

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1358/08
by Marcello Vernola (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Refusal to grant compensation for summer forest fires on the Gargano promontory (Puglia, Italy)

On 26 September 2007 the Italian Civil Protection Department sent the Commission a request for support from the European Union Solidarity Fund in respect of the damage caused to certain southern regions by summer forest fires, including those which had occurred in Puglia, on the Gargano promontory, on 24 July. The Commission declared the request to be admissible on the day after its receipt, but asked for supplementary information from the regions concerned. However, following consideration of the matter, it sent the Civil Protection Department a letter of refusal, on two grounds: the extent of the damage claimed by the Puglia region (EUR 60 m) was not enough to trigger the release of EU aid and the request had been submitted a long time after the first outbreak of forest fires, which dated back to June. It should be pointed out that the events of 24 July were unrelated to those of June, since the latter had been caused by arson while the former resulted from a natural disaster, due to a strong southwesterly wind and temperatures of over 40°C.

Will the Commission clarify its reasons for rejecting the request?

Does the Commission consider that the initial admissibility decision was taken rather hastily, or can it explain how the request was initially deemed to have been submitted in good time, with the result that the Puglia region forwarded additional documents?

Should the Puglia Region's compensation request be definitively rejected for reasons of form or substance, will the Commission indicate whether use could be made of other financial instruments (in particular the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development - EAFRD - and, in the specific case of arson, measures against environmental offences under the Work Programme for the Prevention of and Fight against Crime)?

Does the Commission not consider that the damage threshold laid down in Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002¹ in effect makes the instrument inapplicable to cases of forest fires, given that forests are generally sparsely populated areas?

¹ OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3.