



Regional Consultation on Cross-boundary Cooperation in Fire Management

Skopje, 11 November 2016

Announcement, Background Information and Draft Agenda

Background and Rationale

As a consequence of climate change and socio-economic and demographic changes the countries of the Western Balkan region are becoming more vulnerable to be affected by large wildfires. The increasing threats of extreme wildfires, which may lead to emergencies and reach disaster dimensions, are calling for enhancing coordinated preparedness to manage wildfires both at national level and by cross-border cooperation.

The Council of Europe (CoE) through the Secretariat of the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) cooperates and provides support to CoE Member States in the endeavor to enhance governance for the prevention, preparedness and management of major natural and technological disasters. In the arena of wildfire disaster risk reduction the CoE is working through the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), a Specialised Euro-Mediterranean Center under the EUR-OPA agreement based in Germany.

In order to ensure that initiatives and projects addressing wildfire disaster risk reduction in the Western Balkans are coordinated with the thematic agenda of other regional organizations and agreements the CoE and the GFMC are closely cooperating with the

- UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction / United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) in the implementation of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*¹
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in the implementation of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 6/2014²
- Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative of five international organizations – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)³
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in following up the *UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Crossboundary Fire Management (2013)*, co-sponsored by CoE EUR-OPA, notably through the establishment of the (voluntary) *International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM)*⁴ and the *International Fire Aviation Guidelines*⁵

On behalf of the CoE EUR-OPA agreement the GFMC has been a founding partner of the Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network⁶ (one of the 14 Regional Wildland Fire Networks of the Global Wildland Fire Network⁷) and supported the establishment of the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC) at the Faculty of Forestry in Skopje in 2010.⁸

Between 2004 and 2016 a number of activities within countries and at regional level within the Regional SE Europe / Caucasus Wildland fire Network have been conducted.⁹ Among other the following activities

¹ <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>

² <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/intro/OSCE-Ministerial-Council-2014-Decision-6-Enhancing-DRR.pdf>

³ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/SEEurope_8.html

⁴ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iwpm/index.htm>

⁵ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iwpm/ifawg.htm>

⁶ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/SEEurope.html>

⁷ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/globalNet.html>

⁸ <http://www.rfmc.mk/>

⁹ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/SEEurope_1.html

aimed at supporting nations to develop a National Fire Management Policy and to foster regional cooperation in fire management, notably:

- Proposal for a Regional Strategy on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Regional South East European Wildland Fire Network, presented at the 33rd Session of the FAO European Forestry Commission (Zvolen, Slovakia, 25 May 2006)¹⁰
- Development of the *Guidelines for the Defense of Rural Populations, Local Communities and Municipality Leaders in the Balkan Region* ("Village Defense Guidelines")¹¹
- Development of the *EuroFire Competency Standards and Training Materials* including translations for the use in the countries of the region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia as well as in neighbouring Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey)¹²
- Organization of two regional fire management training courses hosted by Turkey in 2010 and 2014¹³
- Various national and regional analyses of the fire situation in the Western Balkan countries, the last conducted in 2015 by RFMC on behalf of the Regional Environment Center (REC) (ADA/REC/ENVSEC/RFMC Project *Environment and Security Initiative: Addressing the risk of forest fires in the SEE*), resulting in the publication of country studies for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia)¹⁴

At international level the Western Balkan countries contributed to various voluntary processes and informal agreement address international cooperation in fire management, the latest including

- Continuing participation in the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (W FAG)¹⁵
- The above-mentioned *UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Crossboundary Fire Management* (2013), notably through the establishment of the (voluntary) *International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM)* (cf. footnote 4)
- The International Wildland Fire Conferences¹⁶
- The series in International Aerial Firefighting Conferences¹⁷
- Development of the International Fire Aviation Guidelines¹⁸

With these activities the CoE EUR-OPA Secretariat is encouraging its member states to intensify the dialogue on national cross-sectoral and regional cross-boundary levels to enhance inter-operability, efficiency and effectiveness of fire management, notably by sharing of responsibilities and resources.

Support by the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) in 2016

Following the history and experience of the GFMC in establishing and facilitating national inter-agency cooperation and international cross-boundary cooperation in fire management in many countries and regions globally, the Secretariat of the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) proposed to support the Republic of Macedonia to organize a National Round Table on Fire Management and a Regional Consultation on Cross-border Fire Management in 2016. Both events will be facilitated by the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC) in Skopje and the GFMC.

