

# Minutes

## of the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CTIF Volunteer Firefighters Commission

### 18/09/2025

### Tallinn, Estonia

**Participants:** 28 participants from Austria, Bulgaria, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Ukraine, United States

Country	Organisation	First Name	Remarks
Austria	Austrian Fire Brigade Association	Raphael Koller	Minutes
Bulgaria	General Directorate "Fire safety and civil protection"	Ralitsa Todorova	Online
Bulgaria	General Directorate "Fire safety and civil protection"	Martin Georgiev	Online
Ecuador	Benemerito Cuerpo de Bomberos Voluntarios de Cuenca	Kevin Mateo Gomez Carpio	Online
Estonia	Estonian Rescue Service Agency	Margus Möldri	
Finland	The Finnish National Rescue Association (SPEK)	Niko Ara	
France	CTIF & French Firefighters' Association.	Christophe Marchal	
Germany	DFV	Dr. Christoph Weltecke	Chair
Germany	CTIF / DJF	Jörn-Hendrik Kuinke	
GREECE	Hellenic Fire Service	Bikas Vasileios	
Greece	Hellenic Fire Service	Thomas Antonopoulos	
GREECE	Hellenic Volunteer Firefighters Association	Pavlos Kokkos	
GREECE	Hellenic Volunteer Firefighters Association	Zafiriou Alexandros	
Hungary	Hungarian Firefighters Association	Dr. Cziva Oszkár PhD	
Italy	Associazione Italiana Vigili del fuoco Volontari	Roberto Zanin	Online
Latvia	State fire and rescue service	Kristaps Kolbergs	
Luxembourg	National Firefighter Federation Luxembourg	Marc Mamer	
Netherlands	Dutch Association for Volunteer Firefighters	Ronald Kraan	
Netherlands	Dutch Association for Volunteer Firefighters	Marcel Dokter	
Portugal	Portuguese Firefighters League (National Federation)	Marco Filipe Simão Martins	
Romania	Federația de Pompieri Voluntari și Protecție Civilă	George Secareanu	
Romania	Federația de Pompieri Voluntari și Protecție Civilă	Nicolae Lucian Cebuc	
Slovenia	Firefighting Association of Slovenia	Janko Cerkenik	
Slovenia	Firefighting Association of Slovenia	Dr. Janja Kramer Stajnko	
Ukraine	Association of Volunteer Fire Brigades of Ukraine	Valerii Parfeniuk	
Ukraine	Association of Volunteer Fire Brigades of Ukraine	Serhiy Kruk	
Ukraine	Association of Volunteer Fire Brigades of Ukraine	Mykhailo Hryb	
United States	Organizacion de Bomberos Americanos	Philip Stittleburg	

## **1. Welcome and Opening**

### Chairman Christoph WELTECKE

Sincere thanks are extended to all participants, including those joining from overseas (USA). Special appreciation is expressed to Piia Kallas for organizing the meeting. The visit to Kaberneeme Land and Maritime Rescue Command was highly impressive and underscored the value of coming together to build something meaningful for a community. Furthermore, the new EU Firefighters Association was founded in May in Berlin. Best regards are conveyed by President Karl-Heinz Banse on behalf of the newly established association.

### Director General Margo KLAOS (Estonian Rescue Services Agency)

Sincere thanks are extended to Piia Kallas for organizing the second meeting in Estonia. The agency operates a centralised system with a professional fire service of approximately 1,600 firefighters, supported by an extensive network of volunteer rescue stations. Close cooperation between professional and volunteer forces has been further strengthened, with volunteers also playing an important role in prevention. Particular appreciation is expressed to the Ukrainian colleagues for their impressive work under extremely difficult conditions. This Commission is essential for sharing best practices and addressing common challenges.

### CTIF Vice-President Christoph MARCHAL

Appreciation was expressed to all contributors and to the highly important work of the Commission. Key updates were provided on CTIF activities, its EU engagement, and newly established EU Firefighters associations linked with CTIF. The "CTIF-Games" will take place in Czech Republic and Austria. The Working Time Directive remains a significant challenge for volunteer firefighters in several countries. Information was also shared on upcoming CTIF events and the General Assembly. Nepal was welcomed as a new member country to CTIF.

