



# FIRE-RES

Innovative technologies & socio-ecological-economic solutions for fire resilient territories in Europe

renew  
europe.



# TOWARDS A FIRE-RESILIENT EUROPE: CAN WE DO BETTER?

## Policy Event Report

**24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 | 14:30 – 18:00**

European Parliament

*Event co-hosted by Ulrike Müller and Jordi Solé, Members of the European Parliament*



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101037419.

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# 1. Executive summary

The EU funded project FIRE-RES held the Policy Event “[Towards a fire resilient Europe: can we do better?](#)” in Brussels on 24 October 2023 at the European Parliament. The event was co-organised with MEPs **Ulrike Müller** (Renew Europe) and **Jordi Solé** (The Greens/EFA). This document summarises the speakers' key messages. The event was moderated by Guillaume Corradino, from the European association of mountain areas (Euromontana), and featured the following speakers:

- Ulrike Müller, Member of the European Parliament
- Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Member of the European Parliament
- Jordi Solé, Member of the European Parliament
- Martí Rosell Ibarz, Catalan Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS)
- Antoni Trasobares, Forest Science and Technology Centre of Catalonia (CTFC)
- Hanna Jahns, European Commission - DG ECHO
- Eduard Plana, CTFC
- Cecilia Fraccaroli, European Forest Institute (EFI)
- Nicolas Faivre, European Research Executive Agency (EREA)

The full agenda is available on the FIRE-RES website<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Introduction

Extreme wildfire events are becoming a major environmental, economic and social threat across Europe, increasingly affecting regions that were until now relatively spared. The summer of 2022 was a record year for forest fires, and the recent winter drought triggered a proliferation of forest fires across Europe in the summer of 2023. The policy event, attended by 45 participants, aimed at bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, including policymakers, regional representatives, scientists, environmental organisations, and industry representatives. On the top of the agenda was understanding how the European Union can improve its territorial resilience to forest fires, by sharing best practices and exploring potential policy solutions to address this growing concern. The promotion of resilient territories in Europe

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fire-res.eu/event/towards-a-fire-resilient-europe-can-we-do-better/>



requires a holistic approach. Each landscape or homogeneous region must be analysed specifically to ensure a broad implementation. This requires integrating science-based solutions that blend landscape design, economics, society, and technology, engaging with local communities, and stakeholders, and establishing high-level policy and financial partnerships. The European Commission holds a pivotal role in shaping a dedicated framework for realizing this vision in the upcoming years. Coordination of policies and programs related to agriculture, environment, bioeconomy, energy, and other domains is crucial to accomplish this goal.



*Figure 1 The panellists with the participants*

### 3. Presentations

The floor was given to Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the European Commission, as well as firefighters and researchers, in a complementarity of perspectives with the facilitation of Euromontana.

[Welcome address | Ulrike Müller, Member of the European Parliament](#)

The event was opened by Ulrike Müller, MEP (Renew Europe) and rapporteur of the European Parliament's [report on the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 – Sustainable Forest Management in Europe](#). Her intervention underlined the most recent trends in Europe concerning climate change and wildfires and their consequences for society, especially in the medium and long term. Forests play a vital role in climate adaptation, including storing CO<sub>2</sub> and hosting a remarkable part of the biodiversity on land. They also



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constitute an integral pillar of livelihood in rural areas and remain a key enabler for a climate-efficient economy. The EU is committed to climate neutrality, possible only with resilient ecosystems and landscapes. Ms. Müller reassured that the topic is high on the political agenda and actively incorporated through R&I and funding but acknowledged there is always more to be done.

### [Pyrocene: the end of firefighting age | Martí Rosell Ibarz, CFRS](#)

The following intervention provided insights into firefighting's pressing challenges. Martí Rosell Ibarz is a Forestry engineer for CFRS – Catalan Fire and Rescue Service and an expert in the economic viability of forest management, local development, forestry and habitat management. His presentation illustrated and emphasised the need for a change of paradigm, from fire suppression to integrated fire management, in a new age of firefighting marked by high unpredictability and new behavioural patterns that can affect all European territories. This new paradigm does not necessarily call for more resources or equipment for fire suppression: data indeed show that suppression capacities remain unvaried but dealing with these types of fire demands a better understanding of atmospheric information and early management of forest landscapes. Rosell emphasised the need to learn to live with wildfires and to focus on incorporating knowledge and expertise from those on the first line of these actions in the response.

