



2017 wildfire season in Portugal. Rural exodus, poor management and education

Paulo Pereira (1), Carla Ferreira (2), and Antonio Ferreira (2)

(1) Mykolas Romeris University, Environmental Management Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania (paulo@mruni.eu), (2) CERNAS, Escola Superior Agrária de Coimbra, Bencanta, P-3040-316 Coimbra, Portugal

In Portugal, 2017 was catastrophic regarding to wildfires. An unprecedented number of fatalities resulted from the extensive wildfires. The magnitude of this tragedy had important social, political and environmental costs. The combination of a severe drought period with the occurrence of scattered thunderstorms, criminal hand, a large accumulation of highly flammable biomass (mostly associated with *Eucalyptus globulus* and *Pinus pinaster* plantations), the lack or inappropriate forest management, steep slopes with difficult road accessibility and the insufficient technical means of the firefighters were the most important causes. Nevertheless, this is the consequence of rural abandonment and the commercial speculation of those areas, which led to the plantation of extensive monoculture areas with flammable species over the last decades. These conditions triggered the “perfect bomb”, and should be considered under climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, since long dry periods are expected to become more frequent and severe and, thus, longer fire seasons. The ignition of this bomb explosion depends on the human factor, especially as a consequence of criminal intentions and negligence. Both education and forest management are old questions subject to a strong discussion after each fire season. However, the tragedy recorded this year demands actions from the authorities and questions have to be solved such as more investment in preventive measures (e.g. prescribed fires), reduction of the area covered by commercial plantations and promotion of a diversified forest, with species more resistant and resilient to fire, as well as educational campaigns to raise awareness on the population about fire risk and protection of people living near wildland areas. These questions will be discussed in this communication.