

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

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*Session document*

29.8.2007

B6-0327/2007

## **MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Martin Schulz, Linda McAvan, Stavros Lambrinidis, Manuel Medina Ortega, Guido Sacconi, Paulo Casaca, Constanze Angela Krehl, María Sornosa Martínez, Stavros Arnaoutakis, Katerina Batzeli, Panagiotis Beglitis, Maria Matsouka, Marilisa Xenogiannakopoulou, Nikolaos Sifunakis, Evangelia Tzampazi and Catherine Anita Neris

on behalf of the PSE Group

on this summer's natural disasters and the extraordinary fires in Greece

**B6-0327/2007**

**European Parliament resolution on this summer's natural disasters and the extraordinary fires in Greece**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 2, 6 and 174 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to its resolutions of 18 January 2006 on the outcome of the Montreal Conference on climate change, 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe, 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal, 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain, 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe, 7 September 2006 on forest fires and floods, and its resolutions of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (fires, drought and floods) – agricultural aspects, regional development aspects and environmental aspects (2005/2195(INI), A6-0152/2006, A6-0147/2006 and A6-0149/2006),
- having regard to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of 11 December 1997 and the Community's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on 4 March 2002,
- having regard to the 'Forest Focus' Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 2152/2003 of 17 November 2003),
- having regard to the Council Decision of 5 March 2007 establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument (2007/162/EC),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and to the 'Community strategic guidelines for rural development' of 20 February 2006,
- having regard to the rapid response and preparedness instrument for major emergencies (COM(2005)0113),
- having regard to the conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting of 12 and 13 June 2007 on enhancing the coordination capacity of the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) within the Community civil protection mechanism,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund and to the European Parliament's resolution of 3 April 2006 on the revision of the aforesaid regulation (A6-0123/2006),
- having regard to its legislative resolution of 25 April 2007 on the Council common position with a view to the adoption of a directive on the assessment and management of floods,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 June 2006 on the revised sustainable development strategy (B6-0335/2006),

- having regard to point 12 of the Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006,
- having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. having regard to the devastating fires and violent floods which have caused death and destruction throughout the European continent, in particular in Greece and the United Kingdom, during the summer of 2007, affecting EU Member States, outermost regions, in particular Martinique and Guadelupe, which were hit by Hurricane Dean, applicant countries and the EU's immediate neighbours,
- B. whereas the fires in Greece resulted in an unprecedented loss of citizens' lives and unprecedented material and environmental damage, as well as the destruction of part of ancient Olympia, a world heritage site, NATURA protected areas, crops, livestock, houses, the livelihood of thousands of individuals, other property and even whole villages; whereas these events affected not only the local economy, the tourism industry, infrastructure etc., but has also, directly or indirectly, destroyed or diminished the effects of the implementation of EU policies, projects, infrastructure and funding efforts, and wrought havoc with EU objectives for growth and cohesion,
- C. whereas, according to the available statistics, since 2001 there had been a dramatic decrease in the devastating effects of forest fires in Greece; whereas in 2007 the forest fires in Greece alone resulted in the burning of 300 000 hectares, the loss of at least 64 human lives and injury to numerous people, who reportedly remained cut off for hours from safe areas or help,
- D. mourning the tragic loss of the lives of dozens of civilians, fire-fighters, soldiers and volunteers in their efforts to combat these catastrophes,
- E. having regard to the serious damage to homes, infrastructure and agriculture caused by the floods, in particular in the United Kingdom, Germany and other parts of Europe; noting the dramatic flooding which occurred in the United Kingdom during June and July 2007, affecting thousands of businesses, tens of thousands of homes and up to a million people, and urging the European Commission to act rapidly to mobilise EU resources to the affected areas,
- F. whereas the total area of vegetation and woodland affected by the fires in Europe this summer was more than 500 000 hectares, and whereas the most severely affected countries are Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, FYROM, Spain (in particular the Canary Islands), Turkey and Albania,
- G. whereas these fires were caused partly by this summer's drought and high temperatures, as well as by the socio-economic and cultural changes that have occurred over the last decades in rural areas: abandonment of rural areas because of lack of economic opportunities, inadequate maintenance of forests, inappropriate tree variety planting and a considerable percentage of criminal activity,
- H. whereas the European Environment Agency (EEA) has predicted that southern Europe will experience increased drought stress, more frequent forest fires and increased heat

stress, while northern Europe will experience increased precipitation, and most regions of Europe will encounter increases in flood magnitude and frequency as a result of climate change,

