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2 **On uncontrolled forest fires in Southern Europe**

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4 On the day of 15th October huge forest fires took over many places in Southern Europe  
5 leading to massive destruction and dramatic loss of lives and goods. A combination of  
6 several factors led to an unprecedented wave of fires that remained uncontrolled during  
7 the following days.

8  
9 Abnormal weather conditions for October, including high temperatures, very strong winds  
10 originated by the Ophelia storm and a severe and prolonged drought period, tragically hit a  
11 vulnerable and potentially explosive forest and landscape. Those were very dark days in  
12 Portugal, France, Italy, Spain and other countries in Europe.

13  
14 In these days, in Portugal, more than 200.000 hectares were consumed by the flames,  
15 more than 45 lives were taken, and more than 700 fire ignitions were reported. In the North  
16 of Spain (Galicia and Asturias mainly) these vast fires resulted in four dead people. In ~~the~~  
17 ~~North-Western Italian region of Piemonte the very large fires lasted for many days and in~~  
18 Corsica, France, 2000 hectares were burnt.

19  
20 Many of these Southern European countries have experienced a historical record of forest  
21 fires this year. In Portugal, more than 440.000 hectares of land have been burned and  
22 more than 110 people were killed trapped by the fires. ~~In Italy more than 140.000 hectares~~  
23 ~~were burnt and in France 16.000 hectares have been destroyed by flames.~~

24  
25 Although forest fires are a common and natural occurrence in the Mediterranean region  
26 and its ecosystems, the man-induced modifications, especially in the forest composition  
27 and agriculture type, have increased the vulnerability of the Mediterranean territory to  
28 forest fires that are no longer occurring within the natural pattern, and which thus have  
29 much more tragic consequences.

30  
31 This has been the result of inadequate forest policies, leading to depopulation of rural  
32 areas, to the abandonment of the traditional, diverse and difficult-to-burn agricultural  
33 landscape, and its replacement by homogeneous pine forest and scrubland or extensive  
34 flammable monocultures such as eucalyptus. The uncontrolled expansion of settlements  
35 and infrastructure in natural and rural areas is adding great risks to human life. Also, in  
36 Italy, France, Spain and Portugal fires were often provoked by intentional arsonists or by  
37 carelessness.

38  
39 To some extent, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) supports and promotes big  
40 corporations, enabling them to compete in the international market. By doing so, the CAP  
41 kills small farmers and traditional agriculture. This not only leads to the desertification of

42 the rural areas leaving them without surveillance, but also destroys the agriculture fields  
43 that have worked in the past as stopgaps between forested areas, thus slowing and  
44 stopping wild fires.

45  
46 The forest fires are ~~an annual recurrent~~ tragedy and the vulnerability of the Portuguese  
47 Southern European forest to fires is a big issue. The sustainability of the forest and  
48 agriculture policies have been a core issue for the Greens. Currently the Portuguese  
49 Greens have been negotiating with the Government to halt the growth of the eucalyptus  
50 tree area. This has been a hard issue to negotiate, but finally is reaching the light of day. In  
51 Portugal the forest area represents 35% of the territory, and the forestry industry is a heavy  
52 weight in the economy. Following the demand of this industry, nowadays eucalyptus areas  
53 represent more than 26% of the Portuguese forest. This is a direct result of the promotion  
54 of pulp & paper industry in replacement of the more traditional woods of oaks, chestnuts  
55 and maritime pine tree (for construction and furniture industries), of the cork tree (and  
56 associated cork industry), and last but not the least, of the traditional Portuguese  
57 agriculture. ~~This process was caused by the more aggressive European Union Agriculture~~  
58 ~~Policy. To some extent, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) supports and promotes big~~  
59 ~~corporations, enabling them to compete in the international market. By doing so, the CAP~~  
60 ~~kills small farmers and traditional agriculture. This not only leads to the desertification of~~  
61 ~~the rural areas leaving them without surveillance, but also destroys the agriculture fields~~  
62 ~~that have worked in the past as stopgaps between forested areas, thus slowing and~~  
63 ~~stopping wild fires.~~

64  
65 In Greece, more than 5.5 million acres of forest and farmland were burnt in the past 10  
66 years, with multiple consequences not only in terms of biodiversity loss, human losses,  
67 enormous economic damage but also causing the desertification of soil due to erosion  
68 and loss of soil structure, groundwater level decline, and catastrophic floods from the  
69 intense weather phenomena that appear more and more frequently.

70  
71 In France if the amount of area burnt has decreased since the 1990s as the firefighters are  
72 better equipped and the tools to detect and prevent the fires are more efficient, the risk of  
73 forest fire is nevertheless bound to increase.

74  
75 In 2017, in Italy more than 141.000 hectares of land burnt, 316% more than the average of last 10  
76 years. The sum of land burnt from 2010 to 2017 reaches 446.919 hectares. The economical loss  
77 amount to 900 million of euros only in 2017, since 2010 the total amount of damages is more than  
78 9 billion euros. From 2000 to 2015 the 71% of fires are man-made. 87 European relevant natural  
79 sites in Italy have been hit by fires. 5684 people have been incriminated of which 181 drawn in  
80 arrest in flagrancy of crime or submitted to measures of custody.