## **2. Introduction of new commission-members**

The participants explained their respective roles and the associations or organisations they represented at this meeting.

- Estonia: Firefighting and Rescue Service.
- Latvia: State Department, also responsible for volunteer firefighters.
- Luxembourg: President of the national organisation.
- Netherlands: President of the Volunteer Firefighters Association.
- Greece: Representative of the Hellenic Fire Service Corps and Vice President of the Hellenic Volunteer Firefighters Association.
- Portugal: Vice President of the Firefighters League, representing all fire stations, and Director of the Fire Academy.
- Finland: National Rescue Association.
- Austria: Secretary General of National Firefighters Association.
- Germany: Vice President of National Firefighters Association.
- France: National representation.
- Ukraine: Chairman of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Association.

United States: Chief of a volunteer fire department in the State of Wisconsin, representing the National Volunteer Fire Council and member of the OBA.

Bulgaria: President of the Volunteer Firefighters Federation and representatives of the National Fire Service, as well as the International Association.

Hungary: Former Chief of the Budapest Fire Brigade and President of the Hungarian Firefighters Association. Professional firefighters are currently not members of the association; future organisational options are under consideration.

Slovenia: President and Deputy President of the Slovenian Volunteer Firefighters Association.

Ukraine: The organisation was founded in 2020 with the objective of creating an integrated volunteer system with clear objectives and structured cooperation with public authorities. Key steps include strengthening response at the local level, developing standard organisational solutions, and uniting volunteer teams across Ukraine. Special attention is given to the reintegration of combatants and former soldiers returning from the war, including the concept of a Community Safety Officer. Several projects are supported, such as Interreg Poland–Ukraine initiatives, youth sports programmes, and activities of a young association. International cooperation includes partnerships with Estonia and integration within CTIF structures. While Ukraine maintains a strong state rescue service with approximately 80,000 professionals, an increasing number of citizens join volunteer services after retirement. During the war, CTIF has supported Ukraine by replacing more than 2,000 emergency vehicles.

Energoatom was presented as a specialised unit responsible for nuclear power plants. The unit consists primarily of former professional firefighters with extensive operational experience.

*(File: 2025 UA General Information.pdf)*

*(File: 2025 UA Nuclear.pdf)*

Portugal: Forest fires were identified as a major challenge. The Portuguese Firefighters League was presented, highlighting firefighting as its primary mission, alongside ambulance services, water rescue, animal rescue, and prevention activities, for example during sporting events. Volunteer stations are required to include a minimum number of professional firefighters. The legal framework is based on the basic Civil Protection Law, with organisational regulations scheduled to be revised next year. It was further noted that a National Firefighters Commander will be established.

*(File: 2025 PT General Information.pdf)*

### **3. Youth Firefighters: Strategies for Recruitment and Transition to active Fire Service.**

Participants were invited to reflect on their strategies for youth work within the fire service. In doing so, they were asked to address key aspects such as entry and transition pathways, motivation, and examples of best practice.

Slovenia: The organisation serves a population of approximately 2 million and maintains youth commissions at all levels, reflecting a strong family tradition. Participation in an EU Erasmus project was noted. Operational service is possible from the age of 18, with trainees admitted from the age of 16.

*(File: 2025 SI Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Estonia: Recruitment begins at an early age, with particular challenges identified in the transition phase between 16 and 18 years. Nationwide youth rescue camps have proven to be highly successful; these camps are financed by the Rescue Board, while teachers and trainers serve on a voluntary basis. Operational service is permitted from the age of 18.

*(File: 2025 EE Youth Fire Fighters.pdf.pdf)*

Romania: Romania's strategy to strengthen volunteer firefighting through school-based youth training, strong interinstitutional cooperation, and early motivation supported by professional firefighters were highlighted. Structured training pathways, competitions, and a planned Youth Firefighters Academy aim to ensure a sustainable transition from cadets to active volunteers and to enhance community resilience.

