

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0059/03

pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure

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to the Commission

Subject: Forest Focus and forest fire prevention

Following the terrible drought and forest fires which have destroyed thousands of acres of forest in the south of France and Spain, as in Portugal, the French Prime Minister, Jean Pierre Raffarin, has come to Brussels to ask for assistance from the European fund for natural disasters. However, prevention is still the best course of action.

There used to be a European Regulation (EEC) 2158/92¹ on the protection of Community's forests against fire which made it possible to fund a range of preventive measures. However, this regulation expired on 31 December 2002.

To replace this regulation, the European Commission has presented the 'Forest Focus' proposal, which is now coming back to Parliament for second reading. The common position covers only the fire surveillance aspect of the earlier Regulation and has rejected all the amendments tabled by the European Parliament at first reading seeking to introduce the fire prevention aspect. In explaining its position, the Commission argues that forest fire prevention has been incorporated into the rural development regulation (EC) 1257/1999².

Not only are we seeing a renationalisation of fire prevention policy and less predictable funding which has been condemned by experts in the sector, but the Commission is completely disregarding the judgment of the Court of Justice of 25 February 1999, which clearly stipulates that forest fire prevention is entirely a matter of environmental policy and not agricultural policy.

- Consequently, can European Commission explain why it is going against the decision of the Court of Justice? Does it now intend to follow the position on Forest Focus adopted by the European Parliament at first reading and amend the rural development regulation accordingly?
- Or, better still, will it consider proposing a new regulation devoted solely to the prevention of forest fires, thereby ensuring continuity in the measures taken by professionals in the sector to effectively combat these terrible disasters?

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Deadline for reply: 08.09.2003

¹ OJ L 217, 31.7.1992, p. 3.

² OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80.