



EDITORIAL

The years 2007 to 2010 have seen drought and extreme fires in temperate-boreal Eurasia, and a number of political events addressing causative agents of changing fire regimes, vulnerabilities and the adverse effects of fire use and wildfires on the environment, society and human security.

While IFFN Issue No. 37 (2008) provided insight in the fire situation of Southeast Europe and adjoining countries in 2007, this volume has brought together country reports from temperate-boreal Eastern Eurasia, together with a pan-boreal fire analysis.

The past four years revealed a number of fire problems in the region. Socio-economic changes over the past two decades have dramatically affected the agriculture and forestry sectors. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union the decreasing support of the agricultural sector by the Russian government resulted in abandonment and fallow of 27 million ha of agricultural lands between 1990 and 2009. In 2010 alone more than 3,000 villages in Russia became deserted. Empirical observations suggest that abandonment of agricultural lands, coupled with uncontrolled succession towards bush encroachment and natural reforestation, constitute an increasing wildfire hazard – at least during the transition phase to forest formation. At the same time it seems that fire is increasingly occurring – intentionally set for keeping agricultural lands open, or to dispose crop residuals, with consequences on uncontrolled wildfires spreading to surrounding vegetation including forest and peat swamps. Recent studies of agricultural burnings at global level are revealing the magnitude of occurrence but due to the lack of historic data cannot prove changes of agricultural fire regimes in temperate-boreal Eurasia along the history and current trend of rural exodus.

This issue of IFFN provides insight in the hot summers in Ukraine 2007, Belarus 2009 and Russia in 2010, and the increasing vulnerable of society to fire. Among other there are problems of fires burning on terrain contaminated by radioactivity and heritages of armed conflicts; problems of fires threatening vulnerable assets and affecting millions of people by smoke pollution. An example are 55,800 above-average deaths in Russia in July-August 2010, which are attributed to the combined effects of the extreme heat wave and fire smoke pollution.

After the first report – a rapid assessment of the fire situation in Western Russia compiled by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) in August 2010, the second paper from the *Aerocosmos* Scientific Center for Aerospace Monitoring of Russia provides more detailed views from space to the fires and smoke of the hot summer.

When preparing this second paper for publication the editor felt that some of the original wording of the English manuscript should be maintained and not “westernized”. In Russian language the location of active fires are *fire seats*. But what I like most is the term *nature fires*. This term does not mean *natural* fires, but “nature is burning”. Probably a term that is another alternative on the keyboard of the technical fire language, besides the terms *wildland fire* and *vegetation fire*.

Experienced readers of IFFN may have noted that style and wording of many country reports from throughout the world are reflecting language and cultural environment of the originator. Despite the need of a common global language in fire management we need to preserve some originality and richness of language. *Nature fires* is a wonderful example!