- I. whereas the Community Civil Protection Mechanism was activated twelve times for the same kind of emergency in a period of two months, and whereas seven of these activations were simultaneous; whereas Member States' assistance was not sufficient to ensure a rapid and adequate civil protection response in all of these emergencies,
- J. having regard to the damaging economic and social consequences of the natural disasters for regional economies, productive activity and tourism,
- K. whereas these fires represent a recurrent and common problem for the whole of the south of Europe; whereas this region has become the main risk area within the Union, given that it is subject to special climatic characteristics and that 70% of the affected land is owned privately by individuals who are required to carry out prevention measures by themselves,
- L. whereas the Council Presidencies have failed to reach a decision on the new Solidarity Fund Regulation, and whereas the EP adopted its position as early as May 2006,
  1. Expresses its solidarity with the suffering relatives of those who lost their lives, as well as the inhabitants of the damaged areas; thanks all those – professionals, volunteers and local authorities – who participated in extinguishing the fires and rescuing flood victims;
  2. Welcomes the prompt reaction of the authorities in some of the Member States concerned; calls for an improvement in the solidarity shown by the European Union and its Member States with the affected regions; expresses its thanks for the help given to their authorities and rescue services;
  3. Expresses its concerns at the increasing number of natural disasters that, according to experts, can be attributed mostly to climate change, and calls on the Commission to take initiatives to guarantee that Kyoto commitments are honoured and followed up;
  4. Calls on the Council to modify as a matter of urgency the rules of the Solidarity Funds in line with the European Parliament resolution of 18 May 2006, and on the Commission to facilitate the implementation of the new criteria in the affected areas;
  5. Asks the Commission for the rapid mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund to be applied with flexibility, as soon as the affected countries have presented their requests for aid, with a view to helping the population concerned to deal quickly with the consequences of the fires and floods;
  6. Welcomes the Commission's proposals for improving the EU's rapid response capacity for disasters;
  7. While emphasising that the primary responsibility for preventing and extinguishing fires lies with the authorities of each Member State, invites the Commission to take the necessary action for the creation of an independent, permanent European reaction force to assist its Member States and the affected regions during extreme forest fires and other

catastrophes, providing the best equipment and expertise; notes in this connection that the European Commission should study possibilities for having access to a complementary capacity to ensure a rapid response to major emergencies that may be available from other sources, including private resources;

8. Recognises that this year's experience emphasises the need to strengthen the Community civil protection, prevention, preparedness and response capability with regard to forest and other wild fires, and urges the Commission to take an initiative to this end;
9. Invites the Commission to explore potential cooperation with the EU's neighbours and other third countries in fighting disastrous fires and exchanging best practices and/or capacities during precarious summer months in order to be better prepared for the forest fire season in 2008;
10. Urges the European Commission to take the necessary initiatives to ensure that all available funds, including the European structural funds, funds provided for agricultural and other EU policies and the current EU Solidarity Fund can be immediately and efficiently applied, avoiding time-wasting procedures and administrative obstacles, bearing in mind that the first priority is to make any European resources available for the citizens and regions in distress. Stresses, furthermore, that Community funds available for tackling natural disasters should be plainly and efficiently absorbed;
11. Stresses the fact that the forest fires this summer in Greece resulted also in the partial burning of the archaeological site of Ancient Olympia, birthplace of the Olympic Games, and caused damage to the International Olympic Academy; asks, therefore, for immediate repair of the damage, with the assistance of the European Union;
12. Considers that the increase in fires is the result of factors over and above climate change, and that a combination of natural causes and human activity relating to the definition of forest, cultivation or building areas can have a decisive effect in increasing the number of criminal fires. Calls urgently, therefore, for the adoption and strict implementation by Member States of legislation protecting forest and other ecosystems, preventing commercialisation of forest land and change of use and mandating the efficient monitoring of such legislation as an effective disincentive to criminal activity. Calls for all available EU know-how, including satellite systems, to be used to this end;
13. Points out that arsonists, especially those who gain from rebuilding or from forest land, can be encouraged by laws that do not strictly define or protect such land and/or by the inadequate application of laws that prohibit illegal building. Urges the Member States, therefore, to declare and implement the reforestation of all burned areas and the protection of the national environment;
14. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to work in closer coordination on civil protection measures in the event of natural disasters with a view to preventing and minimising their devastating impact, allocating the resources needed for immediate alerting, coordinating and making available of logistical resources;
15. Calls for better use of existing financial and technical resources, and scientific improvements in the prevention of disasters and the alleviation of their consequences;

