



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

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**OPEN PARTIAL AGREEMENT ON THE PREVENTION OF, PROTECTION
AGAINST, AND ORGANISATION OF RELIEF IN MAJOR NATURAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL DISASTERS**

DRAFT MEDIUM TERM PLAN

2007 - 2011

prepared by
the Executive Secretariat of the European and Mediterranean
Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

The present Draft Medium Term Plan (2007-2011) has been prepared by the Executive Secretariat based on work developed by the Agreement since its creation, the Medium Term Plan 2002-2006, previous decisions of Ministerial Sessions and of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents, priorities set by Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe and (at world level) by the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction (2005) and on comments received by members of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents.

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents examined a previous draft of this document at its meeting on 6-7 April 2006 and provided the Secretariat with comments.

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents is invited to examine the draft Medium Term Plan, discuss and modify it as appropriate in view of its presentation to the 11th Ministerial Session of the Agreement and its possible adoption by the Ministers.

I. PREAMBLE

Disasters not only cause severe human loss and suffering but also impede development by their dramatic economic and social effects. The Statute of the Council of Europe (London, 1949) lists in its Article 1 as one of the aims of the organisation to “*facilitate the economic and social progress*” of its member States. This aim shall be pursued “*by agreements and common action in scientific, legal and administrative matters*”.

It is in this scope that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided in 1987 to adopt the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) which establishes a co-operation group for the prevention of, protection against and organisation of relief in major natural and technological disasters [Resolution (87) 2].

The main aim of the Agreement is thus to promote co-operation on prevention, protection and relief in connection with major disasters, reducing their effects on people and on the economy through appropriate policies and the implementation of adequate technical solutions.

In addition to Council of Europe member States, the Agreement is open to States which are not member States of the Council of Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean, thus enhancing regional co-operation by adopting common approaches with European neighbours with regard to disaster reduction issues.

In the last nineteen years the Agreement has carried out important work in the field of risk prevention and management and in aid to decision making in emergency situations, having developed appropriate research, training, awareness and information programmes. At the same time it has promoted the creation of an efficient network of specialised Euro-Mediterranean Centres. This network has facilitated practical contributions from signatory States through the implementation of precise programmes.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by its General Assembly in September 2000 noted that children and all civilian populations that suffer disproportionately the consequences of natural disasters should be given every assistance and protection so that they can resume normal life as soon as possible. The Heads of State and Government resolved to strengthen the protection of civilians in complex emergencies and to foster international co-operation, including burden sharing in the coordination of humanitarian assistance to all refugees and displaced persons.

The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (September 2002) noted that natural disasters are more frequent and more devastating than in the past. The Summit approved an Action Plan in which States were encouraged to adopt “*an integrated, multi-hazard, inclusive approach to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, is an essential element of a safer world in the twenty-first century*”.

Specific action in the field of major hazards has been pursued, at world level, mainly in the framework of the United Nations’ International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). This organisation prepared the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held from 18 to 22 January 2005 in Kobe (Hyogo, Japan), in which an ambitious set of objectives was set for future action, namely the “*Framework for Action 2005-2015 : Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*”, (more often referred to as the “*Hyogo Framework for Action*”).

The Hyogo Framework for Action sets world priorities by identifying specific activities that may result in reducing the exposure of people to natural disasters and technological accidents and in improving risk assessment and disaster management. These priorities also help implement relevant provisions of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World summit on Sustainable Development.

At their Third Summit held in Warsaw (May 2005), the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe outlined an action plan listing the principle tasks of the Council of Europe for the coming years (chapter “Strengthening the security of European Citizens”):

“We are committed to improving the quality of life for citizens. The Council of Europe shall therefore, on the basis of the existing instruments, further develop and support integrated policies in the fields of environment, landscape, spatial planning and prevention and management of natural disasters, in a sustainable development perspective.”

In the context of the above political framework, the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) stands as a unique structure for regional co-operation between the States of the Northern and Southern Mediterranean, Western, Central and Eastern Europe. The Agreement will encourage its member States to actively participate on a regional scale in undertaking international efforts aiming to reduce risks, to minimize vulnerability and to increase sustainability of the nations and communities in support of sustainable development.

The new political framework set up by the Third Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe and, at world level, by the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction, invites to adapt the action of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement to the new challenges and priorities identified, also maintaining activities which have proven their value.

II. GUIDELINES OF THE MEDIUM TERM PLAN

The emphasis is set on **prevention and rapid response**. The following guidelines have been used for the elaboration of proposals contained in this Medium Term Plan.

