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Forest fires in southern Europe and their consequences and the conclusions to draw for prevention and alert measures

A Greens/EFA motion for resolution

Tabled by **Michail Tremopoulos, François Alfonsi and Raul Romeva**
On behalf of the **Greens/EFA Group**

The European Parliament,

Having regard to its resolutions of 7 September 2006 on forest fires and floods, 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe, 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal, 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain and 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe, and its resolutions of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, droughts and floods) agricultural aspects, regional development aspects and environmental aspects, and in particular its resolution of 4 September 2007 on the summer's natural disasters

Having regard to the Barnier report entitled "For a European civil protection force: europe aid",

Having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the total area of vegetation and woodland that was affected by the fires in Europe this summer is more than XX hectares, and the most severely affected countries are Greece, France (in particular Corsica), Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain (in particular the Canary Islands),

B. whereas several Member States have offered support to help fight the forest-fire emergency,

C. whereas recent years have shown that the problems with forest fires and draught will become increasingly acute with extremely dry summers growing more and more common, whereas investment in combating climate change is therefore an investment in preventing the catastrophes of draught and forest fires,

D. whereas the high number of fires in southern Europe in 2009, as well as their extent, is the result of a number of factors, including criminal activities, together with the inadequate implementation of laws prohibiting illegal building on burnt land, but also of climate change, an inadequate definition and inadequate care of forests and a combination of natural causes and human negligence;

E. whereas the exertion of pressure in order to change the land use of forest areas and to build and tolerate illegal constructions has contributed to the deterioration of the protection of the forests in Greece including criminal provocations of fires in some regions,

1. Deplores the victims and expresses its solidarity with the inhabitants of the areas devastated by the forest fires;
2. Regrets the lack of implementation of recommendations made in earlier resolutions of the European Parliament on the subject of natural disasters;
3. Welcomes the cooperation and assistance offered by other Member States to the affected areas in the framework of the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection, supports the continuation of the pilot project for combating forest fires in anticipation of the creation of a permanent European Civil Protection Force; urges the Commission to follow up the Barnier report with concrete proposals for a more rapid European cooperation capacity to natural disasters;
4. Notes that the damage caused by the forest fires and other natural disasters could have been, to a large extent, prevented and must provide an incentive for the national, regional and local authorities concerned to develop, fund and implement more efficient prevention policies and adequate legislation on conservation and appropriate land use, including on sustainable farm and forestry practices, water management and efficient risk management;
5. Deplores the fact that so many of these forest fires appear to have been started by acts of arson, and is particularly concerned that criminal acts of arson are increasingly to blame for forest fires in Europe; calls on the Member States, therefore, to strengthen and make use of penal sanctions for criminal acts that damage the environment and, in particular, for those causing forest fires, and believes that prompt and effective investigation in order to establish liability, followed by proportionate punishment, would discourage negligent and deliberate behaviour;
6. Urges the Commission and the Member States to take measures, including measures to raise public awareness, in support of more sustainable use of water, soil and biological resources and better waste management the absence of which is often the cause of fires;
7. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the regions affected to set up restoration and rehabilitation plans for the affected areas including compulsory conditions which guarantee that all possible measures for fire prevention and rapid fire extinction are implemented in those regions;
8. Demands that the co-financing by Community funds of the implementation of such plans, particularly by the Structural Funds, the EAFRD, the Cohesion Fund and the European Solidarity Fund, should be conditional to the genuine reforestation of the entire affected areas with local equivalent tree varieties replacing the former forest and to measures aimed at preventing repetition of such disasters;
9. Calls on the Commission to report on Community funds granted for forest fire protection and whether they have been used in an adequate manner;
10. Believes that no land use change after forest fires should be allowed and calls for the sanction of repayment of the Community aid by the Member State that does not fully reforest the affected area or allows a change of land use for any speculative urbanisation and tourist projects;
11. Believes that a precondition for the long-term protection of forest areas is a sustainable programming and implementation of regional and rural development plans that aims at preventing the rural population from abandoning rural areas, creates new diversified rural income especially for the young generation and

establishes the necessary modernised infrastructure which attracts sustainable tourism and services in rural areas;

12. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to create incentives for farmers, rural entrepreneurs and forest owners in adapting farming and forestry practices that do effectively and measurably reduce the risks related to extreme climatic conditions and forest fires;

13. Believes that special attention for measures to enhance the accessibility of rural communities, effective fire early warning systems, better voluntary and professional fire prevention forces as well as a better water management should be part of the policies to prevent and fight forest fires and be conditional to future support from the European Union;

14. Believes that beyond an effective and unambiguous role of public policies, measures of awareness-raising, education and vocational training which together must increase personal responsibility to prevent repeated incidents of fires in the Mediterranean region must be initiated and carried out by the responsible administrations at all levels concerned as part of the rural and regional development programmes in order to prevent natural disasters;

15. Calls on the Greek government to immediately draft a land register for forests, to use effectively existing forest maps, and draw up new ones where required, as well as to adequately organise and staff forest and fire protection services, and ensure coordination and cooperation among them;

16. Condemns that practice of the legalisation of illegal constructions on protected and non-authorized areas;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the governments of the Member States concerned.

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