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Or. E.

EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)

**Decision on the use of the operative budget
of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement
(EUR-OPA)**

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement

Wishing to improve the efficiency in the use of the resources of the Agreement;

Recognising the good work of the Network of Specialised Centres of the Agreement as a fundamental aspect of the action of the Agreement;

Aiming to improve the coherence of the Network of Centres, the visibility of their technical work and its consistency with the priorities set up by the 2010 Ministerial Session;

Desirous to improve the synergy of action between the Centres and the Committee of Permanent Correspondents;

Recognising that the transparency and efficiency in the use of the budgetary means of the Agreement is an important way, but not the only one, to achieve those goals;

Taking note of the observations and suggestions made by the Council of Europe audit on the use of the budgetary resources of the Agreement;

Wishing to align itself with the practice of two-year budgets now applicable to the whole Council of Europe;

INSTRUCTS the Executive Secretariat and the Bureau of the Committee to apply the following criteria in the use of the operative budget of the Agreement:

1. Operative funds will be used for the funding of the following activities:
 - A. Statutory meetings of the Agreement
 - B. Working groups created by the Committee of Permanent Correspondents to carry out specific tasks¹
 - C. Seminars organised by the Executive Secretariat to implement specific concerns or decisions of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents
 - D. Activities carried out in cooperation with other international organisations implementing specific concerns of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents²
 - E. Payment for services provided by Specialised Centres involved in the European Warning System³
 - F. Audit activities of the scientific quality and sound budgetary management of the Specialised Centres
 - G. Activities (studies, projects, seminars, training, publications, etc..) carried out by the Specialised Centres or by some Governments (preferably in cooperation with Centres and providing additional resources) of member States of the Agreement.
2. The Bureau will oversee the implementation of the programme of activities, supported as necessary by the Chair of the Meeting of Directors of Specialised Centres and other experts the Chair may appoint. The Executive Secretariat will present proposals at the first meeting of the year of the Bureau. Such proposals will be presented annually but will cover a two year cycle, starting in the period 2012-2013.
3. The Bureau and Executive Secretariat will use the following guidelines in the choice of activities proposed under G) above :
 1. The activity/project is in line with the priorities set in the Medium Term Plan and those set by the Committee of Permanent Correspondents for the biennial period concerned.

¹ i.e. existing working groups on education, ethics and resilience, cultural heritage and natural risk, vulnerability, etc.

² i.e. participation in the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) , the Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR), cooperation with the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations, etc.

³ i.e. EXTREMUM system of ECNTRM, Moscow, or alerts of CSEM, Paris

2. The activity/project has clear, immediate application to increase the resilience of populations facing a risk or in the improvement of response in crisis situation and is line with specific needs of a state party to the Agreement.
3. The activity/project has a true European and Mediterranean dimension and, for activities/projects of a fundamentally national character, their results may be used by other states, having an interest as pilot-cases.
4. The activity/project is presented by two or more Specialised Centres or in collaboration with other Centres of recognised competence.
5. Other partner Centre(s) or Government(s) involved bring additional resources and expertise to the activity/project.
6. The activity/project has a transversal, multidisciplinary character, covering several risks or being developed in different states.
7. The activity/project has clear deliverables with summaries of results in at least one of the two official languages of the Partial Agreement that may be publicised by the Partial Agreement and other appropriate sources.
8. The activity/project is scientifically or technically sound, innovative and far-reaching.
9. The activity/project is to be developed over two or more years.⁴
10. The activity/project contributes to further synergies among the Specialised Centres in the network of the Agreement.
11. The activity/project is aimed to analyse the “state of the art” in a sector of Disaster Risk Reduction aiming to providing new directions of research and action.
12. The activity/project integrates partners from the private sector which fund part of the activity/project.

The above criteria will be valued positively in assessing the activities/projects presented but their non fulfilment is not meant as an exclusion criteria.

