

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2005/2193(INI)	Procedure completed
Natural disasters, fires, floods and droughts: regional development aspects		
Subject 3.70.11 Natural disasters, Solidarity Fund 4.70 Regional policy		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	REGI Regional Development	PPE-DE GALEOTE Gerardo	23/01/2006
European Commission	Commission DG Regional and Urban Policy	Commissioner	

Key events			
27/10/2005	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
20/04/2006	Vote in committee		Summary
27/04/2006	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0147/2006	
18/05/2006	Results of vote in Parliament		
18/05/2006	Debate in Parliament		
18/05/2006	Decision by Parliament	T6-0223/2006	Summary
18/05/2006	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2005/2193(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	REGI/6/31162

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE370.152	28/02/2006	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE371.872	31/03/2006	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0147/2006	27/04/2006	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0223/2006	18/05/2006	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2006)2902	22/06/2006	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2006)3065-2	01/08/2006	EC	

Natural disasters, fires, floods and droughts: regional development aspects

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by its chair, Gerardo GALEOTE QUECEDO (EPP-ED, ES), on the regional development aspects of natural disasters (fires, drought and floods). The report pointed out that, in 2005, there was serious flooding in Europe, fires destroyed thousands of hectares of forest and there was a drought of exceptional intensity and duration, especially in the south and west of Europe. It added that natural disasters have a catastrophic effect - in both the short and the long term - on the economy of the regions, with adverse repercussions for infrastructure, economic potential, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism. Fire and drought in particular had become "an annual scourge" for the regions and countries affected, and the problem was getting worse.

In response, MEPs said that that Commission should draw up a European strategy to combat natural disasters, including a compulsory approach for risk prevention, and devise a technical protocol for joint action by the Union. A 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. The committee called for the creation of a "European Civil Protection Force" and wanted the Commission to propose a directive on fire prevention and management in the EU in order to make the best possible use of existing Community and national resources. A similar proposal should be drafted on drought-risk prevention and management, and the Commission was also urged to look into the establishment of a European monitoring centre for drought and desertification.

In other recommendations, the committee called for the 2007-2013 financial framework to 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". The Commission's forthcoming Forestry Action Plan should contain provision for a possible European Fire Fund or European Forest Fund to support action aimed at conserving and restoring the mountain and forest areas included in the Natura 2000 network. MEPs also called on the Commission to make available the resources needed to relieve suffering and satisfy the material needs of all the victims of natural disasters and their direct families, by means of the European Solidarity Fund and other Community instruments. Lastly, they wanted consideration to be given to setting up an agriculture disaster fund to compensate any loss of income stemming from crop losses of farmers affected by natural disasters.

Natural disasters, fires, floods and droughts: regional development aspects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Gerardo GALEOTE QUECEDO (EPP-ED, ES), on the regional development aspects of natural disasters (fires, drought and floods). The report was adopted by 498 votes in favour 35 against 20 abstentions. (This resolution is closely linked to two other resolutions adopted at the same time, on the environmental and agricultural aspects respectively, of natural disasters. Please see INI/2005/2192 and INI/2005/2195.)

Parliament pointed out that natural disasters in the EU had caused the deaths of 65 000 people since 1980 and cost EUR 124.2 billion, according to UN figures. In 2005, there was serious flooding in Europe, fires destroyed thousands of hectares of forest and there was a drought of exceptional intensity and duration, especially in the south and west of Europe. Natural disasters had catastrophic short and long-term effects on the economy of the regions, especially in less prosperous areas concerned by the convergence objective or ones affected by natural constraints, with damaging repercussions for infrastructure, economic potential, employment, the natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism, all of which had an adverse effect on social and economic cohesion. There were still shortcomings in the Community's involvement, which were aggravated by the differing levels of development found in the arrangements made by the individual Member States for combating natural disasters. Community fire-prevention measures are limited almost exclusively to rural development policy and had clearly proved to be inadequate, which demonstrated 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 forests in the Member States.

Parliament felt that the Commission should submit a proposal for a European strategy to combat natural disasters, including comprehensive risk prevention, and devise a technical protocol setting out joint action at Union level addressing suited to each type of disaster and each forest eco-system. The Commission should also adapt Community prevention, research, risk-management, civil-defence and solidarity tools with a view to improving the response to such disasters.

In all the Member States an exhaustive list should be drawn up of the locations which are most vulnerable to fires and to prolonged droughts and also of the resources available, with a view to devising a preventive strategy and enabling genuinely effective action and coordination to be carried out at local level. This proposal should also include measures designed to ensure that water is used rationally by major water consumers, such as farmers, urban users and industry. Particular attention must be paid to isolated regions, regions with low population density or suffering from depopulation, mountainous areas and border regions, outlying and extremely remote regions and the least favoured regions concerned by the convergence objective.

Parliament went on to stress 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 these disasters. 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. The Commission was urged 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 EUSF and other Community instruments. Within the 2007-2013 financial framework a Community forest-fire protection programme must be designed to promote adequately funded forest-fire awareness-raising, prevention and risk-management initiatives dovetailing with agricultural- and structural-policy measures.

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.

In addition, the Commission should submit a proposal for a directive for fire prevention and management in the EU. A similar proposal should be drafted on drought-risk prevention and management. Parliament reiterated its call for a European monitoring centre for drought and desertification integrated into the activities of the seventh framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013). It deplored the fact that the Commission communication reporting on the implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy did not devote special attention to the issue of fires, ignoring the fact that they are the main cause of the deterioration of forests. The Forestry Action Plan 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.

Since many areas have witnessed a very high rate of forest degradation over the last few years, Parliament called on the Commission to devise schemes which would 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.

Parliament called for the creation of a "European Civil Protection Force", stating that such a European mechanism 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 mechanism by providing equipment, means and personnel.

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. 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 serious effects on their living conditions.

Finally, Parliament asked 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.