



REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

Minutes of the closing workshop of the project “Forest fires in the SEE”, implemented under the ENVSEC Initiative, 29 October, Budapest, Hungary

Opening Session

Introduction to the activities under ENVSEC in SEE region- Gordana Kozhuharova (REC)

Ms. Gordana Kozhuharova introduced quickly the Regional Environmental Center (REC), and presented the mandate and structure of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) under which the project “Addressing the risks of forest fires in South Eastern Europe” is implemented by REC in cooperation with OSCE. Project is implemented under the second phase of ENVSEC Programme “Transforming Risk into Cooperation in SEE 2013-2015” financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation. The REC is hosting the ENVSEC Regional Desk Office for SEE. The focus of ENVSEC work in SEE corresponds to the initiative’s three main pillars 1) carrying out in-depth vulnerability assessments, ensuring early warning and monitoring environment and security risks; 2) improving awareness of the interrelation between the environment and security, strengthening environmental policies, and improving the capacities and roles of environmental institutions; and 3) providing technical expertise and mobilizing financial support for clean-up and remediation. Ms. Gordana Kozhuharova highlighted a few projects, key results and lessons learned.

She also announced the planned annual ENVSEC meeting in December 2015 in Vienna (to be confirmed).

Introduction to the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC), Skopje - Nikola Nikolov

The Head of the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC), Mr. Nikola Nikolov, gave an introduction on the establishment and purposes of the RFMC, which is part of the UN organization overseeing the development of disaster reduction policy (UN-ISDR). Member countries of the Regional Southeast Europe/Caucasus Wildland Fire Network are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

Session A

Introduction of the OSCE activities in the field of forest fires: experience from the South Caucasus, Nino Malashkhia, OSCE

The involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the field of wildfire management is due to its links to security. Activities were initiated by the OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission on fire affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region in 2006 and by the Joint OSCE/UNEP Environmental Assessment Mission to Georgia in 2008. To assist the South Caucasus countries in enhancing their fire management capacities, the OSCE within the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative launched in 2009 the project “Enhancing National Capacities on Fire Management and Wildfire Disaster Risk Reduction in the South Caucasus”. The project was conducted in partnership with the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC).

Between 2009 and 2015 OSCE had many wildfire management Initiatives in South Caucasus:

- Assisting in development of policy framework for Integrated Wildfire Management;



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- Creating early warning capacity;
- Introducing Fire Danger ratings System;
- Strengthening national capacities in wildfire response;
- Facilitating cooperation through: Regional and cross-regional trainings, participation in the UNECE forums on wildfire management, and engagement in Southeast Europe /South Caucasus Wildland Fire Network.

Session B

Introduction to the topic: forest fires as a risk to forest management, Nikola Nikolov, RFMC

Mr. Nikola Nikolov defined forestry and explained its components: 1) Forest management planning; 2) Silviculture (forest maintaining); 3) Forest utilization; 4) Forest protection (fires, insects, diseases etc.). He emphasised the impacts of forest fires on the environment and the cost incurred. The impacts are biological and economic. Forest fires can destroy decades of sustainable forest management in mere few days.

Session C

Introduction of the LIFE+ FIRELIFE project and the main outcomes as well as the situation of wildland fires in Hungary, Dr. Daniel Nagy project coordinator, Deputy Director of the National Food Chain Safety Office

The participants learned from Mr. Daniel Nagy about wildland fires in Hungary, where 99% of the wildfires are human caused. Their frequency and their intensity has increased. He also explained the LIFE+ project FIRELIFE. In the context of wildfire prevention, suppression and recovery, the FIRELIFE project is implemented in Hungary by the National Food Chain Safety Office and Forestry Directorate and focused on the aspect of forest fire prevention. The main activities of the project are: intermediate level forest fire prevention training course; advanced level forest fire prevention training course; preparation, dissemination and publication of printed information materials; a 15-minute educational film, activity and color books for children; outplace information boards; information events and communication workshops.

Session D

Illustration of the project Forest fires in the SEE (ENVSEC) and the main project outcomes, Nikola Nikolov

Mr. Nikola Nikolov gave an overview on the Forest Fires Regional Report compiled in the context of the project “Addressing the risks of forest fires in South Eastern Europe”, implemented under the ENVSEC Initiative. The study was prepared mainly by the Regional Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC), through Nikola Nikolov, together with Aniko Nemeth, Bruno Mesquita and Cecile Monnier, and with the contribution of Danko Aleksic. It is based on national reports¹ prepared by the Regional Fire Monitoring Center’s key expert, Nikola Nikolov. .

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia



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Session E

Next Steps - discussion

Based on the outcomes presented during session D the delegates adopted a *Roadmap on Addressing the Risks of Forest Fires in SEE* and a *Statement of the Participants of the Workshop on Forest Fires in South Eastern Europe by consensus*. Both documents are annexed to these minutes.

Annex 1

Statement

by the participants at the workshop on forest fires in South Eastern Europe
October 29, 2015
Budapest, Hungary

On the occasion of the closing of the project “Addressing the Risks of Forest Fires in South Eastern Europe”, implemented under the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), a workshop was held in Budapest, Hungary, on October 29, 2015, with the participation of representatives from the national authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Acknowledging the discussions that took place during the workshop, the participants:

- 1) State that the project outcomes are welcome and express their gratitude to the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) for the financial support under the ENVSEC Initiative and for cooperation with ADA (Austrian Development Agency).
- 2) Agree with the roadmap of forest management recommendations produced by the project.
- 3) Are aware of the importance of good forest governance and recognise the importance of the European Union’s forestry-related legislation and policies.
- 4) Are aware that the insufficient level of financial and human resources allocated to institutions responsible for forest disaster management and forest fire prevention is a major obstacle to better forest governance.
- 5) Recognise that the exchange of best practices, experiences and lessons learnt with other countries, institutions, and international players is a valuable resource for building additional institutional capacity.
- 6) Recognise that cooperation with each other and with international partners, including ENVSEC, the Global and Regional Fire Monitoring Centers, the Regional Environmental Center and the Themis Network is of immediate value in light of point 5).
- 7) Agree to support the Regional Environmental Center in its work to improve the long-term sustainability of the project results, and understand that the Regional Environmental Center will therefore seek to implement follow-up activities and secure the necessary funding for them.



