



UNITED NATIONS



UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network

Coordinator and Secretariat: Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany

Regional South East European / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network

**Report of the
Regional Wildland Fire Consultation on the Development of a
Strategy on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the
Regional South East European / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network**

Sofia, Bulgaria, 19-21 March 2007

1. Background Information on Regional Cooperation in Fire Management

The demographic, socio-economic and political changes in many countries of Southeast Europe, the Caucasus region and adjoining CIS States in the early 1990s, have resulted in an increase of wildfire occurrence and wildfire disaster risk, destabilization of fire management capabilities and increased vulnerability of ecosystems and human populations. In some countries some of the main reasons for this development include the transition from centrally planned to market economies, national to regional conflicts, creation of new nations, involving political tensions and war, and land-use change. New solutions are required to address the increasing fire threat. The Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network promotes cooperation in fire management between the South East European countries, notably on the Balkan, and also with the neighbouring countries of East and West Europe.

Cooperation and networking on forest fires within the ECE region and the region of the European Forestry Commission has a long tradition. In 1981 the FAO/UNECE Team of Specialists on Forest Fire was established as an activity of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training. The team's main task is to provide a platform for communication and cooperation between fire scientists, managers and policy makers. The main activities include (1) the production of International Forest Fire News (IFFN); (2) organization of seminars; and (3) promotion of synergistic collaboration between governments, non-government institutions, and individuals, especially science and technology transfer. The Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), based in Freiburg (Germany), is in charge of team coordination and editorial office of IFFN. GFMC is serving as secretariat of the Global Wildland Fire Network and the Wildland Fire Advisory Group of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

With the creation of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network in 2002 and its recognition as an activity of UNISDR since 2004 the networking on forest fires in the region began to diversify in regional settings and activities.

Regional networking in South East European was initiated in 2002, at that time called "Regional Balkan Wildland Fire Network". A major regional activity was the "UNECE/FAO Conference on Forest Fire Management and International Cooperation in Fire Emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and adjoining Regions of the Near East and Central Asia" (Antalya, Turkey, 30 March - 3 April 2004). The conference was followed by a regional forest fire exercise "Eastern European, Near East and Central Asian States Exercise on Wildland Fire Information and Resources Exchange - EASTEX FIRE 2005". At a regional consultation in the Republic of Macedonia in 2005 members of the Balkan Network decided to

invite neighbouring countries and to expand its area of joint activities to Southeast Europe. Subsequently the network was renamed "Regional South East European Wildland Fire Network". With the growing interest of the countries adjoining to the regional, notably in the Caucasus region, it was suggested in 2006 to broaden the geographic scope of the region by adding Caucasus region. Representatives from the Ukraine have indicated a strong interest to join the network.

2. The next Step: The Sofia Consultation

As a consequence of the developments in 2006 the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) prepared and convened the "Regional Wildland Fire Consultation on the Development of a Strategy on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Regional South East European / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network". For the first time representatives of countries were invited, which so far had not been involved in the networking process: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and the Ukraine.

The consultation was held between 19 and 21 March 2007 in Sofia, Bulgaria, under the umbrella of the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network through its Coordinator and Secretariat, the GFMC. The consultation was kindly supported and hosted by the National Forestry Board, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Bulgaria. The consultation included two days of meeting in Sofia and one day study to visit fire management establishments and measures taken in fire management in Bulgaria (see Annex A: Programme of the Consultation).

The participating countries included Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine (for a full list of attendees, including their affiliations and contact details – see Annex B). Due to technical reason invited focal points from Greece, Slovakia and Azerbaijan could not participate in the meeting.

The main aim of the meeting was to seek inputs from participants of the invited countries to discuss and revise the initial draft of the regional strategy paper, which had been developed by the coordinators of the Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network and the Global Wildland Fire Network (Global Fire Monitoring Center), sponsored by the German Foreign Office, and presented to the 33rd Session of the FAO European Forestry Commission (Zvolen, Slovakia, 25 May 2006).

In order to obtain a realistic picture of the fire situation in the region, all represented countries were asked to prepare a national country report, which would include a self-assessment of the fire management capabilities and the definition for the need of action and international cooperation.

3. Results and outputs of the consultation

Thanks to the financial support provided to the Global Wildland Fire Network through the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) it was possible that most of the invite countries were able to attend the meeting (due to some unforeseen technical reasons the above-mentioned country representatives were not able to participate).

Thus, it was possible to

- obtain a comprehensive and almost complete picture of the fire and fire management situation in the greater region;
- include representatives from government institutions and academia of the newly added countries to the networking process;
- involve the representatives of the countries in the review and consolidation of the draft "Regional Wildland Fire Consultation on the Development of a Strategy on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Regional South East European / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network";

- formulate a statement in which participants expressed their assessment, concerns and views of the fire situation on the region and to underscore the need for improvements nationally and through international cooperation; and
- to agree on participation at and inputs to the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference, Madrid, Spain (May 2007).

Two major products of the consultation are attached to this technical report:

The Draft Regional Strategy

The draft "Regional Wildland Fire Consultation on the Development of a Strategy on International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Regional South East European / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network" was reviewed and discussed with inputs by all participants.

This strategy will serve as initial basis for discussion, application or implementation at various levels, e.g.

