

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Session document

29.8.2007

B6-0324/07

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 Vittorio Prodi, Alfonso Andria, Jean Marie Beaupuy and Marios Matsakis

on behalf of the ALDE Group

on this summer's natural disasters

European Parliament resolution on this summer's natural disasters

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 6 and 174 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 September 2006 on forest fires and floods in Europe, its resolution of 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe¹, its resolution of 14 April 2005 on the drought in Portugal², its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the drought in Spain³, its resolution of 8 September 2005 on natural disasters (fires and floods) in Europe⁴ and its resolutions of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, droughts and floods) - agricultural aspects⁵, regional development aspects⁶ and environmental aspects⁷,
- having regard to the two joint public hearings organised by its Committee on Regional Development, its Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and its Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on a 'European Strategy for Natural Disasters' (20 March 2006) and on the 'European civil protection force: Europe aid' (5 October 2006),
- having regard to the Council decision of 23 October 2001 establishing a Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions (2001/792/EC, Euratom)⁸, to the forthcoming adoption of the recast Council decision establishing a Community civil protection mechanism and to Parliament's position of 24 October 2006⁹,
- having regard to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of December 1997 and the Community's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on 4 March 2002,
- having regard to Commission Report No 21553 on climate change and the European water dimension;
- having regard to the 'Forest Focus' regulation,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 November 1998 on a forestry strategy for the European Union (COM (1998)0649),

¹ OJ C 272 E, 13.11.2003, p. 471.

² OJ C 33 E, 9.2.2006, p. 599.

³ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 414.

⁴ OJ C 193 E, 17.8.2006, p. 322.

⁵ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2006)0222.

⁶ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2006)0223.

⁷ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2006)0224.

⁸ OJ L 297, 15.11.2001, p. 7.

⁹ Texts Adopted, P6_TA(2006)0286.

- having regard to the Commission proposal of 29 September 2004 on the LIFE+ programme and to Parliament's resolution of 2 May 2005 on LIFE+, financial instrument for the environment: multi-annual programme 2007-2013,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 June 2006 on the revised sustainable development strategy¹,
 - having regard to point 12 of the conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2005)0108), and to Parliament's position of 18 May 2006²,
 - 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 floods³,
 - having regard to the Council Decision of 5 March 2007 establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument (2007/162/EC, Euratom)⁴,
 - 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 Michel Barnier's report of 9 May 2006, entitled 'For a European civil protection force: Europe aid',
 - having regard to point 12 of the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006 concerning the Union's responsiveness to emergencies, crises and disasters,
 - having regard to the Commission communication on droughts⁵,
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the summer of 2007 was marked by particularly dramatic forest and other wild fires across Southern Europe, resulting in many cases in the loss of the lives of European citizens, including dedicated fire-fighting personnel, and in considerable material and environmental damage; whereas the area burned in July alone was as large as the total area burned during the whole of last year; whereas in the month of August, Greece has experienced a severe national tragedy as a result of one of the most lethal fire disasters to have occurred anywhere in the world since 1871,

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2006)0272.

² *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2006)0218.

³ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2007)0143.

⁴ OJ L 71, 10.3.2007, p. 9.

⁵ COM(2007) 414 final.

