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EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT (EUR-OPA)

**Meeting of the working group “Role of local and regional authorities in
major hazard management”**

4 - 5 December 2008

PARIS, Council of Europe Office (Room 2), 55, avenue Kleber

CONCLUSIONS

Organised by *l'Institut Supérieur de Planification d'Urgence* [Higher Institute of Emergency Planning]

Introduction

On 4 and 5 December 2008, a workshop on the role of local and regional authorities in major hazard reduction was held for the countries which had taken part in the questionnaire-based survey (Algeria, Armenia, Belgium, France, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Greece). The aim of the workshop was:

- to provide a summary of the analysis for each participating country,
- to consider the best way of using the information already available
- to explore certain aspects in greater depth
- to consider whether the analysis should be extended to other countries.

- Country-by-country presentation

The ability of local and regional authorities to take steps to reduce major hazards and their responsibilities after the event depended on the degree of decentralisation or devolution, which differed from country to country. Each participant thus began their paper with an outline of their country's administrative system. After explaining the role of local and regional authorities in major hazard management, they each went on to describe two commonly encountered problems and two examples of best practice that might be of use to others.

In view of the wealth of information provided, participants agreed to append the papers to document APCAT (2007)11, with references to the relevant legislation. The best practice identified would be examined in greater depth and shared through the ISPU factsheet "*Best practice*".

- Observations

Problems:

- ▶ The resources allocated to local and regional authorities often depended on the density of their populations. Some less populated areas, however, were extremely vulnerable to hazards because they were remote and difficult to access or because of the recurrent nature of the events. A disaster in areas such as these could cause extensive casualties. There needed to be more rational use of resources therefore. Mapping was a vital tool in this regard.
- ▶ There was still a lack of awareness of, and hence attention given to, risk in regional development and town planning. In many countries, however, regional development had been decentralised to a large extent. In Belgium, one municipality now had the

staff responsible for compiling the list of potential hazards, drawing up plans and organising practice drills in the same office as town planning staff.

- ▶ Generally speaking, populations were ill-informed about the risks facing them. Sometimes, too, municipalities which were at severe risk from major hazards feared the damage that releasing information about hazards could cause to the local economy (construction projects, tourism, job creation thanks to new industries setting up in the area, etc.).
- ▶ As regarded drawing up emergency plans, often authorities underestimated the scale of the task and the persons entrusted with it had other duties as well.
- ▶ Responsibility for hazard management was extremely fragmented and involved a large number of government departments. Belgium, as a federal state, was a case in point with an overall major hazard management strategy involving dozens of ministries (the competent federal ministries, the ministries of the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community), none of which had authority over the rest.
- ▶ Some countries had large numbers of municipalities, many of them small and sparsely populated. Mergers were planned in some countries.
- ▶ Local authorities needed to find a way of analysing risks. In Belgium, the Ministry of the Interior was planning to offer provinces and localities a standard method of identifying and analysing risks.
- ▶ Generally speaking, there was little transfer of knowledge and experience within departments. Work was needed in this area (See SYNERGIE in France, and the continuity provided by the job of emergency planning officer in Belgium).
- ▶ Evacuation plans needed to be drawn up (See Greece where mayors were required to have an evacuation plan).
- ▶ Feedback was rare. Particularly when a judicial inquiry was under way.
- ▶ In some countries, local authorities had heavy responsibilities which they were not even aware of in some cases. Nor did authorities always have the resources to perform these tasks.
- ▶ Local and regional authorities needed to be surrounded by experts if they were to respond effectively in an emergency. It was important to find experts who were willing to work on a voluntary basis.
- ▶ Risk analysis and prevention were not a priority for policy-makers because they were very expensive.

Best practice:

- ▶ Legislation alone was not enough: sometimes good laws were badly implemented and sometimes best practice came about as a result of trying to find a solution to bad laws.
- ▶ People had a very strong sense of community so it was important to keep them informed. Individual initiatives, moreover, often paved the way for greater institutional support.
- ▶ When seeking to improve its legislation, Armenia had looked to both European standards and Russian best practice.
- ▶ In some countries, a large proportion of the population were still at school so any move to include risk education in school curricula could be regarded as good practice.
- ▶ In France, anyone wishing to sell or rent out a property was required to disclose potential hazards.
- ▶ In Belgium, the requirements for the post of officer in charge of drawing up emergency plans were published by the provincial authorities to help localities with recruitment.
- ▶ In Belgium, co-operation between localities or municipalities exposed to the same risks was encouraged by the Royal Decree which dealt with emergency planning and management at local level.
- ▶ In France, training for local elected representatives was compulsory (www.mementodumaire.net)
- ▶ In Luxembourg, an early warning system in case of flooding had been introduced through cross-border agreements.
- ▶ In Luxembourg, communication channels were short, and not merely because of the country's small size. It was important to encourage consultation between spokespersons so that information was shared, at all levels. In Greece, all communication was handled by the central agency in emergency situations.
- ▶ Greece had plans in place for mobilising volunteers.

- Discussion

The comparative analysis currently covered the following countries: Algeria, Armenia, Belgium, France, Greece and Luxembourg, providing a good geographical mix. The persons who answered the questionnaire for these countries and who made up the working

group were from various backgrounds such as research (Algeria, *Centre de Recherche scientifique et Technique sur les Régions Arides* and France, *Université de Montpellier*), government agencies in charge of major hazard prevention (France, *MEEDDAT*), government agencies in charge of planning and management (Belgium, *Service Planification d'Urgence du Ministère de l'Intérieur*, Greece, *Civil Defence* and Luxembourg, *Administration des Services de Secours*).

