

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001921/25
to the Commission
Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos (NI), Kostas Papadakis (NI)
(14 May 2025)**

Subject: EU's dangerous strategy considers fire protection a cost, ahead of the start of the firefighting season

Last year the EU suffered a burnt area of 419 298 hectares, a figure above the average for the years 2006-2023, with 35% of the burnt territory inside Natura 2000 areas. Greece, for its part, saw approximately 500 000 acres on fire. The Hellenic Fire Service and the Hellenic Forest Service continue to operate with tragic understaffing, with over 4 000 vacant positions. Over time, Greek governments and the current New Democracy Government, have, like the EU, not chosen to staff competent services, with a shortfall of approximately 1 500 foresters and 10 000 forest workers.

In view of the above:

1. What is the Commission's position on the fact that the ineffective 'rescEU' mechanism — which is oriented towards firefighting rather than comprehensive prevention — perpetuates the huge shortages in personnel, resources and infrastructure, recycling very little of them and even delaying from country to country?
2. What is the Commission's position on demands that the huge needs of the Hellenic Forest Service and Hellenic Fire Service be met immediately with permanent personnel, with all seasonal firefighters being made permanent, along with the strengthening and renewal of the state ground and aerial firefighting fleet, taking into account the effectiveness of its use as a means, as well as the particular geomorphological conditions of Greece?
3. What is the Commission's position on the fact that, under Regulations (EU) 2018/841 and (EU) 2020/852, forest protection is considered a cost and is not a preferred option, since forests and land are treated as fields of business activity aimed at making profits for business groups?

Submitted: 14.5.2025

**Answer given by Ms Lahbib on behalf of the European Commission
(4 August 2025)**

Member States are primarily responsible for prevention and preparedness measures, including their firefighting services. The EU has a supporting competence in civil protection.

RescEU ⁽¹⁾ strengthens Europe's disaster preparedness by establishing strategic reserves to respond to disasters, such as wildfires. Since its establishment, it has proven successful in the fight against wildfires, including in Greece.

The independent peer review of the Greek wildfire risk management system carried out in the framework of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) ⁽²⁾, highlights the strengths of the current system and puts forward recommendations for reinforcing it.

It advocates for building a more integrated wildfire risk management system in Greece, with a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, and with a long-term dedicated wildfire prevention budget.

Cohesion Policy supports Greece in 2021-2027 with more than EUR 421 million to prevent climate-related fire risks, strengthening its overall fire prevention.

Of this, EUR 328 million are allocated under the civil protection programme to procure essential firefighting equipment and support upskilling civil protection personnel ⁽³⁾.

Regulation (EU) 2018/841 ⁽⁴⁾ aims to increase net removals in EU forests and soils; forest protection is a practical, cost-efficient and positive approach to revert the decreasing trend affecting the current sink.

Regulation (EU) 2020/852 ⁽⁵⁾ promotes market transparency and prevents greenwashing, providing a framework for identifying sustainable activities.

⁽¹⁾ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en.

⁽²⁾ <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/news/ucpm-wildfire-peer-review-report-handed-over-greek-authorities>.

⁽³⁾ In 2023, the General Secretariat for Civil Protection of Greece requested a UCPM independent peer review of its wildfire risk management system. The report, published in June 2024 puts forward recommendations for reinforcing the current system. While also highlighting the strengths of the current system, the report recommends building a more integrated wildfire risk management system in Greece, with a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, and with a long-term dedicated wildfire prevention budget. See: <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/news/ucpm-wildfire-peer-review-report-handed-over-greek-authorities>.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R0841>.

⁽⁵⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0852>.

It does not intend to establish rules for forest protection but to ensure that claims of environmental sustainability are credible and allow to channel capital into sustainable forestry activities.