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- 8) Agree to officially present this statement and the roadmap addressing the risks of forest fires in SEE at the next regional ENVSEC coordination meeting.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Annex 2

ADDRESSING THE RISKS OF FOREST FIRES IN SEE ROADMAP

Based on the findings of the Regional Report on Forest Fires in South Eastern Europe

Introduction

Forests represent a common heritage and have important ecological, economic, social, aesthetic and cultural values. Forest fires are among the main threats to our forest resources and give rise to a wide range of devastating economic, social and ecological consequences. Although the issue is receiving increased attention, and although forest fire prevention is being tackled in the framework of climate change adaptation measures both regionally and internationally, the necessary political momentum is still lacking. Accordingly, policy and legal mechanisms still need to be put in place at national and regional level.

Under the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), with the support of Austrian Development Cooperation, is implementing a project aimed at identifying potential actions to combat this form of forest devastation in South Eastern Europe (SEE), as well as at enhancing dialogue and cooperation among SEE countries. One of the goals of the project is to identify concrete activities by which key actors can close the existing gaps in legislation, policy, implementation and enforcement in order to reduce or eliminate forest fires in SEE. The main outputs of this project are 1) national fact-finding assessments of the forestry regimes and forest fires prevention, mitigation and control, together with the basic assessment of the institutional, policy and legislative framework in the SEE region², 2) regional study with policy recommendations 3) closing workshop aiming to outline the next steps, embodied in this roadmap.

Main conclusions of the regional report

In recent years many of the relevant institutions in the countries of SEE have been restructured or annulled, and new institutions have been established. Some competencies have been transferred to other institutions, giving rise to governance inefficiencies and overlaps. Common to most of the countries is the overall lack of coordination between the various institutional and administrative frameworks. There is also a lack of reliable and aggregated data on forest fires (forest fire statistics) and lack of national early warning systems. Institutional capacities need further strengthening. There is a lack of well-established bilateral processes with neighbouring countries in the field of forest fire protection, and especially fire suppression (with respect to both dispatching and receiving assistance). Not enough joint actions are being implemented for the suppression of cross-border and internal forest fires. In all countries of the region, there is a clear lack of specialised equipment such as off-road vehicles, fire trucks and aerial firefighting aircrafts.

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia



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The main causes of forest fires in the region are agricultural burning, pastureland burning, negligence (along highways, railways, etc.) and arson. The rise in the incidence of arson as a reason for forest fires in the SEE region over the past decade is a cause for concern. The main motive for arson is economic, as arson attacks are generally connected to illegal logging. The Mediterranean and sub-Mediterranean types of forests, such as beech forests and large territories afforested with coniferous trees, are particularly prone to forest fires.

Roadmap

This roadmap focuses on strategic priority activities. The proposed priority activities have been developed based on the recommendations formulated in the Regional Report on Forest Fires. The current international and regional legal, policy and institutional frameworks contain all the essential components for dealing with forest fires. However, they still need to be improved in order to achieve greater efficiency in forest fire protection. In this context, efficiency does not refer only to efficient forest fire suppression, but also to efficient forest fire prevention. The activities required to achieve efficiency can be implemented at both national and international level.

1. Internal coordination

Consolidate and strengthen national institutions and capacities. Attention can then be given to national, transboundary and regional networking among agencies and ministries. Where needed, the legal framework should be clarified and responsibilities clearly assigned, taking special care to avoid overlaps.

2. Transboundary coordination and cooperation

Open transboundary coordination and cooperation channels. The exchange of information, best practices, and disaster management information flows are essential tools to collectively address the risks of forest fires and forest fires themselves. Consider creating a permanent regional mechanism to ensure such coordination and cooperation.

3. Setting up early warning systems in the countries

Create early warning systems where they don't exist yet. Early warning systems are key to prevent catastrophic forest fires that can also affect neighbouring countries and can have grave negative impact on local economies, ecosystems, air quality, soil quality and resilience to climate change.

4. Strengthening and building capacities in the competent national authorities

Develop training programmes on forest fire prevention and control. Emphasize forest fire management programs (prevention, preparedness and suppression) through training programmes on forest fire prevention and control, with a special attention to the transboundary aspects, to increase efficiency and capacity of the national authorities responsible for natural resource and forestry management. Special attention should also be given to the identification and reduction of the causes of forest fires as a part of forest fire prevention.

5. Public participation, meetings and other events

Include public participation in forest and forest fire management practices, both at the policy design and monitoring and implementation levels. Conferences, roundtables and other public events can be used to raise awareness and collect valuable inputs that reinforce citizens' engagement in forest governance.



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6. *Development of a Regional Action Plan*

Develop and adopt a Regional Action Plan with a time bound set of goals and activities that should include all of the strategic points listed above and any other intermediate measures necessary to achieve them. The implementation of such a Regional Action Plan should include a monitoring mechanism and provisions for support services.

7. *Development of research programs*

Strengthen the existing national funds for scientific research connected with forest fire protection and seek to use the available international financial resources for regional scientific projects.