The National Round Table is scheduled for 9 November 2016 shall convene the national actors / stakeholders, which have a mandate (agencies) or voluntary commitment (civil society) in fire management (fire management at "landscape level", i.e. on all types of lands including forests, protected areas, agricultural and pasture lands, and the interface areas between residential areas and vegetated lands).

¹⁰ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/Strategy-WFM-RSEEFN-2-02-05-2006.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/Manag/CBFiM_11.htm

¹² <http://www.euro-fire.eu/>

¹³ 2014 regional training: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/Antalya-2014.html>

¹⁴ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/SEEurope_2.html

¹⁵ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Rationale-and-Introduction-1.html>

¹⁶ The last International Wildland Fire Conference was co-sponsored by CoE EUR-OPA and hosted by Republic of Korea in 2015: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/korea-2015.html>

¹⁷ The last European / International Aerial Firefighting Conference was co-sponsored by CoE EUR-OPA and hosted by Croatia in 2015: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2015/meet2015_03.htm and <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2015/AFF-Conference-Croatia-2015-Chairmans-Report.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iwpm/ifawg.htm> - A representative of the aerial firefighting establishment of Croatia and host of the last Aerial Firefighting Conference will be invited to discuss the regional experience and prospects in exchanging aerial firefighting assets

At regional level countries bordering the FYR Macedonia and additionally Croatia are invited to this regional consultation to review past experiences in cross-boundary cooperation in fire management and propose future procedures for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of cross-boundary cooperation in fire management, particularly with regards to enhancing inter-operability for cooperation in wildfire emergency situations.

The Regional Consultation on Cross-boundary Cooperation in Fire Management

The Regional Consultation on Cross-boundary Cooperation Fire Management will be held on 11 November 2016 in Skopje. The objectives of the Regional Consultation include:

- Evaluation of the current forest fire situation and the fire management capabilities of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia and Serbia
- Share experience in cross-border cooperation (mutual assistance) in wildfire emergency situations, including sharing of aerial assets for firefighting
- Inform participants about the voluntary International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM) and the International Fire Aviation Guidelines
- Enhancing the cross-boundary dialogue and inter-operability in fire management between FYR Macedonia and its neighboring countries

Expected outcomes of the Regional Consultation:

- A review of current practice of cross-boundary cooperation in fire management in between Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo and Serbia
- Recommendations towards enhancing the preparedness, inter-operability, efficiency and effectiveness of wildfire emergency management systems of the countries concerned.

The objective of the Regional Consultation is in line with the results of:

- The Regional South East Europe/Caucasus consultation meeting in Skopje 2008, which was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy-Skopje and GFMC and supported by Council of Europe, Secretariat of the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement [EUR-OPA] and the Environment and Security [ENVSEC] Initiative
- The ADA/REC/ENVSEC/RFMC Project "Environment and Security Initiative: Addressing the Risk of Forest Fires in South East Europe (SEE)" and the resulting country studies for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.
- The translation and potential use of the EuroFire Competency Standards and Training Materials for common border-crossing training and preparedness for mutual assistance in wildfire emergency situations.

The Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC), Skopje and Ministry for agriculture, forestry and water economy, Skopje, will support GFMC in the preparation, logistical / organization of the Regional Consultation.

Draft Agenda and Logistics

Thursday 10 November 2015

Arrival of delegates from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo and Serbia in Skopje.
Details for accommodation will be announced. – Evening: Icebreaker (at hotel)

Friday 11 November 2015

Meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Conference Room, str. Aminta Treti No.2, Skopje.

10:00 – 10:30	Registration
10:30 – 11:00 11:00 – 13:00	Opening Session. Welcome and Introduction Session I: Ministry Presentation of participating countries on the state of wildfire situation, fire management on experiences in cross-boundary cooperation in fire management
13:00 – 13:30	Coffee break with light snacks
13:30 – 15:30	Session II: Discussion for enhancing the interoperability, effectiveness and efficiency of cross-boundary fire management in the region GFMC
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 – 17:00	Summarizing, conclusions and recommendations of the consultation to the Council of Europe and EUR-OPA signatory countries RFMC
19:30	Closing Dinner

Saturday 12 November 2015

Departure of regional participants

Logistics and travel

The CoE EUR-OPA Secretariat through the GFMC will cover the travel costs of participants (transport, accommodation, food). Participants are kindly requested to use economic ways of transport. If private or official cars will be used the costs for fuel will be reimbursed on site.

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