



7th International Wildland Fire Conference

Statement of the Secretariat of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

30 October 2019

Introductory Remarks

The European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) of the Council of Europe is a platform for co-operation in the field of major natural and technological disasters between Europe and the South of the Mediterranean. Its field of competence covers disaster risk reduction, in particular; knowledge, prevention, preparedness, risk management and post-crisis analysis. The main objectives of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement are to reinforce and to promote co-operation between member States in a multi-disciplinary context to ensure better prevention, protection against risks and better preparation in the event of major natural or technological disasters. Set up by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1987, the Agreement is "open" because any non-member State of the Council of Europe may apply to become a member. It has to date 25 member States.

EUR-OPA is supported by a network of 27 Specialized Centers, which are developing projects at national and regional level within the 48 Member States of the Council of Europe, with the aim of increasing awareness of and resilience to major risks within the population. Since 2007, the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) is mandated to operate as Specialized Center with the overall aim to support the development of national fire management policies and capacity building in fire management at all levels, including community participation.

Between 2010 and 2019, the EUR-OPA Secretariat has supported the establishment of three regional branches of the GFMC:

- The Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC) for Southeast Europe / Caucasus, based in Skopje, North Macedonia (2010)
- The Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC), based in Kiev, Ukraine (2013)
- The Regional Eurasia Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC), based in Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation (2017, inaugurated in 2019)

The Regional Centers are based at independent academic institutions and provide voluntary services at the interface between the science community, policy and decision makers, and the community of practitioners. The services include:

- Science and technology transfer for application in fire management (fire prevention, preparedness, suppression, rehabilitation) adjusted to different ecological, cultural and socio-economic environments
- Establishment of temporary or permanent National Round Tables on Fire Management, resulting in the initiation of a cross-sectoral dialogue to develop national fire management policies
- Development of relevant legislation and implementation strategies
- Capacity building in Integrated Fire Management (IFM), i.e. empowering State authorities and local actors to manage fire (the environmentally benign use of fire; prevention and control of fires)
- Setting up pilots of community-based projects
- Furthering transboundary cooperation in fire management aimed at sharing responsibility, expertise and resources in fire management
- Involvement of international / multilateral organizations supported transboundary cooperation in fire management

Through this approach, experts of civil society contribute in a democratic and transparent way to develop informed policies, but also obliging civil society to take responsibility. Local participatory approach

combined with national inter-agency and cross-sectoral cooperation as well as transboundary cooperation between countries contribute to confidence building and peace.

Progress of Work since 2015

Since the 6th International Wildland Fire Conference held in South Korea in 2015, the following activities, which had been conducted by the GFMC and the three Regional Fire Monitoring Centers and financed by EUR-OPA, are highlighted (GFMC 2019):

Establishment of the Eurasian Team of Specialists on Landscape Fire Management

In following-up the work of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire (led by GFMC between 1994 and 2014) the countries participating in the Regional Networks of Eurasia, Southeast Europe / Caucasus, Central Asia and the Euro-Alpine Subregional Wildland Fire Networks continued to cooperate. Consequently, fire management experts proposed to re-establish a Regional Team of Specialists, which would serve the Member States of the Council of Europe and foster cooperation with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the UNDRR *Global Wildland Fire Network / Wildland Fire Advisory Group*. Furthermore, in following up and implementation of the *OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 6/2014 on Wildfire Disaster Risk Reduction*, the Team would serve the OSCE Participating States of Europe through the OSCE Secretariat. In 2017, a formal proposal was submitted to the Council of Europe to establish the *Eurasian Team of Specialists on Landscape Fire Management*. The proposal stated that this Team would take advantage of the experiences and achievements of the previous UNECE Team and would work under the auspices of the GFMC. In November 2017, the participants of the Joint Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and Directors of Specialized Centers of EUR-OPA endorsed the proposal. On 12 October 2018, the inauguration meeting of the Team was held at GFMC (Freiburg, Germany).

