Resolution on forest fires and floods

2006/2614(RSP) - 07/09/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on the devastating forest fires and floods in the EU in 2006.MEPs expressed their solidarity with the relatives of those who have lost their lives as well as the inhabitants of the damaged areas, in particular in Galicia, and thanked all those – professionals and volunteers – who helped to extinguish the fires and rescue the victims of the floods. These fires had partly been caused by the drought and high temperatures of summer 2006 as well as the socio-economic and cultural changes that had occurred in recent decades in rural areas. Parliament regretted that Russia neglected to cooperate with its neighbouring countries during its recent forest fires, and called for the Commission to raise this issue in the framework of the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Parliament was concerned at the growing number of disasters, which, according to experts, might be attributed largely to climate change. Accordingly, it called on the Member States to do what was necessary to attain the Kyoto goals. The Commission too should take initiatives to guarantee compliance with the Kyoto commitments and the follow-up to them. Parliament felt that the damage caused by recent events further emphasised that mitigation would be much less costly than the consequences of global warming.

The Commission was asked to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund in a flexible fashion, facilitating its implementation, in order to tackle serious damage caused by fires. There should also be adequate resources allocated to civil protection against major emergencies. Parliament regretted the Council's lukewarm response to the proposal for creating a European civil protection corps (the Barnier report), but welcomed the Commission's proposals for improving the EU's rapid response capacity for major emergencies.

Parliament asked the Finnish Presidency-in-Office to pay particular attention to the development of the Union's rapid response capacity for major disasters and to the proposals made by the Commission and Parliament for reinforcing the Community's civil protection capacity.

Other points urged by the Parliament were as follows:

- the adoption and the prompt implementation by the Member States of the proposed legislation establishing a Community civil protection mechanism and concerning the assessment and management of floods (the latter under codecision);

- a programme for the exchange of experience of the implementation of new technologies for controlling and following up the risks and effects of forest fires;

- specific proposals to solve certain problems in the "Forest Focus" regulation in the field of prevention;

- concrete proposals for the forests in southern Europe concerning the use of forest biomass for energy purposes, entailing a new source of income for the owner and at the same time contributing to better management of forests. This should be done in the context of the Action Plan for Biomass;

- specific proposals for a directive on combating forest fires and droughts in the Union, with a view to improving the coordination of Member States" policies and optimising the existing Community instruments;

- the reintroduction of aid to farmers for creating and maintaining firebreaks as part of the implementing rules for the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);

Finally, Parliament called on its Bureau to authorise a delegation to the worst-affected areas ahead of the public hearing planned for October 2006, during which the Barnier report would be considered.