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EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)

RECOMMENDATION ON RISKS IN COASTAL AREAS

**adopted by the Committee of Permanent Correspondents at its
meeting in Bucharest, Romania,
27-28 September 2007**



The Committee of Permanent Correspondents

- A. points out that most of the world's inhabitants live in coastal areas and that many human activities in Europe and the Mediterranean area are to some extent influenced by the proximity of the seas and oceans;
- B. recognises the prominent social and economic role played by coastal areas in interaction between land and sea, particularly in the case of estuaries, deltas and lagoons, which have their own special features;
- C. emphasises the extreme vulnerability of coastal areas, linked to the large number of stresses to which they may be subjected, from the sea or the land and on a regular or occasional basis;
- D. expresses its concern at the possible increase in coastal risks caused by climate change;
- E. notes that, through the natural intermediaries of rivers, coastal areas ultimately suffer the effects of any disruptive action on land, whether of natural or human origin;
- F. recognises the importance of geophysical changes, particularly those linked to the dynamics of the underlying structure of the earth's crust, which can cause huge disasters in these particularly vulnerable areas;
- G. states, with regard to the assessment of the scale of coastal risks, that the time factor has to be taken into account in the emergence of certain damages, although it may be impossible to determine their exact cause or at what point they will be triggered;
- H. notes the serious risk of accident in coastal areas due to marine pollution and in particular where the transport of oil and chemical products is concerned;
- I. regrets the impact of certain human installations whose immediate consequence has been to destabilise still further areas that are already unstable or even to destroy them, frequently forever;
- J. expresses its concern at the limited know-how of those in charge of managing coastal areas regarding their natural development, which may be disrupted by human activity;
- K. emphasises the clear lack of co-ordination, despite all the efforts that have been made, between often hastily-devised protective measures and the practical know-how made available to all those involved;
- L. notes the limited effectiveness of many of the measures taken by local or regional authorities to offset certain natural processes such as coastal erosion or accretion;
- M. notes the interest shown by the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement in coastal risks in recent years and the desire expressed at the 11th Ministerial Session of the Agreement to include measures to reduce the vulnerability of areas exposed to these risks in its Medium-Term Plan 2007-2011.

RECOMMENDS that the member States of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA):

1. ensure, in so far as possible, that integrated management of coastal areas and the associated risks is co-ordinated at regional level, according to the natural features of the areas concerned and regardless of local or national administrative boundaries;
2. encourage local and regional authorities to devise adequate joint policy instruments to take increasingly fuller account of the risks facing coastal areas in terms of their natural development, which is impeded to differing degrees by the excesses of human activities. In this context, it is of major importance that natural and technological risks be taken into account in town and spatial planning policies in order to avoid or limit building in vulnerable areas;
3. carry out simulations designed to gauge the possibility of disruptions in coastal areas caused by unwanted inflows following the flooding of drainage basins, whether natural in origin or the result of problems triggered by damage to engineering structures; to also carry out simulations designed to gauge the possibility of accidental marine pollution;
4. study the requisite conditions for the establishment of warning networks for tsunamis, linked more or less directly to mechanical stresses on the earth's crust and occurring in coastal areas;
5. promote the development, in Europe and the Mediterranean area, of new scientific and technical co-operation networks intended to foster a multidisciplinary approach to interventions, co-ordinated methods for the analysis and interpretation of phenomena and intercalibration of results;
6. make the necessary arrangements for existing information to be collected with a view to setting up networked databases making for increased exchange;
7. encourage a policy of reviewing know-how at given times in the coastal protection decision-making process so as to eliminate duplication or superfluous items from activity programmes and be able to make the best use of past experience;
8. establish models for the evaluation of marine and coastal risks in the light of climate change;
9. promote the establishment of a higher education course on coastal risks, intended to train future managers of coastal areas on problems associated with the vulnerability of these areas which will form part of planned or existing Masters programmes on risks;
10. take account of the differences between the disruptive events likely to affect the coastal areas of northern Europe or the Atlantic coasts and those on the eastern and western shores of the Mediterranean, which are subject to highly active plate tectonics;

11. bear in mind the highly variable nature of the temporal and spatial processes affecting coastal areas so as to take account of the differences in the development of those on the mainland and those on islands and archipelagos;
12. regard, in the light of previous successful operations, coastal risks as a potential vehicle for international co-operation as coastal processes often have disastrous consequences for countries' economies and inhabitants.

Furthermore, bearing in mind both the diversity of European coasts and their hinterlands and also the distinctive features of the seas and oceans on whose shores they lie, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents recommends that in future the Agreement should:

- plan to set up research, training and development activities having as focal points:
 - the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics, Valletta-Gozo (Malta), which specialises in coastal problems and risks in the Mediterranean;
 - the Biarritz Oceanography Centre (France), which specialises in the study of coastal risks and their consequences on Europe's Atlantic coast and could be included in due course in the Agreement's Network of Specialised Centres.