### [From fire management to landscape resilience: how to connect the dots? | Antoni Trasobares, CTFC](#)

The previous discussion gave way to a more detailed examination of integrated wildfire management and landscape resilience. Antoni Trasobares is the director of the Forest Science and Technology Centre of Catalonia (CTFC), as well as the project coordinator of FIRE-RES. While delving deeper into the project's objectives, he highlighted that much needs to be learned from science as well as economics, social and landscape dimensions, to design and promote resilient landscapes. Mobilising 11 Living Labs, FIRE-RES aims at defining extreme wildfire events, while developing, testing, deploying and ultimately upscaling innovations. In a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, the innovation scope embraces the technological, social, health/safety, administrative, ecological and economic levels, not least keeping societal awareness and knowledge sharing at its core. In conclusion, Trasobares indicated how the landscape can progress towards resilience, harmonising well-organised emergency management, monitoring technologies, farsighted planning, provision of ecosystem services, and emphasised the need to scale up public-private partnerships.

### [Europe's strategy to fight wildfires: tools and initiatives | Hanna Jahns, European Commission – DG ECHO](#)

In the following intervention, the focus shifted to the role of the European Commission in supporting Member States in confronting wildfires. Hanna Jahns, Director for Disaster



Preparedness and Prevention of the European Commission's DG Echo began by depicting the increasing concern with the latest Copernicus data. Despite a decreasing intensity compared to last year, the summer of 2023 counted 9 activations for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, most in Mediterranean countries. The Responsibility for wildfire management lies within Member States and the European Commission can support only upon their mandates. Acknowledging that resources and equipment are just one side of the solutions, the European Commission is reinforcing its focus on prevention and preparedness. Following the requests of Member States, a [Wildfire Prevention Action Plan](#) was designed to examine their institutional capacity to prevent fires, identifying their gaps.

Jahns stressed how awareness raising is another crucial point of action, especially when it comes to sensitising decision-makers to the importance of investing in resilience, as this approach produces tangible economic benefits. DG ECHO's efforts are directed towards mapping all research, policies and reforms focused on mainstreaming disaster prevention and preparedness in the EU. It is only by understanding the gaps in information and evidence that Member States can redirect their necessities for assistance. Often, these types of funds are initially allocated by the responsible institutions, but can easily be redirected following more urgent needs, especially because prevention is not appealing to all policymakers. In conclusion, Jahns encouraged to map what is available and raise awareness of the importance of investing in holistic and integrated approaches.

### [Towards a policy coherence for integrated wildfire risk management | Eduard Plana, CTFC](#)

Thereafter, Eduard Plana, coordinator of the Forest Policy and Risk Governance group of CTFC, emphasised the notion of policy coherence. To set the scene, Plana elucidated that traditional risk management is collapsing as the future of fire weather worsens. While society expects to be protected from fire risks, a paradigm transformation demands risk management actors to reshape this dynamic. They need to acknowledge that they will not be able to control all fires and set a new contract with society, focusing on stopping fatalities and the collapse of key territorial infrastructures. In the policy arena, coherence emerges as the key factor to pave the way to a long-term solution, as previous reports by OECD, DG R&I and DG ECHO have already highlighted. Precisely the systemic connection and harmony between the different policies dealing with wildfires can avoid silo effects, including agricultural, civil protection, environmental, climate change and land-use planning.

Resilience is fundamental because, in the unique case of wildfires, hazard intensity can actually be controlled with appropriate management. The question remains open about the actual capacity to promote this resilient management, raising important trade-offs in terms of funding. Wildfire responsibilities need to be distributed across stakeholders and should actively incorporate the justice aspect. The intervention ended with an



encouragement to actively mobilise knowledge and to strengthen connection and understanding between extreme wildfire events experts and actors in charge of implementing climate action.

### [Can economic incentives help reducing wildfire risk? | Cecilia Fraccaroli, EFi](#)

Cecilia Fraccaroli holds an MSc in Forest and Nature Management from the University of Copenhagen and co-authored the Policy Brief "[Can economic incentives help reducing wildfire risk?](#)". The presentation illustrated the main findings of the document, screening a series of economic incentives. Wildfires are a public issue with negative externalities affecting the society as a whole. The complexity of wildfire management interconnects the landscape status, and its resilience highly depends on the role of stewards, such as landowners, in mitigating risks.