⁴ This point is not meant to exclude Activities/ Projects that may be developed during one budgetary year

Some issues of special concern of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents for 2012-2013 biennium

- Reduction of vulnerability (improving resilience, mapping risks, improving environment resilience and planning, adapting to climate change, etc...)
- Governance of risk (integrating the different aspects and actors of prevention and response, building national platforms, etc..)
- Awareness and improving preparedness of populations and rescuers to emergency situations, building a culture of risk
- Earthquakes and prevention. Identification of areas or buildings at risk, preparedness for events, etc...
- Cultural heritage and risk (protection of cultural goals, buildings, collections, world heritage, historical sites)

Appendix 2 to the Decision

Improving the work and efficiency of the Agreement in particular through the streamlining of the work of the network of Specialised Centres with the new Medium-Term Plan 2011-2015

1. Introduction

At the Ministerial Session of the Agreement, held in September 2010 in St Petersburg (Russian Federation), a new Medium-term Action Plan 2011-2015 was adopted (see AP/CAT (2010) 5rev2).

At the previous meeting of Permanent Correspondents in Paris (Spring 2010), a strong wish was manifested by a number of States to have a full overview of the activities of the Agreement since the previous Ministerial meeting of the Agreement in 2006 Marrakech (Morocco).

At the meeting of the Permanent Correspondents in St Petersburg, the Secretariat presented a comprehensive view of all programmes and activities carried out in the previous 4 years (document AP/CAT (2010) 21) and also a new brochure summarising both the purpose, reach and technical work of the Agreement, as well as its synergies with other processes and international bodies in the field of disaster risk reduction.

Based on that overview and taking into account the new Medium Term Plan, the need to examine, at a further meeting, the working methods of the Agreement and more particularly, the work of the network of Specialised Centres, in view to aligning the whole of the work of the Agreement with the priorities set, increasing the visibility of the action of the Agreement and creating further synergies among the different Specialised Centres.

To examine the working methods of the Agreement, the Executive Secretariat, under the instructions of the Chair and Vice-chair of the Agreement, created a small working group that met in Paris twice (on 17 February and 10 March 2011) to make precise proposals to be submitted to the April meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

The Group was composed of Permanent Correspondents (from the governments of France, Croatia and Belgium), Directors of the Centres (from Armenia, Ukraine and Morocco), the Chair of the meeting of Directors, the Chairs of the Programme and the Audit Committees, as well as the Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary. The choice of persons aimed at favouring a variety of opinions and a good expertise on the way the Specialised Centres work.

The debate of this working group was very rich in ideas and suggestions. Most of them have been incorporated in point 3) above, which is the result of a collective reflection exercise.

The main finding was that, although the present working methods and the attribution of funding to activities - the result of a complex development of the Agreement over the years - was not an unreasonable one, it was necessary to proceed to a progressive change to improve transparency, accountability, efficiency in the use of resources, visibility of results and a greater coherence with the objectives and priorities of the Agreement and the needs of its members States.

The Centres have been pivotal in the development and disaster reduction action of the Agreement but needed to better plan activities, increase synergy between them, avoid the dispersion of resources and devote more efforts to publicise results. The system of fixed, small grants to Centres was no longer justifiable as resources get dispersed and are not attached to results. Concentration of resources could permit joining forces with other Centres of expertise, governments interested in the development of some programmes and the private sector where applicable.

The working group invited the Executive Secretariat to present these new ideas, to invite all the structures of the Agreement to apply them in their field of competence (including the Committee of Permanent Correspondents, its Bureau, the Specialised Centres, the meeting of Directors and the Executive Secretariat).

The working group considered appropriate to present, for consideration of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and possible approval, a "*Draft Decision on the use of the operative budget of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)*" considering that, although not all problems may be solved by clear rules on the use of the budgetary means of the Agreement, the proposal put forward can help the objectives of improving working methods.

