



EDITORIAL – BALKANS AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SPECIAL ISSUE

In April 2004 the Conference „Forest Fire Management and International Cooperation in Fire Emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and adjoining Regions of the Near East and Central Asia” was held in Antalya, Turkey. In IFFN issue No. 32 we reported about the conference and the outcomes – the “Antalya Declaration”. The conference was followed by a number of regional activities, which had been recommended at the conference.

This special issue is focussing on the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean region. A number of country reports, which had been prepared for the conference and the regional wildland fire assessment for the Balkans, provide insight in the specific wildland fire problems in the region. Several contributions delivered by scientists of Turkey, the host country of the Antalya conference, reveal the progress that has been made in fire management research, particularly in the use of GIS for fire management and in assessing the magnitude of economic assets affected by wildfires.

Most importantly are the follow-up activities in Southeast Europe. At the International Technical and Scientific Consultation “Forest Fire Management in the Balkan Region” (Ohrid, Macedonia, 4-5 April 2005) the former UNISDR Regional Balkan Wildland Fire Network decided to expand its scope of work and membership to the whole Southeast European region. Several weeks later the “Eastern European, Near East and Central Asian States Exercise on Wildland Fire Information and Resources Exchange 2005” (EASTEX FIRE 2005) was held in Haskovo Region, Bulgaria, 20-22 April 2005, in pursuance of the Antalya conference. The exercise brought together fire services from the host country Bulgaria and its neighbour countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey.

The exercise revealed the importance of cooperation in fire management in a region, which had been weakened by conflicts and the process of political and economic transition. With the bilateral agreements in place and the experiences gained by active mutual assistance in suppressing wildfires close to or crossing national borders, the fire services and the forest services involved in the exercise showed remarkable professionalism and routine in exchanging personnel and equipment.

This cooperative work has been supported by government agencies and civil society of the region. Valuable assistance was given by the Federal German Foreign Office, which provided resources for the consolidation of the regional network. In accordance with the Ohrid Declaration the network was renamed “Regional South East Europe Wildland Fire Network”. The new logo is symbolizing the expanded region.

