

**OSCE Chairmanship Event within “V to V Dialogue”:
Informal Ambassadorial Meeting on Challenges Posed by Natural and
Man-Made Disasters and the Co-ordinated Response of the International
Community**

20 May, Vienna

Concept Paper

Background and Rational for the Meeting:

Natural and man-made disasters have severe consequences for the economic and social development of communities and states, as well as for the environmental resources at their disposal. Natural and man-made disasters and the damage they cause, frequently extend across national boundaries, possibly affecting the relations between states.

Floods and forest fires hitting Europe in 2010, and most recently, the environmental crisis in Japan, a partner country of the OSCE, has turned the attention of OSCE participating States to the necessity of adequate preparation for disaster prevention, risk reduction, as well as effective disaster response.

At the **global level**, co-operative efforts for disaster prevention, risk reduction and response between states are taking place in the framework of the United Nations. The United Nations Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) was put by UN member states in the role of co-ordinator of national and regional disaster risk reduction policies. The Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA) is its global strategy instrument to mainstream disaster risk reduction into development and planning policies. The HFA emphasizes regional co-ordination of policies – in recognition of the cross-border consequences of disasters. The main global player in the field of disaster response is the UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In the event of a disaster, OCHA ensures that coordination between relief actors takes place and organizes humanitarian financing for the UN, to make sure that the response of the international community is as effective as possible.

There exist a series of **regional and sub-regional instruments** for disaster prevention, risk reduction and response in the OSCE area. These include the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE), as well as NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EDRCC), and several European Union institutions and programmes, including the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) department, and the Euromed Programme on Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters” (PPRD South).

Several **Multilateral Environmental Agreements** in the framework of the UNECE are also of relevance to disaster prevention, risk reduction and response. The UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents obliges parties to cooperate in cases of industrial accidents that have transboundary effects (with some notable exceptions, including accidents at military sites). It also obliges parties to put in place an Industrial Accident

*) Redistribution due to change of distribution status text remains unchanged

Notification System. UNECE maintains this system in a standardized online format that is operated by Parties' points of contact in case of emergency.

The UNECE Convention on Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (Espoo Convention) obliges parties to consult affected parties when developing projects and programmes that have transboundary environmental implications. A transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment process would include considerations on the safety of sensitive infrastructure, including industrial plants and nuclear installations, in the event of a natural disaster.

With these instruments for disaster prevention, risk reduction, and response in place, the task for the OSCE is to identify a role for itself in this field, without duplicating existing efforts.

OSCE participating States have recognized the importance of co-operation on addressing natural and man-made disasters:

As early as at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul of 1999 the participating States, in the aftermath of terrible earthquakes in Turkey, emphasized their desire for improved co-ordination in disaster response. The Istanbul Summit Document recognized the need to strengthen the international community's ability to respond to disasters, by improving the co-ordination of the efforts of participating States, international organizations and NGOs. In paragraph 38 of the Istanbul Summit Declaration, the Heads of State or Government "task the Permanent Council to discuss this matter further".

In the 2002 Porto Ministerial Declaration, the OSCE Ministerial Council stated: "The catastrophe caused by the loss of the oil tanker Prestige a hundred miles offshore from our meeting place painfully reminds us of the need to protect the marine environment against oil pollution and its consequences for the local population." The Ministers called "on participating States, the International Maritime Organization and other relevant international organizations to enhance their efforts to ensure the protection of the marine environment against such disasters by strengthening co-operation on the prevention, reduction and control of pollution by oil on the basis of full respect for international law."

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the OSCE Ministerial Council in 2005 declared that "the OSCE will continue to contribute to international co-operation efforts to alleviate the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, including through participation in and support of relevant projects, and to provide appropriate assistance and expertise in consultation with the States concerned."

The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension of 2003 and the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security of 2007, recognize that natural and man-made disasters pose security threats. The Strategy Document calls for co-operation among OSCE participating States on natural and man-made disasters, without however, specifying a role for the OSCE. The OSCE's Border Management Strategy of 2005 also mentions "facilitation of cross-border co-operation in case of natural disasters or serious accidents in border zones" as a possible contribution of the OSCE. Finally, the Draft Framework for Action drawn up in preparation of the Astana Summit of 2010 reiterated this call, encouraging participating States to engage in co-operation on collective responses to natural and man-made disasters.

Tasked with a broad but weakly specified mandate, OSCE engagement in the field of disaster prevention, risk reduction and response has, to date, been limited. In 2006 the “OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission to fire affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh Region” took place.

OSCE engagement in disaster prevention so far is confined to the area of fire assessment, prevention and management, where the OSCE supports capacity-building and regional co-ordination of fire management policies in the South Caucasus in the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative. This engagement was a result of the “Joint OSCE/UNEP Environmental Assessment Mission to Georgia” conducted from 29 September – 3 October 2008.

Hence, the OSCE can draw on considerable expertise in the particular field of fire management. In addition, the OSCE has promoted the implementation of UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements by participating States.

Any possible further role for the OSCE’s Second Dimension in addressing natural and man-made disasters should be based on the strengths of the organization, including its record of functioning as a forum for inclusive dialogue and co-operation among all 56 participating States:

- The OSCE could expand its regional activities in building capacity for disaster prevention. In particular, it could draw on its extensive experience in fire assessment, prevention, and fire management in the South Caucasus and expand these activities to other regions.
- The OSCE could function as a regional platform for sharing information and best practices in disaster prevention, risk reduction and response developed by states, international organizations, sub-regional initiatives, and NGOs.
- The OSCE could serve as a regional platform for co-ordination of disaster prevention, risk reduction and response policies of participating States.
- The OSCE could serve as a regional platform for multilateral co-ordination in terms of provision of assistance in the event of a disaster affecting one or more participating States.
- The OSCE could reinforce efforts to promote the implementation of relevant UNECE Conventions, including the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the Convention on Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment.

Modalities of the Meeting:

The OSCE Chairmanship is convening this half-day informal meeting at ambassadorial level to bring together participating States in order to take stock of multilateral agreements, instruments, good practices and successful policies in disaster prevention, risk reduction and disaster response in the OSCE area, and to discuss a possible role for the OSCE.

International experts will present existing international efforts in the field of disaster prevention, risk reduction and disaster response. The presentations are designed to inspire the discussions of participating States on a complementary role of the OSCE in the prevention, risk reduction and response to natural and man-made disasters.

The meeting is open to all 56 participating States and the OSCE Partners for Co-operation.

The meeting will consist of a single morning session and feature presentations on the following topics:

- Activities of the OSCE in Disaster Prevention and Disaster Risk Reduction and Response
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements and their Role in Disaster Prevention and Disaster Risk Reduction and Response in the OSCE Area
- Good Practice in Disaster Relief
- Safety of Sensitive Infrastructure from Disasters