



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**8th International Wildland Fire Conference
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Plenary Session

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, let me thank our hosts for inviting us to this Conference.

The OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization with 57 participating States in Europe, Asia and North America, and with 11 countries as Partners for Co-operation in Asia and the Mediterranean.

The OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security, which encompasses politico-military matters; the economic and environmental aspects; as well as human rights issues - all in a complementary and inter-connected manner.

Disaster risk reduction and tackling climate-related risks are an integral part of this comprehensive approach, which we address primarily within the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension – also known as the Second Dimension.

The OSCE provides the platform for political dialogue on the possible security implications of these topics.

At the same time we implement concrete activities on the ground with the support of our Field Operations.

In December 2014, in Basel, under the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of 57 OSCE participating States adopted by consensus a Ministerial Council Decision on Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction.

This Decision acknowledges that disasters could be a potential additional contributor to conflict and that conflicts affect the vulnerability of society to disasters.

It also emphasizes the importance of co-operation among participating States in disaster risk management, in order to diminish tensions as part of a broader effort for conflict prevention and confidence building.

Furthermore, it calls for an integrated approach to disaster risk management and for good governance and transparency in all stages of prediction, prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

The Decision includes a specific reference to fire management – an area in which the OSCE has been actively engaged in close partnership with the Global Fire Monitoring Center.

For almost two decades, we have been implementing several initiatives and projects to assess and address risks associated with fires including in sensitive settings. Some examples include:

- Forest fire vulnerability assessments in the South Caucasus region along with support for national fire management policies, and early warning systems;
- Trainings on preparedness for, prevention of and response to wildfires, such as the two trainings that we organized in Turkiye, which brought together the countries of the South Caucasus and the South-Eastern Europe regions;
- Specific trainings and exercises to manage fires burning on areas contaminated by radioactivity or unexploded ordnance and land mines; and
- Institutional efforts, such as our support for establishing the Regional Fire Management Resource Center for Central Asia in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

All these activities have gained a new momentum following the adoption of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Strengthening Co-operation to Address the Challenges Caused by Climate Change on 3 December 2021 in Stockholm during the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship.

Co-operation is at the heart of this decision.

It calls the OSCE participating States to co-operate for climate-related risk analysis; for early warning; for joint, adaptation, and mitigation action; and for disaster risk reduction and management.

We are already supporting the implementation of this Decision through our flagship project on climate change and security which covers four regions: South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

So far, we conducted regional climate security risk assessments in all these regions and identified and mapped 42 hotspots, most of them being transboundary, with the involvement of hundreds of local stakeholders.

We are now moving forward in the selected hotspots to identify and implement joint co-operation measures for climate resilience and adaptation.

And, fire management is an integral part of these efforts:

- For instance, in South-Eastern Europe, in the *Shar/ Šara Mountains and Korab Massif area* - a shared biodiversity hotspot, we are aiming to strengthen fire prevention and preparedness capacities of the four protected area authorities through joint initiatives.
- In the South Caucasus, we are supporting cross-border co-operation between Armenia and Georgia, and Azerbaijan and Georgia, and promoting community-based approaches to landscape fire management and wildfire risk reduction among neighbouring communities.
- In Central Asia, next month in Tashkent, Uzbekistan we will convene the five countries of the region to exchange on climate change and security in high-mountain areas. Disaster risk reduction, including fire risks, will be part of this new initiative.
- We are also promoting networking across regions. For instance, in December last year, we brought together emergency management and climate experts from South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Mongolia in Skopje, North Macedonia to share experiences and best practices on wildfire risk reduction and climate resilience.

This year, we are continuing our activities during the 2023 OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia, which has prioritized climate change and its security implications.

In all these initiatives, we are partnering with the Global Fire Monitoring Center, the Regional Fire Monitoring Centers and with the Berlin-based think-tank adelphi.

And, we are grateful to all our project donors, namely Andorra, Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and the United States.

Taking this opportunity, based on our experience so far I would like to highlight three areas that would benefit from further work:

1. The need to bridge the silos in order to address various connected issues horizontally at institutional level and to further raise awareness and build capacities of policy-makers, practitioners, and communities.
2. The need to strengthen efforts to foster a preventive approach towards both wildfire and climate-related risks, which requires further investments in early warning, foresight tools and monitoring of risks.
3. The need to step-up dialogue, co-operation and co-ordinated approaches among neighbours and to reinforce regional approaches and transboundary responses. The Global Wildland

Fire Network including the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the Regional Fire Management Resource Centers offer extensive expertise and experience in this respect.

We look forward to benefitting from the Landscape Fire Governance Framework, which would offer opportunities to address and fill in these gaps through its integrated approach and also to enhance synergies and partnerships among the international actors.

Thank you.