Coordination Meeting and Agenda for Cooperation between EUR-OPA, OSCE and UNISDR

In September 2018 the meeting “Streamlining International Cooperation in Landscape Fire Management: Development of a Joint Agenda between UNISDR, Council of Europe (EUR-OPA), OSCE and the GFMC” was held with the Secretariats of the OSCE, the EUR-OPA Secretariat, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the GFMC. The meeting, hosted by the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) in Vienna, came up with a set of basic conclusions and recommendations, among other:

- The international organizations participating in the meeting will continue and intensify (depending on demands / requests and needs) to utilize the advisory services of the GFMC and the Regional Fire Monitoring Centers (RFMCs) and the Regional Fire Management Resource Centers (RFMRCs)
- Within Europe, the international organizations will utilize the advisory services of the Eurasian Team of Specialists on Landscape Fires, especially in the context of developing holistic approaches in landscape fire management, addressing fire management as confidence building measure in conflict and post-conflict regions, including fire management on territories contaminated by remnants of conflicts and radioactivity.
- At international global level, explicitly with regards to the implementation of the Paris Climate Accord, the international organizations participating in the meeting will utilize the scientific-technical advice for the role in integrated landscape fire management in reducing excessive greenhouse gas release and for increasing terrestrial carbon sequestration.

Activities in Eastern Europe

In Ukraine, the series of *International Fire Management Weeks* (IFMW), organized by the Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC), continued between 2016 and 2019:

- In April 2016, the *Third Eastern European Prescribed Fire Demonstration and Long-term Observation Experiment* addressed the use of prescribed fire for enhancing regeneration of Scots pine stands was a major activity.
- Between 2017 and 2019, EUR-OPA sponsored the project *Enhancing the National Interagency and International Cross-boundary Dialogue and Interoperability in Fire Management in Southeast Europe and Eastern Europe*. The project, jointly conducted by GFMC and REEFMC, initiated the process of developing a national fire management policy by convening two national round tables

entitled *Fires in the Natural and Cultural Landscapes of Ukraine: Developing a National Policy for Fire Management*. These two consultations held at REEFMC in 2017 and 2019 were the major milestones for drafting the Law of Ukraine *on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning the Immediate Elimination of the Crisis Situation due to Forest Fires*, which will be submitted to the parliament and government of Ukraine respectively in late 2019.

- In addition to the activities in transboundary cooperation between Ukraine and Belarus, which are focusing on fire management on radioactively contaminated terrain, the REEFMC and GFMC convened a *Regional Consultation on Cross-Boundary Cooperation in Landscape Fire Management*, sponsored by EUR-OPA. Representatives of government institutions of Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Ukraine and the Regional Fire Monitoring Center for Southeast Europe / Caucasus attended the consultation.

Activities in the Russian Federation

Between 2016 and 2019, the GFMC in its function as EUR-OPA Specialized Center contributed to or co-organized several conferences and consultations in the Russian Federation:

- In September 2016, GFMC attended the All-Russian Scientific Conference with International Participation “Intensification of Russian Forestry: Problems and Innovative Solutions”. GFMC contribution: “Need for the development of pragmatic and science-based solutions for forest management and fire management for the Russian Federation”.
- This event was followed-up by consultations on continuing cooperation between the Russian Aerial Forest Fire Center *Avialesookhrana* and the GFMC at the occasion of the 85th Anniversary of *Avialesookhrana* and the 25th Anniversary of cooperation between GFMC and *Avialesookhrana* (September 2016).
- In November 2017, EMERCOM of Russia hosted the international conference *Protection of Human Settlements and Social Infrastructure from Wildfires* in cooperation with UNISDR and supported by the EUR-OPA Secretariat and GFMC. The conference statement – among other – included this recommendation:
National authorities concerned with agriculture, forestry, protected areas / nature conservation, public health and security, and other agencies (are recommended) to develop coordinated and holistic policies and pragmatic approaches in landscape fire management based on advanced technological achievements and recommendations of the scientific and research community.
- On 27 August 2019, the Regional Eurasia Fire Monitoring Center (REFMC) was formally opened at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Siberian Branch, Krasnoyarsk. The GFMC represented the EUR-OPA Secretariat.
- An Interagency Round Table “Evaluation of achievements in nature-based fire management and development of future cooperative approaches at the science-policy interface in Siberia and adjoining regions of Central Asia” preceded the opening ceremony. Representatives of Russian agencies at Federal and Regional (Krasnoyarsk Krai) levels and representatives from the Regional Wildland Fire Networks of Eurasia and Central Asia discussed the situation of the 2019 fire season in Siberia and the lessons identified.

