

# 'Critical situation' as fires rage in Greece

August 5 2021, by Will Vassilopoulos

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A helicopter pours water on a wildfire on August 5, 2021, near the village of Kechries in northern Evia.

"It's a very sad moment," said a villager in Evia who had to evacuate as a violent fire ravages the Greek island, one of dozens of blazes that have torn through the country this week in the worst heatwave in over three decades.

"Luckily everyone is ok," Konstantinos Konstantinidis told AFP.

"We're going to bounce back, hopefully with state help, and we hope to be able to enjoy the summer in our village like we always did," the 79-year-old said.

In Kourkouloi, his village, thick yellow smoke covers the top of the mountain as water-bombing planes and helicopters fly up ahead over and over again in a relentless struggle against the flames.

Firefighters were battling a series of raging blazes in sweltering heat on Thursday in western and eastern Greece, and on the outskirts of Athens where a fire that had been coming under control regained strength.

"We will be fighting on all fronts throughout the day. The conditions are tough, very unusual," civil protection minister Michalis Chrisochoidis told ERT television.

Six out of thirteen regions, including Attica where Athens is located, have been placed on high alert for Friday, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced on Thursday evening.

"Our country is facing an extremely critical situation," he said, as the country experiences the worst heatwave in more than 30 years that has seen temperatures rise to 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) in some places.

"Unfortunately, the difficulties are still ahead of us and the night ahead is worrying."

## **'We need help'**

According to Giannis Tsapourniotis, the mayor of Mantoudi in Evia, the

island blaze is spreading on four fronts, including one that is advancing out of control near a monastery that was forcefully evacuated on Wednesday.

The 12 monks at Saint David Monastery agreed to leave after several hours of negotiations with security forces.

In Kourkoloi, local resident Ioannis Aslanis says he saved what he could.

"It's a disaster, everything burnt in the village."

On the island, the second biggest in Greece after Crete, some 500 soldiers assisted by around 40 planes and helicopters were due to arrive on Thursday as back-up, said Konstantinos Floros, head of the armed forces.

France despatched 40 [rescue workers](#) to Evia on Thursday.

Hundreds of houses have already burnt down on the island, as have swathes of pine forests.

## **92 wildfires in 24 hours**

Firefighters said Thursday morning they had had to tackle 92 blazes within 24 hours.

North of Athens, a blaze that firefighters had hoped to control regained strength on Thursday evening, after having destroyed large areas of pine forests.

Caused by sudden gusts of wind, the resurgence forced the evacuation of several villages as the flames came dangerously near people's homes, ERT reported.

Asylum seekers in a nearby camp were also due to be transferred to other facilities, according to the migrations ministry.

Acrid smoke from the fire poured over Athens, where the air quality has deteriorated fast.

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