



Forest fires in Portugal in 2017 - fatality or consequence of the lack of coherent policies

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ABSTRACT- In Portugal, forest fires are a common phenomenon, especially during the hot and dry months and the causes are very diverse (negligence or arson), but with the possibility of highlighting the regeneration of pastures. Indeed, the climate allows a rapid growth of the vegetation in the winter, which gets very dry in the summer, and, fires are an important land use tool in Portugal. One of the main problem is the occurrence of an extremely high number of ignitions. Nevertheless, only a small number of forest fires causes the highest percentage of burnt areas, and, the more populated areas have a greater number of forest fires, while areas with lower population densities have a larger amount of burnt areas. Nowadays, as Large Forest Fires become recurrent, their intensity and dimension have increased and they have taken on catastrophic proportions, therefore losing their role as catalysts of ecosystem renewal. Large Forest Fires (or even Mega Fires) are likely to increase, and the period of its occurrence will widen throughout the year, as a result of climate and other global changes, making the regime of extreme fires in the normal fire regime. In fact, Portugal has witnessed this reality year after year, for if, by 1986, we had never been plagued by a fire of more than 10,000 hectares, 2003 saw the mark of 20,000 hectares and 2017 twice, of the 25,000, twice the 30,000 and, once, the 40,000 hectares. In 2017, more than 100 people died in Portugal, trapped by extreme fires, in only two days, June 17 (66 people) and October 15 (45 people), before and after the “normal” fire season, where, only 1.26% (214) of the total of the ignitions burned 93% (412781 ha) of the total burned area. In fact, it was an extremely dry year and there were some rare phenomena (eg, the tropical storm Ophelia), but, from the moment that forest is composed by monocultures of highly combustible species, such as pines (*Pinus pinaster*) and eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), without real territorial planning, civil protection or environmental education policies, the consequences of fires can be tragic.

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