It was agreed among the group members that to begin with, they would focus on making existing material available, before extending the analysis to include other countries. There would nevertheless be a further call for contributions before the next meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents in order to determine what the next subjects of the study should be. A new contribution had just been submitted in this regard, namely the questionnaire completed by the Cypriot Civil Defence.

The group also identified a number of topics that were worth exploring further:

- ▶ concept of risk and sources of risk
- ▶ governance (central government, local and regional authorities and civil society)
- ▶ the notion of risk as an integral part of sustainable development
- ▶ societies' resilience, or their ability to recover from a major crisis
- ▶ the responsibilities of public authorities and compensation for victims
- ▶ co-ordinating volunteers
- ▶ the principles of prevention and precaution
- ▶ co-operation between central and local government: studies of interfaces
- ▶ evacuation

March 2009

Before making the existing material available, the contributions would need to be harmonised somewhat. In two cases (Belgium and France), the completed questionnaires could form the subject of a monograph and thus required a simplified version for inclusion as an appendix to APCAT (2007)11. In addition, while some questionnaires could be appended to APCAT (2007)11 as they stood, others needed clarifying. A letter to this effect had been sent to Algeria, Armenia and Greece.

The best practice identified would be shared in the form of factsheets which would likewise be appended to APCAT (2007)11.

June 2009

The current meeting having focused mainly on the preparation and management phases, the next meeting of the group would look at awareness of major hazards and prevention at local level. It would be held in Paris in the first half of June.

Members of the group would be asked to prepare a paper on action taken by local and regional authorities in the field of awareness and prevention, the problems encountered and any examples of best practice that might be of use to others.

October 2009

Publication of the report on the comparative analysis of local authorities in the field of major hazard management in Armenia, Algeria, Belgium, France, Greece and Luxembourg (based on APCAT(2007)11 revised) and its appendices.

Publication of the "Best practice" factsheets and relevant legislation on the website:
<http://crisis.ibz.be/>

December 2009

First meeting of the enlarged group

List of participants

Algeria	<p>Madame Fattoum LAKHADARI Directrice Générale Centre de Recherche scientifique et Technique sur les Régions Arides (CRSTRA), B.P.1682 RP 07000 BISKRA Tel : +213.33.73.42.14 Fax +213.33.74.18.15 e-mail : crstra_biskra@yahoo.fr</p>
Armenia	<p>Mr. Stepan BADALYAN Director European Interregional Educational Center For Training Rescuers 10, Byron St, 0009 YEREVAN Tel./Fax +374.10.54.49.92 e-mail : ectr@europe.com</p>
Belgium	<p>Madame Monique BERNAERTS Directrice du service Planification d'Urgence DG Centre de Crise du Service Public Fédéral Intérieur Rue Ducale, 53 B-1000 BRUXELLES e-mail : monique.bernaerts@ibz.fgov.be</p> <hr/> <p>Madame Alexandra SONCK Attaché DG Centre de Crise du Service Public Fédéral Intérieur Rue Ducale, 53 B-1000 BRUXELLES e-mail: alexandra.sonck@ibz.fgov.be</p>
France	<p>Monsieur Jacques FAYE Direction de la Prévention des Pollutions et des Risques SDPRM Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement durable 20 Avenue Ségur, F- 75302 Paris 07 SP Tel : 33.1.42.19.15.63/15.79 Fax :33.1.42.19.14.79/14.63 e-mail : jacques.faye@developpement-durable.gouv.fr</p> <hr/> <p>Madame Christelle GRATTON Adjointe au Chef du Bureau de l'information Préventive de la Coordination et de la Prospective, Services des Risques naturels et Hydrauliques DGPR,MEEDDAT, 20 Avenue Segur, F – 75302 PARIS 07 SP tel : 01.42.19.15.67 Fax : 01.42.19.14.63 e-mail : christelle.gratton@developpement-durable.gouv.fr</p> <hr/> <p>Madame Marie-Luce PAVIA Professeur Faculté de Droit de l'Université de Montpellier 1, 39 rue de l'Université, 34060 MONTPELLIER Cedex 02 Tel : +33.(0)4.67.61.51.06 Fax :01.42.19.14.63 e-mail : merie-luce.pavia@univ-montpl.fr; europarisks@free.fr</p>
Greece	<p>Mr. Dimitri PAGIDAS, General Secretariat of Civil Protection (GSCP) Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation Directorate for International Relations, Voluntarism, Training and Publications, 2 Evangelistrias St. GR-105 63 Tel.+30.210.33.59.982 E-maildpagidas@gscp.gr</p>
Luxembourg	<p>Monsieur Jean-Mathias GOERENS Président de la Sous- Commission « Audit », Représentant de Monsieur Michel FEIDER 15 rue Follereau L-1529 Luxembourg Tel : +352 621 260 452 Fax : +352 26431207 e-mail : jmg@pt.lu</p>
Council of	<p>Monsieur Francesc PLA</p>

Europe Adjoint au Secrétaire Exécutif
. Tel. +33.3.90.21.4930 Fax. +33.3.88.41.2787
e-mail : francesc.pla@coe.int

Interpreters Madame Claude JEAN-ALEXIS
Madame Karen TWILDE

► Apologised for absence

Luxembourg Monsieur Michel FEIDER
Directeur Administration des Services de Secours
1, rue Robert Stümper, L – 2557 Luxembourg
Tel ;+352.49771-406 (+352)49771-771 Fax.+352.49771-771
e-mail : michel.feider@secours.etat.lu
