

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

---

*Session document*

1 September 2003

B5-0377/2003

## **MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

further to the Commission statement

pursuant to Rule 37(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Charles Pasqua and José Ribeiro e Castro

on behalf of the UEN Group

on the consequences of the summer heat wave in Europe, especially in Portugal

**B5-0377/2003**

**European Parliament resolution on the consequences of the summer heat wave in Europe, especially in Portugal**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the exceptional forest fires which occurred during the summer of 2003 in Europe, particularly in Portugal (approximately 336 000 hectares) but also in Italy, France and Spain,
  - having regard to Decision 1999/847/EC establishing a Community action programme in the field of civil protection,
  - having regard to the proposal for a regulation concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community (Forest Focus), adopted at first reading on 13 February 2003,
- A. whereas a large number of forest fires have devastated huge areas in southern Europe, killing several dozen people and burning, in Portugal alone, more than 350 000 hectares of forests and crops and a large number of livestock farms and other properties and in particular causing serious damage to housing and infrastructure as well as spreading fear among the local population in areas where the flames threatened towns and villages,
- B. having regard to the fires' disastrous impact on the economies of the areas affected (the damage in Portugal is estimated at € 1 billion), which were also hit by the exceptionally hot and dry weather recorded during the summer of 2003,
- C. whereas forests play a major role in regional economies, spatial planning, quality of life and the conservation of biodiversity, and whereas the surface area destroyed by this summer's fires greatly exceeds the area that is replanted each year, thus having an extremely serious impact in economic, social and ecological terms,
- D. whereas Community forestry policy is non-existent, and whereas the amendments to Regulation 2158/92/EEC do not allow the Community to go any further than simply monitoring the state of forests,
- E. whereas the Member States, particularly the least-favoured among them, are not capable of dealing with natural disasters of this scale and are thus obliged to rely on solidarity and assistance,
1. Expresses its deepest sympathy for and solidarity with the families of the those who died and with the inhabitants of the devastated areas, which include many elderly persons living in less-favoured rural areas, and salutes the dedication of the full-time and voluntary firemen and members of the public who fought the fires unstintingly, often at the risk of their lives;

2. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the criminal behaviour of a few people, which, during exceptionally dry weather, has drastic consequences, placing the lives of fellow citizens and firemen in danger;
3. Calls on the Commission and the national and regional authorities to coordinate their legislation on fire prevention and the training of professional firefighters;
4. Calls on the Commission and the Member States affected by the forest fires to adjust their regional development programmes financed from the Structural Funds so as to enable them to tackle forest fire-related problems by means of preventive, restoration and reforestation measures, particularly in Mediterranean areas and the rest of southern Europe;
5. Calls for reforestation policy to be conducted with due respect for local tree species and rural landscapes and for a review to be made of the recent management of our forests, the way in which it has developed and the occupations connected with it, with a view to making forests more accessible to society, *inter alia* by means of environmental education;
6. Calls on the Commission to submit a legislative initiative seeking to increase exchanges of information on technical and investigatory matters and to step up coordination at European level of police units specialising in agri-environmental and forestry matters;
7. Calls on local authorities to improve forest management and to adopt spatial and town planning measures and budgetary measures that will enable fire brigades to detect fires as soon as they break out and thus to take immediate action to deal with them;
8. Calls on the Member States and local authorities to take steps to anticipate the effects, together with various risks such as mudslides, of rain in the devastated areas and on land dried out by the heat wave;
9. Calls on the Member States to review their arrangements for the prevention of fires in Mediterranean-type forests and to draw all the necessary conclusions from these events; calls on the Commission to organise in an effective manner a network for the pooling of experience in fire prevention and new techniques for the prevention and control of forest fires in Mediterranean countries and the other southern European countries;
10. Calls on the Commission to promote a system for the coordination of mutual assistance arrangements between the Member States and for a rapid response to natural or industrial disasters;
11. Calls on the Commission to disburse as a matter of urgency the aid made available by the European Union through the European Union Solidarity Fund (proposal for a decision on the mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund and preliminary draft amending budget No 6 for the 2003 financial year) and, at the same time, rapidly to set up aid and compensation mechanisms at European level, in particular through the Community Structural Funds (Regional Fund, Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund - EAGGF, etc.);

12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the governments of the Member States and the local authorities in the areas affected.