Economic incentives can encourage better management to achieve resilient landscapes, and many typologies have been explored in the document including subsidies, payments for ecosystem services, bonds and insurance. The intervention highlighted a set of policy recommendations, including the combination of governance strategies, giving priority to target high-risk areas, the identification of the most appropriate payment type, replacing the scaling-up process of initiatives with a more customised replication. Finally, Fraccaroli stressed the importance of carefully evaluating the impacts of these incentives to identify the most effective tools.

### [EU R&I delivering on sustainable forest management and resilience | Nicolas Faivre, European Research Executive Agency](#)

Nicolas Faivre is the Project Officer for REA's Climate Resilience & Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as the Project Officer responsible for the FIRE-RES on the side of the EU. His intervention focused on how the EU is prioritising forest resilience through investment in R&I projects. The new EU forest strategy for 2030 aims to improve the quality and quantity of EU forests, making them more resilient to new extreme events and uncertain climatic conditions, while maintaining their multifunctionality.

Horizon Europe and H2020 projects demonstrated the growth of investments in this direction, encouraging a better understanding of rural forests and improving their competitiveness. Faivre provided an overview of how different projects contributed to these objectives, by developing decision-support systems, actively integrating stakeholders, adaptive breeding strategies, and focusing on wildfire risk management. Analysing some of these projects, a [report](#) was produced with a series of policy recommendations which are valid for today's context.



## 4. Panel discussion

How to increase Europe's fire resilience in a warming climate? - Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Nicolas Faivre, Antoni Trasobares.

The panel discussion, moderated by Guillaume Corradino (Director of Euromontana), began by inviting Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, MEP for the Greens/EFA and forester by training, to react to the presentations. At the core of Deparnay-Grunenberg's intervention stood the concern of how to protect multifunctional forests and at the same time confront the threat of climate change. She challenged the dualism between agricultural landscapes and forests often reflected in policies, measures and funds and stressed the lack of a pan-EU strategy against forest fires: EU invests 90% in reactive measures when the fire is already there, but not enough in prevention including alternative types of forestry or structuring differently the landscapes.

Focussing on education, Deparnay-Grunenberg highlighted the learning opportunities from southern countries with a longer tradition of confronting fires, where interdisciplinary thinking and sharing knowledge are key factors. Trade-offs and dilemmas must be part of a common reflection which should leave space for biodiversity, acknowledging the role of forests as carbon sinks. Bringing together experts from the field, research and policymakers can help understand what data is needed in the different countries to combine monitoring and preparedness approaches.



*Figure 2 Moments from the panel discussion*



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Nicolas Faivre (REA) further elaborated on the role and methods of the European Commission in taking the project outcomes up into policymaking. Results need to be synthesized in a language that speaks to policymakers and that makes dissemination easier. Several initiatives are there for this purpose, including the JRC Knowledge Centre. To facilitate the dissemination of results, Faivre added, we need to better understand how to bring project results to the right policy makers, taking into account the wide range of policies and topics relevant to fire resilience. More dialogue is required between EU institutions and Member States representatives and experts so that they can clarify where the change is needed. Science is crucial but is only a layer of policymaking. In conclusion, Faivre applauded cross-sector collaboration in formats such as this policy event, where different EU bodies can discuss. He eventually promoted the clustering event FIRELOGUE.

Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg agreed on the need for more such events to share further precious insider knowledge. She commended the potential role of research actors in indicating gaps in data and funding and encouraged further empowering education and awareness-raising activities. She concluded by stressing that when looking for concrete fire prevention measures, one should first and foremost look at involving local agricultural and forestry actors. She proposed to make education programs for farmers so that they can easily react to fires, not relying all on firefighters as such an initiative would make it easy for them to act from the beginning covering all the blind spots.

Reacting to the last point about farmers, Trasobares highlighted the need to involve all actors at all levels, even those living in urban areas and visiting rural landscapes occasionally. Good management has to be orchestrated at the EU, regional, and national levels. Currently, to act before the disaster takes place should be the highest priority. Many initiatives developed in that direction but still require appropriate legal frameworks, such as the case of forest ownership distributions. He concluded by urging for synchronisation between correct and active landscape management, combined with a reflection on possibilities to finance that.

