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on natural disasters (fires, drought and floods) - regional development aspects

(2005/2193(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	3
PROCEDURE	12

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on natural disasters (fires, drought and floods) - regional development aspects (2005 – 2005/2193(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication on reinforcing EU disaster and crisis response in third countries (COM(2005)0153),
- having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2005 entitled 'Winning the Battle Against Global Climate Change'¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication on improving the Community Civil Protection Mechanism (COM(2005)0137),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a Council decision establishing a Community Civil Protection Mechanism (recast), (COM(2006)0029),
- having regard to the Commission communication on flood risk management - flood prevention, protection and mitigation (COM(2004)0472),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment and management of floods (COM(2006)0015),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2006)0108),
- having regard to Articles 2 and 6 of the EC Treaty, according to which environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the other Community policies, with a view to promoting economic development that is environmentally sustainable,
- having regard to the Commission report on climate change and the European water dimension²,
- having regard to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change of 11 December 1997 and the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by the European Community on 31 May 2002,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 2152/2003 of the European Parliament and the Council of 17 November 2003 concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community (Forest Focus)³,

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005) 0433.

² Scientific report of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, published in February 2005, EUR 21533: http://ies.jrc.cec.eu.int/Scientific_Reports.271.0.html.

³ OJ L 324, 11.12.2003, p.1

- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)¹,
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds²,
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1164/1994 of 16 May 1994 establishing a Cohesion Fund³, as amended by Council Regulations (EC) No 1264/1999⁴ and (EC) No 1265/1999⁵ of 21 June 1999,
 - having regard to European Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999 of 12 July 1999 on the European Social Fund⁶,
 - having regard to the Commission communication on a European Union strategy for the forestry sector (COM(1998)0649),
 - having regard to the Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the financial instrument for the environment (LIFE+), (COM(2004)0621),
 - having regard to its resolution of 8 September 2005 on the natural disasters (fires and floods) of this summer in Europe⁷,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0147/2006),
- A. whereas natural disasters in the European Union have caused the deaths of 65 000 people since 1980 and have cost EUR 124 200 million, according to UN figures,
- B. whereas the torrential rain in August 2005 caused the most serious floods in Europe since 2002 and caused the deaths of 70 people,
- C. whereas fires once again destroyed thousands of hectares of forest in 2005 and, what is more serious, cost the lives of more than 30 civilians and firemen, and the extraordinary drought has contributed and continues to contribute to the worsening of this phenomenon which has become an annual scourge for the regions and countries affected,
- D. whereas the fires have resulted in major personal tragedies involving in particular the destruction of houses and agricultural property and the loss of hundreds of animals,

¹ OJ L 277, 21.10.2005, p.1

² OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 1.

³ OJ L 130, 25.5.1994, p. 1.

⁴ OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 57.

⁵ OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 62.

⁶ OJ L 213, 13.8.1999, p. 5.

⁷ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0334.

- E. whereas the drought in 2005 was of exceptional intensity and duration, especially in the south and west of Europe, and severely affected practically the whole territory of Portugal and wide areas of Spain, France and Italy,
- F. whereas natural disasters have a catastrophic short and long-term impact on the economy of the regions, especially in less prosperous areas concerned by the convergence objective or ones affected by natural constraints, with adverse repercussions on infrastructure, economic potential, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism, all of which has an adverse effect on social and economic cohesion,
- G. whereas drought and persistent fires are speeding up the process of desertification of large areas of southern Europe, especially in Mediterranean forested areas and in extensive woodlands comprising a single, non-native species which is highly vulnerable to fire, seriously endangering the quality of life of the populations affected, depriving them of the water required for basic survival needs and resulting in the loss of all crops and hence in speculation in the price of animal feed,
- H. whereas natural disasters occur when an extreme weather situation hits a vulnerable area and, therefore, it is necessary to reduce the fragility of these regions, bearing in mind that extreme climatic phenomena are becoming increasingly frequent,
- I. whereas there must be perfect dovetailing with all the synergies created under the European Neighbourhood Policy - in particular with the Euro-Med Partnership countries, which are in a similar situation,
- J. whereas, because of their geographical situation, the outermost regions are exposed to specific and severe risks of natural disasters, in particular cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or even tsunamis,
- K. whereas some factors linked to human activity may aggravate the impact of natural disasters, such as intensive farming, involving the traditional use of fire as a farming tool, deforestation, the massive reduction in the natural flood retention capacity of river basins and intensive urbanisation in areas at risk and also the invasion of mountain areas by urban dwellers in pursuit of certain leisure activities,
- L. whereas drought decisively contributes to the spread of fires, which is the main cause of the deterioration of Europe's forests,
- M. whereas the common agricultural policy as successively reformed has promoted the concentration of production which has contributed to the steady desertification of rural areas and the abandonment of farming, thereby increasing the risk of forest fire and aggravating the consequences of drought,
- N. whereas the phenomenon of forest fires is also aggravated by: the progressive abandonment of the countryside, farming and its traditional activities, inadequate forest maintenance, the existence of large expanses of forest consisting of one single tree species, the planting of unsuitable tree varieties and the absence of a proper prevention policy with adequate instruments and funding at EU level and inadequately severe penalties in the case of fires started deliberately,

