



EDITORIALE

LEADER

by

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TWENTY YEARS AFTER

The NATO Advanced Research Workshop on “Massive Rock Slope Failure: New Models for Hazard Assessment” was held in Celano (Abruzzi, Italy) exactly twenty years ago. The Workshop was sponsored by NATO as part of its “Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme”, aimed at promoting dialogue and practical cooperation between NATO member states and partner countries based on scientific research, technological innovation, and knowledge exchange. The Celano Workshop was purposely organised to bring together Earth scientists, engineering geologists, and geo-technical engineers actively involved in a range of research topics related to massive rock slope failure, in order to undertake a critical assessment of the state-of-the-art concerning catastrophic rock slope failure and for defining future research directions.

It was specifically dedicated to an examination of major mountain rock slope hazards, combining different experiences from different mountain environments of the world, as a contribution to the “Year of the Mountains”, declared by the United Nations in 2002. In fact, landslides resulting from large-scale rock slope failures are a major hazard in mountainous regions. In the 20th century, disasters caused by massive rock slope failures killed more than 50,000 people on a global basis.

The successful Celano Workshop was attended by 63 researchers from 16 countries. An important highlight of the Workshop was provided by the fact that the NATO Science Programme afforded a unique opportunity to solicit the participation of scientists from the former Soviet Union, who introduced little known case-histories of massive rock slope failure in Russia and the Central Asia Republics, which were published for the first time.

Even more important was the opportunity to share views and build friendships between researchers from NATO member countries and scholars from the former Soviet Union. The Workshop (16 to 21 June 2002) was particularly rich in scientific contributions, debates, exchanges of opinions on technical aspects, round tables, and field trips to the central Apennines, amidst the magnificent landscape of the Maiella massif. However, its key

focus was on cultural exchanges and on the start or consolidation of knowledge of and friendship between people coming from very different worlds, in a spirit of serenity, peace, eagerness to share, and great hopes for the future. To contextualise the event, it is worth recalling that it took place just 10 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and just a few months after the introduction of the euro in the European Union (1 January 2002).

“Twenty Years After” – as in the book of that title by Alexandre Dumas on the saga of the three musketeers – things look totally different with the war in Ukraine. The global context in which scientific research has thrived in the past decades has dramatically and suddenly changed. Both multilateral and bilateral relations have abruptly deteriorated, bringing about enormous and tragic issues, in addition to the casualties and damage caused by a horrible war. From the availability of food, especially for the poorest countries of Africa, to the supply of energy resources, particularly for the more developed countries, the world has been set back by 70 years as a result of a terrible and swift process of “reset”. Another tragic consequence of the ongoing conflict is the actual halt of initiatives for greenhouse emission reductions, arising from global awareness of the inescapable environmental issue. Hence, we are talking again about large-scale use of an extremely polluting fuel, such as coal. The future of joint space research programmes, such as the International Space Station, is being threatened. The war in Ukraine appears to have swept everything away in a matter of few weeks.

What should the members of the international scientific community, especially those engaged in research on geohazards and risks from natural events, do about this situation? They should do everything in their power to rekindle and grow the spirit dominating the event that took place in the Piccolomini castle of Celano in those days of June, as hot as today, twenty years ago. The four organisers of that NATO Advanced Research Workshop (a bit like the four musketeers), namely Stephen Evans, Gabriele



Scarascia Mugnozza, Reginald Hermanns, and Alexander Strom, are fully aware of the current tragic situation and of the difficult and long path towards peace.

Nevertheless, each of us, in our own small way, will make all possible efforts to restore full and friendly cooperation relationships at both personal and international level.