

“NATURAL DISASTER PREVENTION”

As part of the Series

“What A Disastrous World It Is”

Friday, 13th October 2017

UN Natural Disaster Prevention Day



This high level, student organized panel discussion focused on elaborating national and international efforts on preventing natural disasters and minimizing their effects and discussed problematics arising in the cooperation between different institutions working on establishing disaster prevention methods. The talks was moderated by Magdalena Meergraf, Journalist of the GAP, Biorama and the Kurier Health Extra.

The following international experts were invited to discuss the topic:

- **Priv. Doz. Dr. Mag. Christoph Matulla:** Senior Scientist, Climate Impact Group ZAMG, Meteorological Service Austria
- **Priv. Doz. DI Dr. Florian Rudolf-Miklau:** Head of the Department Torrent & Avalanche Barriers, BMLFUW
- **Dr. Susanne Hanger-Kopp :** ETH Zürich, Climate protection & Adaptation, EU climate adaption policy; IIASA research Scholar Risk & Resilience
- **Dr. Eberhard Faust:** Munich Reinsurance Company ; Global risk solutions for natural hazards, Geo Risk Research / Corporate Climate Center

The panelists established different criteria to determine when an event can be declared a natural disaster. While from the insurance side loss statistics as well as the number of events are crucial, from a scientific side, in the Alps three days of rain exceeding 150mm with at least one day exceeding 60mm would increase the probability of earth slides. While on the small scale only minimal changes in the quantity of natural disasters have been noticed, on the global level extreme weather has appeared on a quantitatively higher basis due to the effects of climate change. These extreme events are directly linked to social and structural vulnerabilities, increasing risk hazards on the regional level, which in turn are amplified by low awareness and short-term memory by the affected community.

While international law establishes precedence of a right to life and a right to protection from extreme weather as well as early warning from natural disasters, the main competence of preventive action lies with the national governments, who often fail in successfully communicating such measures beforehand as well as in accurately allocating funds for rebuilding and enhancing the living conditions of the population in high risk zones after a disaster happened. While the experts generally praised the cooperation between Austrian ministries, research institutions and insurance companies regarding preventive actions, risk is often hard to measure and difficult to communicate to politicians, leading to the fact that in Austria less than 10% of scientific proposals are implemented on the political level.

A mixture between private and public responsibility would be a start as well as a focus away from pure economic compensation, towards the incorporation of risk concepts into the legal system as well as areal planning. The insurance side has for example been able to improve tools for the effective decrease of disaster affectedness regarding flood, wind and earthquake zoning and in increasing regional knowledge on the respective hazard level.

The evening was ended by informal discussions at the food and wine buffet. This first ETIAtalks was visited by approximately 100 interested experts of different fields.

This “What A Disastrous World It Is...” series will be continued on the 25th of January 2017 with the topic “Outer Space Disasters”. For more information visit our website www.etiatalks.at or follow us on Facebook.