

ATHENS — A broiling summer and raging wildfires made Greece a hot spot for the impact of climate change — now it's leading an effort to make the region more resilient.

A summit of southern EU countries on Friday agreed to a pledge focusing on the need for joint action to tackle the climate crisis. Greece, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and Croatia adopted a common declaration focusing on climate change, biodiversity, forest management, the marine environment, and civil protection, prevention and preparedness.

"The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat, it has landed firmly on our shores", said Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, calling it "the greatest ecological catastrophe of the last few decades".

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described it as the "right move at the right time" to tackle what she called "the horrifying wildfires and the stark rain and the flooding" of past months.

"We all see that climate change is heavily affecting the Mediterranean region and we need to find solutions and we can offer solutions", she said.

"The Mediterranean region is potentially the most affected by climate change", European Council President Charles Michel said in a televised address, adding that the only solution to the climate crisis is to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent and implement the measures set out in the Green Deal that are crucial for transforming the economic and social model.

The leaders reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to work together to achieve an ambitious outcome at November's COP26 climate summit to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees.

They also committed to combat the loss of natural habitats and degradation through enhanced cross-border collaboration, and to increase investment in forest management to combat soil erosion and protect drainage basins. There is also a commitment to strengthen cooperation on civil protection, prevention and preparedness across the region.

The Greek government has faced severe criticism over how it managed the devastating blazes and is under pressure to shore up its response to the climate crisis.

Earlier this month, Mitsotakis created a special ministry to handle the climate crisis and appointed Christos Stylianides, previously the European commissioner for humanitarian aid and crisis management, to head the department.

Source: politico.eu