- B. whereas the total area of vegetation and woodland, including Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) forming part of the Natura 2000 network and other areas of major ecological value, with ecological connectivity between the whole region, that was affected by the fires in Europe this summer is more than 500 000 hectares, and whereas the most severely affected countries are Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, FYROM, Spain (and in particular the Canary Islands) and Albania,
- C. whereas in periods of drought, which are becoming increasingly long, it will always be more difficult to restore forests after a fire, with the attendant risk of desertification,
- D. whereas in recent years there has been a growing incidence of extreme climate events in Europe, including persistent drought and high temperatures causing the proliferation of forest fires, worsening desertification in many regions and affecting agriculture, stockbreeding and the forest heritage, and in other areas storms and exceptionally heavy rainfall causing record flooding and damage from landslides,
- E. having regard to the damaging economic and social consequences of the natural disasters for regional economies, productive activity, environmental diversity and tourism,
- F. whereas a large proportion of forest fires are started deliberately by arsonists in order to obtain permission to build in formerly protected forest areas,
- G. whereas the recent devastating forest fires in Greece alone resulted in the loss of more than 60 human lives, injuries to many people, the burning of thousands of hectares of forest and brush-land, the loss of animals, the destruction of many houses and properties and the obliteration of villages; whereas, during this crisis, 170 separate forest fires were reported in various places in Greece on the same day,
- H. whereas Italy has experienced the critical situation of floods in the Centre-North and droughts and fires in the South,
- I. whereas, at the same time, other parts of Europe experienced severe floods, in particular the UK, resulting in the loss of at least 10 lives and causing an estimated EUR 5 billion worth of damage to homes, schools, infrastructure and agriculture and the failure of supplies of clean water to over 420 000 people, leading to the displacement of large numbers of people and significant losses for businesses and the tourism industry; whereas exceptionally heavy rainfall in the West Midlands region of the UK of up to 142 mm in a day caused additional flash flooding which severely impeded efforts by the emergency services to deploy defences against rising river levels and further damage to infrastructure and property from landslides,
- J. whereas, with increasingly hot and dry summer seasons in Southern Europe, forest fires and other wild fires are a recurrent phenomenon, but still vary dramatically from year to year in intensity and in geographical location; whereas the trend of these disastrous events is also influenced by climate change and is linked to the increasing occurrence of heatwaves and droughts, as noted in the Commission communication on droughts,
- K. whereas the frequency, severity, complexity and impact of natural and man-made disasters across Europe has increased rapidly over recent years; whereas the damaging effects of

these disasters have been exacerbated by planning, development and land-use policies, increasing the risk of fires spreading and decreasing natural drainage and water absorption into the environment,

- L. whereas the increasing occurrence of heatwaves has a disproportionate effect on vulnerable groups of the population, and especially the elderly, too often resulting in casualties and loss of life,
- M. whereas the Community Civil Protection Mechanism was activated nine times for the same kind of emergency in a time period of five weeks, and seven of the emergencies were simultaneous; whereas Member States' assistance was not sufficient to ensure a rapid and adequate civil protection response to all of the emergencies,
- N. whereas the Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development and the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy have, in the past 12 months, written to the Presidencies of the Council to urge them to reach a decision on the new Solidarity Fund regulation, bearing in mind that Parliament adopted its position back in May 2006,
 - 1. Expresses its strong solidarity with the relatives of those who lost their lives and with residents in the affected areas, and pays tribute to the fire-fighters, professionals and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to extinguish fires, rescue people and limit damage from this summer's natural disasters;
 - 2. Acknowledges the solidarity of the European Union, its Member States and other countries in assisting the affected regions during forest fire emergencies with the supply of aircraft, fire-fighting equipment and expertise, as well as the commendable help provided to the relevant authorities and rescue services;
 - 3. Considers that the dimensions of these phenomena and their consequences go beyond the regional and national scale and capacities and urgently call for new and more effective European instruments; regrets, in this connection, the lack of response and follow-up to the proposal for the creation of a European Civil Protection Force that could immediately react to emergencies at a European level (Barnier report), already called for by Parliament on several occasions and in several reports; considers that such a force would play a fundamental role, especially in the prevention, management and reconstruction phases;
 - 4. Recognises the contribution of the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) in supporting and facilitating the mobilisation and coordination of civil protection assistance during emergencies; notes, however, that Member States' resources to combat forest fires, especially by aerial means, are limited and that it is not always possible for Member States to offer support when the resources are needed nationally; notes, as a result, that some Member States received less assistance than needed and had to rely on bilateral agreements with non-EU states for assistance; regrets, therefore, that in some cases the EU as a whole failed to display sufficient solidarity;
 - 5. Strongly urges the Council to reach a decision, without further delay, on the new EU Solidarity Fund regulation, bearing in mind that Parliament adopted its position in May 2006; believes that the new regulation, which - among other measures - lowers the thresholds for the mobilisation of the EU Solidarity Fund, will be able to address damage

in a more effective, flexible and timely manner and should be applicable to the repair of damaged road and railway infrastructure; calls on the Portuguese Presidency-in-Office, as well as the EU Ministers for Finance, Environment and Regional Development, to take swift and firm action immediately;

