

## **Improving dispatching for Forest Fire Control: Opening Speech**

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As General Secretary of Civil Protection for Greece and honorary chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Workshop, I would like to welcome all the participants to Greece, and more specifically to the hospitable city of Chania.

In today's modern societies citizen safety is of utmost importance. This is reflected in efforts to organize mechanisms in all countries that will protect the life, property and well being of citizens from all types of natural and technological disasters. The term Civil Protection, which was coined to describe these efforts, is heard more often in all the European Union countries and is of increasing importance in political decisions as well as in the opinion of the citizens.

Forest fires is one of the most important dangers faced by the citizens of the countries of the EU, especially those of the Mediterranean region. As a danger it differs from other threats in that it appears every year, and that it not only affects the safety of the citizens but also has significant consequences to the environment. All affected nations have been trying to improve their capability for firefighting and in the last few years the costs for this task have increased sharply in the European Union and in many other countries around the world. However, forest fires have been appearing more often in the news taking unbelievable extend and causing heavy damage to properties or even loss of lives.

In our view, at the General Secretariat for Civil Protection of Greece, these trends can be explained by an in-depth view of the forest fire issue. Aspects that must be examined include:

- The ecological role of fire which is really prominent in the Mediterranean ecosystems.
- The economic and social aspects of the problem, including population immigration, change of land uses, change of potential sources of income (e.g. tourism), etc.
- The tendency of people, as well as of organized states, to react to the immediate problem (in this case fighting the fire) instead of looking at the reasons behind it.
- The difficulty of making various public organizations to work together, complimenting each other, in order to achieve maximum possible results.

In the last few years, the General Secretariat for Civil Protection is making significant efforts to apply the ideas that result from the examination of the fire issue as presented above. More specifically it has worked on:

- Making the public organizations in the country, including local authorities, work together, first by developing common presuppression plans at the prefecture level, and then by assigning a clear role for each "player" in these

plans. The Greek Fire Corps is the backbone of firefighting in Greece but other players can help in order to achieve better results. These players include the local authorities, the Forest Service, the Police, the Armed Forces, volunteers, etc.

- Developing standards of planning, as well as databases in support of operations and planning.
- Developing improved fire prevention campaigns in cooperation with the other authorities.
- Studying ways of organization and policies that will lead to a management of forests by the corresponding authorities that will make them more healthy, stable, useful to the public, and less fire prone.
- Advocating better use of the funds devoted to fire management by supporting original research as well as technology transfer and assimilation.

This specific workshop, falls in this latter category. It is well known that an effective initial attack on forest fires is the most important element for successful fire control. However, massive unlimited attack is not the answer, as both cost considerations and operational considerations (e.g. cases of many simultaneous fires starting) are of great importance. Small improvements in dispatching may lead to significant improvements in the operational results as well as to important cost savings. It is our belief that the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and ideas that will take place, and the technologies that will be presented, will aid in improving dispatching both in Greece and in the other EU countries. In order to achieve that, we have made every effort to facilitate and record this exchange and also to secure the production of a volume of proceedings that will capture and disseminate the information presented here.

You have my best wishes for a successful and fruitful seminar, and an enjoyable stay in Chania.