resilience to disasters and a recommendation on reducing vulnerability in the face of climate change.

The growing involvement of local and regional authorities in major hazard management has motivated to launch in 2008 a comparative study on that topic. Its initial phase (based on 8 Member countries) was concluded in 2010 by a first report which highlights the importance of a smooth cooperation between the various levels at all stages of risk management and consequently the need to avoid information gaps between them: several proposals based on good practice were identified. An electronic version of the data collected is underway to allow information update through internet and an easier contribution by other countries.

In order to cope with that wider spread of competencies among multiple stakeholders, the Agreement confirmed its commitment to support the creation of National Platforms better coordinate their actions and maintain efficiencies, proposing to the interested Member States its support to set up such National Platforms. Following the 2007 and 2008 meetings co organized with UNISDR, the Agreement supported the Bonn and London European meetings of National Platforms and Focal Points in 2009 who led to the creation of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, whose first meeting took place in Goteborg in 2010.

2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

The Agreement is mainly interested in the comparability of risk issues between countries and consequently favours such transnational projects. Along this line of action, and based on a study on the different methodologies used in mapping landslides and their possible harmonisation, the Strasbourg Centre has prepared in 2009 an early warning cartography on landslides generated by climatic factors to identify more threatened areas. The development and test of an adapted model based on landslide susceptibility mapping at European scale was done in 2010.

A quite ambitious undertaking on hazard mapping over the South Caucasus region was coordinated by the Tbilisi Centre. Following an international workshop organised with scientists

¹ Serbia joined the Agreement in 2009.

and decision makers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, their contributions led to the publication in 2009 of an Atlas of GIS-based maps of natural hazards for the region, paving the way to similar initiatives in other regions. The trans-boundary effects of major hazards are also an important aspect for the Agreement : examples of such commitment include the ongoing initiatives on forest fires (management in the Balkans and consequences of forest fires in Chernobyl area) lead by the Freiburg Centre.

3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

The network of 27 specialised centres has developed extensive work in such diverse fields as landslides, coastal hazards or risk education, and has thus contributed to a better knowledge of the phenomena. Furthermore, a workshop on climate change impact on water-related and marine risks organized in Murcia (Spain) in 2009 highlighted the increasing role of climate change: both droughts and severe floods may begin affecting regions which up till now have been preserved and the concentration of human activity in coastal areas will be challenged by the rise in sea-level.

Following the 2006 recommendation on disaster risk reduction through education at school, the Agreement is developing the BeSafeNet initiative, a web based project addressed to teachers to provide them with teaching material on main hazards to raise students' awareness. The organisation of short-term specialised courses at master-level has been favoured during this period and three new courses were organised in 2009 and 2010 :

- a training on cultural heritage and climate change impact, coordinated by the Ravello Centre;
- a course on "Climate Change: impact on health, human environment and water" coordinated by the Strasbourg University and the ENGEES
- a coastal risks' training, coordinated by the Biarritz Centre, mainly for coastal managers.

4. Reduce the underlying risk factors

The collaboration of some Centres with their national authorities on earthquake risk and infrastructures must be highlighted as an example of greater synergy between scientists and decision makers. The Rabat Centre developed joint work with authorities on seismic feasibility studies for new cities and existing large dams and public buildings' vulnerability to earthquakes. Similarly, the Bucharest Centre supported in 2009 the enforcement by the Romanian Government of seismic rehabilitation programmes of existing buildings according to a new national Code. The Moscow Centre's work on remote control of structures and buildings, already experimented on several public sites in Russia and whose methodology was adopted at national level, also reflects the need for technical works more oriented to their actual implementation.

The involvement of citizens in disaster risk reduction must also been pointed out. The Bruyères-le-Châtel Centre continued to develop its innovative initiative on earthquake monitoring through on-line questionnaires filled in by web users and will try to use new social networks (such as Twitter or Facebook) to collect more information on earthquakes. The role of public awareness campaigns in increasing resilience to disasters was also explored through a pilot project to identify needs and shortcomings of national and municipal campaigns on population information in Armenia with a view to define a general methodology valid for other neighbouring countries.

5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

The Agreement has continued its support to two major initiatives concerning data dissemination : 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, and the Extremum project (operated by the Moscow Centre), which completes it with an early estimation of the possible consequences of the reported earthquake. Based on that information, the Agreement collects possible needs expressed by the affected country to disseminate them among the other Member States.

Regarding psychosocial assistance to victims, the cooperation with the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) allowed to benefit from the expertise of their task force on the topic. A first concrete project was the definition of the structure of a training course addressed to psychologists, which materialized in a first training course for psychologists organised in 2010. A document on lessons learned in various past disasters was also published in 2010 while the Secretariat has set up in its website a psychological assistance e-library with material from various countries. In parallel to this new approach of victims, activities around the more traditional medical emergency viewpoint were organised in various countries.

In the past two years, the Agreement's activities have thus concentrated mainly on addressing the sources of possible disasters as responding to those disasters already benefit from existing response mechanisms in place at various levels and including an important degree of international co-operation. In spite of that, both economic and death tolls paid by our societies to disasters remains heavy and the need to work on actual sources of vulnerability is crucial.

The new 2011-2015 Medium Term Plan adopted at the Agreement's 12th Ministerial Session (St Petersburg, 28 September 2010) builds on previous achievements to further promote disaster risk reduction in Europe and will serve as guidelines for future activities, stressing in particular the recent emergence of two important issues : the role of people themselves as a tool to improve resilience and the additional challenges raised by climate change.