

EU to re-think civil protection aid after Portugal fires

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The European Union is re-thinking civil protection assistance, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said Monday, after a request from Portugal which this year suffered several deadly forest fires.

"We will consider, at Portugal's request, the reorganisation of civil

protection in Europe," Juncker said at a press conference alongside Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.

In the immediate aftermath of a tragedy, the EU can deploy civil protection aid through either in-kind assistance, with the deployment of specially equipped teams, or send experts to the field to assess and coordinate with local teams.

In mid-June, 64 people died when huge [forest](#) fires swept the central Pedrao Grande region of Portugal. Those were followed in the middle of October by new fires that killed 45 people, according to a toll by the country's [civil protection](#) agency.

Nearly half of all forests burned in the European Union in 2016 were in Portugal, where [fire](#)-prone eucalyptus and pine plantations along with poor soil encouraged the deadly flames.

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The Portuguese government has promised to prevent new tragedies by carrying out "fundamental reforms" in forest management and firefighting.

Juncker, a former Luxembourg prime minister who on Monday began a two-day visit to Portugal, said the disaster touched him "personally".

"One of my fellow citizens perished in the fires here in Portugal," he said.

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