## 5. Voices from the public and closing keynote

Finally, the floor was open for questions from the public. DG ENV representative Marco Onida clarified that the assumption that more biodiversity necessarily means more deadwood and fires is not always true. He also stressed a key trade-off to consider: the resources in response are important but can divert the focus away from investing in prevention. In conclusion, he remarked that forest policy is a shared competence of EU and national governments – not regional.





*Figure 3 Comments from the audience*

Another remark came from Sophie Giordanengo, representing AIRBUS. While acknowledging the different phases of wildfire management (prevention and preparedness, detection and response, adaptation and restoration), she challenged their separation as appropriate for the much-needed holistic approach. She suggested that the interaction and connection between the stages is key, starting from awareness. Drawing a comparison with the defence sector, she encouraged a higher integration of these different stages.

The policy event was concluded by a keynote by Jordi Sole, MEP and vice-chair of the group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. MEP Sole reiterated the cruciality of financing EU projects to fight climate change in its multiple manifestations, including forest fires and extreme wildfire events. As the intensity and frequency of these events grow, with multiple events happening at the same time, we need to adapt and react to this new reality. Sole stressed that the concern affects countries far beyond southern Europe, afflicting regions where this issue was previously unthinkable. Sole also underlined the importance of the Catalanian experience in showing how to fight in a new way against new waves of these events and moving towards resilient landscapes. Ultimately, he focused on a more holistic approach in the management of forests and landscapes, in collaboration with communities from different policy backgrounds and governance levels and in harmony with science experts.

The participants were finally invited to join a networking reception in the premises of the European Parliament, to further connect and exchange.





*Figure 4 Moments from the reception*

## 6. Conclusions

The Policy event was a successful opportunity to gather multiple perspectives in an insightful conversation about the future resilience of European forest landscapes to fires. A series of key takeaways was distilled from the discussion, as follows.

- **Climate Change** is impacting wildfires' frequency and intensity. Wildfire events are becoming more unpredictable with new behavioural patterns that are yet to be fully analysed. More territories in EU will face this issue, if they are not already doing so.
- **Firefighting** is entering a new age, shifting the focus from traditional fire suppression approaches to **integrated management**. The capacity to fight extreme wildfire events is limited, and not because of the resources available. We need updated, reviewed knowledge and increased awareness.
- Wildfire management is a system requiring a **new paradigm** based on **policy coherence**. Unlike phenomena such as tornadoes, the intensity of fire hazards can be controlled by adopting appropriate landscape management. We need to align the different sectors of this system to reduce conflicts and promote synergies in



harmony with the agreed policy objectives. Responsibilities should be distributed across stakeholders, incorporating the justice dimension.

- Fire risk prevention and mitigation involves many different stakeholders and can be **encouraged using economic incentives**, from subsidies to payments or fines. A policy brief analysed different mechanisms and produced a series of strategy recommendations. Among them, is the need for mixed governance strategies, prioritising high-risk areas, and ensuring that impacts are carefully evaluated to customise the adoption of initiatives following local conditions.
- **Forest landscape needs to become resilient.** FIRE-RES focuses on minimising the damages and seeking more fire-related benefits. Integrated Wildfire management combines different factors, from more organised emergency management to diverse land use and forest types, and forest-based bioeconomy. A comprehensive and multidisciplinary vision is key to this transition.
- The **promotion of resilient territories in Europe requires a holistic approach.** Each landscape or homogeneous region must be analysed specifically to ensure a broad implementation. This requires integrating science-based solutions that blend landscape design, economics, society, and technology, engaging with local communities, and stakeholders, and establishing high-level policy and financial partnerships. The European Commission holds a pivotal role in shaping a dedicated framework for realizing this vision in the upcoming years. Coordination of policies and programs related to agriculture, environment, bioeconomy, energy, and other domains is crucial to accomplish this goal.
- Increased investments were made by the EU in **forest-related research & innovation projects** over the last decade, acknowledging the need for better scientific knowledge and the complexity of the challenges towards resilient forests. A [report](#) was produced with a series of policy recommendations.