In the draft decision some criteria are presented to assess the projects presented by the Centres (under point G). These criteria should not be taken as exclusive, in the sense that projects will not be financed if they do not meet all criteria, but rather as positive points for an evaluation. The Group also suggested that the Committee of Permanent Correspondents highlight a certain number of fields for each two years-period and made a few proposals for the period 2012-2013.

The Executive Secretariat presented the main conclusions of the working group to the meeting of Directors of Specialised Centres, who were in general favourable to the new methods proposed, as they understood that the evolution of the work of the Centres necessitated the changes proposed.

2. Present working methods of the Agreement

The present working methods of the Agreement are the result of a complex history in which the Specialised Centres played a key role in encouraging governments to join the Agreement, at a time where a relatively small network of Centres received, comparatively, far higher funding from the Agreement. The network of Centres was designed to bring expertise in many different topics and the Agreement was seen as a main source of finance.

Basically the different roles of the bodies of the Agreement consist in :

- a governmental Committee of Permanent Correspondents which has a political leading role and supervises (supported by its Bureau) the implementation of the priorities set by the Ministerial Sessions
- a network of Specialised Centres that make proposals on scientific, technical, training or awareness activities on disaster risk reduction
- an Executive Secretariat that serves both bodies, implements directly part of the programme of activities through the organisation of working groups, is involved in other activities carried out in cooperation with other international organisations, oversees and follows very closely the implementation, budgetary accountancy and results of the work of the Centres (supported by the Audit Committee and, as necessary by the Chair of the Programme Committee).

The Executive Secretariat also maintains a web site, takes care of compliance of all procedures with Council of Europe rules and maintains a capacity of proposal for new activities for submission to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

Resources provided by governments are approved on an annual basis by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and are used for staff, organisation of statutory meetings, travelling of Executive Secretariat and some government experts or directors, audit activities, maintenance of the European Alert System and EXTREMUM (financed only partially through the Agreement) and a more action oriented "operative budget".

The operative budget is at present fractioned into roughly two halves:

- one that provides (relatively modest) "fixed grants" to 21 Centres (out of the 27 in the network)
- the other that pays for "coordinated programmes", which are activities or projects, carried out by one or several Centres (more often one than several).

Grants pay for maintenance of Centres or its ruling bodies, travelling of directors, meetings and other technical or scientific activities in the field of competence of each Centre. Resources for coordinated programmes pay for groups of experts organised by the Executive Secretariat, collaborative action with other organisations (e.g. promotion of National Platforms for DRR, participation in ventures such as the Partnership for Environment and DRR, training of psychologists for intervention after disasters, etc) and also for activities and projects presented by the Centres.

Proposals are received annually by the Executive Secretariat, assessed for scientific, technical and budgetary soundness, presented to the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives for comment and, after acceptance, implemented by the Centres with support and scrutiny from the Executive Secretariat.

3. Some ideas for improvement of working methods

a) Match the needs of countries and priorities

The present system does not ensure enough that the activities made by the Centres are in line with the priorities of the Ministerial Session - or specific needs having been identified by governments -, especially in the use of grants. Even if most directors of Centres play the game honestly and try, within the sphere of their expertise, to follow priorities, sometimes other considerations are more important. The Executive Secretariat tries to influence proposals in a constant dialogue with the Centres, but is also handicapped by the modesty of the sums provided, which do not permit to be in a strong negotiation position.

Notwithstanding the modesty of the sums provided, most directors find that their integration in the network of Specialised Centres gives them two important values (apart from the resources): one is the labelling of their centres as "European and Mediterranean Centres" attached to an international organisation such as the Council of Europe, the other is being part of a network of expertise in DRR that offers interesting contacts in many fields of expertise and in many different States.

