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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to the Commission statement

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

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on behalf of the PPE-DE Group

on the fires which have devastated many countries in Southern Europe, particularly Portugal, and the serious effects of this summer's heatwave on agriculture

European Parliament resolution on the fires which have ravaged many countries in Southern Europe, particularly Portugal, and the serious effects of this summer's heatwave on agriculture

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the large number of fires which have ravaged many countries in Southern Europe in the summer of 2003, particularly Portugal, and the devastating effects they have had on the forest areas concerned,
 - having regard to the losses in terms of human life and the destruction of many farms and homes as well as transport, communication and energy infrastructures,
 - having regard to the serious economic damage caused to forests and the environment in areas particularly sensitive to desertification,
- A. whereas in Portugal, the country most affected by the fires, more than 400 000 ha of forests have been destroyed, representing 5% of the whole area of the country and 11% of its forests,
- B. whereas the fires which have occurred during the summer are a problem common to the whole Mediterranean area and whereas the climatic features of Southern Europe mean that it is one of the areas of the European Union most at risk from fires,
- C. having regard to the important role played by forests in the regional and local economy, in job creation, land conservation, biodiversity and quality of life,
- D. whereas the area devastated by the fires is much greater than the area reforested each year, and whereas this will have serious human, social, economic and environmental repercussions in the long term,
- E. having regard to the indefatigable efforts of firefighters and volunteers in combatting the fires,
- F. having regard to the lack, on the part of some of the countries affected by these fires, of adequate logistical and human resources to deal with a disaster of this magnitude, and to the technical assistance given by a large number of Member States,
- G. whereas the fires throughout this summer pose a risk common to all the countries of Southern Europe and are gradually destroying the forests which form part of these countries' heritage,
- H. whereas it is essential to protect and exploit this shared forest heritage, given its socio-economic and environmental importance,

- I. whereas prevention is still the most effective means of combatting fires, and whereas the Commission, in its proposal entitled 'Forest Focus', takes away from the relevant professionals an important independent financial instrument aimed specifically at the prevention of forest fires,
 - J. whereas the regions have an important role to play in the conservation and exploitation of forests,
 - K. whereas the damage caused in Portugal by forest fires amounts to some EUR 1 bn, that is 0.864% of the country's gross national income, and whereas, given damage on this scale, there is a need to assure the people of Portugal as soon as possible of the solidarity and support of the European Union,
 - L. whereas the damage done in other Member States may also merit EU support,
 - M. having regard to the serious consequences which drought and unpredictable weather in recent months have had for agriculture, putting at risk a large proportion of European farmers' harvests, productivity and markets,
 - N. whereas this crisis in the agricultural sector has led to an increase in the costs of production and therefore a reduction in the profit margins for European agricultural products on the world market, and may have serious consequences for farming in Europe and on the ecological balance,
 - O. having regard to the need to promote better cooperation between the Member States and the Commission with a view to improving the integration of environmental and infrastructure policies into rural development,
 - P. having regard to the desirability of creating a solidarity fund or some other instrument to enable European farmers to continue farming,
- 1. Expresses its condolences to the families of the victims of these fires and its solidarity with the people living in the affected areas;
 - 2. Appreciates the indefatigable work and courage of firefighters, and the solidarity of volunteers, in their efforts to put out the many fires, so often at the risk of their lives;
 - 3. Appreciates the efforts of many Member States which have made available to the Mediterranean countries affected additional resources, both human and material; calls for better coordination and collaboration at European level in this area to enhance the response to specific needs in emergencies, including the sharing of human and technical resources, particularly water-bombing aircraft to combat forest fires;
 - 4. Notes the decision taken by the Commission to propose the mobilisation of the European Union's Solidarity Fund with a view to granting aid of EUR 31 655 million to Portugal to enable it to restore its infrastructures and reimburse the cost of the emergency measures, but considers that the contribution from the Solidarity Fund should be nearer the total emergency aid available under the EUSF, assessed at EUR 94 579 m;

5. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the regions affected to set up jointly an infrastructure restoration plan and a rehabilitation plan for the areas affected, seeking to reforest these areas and to prevent fires by reallocating a proportion of the Community's funds, particularly the structural funds, the EAGGF and the cohesion fund,
6. Calls for a reafforestation policy for the affected areas based on respect for their bioclimatic and environmental features, and hopes that great store will be set by the rehabilitation of the specific local rural landscape; stresses that research and the environmentally sound management of resources calls, in any given region, for a balance between agricultural and forestry potential, grazing and appropriate economic activities likely to give a boost to the areas in question, thus offering a real sustainable development option; stresses that the existence of these activities in forest regions means that there will be people to keep a watch for and help prevent fires, whether or not they are volunteers;
7. Stresses the importance which agricultural policy can have in preventing this type of disaster;
8. Considers it necessary to step up, as a matter of urgency, Community action to protect forests against fires, and calls on the Commission to introduce a financial instrument for preventing forest fires in its Forest Focus proposal, and to amend the Rural Development Regulation accordingly;
9. Further considers it necessary to establish a genuine common water management policy to deal with increasingly frequent droughts and erosion, which cause serious economic damage to agricultural production and farmers;
10. Calls on the Commission to establish measures in all the affected Member States to compensate for the losses suffered by European farmers as a result of the drought, given that the EU will have lower budgetary expenditure owing to the lower harvests;
11. Considers it desirable to look closely at the possibility of introducing new instruments for the management of agricultural crises as a result of extreme weather events, such as a special compensation fund or a Community insurance scheme, while respecting budget discipline.
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the governments of the Member States affected by the fires.