- O. whereas the European Union needs to acknowledge the specific nature of natural disasters occurring in the Mediterranean such as drought and fire and to adapt its prevention, research, risk-management, civil-defence and solidarity tools,
- P. whereas Europe should step up measures to adjust to climate change, something which requires effort on the part of local, regional, national and European authorities, but also on the part of the population and of the industrial and transport sectors,
- Q. whereas the European Union's prevention measures to tackle all types of natural disaster need to be enhanced by establishing, where necessary, joint strategic guidelines to ensure better coordination between the Member States, as well as greater operability and coordination between the various Community instruments (structural funds, future European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), future financial instrument for the environment (LIFE+) and future rapid response and preparedness instrument for major emergencies),
- R. whereas there are still shortcomings in Community operations which are aggravated by the diversity and the differing levels of development found in the arrangements made by the individual Member States for combating natural disasters,
- S. whereas the Structural Funds should play a more substantial role in funding measures designed to prevent disasters and to tackle their consequences, and whereas the Community instrument specifically envisaged for this, the European Solidarity Fund, has proved ineffective in practice - hence the proposed revision which is currently under way,
- T. whereas preventive measures reduce the material damage that floods cause to housing, infrastructure and production activities, as was demonstrated in the Alpine regions, where the floods in 2005 caused much less damage than those in 2002, despite being on a larger scale,
- U. whereas, nevertheless, Community fire-prevention measures are restricted almost exclusively to the rural development policy and have so far clearly proved to be inadequate, which demonstrates the need for a specific, adequately funded Community forest protection programme designed to prevent and manage the risk of forest fires and tailored to the specific nature of Mediterranean forests,
- V. whereas intensive information campaigns on the sustainable use of water may reduce water consumption considerably and thus alleviate serious drought situations,
- W. noting the lack of coordination between the competent public administrations and that prevention, disaster management and assistance to the territories and direct victims involved are the three axes for action by the European Union, in which it should play a more active and in particular a preventive role,
- X. whereas there is evident dissatisfaction among ordinary people, broad sections of society, NGOs and representatives of civil society,
- 1. Considers that the Commission should submit a proposal to draw up a European strategy to combat natural disasters, including a compulsory approach for risk prevention, and

devise a technical protocol suited to each type of disaster and each forest eco-system for joint action by the Union;

2. Acknowledges the specific nature of the natural disasters which occur in the Mediterranean such as drought and forest fire and urges the Commission to adapt Community prevention, research, risk-management, civil-defence and solidarity tools with a view to facilitating a more satisfactory response to such disasters;
3. Considers that an exhaustive survey should be drawn up in all the Member States of the locations which are most vulnerable to fires and to prolonged droughts - and also of the resources available at those locations - with a view to devising a preventive strategy and enabling genuinely effective action and coordination to be carried out at local level;
4. Considers, furthermore, that this proposal should also include measures designed to ensure that water is used rationally and efficiently by major water consumers - i.e. farmers, urban users and industry; calls for the 'user pays' and 'polluter pays' principles to be applied in order to ensure that water is managed more rationally and that effluent is more extensively monitored and checked;
5. Considers that this strategy should devote particular attention to isolated regions with low population density and suffering from depopulation, mountainous areas and border, outlying and extremely remote regions concerned by the convergence objective;
6. Points out that local and regional authorities throughout the EU are becoming increasingly aware of the issue of natural catastrophes and points to the unsubstitutable role of regional and local actors in prevention, disaster management and alleviation of the impact of natural catastrophes upon individuals;
7. Stresses the need to adjust the action of the Structural Funds in the prevention and management of natural disasters as well as to coordinate them with the other existing Community instruments, in order to tackle the disasters; urges that, in the forthcoming financial programming for 2007-2013, the necessary flexibility should be ensured in the redistribution of resources available among the different funds, in order to improve their operability in the event of disasters;
8. Urges the Commission to make available the resources needed for the purpose of relieving the suffering and satisfying the material needs of all victims of natural disasters and their immediate families, by means of the European Solidarity Fund and other Community instruments;
9. Points out that measures to prevent and combat fires and floods are eligible under the Structural Funds for the new programming period, and thus calls on the Council to bear this in mind and to be consistent in its common positions;
10. Stresses that restorative measures receiving financial assistance from the European Union should include measures aimed at preventing reoccurrences of disasters;
11. Believes that the Council should consider the most effective measures to prevent and respond effectively to the direct and inevitable needs which may result from a disastrous

fire;