It is suggested to discontinue "grants" (too dispersed now and with limited relevance as based mainly on geographical reasons) to concentrate all resources on "coordinated programmes" comprising activities and projects that will be assessed according to their topics' relevance with the priorities of the Agreement or specific needs and interest of Member States.

b) Increase the European and Mediterranean dimension of projects

Present dispersion of resources does not favour significant transversal work among several Centres, even those dealing with the same topic or hazard. Many Centres can find common projects around some DRR issues, but so far they have not shown much interest in doing so because of the difficulties in carrying out common tasks together. This is clearly something that can and must change.

It is suggested that common projects presented jointly by a few Centres (even if each individual Centre may, at a later stage, carry out a part of the common project), be regarded as adding value to the results and coherence of the network of Centres and thus be considered under a favourable light. As these projects will require a more substantial funding, they are also more likely to be able to find additional sources of funding (from governments, or other sources). Needless to say, this does not exclude some Centres from continuing to present projects on very specific issues (where they may be the only Centre in the network on that topic) but with a clear international added value.

It is also suggested that Centres present more projects with a European and Mediterranean dimension (i.e. that they do not have a purely local or national character). The mapping of a certain risk in one country of the Agreement, for instance, may be of use to that State but it has little added value to other States, unless an "exportable" innovative methodology is used. It is also suggested that projects covering several States, having a multidisciplinary character or covering several hazards should be seen as meriting closer attention. A multi-state project can also make it easier to find additional resources and contributes to the coherence of the network.

c) Improve planning and gather external resources and expertise

The problem with many projects or activities is that they are developed over a short period of time and there is no clear evidence of their impact on disaster risk reduction. Sometime activities help maintain the coherence and communication of existing networks of experts researching on a particular risk and it is much easier to see, from year to year, a certain "line of research" around topics of interest for DRR.

This is not a problem restricted to the Agreement. The Council of Europe has felt that having "one year programmes" attached to the budgetary calendar of the Organisation (which states that budgets are voted every year) may become a problem by lack of continuity in action. The Council of Europe has decided in 2011 to pass to a system of two-year budgeting as from 2012-2013 (even if formally there will still be an annual approval of budgets) that permits to better plan and carry out activities.

It is suggested that the EUR-OPA Agreement also adopts a two year budgeting and that projects and activities of the Centres are also presented for development over two or more years, if this is feasible. This would permit a project to develop work in different phases, improve planning and implementation of

projects and also foresee results at various stages of the activity. It is also recommended that multi-year projects include an annual reporting to facilitate a better follow-up of the activity by the Executive Secretariat and the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

A longer duration of the project/activity should also facilitate the search for additional funds (in governments or other sources) and the involvement of other partners (for instance other technical centres of expertise – not necessarily in the network of Specialised Centres). In this way the meagre funds of the Agreement might be complemented by other sources, making projects more consistent and significant and thus more attractive to potential donors. It is suggested that Centres look for outside partners, including government agencies, and approach them for presenting more substantial – and hopefully, better financed - activities.

It is also suggested to make an assessment of the evolution of the activities of the Centres over the years and to evaluate whether the Centres and their main orientation are still in line with the needs of the Agreement and the priorities set by the Medium Term Action Plan 2011-2015, and to make appropriate recommendations. In that context it would also be useful to identify whether the Centres find that there is an added value of being integrated in the Agreement and, likewise, how states parties of the Agreement value the contribution of the Centres to its work and priorities.

d) Improve presentation of results and visibility

The results of certain projects and activities carried out in the framework of the Agreement are now far from clear. Even if the Executive Secretariat gathers synthetic information from each project and presents it to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents in the form of summary documents, this does not appear to be sufficient to ensure clarity. It is suggested that the projects/activities have better defined "deliverables" and that their presentation is somehow homogenized, so that governments may have a clearer idea of the work developed.

One of the present weaknesses of the Agreement is that the very interesting work carried out by the Centres in their different spheres of expertise is much dispersed in many different publications, some printed by the Centres, some by the Council of Europe, some published only online, some presented in other scientific fora or Conferences of specialised character which are not necessarily attended by practitioners from governments. The final result is that there is no clear visibility or "return" to governments for the funds invested in these projects, creating a sense of opacity and losing many good opportunities to enhance the usefulness of the work done and the image of the Agreement.

