

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2624/03
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to the Council

Subject: Establishment of a European civil protection corps

The fires which recently swept through Europe, destroying several thousand hectares of vegetation, highlighted the chronic lack of forest fire prevention and control resources. The Commission must respond to such disasters with the utmost urgency.

While the existence of a European civil protection centre in which the EU Member States plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein are involved and the setting up on 18 August 2002 of a European Solidarity Fund are a cause for some hope, given the devastating impact which fires have on the communities and local councils concerned and the damage they cause to the environment and economic activities such as forestry and tourism, fire-fighting resources need to be stepped up and new prevention and intervention rules need to be laid down at European level.

The management of forests and other natural resources, which cover 60 million hectares in 25 countries in the Mediterranean area, must remain an economic and social priority. The establishment of a European civil protection corps would enable such disasters to be dealt with more effectively.

There are many arguments in favour of a new administrative and technical entity, which could be placed under the supervision of the European Parliament and under the responsibility of the competent national authorities, given that civil protection falls within the sphere of responsibility of the Member States.

In the run-up to the forthcoming enlargement, this would send out a strong signal in support of European forests. What are the Council's views on this proposal? Can it take action in support of the establishment of a European civil protection corps?