12. Considers that the 2007-2013 financial framework must include a Community forest-fire protection programme designed to promote adequately funded forest-fire awareness-raising, prevention and risk-management initiatives dovetailing with agricultural- and structural-policy measures;
13. Points out that the existence of an extensive network of small and medium-sized farms and of an agricultural policy which promotes more sustainable production methods (particularly in the use of water and soil) could help reduce the effects of drought and forest fire;
14. Notes that, following the European Council decision of December 2005, the objective 'Territorial Cooperation' has been substantially reduced, particularly as regards its transnational and interregional dimension; calls on the Commission to ensure that the financial allocation is adequate in the current negotiations, in order not to hamper the implementation of measures to prevent and combat the impact of natural disasters covered by the Interreg programme; also stresses the importance of cooperation with neighbouring third countries on matters concerning floods and fires;
15. Considers that the Commission should submit a proposal for a directive for fire prevention and management in the European Union, in order to make the best possible use of the existing Community and national resources for tackling the phenomenon on the lines of the proposal for a directive on the assessment and management of floods; also considers that a similar proposal should be drafted on drought-risk prevention and management and asks it to look into the establishment of a European monitoring centre for drought and desertification integrated into the activities of the seventh framework research programme (2007-2013);
16. Suggests that Parliament should begin to monitor deficiencies in means and equipment and all relevant problems in the fight against fires;
17. Calls on the Commission to draft a communication forthwith on earthquake-risk prevention, management and assessment in the same way as for other natural disasters (floods, fires, drought);
18. Calls on the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, regional and local authorities and other interested institutions, to gather and disseminate good practice case studies of measures adopted to prevent and effectively manage natural catastrophes;
19. Calls on the Council and the Member States to step up research into disaster prevention under the 7th framework programme, which is in the process of being adopted, paying particular attention to the improvement of early-warning systems and systems for the gathering and the real-time transmission of data;
20. Notes the launching of the pilot phase for the creation of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) initiative, which should enable the European Union to improve the forecasting, monitoring and assessment of natural disasters, and urges that the financial allocation for the initiative should be increased and that the action programme

should be extended to cover all natural disasters that might occur within the Member States;

21. Calls for the launching of the GALILEO system, which should help to improve the European Union's ability to anticipate, monitor and understand extreme meteorological weather situations and natural phenomena; also calls for the use of other kinds of equipment and means so as to detect fire outbreaks and effectively prevent fire bursts;
22. Deplores the fact that the Commission communication reporting on the implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy (COM(2005)0084) does not devote special attention to the issue of fires, ignoring the fact that they are the main cause of the deterioration of forests; therefore calls on the Member States to remedy this deficiency and asks the Commission to include the necessary measures in the Forestry Action Plan which it is to submit in the near future and which must contain provision for a possible European Fire Fund or European Forest Fund which could be used to support action intended to conserve and restore the mountain and forest areas included in the Natura 2000 network;
23. Suggests that the Member States should include and be obliged to carry out measures to combat drought and desertification and to prevent fires and flooding in the context of their rural development plans by encouraging participation by farmers in the replanting of forests with suitable species, in clearing out forests, in combating erosion and in making better use of water since farmers are the main guardians of the countryside; consequently, calls for the aid established for the creation of fire-breaks in Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)¹ to be maintained and for better support for measures designed to increase the profitability of forests and to prevent the depopulation of less economically productive mountain areas which may lie within the Mediterranean region (with particular attention to be paid to keeping combined farming/forestry/grazing operations in business and to protecting meadows);
24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to devise information and education campaigns on prevention and combating measures agreed on with the Member States in order to reduce the risks and consequences of natural disasters, especially in the areas of highest risk, by making the public aware of the need to care for the environment and conserve natural resources by avoiding, inter alia, agricultural practices or leisure activities that entail risks; also calls on the Commission to promote training drills to minimise the negative effects during the outbreak of a disaster;
25. Urges the Commission to promote (in connection with EU training programmes and programmes for the exchange of sound working practices) a special programme for firefighters and firefighting specialists with a view to enabling such individuals to undertake additional tasks relating to the protection, conservation, improvement and restoration of mountain areas, and thus to secure safe jobs and stable employment; also urges the Commission to consider the possibility of proposing an EU evaluation and approval scheme both for firefighting teams and for the training and skills of firefighters themselves;

¹ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80.