It is suggested that projects and activities carried out in the Agreement are publicised both on the Agreement's web site and, where existent, on the Centres' web sites. In addition, it would be necessary to foresee, in the budget of the projects, some funding for the translation of summaries of results into the two official languages of the Agreement and request them from project managers.

e) Foster communication between Permanent Correspondents and Specialised Centres

The communication between the Centres and the Committee of Permanent Correspondents is relatively good at present, but can be improved. Existing mechanisms of communication are the following:

- at least a third of the States in the Agreement are regularly represented at the Committee of Permanent Correspondents by directors of Centres;
- in every meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents the work of one or two Specialised Centres is presented by their directors;
- the Chair of the Meeting of Directors of Centres is invited systematically to the meetings of Permanent Correspondents;
- in the last six years there has been a meeting of directors and two seminars (mainly attended by directors) organised "back-to-back" to the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents;
- progress in the work of the Centres is presented at least once every year to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

The Executive Secretariat is thus invited to integrate more both Directors and Permanent Correspondents in existing working groups. It is also suggested that meetings held "back-to-back" between the two bodies are privileged and that both Permanent Correspondents and Directors of Centres contact each other more often at national level.

At the national level, it is also suggested that both governments and directors of Centres increase communication efforts and keep each other respectively informed of their action and priorities, so that contacts between some Centres and their own governmental authorities does not necessarily rely in meeting in the framework of the Agreement, but in a more fluent, direct communication. It is also suggested that Centres be aware and participate, as appropriate in the work of the National Platforms for disaster risk reduction (where they exist) so that they can offer their technical expertise and also benefit from the multi-stakeholder approach of national Platforms.

f) Keep flexibility in the application of criteria

The suggestions above are aimed at improving the quality and consistency of the work of the Centres and at integrating more efficiently in their work the priorities defined by governments. They are not intended to exclude the activities of any of the Centres, so the guidance above will have to be applied flexibly, trying more to obtain a progressive change in orientation than a discouragement of the Centres input into the Agreement.

It is suggested that both the Executive Secretariat and the Bureau apply the rules in a flexible manner, so that Centres have time to adapt, look for new technical partners that may help them to embark in more consistent and ambitious projects and also search for supplementary financial sources. It is suggested that the decisions of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents are transmitted without delay to the Centres and the Executive Secretariat and, where appropriate, national governments, explain the new orientations. A special effort of communication will be requested from the Executive Secretariat.

4. Council of Europe internal audit suggestions

Concerning the grants agreed by EUR-OPA to the Centres for specific action, the Council of Europe audit recognises that the absence of a procedure and formal criteria in the attribution of grants is a problem to be solved, even if the existence of "customary practice" (i.e. that the funds are given to the network of Centres, that the Executive Secretariat requests reports on the expenditure and bills, and the positive role of the audit committee) and the relatively modest amount of funds alleviates the problem.

The audit recommends maintaining a certain flexibility in the process of attributing funds but to better formalise the criteria for their provision. The audit suggests the adoption of rules fixing the criteria for funding to specific projects or Centres. Given the relatively small amount of resources involved, they do not recommend setting up a specific committee entrusted to distribute these funds, but rather to better formalise the conditions for their request (deadline for presentation of projects, delimiting responsibilities in the roles of Executive Secretariat and the Committee of Permanent Correspondents).

The audit recommends replacing the system of fixed grants to Centres by a system of project funding exclusively, so that funds would only be used for activities and no longer a share of the running costs of Centres.

More strategically, the audit suggests that projects avoid the present dispersion and focus on a number of priority issues for the Agreement, which would permit the Agreement to better align the activities and projects with the political priorities of the Council of Europe in disaster risk reduction.