6. Considers that the past years' and recent experience emphasises the need to strengthen the Community civil protection prevention preparedness and response capability in connection with forest and other wild fires, and strongly urges the Commission to take action towards this end;
7. Welcomes the recent Council Decision of 5 March 2007 establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument and believes that the actions receiving financial assistance under this instrument should ensure the visible expression of European solidarity and provide further European added value to the effective management of natural disasters; is concerned, however, that the amount allocated to this new instrument will not be sufficient to carry out its ambitious tasks effectively;
8. Invites the Commission to look into the possibility of having prearranged access to a complementary capacity geared to ensuring a rapid response to major emergencies, which may be available from other sources, including the commercial market; suggests that the cost of the stand-by force could be covered through the Civil Protection Financial Instrument;
9. Emphasises, in this context, the need to continue the development of a rapid reaction capability based on the civil protection modules of the Member States, as called for by the Brussels European Council of 16 and 17 June 2006;
10. Stresses that natural disasters, and in particular forest fires, have this year placed in considerable danger monuments and archaeological sites that are of major importance to the European cultural heritage;
11. Invites the Commission to explore the potential for cooperation with the EU's neighbouring countries and other third countries in fighting disastrous fires, exchanging best practices and/or capacities during the hazardous summer months in order to be better prepared for the forest fires season in 2008;
12. Emphasises the need for stronger measures aimed at the prevention of natural disasters; in this connection, eagerly awaits the publication in 2008 of two Commission studies aimed at the creation of an integrated strategy for the prevention of natural disasters;
13. Voices its concern at the growing number of disasters caused by extreme climate events which, according to the experts, may be attributed largely to climate change due to global warming; calls, accordingly, on the Member States to take the necessary steps to comply with the Kyoto goals, and calls on the Commission to take action to ensure respect for the Kyoto commitments and secure their follow-up;
14. Believes that its resolution of 15 June 2006 on the revised sustainable development strategy contains key elements and principles to follow, and urges timely implementation of the strategy;

15. Believes that the key role should go to global and regional prevention, rather than damage limitation after the event;
16. Calls for comprehensive forest care, to reduce as far as possible the fire load of forests and the spread and velocity of fires; points out that the recovered biomass could contribute to the economical feasibility of the operation;
17. Expects all Member States to have comprehensive and effective plans for the management of forest fire disasters, including civil evacuation procedures subjected to regular scrutiny and review at centralised EU level;
18. Deplores the fact that so many of these forest fires appear to have been started by acts of arson; calls on the Member States to pursue without delay measures to bring the arsonists to justice, in order to discourage any further deliberate criminal behaviour;
19. Regrets that intentional fires are caused because of land speculation; considers, accordingly, that it is time for an EU-level law to protect burned forest areas from subsequent utilisation as building land and for a compulsory programme of reforestation after forest fires;
20. Believes that such disasters can be handled efficiently only at Community level and therefore require an effective response at a strengthened European level, with, if necessary, new Community instruments for preventing and dealing with the problem;
21. Urges better use of existing financial and technical means and scientific improvements in the prevention and alleviation of the effects of disasters;
22. 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, following by a proportionate punishment, would discourage negligent and deliberate behaviour;
23. Calls on the Commission and Member States to review planning and land-use policies and best practice in the light of the latest research on the increased risks of flooding and forest fires caused by the way in which land, habitat and drainage are managed, and to promote a more sustainable policy framework that facilitates natural drainage and water retention in the environment as far as possible, while also increasing the capacity of flood control and drainage infrastructure to limit the damage from extreme rainfall;
24. Calls on the Commission to carry out more research geared to improving forest fire prevention and forest fire-fighting methods and materials, together with research into possible changes in planting policy and practices, to take account of the ever increasing fire risks faced in EU Member States;
25. Calls on the Commission to undertake an in-depth analysis of the consequences and repercussions of the 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;

26. Calls on the Commission and all relevant public authorities to take into account climate change and the increased likelihood of disasters such as flooding and forest fires when it comes to setting budgets and contingency reserves for the emergency services and for schemes such as the Solidarity Fund to alleviate damage;
27. 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.