

Resolution on forest fires in the summer of 2009

2009/2668(RSP) - 16/09/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 647 votes to 31 with 22 abstentions a resolution on forest fires in the summer of 2009.

The resolution had been tabled by the EPP, S-D, ALDE, EFD and ECR groups.

Members refer to the devastating wildfires and floods across southern Europe in 2009 causing both human suffering, with at least 11 lives lost, and immense material and environmental damage. It expresses its sympathy with the relatives of those who lost their lives, and pays homage to the fire-fighters and others who worked courageously to extinguish fires and rescue people. Members deplore the failure to implement recommendations made in its earlier resolutions on natural disasters, recalling that Parliament has submitted successive resolutions since 1995 calling urgently for various EU initiatives to combat wildfires, which were either not implemented or left ineffective. They also note that the damage caused by the forest fires could have been prevented if some Member States had implemented **more efficient prevention policies** and adequate legislation on conservation and appropriate land use.

Parliament takes the view that the Commission should submit a **proposal for a European strategy to combat natural disasters, including a compulsory approach to risk prevention**, and devise a protocol for standardised action for each type of disaster throughout the Union.

The resolution urges the Commission to **mobilise the current EU Solidarity Fund** in the most flexible manner possible and without delay in order to assist the victims, noting that the most important problem with regard to the Fund remains the lack of rapidity with which the Fund can be activated as a crisis management instrument. It criticises the fact that the Council blocked progress on a new Regulation on the Solidarity Fund, unlawfully delaying the revision, although Parliament adopted its position by an overwhelming majority at first reading in May 2006. Reviving this initiative could generate major benefits for the practical operation of the Fund, widening its scope, abolishing the exceptional activation of the Fund for regional disasters, allowing more regions to receive assistance by the introduction of a lower damage threshold for mobilising it and allowing a faster disaster response by speeding up payments.

Parliament welcomes the assistance offered by other Member States to the affected areas in the framework of the **Community Mechanism for Civil Protection**. It asks the Commission to report urgently on the pilot project to step up cooperation between Member States and the preparatory action on an EU rapid response capability, and calls for legislative proposals to be presented establishing a **genuine Community disaster response capability**. Members emphasise the extreme urgency of this issue. They call for the creation of an effective European force that could react immediately in emergencies, as proposed in the Barnier report of 2006 entitled "For a European civil protection force: Europe aid."

The resolution deplores the fact that the Commission and the Council did not plan any financial commitments for 2010 to continue the preparatory action for an **EU rapid response capability** already established in 2008 and 2009. Members welcome the contribution of the European tactical reserve of fire-fighting aircraft (**EUFFTR**), which was established the summer of 2009 to assist Member States facing major fires. This pilot project was established with Parliament's support and proved to be an excellent example of enhanced capacity at European level providing immediate help in emergency situations.

They also emphasise the **individual responsibility of the Member States** for civil protection and disaster control measures. Member States are asked to supply details of their operational programmes in place for dealing with natural disasters, with a view to exchanging experience on coordination of administrative and operational bodies, and availability of the necessary human resources and material.

Parliament calls on the Commission, Council and Member States, as appropriate to support rehabilitation of the regions which have suffered heavy damage, and ensure **sanctions requiring the repayment of Community aid** by any Member State that does not fully re-forest the affected area or allows a change of land use for any speculative development or tourist projects;

It underlines that the current frequency of fires in southern Europe – almost 95 % of the total area burnt in the EU is located in the Mediterranean region – is said to be directly linked to the worsening impact of **climate change** (erosion and soil loss, desertification and increase in greenhouse gas emissions, including CO₂). It calls, therefore, for an integrated **EU strategy for the preservation of the southern European forest ecosystems**, which will ensure sufficient financing of prevention measures, and the full restoration of the ecosystem, as well as allocations for the adaptation of the south European forest ecosystems to climate change.