*(File: 2025 RO Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

USA/OBA: The scope of missions continues to expand beyond firefighting, with training becoming increasingly intensive and time-consuming. It was noted that each generation is shaped by its own experiences, and the need to overcome stereotypes was emphasised. Recruitment and retention remain key challenges and priorities.

*(File: 2025 OBA Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

France: Approximately 80% of firefighters are volunteers. Strong recruitment pathways and close ties to the local community support a seamless transition from the age of 16 onwards. Gender representation within youth services is balanced at approximately 50/50, while in active service the ratio is around 80/20.

*(File: 2025 FR Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Austria: There is a well-structured organisational framework on all level to deal with youth agenda. Continuous training and education programmes, strong participation through youth competitions and symposia, and close cooperation with schools and communities are key factors. Emphasis was placed on child safeguarding, clear transition guidelines to active duty, sustainability projects, and giving young firefighters an active voice, ensuring long-term commitment to the

*(File: 2025 AT Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Finland: The declining birth rate was noted as an increasing challenge, highlighting the need to transform early enthusiasm among young people into lifelong commitment. A video presentation was referenced, and the International Youth Firefighter Camp with approximately 3,000 participants was highlighted as a successful recruitment and engagement initiative.

*(File: 2025 FI Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Portugal: The Infants and Cadets Schools (ICS) project was presented as a school-based initiative for children aged 6 to 13. The project is linked to the Erasmus+ programme, including international internships, such as placements in France.

*(File: 2025 PT Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Greece: General Information: Volunteer firefighters are part of the HFC. It was noted that interest tends to decline after approximately four years, although the reasons for this remain unclear. Hellenic Volunteer Firefighters Association: Youth camps are organised jointly by Greek career and volunteer firefighters. Firefighting is emphasised as a noble calling rather than merely another profession.

*(File: 2025 GR General Information.pdf)*

*(File: 2025 GR Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Germany: Organisational structures operate at multiple levels. Administrative employees are positioned at the state level within the central offices.

*(File: 2025 DE Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Luxembourg: Luxembourg operates a single, unified fire service in which active members, youth, and veterans are integrated within the same corps. The federation and the national corps work closely together. The organisational pathway and structure were presented in detail through the accompanying slides.

*(File: 2025 LX Youth Fire Fighter.pdf)*

Latvia: An overview of the current situation of volunteer firefighter resources was presented. It was noted that there is no national system or policy in place for the integration of youth firefighters; however, recruitment is supported through promotional events and a range of sports activities.

*(File: 2025 LV Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

Bulgaria: The role of social media was highlighted as an important tool under the guiding principle "Together we learn, grow and protect".

*(File: 2025 BG Youth Fire Fighters.pdf)*

**Conclusion:** Inspiring young people is a key factor for the future of the fire and rescue services. Social media and schools were identified as essential platforms for outreach and engagement. In many countries, youth fire brigades represent the foundation for future active service, with strong emphasis on child protection and education. Appreciation was expressed for the valuable insights shared and for the strong dedication to youth work.

#### **4. Next meeting**

A virtual meeting is planned for spring 2026. The Hungarian Firefighters Association will host a meeting in September 2026 in Budapest. A further meeting is scheduled to take place in Bulgaria in autumn 2027.

#### **5. Any other business**

The challenges currently faced by the Ukrainian fire services were illustrated in a two-minute video. The Commission expressed its deepest respect for the courage, resilience, and dedication of the Ukrainian firefighters. The Ukrainian delegates expressed their sincere gratitude for the support they are receiving.

The Chair expressed his sincere thanks to the Secretary for the support provided, as well as to the team around Piia Kallas for the excellent organisation.

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm.

Minutes:

Raphael KOLLER, BSc MSc

Chairman:

Dr. Christoph WELTECKE

Enclosures:

- Presentations as mentioned in the document.



*Photo of commission members (© Päästeliit / Hendrik Tali)*

More Fotos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/155023592@N06/albums/72177720329101245/>

Credit: Hendrik Tali /Estonian Rescue Association