- Submission to government authorities in the participating countries as a basis for national development of capacities, or initiatives to developed with at bilateral levels (agreements between neighbouring countries), or multilaterally (at regional level);
- Submission to government agencies and the international donor community to encourage the development of projects and programmes in capacity building and cooperation in fire management, preferably to be implemented at multinational / regional levels;

Statement prepared by the participants of the Consultation

In addition to the draft strategy the participants of the meeting prepared a statement in which they expressed their overall assessment of the fire situation and the needs for joint action to overcome current gaps and shortages in:

- Consistent information and statistics about fires, their causes and their effects
- Applied research in social sciences and humanities, including finances for research
- Integration of social, economic, environmental considerations and institutions in developing tangible policies and practices related to wildland fire
- Integration of fire as a component of land, resource, and forest management
- Community-based approaches to fire management
- Compatible approaches, e.g., global implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the International Wildland Fire Agreements Template

Besides recommendations for intensifying and supporting dedicated fire research, the participants of the meeting recommended to

- Support the expansion of the network to the new member countries in the Caucasus and adjoining countries, such as Ukraine and Romania
- Maintain and develop the network of country Focal Points, preferably with one representative of a government agency and a representative of the academia
- Support the network co-coordinators that are representing the main stakeholders involved (Mr. Nikola Nikolov, Macedonia, Research; Mr. Vladimir Konstantinov, Bulgaria, Forest Service; Mr. Dulijano Grum, Croatia, Fire Service) and co-coordinators from the Caucasus countries (to be determined)
- Seek for widespread membership in the network
- Maintain a publicly accessible website of the network (communication language: English)
- Produce an initial publication of this regional consultation and the network foundation, to be published in UN-ECE/FAO International Forest Fire News, including a summary of previous activities in international cooperation in the SE European and Caucasus Region

- Conduct a first Regional Advanced Wildland Fire Management Training Course not later than 2007, based on experiences in other regions and the FAO courses in Bulgaria; seek support from the German Foreign Office
- Request a FAO Technical Development Project (TCP) or similar technical and financial support for a project "Implementation of a Regional SE European/Caucasus Strategy for International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management", preferably to be conducted in 2008
- Improve access and reliability of regional and country / ecosystem specific early warning information, including automatic distribution
- Participate at the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference, Madrid, Spain (May 2007)
- Convene the next network meeting not later than 2008

Regional Participation at the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference

It was agreed that the conclusions of the Sofia consultation, notably the draft strategy, would be presented at the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference, Madrid, Spain (May 2007), notably in the joint Regional Session "Europe, Balkans and Caucasus". The main aim of this exercise will be to provide the inputs from the Region into the Global Wildland Fire Network and to support the development of the "Strategy to Enhance International Cooperation in Wildland fire Management". This strategy is currently coordinated by FAO and supported by the Global Wildland Fire Network.¹

In the weeks following the consultations several donors were contacted and asked for assisting in bringing representatives of the region to the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference. Finances have been secured by three international organizations to finance the participation of:

- Albania
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Bulgaria
- Georgia
- Hungary
- Macedonia
- Serbia
- Turkey
- Ukraine

Conclusions and Recommendations

The organizers, hosts and participants of the regional consultation agreed that the meeting was a success in bringing together representatives of countries in a region where forest fires and wildland fires are playing an increasing role in the degradation of the natural environment and affecting human health and security. The participants are confident that bilateral and multilateral cooperation in fire management and cooperation with those sectors that are affecting fire incidence and impacts, or vice-versa, are being effected by fire, need to be addressed with priority. Border-crossing collaboration in fire prevention, capacity building and in suppression of fire disasters will be essential for making these visions reality.

The participants of the meeting expressed gratitude to the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and GFMC's financial sponsors of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network, as well as the coordinator of the UNISDR Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network for conducting the consultation, as well as the National Forestry Board, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests of Bulgaria, Sofia, for the logistical preparation and organisation of the consultation.

¹ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/RationaleandIntroduction.html>

Contacts of Conveners

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ANNEX A: Timetable of the Consultation

Day 1: Sunday 18 March 2007

Arrival of participants and welcome reception.

Day 2: Monday 19 March 2007

09:00-09:30 Opening of the Consultation by the host country and conveners (J.G. Goldammer, N. Ionov, V. Konstantinov, N. Nikolov)
09:30-10:30 Presentation of the draft regional strategy (N. Nikolov)
10:30-11:00 Coffee Break
11:00-13:00 National wildland fire reports I: Albania (G. Hoxhaj), Bulgaria (V. Konstantinov), Armenia (N. Zastoukhova)
13:00-14:30 Lunch Break
14:30-16:00 National wildland fire reports II: Bosnia and Herzegovina (B. Pešković), Croatia (Đ. Grum), Romania (I. Vorovencii)
16:00-16:30 Coffee Break
16:30-18:00 National wildland fire reports II: Serbia (Ms. V. Jovanovic), Turkey (E. Bilgili), Ukraine (S. Zibtsev)

Day 3: Tuesday 20 March 2007

09:00-10:30 National wildland fire reports IV: Georgia (I. Edilashvili), Macedonia (N. Nikolov)
10:30-11:00 Coffee Break
11:00-13:00 Discussion of the Regional Strategy
13:00-14:30 Lunch Break
14:30-16:00 Finalization of the Draft Regional Strategy
16:00-16:30 Coffee Break
16:30-18:00 Discussion of Regional Contributions to the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference
18:00-18:30 Wrap up, closure of consultation (N. Nikolov, J.G. Goldammer)

Day 4: Wednesday 21 March 2007

Study Tour: Fire management, forests, culture, and land use in Bulgaria

ANNEX B: List of Participants

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