Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2493 (2023)[1]

Political strategies to prevent, prepare for and face the consequences of natural disasters

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Our planet is suffering from the negative effects of the climate crisis which, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is making some "natural" disasters more frequent and their consequences more devastating. These disasters pose a permanent and predictable threat, with serious repercussions on the well-being of humanity and the global economy. The worst affected are vulnerable groups such as women, who are, according to the United Nations, 14 times more likely than men to die as a result of such an event, but also children, the elderly and all others in vulnerable situations.

2. Türkiye has just experienced the worst natural disaster in the last 100 years in a Council of Europe member State. The Parliamentary Assembly expresses its solidarity with the Turkish and Syrian peoples, severely affected by an earthquake which struck their countries on 6 February 2023. It sends its condolences to both countries and to the relatives of the likely 100 000 victims; according to official sources, there are currently more than 57 000 victims. It affirms its support for the millions of people affected, including the thousands injured and the displaced Turks and Syrians. The terrible consequences of this exceptional event will be felt for decades to come. This disaster is a stark reminder to us of the indomitable power of nature, in the face of which human beings have no choice but to try to prevent and prepare for such events and deal with their consequences as a matter of urgency, before preparing for reconstruction, by gathering the whole population together and not leaving the affected populations isolated and without assistance.

3. In circumstances of such magnitude and gravity, the Assembly reiterates the importance of providing financial and technical support to Türkiye and Syria. Assistance must not only address immediate, medium- and longer-term needs but also, and above all, be based on human rights. The Assembly welcomes the extraordinary efforts by the member States and the European Union. It thanks the Council of Europe Development Bank for the speed with which it has moved to assist the Turkish authorities and for its support for earthquake-related projects in the country.

4. Following the donors' conference of 20 March 2023 and in anticipation of the reconstruction process, which will have to address the needs and the state of mental health of the earthquake-affected populations in central Türkiye and Syria, the Assembly calls for a broad awareness among stakeholders of major hazards and the handling of their consequences. This disaster is a historic event. It must make us question how we deal with prevention of, preparation for, consideration about and reconstruction after an extreme event. We must provide a global response to natural risks, so that no one is forgotten, while taking into account the risks associated with the Anthropocene era. The Assembly regrets the general lack of investment by member States in Council of Europe instruments centred on nature, landscape and major hazards, and the inexorable disengagement of States Parties.

5. International players specialising in extreme events having emerged since the year 2000, the Assembly calls for better co-operation between the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe to ensure greater complementarity when it comes to dealing with natural disasters. It reminds Council of Europe

1. *Assembly debate* on 26 April 2023 (12th sitting) (see Doc. 15738 and addendum report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Simon Moutquin). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 April 2023 (12th sitting).
See also Recommendation 2251 (2023).

member States of the need to practise prevention by preparing national strategies for extreme events, including those linked to the Anthropocene era. These strategies should involve, in a democratic manner, not only national but also regional and local authorities in order to respond as closely as possible to the needs of the populations affected by disasters, while at the same time drawing on multilateral and bilateral international co-operation, in particular between neighbouring countries. Responding to natural risks demands an enhanced right to access to information and information, particularly for vulnerable people who also need to be prepared. The Assembly stresses the role of decentralisation policies in promoting these standards as far as the local level of governance.

6. Drawing on the IPCC recommendations, the Assembly stresses the need for member States to include in their regulations, as soon as possible, measures to adapt to climate change and offset the impact of the climate crisis, including with regard to extreme events. There is no room for fatalism when it comes to natural disasters: dealing with them is the responsibility of public authorities. These authorities must anticipate the risks so that they do not become threats to the human, social and economic rights of people living in Europe and elsewhere. The Assembly hopes that the standards regarding prevention, anticipation, response and monitoring in this area will be shared more widely. It therefore calls for more robust checks and prosecution measures where necessary to combat corruption in the sectors related to (re)construction and the prevention of earthquakes and extreme events in general.

