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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 Josu Ortuondo Larrea, Ignasi Guardans Cambó, Jan Mulder and Vittorio Prodi

on behalf of the ALDE Group

on this summer's forest fires and floods in the European Union

European Parliament resolution on this summer's forest fires and floods in the European Union

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 6 and 174 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 January 2005 on the outcome of the Buenos Aires Conference on climate change, its resolution of 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe, its resolution of 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal, its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain, its resolution of 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe 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 Commission's Report No 21553 on climate change and the European water dimension,
- having regard to the 'Forest Focus' regulation, Regulation (EC) No 2152/2003 of 17 November 2003,
- having regard to the Commission's Communication of 3 November 1998 on a Forestry Strategy for the European Union (COM (1998)0649),
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 29 September 2004 on the LIFE+ Programme and the European Parliament Resolution of 2 May 2005 on LIFE+, financial instrument for the environment: multi-annual programme 2007-2013,
- having regard to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the 'Community strategic guidelines for rural development',
- having regard to the rapid response and preparedness instrument for major emergencies (COM(2005)0113),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 20 April 2005 on the improvement of civil defence measures and Michel Barnier's Report 'For a European Civil Protection Force: Europe Aid',
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund, and the European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2006 on the revision of the aforesaid Regulation (A6-0123/2006),

- having regard to the Biomass Action Plan (COM(2005)0628) and the European Union strategy for biofuels (COM(2006)0034),
 - 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. whereas in 2006 the European Union has suffered devastating forest fires, especially in its southern Member States, which have caused fatalities and considerable material damage,
 - B. whereas the total area of vegetation and woodland affected by the fires in the EU is more than 200 000 hectares, half of it in Spain; whereas the other Member States affected include not only Portugal, Greece, France and Italy but also others traditionally considered less at risk, such as the Netherlands, Ireland, Lithuania, the UK, Austria, Sweden and the Czech Republic,
 - C. whereas the forest fires were particularly severe in regions such as Galicia, where 78 000 hectares were affected, leading to 4 deaths, injuring 514 people, killing animals and causing considerable material and ecological damage, including to 17 Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) included in the Natura 2000 Network and other areas of ecological significance, with ecological connectivity throughout a region,
 - D. whereas in recent years persistent droughts and high temperatures have led to the proliferation of forest fires in Europe, worsening desertification in many regions and affecting agriculture, stockbreeding and the forest heritage,
 - E. having regard to the damaging economic and social consequences of the natural disasters for regional economies, productive activity and tourism,
 - F. having regard to the serious damage to homes, infrastructure and agriculture caused by the floods, in particular in Austria, Hungary and other parts of Europe,
 - G. whereas the fires and floods are often transnational in nature and it is therefore necessary to reinforce the joint measures for fighting natural disasters and the Community civil protection mechanisms,
 - H. whereas rural development policy will not suffice to tackle this problem, and the heading for aids to farmers for creating and maintaining firebreaks has disappeared from the framework regulation for the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD),
 - I. whereas the Brussels European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006 adopted the Presidency's report on reinforcing the Union's response capacities in cases of emergency and crisis, as well as the report presented by Michel Barnier in May 2006,
 - J. whereas, pursuant to the conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15 June 2006,

the Brussels-based ad hoc crisis steering group should be operative from 1 July 2006,

