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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.

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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, Spain and other countries in Europe.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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37 The forest fires are an annual tragedy and the vulnerability of the Portuguese forest to fires
38 is a big issue. The sustainability of the forest and agriculture policies have been a core
39 issue for the Greens. Currently the Portuguese Greens have been negotiating with the
40 Government to halt the growth of the eucalyptus tree area. This has been a hard issue to

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41 negotiate, but finally is reaching the light of day. In Portugal the forest area represents 35%
42 of the territory, and the forestry industry is a heavy weight in the economy. Following the
43 demand of this industry, nowadays eucalyptus areas represent more than 26% of the
44 Portuguese forest. This is a direct result of the promotion of pulp & paper industry in
45 replacement of the more traditional woods of oaks, chestnuts and maritime pine tree (for
46 construction and furniture industries), of the cork tree (and associated cork industry), and
47 last but not the least, of the traditional Portuguese agriculture. This process was caused
48 by the more aggressive European Union Agriculture Policy. To some extent, the Common
49 Agriculture Policy (CAP) supports and promotes big corporations, enabling them to
50 compete in the international market. By doing so, the CAP kills small farmers and
51 traditional agriculture. This not only leads to the desertification of the rural areas leaving
52 them without surveillance, but also destroys the agriculture fields that have worked in the
53 past as stopgaps between forested areas, thus slowing and stopping wild fires.

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

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

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65 The annual budget allocated to forest fires by the EU, the state and the local authorities
66 amounts to half a billion euros, 2/3 of which are used to fight the fires, 1/3 to prevent
67 them. This does not take into account the environmental damages and the cost to repair
68 them.

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

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

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78 Indeed, the increased temperatures and drought exacerbate the risk of forest fire since
79 they increase the length of the fire season and the size and location of the risk areas to
80 more areas where it will be more difficult to fight the fire. Moreover, growing urban sprawl

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81 and the decrease in logging, that leads to less clearing, also puts our forests at risk.

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

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88 The Paris agreement needs to be implemented urgently. Innovative and transformative
89 transport policies, renewable energy and meat production need to be designed and
90 implemented. It is imperative to reduce the use of fossil fuels, to effectively and massively
91 promote public transport, the local food production and, if not possible, the sustainable
92 transportation of goods, and reduce meat production. To do so, it is necessary to reform
93 the Common Agriculture Policy and to promote and focus on small scale agriculture,
94 farmers and local markets.

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

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103 The European Greens gathered in Karlstad, Sweden:

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- 105 • Express their solidarity with victims' families and with the countries affected by
106 forest fires;
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 - 108 • Urge the need to take into consideration seriously and effectively the effect of
109 climate change and extreme weather conditions in the forest fires, especially
110 concerning Mediterranean region majorly affected. This has to be taken into
111 account in the fight against forest fires;
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 - 113 • Urge the need to reform the Common Agriculture Policy in order to support small
114 farmers and local crops and markets, ensuring that rural areas are kept alive;
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 - 116 • State that more resources have to be devoted to the public environmental
117 prosecution services;
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 - 119 • Urge that new measures should be taken in considerations during the critical period
120 of fires



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- State that security systems appointed for the control of the region should not be laid off (i.e. the Italian “Corpo Forestale dello Stato”, that was appointed for the control and the safekeeping of the natural environment, but was abolished by the government last year)

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- State the need to reinforce the EFFIS - European Forest Fire Information System

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- Urge that greens should work on a structural resolution about climate change and desertification

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- State that the European Union, should, through structural funds, create a Prevention Center on Fires

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- State that high risk of fire areas have to be prioritized when planning the distribution of resources and prevention measures via the Structural Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

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- State that it is imperative to return to original more acclimatised forest, more resistant to wild fires;

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- Ask that a process to open the deficit limit is instated so that countries can use much needed budget to address victims of the fire, the reconstruction of the destroyed areas, and reinforce the needed public services.

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