

6th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Statement of the Southeast Europe / Caucasus Region – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

13 October 2015

General Fire Assessment

Within the last five years, wildland fires in the region of Southeast Europe/Caucasus have had a significant influence on the environment and the economy. This has been especially true within the Balkan region during the 2012 fire season. Around 16,000 wildland fires occurred and burned around 232,000 ha of forest and other land. Cases of wildfire-caused fatalities were experienced in Macedonia (4) and Serbia (12) and large numbers of people (civilians and firefighters) have been injured, as well. A large number of private and public properties were destroyed, as well.

The main reasons for wildland fires in the region are agricultural burning, negligence and in some countries arson. Arson is mainly motivated by illegal logging and the low price of timber harvested after the fires; political discontent is also a motivation for arson. Natural caused fires (lightning) are less than 3% of the total number of wildland fires in the Region of Southeastern Europe/Caucasus. A special issue in the region is fire management on terrains contaminated by land mines and unexploded ordinance-UXO.

In the period between the 5th and the 6th International Wildland Fire Conferences, many activities in the region of Southeast Europe and the South Caucasus were organized, especially in line with the recommendations of the 5th IWFC – notably:

- **Recommendation** *“Development of capacities in rural fire management to address possible vacuums concerning the responsibility and capabilities for fire management in the agricultural / rural domain”*

A key effort to meet this recommendation was the development of “Guidelines for the Defense of Rural Populations, Settlements and other Assets against Wildfires and Smoke Pollution”. The Guidelines are tailored for the use of local authorities (Part 1) and local populations living in villages and otherwise across the landscape (Part 2). The project was funded by the Council of Europe and the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) and implemented by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany, and the Regional Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC), Skopje, Macedonia.¹

- **Recommendation** *“UNECE member states and representatives actively participate in the preparation of the UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management aimed at developing a proposal for a regional agreement on cooperation in wildland fire management”*

The Forum was held in November 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland and the region was represented by representatives of eight countries of the SE Europe / Caucasus Region.² Since 2014, the RFMC actively contributes to the International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM), which is serving nations in capacity building in fire management by exchange and training of human resources.

- **Recommendation** *“Support and use the Fire Management Training Center in Antalya, Turkey for the regional training activities”*

In continuation of the implementation of the project “Enhancing National Capacity on fire Management and Risk Reduction in the South Caucasus”, a project under the aegis of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the GFMC (initiated in 2009) a number of national training courses were conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In 2014 the Second Regional Advanced Seminar/Training in Wildland Fire Management was held in Antalya, Turkey with participation of representatives from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Russian Federation and

¹ http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/Manag/CBFiM_11.htm

² <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/intro/team.html>

Turkey. The aim of the regional training was to demonstrate the EuroFire multi-lingual competency-based fire management training standards³ and to ensure interoperability between nations when working together in wildfire emergency situations.⁴

Taking into consideration that Iran borders the South Caucasus countries, and that many wildland fire problems are held in common, the RFMC and GFMC suggested at the First International Conference on Wildfire in Natural Resources Lands, hosted by academic and government institutions in Gorgan, Iran, October 2011, to invite Iran to join the Southeast Europe/Caucasus Wildland Fire Regional Network.

Between 2011 and 2015, the RFMC and members of the Regional Network contributed to an inter-regional dialogue and cooperation in fire management within the greater Asian region and globally:

- Biennial meetings of the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) (at GFMC, 2012 and 2014)
- Regional policy dialogue meetings in Belgrade, Serbia (2012 and 2015)
- International Symposium on Strategy Development of Advanced Forest Fire Policy and Organization (Seoul, South Korea, 2013)
- International Congress and Trade Fair “Forest Fire and Climate Change: Challenges for Fire Management in Natural and Cultural Landscapes of Eurasia” (Novosibirsk, Russian Federation, 2013)
- Aerial Fire Fighting Conferences Europe 2013 (Aix-en-Provence, France) and 2015 (Zadar, Croatia)
- Regional meetings of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative (Podgorica, Montenegro, 2014)

The achievements of the RFMC and the Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network in fostering efficient regional cooperation in fire management were recognized by the 2013 Green Star Award – a joint award by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Green Cross International and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The Award was also given to the coordinators of the UNISDR Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network (Kathmandu, Nepal) and the Head of the Regional Eastern European Fire Monitoring Center (Kiev, Ukraine).⁵

Conclusions

- With the establishment and expansion of the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC) in Skopje, Macedonia, the regional network was strengthened and the number of activities and projects were increased
- However, there is still a lack of regional projects, especially in terms of cross institutional collaboration at the international level and scientifically oriented, as well.

Recommendations

- The financial support of the RFMC, which was initially funded by the Council of Europe and the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) and technically supported by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), is intermittent and irregular. International organizations and participating governments are requested to assist in financing the RFMC on a sustainable basis in order to ensure the continuation of its functioning;
- The development of national Wildland Fire Early Warning Systems, which are in place only in a few countries, and a joint Regional System for the Western Balkans, needs to be supported;
- Development of technically feasible and safe solutions for fire management on terrain contaminated by landmines and UXO must be prioritized;
- Regional scientific projects addressing the consequences of land-use change, climate change on fire regimes and fire management solutions, should be initiated and supported.

³ In order to ensure harmonized training in fire management in the region by 2015, the EuroFire Competency standards and Training Materials have been translated and tested for regional use and exchange between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia and Ukraine (Serbia in prep.): <http://www.euro-fire.eu/>

⁴ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/SEEurope/Antalya-2014.html>

⁵ <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/green-star-awards-environmental-emergency-%E2%80%99Cheroes%E2%80%9D-honoured> and <http://www.gcint.org/green-star-awards-2013-joint-winners-nikola-nikolov-sundar-prasad-sharma-sergiy-zibstev/>