



EUROPEAN SUMMIT OF FIREFIGHTERS

Faced with climate change, the European Union's (EU) firefighters are calling for the EU's civil protection architecture to be strengthened.

FIREFIGHTING AND CIVIL PROTECTION SERVICES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE EU'S SECURITY POLICY.

Meeting today in Paris, the European Union Member States firefighters' representative organisations (national federations or associations, national structures) including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, CTIF¹, and FEU², wish to affirm:

That the exceptional commitment and unwavering solidarity demonstrated by firefighters within the Member States of the EU constitute an essential cornerstone in preserving human lives, safeguarding property and heritage, protecting the environment, and building a safer and more resilient society.

That this mobilisation relies, in collaboration with professional firefighters (civilian, military, or part-time), on the civic engagement of over 3.5 million men and women in firefighting organisations. These individuals freely choose to dedicate their time, selflessly and altruistically, making themselves available alongside their personal, family, and professional commitments, as volunteer firefighters in the service of others, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

That firefighters are an indispensable pillar of the security and resilience architecture both at the Member State level and at the European level.

¹ Comité Technique International de prévention et d'extinction du Feu, The International Association of Fire Services.

² Federation of the European Fire Officers.

In a context of multiplying crises, where climate disruptions cause more frequent and larger-scale natural disasters, where epidemics spread with unprecedented speed, and where the terrorist threat persists, the robustness and reactivity of civil protection are put to the test. Considering the serious threat to the sustainability of volunteer firefighting in Europe posed by Directive 2003/88/EC on Working Time (WTD), the European firefighter representative organisations:

Highlights the need for an adapted European legal framework that recognises and supports the specific needs of volunteering in fire and rescue services and more broadly the organisations responsible for civil protection.

Urge the European Union's institutions to take decisive measures, in the next mandate, to implement the Council's conclusions 2022/C 322/02 of 26th August 2022, calling for increased adaptation of civil protection systems in response to the impact of climate change in terms of prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Call for the immediate adoption of a specific European directive on citizen engagement in civil protection, in order to secure the activity of volunteer firefighters and strengthen civil protection human resources across Europe, ensuring a system that is responsive, resilient, and adapted to the challenges of the 21st century.

Furthermore, the European firefighter representative organisations invite the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council to prioritise on the next mandate's agenda:

Harmonisation of operational doctrines, training, and the establishment of an Erasmus exchange program to promote sharing knowledge among European civil protection forces.

Remove barriers restricting firefighters' ability to drive emergency and firefighting vehicles, by granting flexibility in European driving licence regulations.

Continued investments in the renewal and strengthening of Member States' aerial resources and the doubling of the European civil protection fleet, with a triple focus on innovation, sovereignty, and employment solidarity.

Encourage homogeneous measures for employers of volunteer firefighters to foster volunteer's availability.

Promotion of research and innovation, notably aiming to make civil protection operations more sustainable and environmentally friendly at all phases of disaster management.

Concrete measures to protect firefighters from health risks posed by smoke residue, including restrictions on the production, use, and market placement of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Strengthening the social protection of volunteer firefighters.

Taking into account operational needs related to the fight against extreme weather events, including through the granting of appropriate derogations, such as the exemption of «Euro 7» standards for firefighting and rescue vehicles.

In this context, the European representative organisations of firefighters are initiating a formal dialogue aimed at establishing a common representative structure with the institutions of the European Union.

Paris, 9th April 2024.

Signatories

Pour Reconval

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