- The Agreement will enhance its political dimension, insuring that disaster risk reduction becomes a national and political priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation. Member States of the Agreement are expected to modify policies, update and improve laws and practice to better integrate disaster risk reduction into their current action and into their development policies. The Agreement will have the ambition to include risk perspectives in national and regional sustainable development strategies and action.
- The Agreement, as an instrument of co-operation among its member States, will streamline its activities with other Council of Europe political priorities in the social and sustainable development fields, including the actions of the Council of Europe Development Bank and those in the field of environment protection, the European Conference of Ministers in charge of Spatial Planning, the local development projects in South-East Europe and the Caucasus as well as those of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

- Furthermore, the Agreement will strengthen synergies with other international organisations working in major risks, so as to avoid overlap and improve common efficiency.
- Privileged partners at European level will be the European Union, the European Space Agency and the European Environment Agency among other European institutions. Thus the fourth Medium Term Plan will be particularly attentive to European Union action and guidelines regarding security in the field of natural and technological risks, so as to make better use of existing synergies. Collaboration of the Executive Secretariat with the European Commission will be reinforced, in particular with the civil protection and research units and further coordination programmes and objectives will be sought.
- Special attention will be paid to the relevant work of the pertinent specialised United Nations' Agencies and bodies (including OCHA, ISDR, UNESCO, UNITAR, WHO, ILO, IAEA, WMO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Civil Defence Organisation. In this context the Agreement's fourth Medium Term Plan 2007-2011 has been drawn up searching coherence with the main priorities identified in the Hyogo Framework for Action, adapted as appropriate to the characteristics of the European and the Mediterranean space.
- In the period 2007-2011, the Agreement will better target its action, increasing its efficiency by focusing on a limited number of issues in line with the priorities defined. The activities conducted under the Agreement will concentrate on:
 - Policy, legislative and institutional aspects of risk reduction
 - Training, education and information: building a culture of risk reduction
 - Research aimed at identifying, assessing and monitoring risks and their impact and enhancing early warning systems
 - Specific programmes aimed at reducing the underlying risk factors
 - Effective response through service activity: European Warning System, psychological assistance to victims.
- An enlargement of the Agreement to the member States of the Council of Europe and Mediterranean countries which are not yet member States of the Agreement is to be promoted so as to improve its institutional, political and budgetary dimensions and enable the Agreement to play a fundamental role as a regional instrument for implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action.
- The network of Specialised Centres of the Agreement is to be reinforced and enlarged as necessary relying on the technical and scientific capabilities of the Centres to conduct specific Agreement activities and focusing more their action on the priorities set in this Medium Term Plan.
- The Agreement will continue to be financed by contributions from States parties to the Agreement as it is statutorily provided for. Special programmes or coordinated actions will be proposed for financing by voluntary contributions if the States so wish, enabling the Agreement to be more actively present in some fields.

III. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

III.1. POLICY, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Policy

The European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) will continue to act as an instrument and forum of co-operation among its member States and a political and technical reference for its observer States. It will serve as a platform to exchange information on member States' protection, prevention and relief organisation policies, facilitating contacts, promoting best practices, exchanging experiences and know-how, supporting where necessary and possible the improvement of risk prevention policies. It will encourage States to develop and improve as appropriate their policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction. The role of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents is to be reinforced in this context.

One of the aspects to be promoted in the context of the Agreement will be the need for States to make appropriate financial provisions for disaster reduction, as present resources devoted to this field fall short of needs.

Legislative aspects

Particular attention will be devoted to the analysis of the legislation of member States on major hazards and the management of emergency situations. Comparative studies will be continued, aiming at identifying legal texts and procedures that have proven particularly useful and proposals and recommendations will be made in view of providing examples for possible standard setting activities.

The purpose of this work is to promote the improvement and update of national legislations in disaster reduction and emergency management areas, bringing national legislations closer to international principles and norms accepted within the scope of the Agreement and of the Kobe conference. The comparative study already carried out by the Agreement could be used as a basis for the elaboration of an adequate model legal framework on risk reduction which may be used as a source of inspiration for each State, taking into account its situation and needs.

Institutional aspects

Institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction will be analysed, with an emphasis on interministerial processes and structures, on the promotion of national platforms for coordination of response and prevention and on the share of responsibilities among different actors whilst strengthening the role of local and regional authorities and the collaboration of the private sector in dealing with disaster prevention and risk reduction.

Special attention will be paid in this context to the role of spatial planning in disaster prevention and to the inclusion of security considerations in development projects.

III.2. BUILDING A CULTURE OF RISK REDUCTION

Information exchange

The Agreement will continue to promote and improve dialogue and co-operation among scientists and practitioners working on disaster risk reduction, including the setting up of clearing house mechanisms and/or information sharing systems for the exchange of information on good practices, efficient risk reduction technologies and lessons learned on policies, plans and means. Local and regional authorities and other relevant actors will be invited to actively participate in this exchange of experiences. The web site of the Agreement will play a special role in this context.

