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Press Release

Wildfires more Frequent and Intense Europe Must Learn to Live with Fire

Brussels, 19 May 2025 - “Many parts of Europe are facing a large increase in multi-year droughts, leading to an increased probability of extreme fires. Some areas are likely to experience severe events every two years”, says Prof. Thomas Elmqvist, EASAC Environment Director. In response, the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) is calling for an urgent shift in EU wildfire policy - from reactive fire suppression to proactive, risk-based land management.

“Europe will increasingly have to learn to live with fire and adapt society to a new challenging reality,” Elmqvist warns. “More than twice as many urban areas are at risk of fire in Europe than in North America and Asia.” Already today, wildfires in the EU burn, on average, half a million hectares yearly - nearly twice the size of Luxembourg.

Elaborated by 23 scientists nominated by their respective national science academies, the new report launched today, *Changing Wildfires in Europe*, highlights the complex drivers behind the surge in wildfire risk. They include climate change, rural depopulation, and land-use changes. Droughts and declining summer precipitation are predicted to double fire risk by 2100. Meanwhile, the abandonment of farmland and unmanaged vegetation growth have created vast landscapes of flammable biomass.

Fire Suppression Alone is Not Sufficient

EASAC criticises current EU policies for their overwhelming focus on fire suppression and emergency response. Instead, the report advocates for an integrated EU framework for landscape fire-risk governance which should also prioritise prevention. “Suppressing fires alone is not enough. We need to address root causes, better fight climate change, invest in resilient landscapes, and engage society in living with fire,” says Dr Cathelijne Stoof, Co-Chair of EASAC’s Wildfires Working Group.

3 Key Messages and 8 Policy Options

EASAC underscores the need for enhanced institutional capacity, cross-border collaboration, and better resource-sharing among EU states. The Report sets out three key messages and eight policy options to reshape Europe’s approach to wildfires:

Urgent Messages:

1. **Implement climate and land-use policies without delay** – including the new EU Nature Restoration Law, with a focus on restoring carbon-rich peatlands and managing forests sustainably.
2. **Integrate fire risk into biodiversity and tree-planting plans** – to avoid unintentionally increasing vulnerability in reforested areas.
3. **Educate for a fire-resilient society** – particularly younger generations, through targeted public health interventions and wildfire education programmes.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Invest in integrated wildfire risk reduction, including prescribed burning and fuel management.
2. Implement nature-based solutions such as grazing and native species reforestation.
3. Embrace the role of fire allowing planned burns to maintain ecological balance.
4. Invest in education and communication to increase “fire literacy” and preparedness.
5. Invest in landscape management to reduce vulnerability, design and maintain resilient landscape that reduce wildfire risks.
6. Harmonise sectoral policies across agriculture, environment, and urban development to reduce conflicts and risks.
7. Promote compact urban development to limit wildland-urban interface expansion.
8. Encourage sustainable private land management to help landowners adopt fire-resilient practices.

A Continental Crisis Calls for a European Response

While the Mediterranean remains Europe’s highest-risk region, the report warns that continental, alpine, and boreal regions must also prepare for a new era of fire. “The changing fire regime with larger, more intense blazes is driven not only by weather, but also by structural socio-ecological shifts. Many new areas, such as Central Europe and rapidly warming mountainous areas, will probably be exposed to severe fire weather. This marks a fundamental shift with major consequences for environmental and public safety,” says Dr Orsolya Valkó, Co-Chair of EASAC’s Wildfires Working Group.

The Report launch on 19 May forms the prelude to the publication of proposal for a European Strategy by [Firelogue](#), a coalition of research projects at a two-day event on 20th and 21st of May in Brussels. “We must embrace fire-smart landscapes, engage communities, and integrate policy, science, and technology to adapt effectively,” says Dr. Claudia Berchtold, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, one of the Strategy’s lead contributors.

EASAC Commentary:

Link (active from 19 May): <https://easac.eu/publications/details/changing-wildfires>

Firelogue Project: firelogue.eu

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About the European Academies’ Science Advisory Council (EASAC)

EASAC is formed by the national science academies of the EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom, to collaborate in giving advice to European policymakers. EASAC provides a means for the collective voice of European science to be heard. Through EASAC, the academies work together to provide independent, expert, evidence-based advice about the scientific aspects of European policies to those who make or influence policy within the European institutions.

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