Activities in the European Union

During the last four years, EU Member States experienced an increasing occurrence of large and extremely severe wildfires in the South – especially in Portugal in 2017 and Greece in 2018 – and an increase of wildfires in the Central and Northern regions. The GFMC in its function as Euro-Mediterranean Specialized Center and its partners provided advisory services to a number of countries, e.g. Portugal and Greece:

- On 10 November 2017, Prime Minister of Portugal António Costa convened a National Round Table and consultation on the Future of Fire Management in Portugal. International experts provided the experiences and recommendations for the future strategy. In February 2018 the Agency for Integrated Wildfire Management (Agência para a Gestão Integrada de Fogos Rurais – AGIF) was established. AGIF provides an Integrated System of Rural Fire Management (SGIFR) tasked to conduct integrated analysis, planning, evaluation and strategic coordination of the SGIFR, including qualified intervention at high-risk events. AGIF operates under the authority of the Prime Minister.
- On 23 July 2018, wildfires near Athens affected the suburban resorts Kineta and Mati and resulted in the death of 102 people, numerous injuries and the loss of critical infrastructures, houses, and other assets. In August 2019, the Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, asked the GFMC to

set up and lead a committee under the aegis of GFMC. The aim of the committee was to investigate the underlying causes of the wildfire risks in the country and to develop recommendations for required reforms and policy measures in order to increase the resilience of the natural, cultural and urban-industrial landscapes of Greece and the people living therein against wildfires, and to prevent such disastrous events in the future. In February 2019, the “*Report of the Independent Committee tasked to analyse the Underlying Causes and Explore the Perspectives for the Future Management of Landscape Fires in Greece*” was handed over to the Prime Minister, the Hellenic Parliament and to the President of the Hellenic Republic. The Committee recommended the establishment of a Landscape Fire Management Organization, which would operate in a supervisory and co-operative manner with the other competent bodies having an advisory, coordinative and supervisory role in landscape fire management in the country with the mission to develop a national, interagency fire management plan and monitoring and follow up its application.

Interagency and Transboundary cooperation in Fire Management in Southeast Europe

The following activities in countries and regions adjoining the region of the Regional Network were organized by the GFMC and the RFMC:

- National Round Table on Fire Management, Republic of North Macedonia, held under sponsorship of the Council of Europe (CoE), Secretariat of the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) (facilitator: GFMC); Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia (09 November 2016).
- Regional Consultation on Cross-boundary Cooperation in Fire Management, held under sponsorship of the Council of Europe (CoE), Secretariat of the Euro-Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) (facilitator: GFMC); Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia (11 November 2016).

Other Activities

- International EUR-OPA Conference on Culture against Disasters: Protecting Cultural Landscapes as Prevention of Natural Disasters, with GFMC contribution “Wildfire Risks and Fire Use in Changing Cultural Landscapes: Underlying Causes, Challenges and Options for Integrated Landscape Fire Management in a Green Economy” (Ravello, Italy, 28-29 September 2018).
- Design and publication of the multi-hazard website BeSafeNet (<http://www.besafenet.net/en-gb>), with a thematic website on basics in landscape fires for the use in schools: <http://www.besafenet.net/en-gb/natural-hazards-landscape-fires#faq494>.

The Way Ahead

The forthcoming two biennial work programs of EUR-OPA between 2020 and 2023 will build on the achievements and progress made during the last decade. At this stage, we envisage to focus on three main aspects:

- Continuation of the policy dialogue in Ukraine, with a focus on a holistic, cross-sectoral and interagency-coordinated approach in landscape fire management, notably addressing excessive agricultural burning – with the aim to be exemplary for other Eastern European countries
- Fostering transboundary cooperation in landscape fire management between Member States of Council of Europe / EUR-OPA and non-member countries of Central Asia
- Capacity building in fire management on terrain contaminated by radioactivity and unexploded ordnance.

References

Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) 2019. GFMC and the Council of Europe: The European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) – <<https://gfmc.online/programmes/europe-org/coe.html>> Accessed on 15/10/2019.