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THE HELLENIC FIRE SERVICE AT THE POST OLYMPIC ERA  
CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

The Hellenic Fire Service with its today form has been established at 1930, and last year, we celebrated the completion of 75 years from its establishment and this anniversary finds it at the best moment of its history.

The Fire Service with a dense net of fire services and modern material-technical infrastructure constitutes the central factor of the civil protection of our country. Top fact, in that historic way was undoubtedly, its cooperation for the secure organization of the Olympic Games.

The 2004 Olympic Games in an environment of accepted security level, constituted for our country and the Fire Service a challenge, a bet.

The Fire Service, from the first moment of the beginning of this difficult task, worked hard, in one of the most crucial sectors, as showed after the territory attack of 11 September, the one of the Security of the Games. In time, with all the other involved agencies, made a special planning, aiming to the granting of a high level protection and security, in all the Olympic installations. This aim was successful in all the events that took place in or near the installations, totally 77, they were treated successfully in the initial stage, without any problem in their operation.

The responsibility for the security of the 2004 Olympic Games was undertaken by the Directorate of Olympic Games Security. A special autonomous service that has been established at 2001 only for that purpose, in which the Fire Services participated. In order to respond to that big challenge a special operational planning has been made, in which all the activity plans, the spreading of forces and the required equipment exclusively for the Olympic installations during the Olympic games was taken under consideration. Exclusively 1450 fire men and 185 vehicles were used, in 24 hours basis, for all the Olympic (athletic or not) installations, forces that were the biggest from those of all the other organizing cities.

As far as the equipment is concerned for the fulfillment of this aim, a huge program has been materialized, the biggest made by the Service, during its history. With that program the fleet of the Service has been increased per 735 vehicles of several types, 2 helicopters and four mobile Operations Centers. Therefore, the Service acquired new building facilities and modern electronic systems for the management, the control, the coordination and the communications, the well known to all of us C4I.

At the same time a high level educational, training program of the fire men has been realized, in all the activity fields and in all the spectrum of the hierarchy. The target of the program was the upgrading and the modernization of the knowledge and dexterity of all the employees, so that they would acquire highest adoption ability of the special requirements of the organization. Yet, to that direction, apart from the re-definition of the role of the Fire Academy, a significant number of officers was forwarded to modern educational centers abroad, where they have been educated to the new developments and novelties. Tutors of international fame, from the USA, Canada, France, Holland etc. came to our country, during that period, transferring their knowledge and experience, as far as scientific matters were concerned in all the activity fields of the Service.

We are, therefore, in the post Olympic era. The experience we got, from that organization, in combination with the infrastructure the Games left behind them, constitute a precious inheritance.

Today, the Fire Service, can respond to any mission, no matter how difficult it is, having one of the most strong fleet of Europe with modern fire engines of all types, fire planes and helicopters, ships and special rescue equipment. As to the human resources this counts 10.000 professional fire men, 5.500 season forest fire men and 7.000 volunteers.

The results from that quick modernization way that realized the Service, during the last years is something more than positive in all the activity sectors, the sector of forest fire extinguishing being the main.

Given the frequent earth quakes of our country and aiming to the decrease of the effects of the natural and technologic damages, we created eight special units (E.M.A.K.) in certain points of the country, which are equipped with specially trained personnel and with special knowledge, having as mission the handling of big events, as earth quakes, inundation and other calamities, as well as the management of dangerous chemical and radio substances. These units, have a big experience and have participated, apart from Greece in several events abroad, interfering mainly in big disastrous earth quakes, as in Iran, Maroco, Turkey, Egypt and else where, and lastly in Tailand after the disastrous Tsunami.

At that point, I would like as President of the Balkan Association to inform you that we make efforts that aim to a more close and fruitful cooperation among the Balkan Fire Services, aiming to one thing the expansion of the security and protection feeling of the citizens.

The problems, therefore, are common as it is known that the disasters don't have borders. We are small countries and the disposed means in cases of natural and technologic disasters cannot be sufficient. Consequently, the cooperation and the mutual aid in cases of such events is one way road. The Fire Service pays special attention to that direction, has made two parts agreements with the neighboring countries for the preparation of cooperation protocols. Already, protocols that will be signed with Albania and FYROM are ready, whereas the existing protocol with Bulgaria is upgraded. Our target is to sign relevant agreements with the other Balkan countries. And of course all those are the frame of the close cooperation among all the Governments of the area, in all the activity sectors, both in two parts level, and to the evaluation of the European programs.

I am sure that the continuation will be even better and with definite activity plan.