

# Worst-ever drought devastates Europe amid capitalism's climate crisis

Samuel Tissot  
14 August 2022

From Britain to the Balkans, a record-breaking drought is devastating Europe. Over 60 percent of the European Union and Great Britain face drought conditions, according to the European Drought Observatory, in what one EU Commission scientist called Europe's worst drought in 500 years. Major rivers and lakes are drying up, farmers are facing unprecedented crop failures, and energy supplies are collapsing amid unprecedented heat and lack of rainfall.

The summer of 2022, which broke records for heat, wildfires and now drought in Europe, has made clear the urgent necessity of dealing with global climate change. It has now reached such a vast extent that, without prompt and large-scale action, it will threaten basic functions of society critical to human life—such as the ability to provide water, food, electricity, and safe housing.

This summer's extreme drought was caused by record-low precipitation in Europe this year and successive heatwaves, including the July heatwave that shattered temperature records. Extreme heat and drought also led to record wildfires, with 615,341 hectares burned this year across Europe—the highest-ever figure for mid-August. The drought is disrupting key food and energy supplies, already undermined by the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, driving prices for essential goods even higher amid the ongoing inflation crisis.

On the Rhine River, barges are carrying goods at 25 percent capacity due to low water levels. Water levels are now at 40 centimeters but are forecast to fall to around 30cm, which may completely halt transport on the river. Such stoppages in 2018 cost the German economy an estimated €5 billion.

Last week, France forced its nuclear power plants, which produce 70 percent of its electricity, to operate at

reduced capacity: releasing high-temperature coolant water into rivers that are at record low levels is an ecological hazard. Amid the ongoing energy crisis, however, the French energy agency now has ordered the plants to return to full capacity, whatever the resulting damage to the environment, including plant and animal life. Of France's 96 mainland departments, 86 are on drought alert. The Loire River, France's second-largest, can be crossed on foot along much of its length.

The water level on the Danube River, Europe's longest, is currently 43 centimeters, the lowest since records began. In Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, dredging efforts are underway to keep the river navigable for barges, which are crucial for Balkan food and energy supplies. In southern Germany, the river's water temperature exceeded 25°C and is expected to reach 27°C by the end of the month, the same temperature as the Caribbean Sea.

Across Europe, fish are threatened by record high water temperatures and low oxygen content. The entire fish stock of the Conopljankso reservoir in Serbia died after it completely dried up.

The surface of the Oder River, running between Poland and Germany, is now all but covered in dead fish. While Polish officials have contested reports of heavy industrial contamination of the river, it is clear that as the river's water volume has plummeted to record lows, concentrations of industrial pollutants have skyrocketed.

European farmers are facing massive crop failures, with production of key grains down 30 to 40 percent in Italy and nearly 20 percent in France. Spain's olive oil crop, which counts for nearly half of world exports, is expected to be one-quarter of the average produced over the last five years.

In northern Italy's Po Valley, 60 percent of this year's crop has been lost as farmers have been unable to use local rivers for crop irrigation. This has already caused at least €6.2 billion in damage. The region, which produces 30 to 40 percent of Italy's food supply, has seen virtually no rain this year. Near the Po estuary, water levels are so low that salt water from the Adriatic Sea flowed 30 kilometers upstream, killing crops near the river's banks that had so far survived the drought.

Drinking water supplies are critically low in every city along the Po Valley, including Milan and Turin. Water levels in lakes in the region are also at historical lows, including the popular tourist destination of Lake Garda in northern Italy, which has almost completely dried up.

Even Europe's northernmost and wettest regions are suffering. Low water levels in Norway's reservoirs are reducing its ability to produce hydroelectric power. This has led to warnings that it may have to cut energy exports, further exacerbating the energy crisis caused by NATO threats to refuse to pay for Russian gas and Russian threats to cut off supplies. Eight UK regions face drought conditions, including the capital, London.

These events point to the urgent necessity of an internationally coordinated campaign to halt and address the consequences of global warming. Trillions of euros must be invested in high technology, key infrastructure, irrigation technology, clean energy generation, food security programs, and other initiatives to ensure that the globe remains habitable for humanity.

Carrying this out requires a direct assault on the capitalist system, and the wealth and privileges of its corrupt financial aristocracy. Trillions of euros were found overnight amid the stock market crash that followed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet this wealth went not to eliminate the virus, which has since then claimed over 1.6 million lives in Europe alone, or to fund critical infrastructure investments, but to bail out a tiny elite of wealthy investors who answer to no one.

As with the pandemic, the measures needed to combat global warming are well-known to scientists and government officials alike, but the international institutions of the capitalist nation-state system have failed to organize a coordinated response. Instead, they are plunging deeper into war. EU governments are

pledging hundreds of billions of euros in military spending increases, preparing to escalate the war NATO is waging on Russia in Ukraine.

The current drought is exposing the much-vaunted 2015 Paris Accords, which seek to limit global warming to 2°C from pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. Extreme weather caused by just 1.2°C of global warming is already catastrophic. Looking at the devastation in Europe today, one must ask: even if capitalist governments implemented the Paris Accords to the letter, how many of Europe's rivers would run dry, and how much of its farmland would go barren?

The disaster of global warming will continue until a movement is built to stop it in the European and international working class, in opposition to the entire ruling elite. One need only look at the German Greens, supposedly the leading "ecological" party of Europe's political establishment: they are leading the campaign for EU rearmament, while approving a return to the use of highly polluting coal for power generation amid the wartime energy crisis.

Youth and workers seeking to fight global warming must draw the necessary conclusions from the ruling elite's refusal to take action and its suicidal drive towards a new world war. Overcoming these threats to civilization require ending the anarchic profit system and its replacement with a scientifically planned, socialist global economy. This requires building a mass anti-war and socialist movement in the working class to take the control of world economy out of the hands of the financial aristocracy and subordinate it to social need, not private profit.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**