Resolution on the drought in Portugal

2005/2544(RSP) - 14/04/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the drought in Portugal.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE and GUE /NGL groups.

The absence of precipitation in Portugal between 1 October 2004 and the end of March 2005, with rainfall less than 50% of the average between 1961 and 1990, has been causing extremely low levels of ground water, less than 20% in some southern areas of the country. On 15 March 2005, almost 88% of mainland Portugal was experiencing severe or even extreme drought.

The Parliament expresses its sympathy with the populations and sectors affected as well as its concern at the situation currently affecting Portuguese farmers and livestock breeders and also the regions which are experiencing a water shortage, the situation in the central and southern parts of the country being particularly serious.

MEPs consider that Community intervention is called for, not solely in order to provide support for those most affected but also to limit the damage and prevent similar situations in the future from having such devastating effects. They urge the Commission, on the basis of the information already supplied by the Portuguese authorities, to:

- ensure that the full amount of the agricultural aid due to farmers is paid in advance;
- facilitate, in accordance with the Community legislation and following the example of action in similar situations in the past, the mobilisation of cereals from Community intervention stocks resulting from the surpluses in some Member States;
- give its backing to the veterinary tasks listed in the contingency plan to tackle the 'blue tongue' disease which broke out at the same time as the drought and which, because the movement of animals was restricted, aggravated the situation enormously;
- grant derogations from the application of a number of Community regulations, in particular authorisation for grazing in set-aside zones or areas planted with cereals, which it will be impossible to harvest because the production cycle has been affected;
- authorise the Portuguese authorities to grant the state aid required by the situation, especially to small farmers, in particular in order to provide support for the exceptional costs incurred in feeding animals and transporting or collecting water, or the other activities worst affected, such as potato and citrus production;
- submit to the Council and Parliament a proposal for revision of the legal instruments with a view to adapting the existing legislation so that it can be used to help prevent such serious effects from recurring in any subsequent years of repeated drought in southern Europe.

The resolution calls on the Council and Commission to reconsider the possibility of drawing on the Solidarity Fund, and, in particular, of ensuring that the fund can also be used in response to situations of this kind, which are particularly frequent in southern Europe.

The Parliament urges the Commission to carry out an in-depth study into the occurrence of such phenomena in order to determine whether they are cyclical or occasional in nature, or whether they are a further indicator of long-term climate change, and to explore options for a post-2012 agreement in the UN climate change process, together with the development of a long-term EU strategy.