7. The Assembly notes the ground-breaking role played by the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement) and underlines the usefulness of this Council of Europe body in preparing standards. Its approach based on human rights and democratic participation and its regional dimension, taking into account the needs of all groups in society, are still appropriate. The Assembly calls on member States to consider the need for European standards to address not only exceptional natural events, but also events arising from the Anthropocene era, including major technological hazards and the impact of war.

8. The Assembly underlines that the private sector contributes to ensuring resilience to natural disasters. In view of this, it calls on member States to fully implement and operationalise in their national legislation the concept of corporate due diligence obligations, as formulated in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and in Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights and business.

9. The Assembly welcomes the 2016 Draft articles on the protection of persons in the event of disasters, prepared by the International Law Commission and approved by the United Nations General Assembly. It underlines the relevance of their content, including the duty of States to co-operate with each other and with international organisations and the duty to reduce the risk of disasters, conduct risk assessments, collect and disseminate relevant information and set up and operate early warning systems, as well as the duty of affected States to ensure the provision of disaster relief and to seek external assistance. The Assembly supports the framing of these principles as legal obligations of States, as well as the United Nations General Assembly's call for the conclusion of a binding international treaty on this topic.

10. The Assembly calls on Türkiye to:

10.1. continue the necessary efforts to preserve the pre-disaster social, economic and multicultural fabric during the reconstruction phase;

10.2. continue to facilitate the intervention of international humanitarian organisations operating on Syrian territory from Türkiye, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2672 (2023);

10.3. not renew the state of emergency at the end of the three months declared, and favour a democratic approach to crisis management;

10.4. provide a forum for consultation between international humanitarian organisations and national authorities in the event of disasters;

10.5. set up a forum for consultation between national, local and regional authorities in the 11 provinces to be rebuilt so as to strengthen local democracy and organise reconstruction more effectively, without any party-political bias;

10.6. reconsider its decision to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention").

11. The Assembly calls on the other member States of the Council of Europe to:

11.1. show their solidarity with Türkiye and Syria by providing emergency, medium- and long-term technical and financial assistance;

11.2. encourage visits by parliamentarians and representatives of national, regional and local authorities to the 11 devastated provinces in Türkiye to show solidarity with the residents, learn from the Turkish experience, increase twinning schemes between municipalities and strengthen cultural ties and exchanges between young Europeans.

12. The Assembly calls on all member States to:

12.1. co-ordinate their efforts at the United Nations with a view to reopening the three border crossings between Türkiye and Syria for the passage of humanitarian aid, as was the case five years ago;

12.2. spread awareness of the need to prevent, anticipate, take into account and monitor extreme events in order to ensure that the most vulnerable people do not find themselves isolated and abandoned at a time when major hazards are increasing because of the Anthropocene era;

12.3. take account of the role of international humanitarian organisations when preparing their national strategies for disaster risk reduction, so as to facilitate the deployment of such organisations at the site of a disaster;

12.4. step up co-operation between peers, whether professionals or volunteers, at international level in order to make institutions more resilient;

12.5. take into account the distribution of roles between levels of governance in the fight against major hazards in order to build the capacity of local authorities, which are in direct contact with the population;

12.6. move away from a financial approach to disaster management by allocating the necessary funds and combating corruption and bad governance, which increase the vulnerability of those most at risk.

13. In the light of the shared values that bind all Council of Europe member States and the European ambitions expressed by the Turkish youth, the Assembly encourages the European Commission and the Turkish authorities to resume negotiations on suspending the visa requirement for Turkish nationals. In this context, it once more invites the Turkish authorities to review their overly broad interpretation of the anti-terror legislation.

14. In light of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe and taking into account the increased risk of extreme events in the context of the climate crisis, the Assembly calls on member States to put the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment at the top of their agendas. It asks them to reflect on the added value provided by the nature-, landscape- and major hazard-centred instruments set up by the Council of Europe, which use the human rights-based regional approach to protect vulnerable people and to strengthen the resilience of populations against all extreme events and their short-, medium- and long-term consequences, including migration. It calls on member States to build on the experience gained and to ensure the sustainability of these instruments before they disappear. It invites them to co-operate further on the creation of continental standards based on human rights and democratic participation, focusing on the regional dimension.