26. Calls on the Commission to study and to propose to the Council and the European Parliament ways of implementing coercive measures which will discourage negligence and deliberate action in the starting of fires (legal remedies, police intervention, labelling of such action as an environmental offence, etc.);
27. Deplores the fact that the fire prevention measures under the 'Forest Focus' programme do not form part of the priority issues in the future 'LIFE+' instrument; calls on the Commission and the Council to include those measures in the future instrument and to provide adequate funding;
28. Since many areas have witnessed a very high rate of forest degradation over the last few years, calls on the Commission to devise schemes which will enable the forests in such areas to be replanted with native species, thereby ensuring that the objectives of ecosystem recovery and the prevention of further disasters are adopted in the public interest and not just as a private initiative, and that the effect of disasters on climate change is reduced;
29. Notes the abovementioned Commission proposal for a decision establishing a Community civil protection mechanism (COM(2006)0029), in particular the enhancement of the MIC (Monitoring and Information Centre), with the possibility of Community funding for transport expenditure; calls on the Council to adopt this decision as soon as possible and to consider strengthening the instrument, in particular measures on the ground, as well as making the best use of the scant resources available;
30. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to work jointly on substantially improving the coordination and communication of information on existing resources in the event of disasters, by devising harmonised implementation methods for the purpose with a particular view to ensuring that the essential emergency operations which are necessary if land-based and airborne forest-fire combat equipment is to be made immediately available for a limited period of time can be carried out;
31. Reiterates that, in its resolution of 4 September 2003 on the effects of the summer heatwave¹, it advocated the establishment of a European Civil Protection Force and calls on the Commission to insist on this objective; believes that this European force should be alert during the summer season, when Europe and especially the Mediterranean countries are always under the threat of fires and that each Member State could contribute to this European force by providing equipment, means and personnel;
32. Calls on the Member States and regional and local authorities to remove administrative and spatial barriers to civil protection and support greater flexibility and operability of rescue teams (fire brigades, medical emergency, police, mountain, marine and mining rescue teams) in neighbouring regions;
33. Emphasises the importance of the EU Solidarity Fund as the main instrument that should enable the European Union to react rapidly to major disasters, such as floods, fires or drought, as well as to cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or even tsunamis; urges the Commission and the Council to adopt Parliament's proposals for a review of that fund,

¹ OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 382.

with particular reference to extending the assistance provided to all victims of natural disasters and their immediate families;

34. Urges the Council to adapt the EUSF with particular reference to time limits and eligible actions in order to enable it to deal with the kind of natural disasters which occur in the Mediterranean, such as drought and forest fire;
35. Considers that the EUSF should continue to enable action to be taken in the case of disasters which - although significant - do not achieve the minimum level required and that assistance may also be provided in special circumstances in cases where most of the population in a specific region has been affected by a disaster which will have a serious, long-term effect on their living conditions;
36. Nevertheless, points to the need for the involvement of other existing instruments, such as State aid for regional purposes or EIB loans, with the aim of preventing if possible natural disasters from happening and remedying the damage caused by natural disasters;
37. Asks that the setting up of an agriculture disaster fund be looked into for the purpose of providing compensation for any loss of income stemming from crop losses on the part of farmers affected by natural disasters;
38. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the national, regional and local authorities of the areas affected by natural disasters in 2005, as well as to the Committee of the Regions.

PROCEDURE

Title	Natural disasters (fires, drought and floods) - regional development aspects				
Procedure number	2005/2193(INI)				
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	REGI 27.10.2005				
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary					
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision					
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary					
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Gerardo Galeote Quecedo 23.1.2006				
Previous rapporteur(s)					
Discussed in committee	23.1.2006	22.2.06	6.3.2006	20.3.2006	20.4.2006
Date adopted	20.4.2006				
Result of final vote	+: 39 -: 5 0: 1				
Members present for the final vote	Alfonso Andria, Elspeth Attwooll, Jana Bobošíková, Graham Booth, Bairbre de Brún, Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Ambroise Guellec, Pedro Guerreiro, Marian Harkin, Konstantinos Hatzidakis, Jim Higgins, Alain Hutchinson, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Tunne Kelam, Miloš Koterec, Constanze Angela Krehl, Jamila Madeira, Sérgio Marques, Yiannakis Matsis, Miroslav Mikolášik, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Francisca Pleguezuelos Aguilar, Elisabeth Schroedter, Alyn Smith, Grażyna Staniszevska, Margie Sudre, Salvatore Tatarella, Oldřich Vlasák				
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Inés Ayala Sender, Bastiaan Belder, Thijs Berman, Simon Busuttil, Brigitte Douay, Jillian Evans, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Louis Grech, Marcin Libicki, László Surján, Manfred Weber				
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Sharon Bowles				
Date tabled	27.4.2006				
Comments (available in one language only)	...				