European wildfires continue, with record land burned and nuclear plants on verge of shutdown

Robert Stevens
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Europe entered August with severe wildfires burning in Greece, France, Spain and Turkey, hundreds more scattered fires underway in Romania, and a drought and fire crisis threatening nuclear power provision in Britain, Hungary and Romania.

The epicentre of the fires is now in Greece. Over the past five days, firefighters in the western Attica and Boeotia regions of the Greek mainland—around 70 kilometres west of the capital Athens—have been battling to contain wildfires that have burned through more than 14,000 hectares of mostly forest land, with more than 100 homes destroyed or damaged. More than 1,000 people were evacuated from the area, including 300 rescued by sea after roads became impassable because of the fire.

The western Attica fire was one of many raging across Greece over the past week. More than 70 broke out last Friday alone. On July 29, a fire near the town of Rethymno in the southern island of Crete resulted in the burning of thousands of hectares and the evacuation of over 8,000 residents and tourists. The previous day a major fire on Paros spread across around 1,000 hectares, around 5 percent of the island.

The ferocity of the fires has been driven by the extreme summer heat, leaving vegetation exceptionally dry, coupled with strong seasonal winds that have enabled the fires to spread quickly, making firefighting exceptionally challenging.

On Sunday two firefighters were killed in western Attica after two helicopters collided during fire suppression operations over the village of Psatha. Last week two firefighters were killed in Crete after becoming trapped by the fire while driving between fronts. A fifth firefighter was killed last week in a separate fire in the Peloponnese region in southern Greece.

By August 3, according to Copernicus mapping, the western Attica fire had burned some 13,290 hectares. After repeated and ever more violent fires, much of Greece's forests face extinction. According to the National Observatory of Athens, a staggering 42 percent of Attica's forested area has burned in the past decade.

Though the worst fires appear contained on the surface, the threat remains. This week Greek daily *To Vima* (*The Tribune*) reported the analyses of Efthymis Lekkas, president of Greece's Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization (OASP) and Professor of Dynamic Tectonic, Applied Geology and Natural Disaster Management at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Speaking to the state broadcaster ERT, Lekkas explained that even when a surface fire appears to have been extinguished, "The fire can remain active for days inside the burned area. There are cases where tree trunks and root systems continue burning underground. This combustion can last for weeks or even months."

This phenomenon had been seen in "major wildfires in Greece in the past, including the 2007 fires in Ilia, Mount Parnitha and Chios", reported *To Vima*.

In France, the Gironde fire west of Bordeaux burned some 42,000 hectares, France's largest forest fire since 1949 and the first in the country to generate its own pyrocumulonimbus storm cloud. More than 220,000 people were evacuated, the largest civilian displacement in France outside wartime.

By the time the fire was declared contained on August 1, more than 330 firefighters had been injured and 252 buildings destroyed. The Gironde Chamber of Commerce reported 40,000 businesses affected and 19,500 closed due to evacuation orders and fire disruption.

Across the European Union (EU), the European Forest Fire Information System had mapped 457,459 hectares burned by July 29 across 1,407 detected fires—releasing an

estimated 17.98 million tonnes of CO2—nearly a third more than by the same date in 2025 and roughly two-and-a-half times the 20-year average.

Severe fire and drought conditions have threatened nuclear-powered energy supply in three countries. Fire broke out at Dunwich Heath on England's Suffolk coast on the evening of July 29—coming within three miles of the Sizewell B nuclear plant, which supplies around 3 percent of UK electricity, and close to the Sizewell C construction site.

Within a day the blaze had grown to roughly 150 hectares. Suffolk Fire and Rescue deployed 18 engines and more than 100 firefighters, with crews drafted from as far as London. Firefighters were only able to contain the fire by using bulldozers, tractors lent by local farmers, and vehicles supplied by the operators of Sizewell B and C to cut 15-metre firebreaks around the site over the weekend of August 1–2.

As of Wednesday, the fire remained a major incident, with underground hotspots still burning at around 600°C.

Drought conditions have shrunk many European rivers. Record-low levels on the Danube have deprived two nuclear plants of cooling water. Hungary's Paks plant, which supplies close to half the country's electricity, cut output progressively from July 27, with individual reactor units taken offline through July 29 to August 1, leaving just one turbine connected and running at roughly a tenth of capacity.

Prime Minister Péter Magyar said that in the early hours of August 4 the plant came within millimetres of the first complete shutdown in its 44-year history, averted only when the river stopped falling and rose 1.5 centimetres by morning.

Romania's Cernavoda plant, also on the Danube, was forced to take Reactor 1 offline on July 28, and a nationwide energy state of alert was declared for August after Reactor 2 came under threat. On August 3, the Romanian navy carried out unprecedented controlled explosions on the Danube's Bala canal to redirect water toward the plant's intake, followed a day later by sinking rock-laden ships in a second channel. Acting Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan said the measures were necessary to avoid losing 20 percent of the country's entire electricity production.

Up to 400,000 people across Spain, France, Greece, Turkey and Portugal have now been forced to flee fires or placed under evacuation orders. The fires have claimed at least 17 lives across the continent, 14 of them at Los Gallardos in Almería, Spain—the single deadliest blaze of the season. In total, eight firefighters and aircrew have perished fighting fires in France, Sicily and Greece.

These are only a fraction of the overall deaths resulting from repeated heatwaves throughout Europe over the last three months. England and Wales, located in the north of the continent and which have not suffered the highest temperatures, nevertheless recorded their driest July in almost 200 years. All of Wales and half of England is officially in drought.

By July 30, Britain had recorded 2,877 heat-related deaths this year, nearly double the total for all of 2025 and approaching the record 2,985 set in 2022.

On Wednesday, Italy placed its 27 major cities under the highest heat alert as a fourth heatwave hit, with temperatures rising towards 40°C this week—the first time all its cities have been listed on the red alert system. The *Guardian* reported that the heatwave has been linked to at least four recent deaths, including two outdoor workers in Lombardy's industrial areas and a security guard in Bologna believed to have suffered a heat-related illness in his car.

The European capitalist states have done next to nothing to reverse the policies that have placed the planet on the threshold of breaching 1.5 degrees Celsius of global heating—the same policies fuelling the extreme weather behind such calamitous wildfires.

Instead, they have plundered society's resources to fund vast rearmament projects in preparation for major-power conflict. Their inability to respond effectively to this crisis is the direct result of the austerity measures carried out continent-wide to fund military spending and gorge the super-rich. According to European Parliament research, EU defence spending rose from 218 billion euros in 2021 to an expected 381 billion euros in 2025—an increase of around 75 percent.