Particular attention will be devoted to promoting the use of advanced communication and space-based technologies for risk management, including, in co-operation with relevant programmes and activities of the European Space Agency and of the United Nations, such as UNOSAT, the UNITAR operational satellite applications programme.

Training

The Agreement will promote the identification of knowledge requirements in jobs necessary for risk and emergency management and the type of professional profile sought by potential employers in the field, both in the public and private sectors.

In this context it will continue to encourage and support the Euro-Mediterranean masters in the field of risk management as well as the preparation of a post-graduate diploma with a Euro-Mediterranean label. Disaster medicine and psychological aid in emergency situations will also be promoted.

The Agreement will also contribute to the organisation of training courses for relief specialists, central, regional or local government officials, teachers and development planners, on aspects such as disaster prevention, relief management and post-disaster measures.

Education

The Agreement will continue to promote the elaboration, dissemination and use of educational materials for the school community on attitudes to be adopted before, during and after a disaster, contributing to the design of programmes, activities and multi-media tools which will permit teachers and students to learn how to minimise the effects of hazards. Pilot projects will be launched in different member States so they may be repeated and promoted at national level. Successful experiences in certain countries of the Agreement will be disseminated to other interested countries, together with their communication materials.

Awareness

The Agreement will continue to prepare and promote publications, multi-media information and educational material aimed at the general public on risk reduction, trying also to engage the media to stimulate public awareness on risks and how best to prepare for disasters and how to react in emergency situations. It will play an active role in the preparation and implementation of information campaigns, collaborating as appropriate with other interested organisations.

III.3. SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION: RESEARCH, RISK ASSESSMENT, EARLY WARNING AND REDUCTION OF UNDERLYING RISK FACTORS

Through its national Correspondents and network of specialised Centres, the Agreement will promote scientific and technical co-operation among its member and observer States, as well as with appropriate international organisations, on a number of key issues:

Risk assessment and mapping

The Agreement will develop the collection and analysis of information on risks in an appropriate format, including the identification of indicators, the elaboration of multi-hazard maps and the assessment of the vulnerability of populations and economy to natural and technological hazards. The Agreement will promote activities on risks associated with the specific expertise of each of its Centres, as well as promoting the exchange of experiences and the implementation of common Euro-Mediterranean programmes on sciences related to risk assessment and monitoring.

The Agreement will also encourage the development of standardised and user-friendly technologies for disaster risk mapping so they may be taken into account in spatial planning and in major urban or industrial developments.

Moreover the Agreement will foster the record, analysis and dissemination of disaster occurrence, as well as the assessment of impacts and losses. Member States will be invited to report on events of particular significance, as well as on the measures taken.

Early Warning development

The Agreement will promote the development of early warning systems, well adapted to target audiences, and will work, inter alia, with local authorities towards the harmonisation of signals and alarms in the Agreement's area so that warnings are easily understandable by all populations at risk, resident, temporary visitors or tourists.

Particular attention will be paid to promoting the establishment and improvement of information systems (based on vulnerability data) connected to early warning and to the promotion of information tools that may help decision making in emergency situations.

Prevention: reducing vulnerability

The Agreement will continue to promote activities aimed at reducing risks and vulnerability of populations, by encouraging more sound development practices, improved land-use and encouraging a safer and more sustainable management of ecosystems. This includes in particular the promotion of more stringent building codes, building design and innovative construction techniques in seismic areas and safer land-use practices in areas vulnerable to marine risks, landslides or floods. The Agreement will also promote the retrofitting of schools, hospitals and public buildings so they become more resistant to risks.

The Agreement will also contribute to the analysis of the role of the environment and environmental management in disaster risk reduction, co-operating as appropriate with existing initiatives at regional and world levels.

With regard to technological hazards, the Agreement will continue promoting safer standards in the transport and dumping of dangerous substances and for nuclear and industrial plants. The Agreement will support the elaboration of standardised guides on the control of industrial risks.

III.4. PREPAREDNESS AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE THROUGH SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Co-operation in emergency situations

The Agreement will promote a coordinated regional approach in operational mechanisms and communication systems aiming to prepare for and to ensure effective response in transboundary disasters (particularly floods) and in situations which exceed national capacities (particularly earthquakes) in line with internationally agreed methodology, guidelines and check lists. In this context, the Agreement will continue its support to both the European Warning System maintained by the Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Centre, France and to the EXTREMUM rapid assessment of the effects of disasters maintained by EMERCOM of Russia.

Psychological aid

In co-operation with professional associations, the Agreement will promote the establishment of networks of specialists with the capacity to act in emergency situations or to train local psychologists in dealing with disaster victims, in particular children and other vulnerable groups. The Agreement will also support the development of training on “psychological aid to disaster victims” for psychologists from member States of the Agreement or from observer States.