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Greece

In Greece, megaracists fan the flames of megafires

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Greece has suffered terrible fires this summer. They killed at least 26 people, including at least 20 refugees, shepherds and two Canadair pilots, ravaged forests and crops, burnt hundreds of animals, hundreds of houses and several businesses, and even military barracks.

In July, the fires ravaged Rhodes (1/15th of the island, with the chaotic evacuation of 20,000 tourists), and also affected parts of Attica, Corfu and Evia. In August, the suburbs of Volos and the Athenian suburbs burned, and Parnes, one of Athens' three mountains, lost part of its forest, suffocating the city. In total, almost 1,600 km² went up in smoke, with one major catastrophe: in Evros, the north-eastern region bordering Turkey, more than 800 km² are still burning, destroying villages, crops (olive trees) and the protected Dadia forest, with its rich fauna. We have entered the era of megafires. In 2021, 66 fires were recorded, compared with 28 this year, but the 2022 fires burnt "only" a quarter of the area ravaged this year.

Incompetence of Mitsotakis and Co.

In the spring, the Prime Minister claimed that the country was perfectly prepared for fires... However, when fires broke out, we once again saw the lack of resources given to the fire brigade (4,000 unfilled posts, hence the major role played by volunteers this summer), the wear and tear or absence of equipment, and a policy based above all on evacuating the population, who on numerous occasions refused to do so and organized the fight to save their villages from the fire. Above all, the Greek Right's inability to prevent forest fires is strongly called into question: not only in terms of human and material resources on the part of the fire brigade (the resources are going to the forces of repression!), but also through the refusal to reorganize the Public Forestry Office, as the experts are calling for, which has had the task of organised forest fire prevention taken away from it since... 1998! Faced with the experts' very specific proposals on forest maintenance, Mitsotakis is playing the fatalist: it's the climate's fault, he has been singing all summer, with the same refrain from the press...

Racist outburst

Back in July, Minister Vouridis (a former leader of the fascist junta's youth wing) added his two cents: the fires can be started by careless residents, but also by migrants (not forgetting Turkish agents!). As for the river Evros, the border with Turkey, we can count on him, now number 2 in the government: the border wall will continue to be built... And it is this nauseating music, taken up by other ministers, that we have heard very loudly in recent weeks, and put into practice by fascist groups, encouraged by their success in the June legislative elections but in severe extremist competition with each other. Nerds who took armed action against refugees on the Turkish border in 2020, and who have since illegally set up huts and even villas in protected natural areas, played the role of sheriff (with videos of their exploits) by beating and arresting refugees, accusing them of setting fire to the forests, just as at least 20 of them were found burnt to death in the Dadia forest. Fascist MPs encouraged the formation of these militias, using racist rhetoric to conceal the fact that the refugees were exonerated after judicial investigations.

This conspiracy theory does not hold water for a second if you look at the map of fire outbreaks in Greece, Turkey and the southern Balkans between the beginning of July and the end of August [\[1\]](#) : they are of the same intensity everywhere, and of course have nothing to do with the presence or absence of refugees!

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Be that as it may, the experts have pointed out that the fire in the Dardia forest was probably caused by lightning, but that did not stop Mitsotakis in Parliament this week from once again rambling on about the responsibility of refugees for the fires. Confirmation, if confirmation were needed, that racism is a central element of Mitsotakis' policy, and perhaps also a way of making people forget that, if he can, tomorrow he will offer his bosses the burnt areas to set up various businesses and wind turbines, the rampant installation of which in Greece, with the destruction of mountain slopes to build roads to the summits, is usually carried out without consulting the local population, much more for the bosses' profits than out of any concern for the environment. In the same vein, Mitsotakis is already planning to entrust his bosses with the "management" of the forests...

In this tragic situation, an initial mobilization took place at the end of August: two (separate...) demonstrations brought together hundreds of demonstrators to denounce the real crime against the environment, demand resources for prevention and condemn the fascist militias and anti-refugee racism of this government.

Athens, 3 September 2023

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[1] France Info, 31 August 2023 "[Incendies en Grèce : visualisez l'ampleur des feux qui ravagent le pays](#)".