- K. whereas Parliament plans to follow up its work on natural disasters, which has been done in particular since August 2005, with a public hearing on fires and floods to be held in October 2006,
- L. whereas there is no specific European legislation to tackle droughts and fires, although a specific directive is under preparation on the prevention of floods,
1. Expresses its solidarity with the relatives of those who have lost their lives as well as the inhabitants of the damaged areas, and thanks all those – professionals, volunteers and regional and local authorities – who helped to extinguish the fires and rescue the victims of the floods;
 2. Welcomes the prompt response of the regional authorities in the Member States concerned; acknowledges the solidarity shown by the European Union and its Member States with the affected regions of both Member States and applicant countries and the praiseworthy help provided to their authorities and rescue services; considers that the dimensions of these phenomena and their consequences go beyond the regional and national scale and require an effective and urgent European commitment;
 3. Is concerned at the growing number of disasters which, according to experts, may be attributed largely to climate change; calls, accordingly, on the Member States to do what is necessary to attain the Kyoto goals, and calls on the Commission to take initiatives to guarantee compliance with the Kyoto commitments and the follow-up to them;
 4. Considers that its resolution on the revised sustainable development strategy (B6-0335/2006 of 7 June 2006) contains key elements and principles to take into account and calls for the timely implementation of the strategy;
 5. Believes that global and regional prevention must play the key role rather than remedying damage;
 6. Believes that such disasters can be handled efficiently only at Community level: they call for an effective response at an enhanced European level, with, if necessary, new Community instruments for preventing and dealing with the problem;
 7. Calls on the Commission to mobilise the European Solidarity Fund, to be used in particular in Galicia, taking into account the major damage caused by the fires, recalling that this damage affects the way of life of communities which, especially in the less prosperous regions, have to handle the adverse repercussions on infrastructure and transport, economic potential, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism, all of which has a negative effect on economic and social cohesion;
 8. Calls for more resources to be allocated to civil protection for major emergencies, and regrets the Council's lukewarm response to the proposal for creating a European civil protection corps (Barnier Report);

9. Welcomes the Commission's proposals for improving the EU's rapid response capacity for disasters;
10. Calls for better use of existing financial and technical resources and scientific improvements in the prevention of disasters and the alleviation of their consequences;
11. Calls on the European Institutions, therefore, to adopt, and on the Member States to implement as soon as possible, the ongoing procedures to establish a Community civil defence mechanism (2006/0009/CNS) and concerning the assessment and management of floods (2006/0005/COD);
12. Calls on the Finnish Presidency-in-Office to pay particular attention to the development of the Union's rapid response capacity for such disasters and to the proposals by the Commission and the European Parliament on reinforcing the Community's civil protection capacity and to propose the adoption of the legal instruments by the end of 2006, in line with the mandate given by the European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006;
13. Urges the Commission to create an experience exchange programme on the implementation of new technologies for the control and follow-up of risks and effects of forest fires, as well as the preparation of a European approval procedure for the qualifications of technical personnel, to improve their training;
14. Expresses its concern that the aims of the 'Forest Focus' Regulation in the field of prevention have not been attained: notes that the number of fires and the areas which have been burned, rather than decreasing, have increased since it has entered into force; calls on the Commission to include specific proposals to solve these problems in the report that it presents before the end of 2006;
15. Urges the Commission to present, within the Action Plan on Biomass, 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;
16. Calls on the Commission to submit a communication to make society aware of the value of our forests and their resources and the benefits of their conservation, promoting the involvement of civil society through organised volunteering or other formulas, for example involving associations for the protection of forests and natural areas;
17. Calls on the Member States to strengthen penalties for criminal acts that damage the environment and in particular for those causing forest fires, and believes that a prompt and effective investigation that determines responsibilities, followed by a proportionate punishment, would discourage negligent and deliberately criminal behaviours;
18. Reiterates its call on the Commission to submit 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;
19. Calls on the Commission to undertake an in-depth analysis of the consequences and

repercussions of natural disasters, especially those affecting the Union's forests, including the impact on the Natura 2000 Network, and to submit proposals for the development of a Community policy for controlling forest fires and for a joint protocol on preventing and combating such fires;

20. Advocates a Community strategy for the coordination of fire prevention measures in the framework of the rural development regulation;
21. Calls on the Commission to reintroduce aids to farmers for creating and maintaining firebreaks as part of the implementing rules for the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);
22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments of the Member States and the regional authorities affected by the fires and floods.