81  
82 The annual budget allocated to forest fires by the EU, the state and the local authorities  
83 amounts to half a billion euros, 2/3 of which are used to fight the fires, 1/3 to prevent

84 them. This does not take into account the environmental damages and the cost to repair  
85 them.

86  
87 In some of these countries, the depletion of public services such as forest surveillance  
88 ones, especially during austerity times, and the lack of technical means to tackle and fight  
89 the fires, contributed to a progressively weakened ability to effectively address this  
90 problem.

91  
92 At the global level, 29.7 million hectares were destroyed in 2016 by the fire, as much as  
93 New Zealand territory, and more than 51% than in 2015.

94  
95 Indeed, the increased temperatures and drought exacerbate the risk of forest fire since  
96 they increase the length of the fire season and the size and location of the risk areas to  
97 more areas where it will be more difficult to fight the fire. Moreover, growing urban sprawl  
98 and the decrease in logging, that leads to less clearing, also puts our forests at risk.

99  
100 Climate change will further add to this explosive mix, with increased occurrence of drought  
101 periods and very warm temperatures. Therefore, while implementing much needed  
102 adaptation measures is essential, such as replacing eucalyptus with more fire resilient  
103 species, climate change mitigation is equally important.

104  
105 The Paris agreement needs to be implemented urgently. Innovative and transformative  
106 transport policies, renewable energy and meat production need to be designed and  
107 implemented. It is imperative to reduce the use of fossil fuels, to effectively and massively  
108 promote public transport, the local food production and, if not possible, the sustainable  
109 transportation of goods, and reduce meat production. To do so, it is necessary to reform  
110 the Common Agriculture Policy and to promote and focus on small scale agriculture,  
111 farmers and local markets.

112  
113 The forest fires also show the extent of environmental activities: if they impact everyone,  
114 those who have less are the least equipped to deal with its consequences, defend their  
115 goods and prepare their future after the fires. We need to rethink our systems of solidarity  
116 so that they include the loss and damages from environmental destruction and involve the  
117 polluters in dealing with any damage which has a human cause.

118  
119 The European Greens ~~gathered in Karlstad, Sweden:~~  
120 1. Express their solidarity with ~~the~~ victims' families and with the countries affected by  
121 forest fires;  
122 2. Call for greater action on forest fires due to ~~Urge the need to take into consideration~~  
123 ~~seriously and effectively the effect of~~ climate change and extreme weather  
124 ~~conditions in the forest fires,~~ especially ~~concerning in the~~ Mediterranean  
125 ~~regionregion, which is particularly badly affected. majorly affected.~~ This has to be



- 126 taken into ~~account~~ consideration in the fight against to prevent and tackle forest  
127 fires;
- 128 ~~3. Urge the need~~ Encourage to reform ~~of the the~~ Common Agriculture Policy in order to  
129 support small scale farmers and local crops and markets, ensuring that rural areas  
130 are kept alive;
- 131 ~~4. Call on the European Commission and Member States to ensure coherence and~~  
132 consistency across EU policies to guarantee the transition of the CAP from agro-  
133 business monocultures towards the financing of biodiverse agro-ecosystems. This  
134 remains the most efficient way to prevent forest fires;
- 135 ~~5. State that~~ Believe it is imperative to return to original more acclimatised forest, that  
136 is more resistant to wild fires;
- 137 ~~6. Call for the possibility of excluding public expenses and investments to address the~~  
138 victims of fire, the reconstruction of destroyed areas and the reinforcement of  
139 public services from the deficit calculation; ~~Ask that a process to open the deficit~~  
140 ~~limit is instated so that countries can use much needed budget to address victims~~  
141 ~~of the fire, the reconstruction of the destroyed areas, and reinforce the needed~~  
142 ~~public services.~~
- 143 ~~7. Acknowledge the new possibility for the EU to co-finance up to 95% of the~~  
144 reconstruction efforts linked to natural disasters and ask for a bigger share of the  
145 ESI funds to be devoted to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as to  
146 risk prevention and management in the future.
- 147 ~~•8. State the need to~~ Call for the strengthening of ~~reinforce the~~ EFFIS – European Forest  
148 Fire Information System (EFFIS)
- 149 ~~9. Call on the European Union to create a Prevention Center on Fires with structural~~  
150 funds;
- 151 ~~10. Propose building a network of European Security Systems for Environmental~~  
152 matters and the security system for the control of the region should not be  
153 terminated;
- 154 ~~11. State that~~ Believe more resources have to be devoted to ~~the~~ public environmental  
155 prosecution services;
- 156 ~~12. Urge~~ Call for that new measures to should be taken into considerations during the  
157 critical period of fires.
- 158 ~~13. State that security systems appointed for the control of the region should not be~~  
159 laid off (i.e. the Italian “Corpo Forestale dello Stato”, that was appointed for the  
160 control and the safekeeping of the natural environment, but was abolished by the  
161 government last year)
- 162 ~~— Urge that greens should work on a structural resolution about climate change and~~  
163 desertification
- 164 ~~— State that the European Union, should, through structural funds, create a Prevention~~  
165 Center on Fires
- 166 ~~— State that high risk of fire areas have to be prioritized when planning the distribution~~  
167 of resources and prevention measures via the Structural Funds and the European  
168 Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.
- 169