EUR-OPA MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
ACCORD EUR-OPA RISQUES MAJEURS

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

# Contribution of the Agreement to the Hyogo Framework of Action (2011-2013)

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The EUR-OPA Agreement has pursued in 2011 and 2012 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 2011 have been defined according to a two year activity plan implementing the general guidelines defined by its Medium Term Plan for 2011-2015 adopted at the Agreement's 12th Ministerial Session back in 2010. 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 States the importance of disaster risk reduction mainly through recommendations adopted by its Committee of Permanent Correspondents. In 2011, it adopted resolutions on forest fires and on radiological hazards. One additional recommendation was adopted in 2012 on Environment-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and a recommendation addressing the specific needs of most vulnerable people is under preparation for 2013.

The involvement of local and regional authorities in major hazard management motivated back in 2008 the launching of a comparative study on this topic. After an initial phase (based on 7 member countries), it was extended during 2011 to three other countries and led to a revised 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 practices were identified. An electronic version of the data already collected is available at www.ispu.net to allow information update through internet and an easier contribution by other countries (two new countries will join the project in 2013).

In order to cope with this wider spread of competencies among multiple stakeholders, the Agreement confirmed its commitment to support the creation of National Platforms to better coordinate their actions and maintain efficiencies, proposing to the interested member States its support to set up such National Platforms. The Agreement has continued to support the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR), whose second and third meetings took place respectively in Skopje in 2011 and in Dubrovnik in 2012. Through its involvement in the EFDRR working groups, the Agreement is also actively participating in the organisation of the fourth meeting scheduled in Oslo in September 2013.

## 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 of the different methodologies used in mapping landslides and their possible harmonisation, the Strasbourg Centre (in collaboration with the Tbilisi Centre) has worked in 2012 and will continue to do so in 2013 on a pan-European landslides susceptibility mapping based on landslide type maps of three different countries.

Another domain where the Agreement has been active is coastal hazards. In 2011 and 2012 it supported a study on vulnerability of selected Mediterranean coastlines with regard to tsunamis and sea level rise, leading to the production of local vulnerability risk maps. A project launched in 2012 and coordinated by the Valletta centre also focuses on studying landslide risks in such interface areas, emphasizing the necessary coupling of both marine and terrestrial available data to improve existing hazard maps.

The trans-boundary effects of major hazards are also an important aspect for the Agreement as illustrates the ongoing initiatives on forest fires led by the Freiburg Centre and the Athens Centre on the definition of common guidelines on defence of rural zones against wildfires and the project, in collaboration with UNECE, of developing a reference document on trans-boundary cooperation in fire management.

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

The network of 27 specialised Centres has continued its extensive work in such diverse fields as landslides, coastal hazards or risk education, and has thus contributed to a better knowledge of the phenomena. The new 2011-2015 Medium Term Plan adopted at the Agreement's 12$^{th}$ Ministerial Session (St Petersburg, 28 September 2010) was used as guidelines for activities in 2012 and 2013, 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.

Concerning the link between risks and climate change, the organisation of short-term specialised courses at master-level has been favoured in 2011 and 2012:

- on cultural heritage and climate change impact, coordinated by the Ravello Centre;
- on "Climate Change: impact on health, human environment and water" coordinated by the Strasbourg University and the ENGEES;
- on climatic risks management, organised by the Biskra Centre (Algeria);
- on coastal risks, coordinated by the Biarritz Centre, mainly for coastal managers.

The joint initiative with ISDR Europe and the European Commission on common governance issues in DRR and CCA materialized in 2011 in the publication of a study on existing international mechanisms and a workshop on climate-related risks in Brussels and was pursued in 2012 by the organisation of a special session on the topic during the Davos Forum on DRR.

Following the 2006 recommendation on disaster risk reduction through education at school, the Agreement has continued to develop the BeSafeNet initiative, a multilingual web based project addressed to teachers to provide them with teaching material on main hazards to raise students' awareness. The intensive work developed since 2010 led to the official launch of the website in 2012 during the 25$^{th}$ anniversary celebration of the creation of the Agreement. The website will be enriched during 2013 both in terms of content and in terms of available languages.

## 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 continued its joint work with authorities on seismic feasibility studies for new cities and existing large dams and public buildings' vulnerability to earthquakes. The Moscow Centre's on-going work on emerging risks in the arctic region linked to its increased development resulting from climate change, an approach which can be useful to address other climate-related changes, also reflects the usefulness of 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 defining 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 technical 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.

Alongside these technical tools, the Agreement has also stressed the human dimension in disaster preparedness as a major factor for successful response. Regarding psychosocial assistance to victims, the cooperation with the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) initiated in 2010 by the definition of the structure of a training course for psychologists has been pursued in 2011 and 2012 through training courses for trainers addressed to psychologists from Eastern Europe. In parallel to the psychological approach of victims, a new activity around the more traditional medical emergency viewpoint was launched in 2012 to diffuse pertinent first aid information through an online booklet planned to be finalized in 2013.

This focus on the human dimension has also driven the Agreement to address a relatively innovative issue, namely the ethical implications of DRR related activities. It gave rise in 2011 to the publication of ethical principles for DRR and people's resilience, recalling major international commitments applying to the various phases of risk cycle. The natural follow up to this somewhat conceptual work is to define concrete actions, with special attention devoted from 2013 onwards to the specific case of most vulnerable populations such as disabled persons or displaced people.

In short, the Agreement's activities over the past two years have continued to focus on addressing the sources of possible disasters, at the same time acknowledging the disaster response mechanisms in place at various levels. As economic and death tolls paid by our societies to disasters remains high, it is important to continue to work not only on actual sources of vulnerability but also on potential vulnerabilities related to the increasing climate-related risks.