

Open Letter to the European Commission:

Without understanding of fire, protection of citizens cannot be guaranteed

23rd June 2017

Dear Commissioners,

Fire in our forests or in our buildings is an old evil that has always threatened and harmed humans. Despite being a millennial-old risk to humanity, our understanding of fire remains very limited. Following the very recent events of the Grenfell Tower fire in London and the large forest fires in Portugal, both of which claimed a significant number of lives, an intense EU and worldwide discussion of fire safety issues has started in the media, among authorities, and citizens at large. Many of the questions raised by these dramatic events cannot be answered today because fire science is limited and not sufficiently developed. We as members of the European Scientific Community would like to give our contribution to support a better use of the billions of Euros that are spent annually across the EU to protect buildings, or to fight wildfires, for the safety of citizens, communities, businesses and the environment.

Our concern is not raised just by the accidents of last week. Forest fires are a major issue every summer in Greece, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, but the risk of devastating forest fires does not only affect the EU southern countries. Due to climate change it is expanding to central and northern countries as well, with new unprecedented fire regimes. In the urban areas, dozens of dramatic building fires occur annually in major EU cities. Accidental fires stress the need for research in several critical areas of science, for example, as how to respond to fire emergencies, how fire grows and how humans behave during emergencies.

In sharp contrast, Horizon 2020, the EU's current funding mechanism, pays negligible attention to the fire safety and related areas, and provides little funding to fire science community. As representatives of the fire safety scientists, we write to underline the urgent need to support fire safety and request that the EU takes our reflections into account. The allocation of substantial funds to fire research and fire safety innovation.

Although all EU countries face and will continue facing substantial fire threats in buildings and in the forest, there are limited opportunities for sustained and concerted scientific discovery or coordination of efforts among EU research institutions, many of which are world leading in this field.

Without a better understanding of fire, safety technologies needed to protect our citizens we cannot provide a safer life to our Citizens and to those who live among us or just visit Europe. We declare ourselves ready to assist you in this quest.

Signatories of the original letter sent on 23 June 2017:

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