

Official statement

Mediterranean countries fight against forest fires: the need for regional cooperation

Mediterranean countries are fighting united against forest fires, where thousands of firefighters continue to battle devastating wildfires in Greece, Lebanon, Turkey, Spain, and Italy.

A heatwave across southern Europe, fed by hot air from Africa, has led to wildfires across the Mediterranean. **Most countries in the Mediterranean basin are facing the same emergency regarding rural fires.** Their forest lands are burning out year after year through small fires, but ever more frequent the conditions are perfect for fire crises difficult to keep under control, resulting in major environmental and economic damages and severe risks for human life.

Forest fires represent an extremely serious environmental issue in the Mediterranean region. **Each year, 80% of the total area burned in the continent is due to fires** in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Turkey. **More than 5,000 fires burn an estimated average of 600,000 - 800,000 hectares every year.** An area comparable to the island of Crete or the island of Corsica and equal to 1,3 – 1,7 % of the total Mediterranean forests.

Climate change has increased forest fire risk across Mediterranean region. Even so, the burnt area of the Mediterranean region has decreased slightly since 1980, indicating that fire control efforts have been effective. However, in recent years, forest fires have affected regions in northern and South.

Governments must accelerate the energetic transition towards a future free of fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and gas, with policies that sponsor much more ambitious renewable energies and saving policies.

The option is to create a sustainable living concept that addresses current issues with **the aim of providing a better future, while preserving tradition and heritage.** We know the limited resources available, so we need to face the responsibility to respond appropriately with durable solutions.

We have to focus on a Mediterranean and sustainable project for which the preservation of the environment is a priority and where people adopt a productive and healthy lifestyle. Something that is a great challenge.

Most of the Mediterranean countries are sharing the same challenge: tackling the virulence of rural fires, increasingly frequent, exacerbated by climate change. That is why, now more than ever, it is **essential to create cross-border proposals**, shared and adjusted to solve this terrible joint environmental and economic problem.

Moreover, Mediterranean governments must go beyond this and approve a Fire Prevention Strategy for the community, with the participation of all countries in the region and stakeholders, **setting adequate long-term prevention measures** to achieve a more diverse, heterogeneous and fire-resistant environment.

In that way, **ASCAME is fully committed to the development of a Mediterranean action plan** that improves governance, addresses the structural causes in the territory and fights against climate change, appealing to the shared responsibility of the whole society.

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