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On the 26th of January in the period of 09:30 until 13:30 the Military Academy "General Mihailo Apostolski" – Skopje, an associate member of the University "Goce Delchev" from Shtip hosted a kick



off meeting that included all the institutions and individuals taking part in the European Commission funded, Advanced Systems for Protection and early detection of forest fires (ASPires) Project.

At the start, the dean of the Military academy, d-r Orce Popovski, colonel made it clear that this is the first time in its history that the Military academy succeeded in winning a grant from the European Commission, in the segment of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Assistance Operations. He emphasized that with the project being initiated by members of the Military academy, we can be sure that with hard work, determination, and professional commitment the Academy will be able to win these sorts of projects on a more regular basis in the future.

The ASPires project was prepared and is to be realized by a consortium of renowned educational and applicative institutions from Germany, Macedonia and Bulgaria. The Project Coordinator is m-r Nikola Kletnikov, lieutenant-colonel, and the leader of the research team is d-r Jugoslav Achkoski, colonel, both of them coming from the Military academy. In addition, multiple colleagues from the Academy, as well as from the Crisis Management Centre took part in the process of preparing the application paperwork. The entire project is going to be managed by professor d-r Rumen Stainov from the German university of applied sciences from Fulda.

The project aims to create an advanced information system whose purpose would be to monitor forested areas of particular importance, and locate the forest fires in the stage of their occurrence while issuing an early warning directed toward the entities of the Crisis Management System. Within the project, a scientific research effort should provide the team with specific directions toward the creation of this system, which will build upon the existing systems of the kind, used in Macedonia and the member states of the European Union. The project will significantly improve the state of protection of forests and it will be primarily applied in the National Park Mavrovo, with the open possibility of being applied in other countries listed in the project paperwork.

This kick off meeting, had a goal of familiarizing the attendees with the details, plans and activities of the involved institutions, as well as providing a ground for cooperation in the preparatory phases of the project, scheduled to start in May, this year. The meeting, other than the research team, was attended by Goran Stojkovski, Deputy-director of "JP Makedonski Shumi"; Ilko Lazarevski and Tomche Gjorgjevski, representatives from the National Park Mavrovo; d-r Stevko Stefanovski and m-r Igorcho Karafilovski, from the Crisis Management Centre (at the same time a part of the research time); Smiljka Teneva and Roska N. Vukojevik, from the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning; and Nazif Sefer, a representative from the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.

At the meeting, apart from familiarizing the attendees with the project activities, which was realized by the project coordinator m-r Nikola Kletnikov, each representative provided the rest of the attendees with a short presentation on the responsibilities of their home institution in the part of early detection and prevention of forest fires and protection of forested areas. A discussion would take place following each presentation in order to define any uncertainties regarding the project.

The whole meeting was held in a constructive atmosphere. All of the attendees made it perfectly clear that they are extremely pleased and grateful that the Military academy had prepared and plans to lead a project which is unmatched having in mind the importance of protecting the forests as a priceless treasure to a country. All of them showed an unwavering commitment toward cooperating and contributing in the successful realization of the project with hopes of having much more projects of the kind taking place in Macedonia that will make a real difference in the protection of our beautiful forests and the forested areas of the member states and those of the states leaning toward membership in the European Union.