

Doc. 11282
4 May 2007

Preventing forest fires

Recommendation 1761 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 994th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (2 May 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has noted with attention Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1761 (2006) on preventing forest fires. It welcomes this initiative, a worthwhile collection of recommendations designed to promote action to prevent and reduce forest fires. Aware of the devastating effect of forest fires in ecological, human and economic terms, especially in the Mediterranean region, the Committee of Ministers has drawn this recommendation to the attention of the governments of member states, so that they may duly take account of it.

2. In the past three years, forest fires of extreme severity have affected France, Portugal and Spain in particular. These extremely worrying disasters have caused unprecedented material and human damage, leading to the deaths of many of the fire fighters involved, and having long-term economic and ecological effects on the regions concerned.

3. The Committee of Ministers points out that an important part of the Action Plan issued by the Third Summit of the Council of Europe is devoted to strengthening the security of European citizens. The emphasis is particularly placed on the development and promotion of integrated policies in the fields of the environment, landscape, spatial planning and the prevention and management of natural disasters, all aspects closely related to the prevention of forest fires.

4. In this context, there is good reason to mention the activities of the Partial Agreement "Co-operation Group of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA Agreement)", which organises multidisciplinary co-operation between member states in order to improve the prevention of, protection against, and organisation of relief in major natural and technological disasters. It is also active in relation to forest fires, since it has within its network of 25 specialised centres a European Centre for Forest Fires (CEFF). This centre, set up in 2003 under the aegis of the EUR-OPA Agreement, conducts research into forest fires, and more particularly into the effects of the smoke that they produce.

5. The EUR-OPA Agreement regularly collaborates with the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) and the Global Wildlands Fire Network, and in this context, is giving its full support, along with other interested organisations, to the preparations for the fourth International Conference on Wildland Fire, to be held in Seville (Spain) from 13 to 17 May 2007. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers points out that co-operation in the field of forest fire prevention and reduction also extends to the Mediterranean rim, since three states which are not members of the Council of Europe and which regularly suffer forest fires, namely Algeria, Lebanon and Morocco, are parties to the EUR-OPA Agreement.

6. The Committee of Ministers encourages Council of Europe member states which are not yet parties to the EUR-OPA Agreement to consider joining the Co-operation Group. It points out in this respect that all member states were invited to attend the 11th Ministerial Session of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement, held in Marrakech (Morocco) on 31 October 2006 on the theme of "Protecting societies from disasters through preparedness and prevention: a political priority".

7. The Committee of Ministers thanks the Assembly for the interest it shows in the application of the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent, set out in Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2002)1. In this context, it emphasises the reaffirmation by the 14th European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT), held by the Council of Europe in Lisbon (Portugal) on 26 and 27 October 2006, that the Guiding Principles provide a framework for the evaluation of important projects and measures from the perspective of spatial planning policy.