16. Calls on the Commission to continue collaboration with national authorities in order to develop policies which minimise the environmental impact of fires; calls for a reforestation policy based on respect of bio-climatic and environmental characteristics, using varieties that more effectively resist fire and drought and adapt better to the climate;
17. Emphasises the need to collect and register data on the natural resources of each Member State through the creation of "Green National Accounts" in the form of a database open to all citizens;
18. Deplores the fact that in a number of cases the prevention and fire-fighting measures of national governments clearly failed to decrease the devastating effects of the fires, and commends the heroic individual efforts of private citizens and volunteers to help to extinguish fires and to save lives;
19. Stresses the need, in the event of natural disasters, to pay special attention to the specific needs of people with disabilities in all actions undertaken by the Civil Protection Mechanisms;
20. Deeply regrets the fact that so many and such heavy losses occurred during the fires in Greece; considers it necessary in consequence to examine immediately the adequacy of the prevention and preparedness measures in order to ensure that the necessary lessons are drawn in order to prevent and limit the devastating effects of similar disasters in EU Member States in the future. In this regard, urges the European Commission to request from the Member States the operational programmes that are in place to deal with natural disasters, with a view to exchanging experiences and drawing conclusions on immediate measures, coordination of administrative and operational bodies and availability of necessary human resources and material;
21. Urges the Commission to create an experience-exchange programme on the implementation of new technologies for the control and follow-up of the risks and effects of forest fires, and to prepare a European authorisation procedure for qualified technical personnel in order to improve their training;
22. Expresses its concern that the "Forest Focus" Regulation's prevention objectives have not been achieved; notes that since its entry into force the number of fires and the surface burned have increased instead of decreasing;
23. Asks the European Commission to invite all Member States to ensure that all burned forest areas continue to be forests and are covered by reforestation programmes, and to plan extended reconstruction policies for tourism and affected local economies without delay;
24. Decides to send a European Parliament delegation to Greece in order to express its solidarity with the population, to observe the level of destruction and to examine the extent of the damage to EU-funded projects, other economic activities, such as agriculture and tourism, social networks, NATURA protected areas and fragile ecosystems, and to draw conclusions for the prevention and better handling of similar extreme situations in the EU in future;

25. Calls on the European Union and its Member States to make society aware of the value of our forests and their resources and the benefits of conserving them, in so doing promoting the involvement of civil society through organised volunteering or other methods, such as associations for the defence and protection of forests and natural spaces;
26. Regards as regrettable reports in the international media, based on unsubstantiated rumours or claims, regarding the alleged causes of the forest fires in Greece, as they unfairly compound the devastating effects of the fires and affect inordinately the economy of the country; insists that any conclusions on the causes of the fires in Greece and elsewhere must be based on facts and on thorough investigations and that the criminals, if any, must be prosecuted and punished severely under law;
27. Calls on the Member States to strengthen penal sanctions for criminal acts that damage the environment and, in particular, for those causing forest fires, and to enhance coordination not only within the fire-fighting services, but also within all the institutions that deal with the causes and consequences of fires, and with identifying and dealing with those responsible; stresses that prompt and effective investigation to determine responsibilities, followed by appropriate disciplinary action, would discourage negligent and deliberate behaviour;
28. Considers that Volunteer Civil Protection Action should be promoted and supported without delay, with basic training activities and equipment that might harness advanced technologies, since this is one of the major resources available to the Member States when dealing with states of emergency arising from natural disasters;
29. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments, national and regional authorities and parliaments of the EU and applicant countries concerned.