Regional cooperation on civil protection is one aim of the Barcelona Process to promote peace, stability and security in the Mediterranean. Moreover, with an increasing number of forest fires, floods, earthquakes, marine pollution, pandemics, and other catastrophes across the Euro-Mediterranean area in the last few years, cooperation among UfM Member States in civil protection enjoys high levels of political support.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need to build stronger regional civil protection services and networks, which will benefit not only countries on a national level but also as a region through resource and knowledge sharing.

2008: the turning point for civil protection in our region

In the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, which launched the UfM in 2008, Civil Protection appeared already among the major regional projects that were to shape the mandate of the organisation.

Until 2008, civil protection cooperation on a regional level in the Mediterranean had mainly been funded by the EU and realised through two subsequent programmes under the auspices of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP).

Generally speaking, the two Euromed programmes are seen as a success in terms of the high number of realised activities and participating states. The first Euromed programme aimed at promoting cooperation in the field of civil protection was launched in 1998 following a joint proposal by Egypt and Italy.

2009: Clearing the path for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

In October 2009, the Directors-General of National Civil Protection Authorities of the 27 EU Member States and the 14 Mediterranean and Balkan Partner Countries of the UfM (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) met in Brussels for a Steering Committee meeting to discuss and approve the action plan for the third Euromed civil protection programme was launched. It is called the "Euromed Programme of Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters" (PPRD South).

The global landscape is littered with examples of the devastation caused by man-made and natural disasters. The effects of climate change are evident for all. The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable and exposed to such disasters. A joint Civil Protection programme on prevention, preparation and response to disasters, linking the region more closely to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, is, therefore, one of the main priorities for the region.

—Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean Paris, 13 July 2008

2019: Steps towards a new era of Civil Protection across the region

On the impetus generated hand in hand by the UfM Secretariat and the European Commission, the Directors-General of Civil Protection of the UfM Member States gathered on 11 February 2019 at the UfM headquar-

ters, in Barcelona, almost a decade after their last meeting. The Director-Generals launched a reflection to develop an action plan for strengthened Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on prevention campaigns, emergency response and crisis management.

Indeed, the meeting aimed to facilitate thematic discussions focusing on common humanitarian aid and crisis management, implementation of recommendations of the last meeting, and identification of regional and international projects. The meeting focused on understanding the current situation of civil protection in the region and on developing a new strategic vision for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters.

The meeting resulted in the adoption of a detailed action plan aimed at establishing a new era of civil protection cooperation across the Mediterranean. The action plan includes several key objectives and initiatives, such as enhancing national and regional capacities for prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters; promoting knowledge sharing and best practices; improving communication and information exchange; and strengthening partnerships with other regional and international organisations.

The meeting also highlighted the importance of involving stakeholders from various sectors, including governments, civil protection authorities, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector, in the implementation of the action plan. The participants agreed to continue their collaboration and to regularly update the action plan to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

Overall, the meeting marked a significant milestone in the evolution of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on civil protection and set the stage for a new era of regional cooperation aimed at enhancing disaster resilience and response capacity in the Mediterranean region.
The EU Civil Protection Mechanism offers a framework to work together to prevent, prepare for and respond to major disasters. Common joint regional exercises and training on floods, forest fires, earthquakes, medical, maritime, have been done and allowed us to put together our strengths and train together to reach a stronger response in case of disasters. This partnership and solidarity among all UfM Member States should be strengthened further.

—Christos Stylianides,

States could play a key role in coordinating common responses to crises and cooperate on risk assessment, disaster prevention, preparedness and planning.

2020-2021: Developing the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Protection Action Plan

In 2020 and 2021, the UfM Member States progressed on the recommendations of the Directors-General 2019 meeting to continue working together to enhance their cooperation on disaster risk management, with the UfM providing a valuable platform for Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on civil protection, by facilitating links between the political and operational levels.

In collaboration with the European Commission, the proposed three Working Groups — (i) Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro-Mediterranean area; (ii) Engaging citizens in disaster risk management; and (iii) the role of volunteers in civil protection, have been successfully convened by the UfM Secretariat, with their respective final reports completed.

Proposed action plans for the Working Groups have been developed for discussions and follow-up. The meetings further assessed the needs and objectives of the future PPRD programme in the region.

In this sense, a new phase of the PPRD MEDiterranean, funded by the EU, will be presented in 2022 and will start in early 2023, with new partner countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Mauritania. With a budget of 3 million euros for three years, the main objectives of this new phase will be to (i) build sustainable capacities of civil protection institutions; (ii) strengthen interlinkages between governmental actors, civil society stakeholders and the scientific community; (iii) enhance regional and sub-regional coordination, institutional and operational cooperation between the Southern Mediterranean Partner Countries with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

The next meeting of the UfM Civil Protection Directors-General, which should be held in the last quarter of 2022, will be the moment that sets the next steps in this new phase of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and partnership.

Read more on the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Protection Action Plan:

Sources:
- https://www.euneighbours.eu/