



RESOLUTION S3

Decentralized European Data Bank on Forest Fires

The Signatory States and International Institution,

considering that forest fires constitute a major problem from the ecological, social and economic points of view of many European countries, particularly in Southern Europe, and that this problem may in the long term have an impact on climatic changes,

considering that the States hit hardest by forest fires have in the course of the last decade increased the financial means devoted to the protection of forests, to infrastructures on the ground and to the purchase of fire-fighting equipment, thus enabling them to increase the effectiveness of the systems set into place,

considering that it is difficult to control these disasters which have attained important dimensions, and that consequently, preventative actions must be developed capable of resolving this problem in a lasting way, by reducing the number of fires that break out, by diminishing the amount of combustible material available, and by watching for fire outbreaks and intervening as quickly as possible,

observing that each State has installed, often at the cost of considerable difficulties, its own system for gathering information on fires in different vegetation types, notably in forests and on heathland, and that in this matter those countries generally considered to be the most exposed to fire risk often hold more information or have a more advanced system corresponding to specific needs,

considering that the pooling and exchange of such data between the countries concerned has already been recommended by many international organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE), the European Economic Community and Silva Mediterranea,

considering that an information system is of much more value than the mere mass of data that it contains, insofar as it reflects choices of objectives and modes of organization,

taking formal note of the actions already carried out and the efforts already accomplished under the aegis of the joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics with regard to collecting and distributing statistics on forest fires in Europe, but considering that a further effort on the part of European countries is needed to gather together precise and comparable data on outbreak and first moments of fires, in order to better accompany the prevention policy,

considering that the establishment of a European data bank on forest fires would by its nature permit dialogue between the different countries concerned,

considering that the comparison of different indices of fire-risk prevailing in the States would enable the determination of a single index for Europe, and thus ensure better forecasting on this scale,

considering that in order to inform and alert the European public, it is necessary to know the precise causes of forest fires, their socio-economic context, and even the motives or psychology of fire-raisers, in order to better ensure the necessary prevention,

commit themselves to study the feasibility of a decentralized European data bank on forest fires.

THE PRINCIPLES

1. The aim of such a project would be to facilitate and to promote, within a decentralized European data bank constituted by a network of national data banks, the exchange of a certain amount of information on forest fires, of practical use in implementing a prevention policy.
2. This system, which does not aim at replacing the different national systems by a standardized universal system, would limit itself to synthesizing the mass of common data made available to the network's participants.
3. A common language will be aimed at in analysing the diverse situations and their practical consequences in order to facilitate cooperation between countries. To this end, it would be preferable to give precedence to a modest objective to increase the system's performance. Having a reliable and systematic inventory, comparable over a large part of Europe, would already be a considerable benefit.
4. It is not so much a question of holding radically new data than of procuring the means of improving the reliability and precision of data already in hand. A project of this kind could not serve as an instrument for the development of national policies, but it might well contribute to better evaluating the techniques used by each country. For example, it would be valuable to be able to exchange results on the systems used for the rapid detection of forest fires, considering that the diversity of existing solutions is considerable.

5. With this in mind, a project of this kind should enable States to set up or maintain in service a more comprehensive data bank, containing information more specific to their particular needs, and whose access would be reserved exclusively to them.
6. The different systems used should be compatible with each other, notably in view of the possibility of long-distance consultation.
7. The system set into place should be capable of evolving in phase with changes in techniques and situations, as well as developments deriving from experience. It should be designed as a communication system: the quality of exchanges between the national and international partners would indeed be the determining factor for the pertinence of data gathered, and would be obtained by using good communication techniques and by efficiently guiding the networks feeding each national data base.